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

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Reconciling *kastom*, tourism, and art in the Pacific

The case of the Leweton Cultural Group
and “water music”

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

30 January, 2017
I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Signed ..................................................  Date ..................................
Abstract

Embodying dual legacies (ancestral and colonial), communities throughout the Pacific Islands are configuring and re-configuring themselves, their cultures and, consequently, the world around them in ways that are both continuing and new. Contemporary Vanuatu is an intercultural space contextualised by extremely high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity. This research project examines the ways in which a diasporic community is navigating an intercultural space by mobilizing itself and its cultural assets in a variety of rapidly evolving formats that span a range of industries, sectors and cultural transition areas.

I present data and analysis regarding the sub-national Melanesian diaspora in the north of Vanuatu – the Mwerlap-speaking community. The Mwerlap-speakers originate from the islands of Merelava and Gaua. I examine and analyse the agency of the community and the colonial and post-colonial shifts in migration patterns that have led to the formation of the Leweton “village” – a settlement/community in a peri-urban area outside of Luganville, on Espiritu Santo, an island in the north of Vanuatu in SANMA Province.

This interdisciplinary case study project draws on long-term, multi-sited, coactivity and co-performance via participant engagement with artists and producers from Vanuatu. I have published three peer reviewed journal articles, a range of material co-authored with community members and produced a documentary film (Vanuatu Women’s Water Music). Weaving together these elements and creative outputs, this thesis adds to the knowledge and understanding of the significance of subnational diasporas by exploring the role they can play as incubators of cultural export products, particularly in the music and tourism industries, by using the case of the ni-Vanuatu performers of women’s “water music”.

Drawing together ideas from anthropology, linguistics, architecture, and cultural studies, this study provides rich insights into the perspectives of an indigenous community actively promoting itself as both a heritage tourism
destination and a performing arts troupe. Recognizing the intentional and the arbitrary joining and un-joining, assembling and reassembling, creating and recreating, the articulating and re-articulating, of human and non-human actors is what imbues this methodology/approach with its efficacy.
I had the great privilege to live in Vanuatu for almost a decade between the years of 2000 and 2009. For the last three years of my time there, I was based principally in Luganville, the second largest town in Vanuatu. While I relocated to Australia in 2009, I have maintained regular contact with friends and family in Vanuatu. I wish to acknowledge the entire Leweton community for the support of this research, and especially the performers: Anthony Roy, Avon Tolili, Cecelia Lolonun, Charlie Ron, Claudia Frezer, David Ron, Denila Rose Frazer, Daina Ron, Edith Cecilia, Evelyn Vanva, Freddy Weler, Gavin Ron, Gwedulyn Vanva, Hamilton Vanva, Hilda Wavales, James Ovlav Dick, Jessy Roy, Ken Vanva, Keven Ron, Leah Wari, Lydian Ron, Marie Namak, Martin Frazer, Morris Clement, Natalie Tingris, Noel Vanva, Rose Tahi, Sandrine Sur, Selena Teresa, Tangop, Sese Wavales, Shania Siri, Tania Rosal, Tasha Rueben, Thomas Vanva, Vicky Lerry, Warren Salathiel, and Winnie Womal. Brata Sandy Sur, Tawi Delly Roy, and Bibian Maseng David Nalo have been profoundly generous with their time and their insight and friendship. Special thanks to my friends Hilda Rosal Wavales, Cecelia Lolonun, and Mama Celia Edith for their professionalism and generosity.

The project (including the production of the DVD) has received funding from a variety of sources: Southern Cross University and my scholarship through the Collaborative Research Network, the Wantok Musik Foundation, the European Union through the Further Arts “Voices for Change” Project, Further Arts core funding, Ethos Global Foundation, and Canal Studio. I also wish to acknowledge the support of Mama Caroline Nalo for hosting me in her house, sharing insights and providing translations in to and out of Bislama. I am grateful to my supervisors Pr. Philip Hayward, Pr. Kerry Brown and lately Dr. Grayson Cooke, as well as Drs. Monika Stern, Miranda Forsyth and James Leach for valuable feedback on versions of the articles published. I am grateful to Alexandre François for advice on translations from the Mwerlap language and for the use of his maps, and to the editors and reviewers of the journals whose comments have assisted the writing of papers.
All the Further Arts staff and board members have contributed to this thesis in ways that are impossible to specify, but I give special thanks to Sarah Doyle and Luke Johnston. The Wantok Musik Foundation has also played a big part in this journey and I am grateful to David, Amy, and the “confluence of interests” on the board there and to Tim Cole for his sensitivity to the haptics and acoustics of the water music. My friends and family in The Planet Spins have been along for the journey and I am especially grateful to Daniel Schultz for his work supporting the distribution of the film and to Tim Schultz for everything, including the design work on the e-book.

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To Ben Farr-Wharton and Kristina Kelman, finally our little cohort is on the other side: thanks to you both for dragging me over the line. I always believed more in you both, more than I did in myself, and I am humbled by the reciprocated reflection of that belief, humbled by all that we have done for each other.

Kristina, you more than anyone else have shared this journey with me, and your love and support for me has been there every day, on so many levels: without you there is no way that I could be at this point. I treasure your patience, your indulgence, and your love of me.

All my family have supported me through this extremely challenging process. Special appreciation to: my sisters, Kelly, for helping to locate the story of the water music, and Louisa, for her editorial assistance; my hop-wise brother for brews; and both Mum and Dad for emotional and financial support.

In acknowledging all of these contributions, I am reminded of the dynamic and anachronistic nature of gratitude. In Somerset Maugham’s 1907 play
Lady Frederick, the title character herself describes gratitude as “thanks for past favours and a lively sense of benefits to come.” I have no doubt that I will continue to draw on my “lively sense of benefits to come” from all those named here.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of those ancestors of this research assemblage who passed away during the process: my grandfather Thomas Dick Snr, Aunty Elsie, Grandma Norma Stack, “Chief” Martin Frazer, Chief Judah, and Uncle Major Lester Roy. And to the almost-lives: the imperceptible beating of hearts, the small flickering lights on screens blinking a morbid message in morse code.

This project has been granted ethics Approval Number ECN-12-321 from the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. All persons whose image appears in the photos have granted permission for their likeness to be used in this research and in future publications. All holders of copyright of the Figures have granted permission for the Figures to be used in this research and in future publications.
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SANMA</td>
<td>Espiritu Santo-Malo Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWMF</td>
<td>Rainforest World Music Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEKS</td>
<td>Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMBP</td>
<td>Traditional Money Banks Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TORBA</td>
<td>Torres-Banks Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VKS</td>
<td><em>Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta</em> (Vanuatu Cultural Centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWWM</td>
<td>Vanuatu Women's Water Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 - Foreword

1.1 Organisation of the Thesis

This document consists of standard thesis components presented in conjunction with a range of non-traditional elements. The thesis components include a documentary film broadcast on international television and three academic articles published in peer-refereed research journals. These standard components are presented as Chapters.

Augmenting the Chapters, are a range of non-traditional elements – generally shorter length publications, all peer-reviewed, and often co-authored with ni-Vanuatu colleagues and community members. These non-traditional elements are presented as Appendices. The Appendices include a case study for a UNESCO report, a peer-reviewed article published in a special supplement of a journal, a peer-reviewed book chapter co-authored with community members, a peer reviewed photographic essay published in a non-academic journal, two pieces of peer-reviewed creative non-fiction, and a curated public panel staged as part of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art.

It is a requirement of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council that social and cultural research projects must have direct benefits for ni-Vanuatu people. The nature of my research project, focused as it is on the ways that a community presents elements of its cultural heritage (including the practice of creating musical pieces by splashing and scooping water), lends itself to the production of audio-visual media texts. Indeed, after several public meetings the community decided that three ways for the research to benefit them would be to produce a film, to present the “History” of their village and the water music, and to generate livelihood opportunities by attracting tourists to their domestic performances and by promoting their ensemble as a performing act to international festivals. I have found that co-producing videos and photographic essays and co-authoring and publishing shorter length pieces in collaboration with ni-Vanuatu colleagues is an effective way of engaging community members in the research process, especially as a foil to the
hegemony of the written form of the English language. Publishing with the community is a practical demonstration of my interest and commitment to privileging local ways of knowing and local forms of knowledge and presenting the outcomes of research in accessible forms that are relevant to the community. The Appendices also demonstrate the impact of the research in diverse fields.

1.2 List of Publications Included as Part of the Thesis

1.2.1 List of Publications Included as Chapters

Creative Works


Refereed Journal Articles


1.2.2 List of Publications Included as Appendices

Refereed Journal Articles

Industry and Government Reports


Creative Works


1.3 List of Additional Publications not included

Refereed Journal Articles


Refereed Book Chapters


**Refereed Conference Papers**


**Creative Works**


**Conference Presentations**


Feature Articles

    MediaDrive, Lismore, 26 October,

34. Dick, T. (2015) "Vanuatu's stories of resilience after Cyclone Pam"
    MediaDrive, Lismore, 24 April,

1.3.1 List of Screenings of Vanuatu Womens Water Music film:

- Australasian Worldwide Music Expo, Melbourne 2014
- “In-Competition” Asia Pacific Screen Awards 2014
- FIFO, Tahiti 2014
- Broadcast on Vanuatu television, 2014
- Pasifika Film Festival, Sydney 2015
- Intercreate SCANZ2015:water*peace, Taranaki 2015
- State of the Pacific (SOTP2015) conference, Australian National University, Canberra 2015
- Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, Estonia 2015
- Anthropological Laboratory for Tropical Audiovisual Research, Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Cairns 2015
- European Society for Oceanists conference, Brussels 2015
- WOMEX – the International World Music Expo official program, Budapest 2015
- Maoriland Film Festival, Ōtaki Aotearoa, 2016
- 12th Festival of Pacific Arts, Guam 2016
- Pasifika Film Festival, Brisbane 2016
Chapter 2 - Introduction

Through this thesis I address the research question: how does a ni-Vanuatu community’s engagement with place inflect the ways that intangible cultural heritage is produced and presented for livelihood generation. The appendices augment the exploration of themes, ontologies, and epistemologies connected to the overarching research question. Counter to research that uses temporal dimensions to structure the presentation of phenomena, in this thesis I structure my enquiry around place. The place in question is the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu.

2.1 Structure of this Chapter

In this introductory chapter I begin by providing some contextual information that locates both the genesis of the research project and the case study community in contemporary Vanuatu: an intercultural space contextualised by high levels of indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity. I go on to provide some more detailed information about the reasons why I have chosen this particular case study and unpack the fact that I was not a disinterested observer, rather I was embedded, personally and professionally, in the communities which eventually became the context for my research. My research question was developed during the period that I lived in Vanuatu – from 2000 to 2009. Having lived in Vanuatu for almost a decade, it was a privilege for me to be able to dedicate my time and energy towards a doctoral dissertation with the friends and family that I have made. But at the same time it was a challenging process, and I also describe my approach to balancing the academic requirements of the research process with the obligations to the community and to industry partners.

I introduce some of the themes explored throughout the thesis in Table 1. This research is concerned primarily with people from the islands of Gaua and Merelava in the south-eastern corner of Vanuatu’s most northern province TORBA – and more specifically those members of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora involved in the formation of the Leweton “village” – a settlement/community in a peri-urban area outside of Vanuatu’s second
largest town, Luganville, on Espiritu Santo, an island in the north of Vanuatu in SANMA Province. The purpose of this research project is to reveal the underlying tendencies in the presentation of living cultural expressions (including the practice of creating music by splashing and scooping water, or water music, see Figure 4 in Chapter 4 and Figure 1 in Chapter 6; see also Appendix 1), as they are presented as a tourist attraction by the Leweton Cultural Village, as a festival act on the international festival scene by the Leweton Cultural Group (also known as the Leweton Cultural Experience), as art, and as all of this at the same time. Originally a ritualistic cultural expression performed for the celebration of harvests, life events, or for pleasure, many dances and songs are now presented as spectacles for tourists. But they are also presented as creative and artistic performances. The meaning of the form that exists as “cultural heritage” is often opaque to non-members. The form that exists for tourists is something that contributes to a national conceptualisation of kastom (i.e. the knowledge and practice of the place) and cultural tourism. The form that exists as artistic and creative performance is given meaning/agency to the extent that international festivals include the Leweton group in their programming. 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 and these forms of expression intergrade? How do they correlate with the different scales of activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Expression</th>
<th>Embedded Unit</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Mwerlap community</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist spectacle</td>
<td>Leweton Cultural Village</td>
<td>National icon</td>
<td>Inbound tourists</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/dance/art</td>
<td>Leweton Cultural Group</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Festival organisers and patrons</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2.2 introduces the key thematics of the research, especially some of the culturally specific elements with which the reader may be unfamiliar. I also position these themes in relation to the various Chapters and thereby provide an overview of the thesis. This leads into a presentation of the overarching theoretical background for the thesis. Each written chapter is a
peer-reviewed article, and as such contains a review of the relevant literature specific to the content and the journal in which it was published, and so the brief presentation of the overarching theories takes the place of a dedicated chapter for a traditional literature review. In a similar way, in lieu of a dedicated methodology chapter, the final section of the introduction introduces the research design and presents a cohesive scaffolding that accommodates the various methodologies employed and described in each peer-reviewed article.

2.2 Background to the Research Project: *kastom*, tourism, and art in the Pacific

This interdisciplinary case study project draws on long-term, multi-sited, coactivity and co-performance via participant engagement with artists and producers from a sub-national diaspora based in the north of Vanuatu – the Mwerlap-speaking community. I present data and analysis regarding the colonial and post-colonial shifts in migration patterns that have led to the formation of the Leweton “village” – a settlement/community in a peri-urban area outside of Luganville, on Espiritu Santo, an island in the north of Vanuatu in SANMA Province.

2.2.1 Context and Location

Embodying dual legacies (ancestral and colonial), communities throughout the Pacific Islands are configuring and re-configuring themselves, their cultures and, consequently, the world around them in ways that are both continuing and new. Contemporary Vanuatu is an intercultural space characterised by high levels of indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity. In this context, new diasporas are being created as the pace and scale of people’s mobility evolves. This thesis examines the ways in which a diasporic community is navigating an intercultural space by mobilising itself and its cultural assets in a variety of formats that span a range of industries, sectors and cultural transition areas. Building on Epeli Hau’ofa’s (1993) idea of the Pacific as a “sea of islands” and using a framework of “decolonizing methodologies” (Smith 1999) this thesis privileges the voices of ni-Vanuatu artists and cultural producers. Ni-Vanuatu cultural performers from different
cultural groups present themselves as local, national, and international actors simultaneously by allowing outsiders to witness and engage with their living cultural expressions of kastom. In all my engagements with ni-Vanuatu artists and performers, including the research process that informs this thesis, I have supported ni-Vanuatu life projects, artistic and professional development, and livelihoods. Throughout the process of doing my doctoral research I have created opportunities for ni-Vanuatu family, friends and colleagues to publish their own research, present their ideas at international and domestic fora, and connect to international networks. As will become clear, the process of shaping my own research project has been led by my engagement with the artists and producers of Vanuatu.

The Republic of Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides; see Map 1, Chapter 6) 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 km². 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” – or “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 (see Map 2, Chapter 6). The largest islands in 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 also several other smaller islands. This research is concerned primarily with members of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora involved in the formation of the Leweton “village” – a settlement/community in a peri-urban area outside of Vanuatu’s second largest town, Luganville, on Espiritu Santo, an island in the north of Vanuatu in SANMA Province.

2.2.2 Why Vanuatu? My connections to place

When I first arrived in Vanuatu in 2000, I immediately joined the Fest’Napuan Association – a Vanuatu-based incorporated charitable association that delivers an annual five-day cultural event held in the capital, Port Vila. Shortly after, I established another charitable association, Further Arts, as a vehicle to augment the work of Fest’Napuan and to support a year-round program of activities. Further Arts was originally focused on music and young men, but later expanded to engage young women and men in all forms of art and media. 16 years after it was founded Further Arts now employs around 10 staff and has three major work programs:

1. Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support (TEKS) focusing on the northern islands, rural and remotes activities, and production and presentation of kastom (see Appendix 1 for more information);
2. Nesar Studio focusing on urban youth and video and film production and
3. Pasifika a program that supports civic engagement and self-determination across Melanesia

As a part of my work with Fest’Napuan and Further Arts I was involved in the development of several local music and cultural institutions and events in Vanuatu including the public access rehearsal studios Bie Studio and Canal Studio, and the Lukaotem Gud Santo Festival, a two-day festival held in Luganville, Espiritu Santo. It was through this work with the Santo community establishing the Lukaotem Gud Santo Festival and supporting the TEKS program that I first encountered the women from the islands of Gaua and Merelava who perform water music. This was shortly before the Leweton village was officially established. Over the next few years we implemented a plan to generate touring opportunities for the group to perform at international festivals. Between 2009 and 2011, I represented Fest’Napuan as a part of a
delegation of Vanuatu music industry representatives attending the European World Music Expo “WOMEX” where I presented amateur video productions of the Leweton group and various other Vanuatu musicians to a range of promoters, bookers, and festival organizers. In 2010, the Leweton group was invited to perform the water music in the 2011 edition of the Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF) in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Many of the engagements and ideas that informed my PhD, were germinating during the period 2004 to 2008 as the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (Vanuatu Cultural Centre – VKS) and the Vanuatu Credit Union League implemented the Traditional Money Banks Project (TMBP). The principal objective of the TMBP was to maintain and revitalize living traditional cultural practices while stimulating the generation of cash income. Subsequently the organisations involved in the TMBP formed a relationship with the National Council of Chiefs and with the Prime Minister – the key strategic alliance that led to the Government’s declaration of the Year of Traditional Economy in 2007. This initiative was extended into a second year in 2008 (See: Huffman 2005, Regenvanu 2009, Rousseau and Taylor 2012)

It was during this period, after a journey in the north of Vanuatu from Santo, through Malekula (Vao, Lakatoro, Uripiv), to Ambrym, and back to Santo, that I first began to shape the ideas that would later inform the research question for my thesis. In each island location, I reflected on the ways that ni-Vanuatu engage with place - and how this locative engagement inflects the specifics of the production and expression of intangible cultural heritage, through the prism of livelihood generation. Notes and reflections from this journey are presented at Appendix 2 and 3.

For the last three years of my time in Vanuatu I was based principally in Luganville, the second largest town in Vanuatu. While I relocated to Australia in 2009, I have maintained regular contact with friends and family in Vanuatu. It is an indication of both the relative lack of infrastructure and the rapid urban growth in Vanuatu that in between my visit to Leweton in 2013 and the next one in 2015 the Luganville Municipal Council had connected both water services and electricity to the Sograon area where the Leweton
community is located. The people in Luganville are either immigrants or the direct descendants of people who have migrated from other parts of Vanuatu, or from overseas and the significance of this for my thesis is detailed in Chapter 4. The members of the Leweton group are part of the Mwerlap-speaking sub-national diaspora from the islands of Merelava and Gaua, though many members of the community speak the languages of Nume and Lakon (see Map 2, Chapter 6). In this sense, urban Vanuatu in general, and Luganville in particular, can be understood as a site of complex intercultural and transcultural engagement, a contested zone, and a cultural transition area (Pratt 1991, Bhabha 1995, Turner, Davidson-Hunt et al. 2003).

In Chapter 5, I dig deeper into the ways that ni-Vanuatu engage with place (both urban and rural/remote), and I use the idea of a chorography (from the Greek *khora* for ‘region’) which is the art of describing a region or district, and by extension such a description itself. Chorography, according to Maxwell (2012: 22-3), “renders place in chiasmatic idiosyncrasy, setting subjective and objective epistemologies into productive dialogue”. I also use a sand drawing (see below) to visualise a ni-Vanuatu chorographic engagement with the tangible and intangible elements of place. The result is a fluid, poetic reimagining that integrates elements of history, archaeology, anthropology, mythology, and personal reflection.

On a more practical level, between 2011 and 2015, I organised six tours for members of the Leweton group to Australia (four times), Malaysia, and New Zealand. This involved brokering and negotiating contractual arrangements with the festivals and promoters in each of these countries, finding supplementary funding sources to cover costs, applying for visas, organising itineraries, preparing tour information and orientation packs (for both the Leweton group and for their host festivals), coordinating and facilitating dialogue within the village, troubleshooting and problem solving at all stages of the process. This is something that I explore in further detail in Chapter 6, as being “on tour” with the Leweton ensemble shaped the highly pragmatic and functional nature of my involvement which, combined with the pre-existing long term relationships, allowed for an intense and accelerated
engagement with both men and women from the group. This accelerated engagement allowed a deep, if somewhat process-oriented interaction.

2.2.3 Some themes and ideas: Sand drawings, water music, and gender

To facilitate a sense of mutual understanding of the intersections of my research project and the pre-existing research projects within the community, I used the endogenous kinaesthetic framework of sand drawings. Sand drawings are a kind of dance of the vibrant materiality of Melanesian ontology. A person tells a story and figuratively presents that story using material from the liminal space between the land and the sea as palette, paint and performance space. The drawings are both a dynamic embodiment and kinetic abstraction of: kinship systems, navigation and orientation techniques, ancient and modern histories, horticultural knowledge, and current events.

Sand drawings have an ephemeral quality antithetical to the Western treatment of classical art: framed, hung, restored and preserved. In Vanuatu, the designs work in tandem with stories, kinship systems, navigation and orientation techniques, ancient and modern histories, flora and fauna, and current events. Heidy Geismar (2013: 5-7) relates the process whereby sand drawing was elevated to the status of a national icon – a process in which I was peripherally engaged – and added to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Writing about the layered levels of meaning in-between a sand drawing and story on the island of Ambrym, Knut Rio (2005: 409) describes the “surprising way it condenses the whole story into a multi-layered imagery. Looking at it from different angles we can see a human face, sexual intercourse, male and female genitalia, a banana plant in growth, and a yam tuber. It is as if all the moments of the story come together in one image.”

In Chapter 5, I reflect on the way that the “moments of a story” collapsed into one multi-layered image that ultimately became a chorographic scaffolding for my thesis. Several months after my visit to Malekula and Ambrym in 2007, I returned to Ambrym to produce the documentary film Lon Marum. One of the young men from the village where we were based,
Emyotungan in West Ambrym, was Tio Massing. One day, high up on Ambrym’s volcanic caldera, with rain and wind curtailing any possibility of productive film work, Tio, myself and the rest of the crew started showing each other some sand drawings (while the wind and rain were strong enough to prevent capturing quality digital recording of audio-visuals, it was not so bad that we couldn’t practice sand drawing). I am a singularly maladroit artist and having attempted sand drawings many times in the past I knew there was little point in trying again – the cursive, repetitive patterns appeal to me as a concept more like a language rather than as a visual ‘drawing’. Undeterred, Tio showed me a series of children’s sand drawings of diminishing complexity, finally ending with a version of the sand drawing shown below (see Figure 2, Chapter 5), showing three flying foxes eating a breadfruit. The drawing Tio showed me actually had four flying foxes and during the course of our exchange he created other versions with two flying foxes. I was instantly captivated by a kind of cognitive dissonance, presumably reflecting both a simplicity: the empty space in the wings (most sand drawings are dense with complex patterning), the unmistakable figurative flying foxes; and a complexity: the spatial orientation – with each of them hanging “inwards”, the shared overlapping of wings, the sense of arbitrary nominality (how many flying foxes can fit in a circle?). This was intensified by the gendered figure-ground logics whereby one might see the phallic shapes of the flying fox inside the circle as consuming masculinities; while an inverted reading might see the unenclosed tail of the flying foxes inviting or perhaps permitting a penetration (of ideas?) from the unbordered exterior thus encompassing a diversity of ontologies, a pluriverse of uneven trajectories as each set of eyes perceives the enclosed amniotic interiority of fruit in the middle and the unenclosed exteriority of the ‘background’. In Chapter 5 I use these ideas as a vehicle for deeper analysis of the way that ni-Vanuatu engage with the specificities of place.

The multilayering of meanings in the three flying foxes eating a breadfruit was crucially important as I operationalised this sand-drawing-as-methodology in close collaboration with the Leweton community. During the course of the planning, the touring and the follow-up discussions after the trip to Malaysia, members of the community expressed a desire to present their
story in a form accessible to a broad audience that included their own community, other ni-Vanuatu communities, tourists who visit their village to see the water music and also the international audiences at festivals in other countries. Using the sand drawing of three flying foxes eating a breadfruit, I mapped these audiences onto the drawing as a way of expressing the multiscalar nature of the audience engagement with the Leweton Cultural Village (see Figure 2, Chapter 6). I unpack this mapping process in greater detail in **Chapter 6**, explaining the way that the local scale corresponds with the Mwerlap community in Merelava and Gaua, and the narrative history of the Leweton water music innovations; the national scale corresponds with the formation of the Village, the operation of a tourist attraction and an iconic cultural performance; and the international scale corresponds with the export of a world music product for the arts/music festivals touring circuit. This diagram was especially useful as a tool for presenting the research project to community members in a way that was accessible and engaging.

The people of the Mwerlap/Leweton community demonstrate contingent and temporal emplacements of the diaspora/home dialectic. In **Chapters 3 and 4**, I present these emplacements as a critical and creative, performative and historical, re-construction of the Mwerlap/Leweton context. Knowledge and meaning are contested in this intercultural space, and I have focused on presenting diverse ways of knowing in equally diverse formats. As Tawa (2002: 47) argues: “Indigenous narrative is performative. It conjoins knowledge and its performance. In the experience of its performance—the experience of knowledge as performance knowledge does not precede, succeed, or stand over and above its performance. Knowledge is one with knowing, in a praxis which is its very performance.”

One of the first stories that the community shared is the narrative of the development of the water music: étëtung. The story, dating back to 1974 (Wessergo, Dick et al. 2014) is presented as “The History of the Magical Water Music” (see Appendix 4). It was originally presented to me as a written statement by one of the men, the husband of Hilda Rosal Wavales, the woman recognised as the custodian of the étëtung. Recognising that the women were integral to the re-configuring of the water “games” as a contemporary musical
genre, in Chapter 5 I revise the narrative as “The Herstory of the Leweton Cultural Village” (henceforth “Herstory”). The Herstory was translated from Bislama to English and revised to fit the requirements of the liner notes for a commercial release on a world music label specialising in the music of Melanesia, Wantok Musik. The original Bislama version of the Herstory is a distinctly autoethnographic text, in the sense defined by Mary Pratt (1991: 35), whereby “people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them”. The somewhat lyricised English version of the Herstory presented with the VWWM film (Chapter 3) still retains enough of the character and the intent of the original to warrant the autoethnographic label. It is a critical or historical genealogy of the innovations on the water music and a claim to the intellectual property rights emanating from the creation of the ëtëtung as I explore in Chapters 4 and 5 (Dick 2014a, Dick 2015a). Just as European history/herstory is contested, there are, no doubt, community politics, controversies and uncertainties involved in the background of this story. Whatever controversies exist, the Herstory provides an engaging contextualisation for the VWWM film (Chapter 3) and it describes a trajectory of innovations related to the water music.

The gendered aspects of the project made it a challenging space to navigate as a male researcher. Despite the fact that the water music is performed exclusively by women, stories about the water music are often mediated by men. This includes the Herstory, which was presented to me by the husband of Hilda Wavales, who is custodian of the story. This is perhaps a function of my own gender and relationality within the community. In many of the articles that I have published thus far, husbands mediate the voices of their wives, sons of their mothers, brothers of their sisters, and the men present as leaders of Leweton. This conceals the fact that my engagement with the group is often directly and exclusively with the women (on tour, for example). I was conscious of the fact that my own gender made it inappropriate (and often impossible) for me to engage with the women in certain ways, and at certain times. In response to this I made a conscious effort to support projects driven by individual women. In addition to the fact that the women feature in the VWWM film (Chapter 3) as key protagonists, there are two exceptional cases
where I have supported the publishing of perspectives, voices and stories of Mwerlap women unmediated by Leweton men. One is the photographic essay at Appendix 1 documenting the work of one of the Mwerlap women, my adopted sister-in-law, Delly Roy (Roy, Panicali et al. 2015). The other is presented at Appendix 4, the case study for a UNESCO report on Gender, Heritage and Creativity in the Pacific (Dick 2014b).

2.3 Presentation of Literature

As stated the research is concerned with the ways that a specific Oceanian community is engaging with place, and literature specific to each written chapter is more fully articulated therein. In this section I briefly explore some of the broad theoretical concepts that underpin the enquiry. For the past 60 years, research situated in the “world system” and referencing dependency theory (see especially Wallerstein 1974, Brenner 1977, Leys 1977) has explored contemporary geopolitics positing a centre/periphery model, which assumes that the actions and processes emanating from European colonial nations have profoundly affected other less powerful peoples (Connell 2007). Researchers within the world system approach argue that the concentration of value in these nations – 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: 3). While the world system approach has facilitated the generation of useful research, it has also succumbed to its own arguments in the sense that peripheral peoples have been framed as passive subjects of modernity and globalization, one of the key points made relevant to Oceanian people by Epeli Hau'ofa (1993). In this context, Stuart Hall’s (1980) theory of articulation is a revision of materialism that imagines the tactical and strategic selection of friends and enemies, insiders and outsiders, on one team or another, in support (or often not) of a political outcome (Grossberg 1986, Slack 1996). It offers a “nonreductive way to think about cultural transformation and the apparent coming and going of ‘traditional’ forms” (Clifford 2001: 478). With the advent of post structural theories the idea of a division between the social and the natural world, the observer and the observed – a legacy of European Enlightenment philosophy
– has, like objective detachment and the Berlin Wall, become empirically untenable. Drawn from Spinoza and Foucault, the multiple, contingent, relational ontologies of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) destabilised notions of representation, inspiring the performative turn, the affective turn, and the articulation of non-representational theories in many areas of the social sciences and humanities.

Closer to Vanuatu, and inspired by Marshall Sahlins (1993), Epeli Hau’ofa (1993, 2000) railed against the belittlement of Oceania while Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) exemplified the oppressive nature of (some) research from the perspective of indigenous peoples in her landmark book Decolonising Methodologies. Raewyn Connell’s (2007) critique of key sociological theorists challenges the “reproduction of relations of domination” in their work. The fundamental question asked in much of the decolonising literature, and one particularly apposite to Vanuatu, is: On whose land is this happening? This question has shaped the theoretical framework for my thesis as well as grounding the complex set of relations and emplacements that constitute the research assemblage. As I have explained in section 2.2.2, over the period of time that I have been working with the Leweton community we have been on ancestral Mwerlap land, on real estate leased by the Leweton community in Luganville, on land belonging to people in several other countries. It is not the specific detail of “who owns the land” that is important, rather it is understanding that the idea of “land” (and place) itself is ontologically different for different people. This question, and the decolonising theoretical framework continues to be a foundational nexus for my relations with the Leweton community – as well as shaping my understanding of power and privilege.

Adopting decolonising methodologies as a theoretical framework means attending to the way that power and privilege play out in the research assemblage, including the way that the research is contextualised. Drawing on Hall (1980) and Grossberg (1992), Jennifer Slack (1996: 126) explains that “the context is not something out there, within which practices occur or which influence the development of practices. Rather, identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context within which they are practices,
identities or effects”. This fractal inscription of people, practice, and context resonates powerfully with the anthropological literature describing the ways that ni-Vanuatu become located in the economic, political and social structures of their world and how “place reciprocally shapes individuals and society through human agency” (Rodman 1992: 647). This reciprocal relationality is neatly expressed in the Bislama concept of man ples, ‘person of the place’ a condensation of place and person (Rodman 1987: 35, Jolly 1994: 253, Bolton 2003: 68). In reference to the people of north Pentecost, Taylor (2008: 76) writes that they “orient themselves as persons through reference to a corpus of relational categories which, like the mazy lines of a sand drawing, intersect and link with each other to provide an intricate mesh of social identity”. This is also true for people throughout Vanuatu, as it is through relational interweaving of ground and place, and the people with whom one shares the ground of a place, that a ni-Vanuatu personhood and identity is continuously imagined and reiterated through flows of persons and things as a self-productive process of what Torres Islanders refer to as “living growth” (Mondragón 2009). However, as the urban intercultural spaces become more layered and complex, individuals and communities are defining themselves in different ways. Increasingly, urban ni-Vanuatu people are identifying themselves along intercultural lines outside the social structures and kinship systems of a particular home island (Kraemer 2013). There is a fundamental difference between these two subsets of man kam (people who came) one being an urban emplacement that follows village or island-based kinship, such as the Leweton Cultural Village, and primary town emplacement, embodied by the increasing number of people who live their entire lives in urban Melanesia without a sense of connection to a home island, and this difference has implications both ontologically and physically, some of which I explore throughout the thesis.

Throughout this thesis I bring the context into focus using a range of methodological techniques: Chapter 3 and 4 use the medium of film and a non-narrative presentational style to foreground the environmental and cultural specificities of the Leweton community’s own research projects and autoethnographic texts and performances; Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 achieve a similar outcome through more conceptual and theoretical techniques using
chorography and articulation, respectively, to understand the Mwerlap diaspora and its various configurations and emplacements. Mwerlap and Leweton are, of course, more complex and contested ideas than I am able to portray here. Building on Rodman’s (1992) efforts at empowering place through the idea of “multilocality”, I frame the Mwerlap diaspora as a “chain of experienced places”, in which the links “are forged of culture and history” (643). Indeed, the Leweton community is deep in the process of forging precisely these links in its chain of attachments. For Rodman (1992), multilocality has a number of dimensions, including: the assumption of a decentered analysis, reference to comparative or contingent analyses of place; and reflexive relationships with places (646-7). All of these dimensions are relevant to the Mwerlap configurations and emplacements, but as a way of making the Other present “rather than making representations based on the Other’s absence” (Fabian 1990: 771), I am focusing on the ways that the Leweton community performatively construct place by leveraging cultural expression to generate new livelihood activities. In doing so, I also draw on Mondragon’s (2009) reading of Joel Bonnemaison (1976, 1984, 1994) and their belief that Melanesian locative identities are disruptive of Western concepts of space, place, and mobility. In particular, I take Mondragon’s (2009) presentation of “the living milieu as a complex interweaving of land- and sea-scapes”, what he refers to as an “Oceanic Socio-scape”, and inflect this with recent theorising from the field of Island Studies (see Chapter 5).

Unlike Rodman or Mondragon, however, I am not presenting data from a traditional ethnography based on a period of fieldwork in a village/island. Rather, I am positioned within the research context not as a disinterested observer but as an engaged participant in some elements of the livelihood activities and the performative construction of place. Indeed, sometimes the context/place for the ethnography is actually my own house in Australia. With this positionality in mind, this thesis seeks to present autoethnographic data and ideas that reflect on the activities that I have been involved in, as well as autoethnographic texts and performances that have been shared with me by the Leweton community. The challenge for me is to present the results of my research in a way that reflects the depth, richness, and performativity of the “data” while honouring the conventions of methodological and theoretical
frameworks. Working in this way, it is often difficult to balance the requirements of the academy and the expectations of the community; it is difficult to shape the data, as it were, when one is both in and part of the data (Grossberg 1992: 55-6).

With these considerations in mind, both the Herstory, the VWWM film, and the various tours can be understood to be the result of coactivity – a form of dialogic performance that embraces and complicates diversity, difference, and pluralism (Conquergood and Johnson 2013: 93). Madison (2005) describes it as living in “embodied engagement of radical empiricism, to honor the aural/oral sounds that incorporate rather than gaze over” (168, emphasis in original). The chorographic and coactive approach have resulted in a range of textual outputs that are part of the context, part of the data, and new knowledge in their own right, that accelerate the contribution and significance of the project beyond the boundaries of the traditional dissertation.

In the language of Deleuze and Guattari, the place-taking expressions and performances that I discuss throughout the thesis are “territorializing lines” (1987) describing the process of configuration and organisation: the reconstitution of “collective existential territories” (Guattari 1995). They are also modes of knowing that are dynamic, kinaesthetic, and embodied. Distinct village communities, in constant interaction, with a bias towards diversification and “egalitarian multilingualism, … a shared history of contact, and ideological emphasis placed on the value of local identities” (François 2011: 235), are fractal inscriptions of the dynamic interplay of centrifugal and centripetal forces in their social ecology. When a community reaches a certain size it splits itself into smaller communities (fractal inscriptions). Crucially, these forces, dynamics, and inscriptions, as well as contemporary migration patterns, education and work opportunities, colonial and postcolonial structures, and indeed, the new articulated sites of Mwerlap and other indigenous diasporas are all constitutive of the social ecology within which they are forces, dynamics, inscriptions, patterns, opportunities, structures, articulations and diasporas.
Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical dialogues challenged the concept of the self as an end point, an enclosed entity with particular meaning and expression. Their ideas incorporate an ecological context, the mapping of one’s “rhizome” of activity through life’s environments of influence. They use the word rhizome to signify a terrain on which subjectivity travels within both an extended and particular sense of place. A rhizome is a network composed of relational parts linked together: “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 27). The idea of rhizome as a relational nexus aligns with ethnographic data of anthropologist, Carlos Mondragón (2009) who has detailed the changing perspectives of place and subjectivity of people from the Torres Islands (also in TORBA province). Indeed we can imagine a rhizome’s lateral growth as a metaphor for subjectivity as a growing enterprise, or “living growth” (Mondragón 2009). Identity in this context is continually in process, spreading out into different areas of activity, assembling, dissembling, and reassembling into new diasporic imaginings. A land/seascape of creative engagement both territorializes identity through the designation of a person’s occupation of a particular place, and deterritorializes identity within a transformative relocation of a person’s place, as he or she performs within different kinds of contexts. The ecology of performance is a happening, an interchange of kinesthetic and sensory contact with multiple surfaces that are assemblages within assemblages, heterogeneous contexts for expressing lived experience. The members of the Leweton community create and interact with environmental assemblages – habitats – that also create life’s cartography. The land/seascape dilutes/concentrates with accumulative degrees of activity and movements in rhythm within a continuously changing milieu. A rhizome correlates different territories; it simultaneously inhabits many places at one time through aggregate growth. A rhizome is botanical and psychological, a routing through the land/seascape, a trail of generation. Working with the qualities and features of nature-based materials and a landscape of engagement and opportunity extends the practice of Mwerlap-becoming into site-inspired installations and enactments. The discourse – the narrative – of the thesis reflects this indeterminacy and it starts from critical realist ontology and ends up in a new materialist ontology. So an alternative (and perhaps more
accurate) title for this thesis might be: (Introducing the idea of intra-grade via
the unfolding of a diffractive triptych mosaic destabilising the historical
absurdity of a desire to consider) Reconciling kastom, tourism, art in the
Pacific: the case of the Leweton Cultural Group and “water music”. I have
however refrained from using something so specific in favour of a more
immediately intelligible title.

This interdisciplinary study provides insights into the perspectives of an
indigenous community actively promoting itself as both a heritage tourism
destination and a performing arts troupe. This study blends a chorographic
and non-representational theory (Anderson and Harrison 2010) into a praxis
of spatial articulation designed to make visible “the forces (the articulations)
that create and maintain identities that have real concrete effects” (Slack
1996). Recognizing the intentional and the arbitrary joining and un-joining,
assembling and reassembling, creating and recreating, the articulating and re-
articulating, of human and non-human actors is what imbues this
methodology/approach with its efficacy. I detail the processes – the forces of
affect – and account for the affective flows, the affect economy, and the
micro-politics of the research assemblage.

2.4 Research Design

As discussed in the previous section, the diverse and relational nature of
Melanesian subjectivities gives rise to a context of ontological indeterminacy.
In response to this I have embraced the ambiguous conceptual space between
new materialism and critical realism. Porter (1993) has outlined the case for
the adoption of critical realism as a philosophical grounding for ethnographic
research. As a point of departure, I take the critical realist approach to
ethnography to emphasise the structural mechanisms rather than unique
events, to contribute to an understanding of the materiality and sociality of the
case study in question. Indeed, Porter 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. This
provides a basis to deepen our understanding of the ongoing flows of continuity and change for Pacific Island diasporas and for supporting other communities to achieve the multivalent livelihood outcomes (maintaining cultural heritage, facilitating local/domestic enterprise, providing a basis for cultural export) associated with successful cultural villages.

One of the goals of my research project has been to honour and privilege the life projects, the desired outcomes, and the pre-existing local research activities of the people with whom I was engaged. My commitment to this goal has been a major influence in the use of decolonising methodologies as a theoretical framework for my thesis. This research goal was convergent (though not always easily optimised) with my professional goals as a participant within the Leweton entity. As the research project unfolded, it became clear that the dissolution between myself as researcher and the Leweton community as case study site (in other words my embeddedness in the data) was mirrored by the dissolution of the realist model of structure and agency. Despite my ongoing protestations, the Leweton community continues to position itself so as to engage in relations on micro, meso, and macro levels, creating new livelihood opportunities. Embracing these multiscalar positionalities (of myself as researcher-embedded in the data, and of Leweton cutting across multiple levels of analysis, for more on this see Chapter 5) has become one of the key strengths of the project – it is good science – and involved including my colleagues from the Leweton community as investigators in the research project, authors on publications, and presenters at academic conferences. Additionally, as members of the community become more involved in shaping the research, my awareness of the ontological indeterminacy became more pronounced: while I am not concerned with documenting the details of Mwerlap ontology(ies), the fact that they existed (or perhaps the fact that I was becoming more aware that these ontologies existed) has had a major impact on the development of the research project. In accommodating these impacts the project has been transformed into something resembling the emerging ethnographic approaches of new materialism where “ontology evokes the fundamental co-formation – rather than separability of being and knowing, natural and cultural, biological and social, matter and thought. For thinkers of new materialisms, ontology signals
the ongoing emergence of entanglements” (Tiainen, Kontturi et al. 2015: 3). Following Fox and Alldred (2015: 406) I used the case study design to process different kinds of ethnographic data with a view to exploring how the different material and cultural forms of the Leweton group are drawn into assembly together across micro-meso-macro scales of interaction. These different forms and scales constitute the different embedded elements of the case study. In collaboration with the community, I have operationalised these ideas using the methodological tool of participant engagement (see below) scaffolded around a local technique for sharing knowledge: a sand drawing.

From a more traditional or positivist perspective, the design that I adopted in this thesis could lead to a set of constraints and opportunities. The key constraint is its low (statistical) representativeness. 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. 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 mitigate this potential problem by triangulating the research project across the three embedded units: cultural heritage, tourism spectacle, and international artistic performance. I make each of these units the specific focus of the written chapters that follow.

2.4.1 Research Methodology

The ethnographer is interested in the socio-cultural contexts and processes in which people live their lives, as well as the meaning systems which motivate them. Within an ethnographic paradigm, the actors and their corresponding actions, behaviours, and beliefs are examined within the cultural and societal context in which they take place. In so doing, as Agar (1996: 11) suggested in the update of his classic *The Professional Stranger*, an ethnographer must go “beyond a focus on local communities [but should] situate them within the larger political economy, as people are part of states and of a turbulent world”. This understanding of social context draws together multiple systems of meanings, some of which are more dominant than others in affecting the lives of people at the local level. At the same time, however, emphasis in
ethnography is placed not on separate behavioural acts, as is often the case in positivist approaches, but on how behavioural processes are linked. The process of pursuing a holistic view of a group often includes environmental and historical considerations which help the ethnographer gain a better understanding of the context in which an individual or group operates. Clifford reinforces these ideas:

*Ethnography is actually situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, tilling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration and is itself part of these processes.* (1986:2)

I have conducted a qualitative, new materialist ethnography, influenced by the ‘critical turn’ in cultural studies. A case study is an in-depth study of a particular research problem rather than a sweeping statistical survey. A case study design 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. Case research can be defined 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: 119). This process of iterative–parallel research suggests an ongoing shuttling back and forth, a deferral, between the diverse stages of the research project.

In selecting the methodology for this study I was informed by Yin (1989) who lists major reasons for choosing a single-case design, based on the specific characteristics of the study, for example: criticality; extreme/uniqueness, representative/typical, revelatory, longitudinal. Having lived in Vanuatu, and more specifically in Santo, for many years, and also having worked closely with the members of the Leweton group, 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 spent with them on tour, and the time spent together planning activities domestically and internationally. Such a unique research assemblage, allowed the longitudinal collection of data based on stories, histories, notes from tours, reports, briefing documents, interviews, and observations.
2.4.2 Decolonising Methodologies: Place, Power and Assemblage

This research is located in place and because that place is an indigenous place/context my status as a non-Indigenous researcher is an index of power and privilege. As Connell (2007) has suggested, it is important to remind oneself that these research activities are happening on someone else’s land. On whose land is this research happening? Living and working with an Indigenous community, I have been conscious of the ever-present danger of my project becoming the victim of its own historicity, and falling into a trap of transcendental rationalism. In mitigating this risk I have avoided problematizing the community so that I could appear with the ‘solution’ and present it in my thesis. 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. It 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 have adapted this standard participant observation by taking a similar approach to what Lissant Bolton (2003: xv) calls “participant engagement”. I participate in community life in Vanuatu and with the Leweton ensemble when it is on tour “with the express objective of making changes” (ibid.). 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 and internationally, 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 2003: xv)

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, 2003).

The dissolution of observer and observed in the project, that is, my embedded-ness in the data – a potentially conflicted positionality – becomes a methodological strength as it creates an opportunity for a deeply integrative analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place and multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. For example, despite the fact that I am often accused of *fulumap hed blong man* (filling up people’s heads), or *go long we tumas nao* (going too far) with plans or ideas, I am not perceived as an observer. Rather, I am treated as an adopted family member with a set of perceived propensities that various community members are able to leverage. Operationalising new materialism in the context of this research, I embody a set of obligations that impact the research and creates the conditions for an integrated analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place, such as are explored in this article, along with multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. The *VWWM* film, the tours and the performances form part of the data. And simultaneously they are in and of themselves research outcomes – modes of presenting knowledge that belongs to people in a specific place.

In-depth interviews and participant engagement were the key methods employed to gather evidence for the case. A series of semi-structured, in-
depth interviews was conducted with stakeholders and members of the Leweton community, while participant observation occurred throughout. Interpretive analysis of the interviews, coupled with my insider observations as a participant, reveal key issues in policy and planning for regional tourism, creative and cultural industries, urbanization, and self-determination. Data from coactivity with the community is presented that foregrounds people’s strategies of articulation and demonstrate a performative revisioning of space that opens up transformational contingencies for diasporic communities. This data is augmented with autoethnographic vignettes: “in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (Pratt 1991).

2.5 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I present a case study of embodied, multi-local Melanesian subjectivities that attends to questions of power through a framework of decolonising methodologies, in order to explore the performatively constituted identities of a particular community of Mwerlap-speakers in Vanuatu. I contextualise the genesis of the research project and the case study community in contemporary Vanuatu: an intercultural space contextualised by extremely high levels of indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity. I provide detailed information about the reasons why I have chosen this particular case study and unpack the dissolution of observer and observed in the project, that is, my embedded-ness in the data. A reflexive awareness of this positionality affords me the opportunity to leverage my long-term relationships in favour of a deeply integrative analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place and multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. In this way, a potentially conflicted positionality is reframed as a methodological strength. I introduce some of the key thematic ideas explored throughout the thesis, especially some of the culturally specific elements unfamiliar to readers who have not lived in Vanuatu. I also position these themes in relation to the various Chapters and thereby provide an overview of the thesis. In accordance with institutional guidelines, each Chapter is a peer-reviewed article, incorporating its own methodology and review of relevant literature specific to the content and the journal in which it
was published, an introductory discussion the overarching theories takes the place of dedicated chapters for methodology and literature review.

Drawing together ideas from anthropology, linguistics, architecture, and cultural studies, this interdisciplinary study draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theories and the elaboration of these theories in the fields of island studies (Hayward 2012, Hayward 2012, Maxwell 2012, Dick 2015a, Hayward 2015), human geography (Tawa 2002, Olwig 2008, Anderson and Harrison 2010), performance studies (Roach 1996, Roach 2010, Conquergood and Johnson 2013) and cultural studies (Hall 1980, Grossberg 1986, Slack 1996, Clifford 2001, Grossberg 2013) to generate insights into the perspectives of an indigenous community actively promoting itself as both a heritage tourism destination and a performing arts troupe. This study blends a chorographic engagement with place (Tawa 2002, Olwig 2008, Maxwell 2012, Dick 2015a) and non-representational theory (Anderson and Harrison 2010) into a praxis of spatial articulation designed to make visible “the forces (the articulations) that create and maintain identities that have real concrete effects” (Slack 1996). Recognizing the joining and the un-joining, the assembling and the reassembling, the creating and the recreating, the articulating and re-articulating, imbues this methodology/approach with is efficacy.
Chapter 3 - Vanuatu Women's Water Music

3.1 Introduction

This thesis is intended to be read in conjunction with the documentary film *Vanuatu Women's Water Music* (henceforth VWWM) and the liner notes of the commercial release of the DVD, both of which constitute Chapter 3. The liner notes include an essay titled “The History of the Leweton Cultural Village” which, in recognition of the fundamental role of the women in the story, I revise as “The Herstory of the Leweton Cultural Village” (henceforth “Herstory”). This essay describes how the Leweton community is developing some renown for its performances of the ëtëtung (women’s water music) and *stringband matto* (a form of Melanesian string band music blended with traditional percussion). In the VWWM film, the Leweton group present the ëtëtung and *stringband matto* which are contemporary innovations of “traditional” Mwerlap cultural heritage. This is augmented by *na-mag* (a public dance for the young, uninitiated men) that follows rhythms played on bamboo slit gong drums and accompanied by chants and songs; and *ne-leang* (the women’s public dances and songs) which feature the sustained wail called an *orl*. The film also includes 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.

The culmination of almost four years of collaborative work between myself and the Leweton community, the film was partly financed by Further Arts – a Vanuatu-based not-for-profit organisation creating employment pathways and opportunities for young artists and producers in the arts and cultural sector – and the Wantok Musik Foundation (Wantok Musik) a highly-regarded, Australian not-for-profit label in the international world music industry, known for producing Melanesian and Indigenous Australian music. I am involved with both of these organisations, on the Board of Further Arts, and
as an independent producer/researcher with Wantok Musik. Releasing the film on a record label was a strategic choice for the Leweton group. The expectation was that distribution through Wantok Musik would project a particular status of artistic authority and quality to the international industry. Wantok Musik engaged an Australian sound artist, Tim Cole, to direct and record the film. Cole and I, worked with the Leweton community, and several young people engaged by Further Arts and other local partners to record the footage and the audio over a two-week period in November 2012. Both the Herstory, the VWWM film, can be understood to be the result of coactivity – a form of dialogic performance that embraces and complicates diversity, difference, and pluralism (Conquergood and Johnson 2013: 93). Reflecting on this coactivity, leader of the Leweton community, Sandy Sur commented:

_I see three things that connect us on earth. There is mother earth, our natural mother and water. Without these three things, nothing would exist. Vanuatu Women’s Water Music is an amazing display of sounds, rhythms and movements, which demonstrate the living nature of water and life on Earth. (pers comm, 2016)_

The film is a coactive mediation that transitions the live performance of the Leweton “show” into the commodity sphere of a world music product. “In recorded form, the DVD operates in a space demarcated by particular audiophilic parameters in order to secure a profile and related economic advantage for the performers and broader community.” (Hayward 2015: 124).

The film was well received by international reviewers and has been screened in numerous festivals and competitions (see Chapter 1 for a list of the screenings). In full collaboration with the Leweton community, we worked with an established film production company in Australia for the VWWM film to be re-formatted into a style suitable for broadcast on French television. Partly due to the success of the film there are three more identifiable groups of women performing the water music – each with village activities and infrastructure that are presented as a part of the performance. On Gaua there are two groups: Limoros and Salap. And on Santo, on a neighbouring property to Leweton, is the Turgor group. One of the key people involved in the production of the film, and at the centre of this cultural renewal, is a Mwerlap woman named Delly Roy. Delly is the leader of a grassroots indigenous-led movement that was established specifically to promote and preserve the diverse cultural practices of the northern part of Vanuatu and to
engage young people in their cultural heritage. The Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support (TEKS) Program in Santo, focuses its work in the field of traditional knowledge and wisdom transfer, and cultural development (see Appendix 1). The idea that underpins the work of the TEKS project is the unity that underpins the diversity of ni-Vanuatu cultural expression. The work that TEKS has done with Leweton has modelled an effective process for other groups to follow. According to Delly, she selected the water music as one of TEKS first test cases because: it features women prominently in the group; it is not associated with a sacred ceremony; and it is practiced throughout the Banks Islands – not just in one place – which means that any woman from the Banks Islands can perform. Delly explained the significance of the water music as a model for engaging young women in cultural expression in safe and respectful situations:

We know that there is a warrior element to our heritage. But sometimes we forget that the fundamental elements of our kastom are based on peace and respect. Maybe this is because men have dominated the process of telling our stories in recent times? Now that women are standing up and singing and dancing and telling their own stories, we can connect with the part of our heritage that has been hidden from the men: our women’s stories. And with these stories comes a woman’s way of telling the stories, singing the songs, and dancing the dances. (see Appendix 1)

These activities allow traditional ecological knowledge and culture to be transmitted across generations and genders, and they strongly link with their land/seascapes and the maintenance and protection of these land/seascapes as the fundamental basis of life. By supporting local communities to document and continue transmitting important traditions and practices to younger generations, the links between culture, people and their environment can be strengthened. Young people performed alongside their elders in their communities’ traditional songs, dances and ceremonies, thus strengthening intergenerational partnerships and exchange. They also reinterpreted these traditions, developing new cultural expressions, through music composition, visual art and mixed dance styles. These opportunities have given youth deep insight into the process of learning and performing their traditional cultural heritage. They have enriched respect for it, and the tools necessary to continue the practice, maintaining it for themselves and future generations.
In closing, this is a statement from Chief James Dick which he makes in the film. In his official capacity James is welcoming the people into the space for their performances.

*I am very happy to see you all here; our elders, our adults and our children gathered together in our ceremonial space to learn from our leaders. By coming together like this we celebrate the importance of our cultural heritage, and at the same time we pass it on to our children to guide them in their lives.* (VWWM)

### 3.2 Liner Notes and e-book

See DVD insert.

### 3.3 Vanuatu Women's Water Music (documentary film)

See DVD insert.
Chapter 4 - Local Diaspora Imaginings

4.1 Segue

This chapter examines the ways in which the Mwerlap diasporic community is navigating an intercultural space by mobilising itself and its cultural assets in a variety of formats that span a range of industries, sectors and cultural transition areas. I unpack an autoethnographic narrative of Leweton-becoming, the story of how the community is innovating on Mwerlap heritage and tradition to generate livelihood opportunities. In Chapter 2, I introduced the ni-Vanuatu notion of *ples* (place). Then Chapter 3 provides an audio-visual presentation of how the Leweton group engages performatively with *ples*. In this chapter, I describe the dynamics and the context of the processuality of Mwerlap multi-locality: they are domiciled in Luganville but they are from Gaua and Merelava. This facilitates a closer look at the domestic mobility of the diaspora and the configuration of Mwerlap immanence. In doing so, the Leweton village is revealed as *man kam*, (people who have migrated) but who have strong connections to home island communities. This chapter describes how they came to be *man kam* and contextualises the establishment of the cultural village as the local link in the Leweton chain of attachments.
4.2 Vanuatu Water Music And The Mwerlap Diaspora: Music, Migration, Tradition, And Tourism
VANUATU WATER MUSIC AND THE MWERLAP DIASPORA

Music, migration, tradition, and tourism

Thomas Dick*

Abstract

Taking the case of the Mwerlap-speaking people from the islands of Gaua and Merelava in northern Vanuatu, this article investigates the forces at play in the mobility of people in Vanuatu. I describe the process by which a diasporic community transitioned into the Leweton Cultural Village in the urban setting of Luganville, Espiritu Santo. In a context of extremely high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity, the research project reported in this article examines the ways in which a diasporic community is navigating an intercultural space by mobilizing itself and its cultural assets in a variety of rapidly evolving formats that span a range of industries, sectors and cultural transition areas. I add to the knowledge and understanding of the significance of subnational diasporas by exploring the role they can play as incubators of cultural export products, particularly in the music and tourism industries, by using the case of the ni-Vanuatu performers of women’s “water music”.

Keywords

water music, Vanuatu, mobility, Leweton, diaspora, tradition

Introduction

Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago of 83 islands, of which 70 are inhabited (see Figure 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 113 distinct language

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groups (Tryon, 1996, p. 171). 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 languages in absolute numbers. The Bislama term kastom refers to the idea of a traditional system of law, religion, economics and/or governance. It is used by ni-Vanuatu to “characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place” (Bolton, 2003, p. xiii). Kastom is seen as a way of life: an “adherence to ‘traditional’ practices of kinship and marriage, the performance of customary rituals at birth, circumcision, marriage and death, the sacrifice and exchange of pigs in the rites taken in the graded society” (Jolly, 1982, p. 340). In reality, there are as many kastom systems as there are languages as each of the 113 language groups represents a people with different oral histories, cosmologies, customs and traditions (Abong, 2007, p. 1).

The national system of government and the modern cash economy have been overlaid onto these complex traditional systems. Ni-Vanuatu are generally proud and willing citizens of the independent Republic of Vanuatu; indeed, kastom was a unifying force in the struggle for independence throughout the 1970s (Rawlings, 2012, p. 49). However, the majority of ni-Vanuatu still have an extremely strong connection to their subnational language groups. The living expression of this diversity appears in many different forms: it is formulated and presented as customary practice (rituals marking births, deaths, marriages); as a commercial enterprise (in the tourism and entertainment industries); and as creative and artistic performance (at international festivals and events).

Background and approach

In this context of extremely high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity, this article sets out preliminary findings of an ongoing doctoral research project that examines the mobility of a subnational diasporic community and how it is making itself “local, national, and international simultaneously through representing and selling kastom to the outside world” (Geismar, 2009, p. 72). It takes the case of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora from the Banks Islands, in the north of Vanuatu, who perform “water music”, and investigates the forces at play in the transitioning of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora into the entity known as the Leweton Cultural Village (also Leweton Cultural Group, or Leweton). This is located in the peri-urban area around Luganville, the second-largest town in Vanuatu, which has a population of 13,167 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009) on the northern island of Espiritu Santo (see Figure 1). The Banks Islands form the southeastern half of TORBA Province (see Figure 2). The islands that make up the Banks group are Gaua (formerly Santa Maria) (330.6 km²), Merelava (formerly Star, known as Mwerlap by the inhabitants) (18 km²), Mota (9.5 km²), Motalava (24 km²), Ureparapara (39 km²) and
Vanua Lava (314 km²). There are also several other smaller islets. My research is concerned primarily with Mwerlap-speaking people from the islands of Gaua and Merelava in the southeast of TORBA (see Figure 2).

The Leweton Cultural Village was formed in 2008, when Sandy Sur from Merelava brought together the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora living on the island of Espiritu Santo (see Figure 1), into a conscious community based around their kinship. The peri-urban village is called Leweton, which is an acronym comprised of the first few letters of six of the Mwerlap villages in Gaua and Merelava: Lekweal, Lewetmise, Lewetneak, Aot, Tesmet, Ontara. Except for the youngest members, the Leweton community is, like most communities in urban Vanuatu, man kam, meaning they are immigrants. They are resident in Lufangville but they are connected by language and kastom to Gaua and Merelava.

The aim of this article is to describe the processes that stimulated the mobility of people from rural to urban areas and provided the context for the formation of the Leweton Cultural Village. This approach will include identifying the characteristics of Merelava out-migration, from Merelava to Gaua and from Gaua and Merelava to other places for work, for resettlement (urbanization), and to international destinations (as a form of international circular migration) for the performance of water music at festivals in Europe, Asia and Australia. I frame the Mwerlap diaspora as community who are navigating an intercultural space by mobilizing themselves and their cultural assets in a variety of rapidly evolving formats that span a range of industries, sectors and cultural transition areas. This study takes a novel approach to the informal and community-led instruments by using the phenomenon of water music as a lens to gain important insights into the agency of diasporic communities and the creative forces and tensions in intercultural spaces.
As a critical realist, I focus on the functional elements of the Leweton community. Instead of asking why certain things are so, I focus on the structures and processes that influence how these things have come to be (Bhaskar, 1998). The director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Marcellin Abong, insists that in Vanuatu “the practitioner communities define for themselves what they consider to be the important aspects of their culture worth safeguarding and also be actively involved in deciding what measures to take to safeguard these aspects and in the implementation of these measures” (Abong, 2007). In accordance with this statement, the doctoral research project from which this article emanates also includes the production of a professional quality DVD and the publication of a 32-page booklet accompanying the DVD (Leweton Cultural Group, 2014). This booklet includes a translation of “The History of the Magical Water Music” as presented to me by the Leweton community (Wessergo, Dick, & Sur, 2014). The Leweton community has its own agenda and purpose for this research project. I have ensured the community contributed to the design of the research and the interpretation of results in the context of cultural norms and traditional knowledge, and in support of the Leweton community’s agenda. The community and individual participants were informed about their choices with regard to anonymity and the use of data; however, they have chosen to identify themselves.

The study locates itself in the field of Pacific Studies, and more specifically within the discourse of decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999). The research project also owes a methodological debt to Mercer and Moore, who “used oral tradition to provide an Islander perspective” (as cited in Moore, 1992, p. 62). In this article, a local narrative that describes the history of a form of artistic and cultural expression—water music—is used to privilege an indigenous ontology because the Leweton Cultural Village describes its own historical time and space. The historical narrative is interwoven with the findings of a series of interviews conducted with members and supporters of the Leweton Cultural Group. These interviews were conducted at and around a range of events and tours between 2009 and 2014. The interviews and narratives are augmented by research notes taken while I was engaged as a participant in many of the events and activities, including the production of the DVD. This primary data is accompanied by an analysis of relevant theories. The study lays the foundation for exploring the formation of cultural identities at the local, national, and international levels and the relationship between the Leweton Cultural Group and the world around them in future research.

The history of Mwerlap diasporic migration as enabled by water music

The people of Merelava and the people of the neighbouring island Gaua have a strong connection through kinship and trade. The villages on the eastern side of Gaua speak the same language—Mwerlap—as the people of Merelava. Pacific Islanders have been highly mobile people since they first arrived in the region. Durutalo (2012) extends the history of the Pacific Island diaspora far back into the time before Europeans arrived in the Pacific, reminding us that migration and diaspora are fundamental to Pacific identity. Projecting this idea into the future, Durutalo (2012, p. 214) introduces the concept of “diaspora imaginings” to refer to the way that some Pacific Islanders are leveraging the notion of diaspora as a way to generate new opportunities. In this context, I first encountered water music in a peri-urban “village” outside Vanuatu’s second-largest town, Luganville. I quickly became fascinated with this group of people who had transformed their residential arrangement into a tourist attraction constructed around the performance of “women’s water music” (see Figures 3 and 4).
For as long as anyone can remember, the women of Gaua and Merelava have made sounds from the river and the ocean. This practice, called vus lamlam in the Mwerlap language, has been handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter for generations. Women from other islands in the Banks and Torres groups, and as far away as the Solomon Islands have also been known to practise this kastom of making sounds in the water by splashing, scooping, and slapping the water (see Figure 3). Hugo Zemp (1978) recorded this practice in the Solomon Islands, where the Sa’a people of Small Malaita refer to it as kiro; the neighbouring ‘Are’are people of Malaita use the term kiroha or kiro ni karusi, meaning “kiro of the water” (pp. 39–40). Despite identifying that the ‘Are’are have a discrete “musical category” for the kiro, Zemp himself classifies the water percussion as a “game”, perhaps because the “repertoire is very limited” (p. 59). Another reason why Zemp, and the Melanesian communities themselves, have considered water
music as a “game” or pastime may be because, almost exclusively, it is women who practise it. Occasionally boys join in if they are young enough to be bathing with their mothers or sisters but, as stated in the interviews conducted for this research, water music is simply perceived to be “a woman’s thing”. Water music is also not associated with any formal ritual or ceremony, and is therefore not considered a sacred or taboo practice. It is beyond the scope of my research to explore the gender-related issues around the practice of water music, but it is possible that if water music was considered “a man’s thing” then it could have developed a stronger association with men’s customary rituals. To balance this, we could also imagine that the women deliberately prevented the water music from entering any ritual or any musical canon, preferring that it was perceived to be a “game” so as to protect it from being ritualized by men (from inside or outside the community). The fact that it is not associated with any ritual or taboo makes it more accessible than many other kastom expressions.

According to Warren Wevat Wessergo from Gaua, in 1974 two sisters and their daughters came together to discuss the development of the vus lamlam into more formal “water music”. The sisters were Elizabeth Womal Marego and Zalet Hilda, and they were using a range of techniques to create different layers of tone colour structured into different rhythmic arrangements, resulting in a series of unique compositions out of the various beats, rhythms, and textures that had previously been applied in a more random fashion.

It is likely that many other people have similar narratives about the heritage of water music and how it has developed in their communities. Indeed, François and Stern (2013) relate that another woman on West Gaua (but originally from Merelava), Matauli Rowon, “(re)invented” the practice of water music in 1983 while she was doing the laundry in the river. The aim of this article is not to argue the veracity of one history over another, but rather to create space for a multiplicity of histories. Matauli Rowon was possibly part of the 1974 discussions between Elizabeth and Zalet and their daughters.

According to Warren, when these 1974 discussions concluded, Elizabeth and Zalet chose Rovan Womal Marego to be the first leader of the Water Music Group. Rovan worked with the women to name the various sounds, beats, rhythms and chords of the water music. Elizabeth and Zalet decided that the first task for Rovan was to lead the group through the process of naming the existing sounds of vus lamlam being practised all over the Banks Islands. The first sound they named was vus tuwel. They also added në-bë, the word for “water”, to the term that referred to the act of creating the water music, vus lamlam, so that it became vus lamlam në-bë—the sounds created by slapping the water. This has resulted in other changes to the way that people refer to the practice. The term ëtëtung refers to the musicality of the practice, and thus could be translated as “water music”. The second task was to manipulate the water into a series of “songs” or arrangements. The four other arrangements that they had created were given the following names: kor në-bë (the sound of rainwater falling over stones); ne-kea (the sound of dolphins flapping their fins on the water); në-rë (the sound of rainwater falling on leaves and thatched roof); and vus ero (the sound of people chasing and shepherding fish into traps and nets).

François and Stern (2013, pp. 100–101) also describe some of the techniques that the women use to create the discrete elements of the water music, such as (in the Lakon language of West Gaua) häräv (caressing the surface of the water); wes (slapping it); vuh tëqël (smacking it sharply); gisgis (a light sound created by poking just two fingers into the water); and wej (a heavy sound created by plunging both fists into the water). Additionally, the puow or leader’s signal indicates a sequence is about to finish. The ethnomusicological and linguistic team also
describe how a sequence can be played twice, resulting in a two-part polyrhythm (François & Stern, 2013, p. 101)

In 1975, Martha Rowon (sister of Warren Wessergo) was practising the innovations of ëtëtung at the seashore when some yachts visited West Gaua. The sailors asked to hear the water music. My enquiries in the Leweton village as to whether or not Matauli Rowon (François & Stern, 2013, pp. 100–101) and Martha Rowon (Wessergo et al., 2014, p. 3) are related (or even the same person) were inconclusive. The Martha/Matauli enigma persists. Returning to Warren’s story, he goes on to describe the start of the process of the commoditization of water music:

some yachts in the area could hear the sounds that she was making … They found Martha on the reef and some of them were so impressed with the music that they presented Martha with gifts of clothes, shoes, and jewellery. This was the first instance of someone attracting visitors especially to see and hear the Water Music. (Wessergo et al., 2014, p. 3)

There have been other studies conducted which explore the tensions between a specific cultural group and tourism in Vanuatu. Most notable is research done with the Sa-speaking community of South Pentecost and the na gol (also na-gol, nagol, gol), or land-diving phenomenon (Cheer, Reeves, & Laing, 2013; Jolly, 1994). There are some strong parallels between the Sa and the Mwerlap communities, especially in relation to the iconic nature of the cultural activity involved. The ritualistic nature of the na gol makes it more complicated than the water music as a tourism spectacle.

Other elements of local kastom being mobilized as iconic tourism attractions in Vanuatu include the songs and stories associated with volcanos, especially Yasur on Tanna, and the Benbow/Marum complex on Ambrym, and the World Heritage-listed Roi Mata domain at North Efate. The one thing that differentiates the Leweton case is mobility. It has its idiosyncratic production and presentation challenges, but unlike na gol (see Jolly, 1994), the water music can be performed in any waist-deep body of water. This aspect is significant when compared with the ritual and place-based cultural tourism offerings. The interactions between the Leweton Cultural Group and the tourism industry will be explored in future research.

By the beginning of the 21st century, many of the innovators of water music were living in Luganville. In 2006, Sandy Sur organized a meeting of the Luganville-based Mwerlap-speaking diaspora of people from Gaua and Merelava who were living on a block of land in the Sograon area on the fringes of Luganville. Through this meeting Sandy galvanized the family around the idea of establishing the Leweton Cultural Village featuring the performance of ëtëtung.

During the course of the meeting several different activities were suggested as being able to be presented as a package to tourists. These activities included na-mag and ne-leang, the traditional dances (terrestrial) of men and women respectively—and na-matto, a communal dance featuring the whole community—as well as the preparation of food, stories, string band music, and kava. Warren was adamant that the water music had to be a feature of the package of activities that were presented to the tourists. This was important for the community as a way to manage their rights to perform and exploit the ëtëtung. By making it clear that the ëtëtung must be a part of the community’s repertoire, Warren, as the spokesperson for his mother, aunt and sister, made a claim over the customary rights to this cultural expression. In support of this claim he made reference to the 1974 process where the innovation of water music took place in the le-verë (ceremonial meeting place) of Wevat Wessergro, Saint Bartholomew, West Gaua. At the same time, Warren was giving permission to the community to continue to develop, perform, and exploit the ëtëtung. To this end, the meeting continued long into
the night, and also moved down to the shore where the men and women could stand in the water and visualize the water music, and test and demonstrate the possibility of its transmission. In the end, Hilda Rosal Wavales Warren, Warren’s wife, was appointed the Custodian of the Water Music for the Leweton community. As Warren recounts:

Hilda worked very hard to develop the water music and to engage all the women and girls in the community. It is largely due to her hard work that we can say that the Leweton Cultural Group has become so popular and that the Vanuatu Women’s Water Music is known around the world. (Wersergo et al., 2014, p. 6)

Hilda worked collaboratively with the community to create more new water music arrangements. Some of the new sounds they created include sogor (the sound of big fish chasing the bait fish); worworok (the rhythm of the creek or river coming from the hills and running over the volcanic stones, the trickle of a gentle waterfall); and ne-lea (the cave, so-called because when the creek flows through a cave, the sound of the water resonates in the stone chamber creating a unique sonic texture). Finally, and emphatically, Warren links the songs to place through language, creating a genealogy of the water music innovations:

Sometimes the meaning of the song was attributed to the ocean, other times to the sky or the land. All of the names and meanings were assigned in the Mwerlap language which is the language of Merelava and East Gaua, and each of them are a product of Leweton. (Wersergo et al., 2014, p. 8)

For the DVD production, a further innovation was introduced. Each composition was juxtaposed with a traditional song (melody) and performed as a new arrangement (Leweton Cultural Group, 2014). Each of the traditional songs can be performed with its own terrestrial dance, and each of the water music compositions also exists as an “instrumental” piece without the songs. The combination of these two elements is an innovation that seems to have emerged in parallel with the DVD pre-production process—the booklet accompanying the DVD contains a description of water music and the traditional melody. It is as yet unclear whether this innovation will be adopted into subsequent live repertoire.

Man Cam—the urban ni-Vanuatu diaspora

The members of the Leweton Cultural Group are from the province of TORBA (see Figure 2). TORBA’s population of 9,359 people and area of 882 km² makes it the smallest of all the provinces of Vanuatu, in both population and area. These factors, and its location in the remote north of Vanuatu, mean that the TORBA provincial government struggles to deliver basic services—a point I elaborate on later in this article. Notwithstanding the lack of services (and perhaps because of it), a report on ni-Vanuatu well-being concluded that “people of TORBA Province are, on average, the happiest people in Vanuatu” (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2012, p. 13).

This section analyses how the Leweton Cultural Village came to be established in Luganville. To understand the structural forces that have influenced the mobility of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora, and the establishment of the village, we shall explore the complexity of this intercultural world where there is “continuity in change, tradition in modernity, even custom in commerce” (Sahlins, 1993, p. 25). On a practical level, the “dynamism” (Abong, 2007, p. 1) of Vanuatu culture contributes to an abundance of cultural transition areas where different people and different cultures are coming together and co-producing an emergent new culture—some with more agency than others,
and some from a position of greater privilege than others (Douglas, 2004, p. 101). Similarly, on a theoretical level, the “mixed narratives” (Strathern, 1996, p. 521) of the “First Nations” are beginning to converge with the academics of the “First World”, as the never-been-modern hybrids (LaTour, 1993) jostle conceptually with a “totalizing perspective” (Rio, 2005, p. 417). 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, p. 108).

Mwerlap speakers are originally from the islands of Gaua and Merelava. These two islands are separated by about 45 km of the Pacific Ocean, with the tiny Merg Island roughly halfway between them (see Figure 2). Gaua is the larger of the two. It 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 in Figure 2, in addition to the Nume language in the north and Mwerlap in the east, there are two languages spoken on the western side and two on the southern side, making a total of six distinct languages on one tiny island.

On the eastern side of Gaua, we can see the result of the first level of recent migration of speakers of the Mwerlap language. At some point in the past, people from Merelava colonized the eastern side of Gaua, creating tensions between the communities (Arutangai, 1987, p. 285). The second level of recent migration is the temporary or “circular” migration of people from Merelava and Gaua to plantations (through both the inter-island labour trade and the “blackbirding” of indentured labourers to Australia) and the urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville (Arutangai, 1987; Bonnemaison, 1976; Haberkorn, 1992). The third level of recent migration is the permanent settlement of urban Port Vila and Luganville by people from Merelava and Gaua (and of course other islands) (Bonnemaison, 1976; Haberkorn, 1992). These three “levels” of migration are just the recent expressions of a fundamental characteristic of Pacific Islander identity and agency, or what Jolly describes as a “groundedness and mobility, settlement and detachment to articulate their being in the world” (Jolly, 2001, p. 427; emphasis in original).

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 Luganville were permanent migrants (Bonnemaison, 1976, p. 11). This combined result of “structural and cyclical factors triggered off a new wave of wild or uncontrolled urban migration” that no longer reflected “structures, means of control and links with the home environment” (Bonnemaison, 1976, p. 11). When framed as a diasporic imagining of ni-Vanuatu people, this human mobility is a form of reverse colonization—rather than the 113 ni-Vanuatu indigenous cultures being a passive subject of forces such as colonization and urbanization, they are proactively colonizing the world around them. It correlates with the emergence of the nation-state of Vanuatu and the abolition of the colonial administration (Haberkorn, 1992, p. 824). It is also a break from the pattern of circular migration; the Leweton community members are permanent residents of Luganville, with second and third generation residents born there.

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” (p. 203). More recently, researchers have documented a similar process of urbanization in Port Vila in the settlements of Blacksands (Mitchell,
and Freswota (Kraemer, 2013), both with a particular focus on 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. Focusing specifically on young men, Kraemer (2013) explores the process whereby—in the absence of a connection to any other place or kastom—urban ni-Vanuatu youth are constructing a new sense of identity by making place and “making history”. Her ethnographic account of the Kingston-4 boys, a group of urban young males in the Freswota area of Port Vila, shows the ontological transformation that is taking place in Vanuatu. Young, urban ni-Vanuatu are transforming themselves and, by extension, the broader urban society, so that the local urban community, “rather than their parents’ home island places, is emerging as the source of their primary location of belonging and their sense of social identification” (Kraemer, 2013, p. 40).

Kraemer (2013) meticulously maintains a focus on the agency and the self-determination of the Kingston-4 squad as they generate a “new locative identity” (p. 40). This language of “belonging” and “social identification” evokes the definitions of kastom given at the start of this article. What emerges is an outline of a diasporic innovation that connects ni-Vanuatu not with reference to individual island communities but by an urban kastom that is less about the island of origin and more about culture and heritage as “roots” (Dick & Addinsall, 2013; Dick & Stern, 2012; Kraemer, 2013, p. 220).

Leweton and the global system

The Leweton group see themselves as important contributors to a global system. Over the course of a series of interviews, one of the main proponents of Leweton Cultural Village described it as the next step in an interconnected chain of Mwerlap satellite sites. These sites are imagined as places where members of the diaspora can plant the trees and shrubs they use to make their performance costumes, grow the food they use in their cooking displays, store the materials of their craft, perform ceremonies, and generally feel at home. The desire to “share the culture” is articulated as a self-conscious underpinning of the rationale for these imaginings. At the same time, the outflow of culture is balanced with an inflow of resources. Proceeds from the touristic performances, international tours, and sales of DVDs are distributed back to the communities on Gaua and Merelava. There is a continuous flow of people from the Banks Islands to Luganville and vice versa (Ala, 1987, p. 200).

Knut Rio’s thoughts on Melanesian ontology are pertinent here. Writing about Ambrym but with an eye to extrapolating a ni-Vanuatu ontological perspective, Rio (2007) writes that “the concept of society opted for here is then not merely a question of a series of relationships, but a potential for creating larger imaginaries than what can possibly be contained in singular relationships laid out side by side” (Rio, 2007, p. 27). As he argues elsewhere, there are problems in trying to understand, characterize and conceptualize 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).

Vanuatu is an independent republic, of which, undoubtedly, members of the Mwerlap diaspora are willing citizens. But, in this project of decolonization, I, as a non-indigenous researcher, needed to find a way to reframe the Mwerlap diaspora as a nation. An individual, such as Warren, who shared his story about “The History of the Magical Water Music” is simultaneously a ni-Vanuatu First Nations person, and a man Mwerlap First Nations person. Here I am borrowing an identification format articulated by the Arrernte, Alyawarre activist (a First Nation of Central Australia) Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, who clarified, “I am not an Aboriginal or, indeed, Indigenous. I am Arrernte, Alyawarre, First Nations person, a
sovereign person from this country” (as cited in FitzSimons, 2014, p. 1).

My intention here is simply to name the Mwerlap-speaking community as a culturally and linguistically differentiated “nation” of people and recognize the fact that the pluralistic nature of Vanuatu society means that the other 113 cultural/linguistic groups of Vanuatu are also First Nations people. There are some unique dynamics involved in co-producing culture in a place with such extreme diversity. “Naming” is a decolonization strategy in research that privileges First Nations people because names carry histories (Smith, 1999, p. 157). This article identifies Mwerlap people and presents some words in the Mwerlap language, validates the stories and the histories, and unpacks the conceptual frameworks that have marginalized cultural entrepreneurs and “ethno-preneurs” in the Global South (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009, p. 23).

Returning to Rio’s (2005) problems with a totalizing agency in a framework of abstract and concrete relations, what is implied in his 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 are likely to be 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 (Rawlings, 1999, 2004). This act, and the colonial decision to hand over 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 areas such as the Banks Islands (Cox et al., 2007).

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, 2003). The absence of government services in the rural areas is also portrayed as a panacea for the vagaries of the global economic system. Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are among the few places in the world where the informal or “subsistence” economy (referred to in Vanuatu as the “traditional economy” or kastom ikonomi in Bislama) still outweighs the cash economy in terms of providing livelihoods for the population (Regenvanu, 2009; Trau, 2012). The Mwerlap diaspora straddles this urban–rural dichotomy, as the connection to home island and vernacular language is maintained. The Leweton group clearly articulates that it has been established for the purpose of providing opportunities and resources for the island communities on Gaua and Merelava.

“Is it traditional?”

This is the most common question I am asked by people outside Vanuatu when I am talking to them about water music. If we are among the Leweton group then I usually direct the question to one of the members of the group. But this question troubles me primarily because it seems to be what Feld (2000) referred to as a “policing of the locations of musical authenticity and traditions” (p. 152). This question is laden with the fetish of marginality and the quest for an exotic and authentic otherness manifest in the Leweton performers (Connell & Gibson, 2004; Erlmann, 1996; Feld, 2000). This fetish is a device used by marketeers and advertisers in the global economic system to distance, in this case, the tourist/audience from the community/performer and trigger desire in the former (Taylor, 2001, p. 7). The repetition of this question made it an imperative for the Leweton group to publish “The History of the
Magical Water Music” with the DVD so as to provide interested tourists and supporters with a background and context for the water music.

The Mwerlap diaspora has engaged in the practice of what Sahlins (1993) refers to as “devising on their own heritage” (p. 18) to come up with a new form of artistic expression (the water music, overlaid with vocalized traditional melodies) and a mode of presentation (the village/cultural group/touring party) that works on a range of levels. This seems to make the question of “tradition” irrelevant. Sahlins encapsulates this relationship between tradition and innovation, remarking that “cultural continuity thus appears in and as the mode of cultural change. The innovations follow logically—though not spontaneously, and in that sense not necessarily from the people’s own principles of existence” (p. 18). More specifically to water music, ethnomusicologists agree that as it increases in popularity it is also increasing in sophistication. “The style is developing, and new musical pieces are created each year. If it is to be called a ‘tradition’, as is sometimes heard, it is one that is being (re)born before our very eyes” (François & Stern, 2013, p. 102).

Conclusion

Pacific Islanders are a mobile people. As more ni-Vanuatu move from rural island communities into the urban centres, pressure will increase on the social structures of the nation-states to support the population. This article has laid some foundations for exploring these challenges of mobility and social transformation by conceiving of a discursive, intercultural space characterized by an absence of instruments of the state where ni-Vanuatu and expatriates are immersed in a culture that they are co-producing. This co-produced, hybrid culture-of-the-future is being imagined in the context of the diasporic subnational communities. Ni-Vanuatu cultural expressions, such as water music, can be re-imagined and co-produced in a way that creates social and economic opportunities for people in rural and urban areas. Subnational communities have historically coalesced around language and a connection to a home island. As the urban intercultural spaces become more layered and complex, communities are defining themselves in different ways. Increasingly, urban ni-Vanuatu youth are identifying themselves along intercultural lines outside the social structures and kinship systems of a particular home island. The intergrade of island-based urban emplacement, such as the Leweton Cultural Village, and primary town emplacement, such as the Kingston-4 squad, warrants further enquiry and can deepen our understanding of the continuity and change in kastom for Pacific Island diasporas.

The significance of ni-Vanuatu subnational diasporas is also evident in the role they can play as an incubator of cultural export products—in the industries of music and tourism in particular. The approach taken in this study locates the agency in the social structures of the local community. The concept of “diaspora imaginings” facilitates an investigation into the idea of migration as a form of collective agency located in the presentation of living cultural heritage as entrepreneurial action. In the intercultural spaces such as Luganville, people can trial concepts in different contexts. The Leweton community has articulated the connection between language, place, kinship and cultural expression in a narrative describing the recent history of water music. More specifically, they have used the production of a DVD and this research project itself as a way to publish the Leweton claim over the intellectual property of their water music innovations.

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Nalo have been profoundly generous with their time and their insight and friendship. Also, I thank Hilda Rosal Wavales, Cecelia Lolonun, and Mama Celia Edith for their professionalism and generosity. This article forms a part of my PhD incorporating publications. The project (including the production of the DVD) has received funding from a variety of sources: Southern Cross University and a scholarship through the Collaborative Research Network, the Wantok Musik Foundation, the European Union through the Further Arts “Voices for Change” Project, and Canal Studio. I also wish to acknowledge the support of Mama Caroline Nalo for hosting me in her house, sharing insights, and providing translations in and out of Bislama. I am grateful to Alexandre François for advice on translations from the Mwerlap language and for the use of his maps; my supervisors, Professors Philip Hayward and Kerry Brown; Monika Stern; and Miranda Forsyth for valuable feedback on earlier versions. This project has been granted ethics Approval Number ECN-12-321 from the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. All persons whose image appears in the photographs in this article have granted permission for their likeness to be used in this research and in future publications. All holders of copyright of the figures have granted permission for the figures to be used in this research and in future publications.

**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lapule</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ëtëtung (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>water music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gisgis (Lakon)</td>
<td>a light sound created by poking just two fingers into the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hârâv (Lakon)</td>
<td>to caress the surface of the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kastom (Bislama)</td>
<td>the idea of a traditional system of law, religion, economics and/or governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kastom ikonomi (Bislama)</td>
<td>the traditional economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiro (Sa’a, Solomon Islands)</td>
<td>sounds of the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiroha or kiro ni karusi (‘Are’are, Solomon Islands)</td>
<td>sounds of the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kor në-bë (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>the sound of rainwater falling over stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le-veroë (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>ceremonial meeting place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man kam (Bislama)</td>
<td>recently migrated people to a particular place; people from another place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na-gol, na gol, nagol, gol (Sai)</td>
<td>land-diving ritual from South Pentecost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na-mag (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>traditional dance (terrestrial) of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na-matto (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>communal dance; also refers to the syncretic arrangement of traditional songs with the string band format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nê-bë (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ne-kea (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>dolphins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ne-lea (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ne-leang (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>traditional dance (terrestrial) of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nê-rê (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puow (Lakon)</td>
<td>a leader’s signal that indicates a sequence is about to finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sogor (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>the sound of big fish chasing the bait fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vuh têqël (Lakon)</td>
<td>smack it sharply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vus ero (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>the sound of people chasing and shepherding fish into traps/nets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vus lamlam (Mwerlap)</td>
<td>sounds from beating the river and the ocean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VANUATU WATER MUSIC AND THE MWERLAP DIASPORA

vus lam lam nē-bē (Mwerlap) sounds created by slapping the water
vus tuwel (Mwerlap) first beat
wej (Lakon) a heavy sound created by plunging both fists into the water
wes (Lakon) slap it
worworok (Mwerlap) the trickle sound of a gentle waterfall

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Chapter 5 - Regional Oceanic Assemblages

5.1 Segue

In the previous chapter, I described the dynamics that have influenced Leweton diasporic (dis-)emplacement in the north of Vanuatu. In this chapter I explore a regional perspective that positions the Leweton group (and other ni-Vanuatu artists) as part of an Oceanian ontology. To achieve this, I introduce the idea of a chorographic engagement with place that inflects the specifics of the production and expression of intangible cultural heritage. Building on the ideas regarding Melanesian perspectives on place, this chapter also introduces the idea of an “aquapelago” to privilege the marine-side of integrated dynamics involving human and non-human (inter)relations in-between, throughout and with islands, their shores, seaboards and waters. These dynamics, what Hayward calls “aquapelagic assemblages” (2012a), are performed entities that are premised on human presence. According to Maxwell (2012), aquapelagic assemblages imply “a radically interdisciplinary writing of the meanings of place” (23). Seas as places, he argues “are multiple and complex, known and unknown in their specificities… The concept of the aquapelago lays these knowings in front of us, inverting familiar figure-ground logics” (*ibid*.). Building on these ideas, I developed the nonrepresentational diagram of the sand drawing in Figure 1. as an alternative way of conceptualising these knowings with an implied sensitivity to the indivisibility of society and nature, presentations of kinetic performativity in land/sea scapes that embody a spatially-anchored, *maritorially-grounded* indigenous *longue durée*. The chapter also explores some examples of ni-Vanuatu chorographic engagement with place and how the specifics of such an engagement are inflecting creative production and expression as a generator of livelihood opportunities. This leads to an analysis of the challenges and impacts of codifying and commodifying the water music, from the perspective of the Leweton community positioned as a regional entity and custodian of an iconic expression of intangible cultural heritage.
5.2 Chorographing The Vanuatu Aquapelago: Engaging with performatively constituted specificities of place
CHOROGRAPHING THE VANUATU AQUAPELAGO

Engaging with performatively constituted specificities of place

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Abstract

This article applies the concept of aquapelagic assemblages to an understanding of artistic and cultural expression in Vanuatu. Using the radical interdisciplinarity of a chorography, I explore the ways that ni-Vanuatu cultural practices such as water music and sand drawing manifest themselves as components of aquapelagic assemblages. Building on Epeli Hau’ofa’s idea of the Pacific as a “sea of islands” (1993) this article continues a project that privileges the voices of ni-Vanuatu artists and cultural producers. A sand drawing is presented as a chorographic inscription of multiscalar Oceanian ontologies informing an analysis of the livelihood aspects of human and non-human (inter)relations in-between, throughout and with islands, shores, seabeds and waters. This chorographic approach foregrounds the multiscalar dimension of aquapelagic assemblages and the interdependence of different aquapelagic assemblages with 21st Century globalised industry, science, and development. A case study of the Leweton community, featured in the Vanuatu Women’s Water Music DVD, shows that the framework of aquapelagic assemblages has value for revealing the creative processes in generating innovations in local art forms and the step-by-step process of commodification of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords

Chorography, water music, aquapelago, aquapelagic assemblage, sand drawing, multiscalar, Vanuatu

Introduction

In recent issues of this journal, Fleury (2013), Cashman (2013), and Maxwell (2012) have contributed to the development of the concept of an aquapelago and aquapelagic assemblages (Hayward, 2012a, 2012b). Elsewhere, Hayward (2015) starts to expand the discussion of aquapelagic assemblages, exploring “the nature of cultural production within and expressive of them” using the example of the Leweton community, from the north of Vanuatu, and their 2014 DVD production Vanuatu Women’s Water Music (henceforth VWWM) (see Dick, 2014). This article picks up on some of the interdisciplinary themes raised by these authors to analyse temporal specificities of ni-Vanuatu contemporary cultural expression and assess the congruence of the
aquapelagic conceptual framework for the Leweton village and the broader ni-Vanuatu community.

Before introducing and situating the field research that informs this article, it is necessary to introduce some terminology. Hayward (2012a) has introduced the term aquapelago, as a contradistinction to the use of the term archipelago, so as to privilege the marine-side of integrated dynamics involving human and non-human (inter)relations in-between, throughout and with islands, their shores, seabeds and waters. These dynamics, what Hayward calls “aquapelagic assemblages”, are defined as performed entities that are premised on human presence:

existing in a location in which the aquatic spaces between and around groups of islands are utilised and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to social groups’ habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging. (Hayward, 2012a: 1)

As alluded to above, Fleury proposes the addition of the term ‘maritory’ to the aquapelagic lexicon to refer to the depth of the marine space, identifying its “three dimensionality and multifunctional verticality” as its principal characteristic (2013: 2).

According to Maxwell, aquapelagic assemblages imply “a radically interdisciplinary writing of the meanings of place” (2013: 23). Seas as places, he argues “are multiple and complex, known and unknown in their specificities... The concept of the aquapelago lays these knowings in front of us, inverting familiar figure-ground logics” (ibid). Maxwell suggests these knowings might be better understood as a maritorial chorography, derived from the Greek khora for ‘region’1. Reflecting on the heuristic, possibilities that emerge from the confluence of these ideas, both Maxwell and Hayward point towards a methodology that it is sensitive to alternative ways of conceptualising the indivisibility of society and nature, the nonrepresentational, performance and land/sea scopes:

Chorography, in Maxwell’s words, “renders (a) place in (its) chiasmatic idiosyncrasy, setting subjective and objective epistemologies into productive dialogue”... In accomplishing this, it also prioritises a thorough recognition of and engagement with specificities. Chorography is therefore particularly congruent with aquapelagic analysis since each and every aquapelago is differently constituted and temporally fluid. (2012b: 4-5 - my emphasis)

This chorographic “engagement with specificities” of place, “the primacy of a specific locale as a generative context” (Hayward, 2015: 116) for performance of the aquapelagic assemblage, helps to situate the research that informs this article. Working with the terms referred to above, I will argue that Vanuatu, located in the north western corner of the Coral Sea and consisting of a Y-shaped group of some 70 inhabited islands and another 13 that are uninhabited, can be characterised as an aquapelago (see Figure 1). Vanuatu’s maritory has an estimated seawater volume of 1,700,000 km$^3$. It is located at the juncture of undersea tectonic plates on the Pacific Ring of Fire, to the north of New Caledonia, to the west of Fiji, and to the southeast of the Solomon Islands.
Neither Hayward nor Maxwell provide any methodological detail as to what might constitute a maritorial chorography. Following Derrida and Eisenman (1997) and Lukermann (1961), Olwig provides a starting point, suggesting that chorography seeks to present “the relational way in which place is experienced in the passage of a journey.”
from place to place or, more vicariously, in the passages of a narrative” (Olwig, 2008: 1849-1850). Thus, based on over a decade of fieldwork and practice – a conflation that reflects what Bolton (2003: xv) terms “participant engagement” – both in Vanuatu and with ni-Vanuatu producers ‘on tour’ internationally, I draw on observations, interviews, reflections and textual analyses to contextualise the production and expression of types of intangible cultural heritage and deepen the concept of aquapelagos as performed entities. In particular this article attempts a chorographic inflection of people, place, and power. Many of the insights that inform this article were crystallised during a journey “from place to place” (Olwig, 2008) in the north of Vanuatu from Santo, through Malekula (Vao, Lakatoro, Uripiv), to Ambrym, and back to Santo. In each island location, I reflect on the ni-Vanuatu chorographic engagement with place and how this inflects the specifics of the production and expression of intangible cultural heritage in an aquapelago, and through the prism of artistic production, the trajectories.

From a particular reading of this journey (that is to say, from my particular reading of this journey, as it is a journey I shared with my ni-Vanuatu adopted family) it is consistent with Tawa (2002) who refers to chorography as “a praxis of spatial articulation … the experience also functions as a way of construing and actualising country—of recreating and remembering it, of orchestrating and reconstituting its fractal parts” (2002: 49). The journey was constituted by a range of trajectories that intersected to form specific arrangements. Elements of the narrative of this journey are affectively conveyed in two pieces of creative non-fiction and a documentary film. I am conscious of the fact that the insights I draw in this article reflect my historically situated perspective as a white, Australian, middle-class/aged, tertiary-educated male, but also that of what Borofsky (2000) called an “Outlander” (in tongue-in-cheek contradistinction to an “Islander”). I was aware of the utility, the productive tension, that exists between these two loose categories. At the same time that I was learning about ni-Vanuatu “ways of knowing”, producing films, taking notes, writing stories, etc, for my own projects, I was also being made use of in projects belonging to those to whom I was affiliated through adoptive familial bonds. These included Islander projects (and also projects belonging to other Outlanders and yet other projects belonging to Islanders from other Islands) that I participated in as an adopted brother(-in-law), uncle or son and as a means of funding, promoting and broadcasting particular activities, messages or ideas. In the context of this productive tension the first section introduces my chorographic approach showing that sand drawings are a valuable tool for understanding Vanuatu as an aquapelago. The second section will explore the multiple scales of Islander reality, connecting and mediating the human and the non-human actants and providing a context for the case study and discussion that follows. The final section of this article will focus on an analysis of the Leweton group and the performative specificity of their practice of water music from a political perspective – concerning power, people and place.

Sand Drawing

While on my journey through Malekula and Ambrym, at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, there was much talk about sand drawings as people prepared for the 2008 Malampa Sandroing Festivol (Sandrawing Festival of Malampa Province) on Ambrym Island. Sand drawings have an ephemeral quality antithetical to the Western treatment of classical art: framed, hung, restored and preserved. In Vanuatu, the designs work in tandem with stories, kinship systems, navigation and orientation
techniques, ancient and modern histories, flora and fauna, and current events. Geismar (2013: 5-7) relates the process whereby sand drawing was elevated to the status of a national icon – a process in which I was peripherally engaged – and added to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. A person tells a story and creates a figurative representation of that story using material from the liminal space between the land and the sea as palette, paint and performance space. Using one finger, s/he traces a continuous, graceful pattern usually via a circuitous, opaque route. The act is imagined and performed, material and abstract, tactile and dynamic, analogue and analogous. This quintessentially aquapelagic practice often results in a delightful moment of awareness for the viewer when s/he finally recognises the figurative element of the drawing. The idea of it shimmers fleetingly before the tide rises and washes away the patterns, leaving new ones and old ones merging into the wet sand. Or if not the tide, then a flick of the artist’s hand and the pattern disappears from view. But it can leave a strange new pattern merging in the viewer’s mind – a pattern with its own chimeric quality – leaving questions about what exactly “the arts” means. Clearly sand drawings are ephemeral and performed, but they are also dynamic in a way that makes them more like dance than drawing. As Geismar observes, the fact that sand drawings are “a mnemonic for exchange and movement rather than a static representation” suggests (in the context of a comparative perspective of intellectual and cultural property) that their relational nature “draws on a formal understanding of property (and heritage) as a medium of exchange rather than a bounded object, a vehicle for relationships rather than a terminus for ownership” (2013: 6-7).

Attended by over 400 guests including participants, domestic and international visitors, the Malampa Sandroing Festivol featured thousands of sand drawings. The sand drawings that were exhibited as a formal part of the festival program were performed in and around a clearing in the village of Sesivi, where a cluster of temporary shelters of bamboo, sago palm and pandanus leaves had been constructed. These structures provided some cover from sun and rain for the artists, who performed their sand drawings in the porous black volcanic composite of sand and ash – including many contemporary designs such as images of aeroplanes, and the Statue of Liberty. One of the notable aspects of the festival was the spontaneous sand drawing that happened outside of the formal festival program. People of all ages were drawing in the black sand all over the village, on the beach, and on the roads (all of which are unsealed on Ambrym). Many of the sand drawings triggered intense discussion and debate and sometimes controversy.

Several months after the festival, I returned to Ambrym to produce the documentary film Lon Marum. One of the young men from the village where we were based, Emyotungan in West Ambrym, was Tio Massing. One day, high up on Ambrym’s volcanic caldera, with rain and wind curtailing any possibility of productive film work, Tio, myself and the rest of the crew started showing each other some sand drawings (while the wind and rain were strong enough to prevent capturing quality digital recording of audio-visuals, it was not so bad that we couldn’t practice sand drawing). I am a singularly maladroit artist and having attempted sand drawings many times in the past I knew there was little point in trying again – the cursive, repetitive patterns appeal to me as a concept more like language rather than as a visual ‘drawing’. Undeterred, Tio showed me a series of children’s sand drawings of diminishing complexity, finally ending with a version of the sand drawing shown in Figure 2, showing three flying foxes eating a breadfruit. The drawing Tio showed me actually had four flying foxes and during the course of our exchange he created other versions with two flying foxes. I was instantly captivated by a kind of cognitive dissonance, presumably reflecting both a simplicity:
the empty space in the wings (most sand drawings are dense with complex patterning), the unmistakable figurative flying foxes; and a complexity: the spatial orientation – with each of them hanging “inwards”, the shared overlapping of wings, the sense of arbitrary nominality (how many flying foxes can fit in a circle?). This was intensified by the gendered figure-ground logics whereby one might see the phallic shapes of the flying fox inside the circle as consuming masculinities; while an inverted reading might see the unenclosed tail of the flying foxes inviting or perhaps permitting a penetration (of ideas?) from the unbordered exterior thus encompassing a diversity of ontologies, a pluriverse of uneven trajectories (Bennett, 2005) as each set of eyes perceives the enclosed amniotic interiority of fruit in the middle and the unenclosed exteriority of the ‘background’.

Figure 2. A Chorograph: Digital Representation of a Sand Drawing of Three Flying Foxes Eating a Breadfruit (A version of this drawing was first shown to me by Tio Massing on Ambrym in 2008. This version created by Ben Foley, 2015).

Multiple Scales

I propose that the sand drawing of the three flying foxes in Figure 2. is a chorographic representation of the journey, described above, that informs this article (and indeed a chorographic representation of the article itself). The more I looked at this picture, the more I felt that my looking at the picture was somehow inscribed in it, not an unreasonable assumption given that I had actually changed the figure by adding in (or taking away) one of the flying foxes. I considered the possibility of endless fractal
inscriptions\textsuperscript{7} repeating the drawing inside the inner circle of the breadfruit – and the circles of the flying foxes’ eyes. In this reading, the central fruit suggests a differently situated knowledge and pedagogy (it is a children’s sand drawing) of, for example, seasonal harvest patterns, maritorial/territorial/aerial migrations, and other epistemological patterns of Islander existence. Presented in this non-linear way, the theory and knowledge can be understood to be embedded in the sand drawing (Jolly, 2008: 5) – an ontological view of the world where as Epeli Hau’ofa writes, “most of our sources of history are our oral narratives inscribed on our landscapes… Our natural landscapes then are maps of movements, pauses, and more movements… Sea routes were mapped on chants” (Hau’ofa, 2008: 44). Hau’ofa’s words bring to mind the principle of the stationary canoe in ocean travel – that is, that an Oceanic navigator frames the islands, stars and seas as moving around the stationary canoe (Fagan, 2012: 63; Jolly, 2007).\textsuperscript{8} Teaiwa (2014) draws on Hau’ofa’s ideas cited above arguing that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{a reading of our landscapes and seascapes—spaces that are the products of multiscalar processes in both contemporary and deep, geological time—is necessary to better explore our Pacific histories… We can expand Hau’ofa’s proposal to include our reading and framing of the contemporary stakes of globalization and the intense interconnectivity of the twenty-first century. This requires material, corporeal, grounded, and symbolic readings across disciplinary boundaries, geographic areas, and temporal contexts (2014: 119).}
\end{quote}

In her remarkable work on the history of mining of phosphate on Banaba (Ocean Island) makes a powerful and pragmatic argument that “our studies of the global, be highlighted with respect to peoples, commodities, and landscapes with multiscalar, relational, and temporal depth” (2014: 112). This echoes Leitner and Byron’s argument that “a multi-scalar politics implies operating simultaneously at multiple scales at multiple sites to expand the geographical and political reach” (2007: 122). Teaiwa presents a contemporary Islander ontology, a relational perspective that implicates the reader in the performative and the molecular specificities of Banaban landscapes and seascapes, the colonial “discovery” of phosphate and the impact that the global distribution of phosphate (and its use as a fertiliser) has had in places such as Australia and New Zealand and the corresponding impact on the island, people, and culture of Banaba.

I read the sand drawing in Figure 2 as a chorographic inscription of multiscalar Islander ontologies that can inform an aquapelagic analysis – that is, an analysis of the livelihood aspects of human and non-human (inter)relations in-between, throughout and with islands, their shores, seabeds and waters. Following the ideas of Hau’ofa and Teaiwa described immediately above, a chorographic approach foregrounds the multiscalar dimension to aquapelagic assemblages (in Oceania, at least) and the interdependence of different aquapelagic assemblages with 21st Century globalised industry, science, and development. In moving ahead with a fractal, multiscalar, chorographic approach to aquapelagic assemblages, I am conscious of Teaiwa’s critique of scholars who “focus more on presenting an architecture or metaphor for what they are observing, rather than considering the real impact of multiscalar connectivity and what this means for people who inhabit other ontological realities” (2014: 245). I propose that an aquapelagic analysis is far from an intellectual abstraction, instead the next section of this article will attempt to move through the multiple scales of indigenous Oceanic connectivity as a way of contextualising and grounding some of the “real impacts” on the livelihoods of
the Leweton group and their chorographic engagement with “other ontological realities” (in this case, an ocean cruise liner in the tourism industry). Concerned as I am with establishing the idea of aquapelagos and seas as places, it makes sense to start with the “rich yet messy co-presence of the values of roots/trees and routes/boats” (Baldacchino, 2012: 23) before revisiting the Oceanic imaginary described by Hau’ofa (1993) and Jolly (2007).

The “sea of islands” is an important trope for contemporary Oceania. In scholastic commentary on indigenous identity in Vanuatu (and perhaps many aquapelagos) a commonly cited ‘tension’ is that of emplacement versus mobility, roots and routes (Baldacchino, 2012; Clifford, 2001; Jolly, 1999; White and Tengan, 2001). This particular trope is encapsulated in an idiomatic metaphor from the island of Tanna in the south of Vanuatu that is heavily gendered (see Jolly, 1999; Lindstrom, 1990). Tannese identity is embodied in the tree and the canoe – man is tree, rooted, and the canoe is his community and connections: “place provides a man with his roots; a canoe travelling on a road grants him the allies necessary for his survival and reproduction” (Bonnemaison, 1994: 321). The “road” that Bonnemaison refers to here is not a terrestrial road populated by Tannese men lugging a canoe along on their shoulders; rather it denotes the ramifying paths, trajectories that a man may take in his life by venturing in his canoe onto the sea.9 The metaphorical actants are both human (man, and his allies in survival and reproduction) and non-human (tree, roots, canoe, road, sea) in this deeply interconnected assemblage that creates identity. The man is the tree, the tree is the canoe, the canoe is the community, the road and the sea from which man sources his means of “survival and reproduction”. In this metaphorical characterisation, the integration of human and non-human actants and their expression within aquatic spaces aligns to the defining characteristics of an aquapelagic assemblage, ie of it being “fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group’s habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging” (Hayward, 2012a: 5).

Hau’ofa (1993), presents a powerful argument against the “belittlement of Oceania” (1993: 14) and a defence of the diversity of Pacific Island ontologies principally against a “Western imperialism” (ibid: 10), perhaps heightened by the use of (uninverted) figure-ground logic, that contracts the Pacific into ‘tiny’ nation-states excised from the sea around them. This excising of the island from the sea denies the profound human interaction with the ocean in precisely the ways that Hayward aims to address, and is, in part, the result of what he describes as the “centuries of use and the accretions of meanings” of the term archipelago (2012a: 5). Hau’ofa argues that these colonial borders were, from a Pacific Islander perspective, “not imaginary lines in the ocean, but rather points of entry that were constantly negotiated and even contested”.

More recently, with the waxing and waning of Western imperialism, other imperialist aspirations are drawing new imaginary lines, creating the absurd situation where Oceanians/Melanesians are North American, French, or Asian. In particular, West Papua, a Melanesian ‘nation-in-waiting’ on the western half of the island of New Guinea, has been occupied by the Indonesian military since 1963. The points of entry between these two regions, Asia and Oceania are still contested – in the words of leading West Papuan thinker and activist, Rosa Moiwend:

*Papuans want political independence and at the same time they demand recognition of their basic rights as indigenous people living on their customary land … For example there is nonviolent resistance by the Amungme and Kamoro to the U.S owned Freeport gold and copper mine;*
a campaign for economic justice by women market sellers; and, nonviolent resistance by the Malind Anim indigenous people to the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, a ... land grab by Indonesian and transnational corporations that will displace hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples (MacLeod and Moiwend, 2014: 179-183).

These three examples of nonviolent resistance to imperialism are indicative of “the real impact of multiscalar connectivity”. West Papua often does not feature on maps of the Pacific any more, and many Pacific non-government organisations (NGO) are unable to deliver programs inside Indonesia – or if they are, they are delivered through an Asian-oriented office.

Jolly counterpoints the contingent cartographies of imperialism in Oceania (informed by ethnological typology) with indigenous “genealogical histories” (2007: 514-515; also see Kame’eleihiwa, 1992: 23-24). Alternative histories are finding audiences beyond their locality as chorographic accounts of the people of the Pacific identify and connect in “anachronistic and prophetic” ways, undermining imperial boundaries, reflecting fundamentally different spatiotemporal realities and articulating an indigenous *longue durée* (Clifford, 2013: 42). These genealogical histories connect “places and peoples through the spatiotemporal language of kinship” (Jolly, 2007: 514) and in doing so they form the basis of claims over aspects of material (land, for example, see Jolly, ibid) and immaterial culture (water music, see Dick, 2014: 398-399; Wessergo, 2014). Drawing on Hau’ofa (both in terms of his writing of genealogical histories, and his work promoting creative exchange at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture) ni-Vanuatu artist, author, and musician, Marcel Meltherorong has recently created a genealogical history for a different purpose, but which may have implications for regional approaches to West Papuan sovereignty. Meltherorong is from a specific aquapelagic assemblage that incorporates the island of Vao, the waters around it, and a section of land that stretches up the hills directly across from the island of Vao on the north east coast of Malekula (for a comprehensive ethnography of Vao see Layard, 1942). The first time I visited Vao was with Meltherorong a few months prior to the Malampa Sandrawing Festival. During the days Meltherorong prepared for a coming-of-age ceremony for his son, while I tried not to get in anyone’s way. In the afternoons we prepared kava for some of Meltherorong’s family, or for ourselves while we discussed our plans for producing films, festivals and other creative practice, and in the nights he took me hunting for flying foxes – another activity for which I displayed no aptitude. In recognition of his standing in the artistic community (he has published two novels, directed and produced one feature documentary film, scored another, and performed internationally as a musician), Meltherorong was recently invited to co-curate an installation for the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) for their flagship contemporary art project, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT). While working with the Vanuatu-based NGO, Further Arts, and in discussion with QAGOMA and Further Arts staff, Meltherorong conceived the project entitled ‘Yumi Danis (We Dance)’ for APT8 in 2015. As co-curator of this installation Meltherorong has written an artistic treatment of the proposed installation titled ‘From the Land of Papua’. This unpublished document is a chorography in its own right; a poetic reimagining that integrates elements of history, archaeology, anthropology, mythology, and personal reflection:

*The oppositions between the preservation of customs and ancient rituals, against the emergence of a western system, when legends are the written*
history in the dance and the science directed it into other way, these are a constant struggle into indigenous mind trying to find a role to play in this new way of life. But in many ways the dance, and the art in general, is building up a capacity, a safe sphere, where we have a possibility to safely accumulate what we are, inspired by others, and “trans-dance” it. In fact, we all are creating a safe sphere along our lives, it’s vital for an individual. In other view that’s how dance or art, safe keeps our cultural sphere, as different identities living in different islands on one Ocean. (Meltherorong, 2014: 1)

The ‘Yumi Danis’ project continues an ongoing relationship between Meltherorong and QAGOMA. In 2009 Meltherorong was invited to participate as a musician and artist in the sixth edition of the APT. During the course of his participation in this project, QAGOMA staff interviewed Meltherorong. Elements of this interview formed a significant part of a chapter that was later published in a volume titled ‘Songs of Resili ence’ (Dick and Meltherorong, 2011). Some of Meltherorong’s comments in that interview are relevant here to further explicate his understandings of the aquapelagic assemblage.

Echoing Hau’ofa, Meltherorong conceptualises the Pacific as a regional assemblage: “the ocean unites us as one Pacific and this unifying force is very strong. We are a very strong culture – we are water but we are a continent” (quoted in Dick and Meltherorong, 2011: 108). Meltherorong encapsulates this idea in the notion of “Wan Solwora - (literally ‘One Saltwater’) it means one ocean, one people” (quoted in Dick and Meltherorong, 2011: 106, parentheses added). Meltherorong extends the idea of a fluid continent, and following Bonnemaison, Maxwell, and Fleury, he vertically overlays the concepts of road and sea, integrating the tectonic poetry of Hau’ofa and Huffman:

Knowing that our ancestors used to travel from islands to islands not caring about the name of the country, I maintain that the region was more than just five nations of Melanesia, it was a route inviting or safeguarding people to meet the neighbor, in fact the ring of fire is the road followed by many when the land of Papua was the land of wars and terror. So many did the long journey on the sea by canoes to reach the islands of Isa Tabu (Isa Tabu = the Holy place) where Queens and Kings can provide them refuge. Stories reports that those monarchs departed on nine Keanu to explore the rest of the Pacific Ocean. (2014: 1)

Throughout this text, Meltherorong describes an indigenous subjectivity in which the human actants, the voyaging ancestors, are the embodiment of the contemporary “indigenous mind”. He collapses the non-human actants (road, the sea, the ring and the fire, the route) into a conduit that is at once terrestrial, marine and submarine, as though these categories do not even exist. Tensions and “struggles”, clashes of culture, Meltherorong evokes a sense of science and (European) history being actants that have changed the course of the canoe, and changed the names of the landmarks. We have the image of the contemporary “indigenous mind” emerging from a storm, disoriented, still capable of navigating but finding herself under a different sky, in a different sea, with unfamiliar landmarks. And intriguingly, “the art” (as opposed to the “the arts”) emerges as the vehicle “to safely accumulate what we are, inspired by others, and “trans-dance” it”.

Meltherorong has focused his working life on generating a livelihood from his creative practice (see Dick and Meltherorong, 2011) with some measure of success. As can be
seen from the passages above, his creative practice incorporates and inscribes his multiscalar identity, not just as a man from Vao, or a ni-Vanuatu, but as a member of an Oceanic aquapelago that includes West Papua. This resonates with the Japanese concept of *shima* which describes an island as much more than the terrestrial: “*shima* is livelihood… a work of imagination” (Suwa, 2012: 13).

As this article spirals through the multiple scales of Oceanic connectivity, seeking performatively constituted specificities of place in Vanuatu, the focus shifts from the broad *wan solwora* imaginaries of Hau’ofa and Meltherorong, from the questions of geopolitical imperialism where “real impacts” on people’s livelihood is understood in terms of survival and freedom from torture, towards the idea of livelihood inflected by a mercantile analysis of power – the impacts of economic imperialism/neoliberalism specifically for the Leweton community, the performers of the water music.

Livelihood

I have described the generative context for the establishment of the Leweton cultural village in an earlier publication (Dick, 2014) but in summary, the Leweton village was established in 2008 when Sandy Sur from Merelava, an island in the far north east of Vanuatu brought together the members of his extended family living in and around Luganville, the second largest town in Vanuatu with a population of 13,167 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009) on the northern island of Espiritu Santo. In Luganville, just as in the capital of Vanuatu, Port Vila, the customary structures of many of the nation’s 130 different language groups are interacting with each other and with the exogenous structures of expatriates from Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, France, and a range of other places. The Bislama term *kastom* is a catch-all phrase for the endogenous customary structures of law, religion, economics and/or governance in ni-Vanuatu communities. It is used to ‘characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place’ (Bolton 2003: xiii). As Geismar writes, the interactions between *kastom*, tourism and art are extremely complex:

*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.* (2009: 72)

Sur galvanised the Leweton group around the performance of a range cultural expressions – principally the *ëtëtung* (water music), but also more common activities such as terrestrial dance, string band music, and the preparation of food and kava. Hayward argues convincingly that the Mwerlap water music practices are generated by and re-generative of a specific aquapelagic context, stating that:

*the aquapelagic aspects of Mwerlap interaction with the “heterogeneous assemblage” of the coastal environment that they generate through livelihood activities can, in the context identified by Wessergo, be seen to be culturally inscribed in the semiotic structure of their percussion practice.”* (2015: 119)
Drawing significantly on my research with members of the Leweton community (Dick, 2014; Wessergo, 2014) Hayward (2015) identifies the cultural production of water music being in and of aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages, specifically in relation to the VWWM DVD. Hayward also stresses the livelihood aspect of the aquapelagic engagement of the Leweton community. In both cases Hayward is convincing, but limits his analysis to the semiotics involved in the expression of intangible cultural heritage (the literal articulation of aquapelagics) and to the aesthetics of its (re)production in the DVD (the immersion of bodies in water, and the stylistic decisions of the film makers). For example Hayward observes that:

*Despite the addition of a song layer to the percussion compositions, the sound mix and visual track of the VWMM DVD privilege water percussion as the focal element. The shot choices and montage of the overall production and the particular compositions performed (twenty-two in all) emphasize and document the nature of ensemble and individual percussive action, showing such action as the generator of the percussion impacts seen on the surface of the water and heard on the soundtrack. The last phrase is carefully worded as the DVD is very much a composed and mediated representation of the live practice of water percussion (rather than a documentary record of particular live performances). (2015: 124-125)*

In the following section I endeavour to illuminate the discussion of multiscalar chorographics above with reference to the intersecting trajectories of, on the one hand, the Leweton community, and, on the other, a cruise ship operator. In doing so I will further develop the ideas that Hayward touches on above (cultural production and livelihood) configuring these performative practices in chorographic relation with the "laws and political institutions of the various peoples" (van Paassen, 1957: 8).

**Case Study**

With reference to the discussions above regarding genealogical histories, the establishment of the Leweton village was also the culmination of a grassroots place-and-history-making project, whereby the community claims customary rights over the étëtung and "links the songs, to place, through language, creating a genealogy of the water music innovations" (Dick, 2014; see also Leweton Cultural Group, 2014). Following Arac, this is an example of a “critical genealogy” that, with “precise attention to... the opportunities offered for voice, script and instruction, by whom, to whom, and for what purposes... will allow the nuance, detail and differentiation that make a history and set proper limits to a theory” (Arac, 1987: 21-22).13

Out of the multitude of emergent dynamics at play in the Leweton/étëtung history, two are apposite to an analysis of the “proper limits” of aquapelagic assemblage as a conceptual framework for understanding cultural production in Vanuatu. First is the amniotic imminence of the newly innovated musical form of étëtung as a nuanced, detailed and differentiated specificity – a particular musical style or genre. Second is the recognition of the exploitative potential of the performed specificity of the ‘critical genealogy’ of étëtung – the commodification of a product as livelihood. I use the terms commodifying/commodification in the sense of transforming something that was previously non-commercial into a commodity that can be bought and sold as opposed
to ‘commoditisation’, being the generification of an existing product. The importance of this distinction will become apparent.

Without undermining the agency of the Mwerlap diaspora, the arrival of tourists by boat (first on yachts, then on cruise ships) was an important step in the process of revaluing the water music. Thus the cruise liner industry is a “generative mechanism” (Bhaskar, 1998) in the establishment of the Leweton village. Cashman (2013) concludes that the new cruise liners represent the antithesis of the aquapelagic approach for their passengers as they are designed to mediate and often prevent interaction with the ocean. However, from the perspective of the Leweton community, the cruise ship is an extremely important element in their assemblage – one that facilitates many other connections (tourists, money, etc) and opportunities.

According to its website, Carnival Corporation (Carnival) is “the largest cruise company and one of the largest vacation companies in the world” (2015). With a range of cruise itineraries that include Vanuatu, Carnival and its ‘sister’ lines, such as P&O Cruises, and competitors, delivered more than 240,000 people to Vanuatu in 2013. A 2014 report, partly funded by Carnival titled “Assessment of the Economic Impact of Cruise Ships to Vanuatu”, claims that the cruise companies, their passengers and crew spent 34.6 million Australian dollars, henceforth AU$, in Vanuatu during that same period. But according to Sur none of this was spent at the Leweton Cultural Village – none of the cruise ship tourists were coming to Leweton at all. I was surprised at this because on several occasions between 2008 and 2011 I had seen many hundreds of tourists from cruise ships enjoying the water music and other performances at the Leweton village. Over the course of several months, Sur, and other members of the Leweton community, explained to me the breakdown of their relationship with Carnival (and their agent in Vanuatu, Adventures in Paradise, which is a tourism operator based in Port Vila, with sub-agent in Luganville). The story goes back to 2012, when tourists from the cruise ship were regularly coming to the Leweton village. Many of them would purchase their ticket for the Leweton show from Carnival either on board the cruise ship or online prior to leaving (for approximately AU$45). But other tourists from the cruise ship were finding their own way to the village (for example walking around town and then getting in a taxi) and buying their ticket directly at the village entrance (for approximately AU$10). Inevitably, some of the tourists (who paid the higher price) resented the fact that they were paying the industry mark-up. Ensuing complaints to the cruise ship management resulted in the Luganville-based sub-agent for Carnival informing the Leweton village that they had to either price-match the Carnival entry fee of AU$45, or alternatively restrict entry exclusively to Carnival tourists. The Leweton community refused to accept these terms on the grounds that the water music and other elements of their performance are *kastom blong mifala* (“our cultural heritage”) and no third party has the right to dictate pricing or entry restrictions in relation to *kastom*. Eventually, Carnival stopped conducting tourists to Leweton. But the power and value of the water music was evident in the ongoing demand for this ‘tour’. To meet this demand, Carnival/Adventures in Paradise entered into a new arrangement with another cultural group who can perform a variation of the water music – the Turgor group – who reside next to the Leweton village.

The Turgor and Leweton groups are all part of the same Gaua/Merelava diasporic family. When Turgor originally became the preferred provider of the ‘tour’ there was no objection from Leweton. However, the Turgor group had not formally established itself as a tourist destination or spectacle, it had minimal infrastructure, and the tour experience they offered was not as organised or polished as the Leweton version which
had been refined over many years. With no marketing collateral of their own (or at least none of any value from the perspective of the tourists) all of the Leweton material (photos, videos, even the name "Magical Water Music Experience" a term registered by the Leweton group, etc) was being exploited to market the Turgor ‘experience’. This had the effect of diminishing the value of the (now) shared brand. The Leweton group, with so much invested in their brand, was challenged to respond. But how? Kinship obligations, social morés, contemporary customary politics and a desire for friendly relationships with one’s neighbours, made it impossible to challenge Turgor directly. It was not Turgor that was misusing the marketing collateral of Leweton anyway. It was Carnival who was (and still is) using images of members of the Leweton group and the physical features of Leweton village to advertise the Turgor tour.

Sur and the Leweton group sought advice from the Intellectual Property Office of the Republic of Vanuatu, and eventually initiated legal proceedings to prevent Carnival using the Leweton images. Unsatisfied with the capacity of the government to intervene or regulate, and unwilling to continue to bear the costs of ineffective legal representation, Sur confronted Adventures in Paradise in Port Vila directly resulting in a public argument but no change in policy. The situation is nuanced. Both Leweton and Turgor support each other’s right to perform the water music. But what is not nuanced is the continuing use of representations of Leweton people and places to advertise the Turgor tourism product by the cruise ship liner and its operators: Carnival, Adventures in Paradise, and the sub-agent in Luganville. At the time of writing, “Magical Water Music Experience” is advertised on both Carnival and P & O Cruises websites. The Leweton response has been to take a long view and mitigate the damage to their brand in the short term while letting the natural market forces and a process of attrition resolve things in the long term. The challenge for Leweton is structural. The absence of effective, locally-oriented, government regulation of the tourism industry in rural Vanuatu exacerbates the power imbalances between local, ni-Vanuatu operators and national and international companies and increases a reliance on heuristic approaches to industry development and forces villages like Leweton to negotiate self-regulation with multi-national corporations. A further challenge is the Leweton perception that there is an absence of effective, locally-oriented legal alternatives.

The reliance on heuristic processes become more salient when we consider the hybrid institutions that appear in Vanuatu such as the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs (MNCC) and the VKS. The Leweton group resolved to more carefully manage the value of their product and the rights over the use of their brand. Failing to resolve the issues in the Leweton/Carnival controversy above through advocacy or jurisdictional processes, Sur returned to Merelava, and consulted with elders, chiefs, leaders, and the broader community. The result of these discussions was that Sur was mandated by the Merelava nasara (‘tribal’ authority) to secure the rights to the Leweton collateral and performance of êtëtung in Luganville and Port Vila through both statutory incorporation with the Vanuatu Financial Services Commission and customary governance processes through the MNCC. This is an ongoing process and is the subject of future research collaborations between the author and the Leweton and Turgor communities.

Discussion

My geospatial description of the Vanuatu maritory in the introduction to this article is drawn somewhat obliquely from a suggestion in Hau’ofa’s much-cited article, namely
that some of the smallest Pacific Islands are the largest countries on Earth if we judge them by the size of their Economic Exclusion Zones (EEZ) (1993: 13). Following this inversion of the figure ground logic we can formulate a different calculation for the size of island nations such as Vanuatu based on a pro rata of the ratio of surface area to water volume for the Coral Sea versus Vanuatu with information sourced from CSIRO (2011). If the surface area of the Coral Sea is 4,791,000 km$^2$ and its water volume is 11,470,000 km$^3$, and the surface area of Vanuatu is 12,294 km$^2$ (but its EEZ is 710,000 km$^2$), then Vanuatu’s water volume is roughly 29,384 km$^3$ (and the EEZ includes 1,699,791 km$^3$ of ocean water volume). Perhaps what is more important than the fidelity of the measurements is what this way of framing Vanuatu (ie as a maritory) reveals about the possibilities of inverting the existing thinking that compartmentalises island states into isolated land masses. Closely tied to the Law of the Sea, Vanuatu lays maritime claim to 24 nautical miles (nm) of contiguous zone, 12 nm of maritory (preferred here to the oxymoron ‘territorial sea’), and 200 nm of continental shelf and EEZ. These facts, which along with the enormous volume of water in its zone noted above, and its 2,528 km of coastline, are rarely presented in anthropological, sociological, and cultural studies, but challenge the reader to visualise a different semiotic and spatial mental picture of Vanuatu – one that has implications for the leaders of Vanuatu as multinational corporations seek new forms of imperialism applying pressure to aquapelagic resources through deep sea mining, land and property development, fishing and shipping licences.

Speaking of the myths and stories of the peoples of Oceania, Hau’ofa articulates an Islander longue durée:

Their universe comprised not only land surfaces, but the surrounding ocean as far as they could traverse and exploit it, the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens, and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations that people could count on to guide their ways across the seas. Their world was anything but tiny. (Hau’ofa, 1993: 6)

The reverberations of this poetic rendition of Oceanic history can be felt in the words of Kirk Huffman, the former curator of the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, who describes the Pacific Ring of Fire as an unstable fundament of the Vanuatu maritory and suggests that there is art embedded deep under the continental shelf “with active volcanoes on land and under the sea, the land itself moves: islands appear and disappear, some are believed to be the handiwork of particular spirits or spiritual powers, there are few larger ‘artistic canvases’ in the world” (Huffman, 2000: 1). Indeed, Huffman’s characterisation of the tectonic palette, the formulation of the land (supra- and submarine), as an “artistic canvas” underpins the idea of a sand drawing as a chorographic tool for a Vanuatu aquapelagic analysis. A chorographic analysis being as it is “radically interdisciplinary” (cf Maxwell, 2012: 23) is valuable in understanding the “real impacts of multiscalar connectivity” for indigenous Pacific Islanders. Incorporating critical and historical genealogies (Arac, 1987; Kame’eleihwi, 1992), as well as the poetics of creative cultural expression, this chorography allows an analysis to maintain specificity across scales. However, as Teaiwa reminds us, to truly acknowledge diverse ontological realities, we need to acknowledge that in indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, poetics are never just poetics” (2014: 119). The porousness of Banks Islands communities and complex trade and exchange networks make it very difficult to know precisely where the water music originated but they have articulated the critical
genealogy of the innovations to the étêtung (Dick, 2014). To paraphrase Sur, there is a clearly articulated pedagogical aspect that underpins the Leweton group’s operations on multiple scales, and while the étêtung is not attached to any specific ritual or ceremony, it is still an important part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Mwerlap diaspora and the Leweton group – a part that is critical to the Mwerlap reading of place and the:

processes of difference and differentiation in conjunction—such as specific conjunctions between landform, climate, hydrology and ecology. They point to certain situational dispositions which have a propensity, and which can be used to procure certain efficacious outcomes. (Tawa, 2002: 46).

But, as Teiawa as shown in relation to the mining of phosphate on Banaba, and as evidenced (to a much lesser extent) in the Leweton/Carnival case study, the capacity of indigenous Islanders to procure certain outcomes with regard to the propensity of the place, can be diminished in engagements with multinational corporations that inhabit unfamiliar ontological realities. Drawing on case studies in Africa and North America, Comaroff and Comaroff provide a caution that is particularly apposite to the Leweton Carnival case study, namely that:

the current age is one in which the fiction can no longer be sustained that "the political" is apprehensible as an autonomous domain, with sovereignty over material life; that politics and economics, inseparable as never before, are anchored together at once in the market, the law, and the meaning of personal identity. (2014: 255)

In this context, we can read from Cashman’s study that despite the fact that the aquapelagic quality of of the Leweton village (and the broader Vanuatu and Pacific Island assemblages) attracts tourists to cruise tourism, the cruise ships themselves are “the antithesis of the concept of the aquapelagic assemblage” (2013: 9). Awareness of this preexisting, ontological schism between Carnival – seeking to commoditise/generify the water music – and the Leweton village and its chorographic engagement with liquid place, may mitigate future interactions. The controversy with the cruise ship relates to the hybrid strategies that Sur and the Leweton community have implemented on a provincial and national level. These strategies are “hybrid” in the sense that commercial strategies/institutions are constantly interacting with customary strategies/institutions. Following Latour, this is both a scientific and a technological process – a process in which the Leweton community are acting as scientists and engineers busy at work on their “controversial topic” (Latour, 1987: 4). Understanding the specific instance of the cruise liner as an entity in an aquapelagic assemblage – from the perspective of the Leweton cultural village helps in revealing the inner workings of the forces at play in the emergence of local tourism industries. But it does not make problems easier to solve. Regardless of the theoretical and conceptual framing, commodification and commercialisation are problematic challenges on practical levels. The chorographic tools employed in this study can provide a richer and deeper perspective on the controversial work of cultural production (creating art[forms] and developing industries) foregrounding the ineluctable confluence of the emotional, the aesthetic with the cognitive in the Pacific.
Conclusion

Using a toolkit from actor-network and assemblage theories and the radical interdisciplinarity of a chorography I have shown that the framework of aquapelagic assemblages has value for revealing the creative processes in generating innovations in local art forms, the step-by-step process of commodification of intangible cultural heritage, and the inner workings of (post-)colonial controversies. The chorography foregrounds the diversity of ontologies as though through a kaleidoscope – a view finder of dissolving differentiations and collapsing categories of Enlightenment epistemologies – that reveals “the specifics of places and the mesh of actants that perform them/in them at particular moments” (Hayward, 2012b: 5). Further, building on the work of indigenous scholars of Oceania, I have demonstrated that a chorographic approach to aquapelagic analysis can reveal the multiscalar dimensions of the metaphorical (and physical) maritory of Oceania: imagined as some of the largest nations on the planet, as submarine tectonics and volcanoes, a porous borderless cosmology of canoes following paths marked by the stars. Throughout this article the imagining and the performing of the aquapelago have been teased out as key processes that reflect the diversity of ni-Vanuatu cultural expression. I have conducted an introductory chorography of iconic, evanescent and ephemeral cultural expressions from Vanuatu: sand drawing and water music – together the terms dance and loop with cognitive dissonance – but they peal mellifluously with emotional and aesthetic resonance. In this sense it can be said that the Vanuatu aquapelago is one of many sites in a multiscalar indigenous Oceanic assemblage. The chorographic process, enabled by an understanding of the performance of aquapelagality, makes visible elements of relationships and processes in ways that can privilege diverse ontologies. For the Leweton group, operating in the tourism industry has yielded rich rewards. But the chorographic process reveals the limitations of commercial interaction, in particular the negation and denial of ontological heterogeneity, which create challenges that require heuristic responses in the local community and on the national level.

Endnotes

1 Maxwell proposes the term “thallasochorography” though I suspect “thalassachorography” or at least “thalassochorography” would be a more accurate rendering of this neologism.

2 Many of the insights that inform this article, were germinating during the period 2004 to 2008 as the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (Vanuatu Cultural Centre – henceforth VKS) and the Vanuatu Credit Union League implemented the Traditional Money Banks Project. The principal objective of the project was to maintain and revitalize living traditional cultural practices while stimulating the generation of cash income. Subsequently the partners formed a relationship with the National Council of Chiefs and with the Prime Minister – the key strategic alliance that led to the Government’s declaration of the Year of Traditional Economy in 2007. This initiative was extended into a second year in 2008. (See: Huffman, 2005; Regenvanu, 2009; Rousseau & Taylor, 2012)

3 My role in the process of actualisation of country was principally that of witness or audience – I was actualising the actualising. Undoubtedly I was embedded in the process, and I embodied a fiscal payload of agency but the trajectory was glancing. It was made clear to me that under certain circumstances, it was possible that my role could be something other than audience, and that I was expected to engage as though this
possibility might at any moment be actualised, but ultimately, it was others who were actually actualising country.


5 A video of Marcel Meltherorong performing a sand drawing while in Australia for the Asia Pacific Triennial is available online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I745gjx5D-4. For more information see Dick and Meltherorong (2011).

6 One sand drawing from West Ambrym featured two ‘towers’ which some people assumed was a commentary on the imminent arrival of mobile phone technology embodied in the construction of two telecommunications towers on Mene Hill, Ambrym; others were adamant that the image depicted the “twin towers” of the World Trade Centre in New York.

7 This idea of the endless fractal inscription of indigenous reality is informed by Teaiwa (2014) “The land is the people, is the money, is the superphosphate, is the farm, is the grain, is the cattle, is the development, enrichment, and pollution or destruction of lands, seas, and the numerous forms of life dependent upon them.” (2014: 112)

8 It also brings to mind Salman Rushdie’s “sea of stories and ocean of notions” (Rushdie, 2000: 205).

9 Use of the word ‘road’ here is figurative, and is perhaps derivative of the Bislama term rod (literally ‘road’) which can mean road, path, way or manner, track, trail, transport, fare, freight, along with a multitude of other meanings when used in relation with other words for example the past-oriented klinim rod = clean the road make peace, start anew; present-oriented sperem rod = hit the road, wander idly, unemployed; and future-oriented karem rod (tekerod) = get going, take off.

10 Both Meltherorong and I are, at the time of writing, members of Further Arts Committee. For the period 2012-2014 Meltherorong was engaged as Artistic Director of Further Arts. I also participated in the conceptual development and delivery of this installation.

11 Picking up on this theme, the Oceania National Olympic Committee also adopted this slogan (Oceania: Wan Solwora One Team) to rally support for this overarching body in the lead up to the 2012 London Olympics (VASANOC, 2012). There is also a group of performance-based artist/activists in Aotearoa who perform under this name.

12 Elsewhere in the text Isa Tabu is identified as the Solomon Islands, and in personal comments Meltherorong has specified that this ‘myth’ relates to the Lake Te Nggano (also Tegano), the largest inland body of water in the Pacific, on East Rennell, Solomon Islands.

13 For a genealogy of the term “performance genealogies” see also Roach (1996) and Balme (2007).

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Chapter 6 - International Conjunctures of Mwerlap Emplacement

6.1 Segue

In Chapter 4 I used the concept of “diaspora imaginings” (Durutalo 2012, p. 214) to facilitate an investigation into the nexus between migration and emplacement at a level local to the Leweton community. Chapter 5 then repositioned the Leweton perspective as a part of regional aquapelagic assemblage in a multiscalar Oceanian ontology, and the challenges for the Leweton group operationalising this perspective in the tourism industry. In this chapter, using articulation theory, I examine the tactical and strategic – often momentary – instances, the conjunctures, of Mwerlap emplacement. Considering that performance is knowledge activated and embodied, the focus in this chapter is on the performance of emplacement: performing living cultural heritage as entrepreneurial action presents powerful ideas about being indigenous in contemporary Oceania and draws multi-scalar configurations into assembly together.

Departing from Clifford’s (2001: 470) suggestion that we “recognise patterns of visiting and returning – lived connections across distances and differences” in this paper I investigate the “territory-producing expressiveness” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987: 348), of the Leweton community. The rhythm of commuting diaspora, the rhythm of visiting and returning – articulating and re-articulating – can be seen to be a cadence, that is, a specific conflation of rhythm and affect creating subtle shifts in intensity that indicates or registers the sound of re-articulation. For the Leweton group, the processes of re-articulation configuration, on both structural and individual levels, are complexified by the intangible and mobile elements of the water music, and the fact that Leweton is a destination for tourists visiting the islands of Vanuatu, as well as an ensemble often touring to perform at international festivals and events. This chapter lays out some results from a study that investigates the process whereby the Leweton community is attempting to
create a cohesive vision/refrain of their cultural heritage – one that is persuasive to (young and old) members of the community itself, to visiting tourists, and other stakeholders including international festival audiences, neighbouring villages, and the world music industry. The relationships that Mwerlap people have with each other, expressed in performative interactions with the world around them and designed to collectively capitalize their experiences and the multiple scales of cultural performances, reflect new sorts of negotiations among the national and the local, the urban and the rural, the customary and the commercial.
6.2 Performing Place: Tourism and Touring with the Leweton Cultural Village
Performing Place: Tourism and Touring with the Leweton Cultural Village

by

Thomas DICK

ABSTRACT

Embodying dual legacies (ancestral and colonial), communities throughout the Pacific Islands are configuring and re-configuring themselves, their cultures and, consequently, the world around them. This article examines the performative articulation of cultural heritage in Northern Vanuatu. Taking the case of the Leweton "cultural village" - performers of the Vanuatu Women’s Water Music — this article explores the deliberative creation of diasporic identities. The process is complicated by the intangible and mobile elements of the water music as Leweton is a destination for tourists visiting the islands of Vanuatu, as well as an ensemble often "on tour" performing at international festivals and events.

KEYWORDS: Vanuatu, water music, articulation, choreography, Mwerlap, diaspora, knowledge

RÉSUMÉ

Les habitants du Pacifique reconfigurent sans cesse leurs communautés, leurs cultures et par conséquent le monde qui les entoure. Cet article examine le cas du "village culturel" de Leweton - interprètes de Vanuatu Women’s Water Music — l'articulation performative de leur patrimoine culturel et une création délibérée des identités diasporiques. Le processus est rendu plus complexe par les éléments immatériels et mobiles de cette musique d'eau, étant donné que Leweton est à la fois une destination pour les touristes visitant les îles du Vanuatu ainsi qu'une troupe souvent « en tournée », se produisant lors de festivals et d’événements internationaux.

MOTS-CLÉS: Vanuatu, water music, articulation, choreography, Mwerlap, diaspora, knowledge

In September 2015, a conference held in Fiji titled Scripting the Development Narrative Through Indicators and Dance brought together a range of people to explore alternative approaches to development in Melanesia (see Cullwick, 2015). There is a real flourish to this title — a jousance — intensified by an academic over-exposure to less-transgressively-titled research conferences. There is something of an intergrading chiasmus in the effortless transition from the literal to the corporeal, from mimesis to kinesis “scripting... narrative... dance” that lends a poetic quality to the quantitative neo-liberal “development... indicators”. One can imagine an undergraduate program in a liberal arts faculty called Scripting (or Choreographing?) the Development Narrative Through Dance. It is somewhat harder to imagine an economics program called Dancing Development Indicators.

This knowing misapprehension is reminiscent of the (misapprehended) idea of the “development” epoch (Sahlins, 1993: 17). Sahlins (1993: 17) proposes this term as an episodic label that captures “an indigenous way of coping with capitalism”. Two decades later, in a recent issue of this journal, Leach (2014) presents an indigenous narrative that describes our current epoch as the “time of money” in specific relation

1. Though there is an international competition called “Dance Your Thesis” http://gmnop.org/dance.

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to the way Reite people in Papua New Guinea are changing their approach to, and understanding of, the value of land. Both authors, with their nuanced reflexivity, were trying to influence at the most fundamental level, the way that we "know" the idea of knowledge itself. Both privilege Melanesian voices articulating complex and ambiguous perspectives. In doing so, they gently – almost surreptitiously – create space in academia for different modes of knowing and different ways of understanding terms loaded with Western values, such as "development." 

Inspired by the people of Papua New Guinea (who informed the work of Sahlins and Leach) and with reference to the conference title above, this article focuses on the dissonance of the "and" in the conjoining of "indicators" and "dance" as it embodies the transgressive implications of Pacific Island civil society that "knows"—and crucially—knows how to script a development narrative that values (measures, indicates) artistic and cultural performance, defines new conjunctions of the power of place, and nurtures the traces and promises of an enduring spatial nexus. The contemporary diasporic inflections of the Oceanian relationship to place reveal contingent openings for indigenous people to transform their world.

This article presents a way of understanding the dynamic trajectories and the pluralism of Oceanian actuality – islands/villages, urban towns, visiting and returning, assembling and reassembling. It extends Clifford's (2001) reading of Hall's articulation theory (in Grossberg, 1986; Hall, 1980) to demonstrate ni-Vanuatu strategies for cultural continuity and change in concert with global structures, such as the tourism industry. Decolonising societies and their post-national subjectivities "have their own roots and trajectories." (Clifford, 2001: 475)

**Approach and Method**

This article unfolds in dialogue with two perspectives on indigenous people's engagements with place. The first is James Clifford's (2001) keynote address for a symposium at the University of California, Santa Cruz, later published as an essay in *The Contemporary Pacific*. The second perspective is that of Michael Tawa (2002: 49) who explores an indigenous emplacedness—a "mode of being in a place, being placed, and being place" (italics in original). For Tawa this emplacedness is oriented by his personal experiences with the

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2. For readers unfamiliar with Stuart Hall's "articulation theory", the term is differentiated from the common usage of putting thoughts or feelings into words, or vocalising clearly those words. Instead it refers to the less common meaning of a specific joint, or a state of being jointed – like an articulated truck (a semi-trailer) or the articulated joints in the human jaw, or legs.
sub-national Melanesian diaspora in the north of Vanuatu – the Mwerlap-speaking community. The Mwerlap-speakers originate from the islands of Merelava and Gaua (see Map 1). I have documented elsewhere (Dick, 2014b) the agency of the community and the colonial and post-colonial shifts in migration patterns that have led to the formation of the Leweton “village” – a settlement/community in a peri-urban area outside of Luganville, on Espiritu Santo, an island in the north of Vanuatu in Sanma Province. Luganville itself was first established during World War II when the Americans, seeking a secure base for staging action in Pacific, selected the site as a military base. Thus, the people in Luganville are either recent immigrants or the direct descendants of people who have migrated from other parts of Vanuatu, or from overseas. The members of the Leweton group are part of the Mwerlap-speaking sub-national diaspora from the islands of Merelava and Gaua, and many members of the community speak some of the languages of Gaua, such as Nume and Lakon (see Map 2). In this sense, urban Vanuatu in general, and Luganville in particular, can be understood as a site of complex intercultural and transcultural engagement, a contested zone, and a cultural transition area (Bhabha, 2012; Pratt, 1991; Turner et al., 2003).

This article is also intended to be read in conjunction with a DVD “Vanuatu Women’s Water Music” (henceforth “VWWM”) and an essay in the liner notes of the DVD titled “The History of the Leweton Cultural Village” (Leweton Cultural Group, 2014; Wesserger et al., 2014). The Leweton community is developing some renown for its performances of the āleitung (the Mwerlap word for “water music”) and stringband matto (a term that combines a word from Bislama, stringband, and a word from Mwerlap, matto, which are used together to refer to the form of Melanesian string band music blended with traditional percussion from the Banks Islands). I have had the great privilege to live in Vanuatu for almost a decade between the years of 2000 and 2009. For the last three years I was based principally in Luganville, the second largest town in Vanuatu. While I relocated to Australia in 2009, I have maintained regular contact with friends and family in Vanuatu. In 2011 (twice), 2013 (twice), 2014, and 2015 I coordinated tours of Australia, and/or Malaysia, and/or New Zealand for members of the Leweton group.

While the members of the Leweton community are rarely interested in articles published in academic journals, they are engaged in their own research and producing their own knowledge,
such as the vvwam and "The History of the Leweton Cultural Village" that describes the way the women of the Mwerlap families came together for the contemporary crafting of the water music. They are interested in the film and the way it creates opportunities for touring and for them to share their own thoughts on the processes involved in the research/filming, even at academic conferences. Thus there is a complex, reflexive tension that is a function of the different configurations of research, embodied on the one hand in myself as the researcher and on the other hand members of the community some of whom are now conceiving and driving their own research agendas. There is an important shutting of implications - backwards and forwards - between the data and the modes of knowledge.

From my perspective, the reflexive tension is mitigated by my embeddedness in the project and the way that a potentially conflicted positionality becomes a methodological strength. For example, despite the fact that I am often accused of, in Bislama, "foliump bed bang man" (filling up people's heads), or "go long we yana nito" (going too far) with plans or ideas, I am not perceived as an observer. Rather, I am treated as a shared family member with a set of perceived propensities that various community members are able to leverage. I embody a set of obligations that impact the research without being methodologically significant. This creates the conditions for an integrated analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place, such as are explored in this article, along with multipolar and multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. The vvwam DVD, the tours and the performances form part of the data. And simultaneously they are in and of themselves research outcomes - modes of presenting knowledge that belongs to people in a specific place.

Anthropologists working in Vanuatu (and throughout Oceania) have detailed the permeability of personhood, place and language (for example, Bonnemaison, 1994; Tryon, 1996; Hess, 2009; Durand, 2013; Taylor, 2008; Jolly, 1994; Bolton, 2003; Mondragon, 2009; Patterson, 2002). In this paper, I build on many of these ideas, bringing new insights into the processes of displacement and emplacement of ni-Vanuatu people who are using the performance of their cultural heritage as a vehicle for (re)locating themselves on multiple scales. I argue that the Mwerlap diaspora is engaging performatively in a political process of "taking place of place" (Tawa, 2002: 54). Specifically, I will demonstrate that even though the members of the Leweton group reside away from Mereola, their diasporic imaginations are shaped by processes and relationships deeply anchored to the locative identity of their "foundation-place" (Bonnemaison, 1994: 233; see also Durand, 2013: 69-78; Hess, 2009: 42-66).

A departure from Clifford is that I am principally exploring the way the Mwerlap people articulate sites of their own indigeneity as opposed to articulating with broader indigenous movements, as such. Data is presented that foregrounds people's strategies of articulation and demonstrates a performative revisioning of space that opens up transformational contingencies for diasporic communities. This data includes insights and reflections drawn from quotidian coactivity with the community. It is further augmented with autoethnographic vignettes: "in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (Pratt, 1991: 35). The first section provides some contextual markers for the paper, including some reflections on the beginnings of my relationship with the Mwerlap people. It also describes the ways that the choreographic and coactive approach have resulted in a range of textual outputs that are part of the context, part of the data, and new knowledge in their own right. The main body of the paper unbraids the three sites or conjunctures of Mwerlap articulation on: the local level, the national level, and the international level. In many instances I have integrated discussion and analysis into the presentation of data to which it directly relates. While this may be jarring for the reader, the dissolution of observer and observed in the project, that is, my embeddedness in the data, creates an opportunity for a deeply integrative analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place and multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. A more traditional discussion section follows, leading to an analysis of the impacts of this study in terms of coproducing new knowledge and unfamiliar (that is, non-Euro/Western) modes of knowledge. Articulating the findings of this project with those of a recent study of the socio-linguistic ecology of the region (Francois, 2011, 2012) suggests a continuity of processes of linguistic innovation that aligns with modes of configuring social, cultural and political interconnectedness and differentiation: the strategies that the Mwerlap/Leweton community deploys and has deployed in relation to pre-colonial situations are useful, contingent, relational, temporal tactics in the contemporary politics of spatial articulation - though they are being applied on different scales for different reasons.

Beginnings, Choreography and Coactivity

The Leweton Cultural Village is best known for their performances of the "women's water music" (see Figure 1.) whereby a group of approximately six to ten women stand thigh-deep in still water
and splash, scoop and otherwise disturb it to create a range of beats and rhythms (Dick, 2014b; François and Stern, 2013: 100-101). My first encounter with the women who perform the water music was in 2007, in Luganville, just before the Lewton village was officially established. Over the next few years I worked together with the village. We implemented a plan to produce a professional recording of the water music and generate touring opportunities for the group to perform at international festivals. Between 2009 and 2011, a delegation of Vanuatu music industry representatives attended the European World Music Expo “WOMEX”. The Vanuatu delegation presented amateur video productions of various Vanuatu musicians to a range of promoters, bookers, and festival organizers. In 2010, a proposal was accepted for the Lewton group to perform the water music in the 2011 edition of the Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF) in Sarawak, Malaysia. Despite this successful outcome, the Vanuatu delegates reported that many producers and promoters at WOMEX failed to recognise the music and dance of Vanuatu as relevant to the world music industry. Instead, some suggested that 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. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse and critique the world music industry; rather this anecdote acts as an affective benchmark of the types of narratives and perspectives prevalent in the creative and cultural industries that marginalise indigenous performers (for a comprehensive discussion of these issues see Feld, 2000). This anecdote also exemplifies the investment that the Lewton group has made in producing real impacts in terms of what Grossberg (1992: 56) acknowledges as the “constructing, dismantling, and reconstructing of structures”.

During the course of the planning, the touring and the follow-up discussions after the trip to Malaysia, members of the community expressed a desire to present the results of their own research—a story in a form accessible to a broad audience that included their own community, other ni-Vanuatu communities, tourists who visit their village to see the water music and also the international audiences at festivals in other countries. To facilitate a sense of mutual understanding of the intersections of my research project and the Lewton research project, I used the endogenous kinaesthetic framework of sand drawings. Sand drawings are a kind of “dance” of the vibrant materiality of Melanesian ontology. A person tells a story and figuratively presents that story using material from the liminal space between the land and the sea as palette, paint and performance space. In Vanuatu, the designs work, in tandem with stories, on multiple levels and scales. The drawings are both a dynamic embodiment and kinetic abstraction of: kinship systems, navigation and orientation techniques, ancient
and modern histories, horticultural knowledge, and current events. Using the sand drawing of three flying foxes eating a breadfruit, I mapped the three audiences (local, national/domestic, international) onto the drawing as a way of expressing the multiscale nature of the audience engagement with the Leweton Cultural Village (see Figure 2). The local scale corresponds with the Mwerlap community in Merelava and Gaua, and the narrative development of the Leweton water music innovations; the national scale corresponds with the formation of the Village, the operation of a tourist attraction and an iconic cultural performance; and the international scale corresponds with the export of a world music product for the arts/music festivals touring circuit. This diagram was especially useful as a tool for presenting my research project to community members in a way that was accessible and engaging.

One of the first stories that the community shared is the narrative of the development of the water music: életung. The story, dating back to 1974 (Wessergo et al., 2014) is presented in the vwwm DVD as "The History of the Leweton Cultural Village". It was originally presented to me as a written statement by one of the men, the husband of Hilka Rosal Wavales, the woman recognised as the custodian of the életung. Recognising that the women were integral to the re-configuring of the water "games" as a contemporary musical genre, in this article I revise the narrative as "The Hersory of the Leweton Cultural Village" (henceforth "Herstory"). The Herstory was translated from Bislama to English and revised to fit the requirements of the liner notes for a commercial release on a world music label specialising in the music of Melanesia, Wantok Musik. While the original Bislama version of the Herstory is a distinctly autoethnographic text, in the sense defined by Pratt (1991: 35), the somewhat lyricised English version presented with the DVD still retains enough of the character and the intent of the original to warrant this label. It is a critical or historical genealogy of the innovations on the water music and a claim to the intellectual property rights emanating from the creation of the életung (Dick, 2014b, 2015a). Just as European history/herstory is contested, there may be community politics, controversies and uncertainties in the background of the narrative presented to me. Whatever controversies exist, the Herstory provides an engaging contextualisation for the vwwm film and it describes a trajectory of innovations related to the water music.

The vwwm film has a slightly more complex pedigree. The culmination of almost four years of collaborative work between myself and the Leweton community, the film was partly financed by Further Arts – a Vanuatu-based not-for-profit organisation creating employment pathways and

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3. For a description of how this sand drawing relates to the research and an analysis of its chorographic value see Dick (2015a).
opportunities for young artists and producers in the arts and cultural sector — and the Waptok Musik Foundation (Wantok Musik) a highly-regarded, Australian not-for-profit label in the international world music industry, known for producing Melanesian and Indigenous Australian music.4 Releasing the film on a record label was a strategic choice for the Leweton group. For the Leweton group, release on the Wantok Musik label was a tactical response to the perspective of the Vuwem delegates, described above, and the expectation was that distribution through Wantok Musik would project a particular status of artistic authority and quality to the international industry. Wantok Musik engaged an Australian sound artist, Tim Cole, to direct and record the film. Cole worked with the Leweton community, and several young people engaged by Further Arts and other local partners to record the footage and the audio over a two-week period in November 2012. With this complex arrangement in mind, both the Herstory, the Vuwem film, and the various tours can be understood to be the result of coactivity — a form of dialogic performance that embraces and complicates diversity, difference, and pluralism (Conquergood and Johnson, 2013: 93). Madison (2005) describes it as living in "embodied engagement of radical empiricism, to honor the auroral sounds that incorporate rather than gaze over" (p. 168, emphasis in original).

In his review of the cultural-environmental context of the Mwerpap water music Hayward (2015) argues that there is a "localized creative dialogue with the specificity of place" (117) that characterises the Leweton group’s performances. He recognises this as convergent with Feld’s idea of acoustemology (2012: xxvii). Working with the Kaluli people in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Feld, like Sahlin and Leach, was concerned with the limits of Western modes of knowing. Feld coined the term acoustemology "to join acoustics and epistemology, to argue for sound as a capacity to know and as a habit of knowing" (2012: xxvii). Following Hayward, these ideas dovetail with a choreographic engagement with place — an approach developed in an earlier publication of findings from this research project (Dick, 2015a: Olwig, 2008: Tawa, 2002).

In contrast to the use of the term archipelago, Hayward (2012a, 2012b) has introduced the term aquaplago, so as to privilege the marine-side of integrated dynamics involving human and non-human (inter)relations in-between, throughout and with islands, their shores, seabeds and waters. These dynamics, what Hayward calls "aquaplagic assemblages" (2012a), are performed entities that are premised on human presence. According to Maxwell (2012), aquaplagic assemblages imply "a radically interdisciplinary writing of the meanings of place" (23). Seas as places, he argues are multiple and complex, known and unknown in their particularities... The concept of the aquaplago lays these knowings in front of us, inverting familiar figure-ground logics" (ibid.). Building on these ideas, I developed the nonrepresentational "diagram" in Figure 2, as an alternative way of conceptualising these knowings with an implied sensitivity to the indivisibility of society and nature, presentations of kinetic performativity in land/sea spaces that embody a spatially-anchored, mammorially-grounded indigenous longue durée (Dick, 2015a). As nonrepresentational theory tells us, "what pass for representations are apprehended as performative presentations, not reflections of some a priori order waiting to be unveiled, decoded, or revealed" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010: 19).

**Mwerpap Sites of Articulation: Local, National, International**

Applying these ideas to the Mwerpap water music, and the diasporic Leweton performances, Hayward states they are "generated by and regenerative of the specific aquaplagic context in which the community is embedded at particular historical moments" (2015: 118). The performances, the specific contexts in which they take place, and the particular audience (other villages, tourists, festival patrons, etc) can be understood, and in this section they are presented as, a braiding of three levels or conjunctures. These conjunctures reflect the (often arbitrary) "edges and borders [that] crosscut the region, defining conjunctures: local, national, and regional; urban, rural, and in-between; colonial, neocolonial, postcolonial" (Clifford, 2001: 471). Also, these conjunctures correlate with explicit commercial trajectories as well as more implicit political and pedagogical trajectories (and no doubt a range of others that are unknown to me). Importantly, the Leweton group recognise these conjunctures as contingent openings where tactics of (de-, re-)articulation for community benefit are oriented and operationalised by specific commercial and customary entities, as will be seen by the following description. Broadly, the local conjuncture corresponds with the Mwerpap community in Merelava and Gaua, and the narrative Herstory of the water music innovations: the national conjuncture corresponds with the formation of

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4. I am involved with both of these organisations, on the Board of Further Arts, and as an independent producer/researcher with the Wantok Musik Foundation.
the Leweton village, the operation of a tourist attraction and an iconic cultural performance; and the international conjuncture corresponds with the export of a world music product for the arts/music festivals touring circuit.

As we begin to follow the fault lines of these conjunctures, Tawa’s (2002) description of a (choreo- and) choreographic engagement with place is a reminder of the nonrepresentational significance of people and their locative identity in Oceania:

“Every place is a place where someone has come from, where something happened, where someone did something, where something was said or decided. More than that. Places are not contexts or containers for these events. Mythic events, stories and present-day encounters don’t take place in country. Rather, they are the taking place of country as such—the performance of its own narration” (46).

The Local Conjuncture: Merelava to Gaua = Mwerlap

The local level of Mwerlap spatial articulation includes the island of Merelava and the east coast of Gaua (see Map 2.), which was colonized by Mwerlap speakers (Artangai, 1987; Dick, 2014b; François, 2011, 2012). This level or site of articulation is the spatial nexus of the narrative of the water music innovations as documented in the Herstory. There are other groups of women, both Mwerlap-speakers and women from other language communities, performing water music, such as the Salap and Limoros groups. From the perspective of the Mwerlap-speaking people, Gaua can be understood as the frontier of a contested zone of cultural expression (language, arts, etc.), and locative identity. Consider,

"the village of Jolap (500 inhabitants) on the west coast of Gaua counts as many as three distinct languages, which are all heard in public every day: Lakon (itself a composite of two dialects Varé and Quitrew), Olrat (and its variety Viar) and Dorig. These three languages have been spoken and transmitted by families in this village for more than three generations. To these one may add Koro, Mwerlap and Nume; these are the languages of immigrants (spouses, new settlers) and are spoken within certain households. There is enough multilingualism in the small population of this village for everybody to understand, and occasionally speak, each other’s language(s)" (François, 2011: 183).

Intrigued by the fact that it is actually in Jolap where the Herstory locates the genesis of the water music innovations, I enquired as to the conditions that led to this eventuality. To my mind it was somewhat odd that the genealogy of the water music was not spatially centred inside the Mwerlap territory, in the context of the importance of the genealogical function of the story, given that it asserts cultural and intellectual property rights over the innovations. In response to my enquiries, I was informed that of a story from some generations past, about a man from Merelava who married a woman from Jolap and moved into the community in Jolap. The people I spoke prefixed the story with the statement in Bislama that “Gaua heni folen laen blong woman, be Merelava folen laen blong man” (Gaua is matrilineal while Merelava is patrilineal). My interlocutors pointed to the fact that the implications of the story were self-evident in the interrelationships between: the Wessergo-Wavales families, the Jolap and Mwerlap communities, and the genealogy of the water music innovations. As described in the Herstory these interrelationships are embodied in the marriage of the descendant of the man from the story above, Warren Wessergo, and Hilda Wavales. At first, this seemed to be something of a teleological argument to me, as Warren was both protagonist and narrator.

However, reviewing my fieldnotes, and re-reading Tawa’s description of the way indigenous discourses of concealed implications often operate by way of deferment, the story started to make more sense to me:

“Implications defer one to the other by way of an indefinite shuttling across juxtaposed and overlaid patterns. In a sense, this shuttling of implications does more than describe. It weaves the fabric of a place. It traces, presents and constructs place by mapping or registering the signs and tracks of intrinsic configurations and processes—traces left behind, and therefore past, but also carrying a forward promise, and therefore futural.” (Tawa, 2002: 46, emphasis in original)

One wonders at what may be the implications for the Jolap community in Tawa’s visceral parsing of temporality. Indeed, the uncertainty of Jolap’s future, while not a central concern of this article, does raise another important point about the dynamics of the contested zone – the edges and borders – in relation to the Mwerlap articulations/forces/etc. Cultural edges, rather than being border zones between discrete social entities, are zones of social interaction, cross-fertilization, and synergy wherein people not only exchange material goods but also learn from one another (Hau’ofa, 1993; Pratt, 1991). In the same way that ecological borders are places of biodiversity, so too cultural knowledge systems can intersect producing a richness of knowledge and practices that enhances the resilience of local societies” (Turner et al., 2003: 440). The fostering of differentiation, what François (2011) refers to as an “ideological emphasis placed on the value of local identities” (235) has been prevalent in Vanuatu society for thousands of years and there has been a constant state of
performing place: tourism/touring with leweton cultural village

flux between various communities. Functions, processes, and forces historically familiar to the Mwerlap local community are deployed in the articulation of Leweton (id)entities on the national and international levels.

The National Conjuncture Phase 1: Mwerlap to Luganville = Leweton

The next level of articulated sites of the Mwerlap sub-national diaspora is the national level. At this level there are currently two sites, each with its own entity. The first articulation was the establishment of the Leweton Cultural Village near Luganville, Espiritu Santo (described in Dick, 2014b). In summary, in 2008 a Mwerlap man named Sandy Sur was living on the fringes of Luganville, Espiritu Santo. Sandy, having worked for several years conducting tourists around northern Vanuatu on charter yachts, had first-hand experience with the demand for cultural products in the tourism industry. Sandy brought together the Mwerlap community living in and around Luganville and facilitated the establishment of a conscious community – a peri-urban "cultural village" – for the dual purpose of maintaining cultural heritage so that it may be presented to tourists in a commercial enterprise. They named their village "Leweton" being an acronym of the first few letters of the names of six of the villages they came from on Gaua and Merelava. With support from the New Zealand High Commission the Leweton group constructed a purpose-built pool for performing the water music and then constructed a "cultural village" around it.

This transformational moment is a critical juncture. It marks the point at which the de-articulated Mwerlap-speaking diaspora re-articulates itself as the Leweton Cultural Group. In the intercultural space of (peri-)urban Luganville the Mwerlap people from Merelava/Gaua re-articulate a new entity – Leweton: a function of Mwerlap-ness spatially anchored in Luganville. From the perspective of the Mwerlap diaspora who were living in Santo, there is a transition, from an in-between state – a liminal state of collective uncertainty where Mwerlap-ness was just one of many asymmetrically uncertain – virtual – cultural identities, jostling with other identities in Luganville. As Homi Bhabha writes, the spaces in between

"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" (2012: 1)

The transition, or perhaps transgression, from a liminal, in-between Mwerlap indigeneity to a diasporic Leweton groundedness reconfigures, decentralises, the entire Mwerlap identity. Lindstrom (2011: 2) has also traced the productive dialectic of diaspora highlighting the way

"migrants model new urban settlements after island homes and also remake their village with urban experience and resources."

In the story about the Wessero-Wavales family embodying the Merelava-Gaua (Jolap) configuration (above), the deferral between the two sites creates a third place. Similar to the dynamic transition in the Scripting-Narrative-Dance in the Fijian conference title, the "shuffling of implications" traces, constructs, and promises: a performative transition through mimesis, poesis, and kinesis (Conquergood and Johnson, 2013; Tawa, 2002). It weaves the fabric of a place and permits the water music to be an intrinsically Mwerlap product, produced at the same time as being emblematic of the diasporic entity, Leweton. Just as "...life takes place so does sound and places make sense..." (Feld, 1994) and in the dynamic, rhythmic, spatial anchoring of social groups in diaspora, perhaps kinesis is the new mimesis (Roach, 2010).

The National Conjuncture Phase 2: Leweton to Vila = Dungnao

The Leweton village in Santo is a commercial success as they have retained enough revenue to purchase a lease over the land on which the village is based and another block across the road. It is indeed the "time of money". The expanded Leweton village, is rebuilt in the image of an idealised village on Merelava, thus closing the loop on the kinesthetic shuffling of implications and (re-)centring the Mwerlap locative identity. The success has enabled the next stage of articulation at the national level. Leweton have decided to establish another performance village in the Rentapau area just outside Port Vila, the nation's capital. This new village will be called "Dungnao" (the Dungnao Cultural Experience - for the purposes of the tourism industry). The emergent Dungnao village will be discussed in the following section.

The International Conjuncture: The Leweton Cultural Experience

The third conjuncture of Mwerlap articulation corresponds to the international scale: touring
overseas and performing at art galleries and international world music festivals, screening the wwwm film, participating in academic conferences, environmental symposia, and connecting with other indigenous and diasporic communities. Like the establishment of the Dungnno village in the capital, the articulation of the international site is an ongoing process for the Leweton group. Luganville is already a northern hub of social, cultural, and commercial activity in Vanuatu. Luganville's proximity to the islands of Gaua and Merelava, relative to Port Vila, makes it an easier commute by plane, or more commonly, by ship.

Clifford talks about a homology of scale in the rhythm of the commute in pre- and postcolonial lifeways (2001: 469). I suspect that this correlates with commutes of individuals, such as when one of the leaders/managers of the group comes to Australia for an extended stay — often two or three months. But the scale of the Leweton operation — the basic unit is not individual or family, but the entire village — is another factor that tempers the pace of the Mwerlap diasporic expansion. Performances in Santo can happen several times a week and require little planning or preparation beyond what is incorporated into weekly Leweton activities. In terms of both process and scale, these performances are a gentle intensification and touristic inflection of life on Merelava (or Gaua) — a familiar rhythm, a recognizable ethos of place. In contrast, the international tours reflect an ethos of bureaucracy (Handelman, 1998: xxxvii); the procedural logic of this ethos attenuates the Mwerlap rhythm with its constant demand for visas, iterations of flights and itineraries, negotiated contracts, renewed passports, medical reports, travel insurance, invoices, receipts, and taxes. All these functions have their corollaries: the missed planes, the rejected visas, the lost passports, the unpaid invoices, the tax liabilities.

Perhaps the attenuated rhythm of the bureaucratic ethos does correlate with precolonial movements of people in the Banks and Torres Islands, the preparations for ceremonies, construction of canoes? For me, being on tour means thinking of the rhythm of visiting and returning, but for a change in the rhythm, a cadence — a specific conflation of rhythm and agency — the subtle shift in intensity that indicates the possibility of an opening for a new "moment of arbitrary closure" — because this is often the harbinger of a re-articulation in the political practice of cultural theory (Slack, 1996: 126): it could be a change in itinerary, a new performance opportunity; a new love interest; but usually it involves a de-articulation and re-articulation and it is usually related to kinship — in Australia, the Melanesian diaspora has a particularly visceral embodiment in the descendants of the South Sea Islanders, the people brought from Pacific Islands to work as slaves and indentured labourers on sugar and cotton plantations. Detailed analysis of this different and more complex form of indigenous Oceanian diasporic articulation is beyond the scope of this article. The process of establishing Dungnno in the capital also has a bureaucratic ethos. The process started at Leweton in Luganville. After discussions with the community, the leader, Sandy Sur, was required to seek approval from the four nasara. This term nasara has several meanings depending on context. In this case it refers to the process of elders and leaders and broader community coming together in a public forum to make decisions about matters of broad community relevance. After securing his mandate from the four nasara in Merelava (Lekweal, Lewetmise, Leweteana, Tesmet) he travelled to Port Vila and approached the Chief (or perhaps "traditional owner" as is more commonly heard in relation to such matters involving land as there is generally no vernacular word for land 'ownership/owner') at Rentapaua, around ten kilometers north east of Port Vila. Together, Sandy and the Rentapau Chief presented themselves to the Vaturus Council of Chiefs (the provincial customary council), and then ultimately to the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs (MNCC). At the time of writing Leweton have been given approval to start construction on the Dungnno village at Rentapaua, and the Councils have agreed to recognise the rights of the Leweton group to perform the water music in the nasara of the Vaturus Council of Chiefs. This permission is not embodied in a "traditional/customary" cycad palm leaf (mamele) rather it was presented in the form of a letter issued on the letterhead of the MNCC. The administrative aspects of the diasporic articulations described above, are also spaces of

6. Coproducing with the Leweton group on the international tours has taught me a lot about these corollaries. In particular I have learned the value of strategies of deferment.
7. For a discussion of the role of cultural expression in articulating these connections between ni-Vanuatu and Australian South Sea Islander communities see Dick (2015b).
8. The term can also refer to the place where the forum or meeting and other ceremonies take place: the taking place of place. In both cases it usually refers to the collective self-identifying community who attend the meeting — a 'tribe', perhaps.
9. Compare this with the process that Sandy embarked on in an attempt to resolve the controversy with the tourism industry operators, detailed in Dick (2013a).
encounter and arenas of confrontation between Mwerval and concerns and the receptions and responses of external structures of power. There are many examples of such encounters, often related to the fact that the agapetic nature of the Leweton place-taking performances presupposes a range of unique specifications in terms of staging, technical production, and access to certain plants to harvest materials for costumes and instruments. While Sandy Sur was here in Australia last, he registered the business name “Leweton Cultural Experience” and told me that this was to be the entity that they traded under in Australia and for their international activities. He was also interested in the idea of establishing an Australian site of the Leweton natani (in this context, the place where the ceremonies and performances can take place – but also a safe space where the Leweton group can be at home) – a place to nurture and cultivate the plants that produce the leaves to make costumes, and a place to store the material mise-en-scene of performance, costumes, instruments and other belus (adornment, to borrow a word from Tok Pisin). This had been a problem for the Leweton group in the past. From the first tour, the members of the group recognized immediately that there were specific ways to reorient themselves to the bureaucratic ethos. One way was to ensure that they had no material with them that could be confiscated by Customs and Quarantine Officers on arrival in Australia. So from the very first trip, the Leweton group were interested in what materials were available wherever they were on tour, and what places were available for storing material. Exploring these possibilities generated opportunities for members of the group to spatially orient or emplace themselves by identifying familiar plants, engaging with people willing to open their gardens, and harvesting leaves and flowers. The process of sourcing the materials for performance invariably led to meetings and ceremonies designed to enable the most propitious conditions for the performances.

The storage of material is more problematic, as objects are never just objects; in fact, one wonders if they are ever even objects at all. The ways that the Leweton group relates to the materials suggest that the objects are more like performative entities themselves, embodying a confluence of narratives and identities. They seem to be intersubjectively, constituted coactivities – radically empirical. When members of the group returned to Australia for the second tour, instruments and costumes that had been stored there were inspected and assessed. Some of the items had been removed from storage for convenient retrieval by the group. Other items remained in the places where they were originally stored. This distinction was evidently important to the group. For the items that were still in storage, the inspection applied to a variety of relational trajectories: Who had access to them? How were the items situated with respect to the gender of the people who were near them? Was there any fire and smoke nearby? On the other hand, items that were removed from storage before the group found them were assessed differently; the place and manner of the handover became more significant, though these situations seemed to be assessed less vigilantly on account of the dynamism of the handover.

No storage site has emerged as the place of most propensity yet – no place worth taking.

In 2013, the Leweton group was invited to Queensland’s Sunshine Coast for a residency at the Floating Land festival – an art festival geared towards environmental awareness with a strong ethos of community engagement. The Leweton group chose to use the entire fee that the festival paid them to pay for extra members of the group to join the tour – the first time that a Leweton tour included both men and women. A part of the village is transported on tour with its relational persons and much (but not all) of its beauty, power, controversies, and internal politics. It becomes a much more complex, exhausting, and exhilarating process. The capacity for revisioning and reformatting performances creates a whole new array of problems as the individual members struggle with the realities of professional touring. The show that is presented to tourists in situ in the Leweton village is a menagerie of different elements: dancing, singing, water music, stringband music, food preparation, kava, magic shows. The entire show is delivered in under an hour to conform to the expectations of the tourism industry. Thus on the busiest days the group might perform eight shows, at the completion of which everyone is exhausted but it is generalised, full body exhaustion. For the shows that are presented on tour with men and women together such as at the Floating Land festival, each of the individual elements that constitute the in situ show is extended and presented in its own dedicated hour. For the lead singers, the main dancers, and the key musicians, this puts a lot of strain on voices, muscles and techniques – in addition to the exhaustion of touring. The industry demands that individuals deliver their performance in a mechanical, substitutable, standardised way. This is antithetical to the temporal, processual, Mwerval rhythm of intersubjectively constituted coactivity. But from the perspective of the performing arts industry, there are clear commercial benefits to the development of repertoires for each of the distinct elements.
Discussion and Deferral

Throughout this article I bring the context, the background, into focus through the concept of articulation. Yet the Mwerlap diaspora and its configurations as the Leweton group, Dungnao, the Leweton Cultural Experience, etc., is a far more complex and contested entity than I have been able to portray here. As Grossberg explains

"the context is not something out there, within which practices occur or which influence the development of practices. Rather, identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context within which they are practices, identities or effects" (Grossberg, 1992: 55; Slack, 1996: 126)

The challenge for me is to present the results of my research in a way that reflects the depth, richness, and performative of the "data" while honouring the conventions of methodological and theoretical frameworks. Working in my radically empiricist way, it is often difficult to balance the requirements of the academy and the expectations of the community; it is difficult to "shape" the "data", as it were, when one is both in and part of the data (Grossberg, 1992: 55-56).

In the Herstory, and the articles that I have published thus far, husbands mediate the voices of their wives and the men present as leaders of Leweton agencies and trajectories. This conceals the fact that my engagement with the group is often directly and exclusively with the women (on tour, for example). In addition to the fact that the women feature in the DVD as key protagonists, there are two exceptional cases where I have supported the publishing of perspectives, voices and stories of Mwerlap women unmediated by Leweton men. One is a photographic essay documenting the remarkable work of one of the Mwerlap women, my adopted sister-in-law, Delly Roy (Roy et al., 2015). The other is a case study for a UNESCO report on Gender, Heritage and Creativity in the Pacific (Dick, 2014a).

In the language of Deleuze and Guattari, the place-taking expressions and performances that I have discussed throughout the paper are "territorialising lines" (1987) describing the process of configuration and organisation: the re-constitution of "collective existential territories" (Guattari, 1995). They are also modes of knowing that are dynamic, kinaesthetic, and embodied. Distinct village communities, in constant interaction, with a bias towards diversification and

"egalitarian multilingualism, ... a shared history of contact, and ideological emphasis placed on the value of local identities" (François, 2011: 235)

are fractal inscriptions of the dynamic interplay of centrifugal and centripetal forces in their social ecology. When a community reaches a certain size it splits itself into smaller communities (fractal inscriptions). Crucially, these forces, dynamics, and inscriptions, as well as contemporary migration patterns, education and work opportunities, colonial and postcolonial structures, and indeed, the new articulated sites of Mwerlap and other indigenous diasporas are all constitutive of the social ecology within which they are forces, dynamics, inscriptions, patterns, opportunities, structures, articulations and diasporas.

I propose that these insights point to contingent openings for social and cultural transformation that can be strategically employed for the advantage of the community in ways that reflect pre-existing indigenous trajectories. The multiscale Mwerlap conjunctures are an example of these contingent openings that result in the emergence of a new entity from a collaborative encounter between differing formations of humans and non-humans. The cultural innovations, such as those of the Mwerlap community in its codifying of the hētung and the subsequent development of stringband matto take on an emblematic role as chorographic markers of identity. These innovations are an embodiment of the spatial specificity that in northern Vanuatu typically differentiates the village or local community level (François, 2011, 2012; Hayward, 2015)

But not all of this is relevant to, or even consistent with an understanding of a cultural configuration as an articulated ensemble. Clifford warns that an articulated ensemble is characterised by

"its ability to conjoin disparate elements" as "it does not allow you to prefigure it on an organic model, as a living, persistent, 'growing' body, continuous and developing through time" (2001: 478)

Heading this warning, the key element that we know to be true from this ensemble of ideas, is that in Melanesia social and cultural differences

"tend to be formulated and remembered in terms of specific spatially-bound communities" (François, 2011: 228)

and that these communities are chorographically engaged in

"a cultural area where each stable social group, recognised with its distinctive — and internally homogeneous — identity, can be extremely reduced in size" (ibid.: 232)

The idea of the contested zone — one that reflects the history of Melanesian mobilities
and exchanges – is important to this argument because it provides a sense of continuity to the interface between the socio-linguistic innovations that are associated with cultural and linguistic diversity in Vanuatu (and across Melanesia). Languages are social and cultural articulations and performances. And the patterns of exchange within and between languages, reflect other social dynamics. Thus patterns of mobility, such as in the case of the Mwerlap-Leweton conjuncture (on the national level) can be understood as a contemporary inflection of an ancient practice.

The scale is relevant – to the extent that it specifies intent. The point here is that what may appear to be an effect of divergence on the macro scale is first and foremost the result of events of convergence on the micro scale (ibid.: 231). While we cannot be sure that indigenous Melanesians intended to act con- or di-versely specifically to affect linguistic diversity, we can be sure that they intended to act convergently, at the scale of local communities with a predisposition to spatial emblems (Francois, 2011, 2012). Convergence (insider homogeneity) on this scale results in the diversity on a regional (and linguistically structural) scale. These recent changes are creating new cultural edges, increasing the diversity of ecological, social, and cultural capital upon which people base their livelihoods; but also new opportunities for exploitation, cultural erosion and homogeneity.

This raises some interesting questions for the future of the diaspora dialectic. Will the Leweton and Dungnau conjunctures reflect similar dynamic internal convergences within each entity? If so, will those micro-convergences result in macro-divergences between each entity? And for other diasporic communities, is there value in cultivating spatially emblematic markers of identity? Or does this speed up (through micro-convergence/macro-divergence) the process of cultural diffusion? Can this be mitigated?

Conclusion

My intention in this article is to present a perspective on the complex system of knowledge on which the Mwerlap/Leweton people are building strategies for cultural continuity and change. The reader is invited to see this as a performing place – a negotiated (dis-em-) placement contextualised by a performativity that embodies the discontinuous parts of both home and diaspora. I have shown that the Mwerlap/Leweton people embody a contingent and temporal grounding of the diaspora/home dialectic. This proposition is not intended to be a critical solution to the antinomy of this dialectic, rather, as discussed in the paragraph above, it is a theoretical and historical re-construction of the Mwerlap/Leweton context. It is also a contextualization of the impasse – the aporia – implied in the “and” in the “Scripting the Development Narrative Through Indicators and Dance”. The “and” is about articulating different ways of knowing. Dance is an indicator. Dance indicates. Dance develops. Dance is a narrative and is narrative. As Tawa identifies:

“Indigenous narrative is performative. It conjoins knowledge and its performance. In the experience of its performance—the experience of knowledge as performance knowledge does not precede, succeed, or stand over and above its performance. Knowledge is one with knowing, in a praxis which is its very performance” (Tawa, 2002: 47).

Thus narrative, indicators, and dance are all conjoined in an embodied knowledge. Similarly, the www film, the Herstory, the tours and performances, the photographic essays, and most crucially the infiltration of academic conferences by Melanesian performers, are all embodied modes of knowing that trace the past, present the present, and promise the future.

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Chapter 7 - Synthesis and Conclusion

Through this thesis I address the research question: how does a ni-Vanuatu community’s engagement with place inflect the ways that intangible cultural heritage is produced and presented for livelihood generation. The appendices augment the exploration of themes, ontologies, and epistemologies connected to the overarching research question. Counter to research that uses temporal dimensions to structure the presentation of phenomena, in this thesis I structure my enquiry around place.

7.1 Introduction

As a thesis that incorporates publications, this document consists of standard components presented in conjunction with a range of non-traditional elements. The standard components include a documentary film broadcast on international television and three academic articles published in peer-refereed research journals. These components are presented as Chapters and each one is introduced and situated in relation to the argument of the overall thesis. Augmenting the Chapters, are a range of non-traditional elements – generally shorter length publications, all peer-reviewed, and often co-authored with ni-Vanuatu colleagues and community members. These non-traditional elements are presented as Appendices and contribute to a cohesive sense of the richness of the research assemblage.

In this concluding chapter, I provide an anecdote of embodied engagement from the research project and I use this to demonstrate some of the key contributions to knowledge from this project. I describe some of the limitations of the research project and also offer some directions for future research: for the community itself as well as for external researchers. I provide a brief summary of the thesis before closing.

7.2 Embodied Engagement

In 2011, the Leweton group was invited to perform at festivals in Australia and Malaysia. The contract fee offered to the group was only enough to cover
the costs of the involvement of six members of the Leweton group and they
decided that six women of various ages should travel, as this was the
minimum requirement for a performance of the étëtung (water music). One
additional position in the group was allocated to a friend of the group who
was to act as tour manager – an Australian woman who had helped with the
coordination of the travel arrangements. Of the six women in the touring
party, Hilda Rosal Wavales, was the leader because her family is recognised
as the custodians of the étëtung. Hilda is also credited in the liner notes of the
DVD as the composer of the water music tracks. Whilst on tour, some tension
arose within the group of women. I was asked to meet with them to discuss
the issue. We sat down together, the younger women present but disengaged
from the discussion. Readers familiar with community work in Vanuatu, will
recognize the format of this kind of meeting whereby members of a group
meet publicly to resolve disputes, discuss upcoming events, etc. The
discussion was conducted in Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu, while the
women broke off periodically to discuss amongst themselves in their
vernacular Mwerlap language, which I do not speak or understand. This
multilingual meeting format was familiar to me from similar discussions in
many communities in Vanuatu. As the meeting progressed it was clear that
the women were uncomfortable with something, but I could not pinpoint what
the issue was, nor what it was that they wanted me to do about it. The
discussion seemed to meander discursively until, as the anxiety of the women
reached distressing levels, it became clear to me that something was expected
of me, that in this case I was more than a passive witness. The awareness of
this triggered in me the sense of responsibility – instilled in me from an early
age, by parents, and family. I assumed I had been chosen to be a part of this
meeting for some reason inherent to me as an individual: for my judgement.
This misapprehended awareness and sense of responsibility, this hubris,
confounded the meeting process as I set out in earnest looking for a problem
to solve.

The more the women talked the more confused I became. No one was upset
with anyone else. And nothing needed to be changed on a structural level. But
the group was collectively distressed: the younger women avoided any
engagement with each other or with the group and were becoming more and
more withdrawn, while the older women took their turns to speak or answer my questions with increasing exasperation.

When I gave up trying to solve problems, it eventually emerged that the source of the tension seemed to be related to the way that someone, possibly the Australian tour manager (who spoke neither Mwerlap nor Bislama), had nominated Cecilia as the leader of the group without acknowledging the authority of Hilda as composer/custodian via a formal process (for example through a public meeting, such as the one in which we were now engaged). Adding to the anxiety was the fact that the group was profoundly uncomfortable casting any aspersions towards the tour manager, in whose house the meeting transpired (but who was not present for the discussion); and this deferral of blame – along with the very obvious collective-ness of the distress, expressed individually – further confounded my grasp of what was expected of me in the situation (if Hilda alone was upset, for example, that might have signified to me that her authority had been compromised).

For my benefit (at least it seemed that way to me), we broke the issues right down to the most basic level. We talked about the tour and the challenges and the excitements (escalators!). We talked about the interrelated need to contextualise the water music and to represent on behalf of the members of the community who were back in the village/island. We talked about this from the perspective of the Leweton community, and also from the perspective of the festivals and the audiences. We established what we already knew, i.e. that Hilda was custodian, that Cecilia spoke the best English, and that on this basis Cecilia was the “spokesperson” with authority to speak on behalf of Hilda (who we nicknamed the “Chief of the Water Music” thus eliciting peals of laughter and releasing some tension). And then the meeting ended. At this point, I still had no sense of what had happened. I was extremely relieved that the women were laughing and feeling better – but I was disturbed by my own hazy grasp on what had taken place.

Reflecting on the meeting later, it occurred to me that what we had done was to undo the unsanctioned nomination of Cecilia; and then witness the re-doing of it, the re-nomination of Cecilia as spokesperson, this time with a
recognisable process that acknowledged the authority of the group, an authority that is embodied in Hilda. With the realisation that Hilda’s experience of authority and responsibility was better understood as an embodiment of the group’s authority, so too the insight dawned on me that my role in the meeting was nothing to do with what I thought of as my patrician judgement, my sense of justice and equity, or my salt-and-pepper beard. It was something much more contingent – my proximal relation to the group and to the other outsiders (the tour manager, festival organisers, etc). So nothing changed, but everything changed. The radical empiricism of this anecdote reveals (to me) the temporal, processual, intersubjectively constituted identity and authority such as it is articulated in coactivity between the women in the Leweton group and myself.

But was there not something more to this incident. I had been a part of several very similar meetings in Vanuatu in preparation for this tour. But for the women, it seemed that the actuality of being on tour – the escalators and elevators, the airports, the strange food and people – had triggered a need to review and re-orient in the new spatial context, “the mark that makes the territory” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 315), as it were. It is hard to imagine how much the women’s expectations of Malaysia and Australia, of planes and airports, of festival performances, differed from their lived experience of these things. I suspect that there were many questions and issues that the women raised in our discussion that I was oblivious too. But some questions were answered – or more to the point, the women took answers away, perhaps unsatisfactory answers, but answers nonetheless that were situated “in-between, between two milieus” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987: 345) to produce the new temporal, transitional identity of the articulated assemblage that we had become.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This interdisciplinary study draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theories and the elaboration of these theories in the fields of island studies (Hayward 2012, Hayward 2012, Maxwell 2012, Dick 2015a, Hayward 2015), human geography (Tawa 2002, Olwig 2008, Anderson and Harrison 2010), performance studies (Roach 1996, Roach 2010, Conquergood and Johnson
and cultural studies (Hall 1980, Grossberg 1986, Slack 1996, Clifford 2001, Grossberg 2013) to generate insights into the perspectives of an indigenous community actively promoting itself as a both a heritage tourism destination and a performing arts troupe. The anecdote above at section 7.2 is an example of this study blends a chorographic engagement with place (Tawa 2002, Olwig 2008, Maxwell 2012, Dick 2015a) and non-representational theory (Anderson and Harrison 2010) into a praxis of spatial articulation designed to make visible “the forces (the articulations) that create and maintain identities that have real concrete effects” (Slack 1996). Analysis of the anecdote of embodied engagement demonstrates the efficacy of the methodology/approach, as it makes visible (the joining and the un-joining, the assembling and the reassembling, the articulating and re-articulating of) the performativity of Mwerlap knowledge. Three months after the incident described in that anecdote the women were back in Australia for a performance at the Bellingen Global Carnival in October 2011. Their line up had changed slightly – this time two of the younger women from the first trip were replaced by two women who had come not from the Leweton community in Luganville, but from the island of Merelava in the Banks. There was no extra tour manager this time. Sitting with the women as they discussed their performance from the day before and planned for another performance the following day, I watched as they practiced by talking (in Mwerlap) through the ordering of the movements of their hands that create the sounds from the percussive action on and through the water. I noticed that it was the two younger women, who had come from Merelava, who were doing most of the talking and gesturing. I was struck by the kinaesthetic nature of the conversation and I realised that they were discussing various techniques for producing the water music. It is worth noting that in addition to the six women present there were at least three other people in the room. I was not sitting with pen and paper diligently taking notes, it was just a relaxed mid-tour scene, and it is possible that the gesticulating women were not even aware that I was so captivated by their dynamism. In this sense it can be understood that I was engaged in coactivity with the women – I had met them at the airport, driven with them for over six hours, organised and produced the performance for them at the festival, and shuttled them around the small town of Bellingen. What conversation there was transpired in
Mwerlap language, and thus I was not distracted by any verbal cues or the code switching between Bislama and English, just as they were (seemingly) unaffected by my presence. As I watched and listened I noticed that they never imitated the sound of the water music with their voice, as I always did when I was talking about the techniques. Instead they always employed this combination of kinaesthetics and language. I found myself transfixed by the movements, and I thought of … nothing. I thought nothing, but I felt like I was watching a conversation between two dancers. Similar to the gestural process involved in sand drawing, the performance of the water music involves a tactile kinaesthetics that engage viscerally with non-human elements of place. It is relational and contingent. It is a spatial praxis of articulation. It is also the result of coactivity – a form of dialogic performance that embraces and complicates diversity, difference, and pluralism (Conquergood and Johnson 2013: 93). Madison (2005) describes it as living in “embodied engagement of radical empiricism, to honor the aural/oral sounds that incorporate rather than gaze over” (168, emphasis in original).

The blend of chorographic and coactive approaches in this study have resulted in a range of textual outputs that are part of the context, part of the data, and new knowledge in their own right (see Appendices), that accelerate the contribution and significance of the project beyond the boundaries of the traditional dissertation. This new knowledge is published in peer-reviewed journals that recognise its contribution to the fields of Indigenous studies (Dick 2014a), island studies (Dick 2015a), and Pacific studies/studies of Oceania (Dick 2016), in addition to the contribution to understanding Indigenous Oceanian perspectives on wellbeing (see Dick 2015b).

7.4 Limitations

As a single case study, with an Indigenous community, I have been conscious of the danger of my project becoming the victim of its own historicity, and falling into a trap of transcendental rationalism. In mitigating this risk I have avoided problematizing the community so that I could appear with the ‘solution’. I have adapted participant observation by taking a similar approach to what Lissant Bolton (2003: xv) calls “participant engagement”. I participate in community life in Vanuatu and with the Leweton ensemble when it is on tour “with the express objective of making changes” (ibid.).
working with the Leweton group and collaborating with the other partners involved in supporting the production and presentation of *kastom* music in Santo and internationally, I describe historical processes that have culminated in events which did not involve me. I do not concentrate on my impact or 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.

A reflexive awareness of my positionality affords me the opportunity to unpack the dissolution of observer and observed in the project, that is, my embedded-ness in the data. In this way, I leverage my long term relationships in favour of a deeply integrative analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place with the result that a potentially conflicted positionality is reframed as a methodological strength. For example, despite the fact that I am often accused of *fulumap hed blong man* (filling up people’s heads), or *go long we tumas nao* (going too far) with plans or ideas, I am not perceived as an observer. Rather, I am treated as an adopted family member with a set of perceived propensities that various community members are (potentially) able to leverage in their own favour. Operationalising new materialism in the context of this research, I embody a set of obligations that impact the case study and create the conditions for an integrated analysis of contemporary indigenous engagements with place, such as are explored in this thesis, along with multilateral strategies of articulation and de-articulation. The *VWWM* film, the tours and the performances form part of the data. And simultaneously they are in and of themselves research outcomes — modes of presenting knowledge that belong to people in a specific place.

### 7.5 Future Research

The conceptual insights and practical outcomes of this thesis are now informing new research into the development of our understanding of customary law in Vanuatu. Customary law emerges as a complex process of contestations based on existing *kastom* principles and values (such as respect
and cultural heritage), newly emerging ideologies and situations (market economy, individualism, urban migration), power dynamics and introduced legal notions such as copyright. Drawing particularly on the case study data in Chapter 5 and 6 of this thesis, initial findings from new research into the emergent form of intellectual property regulation suggests that policy makers need to be sceptical of assumptions that are commonly made about the rigidity and boundedness of customary law, particularly in the context of the development of state and global regulatory frameworks around traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, such as registries and sui generis statutes. Such modern uses of customary law often adopt a positivistic perspective, seeing ‘kastom’ as something that has always been there and requiring uncovering through removing layers of inauthentic influences, rather than as involving an ongoing process of legal change reflecting/in response to/in dynamic interaction with a myriad of social/cultural/technological forces. The direction of this new research may also develop our understanding of the way in which women’s rights over certain types of intangible cultural heritage are able to be lost through its commodification.

The Mwerlap diaspora itself is actively conducting its own ongoing research projects. One of the current priorities for the community is to develop a baseline of data for the purpose of applying to UNESCO to establish a biosphere reserve. Biosphere reserves are sites recognised under UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to promote innovative approaches to sustainable development. There are currently 669 biosphere reserves in 120 countries comprising terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each biosphere reserve is designed and managed in a different way, but all seek to reconcile the conservation of biological and cultural diversity. They differ from world heritage sites in that they encourage active community participation and are ideal locations to test and demonstrate innovative approaches to ecosystem monitoring and sustainable development. If successful, the Mwerlap biosphere would be the first reserve to be established across a diaspora of people. An additional element to this research is the Leweton interest in the inherently interdisciplinary nature of sound to explore cultural and biological diversity through accessible audio recording
technologies, interdisciplinary creativity and environmental engagement with local and global communities. The Leweton community is currently negotiating an acoustic ecology project at the intersection of art and science, with the audio recordings from my thesis providing valuable scientific data for biodiversity analysis and incredible source material for creative works that can bring awareness to these environments through new technologies.

7.6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I present a case study of embodied, multi-local Melanesian subjectivities that attends to questions of power through a framework of decolonising methodologies in order to explore the performatively constituted identities of a particular community of Mwerlap-speakers in Vanuatu. In Chapter 2, I contextualise the genesis of the research project and the case study community in contemporary Vanuatu: an intercultural space contextualised by extremely high levels of indigenous linguistic and cultural diversity. I provide detailed information about the reasons why I have chosen this particular case study and introduce some of the key thematic ideas explored throughout the thesis. I also provide an overview of the thesis by positioning these themes in relation to the various Chapters and present the themes in a table, as well as mapping them in a more non-representational way that engages with Melanesian knowledge systems in the form of sand drawing. In accordance with institutional guidelines, each Chapter is a peer-reviewed article, incorporating its own methodology and review of relevant literature specific to the content and the journal in which it was published, an introductory discussion of the overarching theories takes the place of dedicated chapters for methodology and literature review.

Chapter 3 uses audio-visual media to draw the reader into the research assemblage. In particular, a feature length documentary film and the liner notes to the DVD provide a non-representational, authoethnographic perspective on the materiality of Leweton cultural expression. Chapter 4 unpacks some of the dynamics that have influenced the emergence of Leweton group at the local level. These dynamics are also positioned in relation to the narratives and histories that the Leweton group present to the outside world. Chapter 5 presents the sand drawing which provides the
scaffold for the overall thesis and contextualises the way that ni-Vanuatu artists and producers engage on multiple scales. The focus in Chapter 5 is specifically on the idiosyncrasies of the ways that Oceanian people, especially the Mwerlap diaspora, engage with place in ways that are multilocal and multiscalar. In Chapter 6, the details of the multiple emplacements of the Mwerlap diaspora are mapped onto the sand drawing. In this way, the Leweton group is revealed as a contemporary, sophisticated, international organisation.


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Appendices
Appendix 1 - TEKS: Promoting and Safeguarding Biocultural Diversity Through the Arts in Northern Vanuatu

I worked with my (adopted) sister-in-law, Delly Roy Nalo, a key cultural worker in Vanuatu, and a member of the Leweton community in Vanuatu to create this photographic essay which was published in the Langscape biocultural diversity magazine. This essay privileges the voices of the community and the photographic medium enables the community members to contribute to the production of “academic” knowledge.
TEKS: Promoting & Safeguarding Biocultural Diversity Through the Arts in Northern Vanuatu

Text by Delly Roy and Thomas Dick, Photos by Cristina Panicali and Sarah Doyle, with contributions by Ham Maurice Joel, Augustin Leasley, and Len Jacob Tafau

Traditional: Habits and ways built over the years that are flexible and change in relation to new circumstances and situations

Entertainment: An opportunity for the people to express and adjust, to adapt, safeguard kastom music and acts using contemporary arts in the face of overwhelming foreign influences

Kastom (custom): Practices that bind people together in relation to the land, their leaders, and the environment

Support: Using appropriate tools to promote and support positive kastom and traditional practices in ways that are respectful of our people

In the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu there are over 130 different languages spoken. With its population of approximately 263,000, this means Vanuatu has the highest rate of per capita linguistic diversity on the planet. For many people in Vanuatu, one of these languages is the first language that they learn from their mother. These languages—and the knowledge and practices that they represent and articulate—are important expressions of cultural diversity. As the cash economy penetrates deeper and deeper into the islands of Vanuatu, communities are identifying the need for alternative, locally based approaches to the promotion and preservation of important traditional wisdom practices including dances, music, songs, and stories, and connecting these with contemporary music and dance.

One of the ways that communities in Vanuatu are responding is through the Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support (TEKS) unit of Further Arts—a local NGO working with communities on arts and cultural projects. Delly Roy, an indigenous woman of Vanuatu and Kiribati descent, founded TEKS in 2011. Delly conceived TEKS to provide space and equal opportunity for traditional performers to express and showcase their artistic talents in a local cultural festival on Espiritu Santo Island in northern Vanuatu. At the same time, TEKS also provides support to practitioners of kastom and those communities that safeguard its values.

Delly speaks fluent English, French and the local creole Bislama (the lingua franca of Vanuatu) in addition to her father’s vernacular language, Mwerlap. She says: “I feel that I understand enough about diverse Vanuatu cultures and that I have a reasonable understanding of many foreign cultures. I created TEKS as a unit to serve as a bridge between the different conceptual worlds.”

TEKS supports a range of traditional wisdom practices such as dances, music, songs, stories, carving, weaving, painting, drawing, and fabric art. There are two principal ways that TEKS engages with communities to support these activities: firstly, by assisting village groups to organize and host Mini Arts Festivals (MAFs); and secondly, by documenting these MAFs through co-produced audiovisual content in vernacular languages.

Delly explains that her “idea is that if each culture can understand or at the very least acknowledge each other, a platform can be set for mutual respect.” TEKS aspires to be there to facilitate that platform and foster the connections.

At the time of preparing this photo essay (March 2015), Vanuatu was severely hit by a tropical cyclone, which affected more than seventy percent of the population through the destruction of ninety percent of homes, gardens and infrastructure. Many people were left without adequate shelter, food, and safe drinking water. The Further Arts office was completely destroyed along with most of the equipment in it. Without the office facility to provide stability to TEKS, its work with communities, local youth, artists and musicians is unlikely to continue. All the communities TEKS works with are in the process of rebuilding their lives but need as much support as possible to restore healthy cultural and lifestyle practices. People wishing to donate for the reconstruction of Further Arts and TEKS initiatives can do so at http://rebuilding.furtherarts.org/.

The full 35-picture version of this photo essay is available as a member-only feature on the Langscape website.
Further Reading


Further Arts YouTube Channel (n.d). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/user/furtherarts


Appendix 2 - Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage I: Malekula

Elements of the narrative of this journey, essentially my fieldnotes, are affectively conveyed in two pieces of creative non-fiction (and a documentary film, *Lon Marum*). The first piece of creative non-fiction is called Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage: Malekula and it was published in an anthology of creative writing thematically linked by the idea of “home” called Coastlines 5. The second piece of creative non-fiction, Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage: Ambrym was published in an academic journal called disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory for a special issue themed around the idea of “transnational lives”. Read together, these two pieces of writing provide an affective sense of the journey that I was on … and a sense of the insight that I took away from the journey. For me this experience was about becoming aware of the connection to the land that ni-Vanuatu people had, that seemed to be powerful and important and it was this that answered a question I had had for a long time. These insights informed the idea of this PhD as a chorographic inflection of people, place, and power.
Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage

Extract from creative nonfiction. Chapter One: Malekula

Thomas Dick

It is strange the way we frame things, the way we create perception and meaning, as innocuous happenstance attains elevated significance according to its context, and our focus. We have relationships with each other as humans, with the environment, and with the objects that reflect our cluttered minds, and each of these relationships has its own own language and culture. Daily, we describe reality, distancing ourselves from it, and creating reflections of ourselves that ripple and sway through the fluttering fabric of life. Like leaves, emotion catches in the mistrals and siroccos, remembering timeless patterns, etching new pathways, and opening new trade routes. When the leaves land they are changed, like us, like our emotions, and everything validates itself. I imagine joining the dots on these patterns, feeling connected to a place, and, through it, to other places.

There is such a tenuous and fragile beauty in our human condition. When I feel disempowered about the seeming randomness of life, I find it helps me to remember that there is a directly proportional relationship between the extent and depth of randomness in the universe and my own need for an illusion of control over it. I think about the fleeting art form that is sand drawing. I imagine a white sand beach with designs that speak of wisdom unpossessed, existing on the periphery of a concept in the interstices of dreams, in that dark empty space of our mind, from whence springs so much insecurity and need. I think of these things fleetingly as the tide rises and washes away the patterns, effectively merging both the new and old back into the wet sand.

I remember Mel Gibson in the movie Gallipoli. His character was a runner, running instructions from the tea-tent of the Field Marshals to the frontlines and trenches. The dramatisation of this epic tragedy ended with a desperate (and very young) Mel Gibson being too late by a fraction of a second to save the life of his comrade. The dejection he conveyed reminds me now of the feeling of watching a sand drawing being erased.

Why is it that I feel so strong a connection to the things around me? Why is it that I have this desire to understand things? Why do I need to possess things?
In the vivid vagabondage of my journey through the islands of Vanuatu, to the Malampa Sand Drawing Festival, I found something deeply peaceful and fulfilling. From the ‘suburbs’ of Luganville, on the island of Espiritu Santo in the north of Vanuatu, where I had been sleeping in pools of full moonlight between bookshelves of insight, I flew to Norsup on the dog-shaped island of Malekula. The last time I made this journey it was by ship, on the MV Tamata, a few days before Christmas. We were rocked and rolled by an ocean that was rough without being threatening. An old man in the berth above me was thrown out of his bunk by misinterpreting the sway. As he hit the ground he sat bolt upright and blinked, eyes wide, thoughts transparent. He reminded me of the sand artists when they emerge from the trance-like state that some of them go into as they draw. Especially if you quietly sidle up to someone totally engaged in their own drawing, there are a few unmediated moments before you are noticed – then the artist goes through an array of emotions and states of being: surprise, embarrassment, coyness, curiosity, and realisation. Then the sand drawing is wiped out with a languid movement of the hand and a shy sideways glance, and there remains only a mild sense of losing something that I never had in the first place. The sand artists use the same languid gesture to remove unwanted pieces of debris which from time to time flutter into the picture. A couple of quick flicks and the rubbish is gone.

When I arrived in Lakatoro this time around, I made my way directly to the Malekula Cultural Centre. The library there is a genuine pearl of a thing. It is only small, but what a trove of literary pleasure awaits the itinerant mind! I spent the afternoon with my back flat on the cool concrete and my thoughts dancing wildly. My adopted nephew arrived, and we walked together down the hill, under the big mango and tamanu trees, past the provincial offices, the commercial cooperative store, the sports stadium, and down the road to the jetty. We climbed into the speedboat, talking about fishing and the weather and while releasing the trolling lines we remembered timeless connections between people, the land and sea. His face became mysterious as we moved away from the shore, like glass darkly mirroring the turgid undulations of an opaque ocean.

We arrived on the small island of Uripiv just before sunset. Before long I was whisked off to a neighbouring natangora house to indulge in the soporific pleasures of the ubiquitous bucket of kava.
The next morning I followed the Curator of the Malekula Cultural Centre back to Lakatoro so he could coordinate the travel arrangements for the delegation of people participating in the Sandroing Festival. As the festival was to be from the three corners of Malekula, this was serious business. Anyone familiar with coordinating travel between the islands of Vanuatu knows that it is a uniquely challenging place to work. It is an unusual situation. Most routes are not very long in duration, not dangerous to traverse, and quite beautiful. But the simple absence of functional vessels and the overheads of maintaining them meant that most routes were simply not serviced.

To look at a map of southern Malekula, you might imagine that people from South West Bay would make their way by road directly to Lamap. But, of course, there is no road between these two locations. So you might think that a short boat ride would be convenient and easy. But this sea route is notoriously difficult. This means that delegates from South West Bay had to take a four- to six-hour boat ride to Lambubu (central west coast), wait for a truck to drive them across the ‘neck of the dog’, wait for another truck in Lakatoro to drive them down to Lamap, only to spend another four to six hours in a boat to get to Sesivi on West Ambrym for the Festival. That is, providing the rain had not made the river (between Lakatoro and Lamap) so big that trucks could not cross it (which the rains had done), and that there was no shortage of fuel (which there was), and assuming the certainty of available boats in Lamap (which there wasn’t).

As we drove back from Lambubu (without our passengers – they had found another truck to transport them and so our trip was for no other purpose than for me to enjoy a new place), I set about making the most of the opportunity. My hosts discussed the operations of the Metensel Plantation and the mélange of Melanesian politics and Marxist maxims, while my soul greedily fed on the scenery. Villages along the road were a study in sustainability; giant, heart-shaped leaves of infinite variety; rows and rows of the elegant nobility of natangora trees, and even the commercially tended plantations had their aesthetics: casuarinas (sheoaks) provided an organic windbreak for the cacao and coconuts.

The descent down to Lambubu is quite spectacular in its own understated way. The sun was creeping slowly around the head as it prepared to drop into the ocean, and the small inlet was lit as if by fire. Everyone in the transport seemed to share a moment of collective pleasure as a small boat disappeared around the southern point.
A canoe eased over to us and sold us some fresh fish, while news passed between people – stories being a more significant currency than vatu. As we drove back to Lakatoro, through the flamingo-legs of Norsup’s coconut plantations (which, when viewed from a moving vehicle, took on the appearance of a shimmering and misted ginger), I looked up at the wind-swept spherical indolence of the giant coconut leaves of Damocles and the even more dangerous fruits, and thought how rich and dense is life. Just for a moment, under a pink Malekula sky, I thought I saw something moving under the trees – but it was just me – moving under the trees, under a pink Malekula sky.

The previous day we had journeyed to the northernmost tip of Malekula and a series of villages called Travol – which with the deliciously ambiguous Bislama pronunciation sounds like 'Trouble' – including: Travol Wan, Travol Tu, and Travol Tri. This trick of aural interpretation was the source of some concern for me, as it sounded to my ears like we were headed directly for 'Trouble Tree'. The journey crossed many small rivers and cut through some of the biggest rural communities in Vanuatu: Walla Rano, Atchin, and Vao. Almost the entire way was lined on both sides with people’s gardens: bananas of every imaginable variety, breadfruit trees, Jurassic taro leaves, cascading mango trees, POPACA (an agricultural NGO) cocoa, coconuts, and ubiquitously unfurling fern fronds. We picked up mothers, young girls, old men and other sand artists. We were splattered as the mellifluous squish and moorish squelch of chocolate mud caked both us and the truck. The road! Oh the road!

Days of vivid vagabondage lead inevitably to the nakamal and to half-shells, half-stories, vicarious questions and playful language. The sun set and the torches flickered. Vernacular languages rumbled subliminal meanings underneath my skin. Someone nearby said quietly, ‘Ol man Uripiv oli dring kava olsem oli planem’ (People from Uripiv drink kava as though it grows on trees). People laughed.

In the mornings, we sat astride a glittering ocean as the sun edged out from behind the clouds. Sitting on the roof of the boat, I watched dolphins languorously play and breathe and play as we rode their wake back to the big island. At night, the silvery sliver moon and dusky stars lit a way back to the small island. The chilled, salted breeze enlivened us. We sat on the prow of the boat accounting for phosphorescence and the dark spaces in between the stories.
For me, the baroque extravaganza of life was never more understated. For Numa, I saw how the weight of insoluble problems and endless challenges were taking their toll. Uncrossable rivers, double bookings, budget limitations, incessant rain, failing engines, and fuel shortages – it all added up and I felt it in the solid tension of his shoulders. He said to me: ‘I just want to go to the garden and cut some bananas and make laplap sorsor’. We talked about his garden, and the pigs, which constantly menace the garden, and the fowl, which also menace the garden, and canoes. We talked about fishing with grandfathers. We talked about yams and we laughed at his pun that ‘the yam is a root of kastom.’
Appendix 3  - Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage II: Ambrym

See description at Appendix 2.
Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage: Ambrym

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5-4-2016

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Reflections on Vivid Vagabondage: Ambrym

Cover Page Footnote
Thanks to the people of West Ambrym for hosting us all during the Sand Drawing Festival, especially Filip Talevu and Jeffrey and Lucy Bong.
On a Saturday afternoon, in mid-May, during a mad and chaotic transit in Vanuatu’s capital, Port Vila, I relieved myself of a large container full of carvings, for sale at the Alliance Française, on behalf of an artist from Vao. I was also reunited with my adopted family who had flown down from Santo earlier in the day. As usual, the airport was bubbling with transparent emotion and drama. People arriving, people leaving, hugs and longing looks, tired and weary travelers, excited tourists, and old and new friends—all creating eddies of emotion which draw some in and thrust others out. After Malekula’s understated yet profound peace, the transit experience in the capital is overwhelming.

A last light rain fell as Air Vanuatu’s “Twin Otter” conducted us from Bauerfield airport to Craig Cove airport on the island of Ambrym, via Lamen Bay. As I looked out the window at the aquamarine garden of the Shepherds Islands, the volcanic quintessence of Lopevi, and the landing strip of Lamen Bay, which evokes similar seaside airstrips such as Cairns and Gibraltar, I noticed a cargo ship, the MV Sarafenua—a tiny speck—making its meandering and copra-stenched way to Sesivi.

On landing in Craig Cove airport, my journey traded in its independence for a rich and lively interdependence. Driving through Craig Cove and Baiap to Sesivi, the site of the Sandroing Festivol (Sand Drawing Festival), it is impossible not to notice the fundamental differences of life on an active volcano. The black volcanic rocks are scathing and sharp. The bush is less dense. There are fewer big old trees. The ground seems younger. There is practically no mud as the rain seeps straight through the porous ash. Underfoot the ash performs microscopic reflexology on one’s feet. The feeling of the soft sandy ash (or is it ashy sand?) between one’s toes is a relieving and engaging sensation—it feels like the land itself is massaging itself into one’s feet. This was a joyful delight after the continuous deluge that made a quagmire of Sarakata’s streets in Santo and was the source of the mellifluous squish of Malekula’s mud.

Marveling at the newness, I wondered about my friends from Malekula and whether they had found some fuel, and a truck to make their way down to Lamap, and whether or not the river had sufficiently diminished to allow safe passage. Safe passage. This is an interesting term used extremely loosely in this part of the world.

Our hosts lead us around the village of Sesivi. We heard the arrival of the MV Sarafenua, which included in its cargo the delegation of people from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) in Port Vila. We wandered over to the top of the steep and craggy black stone staircase that leads down to the pasis (passage) where the ships load and unload their cargo. The VKS delegation disembarked amidst a babble.
of excitement and relief. There was much mumbling about the smell of copra and the meandering course that the ship takes to service as many parts of the country as possible, but also much gladness at being on land and meeting old friends.

The group set about finding its first shell of kava on Ambrym. An adoptive cousin (abu or tu —in West Ambrym, the children of your mother’s brothers, or your father’s sisters, are the parents of your potential husband or wife) invited us to the village for a bucket-sized shell. As I turned my head against the setting sun and washed away the circuitous day with the mysterious alchemies of the peppery drink, inexplicably the feeling of having arrived home overwhelmed me. Now, back in Port Vila, remembering the feeling on the island, comparing it to the feeling of being in town, being in Santo, Malekula, or Australia, I find the concept of home disturbingly nebulous—and comfortably accessible at the same time. I was recently introduced to the poetry of Matsuo Basho, and the following lines speak to the paradox of home:

“The moon and sun are eternal travelers. Even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat, or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home.”

It was not until Tuesday that the last of the contingent from Malekula arrived in Sesivi. When I finally found them and asked about the journey I listened incredulously to their story. I was reminded of something that a friend in Malekula said before I left Lakatoro. “We can plan everything to the last detail but at the end of the day neja i toktok”—nature has the final say. Now, sitting in the sunshine and comfort of the capital, I think back to the journey that the people from Malekula made and I am overcome with sympathy. Apart from the canoe, there was nothing “safe” about the journey at all.

There were three trips across the sea from Lamap to Sesivi. The first one was the traditional outrigger canoe that sailed with five or six people. It arrived without incident or ceremony on Saturday morning after a journey of about six hours. The sight of a dugout, outrigger canoe, under full sail is one of the most fantastic and evocative sights that Vanuatu has to offer. I remember the first time I went to North Malekula: Atchin and Vao; I was utterly astounded at the sight of flotillas of canoes—at first I assumed it was some kind of race or festival—coursing between the islands, conducting people from their homes to their gardens.

Back on Sesivi, the first speedboat from Lamap arrived after the opening ceremony of the festival. The exhausted, cold and wet passengers had faced an overloaded speedboat, an increasingly rough sea, and a powerful wind. The harrowing journey was marginally ameliorated by the skill of the driver. After two hours, they had reached the halfway point across the sea when the engine failed. No amount of coaxing and swearing could start it again. Passengers started bailing out the sea water which was licking at them hungrily, while the driver started paddling. No life jackets, no flares, no other way forward than to paddle against the wind and current. The driver paddled and ruddered his way up and down and across the swells, masterfully manoeuvering the boat towards Ambrym, with support from another passenger on the bow.

After five hours of paddling they arrived at Sesivi. Word was sent back to Lamap that the boat would not be returning that day. The delegates who were stranded in Lamap (there were still 18 of them expecting the boat to return for them) were forced to find accommodation, food and warmth as best they could and wait for other arrangements to be made.

The following day, another boat made the crossing with the remaining delegates. This time it was loaded with two bags of kava, a slaughtered bullock, a replacement engine for the first boat, and 18 passengers. The wind was blowing the sea into a frenzy of white-capped waves. Benbow’s volcanic gas arrowed directly towards Lamap, showing the force and direction of the headwind they faced. Passengers bailed out water for the entire six-hour journey. Eventually, they arrived.

I listened to this story disbelievingly. I thought again of the term “safe passage.” I wondered at the
courage and fortitude of human beings. I wondered at the nature of these festivals and whether or not there is a better, more appropriate format. Perhaps the national sand drawing event could be decentralised? Would the same effect be achieved if all of the communities in Vanuatu were encouraged to engage in a simultaneous celebration of sand drawing? Communities could be invited to send delegations to other communities by canoe, reviving and celebrating traditional trade routes and cultural links (Lamap to Sesivi; Ulei to Paama; North Ambrym to Vao; etc)? As I looked around at the food, the people, and the activities, I was struck by the thought that the current format seems to promote dependence on fossil fuels, imported staple foods, and the compulsive pornography-of-otherness that the snap-happy, red-faced, tourists and bossy film crews seem to love.

I turn my gaze inwards, and question my own motives—what is my pornography? Do I really love this place? Or do I merely love its “otherness”?

I turn away from the tourists who are clearly enjoying the kastom dancing in the middle of the football field. I cannot help feeling a little strange about this dance. It was introduced as a “circumcision dance.” But no one has been circumcised. The dance is deeply moving and powerful. The body art and masks are indescribable. But it still seems out of place. I wonder about this “intangible cultural heritage,” this kastom. I wonder if there is not a kastom dance for arriving at Sesivi to do some sand drawings, instead of for circumcision. If someone invented a new one would it be considered kastom?

As reported by Dr. Kim Selling, Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Museums’ Association, “cultural heritage cannot be safeguarded as an unchanging, static thing, but as a living, ever-evolving and changing way of relating to and expressing a people’s response to their environment.” The people of Sesivi, in fact all the people of Oceania have been crisscrossing the oceans and islands for thousands of years. Myself and all the other visitors to the festival are just the latest in a long history of coming and going that has helped to shape the dynamic cultures of the region in ways that I suspect, the people of Sesivi are far more comfortable with than I am.

I thought about my connection to this place and this feeling of “home.” I thought about Vanuatu as a “living” culture. I thought about how confronting and welcoming it is. I asked myself a question that I have been asked many times: “Why do I love Vanuatu?” and, perhaps for the first time, I had a clear sense of what the answer is for me. I thought about some of the things that are confronting to the undeniable privilege of my upbringing as a middle-class, suburban, white, male: the profoundly different conception of personal space and privacy; the relational construction of identity (versus my individualistic sense of “self”); the linguistic fluidity and expertise—I felt ashamed by my monolingual upbringing; and the imperative to cultivate or catch food. What makes these things so confronting here—when growing up, why was I not confronted by these things? What effect do I have, myself, on these things? What part does “kastom” play? Is the cultural heritage of Vanuatu a more or less “living” thing than that of Australia? or Thailand? or West Papua? What is “kastom,” anyway? And do I have the right to even use the word? One of the most important lessons I learnt from living in Vanuatu was the importance of situating oneself in ways that respond to issues around power and privilege that underpin these questions.

I thought about the concept of liminality, meaning the condition of being on a threshold or at the beginning of a process. This term is often reserved for transitional stages in life, but perhaps it can also describe a perpetual state of things—not necessarily a desirable one. How does this concept apply to the cultural heritage of Vanuatu? Is Vanuatu (in) a liminal state?

We are all, to some degree, liminal. We are all travelers. In ancient and medieval philosophy, “quintessence” or the “fifth element” (after earth, air, fire, and water) is a concept which describes the interconnectedness of all things. Heavenly bodies were said to be made of it and it was the fundamental essence of things on Earth. Like the moon and Pleiades, we are a negotiated rhythmic patterning looping elliptically through space. Also we are traveling through the temporal microcosm of this planet—exploring
new places, cultures, languages. We all consist of, and subsist on, this same quintessence or stardust, the same principle of interconnectedness. It is even present in the dark unknowable spaces between the stories, between the dreams.

Perhaps in this sense, from this perspective, the garden can be framed as the quintessence of kastom: the practical connection between people and the land and the sea, the source of nourishment and security, both fed by and feeding, reflexively forming, informing and being formed?

My journey: my home: the tenuous and fragile dreamscapes of sand drawings and stories; villages and gardens; other people’s bookshelves and photographs; amniotic hot springs and the malarial chill of tropical evenings; rivers and quagmires. A vivid vagabondage through the dark space of my own mind where I found pleasure in: the way the sun looked like the moon through the volcanic gas (approximately 20% of all the volcanic gas on the planet comes from Ambrym!); the congruence of nature and culture in the unfurling fern; story as currency; and the fact that even with a 15 horsepower engine I move slower than dolphins through the water. These are the fleeting fragments of my journey as a home—as a fleeting, ephemeral, artform itself.
Appendix 4 - Gender, Creativity, and Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the Vanuatu Women’s Water Music

My case study titled “Gender, Creativity, and Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of the Vanuatu Women’s Water Music” responds to a UNESCO call for research, case studies and data which resulted in 54 responses, including case studies, statistics, and recommended literature for consultation for the “Gender Equality: Heritage and Creativity” report. The case study also outlines the way that the Leweton successes have triggered a revival of traditional cultural practices in the north of Vanuatu.
In the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu (see Figure 1.) there are over 100 different languages spoken. With its population of approximately 250,000, this means Vanuatu has the highest rate of per capita linguistic diversity on the planet. In the remote north of Vanuatu, in the province of TORBA, are the Banks Islands. 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, means that the TORBA provincial government struggles to deliver services to the same degree as the other provinces. Notwithstanding the lack of services (perhaps because of it) a recent report on ni-Vanuatu indicators of wellbeing concluded that “people of TORBA Province are, on average, the happiest people in Vanuatu” (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2012, p. 13).

For as long as anyone can remember the women of the Banks Islands have made sounds from the river and the ocean. Women from other islands in the TORBA, and as far away as the Solomon Islands have also been known to engage in this practice of making sounds in the water by splashing, scooping, and slapping the water (see Figure 3.). Hugo Zemp (1978) recorded this practise in the Solomon Islands, where the Sa’a people of Small Malaita, refer to it as kiro while the neighbouring 'Are'are people of Malaita use the terms kiroha, or kiro ni karusi, meaning “kiro of the water” (1978, pp. 39-40). Despite identifying that the 'Are'are have a discrete “musical category” for the kiro, Zemp classified the water percussion as a “game”, perhaps because the “repertoire is very limited” (Zemp, 1978, p. 59).

Another reason why Zemp, and the Melanesian communities themselves, have considered the water music as a “game” or pastime may be because, almost exclusively, it is women who practise it. Occasionally boys join in if they are young enough to be bathing with their mothers or sisters, but water music is simply perceived to be “a woman’s thing”. The water music is also not associated with any formal ritual or ceremony, and is therefore not considered a sacred or taboo practise. It is possible that if water music was considered “a man’s thing” then it could have developed a stronger association with men’s customary rituals. Perhaps the women deliberately prevented the water music from entering any ritual, or any musical canon, preferring that it was perceived to be a “game” so as to protect it from being ritualised by men (from inside or outside the community). The fact that it is not associated with any ritual or taboo makes it more accessible than many other cultural expressions in Vanuatu.

More recently, a team made up of an ethnomusicologist and a linguist, recorded the water music on two tiny islands in the south east of the Banks Islands: Gaua and Merelava (see François and Stern 2013). One of the ethno-linguistic groups who live on these two islands are the Mwerlap people. This case study concerns the Mwerlap diaspora and the way that they have
structured elements of their cultural heritage in creative ways to generate opportunities for women and men of all ages to participate in a range of entrepreneurial activities.

The Leweton Cultural Group

In 2008, a Mwerlap man named Sandy Sur was living on the fringe of Luganville, Espiritu Santo, the second biggest town in Vanuatu with a population of almost 15,000. Sandy brought together the Mwerlap community living in and around Luganville and facilitated the establishment of a conscious community – a peri-urban “cultural village” – for the dual purpose of maintaining cultural heritage and presenting their cultural heritage to tourists. They named their village “Leweton” being an acronym of six of the villages they came from on Gaua and Merelava. With support from the New Zealand High Commission the Leweton group constructed a purpose-built “pool” for performing the water music and then constructed a “cultural village” around 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 Bhaba writes, the spaces in between the rural and the urban “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” (Bhabha, 2012). By reclaiming their own physical and conceptual space, the Leweton community transform the structures of the society in which it is an agent.

As the incidence of tourist visitations increased, the Leweton group built on the unique and spectacular performance of the water music and bundled other elements of their cultural heritage into the overall “show”. It now includes na-matto a syncretised format of the Melanesian stringband with elements of traditional musical instruments and rhythms and chants, ma-mag, the young men’s traditional dance accompanied by traditional rhythms played on slit gong drums made of bamboo and wood accompanied by chants and songs; and ne-leang 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. Many of these artefacts are on displayed for sale to visitors.

Water Music

This practice of water music, originally called vus lam lam in the Mwerlap language, has been handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter for generations. According to one of the leaders of the Leweton Cultural Group, Warren Wevat Wessergo from Gaua, in 1974 two women and their daughters,
came together to discuss the development of the *vus lamلام* into a form of ‘water music’. These women were Elizabeth Womal Marego and her sister Zalet Hilda. The women used a range of techniques, to create different layers of tone colour, structured into different rhythmic arrangements resulting in a series of unique compositions out of the various beats, rhythms, and textures previously applied in a more random fashion.

It is likely that many other people have similar narratives about the heritage of water music and how it has developed in their communities. Indeed, *Francois and Stern (2013)* relate that another woman on West Gaua (but originally from Merelava), Matauli Rowon, “(re)invented” the practise of water music in 1983, while she was doing the laundry in the river. Indeed, Banks Island societies are traditionally quite open – with lots of trade, exchange, and intermarriage between islands and communities. And throughout the colonial period labour recruiters and plantation owners would recruit Banks Islanders from different communities to come and work together. This continuous exchange between communities in the Banks Islands makes it very difficult to know precisely where the water music originated. What we do know, is that the water music is seeing something of a resurgence – and it generating an interest in other forms of cultural renewal.

In 2014 there are three more identifiable groups of women performing the water music – each with village activities and infrastructure and activities that are presented as a part of the performance. On Gaua there are two groups: Limoros and Salap. And on Santo, on a neighbouring property to Leweton is the Turgor group.

One of the key people at the centre of this cultural renewal is a woman from Gaua named Delly Roy. Delly is the leader of a grassroots indigenous-led movement of that was established specifically to promote and preserve the diverse cultural practices of the northern part of Vanuatu and to engage young people in their cultural heritage. The Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support (TEKS) Program in Santo, focuses its work in the field of traditional knowledge and wisdom transfer, and cultural development.

**Modelling Effective Cultural Heritage Maintenance**

TEKS is working alongside the Lukaotem Gud Santo Festival (LGSF) in Luganville, Santo, the second largest music and cultural festival in Vanuatu. Together TEKS and LGSF act as a creative hub for cultural promotion and development. TEKS was set up after the 2011 edition of LGSF due to the need to provide more support to traditional performance groups. Delly oversees the work of TEKS ensuring that the program uses alternative locally-based approaches to cultural resource management through the promotion and preservation of important traditional wisdom practices including dances, music, songs, and stories, and connecting these with contemporary music and dance; and traditional artistic creations such as carving, weaving, painting, drawing and fabric art.

Last year, Delly and the TEKS program were awarded the “8th UNESCO
Youth Forum Label” as a recognition of the quality and excellence of the projects, in line with UNESCO’s priorities.

The idea that underpins the work of the TEKS project is the unity that underpins the diversity of ni-Vanuatu cultural expression. The work that TEKS has done with Leweton has modeled an effective process for other groups to follow. TEKS selected the water music has one of its first test cases because:

- it features women prominently in the group
- it is not associated with a sacred ceremony
- and it is practiced throughout the Banks Islands – not just in one place – which means that any women from the Banks Islands can perform.

Delly explained the significance of the water music as model for engaging young women in cultural expression in safe and respectful situations:

“We know that there is a warrior element to our heritage. But sometimes we forget that the fundamental elements of our kastom are based on peace and respect. Maybe this is because men have dominated the process of telling our stories in recent times? Now that women are standing up and singing and dancing and telling their own stories, we can connect with the part of our heritage that has been hidden from the men: our women’s stories. And with these stories comes a woman’s way of telling the stories, singing the songs, and dancing the dances.”

The global economy, is just a way of operating that reflects the kastom of people from Europe or America. Here in Vanuatu communities have developed their own ways of regulating exchange and trade between communities. But the integration of the cash economy makes it difficult to honour the traditional systems. The TEKS program is modeling ways of using the strengths of ni-Vanuatu cultural heritage to support economic development for women. This has implications for the Vanuatu government officials as the tourism industry in Vanuatu relies heavily on the cultural heritage of the indigenous communities. While kastom and traditional wisdom – songs, dances and stories – are a big part of the tourism industry, it must be understood that the people who perform these songs and dances are also musicians and dancers. They are working in the arts/cultural industry, or creative industries, as well as the tourism industry.

Delly explains the tension that exists at this level for the ni-Vanuatu custodians of cultural heritage:

“Sometimes it seems that the tourism operators are not working in the best interests of the performers. And the government officials do not get involved at that level. Of course we understand that everyone has the right to make money and profit from their endeavours. But there are ways of operating that respect the value of cultural heritage and still allow you to make a profit. Artists and performers also need to make a living.” Delly Roy, Leader, Traditional Entertainment and Kastom Support Program
These tensions that exist in the corporate world of the tourism industry and the arts industry, they are still being played out in the daily lives of people who have fairly minimal interaction with the cash economy. The cultural heritage of these communities is far more relevant to them than the regulation of the economy. There are no arts unions in Vanuatu, and there is practically no market for arts products outside of the tourism industry. Not only is the cultural heritage the context for daily life, but it is also – through the songs, dances and stories – the foundation of the economic activity and the source of supply of cultural products. This importance of this is demonstrated by the Alternative Indicators of Wellbeing report that presents quantitative data suggesting that traditional wisdom, in the form of stories and songs, is more resilient in the TORBA than other provinces (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2012, p. 13).

As Delly explained, “The TEKS project recognizes that there is enormous potential within Vanuatu for capitalizing on the inherent strengths of the various cultural expressions. The leaders of the Leweton, Turgor, Limoros, and Salap groups have all displayed outstanding entrepreneurial vision to achieve the success that they have achieved so far. It is our hope that the TEKS project can facilitate the development of these groups and the expansion of their market internationally.”

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the entire Leweton community for the support of this research. This case study forms a part of my PhD incorporating publications. The research project (including the production of the DVD) has received funding from a variety of sources: Southern Cross University and my scholarship through the Collaborative Research Network, the Wantok Musik Foundation, the European Union through the Further Arts “Voices for Change” Project, and Canal Studio. This research has been granted ethics Approval Number ECN-12-321 from the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. Further Arts has worked with the Leweton Cultural Group and Canal Studio for over five years promoting the water music to international festivals.
Appendix 5  -  “History belonging (of the) Gaua Magical Water Music”

The Leweton community has its own agenda and purpose for this research project and I have ensured the community contributed to the design of the research and the interpretation of results in the context of cultural norms and traditional knowledge, and in support of the Leweton community’s agenda. The production of a professional quality DVD and the publication of a 32-page booklet accompanying the DVD to support this project, has been structured around a translation of “The History of the Magical Water Music” as presented to me by the Leweton community (Wessergo, Dick, & Sur, 2014). The following autoethnographic text describes how the women of Gaua and Merelava have made sounds from the river and the ocean. This practice, called vus lam lam in the Mwerlap language, has been handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter for generations. Women from other islands in the Banks and Torres groups, and as far away as the Solomon Islands have also been known to practise this kastom of making sounds in the water by splashing, scooping, and slapping the water (see Figure 3).
**HISTORY BLONG GAUA MAGICAL WATER MUSIC.**

INFORMESON I KAM LONG WAREN WEVAT WESSERO, HEMI
dlong WEST GAUA. HEMIA NA SORIY BLONG HEMI.

MI NEM BLONG MI WAREN WEVAT WESSERO. MI KAM PONG
WEST GAUA PONG VILLAGE DOLAP.

1) EVERY Woman Pong Banks Group oli sae Kilim Solwota
and hemia hemi Gomman. Be blong Kilim Solwota, hemi
just wan sound ol ever the Island!

Be long 1974 anty blong mi mo el girl blong hemi, mo Mama
blong mi, mo el sister blong mi, eli bin-kaif wan miting no
diskasen hao blong development, ha blong Kilim Solwota.
momo blong mi nem blong Kenzo Zalef HEDA mi Aunty blong
mi, nem blong hemi, hemi, Elizabeth Womanale, Marega.

2) Diskasen i bin stop bitwin Elizabeth mi Zalef mi el
girl blong tufula from sound blong Solwota i from ali
Kilim se i Kait Fuap Sailing Boat eli stop pain,
blong visitiin Gaua island. Long sem tanem ya kaufola
mi blong Sailing boat hemi, Kilim wan bikin bok
Pong wan Catechist, nem blong hemi Patten Worere blong
hemi, Kilim bok ya long church house. Biik ya hemi
blong eli ona blong el Sailing Boat bortau ali Sais Long
emi. So Patten hemi meken so tanem wan Sailing Boat
i KAM PONG DOLAP bortau one blong boat i vakem nem
blong boat me hemi Saisem Signi wa blong hemi.

3) AFTER Pong ol diskasens, Elizabeth mi Zalef mi el
pr girl blong tufula ali jummaakt First Leader blong Water
music efe hemi. Movan Womanareko mo sem tanem
hemi Cateher or inventor Pong Group. Mo eli start
Praktisim different Sound mo beats.
First beats hemi usual wan we everybody oj
uwum sound pong aeland mo Banks Group - We oj
pemem pong that falu taem se - VUS TUWAL
Oli never kivim nun ya blong Kilim Solwota bifo.
Be Taem Zalet wethem Elisabeth ali ting ting hong
Kristen oj nara beats so tufala i pemem dekew known
beat se - VUS Tuwal
of nara 4 Falu beats we oj jast mekem up hem i
- KOR NA BE - Rain geda hemi rollen of stones
- NE KIA - Dolphins hemi flapem Fin Pong water.
- NE RE - Rain, fellatong pong ironoor or leaves.
- VUS ERO - Renem of Fish blong go Pong nek.

Elisabeth poa Zalet mo of girl blong tufala ofi
Startan blong praktisim of 4 Falu new Sound ya
Klosap Pong house blong mi, long LEMBRIG spring
Long 1975 Sister blong mi Martha Bowon hemi
Stap Kilim Solwota hem wain Klosap Pong house blong
mifala be Pong Sun taem i Kec Sun Sailing boat oj bin stap
Pong taem ya. Oj ola bong Sailing beats ya oj hem
of Sounds ya Weten 5 Falu different beats so oj
Luak Don. Oli go nao oj Faendem Martha Bowon
we hemi Stap Kilim Solwota Weten oj 5 beats ya.
Oj ola bong Sailing beats ya oj hem non am gud Tumus
that oj Kilim Martha Bowon of clothes, Shoes mo nekkes
Martha Bowon hemi real Sister blong mi, hemi nao
hemi, first woman we hemi attracted of Waten man Weten
Water Music. Oli seba plande oj bin praktisim
Water music be Martha nao hemi bin perform en
hem alan Pong public mo at sem, hemi attractem of White
Toem.

- man
Martha Bowon hemi bin startem be nevey worm.
So Pong first show blong martha emialong Sunday month August ibin gat uan bigikini i ded Pong taemia.
So ded i bapen from se Papa mo Mama tafula i very excited p9o step Karim photo mo forgetem Som blong pigikini nas gat weve i kam draenen i ded. So Pong eath taen ia i gat uan pasta we hemi strett cousin brother blong martha we hemi Father Marcel WEWOT.
So hemi step Pong taen ia ol i seven pigikini ia plaef hagiken mo Father marcel i paithes em, em nem blong pigikini ia Se WEWOT! LEMBRI.

Naoya every year taen ol sailings boat ol go anka Pong. Dulap ol girls blong tu fate o frake Woman ia Elisabeth mo salet mo ol nara girl dulap mo ali step entertainment ol sailings boat o na Wetem Magical Water Music. Long end blong show ol o na blong ol sailings boat ol kivim ol bags blong Second hand clothes Shoes mo ol nara gifts Pong ol Keta ten ed...


Long 2006, Mr Sandy Sur hemi bin sinjooten wan milting we i bin stop long Showground blong startem sam tourism activities long Showground. Sandy hemi bin kam autap wetem tingting ya. From hemi world place nae wetem ol tourists. Long diskasen blong mifala mifala i bin tokbaet Fulaip activities blong mukem olsem. Ol Custom Dame is blong ol man na ol Woman. Be mi nae Warren mi bin takeem long meeting blong mifala se bampire Magical Water Music too.
bambal hemi kam wan activity too in saed long ol tourism activities ve long Lewaton.
Mi bin tem tonging ya fra Mama bong mi wem ol sister bong mi Anty bong mi mo ol girls bong hem mo ol nara Anty nac ol bim Startem Water Music long 1974 ema street long Dulaap Station long Nasara bong WEVAT WESSEbora Saint Bartholomew West Gaia So olketa nac ol first creata. (~ Yami kam nac Long Logumville santo. ~)
So long place ia miFela i apporatem Hilda Warren bong ham i Kam Teacher mo San Tanem, hemi i Creata bong Water Music long Lewaton Community So Hilda i bin nesy wef haad bong izventem mo Torahini olgirl mo ol Mama Mekem se Tema Lewaton hemi i popular long Saad long Water Music. Hilda Warren hemi bin izventem 8 more beads wehdi totally different long ol First beats wehem ol new hemi pro mining bong ol Saad. So long term bong nemen ol beats ma skelten mining bong ol Saad, Full Community ibinga tugeta long Solwata. So ol woman ol stad Kilim Water mo ol man mo Chief Collin mo Sandy Sur mo Huber ngadah ela... So olketa iac nac ola saad bong hemi ol buk mo pen and ol stad skeltem ol Saad Farem act se mining mo Saad i Kamaek Wea (~X~) long Solwata long land or long sky.
So ihems we nimfla imnemi ol stad long land bis MERE-LAHA mo ol product bong Lewaton.~
Fulap man long Gaua mo long Santo oli wandem tokeraot Gaua Magical Water Music - be oli
nd save se water music i startolson wanem
hu i startem nu tingting blong foremo ol
beats ya hemi from wanem - Hu First Wan blong
attraein ol Waeatman - oli no save se okleta hu di
bin gat First miting blong startem ol different beats
ol beats nce ol nekem se Magical Water Music
hemi so different than just Kilim Solwota.

Mi: Warren Wewat Wesseroro mi raatem ol history qa
statement ya. Long behaf blong Family:
- WEVAT WESSERORO
- WEMAL MAREGO
- WEVALES MAREGO

History blong Water Magical Music hemi only just
only 38 years old and mi happy blong behaf
blong takein history blong hem.

Thank you tamas blong ridim ol historical
statements ya.
yours Sincerely,

Warren Wewat Wesseroro
Lewaton, Community - Show ground -
Luganville.
Appendix 6 - Translation of Interviews with Sandy Sur, Leader/Manager of the Leweton Cultural Group

Much of the content of this thesis is informed by a series of interviews conducted with my adopted brother, Sandy Sur, who is the founder and manager of the Leweton Cultural Group. The interviews were conducted in Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu (and second language to both Sandy and I), and I present here the translation of those interviews. Thanks to Mama Caroline Nalo for her work in translating the text from Bislama to English.
T. Is it OK if I record our discussions? I’ll just set this up. Then we’ll just talk. So can you repeat that ...

S. So the idea at the time when I set it up, at that time there were lots of us. When I used to take tourists up to the island, it’s like we’re travelling, and then it’s a remote place, and then ... When I discovered the issues involved, it was mainly on that kind of occasion. And then when I asked everyone what they thought, they said “No, this is just like games for us, we should have it in Santo and if we’re going to learn our way of doing things, then we need to learn this”. So that gave me the idea, that’s it, we’re living in “kastom”, in our traditional style. When we came down to Santo to set it up, that was the time it turned into a tourism activity, and the fine for that went back to the island to help people on the island from what Leweton did. After that, when it became a tourism activity, then I explained it to the tourists like this, “We have the heart to share our culture with you, but in a respectful way, so there are some things that we’re not allowed to show, but never mind, we can present some things, just not the raising of a chief in accordance with our ceremony. But now you’re in Leweton”. But for Leweton, I say that it covers two islands – Merelava and Gaua – that’s led us to advance in some ways, for example in water music. All the islands play water music, but we make this really big sound and luckily the five mothers, who are our pupu [grandparents and others in a relationship to the speaker one generation above his parents], came and enhanced it and they played this music and exerted themselves, so we, in turn, must show them respect. So we have to make kastom ceremonies now to ... So when you pay for something you do it in the correct way, so I’m not saying that you pay in money like I said earlier. I only paid ten vatu for my kastom, for the right to hold those colourful leaves, so for the water music we presented a ceremony to Hilda. It’s just something that if you don’t do it in the proper way, you’ll never attain it, you’ll never learn it. So now we can see the effects of this, because now, like I said, I travel with these young people, because tourism will be my next step. So if there are two groups that split up, tourists can watch one group where we have done things in the proper way. We got some pigs and gave them to Selwyn, and to Evline – Hilda’s Mummy – and so it reached the whole family, because Selwyn’s sister, Mama, started it, not just his sister but the five of them got together as a group, the five mothers including Warren’s Mummy, they were the ones who worked together to create just these five sounds. So then we performed a kastom ceremony at the time when her children presented kastom to her so that they could inherit it from her, just like you said in the explanation, that’s the kastom way. It’s just that the person who starts it off is ... in our language we say, we call it lololmerinina or vanwaswasnina in our language, but in Bislama we say he saw it in a dream. So it’s like this : I say that tomorrow I’m going to go and amuse myself, but this thing comes in a dream, then when she starts to practise it,
then it comes into her possession, so that’s it, five sounds. So when they make kastom for it, it’s like it’s moving, it keeps going. We discovered we were following the right track. So now on Gaua, it’s the same thing. You go there, it’s the same game, the same game. But in Leweton, we change it around. Because of this, when they came to play with us, they brought some girls from Gaua, they had a hard time catching up to our new level with all the rhythms we have. So what we’re doing, that’s it, I believe we’re following the right path, and all the time I bring the chiefs down to help me so that what we can show, we show, what we think of selling, we sell; there are lots of things, only there is respect for it too. So that’s what makes tourism activities go ahead down at Leweton. So our income, that’s why I say I didn’t suggest it to make money for me, it all flows on; so I also have to go around in the right way according to what I see or what I’m trying to do to help the family as far away as the island. Every one enjoys it, now the family are here, they understand, because Gaua’s still like that. Not to beat round the bush, I have to tell you, Tom, now they’re asking us to help Gaua, so many villages, with 5,000 vatu to the Council of Chiefs every month, but it’s just ... they have to understand what we’re trying to operate with them. We made some buildings there as a donation, so that’s how we’re doing things now, never mind if they criticise later, it’ll just flow on.

T. 5,000 every month?

S. Yes, so we’re not taking very much action on it, but I tell them that it will happen. “I’ll be watching now, how you all understand what I’ve been trying to tell you, because it could happen any time, when we work.” So now we’ve come and the girls have come, to replace us, so it seems to me that they’re starting to understand, slowly, they complain, they argue, but I say we must control ourselves, because when everyone argues, we’ll make mistakes, that’s why ... the water music made us think more about it: like we say kastom is kastom, when you believe you’ll die with it, it’ll be lost, so now we’ll sell it ... so things are going well with the kind of organisation we’ve set up, like when we tour, another group comes and takes over, and they want money behind them when they go back to the island, we give them a small gift before they go back, so ... everything has to follow the same principle. Again, I speak a lot wherever I am, saying I must make it clear too that wherever we go, we perform a small ceremony, not anything big, just to clear the way before we perform a dance, people feel straight away that it’s really meaningful. So what I see now, the feedback we’re getting, now we’ll come back to the international tour; so now lots of people have seen us, they open their hearts to say “Please, come and help us”, meaning this project. So now they chase after us to talk, so I think that what the two of us are working on, I told them straight away that I was happy with it. But I didn’t know you had these ideas, but I’m happy to explain what you’ve discussed with me, it’s in line with whatever, but then again I must go and tell them again, and then while the Chief is there, who’ll be meeting us tomorrow. What you were saying earlier, I think I was talking off the point, but what you’re trying to discuss now, that’s my idea, it’s my brain that drew it up. That’s why when we
were departing I told Delly that I’d travel with you, because I could pull some things out of your head, and now I’m drunk with it! I think in return I can give something to you, but I’m waiting because now I can see you’re drunk and I don’t want us to sit and talk and then you’ll lose your way; maybe tomorrow, but anyway, brother, now I’m glad because you’ve drawn my brain up high, it’s got to this point, that Leweton didn’t just happen just like that. The idea of it too, I’m not well educated, but I just research inside my brain to see how I picture it from the start to now, and when I talk about it, it just flows.

T. Yes, yes. Because I’m not meaning to say it’s my idea, no (S. Yes), it’s just my view, I know it exists (S. Yes, that’s right, it exists). So the result is … and research work is like that too, then if you see that yes, that’s the picture that’s inside my brain, then it’ll make me feel good (S. Yes) because my vision is good, my ideas are good, I’ve got it clear that … because … ah yes, it’s right. Because I was surprised the first time I came to the village, because I think I’d been in Santo I guess for one or two years already, and then they took me up there, because of Delly (S. Yes). Afterwards I was surprised, because afterwards I thought “Ah, this must have been here for a long time, since 2000 or so”, but that’s not so. And since that time, it’s been a time when the two of us are just a single mind (S. Yes) as far as this is concerned, because the two of us had never talked together, even the first time I went up there, you weren’t there (S. No). I’d been working with the village for quite some time before I even met you, but really we’re a single mind, a single idea. So as far as you’re concerned, it’s like you grew up over here, and then you come this way, but me, because I grew up over there, then I come that way. So we come from different sides to reach the same point. If it continues like this it’ll be good, because we have a single idea. So for my part for me to go ahead with it through research, so I’ll just follow the thought about how, next time I arrive in the village, I should make kastom for this, so yes, it must be like this, I’ll do my research to make sure that people don’t see I’m (S. Yes) doing one thing but actually I’m doing something different. Yes. That’s it. So if you could discuss it with them first or (S. No) in your home area, because like that when I arrive I’ll draw the same picture.

S. No. I think the two of us should just go and phone them. Because you saw what the Chief did for Randy? I was there then and I saw it. I remember you and Randy and someone else came, and he said “I’m giving a basket”, so in this area we’ve given baskets in how many places now, we’re all coming into the same basket (T. Yes), so this means we’ve already done the same thing over there, so now for the two of us to do your research, it’ll just flow on now, it just needs the time when you’re coming, what we’ll start with, to give me the idea so the Chief can be there, you and I will be there and we [mifala – ie the village] will set it up. And we mustn’t forget, because of this, at that time, that it’s as though it’s me that started things but now my fathers are handing things over to me now, saying, “Ah, you’ll be the one who brings your grandfather back”, but I don’t dance, like Uncle Antony dances like the family faces it. Now the namau, I come back to my grandfather now, after it goes to my father, yes, my real grandfather, like my father set a record by dancing until there was a
hole in the ground where his legs were. So when they gave me the kind of feedback that said they thought I was on the right track, then some people tried to oppose me and exclaimed that “Ah, you look like selling our kastom”, but it got stuck right there. I wanted to laugh at them, because when they were in front of me, when they criticised me, I spoke up too, because that was how I felt, but when I spoke in the end they all had to go away from me. So no, let the village know, because, Tom, I wanted to tell you, about this trip that I wanted to come on, and which I fought hard to make sure I came, because I wanted to meet you. Because our other arms over there work, but you know how it is, they have other things to do and they sit back too much. So how we are now, now you’ve drawn my brain up, like I said, both our brains are standing up. Like you said, I’m coming like this, and you’re coming like that, but the two of us meet somewhere. So to see about it with the chiefs, I don’t think there’s anything, because I’m mainly thinking about the people like that first of all. When someone talks about me it gets stuck right there.

T. Yes. That’s fine. I knew it would be like that. (S. Yes) Just to make sure there’s not too much of that kind of thing; because many of them know me too, so it’s not good that they feel bad about it. People from outside, that’s not a problem, if they’re not happy, it’s their problem. Just for those of us in the group to know that I’m also working on something that in the end will be rewarding for me too. So from the work that we do, I don’t gain anything, like the money we get from tours or whatever just goes back to the village, for us to share out. But in this way, it’ll mean that I can get something out of it too. Not really money, but a rank in ... like a rank in education. So that’s it. So if we look at it like that, I don’t think there’ll be a problem. (S. No, there won’t be). Just to tell everyone, just for information.

S. That’s the point then, I came out so that we could discuss things. That’s why I was telling Delly that they don’t understand what we’ve achieved, but when we landed at the airport and I said I was coming with you, they said my head was already working overtime. But I went to see them, gave them crocodile, they ate the crocodile and went to sleep. (T. Yes, that’s it). Anyway, Tom, I don’t think this’ll be an issue or a problem, because we let you know that if we speak against it again, then we’re killing our kastom. There’s feedback from it, so I strongly believe that it’ll happen. What do we do, we do.

T. Yes. That’s why it’s easy to picture it, because it’s happened. Just to examine it. (S. Yes). If you shut your eyes, you won’t see. If your eyes are open, there’s the picture, it’s not, it’s not really a ... So I’ll write my thing to make it complicated, but really it’s just a simple story. There’s lots of things inside it, but ... Another thing I want to know is, how we can do it, I mean I’ll do it, but it means that when I do my research I’ll be stuck inside, I’ll be doing lots of things. It’ll be easier for us to do tours, to help ni Van in tourism or whatever, for me to do work (S. Yes), which means that it’s one way that I can help the group, the community. But there’s another way too, if you people have got any thoughts about how my research could help people’s ideas to improve, or open people’s eyes, or give people some skills or
anything. I mean I’m not really a teacher but I can do some things or whatever. One idea I’ve got, I’ve got some ideas already, we know about them already, to do this kind of thing. One is the full picture that I’ve just mentioned, to turn it into a movie, like a documentary or a movie just to tell the story about everything we do – the story of water music, the story of Leweton, the story of *kastom*, tourism or art, music ... So this is one way that I think is good, because if it’s a nice movie, it will be shown on TV in Vanuatu, Vanuatu people can see it, we can put it on ... we can sell it (S. Mmm). It will be different from the one we made before, because that was about ... I mean it wasn’t really a ... it didn’t give people information (S. Yes), it was just pictures with sound – music. But I wanted to suggest this one to tell our story. Afterwards, we can sell it, we can show it to people, we can send it to people so that they really catch the idea, “Ah, it’s like that, ah, true, it’s like that”. That’s one way. Another one is the history of water music, I didn’t think of that until we were talking with Chief Warren on the Sunshine Coast, when you were all talking about, what? About the history of ... the one you’ve already written (S. Yes, yes). When you told me about it, I was happy, after wherever I went I was thinking about it all the time and saying that if there was any way I could help with this, we could make a book just about that on its own. I would really put my ideas in it, I’d just use it (S. Use the story, correct any ... ) yes, yes, put it on computer, send it to the place that makes books, or what, it could be big, or small, similar to this one, you know a small one, even one or another one [S. *Words inaudible, sounds as though you’re looking at a book ?*], we could make it for children , for adults, any kind of people. This one is for children but ... 

S. Yes. Because I’m interested in a little place of theirs down there, on Gaua, the place where the music started, with the five mothers who started trying to practise the sound atNamenmenau – Warren’s sister, Hilda, the family as far as ... Afterwards I got the idea about what they were talking about, then I thought “Wow! If someone could write that story”, that’s what I’m basing it on. So it all started in 1975. At the time they paid for it with those shoes. So that’s the story I put in, OK people watched the music and went ahead, they gave salt, a little sugar, some food, and then they played. But in my time, when I went over there, and I must say too that the village got bigger, and then food brought by ship, what we knew we had the money to buy, it increased, so then I had to meet with the chiefs, sort it out, and then I came back to us, so normally that’s the story that’s there, and then I spread it. And so after that I started giving money like Christmas had come, 10,000 for one of their performances. So now I’d got good experience, I kept going to discover some more stories. So I base it on 1975, when we had this issue in Santo, that’s when we picked up our history. That’s when we’d gone back to Vila, we went to see Marilyn Temakon, we found her, and she talked about this copyright thing. Then I went to see Marilyn Temakon, the same thing. If you and I work on this, then we’ll stand up with it, we’ll go and make *kastom* to them, and take it forward like that. For the story of the book, we can go like the book , *[few words not clear]*, and all these things, make a small ceremony, explain that ... , so again it all goes step by step. That’s my understanding of how Marilyn explained it. We’ll have to
go to Hilda and [ ??], and then give a little something to their family on Gaua, a little to Leweton, 10 vatu, 20 vatu to our Mummy, to Cecilia, you know, that’s how it passes on. That’s my understanding of how Marilyn explained it. It’s, it’s on the right track. I went back to Santo, explained to them that it’s clear, it should be like this.

T. So yes. On that aspect of things it’s good to ... So I’m just giving my thoughts, you know, if one is better for us, say so. But now is not the time to say so (S. Yes), if we raise it now, it’s to think about it to make sure ... because it’s a major task, it’ll take one, two, three years or so, so we should make use of it (S. Yes). You know, I’ll make use of it, we’re doing that already, wherever we are, we are making use of each other in a good way, like with respect. But now that we’ve got to the point where it’s like we’re driving a truck in fifth gear, sixth gear or what, that means, OK, but make use of our speed (S. That’s it), you know, if we’re going at top speed, make use of it in a speedy way, so if ... we can do some things like ... like what you were saying about Marilyn, we can help like that to write the story. So a movie’s a movie, history is history, a book is a book, or whatever, but work on the history of the story or work on copyright, is more like legal work, which means it’s not really a story in a book for people to read (S. Yes), because who’s interested in it? (S. Yes) But it has its uses too. So if that’s something that needs to be done, that another idea. But something else, the same kind of thing, but not to do with copyright but with the tourism industry. Because of the issues they face already, with David Cross (S. Yes), and the way people use Facebook. We’ll look at it, I’ll show it to you, because I was working on it just for the international tour, so people would understand. And then I was surprised to discover some others, and then I found out that Mayumi, Mayumi Green, had done them. So then I asked her if we could combine the two, but she said No. And then ...

S. No, that’s a woman who’s a bit crazy. She pestered me like that earlier on, and went on doing it and then dropped me. I told her, I’m not chasing you off, but you go too far, you can’t drive me.

T. Yes, I realised that, I realised she’s ... so after that I abandoned the whole thing, I didn’t talk to her, or send her any messages, I didn’t do anything more on Facebook, I just left her to do what she wants. So later on we’ll discuss it so that we’re clear about what we want to happen and then, whatever we decide, whether we do it, or she does it, or we let Kelly do it, or what, but it’s not really ... it’s a different story, we’ll still get to this story, so that we can get to the end of it here. So any kind of work that we can do, that the village thinks of, or the community thinks of, that we can include in my research, to make it part of our work – the work of us all. Because it’s a good chance, it’s a small chance for us to get a little ... it’s easy when you’re doing research to find the money for books or movies or whatever, you know, but when it’s normal times (S. Normal times) we struggle to find the ... So that’s it, just some ideas, but if you people have different ideas (S. No, Tom), to hold workshops or ...
S. Delly came to see me about this. She said, «O brother in law, I’ll write down your ideas, I want to do it, the two of us can produce a book, I’ll help you to make a book». So like I told you, people already recognise me for this, but the thing is they never turn up to do it. Because now, as I told you last time, now it’s four months since I left my job, I’m drowning with my little kids. The village doesn’t help me, though they suggested it, but I said, “No, I want to take up everything according to my own ideas. OK, after that the village can look to me”. Normally it’s part of the process when I start a project, there has to be a salary fund for me, just small, not a big amount, but just to keep me going, then after that it’s like the picture we’re talking about now. So my ideas are there, they’re really there. It’s like when your sister also mentioned it briefly to me, I said, “Ah, you’re the one”. She said she’d come over to Santo to get it out of my head, so I’d be a bit more free. I said I’ve been struggling with it, but now ... What I’ve said, that’s it. So as things are, family, we speak our language and we say ... The Chief too never lets go of me, he insists that he must be the channel for it. The two of us went to the island, held some awareness sessions, I talked to ... don’t say all the Merelava people, because lots of them have quit the island, they’re having a hard time (T. They’re flying foxes!). That’s it, they’re flying foxes, they’re all over the place! So I talked, I slept all over the island, and they understood, so now there’s a lot of support behind it. Just to bring them to Santo, to perform in the place for tourists, those are the ideas, I did it for all of us. When I travel down to Santo, I come and get a little money to pay the fare on the ship, go back, small sugar, they want to dance for a bag of rice, instead of going to work for a Chinese. We’ve got a strong culture of our own, let’s share it with friends, white people, tourists, they come here. That’s the idea, to get a bit of money and go back, and it works. That’s why you see the Chief working hard on the kava, because when it’s finished, when they say there’s enough money to pay his way back, with a bag of rice, he pays his fare, island!! I tell him all these ideas, because the book too will help us educate the next upcoming generations. So that’s the main idea behind the village. Because otherwise ...I’m happy, but when the children come, they really try hard to learn, but when they get whipped in the nakamal, they really get whipped, but I scold them a bit saying we mustn’t criticise too much ... We only give criticism in the nakamal but we don’t repeat it too much ... But what the two of us are talking about, Tom, I can honestly say I’m releasing some things that I’ve got on my mind. Because I thought Kelly was going to collect my ideas. But I’m glad the two of us are working as one (T. Yes), we’re climbing up the same steps but we only meet at the very end. That’s what I want.

T. Yes, we must ... like we ... Kelly, she’s got some work to do too as part of this. So if that’s it, we’ll close out discussions on research, since we’ve agreed that (S. Yes) it’s all clear, then later we’ll just find time when I arrive for me to discuss it with the people just so that they’ve got things clear, so we’ll go ahead and ... so we’ll just make kastom afterwards or what? (S. Yes, that’s it). Well if that’s it, I’ll turn this off.
S. That’s it, so what are we going to say? Interest in selling internationally, so they buy it as a package, mainly for cruise ships, then, with this kind of idea, that’s where we’re not getting things right. Because there’s some training I’ve been through, with what government organises, with TVET, with ... So that was when they chose the wrong people ... So when we got stuck on this issue, I faced these two Europeans, but I saw that they favour one side, they’re not ... So that’s why I agreed earlier on that if Delly said, “The two of us will talk with Tom, if Tom says it’s OK,” then this’ll be the main thing for you. Because I saw what happened when you and I were talking, how it was when we were travelling to Brisbane airport, and then at the same time we dropped the members. We were talking but while we talked he was already noting it, so he said NO? I understand what you’re trying to say, but I was close to you, I’d already seen how you write, after that you put everything on computer, so it comes out of your head. So I even bothered the people in the Department, I even went to the Deputy Prime Minister because he was Minister for Tourism at the time, but no, they weren’t ... (T. Oh, OK) Yes, because the village helps the government too, you must realise that, so issues like this one where I’m saying that white people are profiting from it ... doing some dishonest things like this, that’s what we’ll stop. What I see at Leweton, a different person, it’s happening now. So I want you to be clear about this so that you can guide us again.

T. So the problem is with the cruise ships or?

S. Yes

T. With ESTA?

S. Yes, ESTA, the association that Dave Cross looks after.

T. Espiritu Santo Tourism Association. So Mayumi and Dave Cross are both members?

S. They invited me, but I didn’t join because ...

T. But those two, Dave Cross with ...

S. Ah yes, with my namesake in it too, the other Sandy, Sandy from Hog Harbour.

T. Ah, OK, with Mayumi?

S. Mayumi’s in it too, yes.

T. But the main one is Dave Cross?
S. Yes, Dave Cross is ... [Pause] Because Dave Cross took the product, he sold it to Adventures in Paradise, because he’s just, what do we call it, the branch of Adventures in Paradise, in Santo. So it was me again that went to the Director of Adventures in Paradise. He told me off, saying I was spoiling my, er, his reputation. I had a booklet that I wanted to come and give to him so that he could read it and see how we would write in it. Then he said we were ruining his reputation, and I said, “Hey! Adrian! Don’t you go saying you have the right to make money behind my back.” He really spoke strongly, but I felt that I was cross with him too, but cross in a kind of way that I’d tell him off. So I spoke up, but he said, “Aren’t you scared of Sandy?” I said, “I’m not scared of Sandy, because it’s my culture, so if I want I can perform its customary activities in Santo, and the area where we live, it’s a government owned area, so we can do ....” He went on talking strongly, but he couldn’t win ... Dave Cross is the one who’s taking wrong advice from them.

T. So ... Adventures in Paradise, they’re the ones who?

S. They’re the ones who own P & O, so to get to P & O, you have to go through Adventures in Paradise.

T. So they have a contract with ...

S. With the cruise line.

T. So it goes down and further down like that and then us in the village ... So the problem is ... There are tourists from the cruise ships (S. Mmm), but there are the tourists who come by plane or ship or yacht or whatever, so it means that if they all follow the same route, then there won’t really be a problem, uh? (S. Mmm). But there’s a problem on the spot with them, no?

S. No.

T. With the ones who ...

S. Ah, yes, yes, you mean ...

T. If the tourists get off the plane, see Beverly and say, “I want to see that water music,” Beverly says, “You can just jump in a taxi and go,” so when they do it like that, they’re not part of a package ...

S. No, with them it’s all right. Only the cruise ships, it’s just ...

T. So if the tourists get off the cruise ship and don’t pass through that channel, but go the other way?

S. Yes, there’s some who go like that, then there are those who go through Dave Cross, i.e. through Adventures in Paradise. It’s not ESTA, ESTA is just a group, they’re separate too. So yes, Dave Cross handles the cruise ships for Adventures in Paradise (T. Mmm). So when ...
they went and lied to us, saying we had a contract, that we’d signed a contract with them so that when their tourists come, there will not be any other tourists coming by taxi or transport or other buses, but we never signed one...

T. Which tourists? All of them?

S. No, no, cruise ship tourists.

T. Only those? They’re not worried about the others?

S. No, the others are all right.

T. So if the others come to see you, it’s not a problem?

S. It’s not a problem.

T. Only that lot?

S. Only the cruise ships.

T. So when the cruise ship tourists get off, if they want to go to the village, they should come, Dave Cross thinks they must come through the (S. Yes).

S. Yes, they must pass through him to come to Leweton.

T. But afterwards, if they get off and wander around and change their minds, they want to go and see the water music, but they go ...

S. When they come directly to us, the ones who have been through Dave Cross to come complain, they say, “Look here! For us, this place is exclusive, no other tourists should enter, we’re the only ones allowed to enter.” Afterwards, they pretend they’re going to go through them, taxis come, when they meet up at Leweton, the cruise ship tourist guides from their tables come up to see us, and I say, “No, we haven’t got any exclusive tour here, Leweton is open to all.” They say, “No, but Adventures in Paradise say they own Leweton.” I say, “No, it doesn’t own Leweton, I own Leweton.” So after that, feedback goes back to Dave Cross at the table, then he’s down at the wharf, he rings me. I say, “No, Dave Cross, we haven’t got a contract like that.” There was a time when I wasn’t here, Adrian from Vila came down, the Director of Adventures in Paradise. He went down and he saw it with his own eyes. Afterwards I told him, “We haven’t got an agreed contract. We haven’t got one, we haven’t signed one, we haven’t got one.” You people talked about it, you asked us, but we didn’t sit down together to write a contract that we would agree on. There just isn’t one.” He said, “No, but they made one; the family signed it too.” I said, “There isn’t one, there’s never been one.” So they insisted that they had a contract that we’d signed, but ...

T. But they didn’t show you the contract?
S. They didn’t show it. Afterwards, when the issue became more important, then people from the Department of Tourism came to see me, with Pascal from Fatumaru Lodge or whatever, in Vila. They came and sat down with me, and this is what they said: “I think there was a contract like that?” “I’m telling you straight, now,” then I called the two who had actually heard it with their own ears, I called Judah as leader, and my Mummy. Because at the time, those two were running it, they were making all the decisions about work and doing the paperwork that goes down. There never was one ... They waited for me, I came back, I went down to see them, there’s none. Ah yes, the story’s turning into a long one, but the main point is there isn’t one. They’re saying something that’s not true. Then the two of them gave 400,000 vatu for next door [??]; afterwards they built the pool, and then they made them rush. They made a little mistake, because they didn’t lease the pool, they came and they sent people to us. When they wanted to send them to us, the bus people said, “No, if we go, they’ll chase us off.” Truly, I don’t know, there were maybe 30 tourists in a big bus, so then they had to put the mothers on the bus and take them to Million Dollar Point, and they slapped the water. The tourists left and went back down and said, “Refund. We were supposed to go to the village, not to see the ocean.” They were really stuck there ...

[Laughter] Yes, so when they talked to me about and said they were going to take action against us, I got Warren and said, “We two are going to Vila now.” It meant the village spent 200,000 vatu. I took him down, went and paid the court fee, I paid all those things. Afterwards our lawyer just dropped it, because we decided that he didn’t know how to do these things.

T. Which lawyer?

S. Er ... Willie something. Willie Oli? Someone from Tanna, I forget his name, I remember Willie something.

T. He’s not from one of the big companies?

S. One ... Yes ...

T. Afterwards, he gave up?

S. Mm.

T. So, those people, when they came?

S. When they came, that’s it, they questioned me and I said, “No, there is no ...”.

T. Just how did they question you, I mean did they come and say, did they come and get cross with you, or did they come to support you?

S. Both, but as it went on it looked to me as though they were cross with me, saying we were the ones who’d pulled out, yes. Because they’d already warned us, but I said, “Yes, why have they warned us? We will agree if they pay us 2,000 or 3,000 for one tourist, yes.
But they pay 1,000, and the taxi drivers also pay 1,000 a head, so how can I stand firm on that? I only receive the same amount. Do you know how many people perform in the village? I’m not from Leweton, we came, we developed the place, we tried to upgrade this place. It’s good for you people in Tourism ... it’s good for our culture, it’s good for us too to educate the children.” I really talked crossly to them then. They said, “Oh, but now you find a way, because now P & O has pulled out, the next lot?” Then I said, “But where is the tourism development law that says the same things can’t be close to each other? Where’s that law?” I questioned them, they were a bit stuck. Me, I’m not going to be stuck. I must find another way. But that’s it, I think if you can help me, with our true stories. I’ve already told the family, “OK, the lawyer’s withdrawn our case, but we’ve got another way, forget him. The stories are going on now, so I want to travel on this trip to find out how I can make my way through”.

T. So if it’s possible, it would be good to have ... Has this guy got what they call a “case file” or what, all his notes that he made about our case?

S. Yes, he’s got them.

T. OK. It would be good to have ... get them from him or copy them, that’s one thing; any little scraps of paper with stories or notes or anything. So you said there were some letters exchanged between Leweton and Dave Cross (S. Yes), Adventures in Paradise or P & O, any kind of letter, we should copy them. Kelly will need a copy of all of them. Then, if there is a contract, well you said there is no contract for this, but if there is any contract or anything with ESTA or with the Department or with anything, we should copy it; any little notes you made on that trip down or whatever, with minutes of meetings, or anything – that guy’s case file, with all the receipts, paper receipts like tickets from the plane or ship or whatever to travel down, accommodation or meals or anything you spent on that business, that travel, she’ll need all of them. Then, if you can do it, try and think, try and add up, if you started in 2008, how many times cruise ships came, in 2008, 2009, 2010, up to now. Then, however many tourists normally visit each time, add them all up. If it’s something like 10,000 tourists, then we’ll make a report, on the one hand just for us, so that we understand it, and then on the other hand to explain it, so that we can take our case to court or to the Department or whatever, saying that this work we’re doing, why does it benefit Vanuatu? Because we’re doing this, lots of people come, but if afterwards, later we [indistinct]. So if there are 10,000 people, my understanding is that 7,000 goes to ... goes that way, to them, to them, to them, how they take it out I don’t know, and then only 1,000 comes as far as the village. This means that out of what they get (10,000 times 7) ... 70 million, that’s if there are 10,000, but I don’t know how many there are, we’ll calculate it and see, but if that’s the number, they get 7 million [should be 70! !], but us, 10. So when we add it all up, when we’ve got all the numbers, we know how many people come, our case will be stronger, what we say will be stronger. Because, we won’t be saying, “I guess,” or what, but we’ll say, “No, this is it.” So that’s why it’s good to have all the ..., you know
how it is for us Vanuatu, telling custom stories, we don’t go in too much for writing (S. Yes), but with this thing, it’s better to have things in writing – letters, contracts, notes, the guy’s case file, receipts – then we’ll make a report to calculate how many tourists, then how the money goes. So Kelly will need all those things. And she can help us to do it. That means that when we do a show in the village, we should note in one place how many people come, each time. Then, it’s good to know where the tourists come from, and how – did they come: this way or that way, maybe from a hotel, or just on their own, or taking the air or what (S. That’s it). It’s good to know how they got there. That means, I don’t know, having tickets (S. Yes), the person must bring his ticket, like his receipt, and you tear off half of it. And afterwards, at the end of the day you take them all and note them down. If we have all that, it will be easier to make a case, to fight it (S. Mmm), fight against them. Because I really don’t, I think it’s wrong (S. You see, you see it like that), and if we reach that point, I mean with the Government, with the Court, with the regulatory body, all that sort of high level place, then we explain it all, because all of it is only about tourism (S. Yes). But if we turn the page, and look at the other side , then you see that “Gosh, they travel all over the place, they go and play at this festival, that festival, that festival, they promote us too (S. That’s right), meaning that, so ... meaning that when we reach that high level, if we find the right man like Ralph or people who’ve got a bit of sense, because some of our Ministers are ... 

S. They just eat roasted taro that’s still hard [??] ! No, I’m serious, because you see, Tom, like I said, me, I can’t write, but when I go in front of them, I speak up, even when I met the Deputy Prime Minister from the previous government, which was replaced when Moana won. Even when Moana came to see us in whichever month it was before they held that, what was it, first ministerial thing down in Torba, he came and stopped at our place, at Leweton (T. Ah, OK). He mentioned the tour, and I told him straight, “Now is the third time, we’ve received a Prime Minister three times, with the third time being you coming here now. Then when the Prime Minister came down, he said, “I keep hearing news, but when I hear the news, the mothers are in Vanuatu. The second time they went, when we heard the news, they were in Vanuatu.” I told him straight, “This is where we are.” So that’s it, I asked for a ... we gave him a petition asking him to support the group. Mainly I want him to provide some laptops and that kind of thing in the village, like that everything is recorded. (T. Then?) I haven’t received them yet, but it’s there, because he’s travelling too, because he’d been on a tour. He spoke to us clearly at that time, to everyone who was listening. He told his secretary or what who was next to him, I forget his name, it’ll happen next week. When he came, after that he went somewhere, they said he went to Thailand or what. We’re looking into it with someone in Santo, because he said, you go and see this person about this decision, for him to contact my office. I told him straight, “We’re doing a lot of work for Vanuatu. I’m glad there are people like that helping us. So far Government has never done anything for us.” I said, “When they see us they see we represent Vanuatu.” I told him, “We all raise the Vanuatu flag. We’ve sewn T shirts and put the flag on them. We mention Santo, Santo is under the name of Vanuatu”.
T. So ... that’s one side of things. Another side, like I said, is when we go on tour [Pause]. There’s one thing we need to explain to everyone, like I told you, is that the work of Further Arts is to promote all kastom music in Vanuatu. If it’s like that ... you have to focus hard on the programme at Leweton, but when you go overseas, you work as though you’re promoting Vanuatu or Santo, you think about tourism T-shirts, hanging out flags and so on. I’m part of a project, it’s a project for Vanuatu, for Santo, yes, but for that as well. And people don’t understand that yet, just a few people do, like Ralph, like Delly and David, Sarah and Luke, I talk a lot about Luke, but we’re all of us working on a project that’s for that. It’s, it’s ... we’re promoting Vanuatu, but really we’re promoting things that are unique to Vanuatu. Because when we travel to music festivals, it’s not really possible for the same group to come back each time, to the same place. They won’t spend a big amount of money for the same group to come and go each time, because they need different things. What we’re doing, like I already said, we’re clearing the bush, we’re opening up the road, for others to follow later, but it’s not for us to stop there and say “OK, it’s finished now.” No, we’ll progress to find bigger festivals, that are more ... we’re trying to open lots of roads, not just one to go to the Floating Land Festival, to [??] No, no, we’ve been to, we’ve been to Malaysia, we’ve been to Bellingen, we’ve been to the Queensland Music Festival, we’ve been to lots already (S. Mm). We’ll still look for others. This means that it’s, it’s, if we think about it the way Further Arts thinks about it (S. Mm), it’s to open the road for everyone in Vanuatu, every Vanuatu music. It’s, it’s hard for people to understand, but if we tell our story properly, like ... So if we only tell the story of Leweton, we can say that first they went to, they went to Spain first? Some of us went?

S. Warren and Hilda’s family, he took them.

T. So we can say, yes, some went to Spain, and following that they had the idea of creating Leweton. Then they went to Malaysia, they went to Brisbane, they went to Bellingen, they came back and went to Brisbane again, to the Brisbane Festival and Floating Land. After that we can say, 6 people went, 6 people went, then 11 people went, 11 people went, then they earned 300,000 or 200,000 or whatever. Then we can explain that the road we’re following, that’s it, we can explain that, “You see! We’re working on something.” It’s the same thing (S. Yes), it’s the other side of it. But the problem is what a lot of hard work goes into making these tours. These tours are hard work (S. Hard work). Visas and things get held up. It’s hard work, really hard work. But when I heard there was this problem, I was really upset (S. Mm), because I’m working hard like this and they start (S. That’s it) spoiling it (S. Yes). What on earth are they thinking about, do they think it’s better to keep things down at a low level like this? So one of my ideas is, I’d like to find something that’s like the root of it (S. Mm), a ... Inside it there are the two stories, but one root, is my idea. Thinking about the same thing, but one side here, one side there, but the same thing. What it is, is the quality of the show, of the performance. And I’m sure that it’s the right way, because it’s the correct way, because it’s the quality that’s important for everything, like our first picture of the flying fox with the breadfruit, there are three things: kastom, tourism, and art. Quality is important for
all of them, so on this side it’s come up, because people call this, they call it a kind of music or what, whereas before it was only a game (S. Mm). For tourism, if its quality is good, people won’t complain; they’re happy, because we can make people cry, even just the tourists, not only the people who are there when we go to different places or whatever. We can do it, but if we do it in a way that’s weighty or what, so how we did it on this tour, where I could see everyone working hard, really working hard, it all comes down to one thing, because if we do this, there won’t be the others, Leweton Number 2, it’ll come back to ... but they can’t compete, competition (S. No), you know. And then, in the future, they must understand (Sandy, must see, that’s it). So there are two ways. One is this one, where we’re following the correct way, and if we work like this, it won’t damage the tour, it won’t damage the village, it’ll be ... everything can go ahead. But then there’s the other side, to be fought (S. Mm). We must have all the little ... every letter, every contract, every small piece of paper, every receipt, the lawyer’s case file. Then we’ll build a report, showing how many people came, how many tours we’ve made, how many people came to the village. So I’ve heard Kelly has been seeking messages of support from these people, Bob, D and the others (S. Mm) at Floating Land. That’s good, but really it would be better if ... because she hasn’t really understood exactly what we’re going to use them for (S. Mm). So at the time I saw, ah yes, that’s something, but I believe it would be better if we wrote the letters, and gave them to them to sign (S. OK). So we write the words, they put them on their letterhead, and then they sign, so that they get to the point that we want to make in the letter. Because they talk like this, “Oh yes, that’s nice, ah yes, ah,” but they don’t really get the point (S. Yup, they don’t get it), they don’t get it, it’s any old how, so ... It depends, if we get hold of one of the undercooked taro Ministers, it’ll be good for him, because, you know, he doesn’t understand it at all (S. Yes). But really if it’s people who really understand things, we’ll have the right points in the letter (S. The right points).

S. OK, now I understand what you’re trying to say. So I also think that’s the thing, so, Tom, that’s mainly what I’m asking from you people. I even told Sam, we’ll just see what our group does, what letters we can use to support it, to give it all back to you. And when you help us with it, that’ll help us find out what we’re not good at, any report, but with the group, I’ll do it when I get back there. Again, I’ve given you the explanation already, that’s why when I explained it to Chief Warren, I already said that ... but afterwards, sorry, I explained it, but it wasn’t clear. And with the picture you’ve drawn, so I’m just asking if we can do it, then we give it back to them to sign, if they read it and say, “Ah, OK, so that’s why we’re travelling. They’re in three different areas, they want to promote this, and this, but ....” No, I see that we’ll help, then they sign, but if they don’t agree with it, I guess they won’t sign it, but they’ll give back their side of the story to help us.

T. We can change it.

S. That’s it. No, I think that’s how it’ll be. But a short one like I’ve been doing, I’ve tried it, I’ve talked, but you can hear my English is like fruit salad, but ...
T. No, but I understand too, because you’re also doing it for a different purpose, to get support for them, to support you inside the tour (S. Yes, yes). Yes, that’s important too, so there’s ...but if it’s a, if it’s a strategy inside our business plan (S. Mm), it’ll, if there’s a business plan, really the business plan will be a good support for the argument. The letters will just follow it up. So Kelly can help, lend a hand to do the business plan (S. Mm). But the thing is, it’s a ... like ... it’s a crazy way of behaving.

S. So you understand now, everyone says so, but nobody acts on it, I even knocked on the door of the Department when I went to Vila. I don’t know why, they can see it’s no good too, but I don’t know why they don’t make any move. So I asked for “A round table, we sit down and talk, I want to tell my side of the story, how I’m trying to carry this out, how I’ve been doing things.” Because how it’s going now, it’s really no good. The complaints are there, but they just sit on them. And then the person who’s running the village too, he’s ... like people are running away from him, but he’s trying to keep them sweet with kava, and that, you know. But it’s not good for them to go on, like it’s ... Because the last time I heard them say it, was at Leweton before we left, afterwards I gave them the next ones, like tomorrow we’re going back, we’re flying back. [I find the last sentence very obscure, not sure I’ve heard it right] On Wednesday there was a performance that needed all of them. Afterwards I told them when there was a meeting about a shooting at the village, I don’t know, about something I’m not familiar with, a book they call, Destination... (T. OK). Yes. After what I’d given them, they asked, “But where are we going to do the shooting?” Then they said, “Oh, not at Leweton Two, we’ll do it at Leweton One.” When I went to see the Tourism people, they rang me up and said, “Oh brother, you’ve heard what they really said, is it true they can use our name?” Then I said, “What are you going to say?” Then they said, “Dave Cross says that ... When people asked, Jason asked what site we could use to shoot the film, then he said ‘Leweton One,’ they don’t know Leweton Two’. What I’m talking about, I got up before I left, we had a church service, then I told them straight away, “We can confirm that they will use Leweton.” Only at the wharf, they changed the name. They got to Santo, but they put a different name on the bus, but Leweton is hanging on to our belts. It’s all right, we’ll go, I think there will be some thoughts we can bring back, but now we’re just talking again (T. Mm), that’s why I ... we’ll go on talking but you’ve understood it already. When I come down, I’ll get all this out of your head. Some of these things, they’re the only ones who are carrying on about them. Another thing I want is for Leweton Two to help with all the little coordination jobs, like a ...yes, if, like I said, you asked me once, “Do you like being team manager like this?” You know, I like dancing too, when I stand up like that it’s really ...so yes, dancing is in the blood. Anyway I want Leweton Two to contribute, not just to our travels but also as art.

T. So they’re relatives too?
S. In Leweton Two? Ah, yes. No, they've picked people up all over the place. They're trying hard, now they're really trying hard for Leweton. I think they'll collapse, I've told them already, “When you do something and there’s kastom it’s good, but when you want to find something for money, you want to fill your pockets ....” They’ll collapse, they’ll capsize. That’s why for a short time I was being stubborn, I didn’t want us to ... I didn’t take them to court, not court. I took that uncle of mine to court, and then I talked, I talked about it, just a middle aged man. You know what people in Vanuatu are like – when they’ve done something, they want to hide it, they can see it’s not good, they hang on, they haven’t even put down any roots yet, they’re just floating on the surface.

T. So you put them in court? Leweton Two, not this one?

S. No, Leweton Two. (T. OK.) They changed the name to Turwar (?) (T. OK) [Discussion on spelling, not clear.] Because when my young brother went inside he saw us, but the photo had changed [?not clear?] and of us on the other side. [Long pause]

T. So they used our photos, so that’s not right. They just said « Magical Water Music Experience,” they, like they’re just telling lies (S. Mhm). Mm ...

S. That’s why I said I’m trying to find out. Because there were two friends from Germany before, they were trying to work to set up a game fishing charter in Santo, then ... this kind of thing. One of them told me, when you’re dealing with advertising or what, if they oppose us, we can go into it and talk to them or whatever. So that’s it, the two of us talked, and after that I had these crazy ideas, and I said “No.” ...

T. So ... it’s, I think it’s important also to [Disturbing noise] I think it’s good especially in relation to the true ... to its roots. Everyone, everywhere on Gaua they make water music, a? Everywhere on Gaua, everywhere on Merelava? (s. Mm) But on Motalava, on Vanualava?

S. Yes, it’s on Vanualava, at Wotafol [? name] Wotafol (T. OK), but it’s different, it’s ... They slap the water but ...like I said. So in our language it’s called [?], but them, you just hear them go “boom”, just for swimming. They use the same thing.

T. So it’s true, we should follow the copyright procedure, with Marilyn ... Yes. We’ll ask Kelly to help us register a patent, or copyright, or mark or ... for the five things you were talking about. (S. Mhm) That’s good ... and I’ve never really heard you all talk about this very much, but it would be good to ... to ... When we’ve sorted that out, we’ll deal with this, find out how we can mark it as ours. Like you ... what’s the meaning of “Leweton”? Does it have a meaning?

S. Yes, Leweton hemi nem blong ol vilij ia. Yu luk L E W E T hemi vilijis raon long Leqwel, Lewetnet [? not sure about village names] ( T. Ah, OK) long Merelava. Ale O N hemi Ontar,
long West Gaua, we men senta blong vilij blong Warren wetem Hilda. Hemia nao ON long en.

T. So say it again?

S. Leweton? (T. Yes. L is what?) L is Leqwel, W, Wetnep [ ?], then T is [ ?]. T I guess is Tasmat, Ontar ON, ON is Ontar. L E stands for both Levetngisi and Leqwel [ ?], the village I’m from, so LE is for two names together [Inaudible, discussion on names & spelling]

T. That’s completely different from things in English, but we’ll turn it into Bislama (S. Yes, this language!) … OK, that’s it, so if we explain it like this, it’s clear that it, it, it stays in one place and can’t come back to the place? Mm … So have you seen this already?

S. Oh, is that Facebook? (T. Mm). [Indistinct, ? looking at Facebook ?] They showed me, but I didn’t …

T. So Facebook, you know what Facebook is? Because you don’t have a computer in the village, a? So you don’t use e mail very much.

S. I use e mail, but mainly for my work, to check it and reply. But to go with this … [Pause, ? looking at Facebook ?]

T. So we started this one, to … because when we were organising the tours, people asked questions, they asked, “What’s this?”, so we started this, because it’s not really a website but people can go and look at it (S. Mm), to look at a few photos, video or whatever. So at the start, in 2011 [Interruption] So afterwards, we used the video that Tania made? Have you seen that video?

S. No, I haven’t seen it.

T. It’s about when they went to Malaysia.

S. So they released this CD to get them to travel to Malaysia?

T. No, it’s the video showing when they went to Malaysia (S. Ah), because Tania was there too.

S. Ah, OK, she went with them to Malaysia, Yes.

T. She went with them. But you haven’t seen it, a? [Plays the beginning of Tania’s video]
Interviews with Sandy Sur – 3 - Translation

(T = Tom Dick, S = Sandy Sur)  

Total words translated: 8,827

T. So tell me about ... the picture where it becomes art, where it goes international, you know ... when it’s as if we’re flowing, like money flows, it comes, it goes to the island; people move, come to Santo, go out or whatever. But tell me what we’ll do at the international level. Myself, I know what I’m doing, I’m promoting kastom music, but all kastom music in Vanuatu. But you, because you belong only to Leweton, to promote the name of Leweton, or to make Leweton into ... because you talk about colonisation, where? Will it go as far as a Leweton village in New York? Is that the community’s dream? What’s the ... what’s the big picture in the mirror?

S. The picture of it is like when we go on discussing things together, for example now, now I’m moving out of Santo, I’m coming to set up in Vila now. That’s the next thing. I’m extending myself. I’m guiding our culture to reach Vila. Then, when Delly and I were talking, what you asked me, there was one place where it faced an obstacle. You know, instead of carrying on the same way, flying everybody, people come every time, well I want us to continue doing it as we are now, now there’s this place. Who’s the girl who ...? Fiauka? Lots of the Floating Land people said, “We’re willing, if there’s a place for you to set up, it’ll be your place.” So we came and set up. But when I went back to the South Sea people, they said “Oh ... Oh ...”. They cried until last night. “We believe you’re selling this culture.” I said, “OK, the culture, this one, is Banks culture, but the understanding I had when I went through the islands is that we can come and do something here, but with your laws it’s hard to set up anything at all. It looks as though you have to have a permit to cut a tree, it’s difficult here...” But what I think is, like the way I set up in Santo, you know, those of us who live with Banks people, we have to continue travelling but we must know that there is a nasara. I can see that it has already borne fruit. Last time they wanted to make a small kastom with the Prime Minister, they called me, “Eh, Sandy, can we come and use the nasara, to make kastom, you perform a dance, to show respect, and so on?” I said, “All right.” “Is there a fee?” I said, “Sorry, we haven’t set a fee yet, we have to talk to everyone to make sure they’re happy, but at the moment we all want to speak with the Prime Minister. I’ve also got some thoughts to give the Prime Minister.” So we did it, you know, like that it continues, so now there are people from Vanuatu here. They gave their ideas, the people at what ... Floating Land gave them ... what happens now, I think they’ve got feedback from it, I don’t know, she said she’s going to send it to you. But normally these little things go ahead, money comes, comes as far as here. I was surprised when my real cousin showed up at this feast. I said, “Ah, you’re the one, you’re a woman who dances. You’re here already, you’ve got rank already. Let’s go, we’ll find enough people to use, instead of flying people over or whatever.” Because we’ve brought it down, but there wasn’t any decision because we’d travelled with it already. If we make a nasara for us here, the people who come to work for, what’s it called, the schemes, or whatever, they’ll work and then tell their friends, “Oh! It’s Chiefs’ Day today, we’ve got a nasara here. Let’s fill up a bus and drive to the celebration, to celebrate Unity Day or whatever. Chiefs’ Day.” Like that it’ll open people’s eyes, we’ll show it. And when there are music festivals, like what we saw happen yesterday, that was really something, it made my hair stand up on the spot; I said, “Ah! Now I’ve got the picture.” While they were making kastom, we went and asked. Like tawi
said, it gave me a shock, but when we presented ours, then they were running after us. They wanted to organise funding or something, they talked about their building, but we were going around with, what’s her name, that woman? Yes, because I wanted to get us back to the house quickly, so that we wouldn’t be late. The picture I’ve got, Tom, if it happens, it’ll happen, but at least we’re getting somewhere close. I don’t know if you’ve got the same idea or not. If we couldn’t organise it ourselves, but there was someone nearby, we could call him and say, “OK, we’re going ahead now, we represent ...”

T. If it was like that, it would be good. It’s not for me to say, I’m just asking because I don’t know the answer.

S. No, because I’ve already asked the chiefs about it (T. Ah yes?). They just said, “That’s it, you people go, share it. Share it with everyone.” (T. Yes) Yes.

T. Good thinking.

S. Yes. “Share it. Share what we have. Our hearts. Our feelings. Our happy times all the time. But if they want to see more, then Vanuatu. It becomes like a village now.” I mean the special dances, like those of the Ambrym people. I’ve seen it somewhere, I saw it, I went inside, I saw it ... the question of the Ambrym people about the, what is it, Rom dance (T. Rom dance). I’d heard about this kind of mistake already, it’s happened to our people on Motalava, they’ve sold their costumes, their head dresses ... But us, we, that’s it, Tom, I honestly ... What we’re doing now has no obstacles. Namau is travelling. So what we developed in Santo, we combined the games, these are our games as children, then we grew up with them. So that’s it, so the only thing left now is that we’ll get back the things that are with Kelly; if they use them, that’s already a good report to take back to the chief, saying that we sent them to our very own nakamal, but for the white people, it’s Na Mao, music. So can we arrange that with Kelly tomorrow?

T. That’s not a problem.

S. But there are not too many things, because I reckon we’ve given out almost all the things we made.

T. Yes, but you know, it’s like kastom, if you give ten vatu, that’s enough (S. Yes), even just one little thing, that’s enough to open the road.

S. That’s right. So because of the good things they said, because I hadn’t said anything yet but they made kastom to me in the first place, meaning that for me ... I’ve got a place where I can stand up. If we decide to start it here, when we’ve done our work, I’ll let you know. Then the two of us will see how we can bring it here, or how many people will come to stay around here, but at that time it’ll be mainly music. Because music, I guess with string band, and the number of dances too, will attract ... it shows the full design for travelling. Because the string band, when we strike up with the string band, like we did yesterday, when the kastom was finished, we went, we used [??] as well, we danced like crazy. I said, “Ah! That’s it!” Because we’d just come on stage, and we went straight into the music. That’s it, we’ve heard it already, it’s good. I’m not speaking badly of us, with the group that came, but of the selection they made over there; it made us start late too. Otherwise we
did everything, I can see we’ve already shown a good image. Just to go back, to make ... to open up
the thinking of the young people who come like this. Afterwards, the ones we missed out, we’ll
draw them back, and then we’ll work together so that if I follow this idea, I’ll see, I’ll let you know
again. If the Chief gives a good sign up front, music will go, and a kastom ceremony too. We’ll make
a kastom ceremony straight away, like that the island will know. It’s all good, because you see, if it
turns out like that, I’ve already told them during the time I spent two months on the island: if we
move out of Santo, a group from the island can come, perform to win a small income to contribute
to building a church, income comes in for ... it’s like help from us too because they need medicine
and so on ... They come, perform for it, then find some help to assist them, and then go back with it
when the team returns to Santo ... I’ve been talking about it privately, but just need to add on to it.

T. So ... about the tour, your feeling, the feeling of Warren, Hilda, Mama, everyone’s feeling is that
it was a success?

S. Well, everyone is taking the same line. They say, “We’ll have gone beyond the limit.” Afterwards,
it’s a form of slang, you know the kind of talk, “We went beyond the limit and so on, but we’re
tired,” that kind of thing. But as to the feeling about me coming with this team, they saw that what
we did ... The first thing they told me, and then I made the same comment to them,”Yes. It’s your
failure. Because when we go on, as we’ve discussed already, when we go on you no longer ask; ‘Eh!
When we go on how many times do we dance or which dance will we do?’ You know that when you
go on you’re just on stage to perform.” Then they recognised these little mistakes, but when they
stand up, they see that ... but the numbers they performed, everyone enjoyed them, everyone ran
after them to ask them questions, at the same time they kept stopping us. I came and called them,
“Oh! Up in the bus. We have to go.” So what I got back from them, you can see that now they ... So
I thanked them, for what they did, because you could see they really put their hearts into it ... I
reckon when we go on, then in three minutes’ time it’s not so hard [?? Not sure about last few
words], then when it really gets going they’re thinking exactly like they do in the village. What I told
our small group that worked hard with us before we came, I said that our timing, sometimes our
timing was a problem, they use the same one as when they’re performing for tourists. When the
Chief goes “Hoo! Hoo!” on the conch shell, someone is still fastening a grass skirt, as though it’s not
serious, fastening shoes [??], chasing after shoes over there, repairing something, pulling it up. But
the way it turned out after Uncle came on was good, he really brought up the village spirit, he went
“Shwieoo”, ... Then all of them, when they came out, no wonder ... they really went ... I’ve seen it
happen here so many times now, but it’s lucky I’m here ... Because the Chief ... the Chief who
represents the team too ... is somebody who doesn’t talk much. He talks like the two of us, then
when we don’t do what he says, we’re looking for Warren, Warren’s way over there ... But he’s an
active performer, everyone says that; in their comments when we get there, we’ll stand up in a line
like this, and then I’ll tell them, “No, start over there, each one gives his views. If someone wants to
talk about me, he talks about me; he talks about Warren, he talks about him. Everyone has to share
what’s in their hearts, so that we can correct each of us, saying that this mustn’t happen next time.”

T. Yes, I reckon Warren’s good. He, he ... he’s like, like, like you know, in kastom, there’s a chief, but
he’s not really a chief in the way that white people define the meaning of chief (S. Mm). It’s about
rank, it’s about respect, it’s about, er ... Yes, mainly ... mainly rank. Things like you eat at a tabu fire,
you do what you do, but that’s it. (S. That’s it.) After, like ... But Warren, I’ve only seen a little of him, but I reckon he’s good in the role of chief, on the artistic side, you know.

S. Yes. You say he’s nothing but dry bones, but when you slap him, he takes off [?? Not clear, too much laughing]

T. But it’s true, his acting, it’s ... (S. Oh, yes) when he stands up like this in the role of chief, you see that, wow! [Lot of laughter in this conversation about Warren]. To start with the light was not lit, but now it’s really bright. (S. That’s it). It’s good, a?

S. Yes, no, that’s why I’m saying that Warren will get a shock, because ... when we learn it, I’ll ring his house and say, “Can you prepare a place for us to stand up in the witness box? The judgement will only be given at this time.” So when he goes to lie down on his bed, he won’t be able to sleep, but he’ll think, “Oh, it’s true! I made a mistake,” or “Tomorrow I’ll go and see Sandy and Martin, and apologise,” or “Maybe I’ll go and behave like this ...”

T. I’d be really happy if we made a video while this was happening, so that everyone could just watch it. So that I could see it too because I won’t be there! (S. No, I’ll ...) It would be really interesting for me to hear each person’s thoughts, and all the things the community says.

S. Yes. No, the two of us will put some credit in the phone, we’ll make a short call to the chiefs, the big chief with Martin, the village chief, we’ll mention the camera, like that they’ll record the whole thing. (T. That would be good.) No, I said it and I mean it! That’s why I said it’s not finished. When he goes back, it’ll be like we’re going to court again to give judgement! Because I told them in the morning, because they were complaining about Anthony, (T. Yes), I said, “Yes. It’s not just him. It’ll be all of us.” But that’s it, as you know, he’s the worst of us. With what’s happened now, everything, like what happened with Kevin with his girlfriend, what it was the two of them [??] That’s one way, well I don’t know, but we’ll go back, suggest it to the village, and say, “Now we can see that it’s something ... “ We’ll be the ones who help him. The ideas will eat at him and will hurt him, so ... while we’re here we still control him, but when it’s the chiefs, they ... If you tell me off, you tell me off; if you tell Warren off, you tell Warren off, saying he didn’t play his part. But I think it’ll happen in our nasara, if they want to get cross with us in our language, we’ll understand it. While we’re here we can’t criticise people. Afterwards I told them, “The time for it is Santo.” They don’t know about this. That’s why I said when David and Delly pick us up, we’ll go straight from the airport, park the truck at the gate of the nasara, leap inside, then we ... we perform a dance, (T. Ah, OK), yes, to return it to our nasara. Because we’ve shown it all over the place here, now we return it to the nasara. Then they’ll stand up and they’ll be surprised, they’ll say, “You stand up straight! Now it’s judgement time!” No, these are my ideas, what I’m doing in the village, you see I’ll stir them up, they’ll have to recognise their bad habits, that’s what I’m saying. I tell them all the time, money comes, there’s a pathway for it to follow. But us too, we also have a pathway. You can’t forget us. There are all the different ways. (T. Yes) So we’re guiding culture, we’re guiding what we’re learning, next time you produce children be conscious that you’re teaching the children too. We have to wake up ... Yes, what I’m saying is true. Ah, I told Sam too, “The report that you’ve got with you now, you see. This will only happen back at our place.”
T. It’s really good for me ... I don’t know, I think it’s really good if Sam does this job. Because ... it’s good for us, because she’s high in the music industry. But I think it’s really good for her too, because ... So she, she’s indigenous, but she’s not from here, she’s from the other side, (S. Yes, they told us,) down there. But I can see that she’s a person who’s grown up in town, which means that she’s not... no connection, she’s not standing on her land where she ... (S. Mm), she’s not hearing her language, you understand. Myself I think this means that when she sees a group that’s strong in this area, in kastom, or when they travel and people perform a kastom ceremony to them ... Because I was very happy when I saw the photos of you arriving in Cairns (S. Yes), because you know in Australia I’ve never seen them perform one ... That’s it, you remember, I guess you weren’t there, when East Journey, the Aborigine group that came to (S. Came to Santo?) Santo, not last year, the year before, to the festival. They arrived, but it was our group, Martin and the others, who went up and danced for them when they landed at the airport. Because I was with them too. We came out, but it was our group (S. Yes), dancing, performing kastom to them. Like, it’s unusual, even in Vila they don’t do it much. But while they were doing it, I watched, and then I left. So everyone was happy with everything whatever it was. Afterwards I was watching, even when we landed at Brisbane, I was sitting down, I was sitting, it was as though I was watching myself, as though I was looking down on myself. And then I was thinking, what am I going to do? Because I’m not, I mean how do I perform kastom here? (S. Laughs) Do I wrap myself in a nambas? What do I do to perform a welcome? So I said no, leave it, because it’s not right to pretend (S. Yes). If you haven’t got anything, don’t pretend. So then, our group arrived, we hurried up, we went to the park and whatever. But I was still wondering whether there was another way, yes, but till now I don’t know what other way. But I’m very happy that you landed at the airport and they performed that kastom.

S. I was surprised too. Because when I came along, Sam didn’t find James, then Sam called my name, with Warren too, “Wait here, there’s a welcome.” We waited for the baggage, we stood up, all the baggage arrived, but the two of us went on standing up and then I saw the two of them sit down. Oh dear! ... I thought about my speech, I thought about what I could unpack quickly, because you know, normally when they give something, we give something too, so that right away we have the right to go around here and we already have a firm footing. It connects us, because in the nasara nothing happened to show the way, but we cleared the way ourselves. They did this, but it took the wind right out of my sails. I stood up and said, shall I talk? I said no, I’ll just waste it ... I’ll stay quiet. But in the other places, the one yesterday, we didn’t know, we were taken by surprise. We were sitting down having breakfast, and it was Sam who said, “Sit down quietly, they’re going to perform a ...” But the one they performed over there, my goodness! Then I spoke. I’m not talking about at the airport. I spoke briefly, on behalf of the Chief. After that I said, “Something will happen at the time before we present a performance.” So the following day, we went to that school. In the morning, we got up, so then we looked for leaves. But some of our leaves have meanings. We looked for them, tied them together. So then, Tom, we did this, we tied the leaves together, there’s the leaf of knowledge Wormren [??] in our language, it gives us knowledge. So when we leave it behind, someone can pick it up, because you can get knowledge about culture or whatever. Then there’s laplap leaf, it means “Leave the day.” Leave the day, the journey is finished. If we tear the laplap leaf, it means we’re leaving each other. I gave all the meanings yesterday ... (T. OK) So we went really quickly and performed the ceremony at the school. Then we shared them
with the people who were cleaning the games area, like that, yes ... While they were there, then what we did made me sweat, we went into a dance inside. There were police officers in front, they wouldn't come over, I think they were scared we were going to spear them with our spears! *(Laughter)* We completed that, then we gave a dance that concluded the ceremony, and after that we gave the [??] on top of something. And then, when we went over there, they did it for us, and I said, “Oh! Now we’re really stuck!” We looked around, saying we had to go hunting for leaves again, said “No.” After I just asked, but they said, “No.” And then we were surprised because this woman came ... *(T. Mabo?)* Mabo, yes. *(T. She came up?)* I saw her come. *(T. That’s the Queen!)* Yes. While she was there, I said, “Ah, no! But this situation ...” When I suggested it, they spoke, then we ... they made a *kastom* presentation, and we had something to link us up. They were surprised, we gave a [??]. You’ve seen that, a? *(T. Yes)* It looked as though they were surprised by it too. What happened then was that we came, the Chief received it for the two of us to hold, we all laid our hands on it – our right hands. Then, I looked again, we all of us did it. Afterwards I explained it to them, I made it clear that “Ah! This is the spirit.” Yes, so there is a pathway for everything, so we’ll take all these reports and everything back, back to the Chief. Then, we’ll go back to the island, and tell them on the island, it’s like this, this happened and this ... The worst thing is that this is going ahead, because, Tom, it’s in our blood already. It’s based on the family. I tried to take it outside the family for someone else to lead the dancing, but when they lead, it doesn’t work out. Because now ... it’s Judah now, Judah. Yes, Cecilia’s husband. They’ve been to Expo and that sort of thing. Because they’re all our relatives from over there, really. There are just a few others involved, the kind who make stupid claims about the dance being like this or like that, but they don’t know a thing. So now when we get to Vila, they’re surprised by us again *(T. Mm)* Yes.

T. OK. So that means ... To get back to what we were talking about before, we ... if we leave some ... like these things *(S. Yes)*, the batons for travelling or dancing or whatever, or instruments or other things like that, yes? And then, if some people stay here, you’re saying that this will happen, and then if we follow on we’ll end up having a *nasara* here too. It doesn’t matter that we’re in Australia, but there can be a *nasara* here.

S. There can be a *nasara* here, but it has to be ...

T. But not right away, not just any old how, it’ll be ... after this, and this...

S. Yes. I think later on if the Chief says it’s all right, that’s when we’ll start work on it. That’s if our Government agrees, it agrees, or it supports us by ... That’s why I tell everybody, “Please, I want to get a clear report that will lead to the two governments working together.” *(T. Mm)* And ... for us, you know how we are, for us it’s not just dancing, what we’re working towards is music. But for us, in the old days, dancing was ... our main activity. We danced, we were forever dancing. Now that the string band’s involved, it means that it includes games and we’re singing the games with *kastom* music from those days. There are lots of them, which is why when I heard your wife was here, you know, we can all record the songs on their own on the keyboard, and when that’s done we’ll tell her to keep them. Because you know, we have to sing these songs using the *kastom* tunes, but when you hear them it’s ... *(T. It’s different)* it’s different. It means that when we play in the string band, yes, everyone enjoys it, but when we play *kastom* music, it’s ...
T. Yes, but what were you saying earlier? When you ... you said something in your language. Then when you were thinking how to translate it into Bislama, you said, “It came in a dream,” or something like that. When it was ... it was when they started water music that changed the character of water music, (S. Ah) a saying in your language that means something like “It came in a dream” or (S. Yes, yes) something like that when you translate it into Bislama.

S. Yes, it’s like what? Now you are seeing the same thing. Like music today, you see ... Like we Kwerkwer ??

T. That’s it. It means that for ... I’m not sure, it’s just an idea, but if ... like for her, for my wife, it’s not ... her music isn’t really a part of any custom or anything like that, it’s part of ... it’s part of her life. So, in one way it’s custom, but it’s not custom like kastom here that has its own dances, its objects, its way of doing things and so on. But when she ... we could say she’s creating music or composing music, she ... it’s not to say that she’s dreaming, but it’s something similar. So it’s a tool of the dream (S. The dream), connecting this machine with a computer or whatever. But it’s different. This doesn’t mean that the two should be linked, no, no, no, it’s just a tool, but like what you were saying about ours, which is kastom music, it’s similar. We ... There is ... So I’m doing my Ph.D. and then there are lots of people who write, because the white people are trying to understand exactly what this is. Like you say some people have questioned us saying we’re selling kastom. So us black people, white people, everyone is asking the same question. But it’s true, some of them are just ordinary people, people on the road, and they come and say, “No, he’s selling kastom,” and so on. But there are important people, wise people, white people with several Ph.D.s and so forth, and they’re asking the same question. There’s no answer to it. So ... it’s ... the answer is not to say, “No, I’m not selling kastom.” Because it’s true we’re working in one way to promote us (S. Promote), to develop us, to make us some money, some income, but we’re using kastom for it too. But if ... it doesn’t mean this is bad, because we know how to use it in ways, those ways we are using (S. Yes, those ways we are using). The result is people are going round and round in circles about it, they’re thinking about it, important people are doing it, unimportant people are doing it (S. They’re doing it), everyone is thinking around it. Because there is still no clear answer. But what we are doing is one answer, but people don’t understand it yet (S. Don’t understand). We just started in 2008 or whenever, we’ve just brought it out how many times, once, twice, three times and now. So if they don’t understand now, that’s their problem.

S. That’s their problem. That’s it. That’s why I said if you worship it as kastom, you’re worshipping it, you’re going to save it. Yes, we earn money from it, but money has to move on, that’s why I say money moves on its own pathway. (T. Yes) Everything that comes out of our roots over there, we have to give back, and then some more comes, we listen to ourselves, we take it back there, we bring it back here, and so it continues (T. Yes)

T. Yes, that’s true. It flows, and when you block it (S. Yes), you block it to restrict it (S. Restrict it), but then they’ll just damage us.

S. They’ll go inside and say, “Oh, MP, I voted for you, but afterwards?” And I say, “Afterwards, afterwards we’ll turn our backs on you, you’re still saying ‘afterwards’, but we’re leaving.” (Laughter) Yes, But to all this talk where they’re trying to get round us, I say, “You people wait for
the MP, we’re going over there first.” Like some time ago I asked for a letter from ... the chief who represents Merelava on the Council of Chiefs, but he’s just completely useless. I stayed two months on the island, and almost lost my temper with him. I said, “No, you should step down, you don’t understand anything.” (T. Oh, really) I said to him, “Uncle, I’m living on Santo but if I was staying here for a long time, I’d like us to have a talk.”

T. Is he from Gaua or from Merelava?

S. No, Merelava. He’s only just come down here. I told him, “You’ve got the rank, but it shouldn’t be you. You’re useless.” So then he was cross with me, I wrote him a letter – well not personally, but I asked one of my cousins to write the words that I dictated, for him to sign. “Just tell him, he has to sign it.” He took the letter to him, and he said, “No. I have to return to the island first. Go and tell my nephew that I’ll get back to the island first.” I said to Uncle, “That’s it, when you get back to the island dig a nice planting hole for a yam, dig a really big one ...” Like that he and the yam will both go in it at the same time (Laughter) and bury his brain along with him.

T. But he’s, what did you say? He represents us (S. Just Merelava) on Malvatumauri?

S. Yes, that’s right. It’s not .. you can’t really say that because you never get to that point. Merelava never gets that far. Because finding transport is difficult, so he’s just pottering about, that’s why I say we ... The only chief now who’s still recognised by everybody is with us in the village now. Even though he’s there today, but we have taken it from all round the island. Because they did something, because when I launched Leweton, the old man was staying with me on Santo. Then he was the one who released everything, we brought our special dance so that we could come down to Qwet (?), he was the one who handled it and that’s when they took off. So while we were doing all this, they were holding the election up on Merelava. So afterwards, right now we’re here, it’s like we’re floating, no one recognises him. (T. OK) Which meant that some time ago when the Police went to arrest him, I thought it was really funny ... (T. Uh? ) Yes.

T. Why?

S. Well that’s it. Because he doesn’t know how to speak up. When there’s a problem he doesn’t speak up. Afterwards I paid my respects to him and said, “Look, you’re the Chief. OK, I’ve written a letter, I’ve explained everything in the letter. Because you’ve got the title, you sign it here and your assistant should sign here.” When he said he had to go back to the island first, I told ?? “Ah! My friend, this is the last year that you plant a good quality yam, and when you’re planting the last one, you dig a really big hole and get inside it with the yam.”

T. Is there ... is there an MP on Merelava?

S. Dunstan.

T. Dunstan Hilton’s from Merelava? Oh dear!

S. The very same one.

T. OK. I know he’s from Banks but I didn’t realise he’s from Merelava.
S. It’s his real home island. We were both on the island at the time. We both travelled up there at the same time. (T. Truly) I landed on Gaua, he was on Gaua. Then I heard people say that he was going up there to give an awareness session and let everyone know what his views were on the next step in developing the airfield or ... Because at the time they were going to have a feast to celebrate the airfield. He went, and it’s true he spoke. His secretary or what, his political adviser or something, spoke and introduced everyone who was travelling with him. Then when he’d finished all that, the Minister spoke. Papa talked on, until when he’d finished, I heard the Chief shout, “Sandy! Get up there!” Then Papa gave his talk about ... I was sitting down too and ... excuse me, what’s this guy going to say now? I wanted to hear what he was going to say to the local people. I stayed there, people were talking; when he started on his talk, not an appropriate topic, I said to his supporters, “Look at that! I thought he was going to talk about what could be done to develop the island.” All I heard him saying was, “Now I’m working with the agencies in Australia to send 600 people down to Australia.” I went on listening and I said, “Oh! Now the old man is campaigning. It’s not the time to campaign, but he’s campaigning.” So then he was giving information about that place, about that work scheme. [inaudible] Now the Chief was sitting down and listening carefully, he went on listening carefully until ... Because that airfield, Leweton also helped with it. He went on talking and when he stopped, I just heard the Chief say, “Ah!” He told their MC, “We’ll call on Uncle”, he meant me, “to tell us what he’s brought. Because he’s new to us, he’s been away from here for a long time, so he’s come back to us like a new man.” Because it was us who’d flown there. But then, because that Chief is funny, and he knows how to speak up, but he was speaking seriously too. I was speaking, and I was trying to hide it, but he said, “You tell us, tell us how much money you’ve brought to give to the people who are round us (T. Laughs), the people who made the palm leaf thatch for Leweton Village. Tell us, tell us the amount!” I felt no, I felt I couldn’t tell them. He was saying to me, “Announce it, announce it [??].” I said, “Eh, no.” He said, “No, you must tell us, because you see, it’s something to tell our MP.” Because at the time the MP was sitting in his chair over there with all his officials and security officers and so on. So they went on forcing me, and I felt embarrassed for him. I said, “No, my heart is with us all, as an organisation, because of the way I I got a supporting letter from you all authorising me to do this. Under the existing Chief, Leweton is now a success, through you ... The request the Chief made about your thatch, I came and asked if I could get thatch from individual households, and then we would give money for this. So we’ve sent money down to us here, so that we can see, so that all of you can see the fruit of Leweton. But I find it hard to talk about the money, because there are so many people. And then, only some will receive it, because I divided it between the villages. So in this place, this village made it; what I’m just paying out now was made by another village. But now that they’re here, I’ve come with this amount, I can say it’s four hundred something thousand, I’ve come. The families made the leaf thatch I’d requested, they cut posts, wood, rope, everything, tied it up, and set the amount to be paid.” So then Papa got up, he was walking to the end of the airfield, he was leaving now with his delegation. They got up too and started to go. Then the Chief said, “You see! That’s fixed him! He was talking about something that’s nothing to do with us, but now you’ve come and you’re paying money!” (Laughter) I felt embarrassed for both of us. Then he said, “Look, this airfield, that the doctor flies to and delivers ...”

T. Where is this? Gaua?
S. No, Merelava.

T. Merelava? That means there’s an airfield on Merelava now?

S. Yes, a small one.

T. Just grass?

S. No, stone, surfaced with coral. Oh, hard work. Tom, if you saw it you wouldn’t believe it. I went and stood there and my tears were falling, sorry. I said, you know, people over there on Merelava are tough.

T. True, you say that, but earlier on we were joking saying they’re the Tannese of the North, but (S. Yes) it’s true, just manpower.

S. Manpower. When you think that for a stone the size of our whole window, they attached it with rope and then they sang *kastom* songs ... That pulled the stone along, they went and pulled it as far as right down over there.

T. Mm. I’ve seen that kind of thing on Ureparapara (S. That’s it) Huge stones that just aren’t supposed to (S. Be moved) be on top of a hill like that, but when you ask people, “Wow, how did that thing get up there?” But it’s not as though they’re all over the place like it’s just natural. You can see it’s a building, they’ve levelled it, they’ve put the stones side by side, people made it. But they’re poor. Afterwards I enquired, “The former people were big people, a?” They said, “No, that’s songs, *kastom*.”

S. Yes, songs, *kastom*, when they sing them. Yes, so then, Dunstan got up straight away and they left. I said, “Oh, now Papa will have a go at me.” Because he got a lot of advice from me. He asked me about lots of things. I could tell him about them, but the thing is he said yes, yes, and then afterwards ... I said I’d try and keep away from him for a bit. I laughed at the Chief too, because the Chief, wow... He said, “You see the airfield? When the doctor flew in here like this, he delivered crowbars, spades and all sorts of things, and Leweton also contributed to delivering tools for us to work with.” Oh, everyone was clapping all over the place. This isn’t a campaign, hey! (Laughter)

T. The Minister from Leweton!

S. Oh come on! While they were talking about it, I got down, because when I went there I’d taken my fishing line with me. I took my fishing line and said, ‘I’m off now,’’ and I called two young lads and said, “Take me somewhere, I’m going fishing now.” No, while I was there, all sorts of things were done by Leweton, and I found all this funny. Everyone was getting all excited about it or what. That’s Warren, the Chief, go!

T. Ah, Warren was on the island too at the time?

S. No. The Chief, the big Chief went, our High Chief from Merelava. He used to be the Paramount Chief. Yes, now they could put him up too, but they still need his assistants. Anyway he’s still around and he came to check on us at Leweton. He was the one who released us to come. The thing is, he’s someone who speaks out, so when we go back ... It’ll even go as far as our little girl,
the youngest of us, Teresa. Oh ... everyone will speak out. Because he’s there, he helps me a lot, he corrects me all the time.

T. The little girl?

S. No. The Chief.

S. When he’s in Santo, I feel I’m learning, that’s the thing, him and Martin.

T. Yes, yes. I was surprised Martin didn’t come. I wasn’t expecting him, but I just thought because he, I mean every time I go to the village, he’s the leader of the group, eh? (S. Yes) For performances.

S. He’s the Chief of that little community. Everyone recognises him, all of us.

T. Him and Judah, the two of them.

S. Yes, Judah, but now that Judah has only one leg.

T. But to start with, yes.

S. The two of them are in the direct chiefly line, those two. They haven’t been officially authorised yet but ... So for Martin, my other uncle, Jacob, an old man who’s been in Santo a long time, he’s been a chief for a very long time, he was Chief on the island, and then as far as ... Later he made an agreement with us and Uncle Martin, that they would both stay. But that’s the thing, I also thought he would be the one to come. (T. Mm) Then I heard it had changed again. When I went down, I really wanted to bring him with me, because he’s the only one I trust a lot, but they’d made the selection already.

T. So the selection is the outcome of ... what, an election? People campaign to go on tour? (Laughs)

S. No. Attendance and then performance. The thing is, when we’d already planned it all out, we’d taken the good names, then the others went to the island, saying they were going for Christmas, and then there was a wedding. That’s where they got stuck, really stuck. So that’s why they selected some people then but ... You can’t say it’s not good, they’re really doing their best. There’s no problem with the dancing, but with the string band I said I was a bit doubtful.

T. Mummy’s good, a? (S. Uh?) Mummy ...

S. Oh yes, the old lady ...

T. I, I ... she’s always there, I see her in the village each time (S. Yes), then she ... Sometimes you see her just provoking people, because (S. Mm) she’s old. That’s it, it’s the job of old people to criticise the young ones, but this time I see that she ... like she always does it, she takes it, she has ... like she can (S. Yes) criticise her sons, yes, but her behaviour’s good, a?

S. Oh yes, no, Mummy is ...

T. A true leader or what.
S. Yes, she’s really a true leader.

T. But I can see that right now, she’s really filling a big space (S. Mm), which she doesn’t normally do much, but I reckon that ... especially in the string band – the way she sings, the way she stands, the way she holds ... For example, the way she stands. When she stands up, you see that she’s really ... not an actor, because you don’t see her acting; with Warren you see that he’s an actor, but with her she’s behaving as though she’s really a musician or what. (S. Yes) She surprised me.

S. That’s why I kept telling Delly, “Don’t worry about Mummy. Mummy, us two, Mummy’s with the two of us. The situation now is that now we’re controlling our Mummy. Leave it, she’s our Mummy, but when the two of us come back to the house ...” I scold her now, because of her ways, because she’s really trying hard ... Then, I scolded her because ... yes, she was just standing there, her mind was blank, I guess, I got up and scolded her, I said, “Mummy!” When I went “Mummy!” like that, she turned round and said, “Hey everyone, what time is it?” When she called me, I took action, I said, “What time is it? Stand up, come on, clean up, tidy everything up, you’re the Mummy, come on!” as an example to the others; Mummy felt badly about it. Afterwards I told everyone, “No, my Mummy ... You see, I grew up with my grandparents, my grandfather. I came back, I love Mummy, I look after her, she’s got the same picture as me, but she speaks out until she gets hung up on some things. I want my Mummy to understand it all properly, then ...” (Pause) Yes, but that’s it, she’s got ideas about things to do ... Now Hilda is a woman that the two of us need to understand, she does things in her own way. But mine (my Mummy), Tom, I’m honest, she should have taken major rights, but she did nothing and the ceremony has already happened. But to join us, as I said, to play the part she plays ...to play her small part, to make a little kastom. But look at little Teresa, with her tiny hands, she takes the lead over Cecilia and Judah’s daughter. Oh, now I watch them carefully. That’s it, when they perform, that’s what Delly told me, “The next one will be the young people.” That’s what she told me. Then she named all of them, my real family. I said, “Oh, I haven’t seen it. You people just tell me and I’ll back them up.” She named them all, saying these are the ones who’ll go next time, on the next tour we get, if it happens at a time when they’re free, we’ll go. Because it starts with the dancing and goes as far as the water music. Maybe just the string band, like I was saying, we’re promoting music. This means I’ve got a picture in my mind. What I said to those two who were responsible for the string band when we came was, “I wish we could record what we’re seeing here now.” I haven’t given my thoughts yet. When we go and stand before the judgment, I’ll say, “When you’re grumbling about ...” I’ll turn around and say, “I see that, it’s true, we didn’t complete the ideas for which we travelled.” That’s going to be my secret until we’re standing up over there in the witness box.

T. Yes, I saw at the time, when did I see that ... It’s hard. One thing in favour of the defence, for us to stand in the witness box and provide people with some defence, is ... It’s hard, a, because when we’re standing in the village, in the nasara, or outside, then we dig the ground, put the wood, bang on it, afterwards when things run on it, the sound is different because it’s not really string band, it’s not really kastom (S. Yes), it doesn’t really join them together. It’s something that’s kind of new. The sound is fresh, it’s something new, it’s nice. But when we come here, (Pause, Turning off timer) Yes, we can’t dig the ground, we can’t do things the same way. Afterwards, it looks to me as though we want to go back to string band, just ordinary string band. Afterwards, that’s one way, it’s a way
that ... I know it’s hard, because we ... because you know, in ... Now with professional musicians they all have the same way. Their life is music. But for us, where life is life – food, dance, music, everything. Then ... It’s different (S. Mm), it’s hard. But this is where we must think, work towards it, to finding a pathway that ... it’s not for me to say this or that (S. Mm), but I just saw it, when I heard the string band in the village, when it beats on the ground, when everything comes together. It looked as though it wouldn’t work (S. Mm), but you people made it work. It’s different, because it’s not really string band; really it’s more kastom music, but it comes through the string band (S. Mm), but string band mixed with things ... This makes it ... I’ve never really heard anything like it (S. Uuh). But it’s really, really ... But when we come here, because it’s hard to (S. Yeah, it’s hard to dig the ground) make it the same, you have to choose whether it goes like this or like this, and it ends up more like string band (S. Mm). Then I saw that everyone was working well, and with ... like Mama when she’s singing, she sings very, very nicely, with the string band. So, so ... the situation is that it’s true for those of us who aren’t really musicians (S. Yes) it’s hard to tell the others what to do, but ... just on that one side (S. Mm) ...

S. No, on one side, like you’ve got this idea, I had this idea too, which is that these games, these songs, we can sing them as kastom games songs and in the way that we learnt these languages. Now we’re singing the songs. Later on when I was doing this, afterwards I kept asking, and then they said “Ah, these are just games, they’re not for ...” We’re working hard on some things so that we can complete them. And for this too, I have to be there. If I’m there or I’m not there, they won’t do it. We’ve picked up these sounds from lots of things. Don’t think it’s just the ones we’re using now. For example, we discussed, but they didn’t do it, we made a recording of a namele fruit, namele, yes (T. Uh?). Namele leaf (T. Ah, OK) , its fruit. But because it doesn’t fall straight down to the trunk, it falls and jumps a long way away ... When you go and look for it, you have to look quite a long way away. Because yesterday an American gave one to Anthony. He gave it or he bought it, I’m not sure, he said an old man gave it to him. But that one they blow like you blow a whistle, and that’s it. But the one we have, we spin. We spin it, spin it, spin it and then hold it tight. Then when it sings ... The music it makes is really colourful. So then we’re working hard at it yet to do it. Then we showed them the bamboo one. Like Fatuana Matua, we have this thing in the island, you beat it with a, what’s that, the branch of a palm, it’s not a palm but there are lots here. In the island there’s natanggura, sago palm, you peel its skin, the thin part. Then you cut bamboos of different lengths, and beat them. Those people beat bottles, they beat bamboos with flip flops, but normally they only beat four different bamboos. You cut the bamboo, there’s the place that blocks the hole, a long one, that’s the place we know, but the sound, the sound comes from the bottom. You beat on it, like the people at Floating Land, look, now we’ve come down here, but again I say, we should have done this in Santo. So I made one, Chief Warren knelt down and beat it. I said, “Goodness, you people have forgotten, but me I’ve got all these things stored in my mind.” I said, “Yes, You people go back, you must do this.” Because this “trouble bamboo”, the what’s it called [??] is here like this, but the bamboos should be one here, another there. If we don’t say they’re all four going to be in the same place, then we say one here, one there, and different people beat them. When we spear it, because the bass just comes in; that’s the game. Afterwards we spear it...
1. Edith Cecilia, 57

(My name is Edith Cecilia and I’m from the Banks Island of Meri Lava. I just live in the village, I don’t work, but my work is to perform in the village. One of these performances is water music. I really like water music – we play it. A woman taught us how to play – one of my sisters, her name is Hilda. She is the one that taught us water music. So I took it and learnt it to my children and grandchildren so that they too can learn and continue to play.

(My name is Edith Cecilia, 57)

Mi nem blong mi, Edith Cecilia. Mi mi kam lo Banks lo aelan blong meri lava. Lo wok blo mi we mi stap lo vilij... mi blo pleiplei olsem wota musik ol narafala pleple bakeken we i stap lo vilij. Mi mi lanem wota musik lo wan sista blo mi nomo, emi kamaot lo aelan blong gaua. mekem mi mi laekem music ia tumas so mi mas stap kwaet lo vilej blong lanem ol pikininio ol bubu blong continue blong holem pleple ia iko. Lo mi, olsem mi wan olfala woman oldest mama insaed long pleple blong mifala. So mi olsem se mi olfala be mi mi laekem pleple ia tumas, so mi stanap from pleple, deal ol pikinini o bubu i kajap olsem mi mi kajap. Hemia nomo.

My name is Edith Cecilia

My name is Edith Cecilia and I’m from the Banks Island of Meri Lava. I just live in the village, I don’t work, but my work is to perform in the village. One of these performances is water music. I really like water music – we play it. A woman taught us how to play – one of my sisters, her name is Hilda. She is the one that taught us water music. So I took it and learnt it to my children and grandchildren so that they too can learn and continue to play.

(MVI_4551)

Favorite singsing blong mi, ol singsing we i kamaot long kastom danis mo mi go wetem lo wota mi singem singsing ia lo music blo wota. Favorite singsing blong mi emi Wes Merin ????

My favourite songs are the songs which blend the traditional customary songs that normally accompany the dances, and we sing them with the water music. My favourite one is Wes Meren (Morning Star/Break of Dawn).

(MVI_4552)

Mi nem blo mi Edith Cecilia, mi mi kamaot lo Banks lo aelan blo Meri Lava.

My name is Edith Cecilia and I’m from Banks - the island of Meri Lava.

Mi mi stap lo vilej, wok blo mi mi mekem lo vilij nomo. Wok blo mi emi pleple... mi laekem tumas pleple.

My life and work is just in the village. My work is as a performer... I really like to perform.

So wan lo ol pleple ia emi wota music, and wota music mi lanem lo wan sista blo mi we emi kamaot lo aelan lo gaua.

One of these activities is the water music, and I learnt it from my sister who is from the Island of Gaua.
My name is Edith Cecilia and I’m from the Banks Island of Meri Lava. I just live in the village, I don’t work, but my work is to perform in the village. One of these performances is water music. I really like water music – we play it. A woman taught us how to play – one of my sisters, her name is Hilda. She is the one that taught us water music. So I took it and learnt it to my children and grandchildren so that they too can learn and continue to play.

So travelling blo mifala mifala i ko lo Malaysia blo mekem wota musik lo Malaysia. Lo bigfala festival we mifala sikis mama mifala representem ol Vanuatu. And mifala i kambak and second calling bakeken mifala kobak lo Australia. So mi mi glad tumas we mi olfala, mi no skul gud... be mi gat jans blo luk ples. So han blo mi nomo i mekem mi mi ko aotsaed. Thank yu.

So we travelled to Malaysia to play water music. It was at a big festival that the 6 of us
women represented Vanuatu. And when we came back there was another opportunity to go to Australia [to play]. So I’m so happy that even though I’m an elder and I’ve had poor schooling… I’ve had the chance to see other places. Thanks to my hands, I’ve been able to go outside of Vanuatu. Thank you.

2. Winnie Womal, 23

(MVI_4562)
Ok, mi nem blo mi Winnie, Winnie Womal, mi kamaot lo aelan blo Gaua. Mi gat 23 yias old mi bon lo 1989. Ok, mi wantem toktok smol lo saet blo wota music. Wota musik i kamaot lo vilej blo mi we mi kamaot lo hemi Tolav lo West Gaua.
So, mi i lanem wota musik i kamoat lo mami blo mi wetem ol anti blo mi. So wota music l bin kamaot nao lo mami blo mi mo ol anti blo mi nao oli stat blo sowemaot wota musik ia. So wota musik ia bifo i kam oli stap plei olsem emi wan gem blo solwota taem oli ko swim afa bifo oli swim oli mas pleiplei lo wota blo ronemaot ol fis, ol big fis oli ko aotsaed, then oli save swimswim lo solwota. So lo taem ia, taem mami blo mi mo ol anti blo mi oli kodaon lo solwota oli stat pleple/playem wota musik, lo taem ia i gat wan yacht i hang i stap lo basis blo mifala then waet man ia wetem waef blo hem tufala harema saon blo wota musik tufala karem bot blo tufala, tufala i padel i ko soa, tufala i _____ mami blo mi mo ol anti blo mi from wota musik ia then oli plei lo tufala. Since we Yacht i stap lo wei lo 1974, oli stat blo sowemaot wota musik ia i ko lo ol waet man, then olgeta nao oli ko oli talemaot i ko lo ol difdifren kantris, then tendi many yachts oli kam lo vilej blo mi lo lagona bay oli kam blo lukim wota musik.

Then mi glad tumas blo olssem, at this time mi proud tumas lo mami blo mi we hem nao emi mekem naioa wota musik hemi...hemi...olssem hemi stat blo popular naioa olssem mi glad tu we ol famele blo mi tu we naioa oli statem wan kastom vilej lo santo then mi proud ol famele blo mi we oli mekem nao kastom blo mifala ia hemi stap kamap naioa, olssem, naioa ol man oli ... ol waet man oli stap kam plante blo lukim wota musik ia. So mi mi proud tu we dis taem mi _____ las yia mi bin ko lo Australia lo perform lo wei lo wan art festival....

Translation (MVI_4562)

Ok, my name is Winnie, Winnie Womal. I come from Gaua Island. I am 23 years old – I was born in 1989. Ok I want to tell you a bit about our where our water music comes from. Our water music comes from the same village that I come from called Jōlap in West Gaua. So I learned the practice of water music from my mother and my aunts. So this new Leweton style of the water music came from my mother and my aunts. Before, it used to be like a game – a game that the women played in the ocean when they were at the beach swimming. For example, they would play the water games to scare away the fish so they could swim without worrying about big fish hassling them. So back then, there was one occasion when my mother and aunts were playing these kinds of games,
scaring away the fish, and there were some foreigners on a yacht who were anchored safely offshore. The foreigner and his wife heard the sound of the water games, so they got in their little dinghy and paddled to the shore where my mother and aunts were swimming. When my mother and aunts realized that the couple was interested in the sound of the water games, they performed it for an audience for the first time. Since that time in 1974 when the yacht came to Jōlap, they have been performing water music for foreigners in different countries, and it has become quite famous. These days we have lots of yachts that come to my village in Lagona Bay just to see the water music.

This makes me very proud of my mother because of how instrumental she was in making water music so popular that people on the other side of the world are interested in this story. And I am also pleased that my family have set up the cultural village in Santo. I am so proud of my family who have elevated our cultural and our customs so much that many, many people are coming to see us perform the water music. I am also proud too because this has created opportunities – like last year when I got to travel with the group to perform water music in Australia at a music festival.

(MVI_4564)

Ok so mi wantem tokabaot smol lo saet blo wota musik. Wota musik we fes wan i bin hemi kamaot lo mami blo mi metem ol anti blo mi lo 1974 taem oli stap ko pleple lo solwota. Ok, wota musik emi wan gem blo mifala nomo lo aelan blo Gaua olsem hemi wan pleple blo mifala i ko swim lo solwota, mifala ronem fis, ol bigfis oli kamaot and mifala save swimswhim.

Ok, since lo 1974 i bin gat wan yacht i stap lo basis blo mifala, then mami blo mi wetem ol anti blo mi oli go swimswhim oli stap ple lo wota musik blo oli stat blo ronemaaot ol fis then ol yacht ia wan yacht ia hemi harem noes blo wota musik oli go lo soa oli askem mami blo mi mo ol anti blo oli plei lo tufala then tufala nao i ko talemaot blo ol nara kantri se about wota musik.

Ok, so mi bin stat blo lanem wota musik ia i kamaot lo mami blo mi, taem mi kat 6 yias old mami blo mi i karemi i kodaon lo solwota i sta stat blo trenem han blo mi blo mi save muvum ol finga blo mi insaed lo solwota then mi lanem koko kasem tedei, mi olsem, naoia mi sta lo vilej ia hemi men wok blo mi hemi wota musik, mi help plante lo saet blo wota musik blo helpem ol mama lo vilej ia blo plei lo wota musik.

Ok, favorite singsing blo mi mo favorite beat blo wota musik we hemi favorite blo mi hemi tarnimbe. Ok, favorite singsing blo mi insaed lo wota musik ia hemi ________.
Hemi langwis blo mifala blo Gaua se olfala man hemi stap sidaon stap kilim kokonas.
Thank you.
My name is Winnie Womal. I come from Gaua Island from the village of Jōlap in West Gaua. I am 23 years old – I was born in 1989.

Ok I want to tell you a bit about our where our water music comes from. This new Leweton style of the water music was started by my mother and my aunts in 1974. Before, it used to be like a game – a game that the women of Gaua played in the ocean when they were at the beach swimming, scaring away the fish so they could swim safely.

In about 1974, there was one occasion where there were some foreigners on a yacht who were anchored safely offshore from our village as my mother and aunts were playing these kinds of games, scaring away the fish so they could swim. The foreigner and his wife on the yacht heard the sound of the water games, so they came ashore and asked my mother and aunts to perform the water music. When these two foreigners traveled to other countries they told people about the water music.

Ok, so I first learned the practice of water music from my mother and my aunts when I was 6 years old and my mother took me down to the sea to train my hands and show me how to move my fingers in the water. So over the years I practiced and practiced until today, so that now it is my main work in the village – I do a lot of work related to the water music with the women in the village to help them perform the water music.

Ok, my favourite song ... my favourite water music rhythm is Tarnimbe. And my favourite song accompanying the water music is Tamarga which is in one of our languages from Gaua and it is about the wisdom of an old man creating a beat on coconut shells.

3. Cecilia Lolonun, 42

(MVI_4574)

Mi nem blo mi Cecilia. Mi mi kam lo aelan blo Meri Lava we i stap long Northern island blo kantri we i stap lo Banks Torba Provens.

Mi mi stap lo komuniti yes mi gat smol job we mi stap wok but men wok blo mi we mi stap lo komuniti hemi komuniti wok. Mi interest tumas lo komuniti wok, and since taem mi grow up mi mi no grow up lo taon mi no grow up lo Santo mi mi grow up lo aelan blo Meri Lava be since mi grow up mi mi wan pikinini we mi laekem tumas kastom stori, mi laekem tumas blo singsing wetem ol olfala woman, blo singsing ol singsing blo bifo, ol kastom singsing.

Olssem, mi wan mama o mi wan... taem mi yangfala gel mi mi wan gel we evri taem
Thankyou, my name is Cecilia. I come from the island of Merelava in the northern islands of the country in the Banks group, TORBA Province.

Even though I sometimes take short term contract employment, my main work is in the community and that is really where my main focus is – on working with our community. I think this is because I didn’t grow up in town, I didn’t grow up in Santo, I grew up on the island of Merelava. As I grew up I loved hearing the traditional stories, I loved singing with the old women, singing all our old songs, our traditional songs.

For me now, as a woman – a mother ... well, when I was a young girl I was really happy. Wherever I was and whatever I was doing I was very happy growing up. My parents ... my father was involved a lot in customary cultural practices and so I think that’s where I
got my interest in it. So when I moved here I helped set up the community, our community here called Leweton. I am one of the founding members of the Leweton community. Its not like I just live here now or moved here after it was set up – no, I am one of the women who established this community. Even the name, Leweton, is something I brought to the community before it was even started.

And inside the community I have an important role. I am one of the women who teaches younger women skills such as weaving baskets, mats. And I am one of the women who leads the women’s dances and songs. Yes, and I also perform the water music, I’m a main member of the group anytime we perform the water music.

And it’s an interesting story for me because I never thought I would have these opportunities ... when I thought about the future as I was growing up until today ... now I have four children ... I never thought I would have the chance to travel to another country. But I am really curious about it all. I am interested in music – all kinds of music – but mainly I am interested in different indigenous women’s dances, and of course water music, that’s important to me. But it is really fascinating for me traveling to other countries – so many, many different things! Its so interesting .. I am so curious about this thing and that thing ...

So I was really pleased to have the chance to go on tour, twice, to other countries. I went to Malaysia – I never thought I would go there but I did. On the way back I went to Brisbane. And I went to Bellingen. I ... I ... for me ... I am really happy. I really enjoyed it each time. And that’s why I think that it’s my happiness that is taking me to these places. I don’t think I can say anymore than that but I am really pleased and the focus for me is on the traditional women’s dances and songs. For me to be involved, there has to be an element of traditional song and dance as that is my vocation.

That’s the end of my story.

4. Noel Vanya, 26

(MVI_4592)

Nem blo mi Noel. Fes samting we mi laekem tumas blo mekem, olsem, evri pleple mi laekem blo plei insaed be lo saet blo string band wetem danis, olsem se favorite pleple blo mi. Lo string band mi holem guitar, afta lo danis sam taem mi kilim tamtam o sam taem bae yu harem mi singaot insaed. Be mi blo Meri Lava mi live lo ples ia lo Santo lo Showground. Komuniti insaed lo Showground emi Leweton komuniti. Insaed lo komuniti ia, mi pat insaed lo komuniti, mi nao fes, olsem, mi nao lida blo ol boe, lo saet blo strong band, lo saet blo danis. I gat man we oli lida blo danis be taem oli aot olsem mekem se... mi stap ful taem lo ples ia... ale, mekem se olgeta nao oli putum se mi nae mi lida blo ol boe.
My name is Noel. The thing that I like most, I like being a part of all the performances, but the string band with the dancing would be my favourite. In the string band I play guitar, and I am also a dancer and a percussionist on the slit gong drum ... sometimes you can hear me singing too.

I am from Merelava but I live here in Santo in the Showground District. Our community – the Leweton community, is inside the Showground District. Inside our community, I am involved like a leader of the young men doing the string band and the dancing. There are other senior leaders, but sometimes they are busy with other things, which means that ... because I live here full time ... its like, it means that they appointed me the leader of the young men.

Regarding my parents, my father is, the same as me, a leader of the boys and the men for the traditional dances in the island. And Mummy, she is not really involved in the performances ... but Papa is, he is a leader of the dancing.

In answer to "What happened to your arm?" (bandaged forearm see MVI_4594)

This is from the slit gong drum ... from beating the drum ... beating the drum so much has made my arm really sore.

In my future, when the elders are no longer with us, I will carry on their work in future performances with all the children.
Evri wan mi singsing lem  evri wan nomo nao mi singsing lem.  
Be lo saet lo danis, olsem kastom danis blo mifala, favorite wan blo mi nao.

**String band?**
Lo saet lo string band mi no se... samtaem mi stap singem evri taem emi *Viti*. Olsen favorite singsing ia, i no favorite wan, be evri taem we mifala i praktis o pleple olbaot be mi mas tingbaot singsing ia.

***From wanem?***
From emia, emi wan pleple blo naet a. Olsen taem evri aftanun olsem ia, taem blo kakae, ale bae mifala i pleplei lo singsing ia nao, emi gat aksen l em we bae mifala i mekem, be evri aftanun taem olsem taem blo kakae wait lo kakae ale ol pikinini oli pleple l em. Taem oli mekem singsing ia, mekem se taem se string band olbaot o mifala praktis be mas tingbaot se mas singsing singsing ia nao.

**Translation (MVI_4597)**
In terms of a song, I don’t know, I don’t think I can say that I have a favourite song. But out of the dances, my favourite dances are the traditional ones. But in terms of songs ... I don’t really know what to tell you.
I sing them all – All of them, I sing them all the same!
But the dancing ... our traditional dances ... they are my favourite for sure.

**String band?**
Regarding the string band songs, I don’t know. I guess sometimes I find myself humming “Viti”. It doesn’t really mean its my favourite one, but whenever we are practicing or performing, I guess this is the song that I think about first.

Why is that?
It’s because it’s a song for the night. Like every afternoon like this, around dinner time, that’s when we play this song. It’s got actions that accompany the music and we perform the actions – every afternoon while we are waiting for dinner to be ready the children sing this song and perform the actions. When they sing this song, like when we have a string band performance somewhere, or we are practicing we always remember to sing this song.

**5. Thomas Vanva, 61**

(MVI_4598)
Thank yu tumas. Mi mi kam mi stap lo ples ia, afta mi lukim olsem danis mi stap tijim ol boe, mi lanem olgeta lo saet blo Namao ia nao. Be mi from mi laekem tumas from fiuja blo ol pikinini bae i kam o spos we mifala i brokdaon be ol pikinini blo mifala mifala lanem olgeta ____________ blo jenjem mifala.
So mi mi kam lo tufala saed, nara kastom danis mi no mekem. But mi mekem Namao nomo. So lo saet blo Namao, emia nao mi mekem, so... mi mi tijim ol pikinini olsem sapos we mi finis, olgeta oli save. So lo saet blo Namao, mi save talem se....lo saet blo Namao, mi no harem tijing blo hem be long save blo mi, mi mi luk se Namao emi wan danis blo devil ia. So wanem we mi tekem se wan danis blo devil from... spos we wan man i ded, wan man i ded be yu save mekem danis blo hem. Taem yumi berem em finis yumi haedem em finis be sem taem lo 5 dei o 10 dei olsem ia, bae yumi mekem danis blo hem. So emia mi tekem se danis ia danis i tru, mi mi ol man mi no stap mekem be danis emi blo devel. From emia nao. Mi talem olsemia from mi bin mekem wan taem. Mi bin mekem wan danis lo ded blo wan man. And man i _____ mi fogetem nomo se hamas dei bl em. Afta girap mi mi mekem danis from ded blo hem. Minim se emia spos we yumi mekem danis lo ded blo man, minim se danis ia hemi danis blo devel. but yumi ol man nomo yumi mekem, yumi mekem danis be yumi mekem folem emia nao, afta ol danis tu yumi mekem folem ol aksen blo Fiji...ah...fulap samting we yumi mekem danis folem aksen blo ol samting ia nao. So, ating mi no save stori long wan, from emia long save blong mi. Olsem, wan kasin ankel, wan...mi no kasin be ankel blo mi strem, emi ankel mo bubu, em nao i stap lanem mi lo taem ia we mi mi PAR PAR nomo, ale ankel blo mi i stap tekem mi i go insaed lo danis so mekem se mi mi save, mi save afta haonao bae mi save se danis ia emi blo wanem? be olsem, mi nomo mi tingting gogogogo, afta mi luk we emia we se taem we wan man i ded ale mekem danis from jif danis blo hem. So long lukluk se i no se devil be yumi man, be man we i ded. Afta long taem taem bifo i kam, oli mekem kaen ia nao, be natio olsem yumi kam Kristen, ale yumi jes mekem nao se ok natio bae yumi mekem danis ia, bae yumi mekem lo lafet blo mared, lo lafet blo bon pikinini o wan seremoni, ale bae yumi mekem danis ia. Emia natio tingting se mi luk se emia nomo, ah... natio olsem yumi kam Kristen nao yumi jes pulumaot lo devil ale yumi kam yumi serem lo yumi ol man bakeken. So emia nao, save blo mi ia nao, mi luk se emia nao emi kam olsem. So ating, tankyu tumas, ating bae mi stori sot wan nomo olsem folem save blo mi nomo.

(MVI_4598)

Thank you very much. After I came and settled here, I saw the dances and so I started teaching the young men, I taught them about the “Na Mag” [traditional dance for uninitiated young men/boys]. But for me I loved this, because its important for our children’s future, like if our culture is threatened, at least we have taught them ???

So I am here for a few reasons, but I am not doing the other traditional dances. I am only doing the Na Mag. So for the Na Mag, that’s the one I am doing, so ... I teach all the children so that, if I die, they will all be able to do it. So for the Na Mag, I can tell you that, for the Na Mag, I never heard anyone teach this, but in my opinion the Na Mag is a dance of the devil. So why do I think it’s a dance of the devil? Lets suppose that a man has died, a man has died so you perform the ceremonial dance for the death of this man.
When we have buried him then after a certain amount of days we will perform the next ceremonial dance for him. So for this, I take it that the dance is genuine, and us men are not doing the dancing, but the devil is dancing. That’s why. I say this because I did it once. I did this ceremonial dance for a man who died … ?? … I cant remember which ceremony it was but it was after we buried him, and I did the ceremonial dance. Which means that, if we are performing the dance ceremony for the death of a man, then the dance is for the devil. But its not just us the men/women who are doing it, we perform the dance but we dance following this thing, and then all the actions in these dances we do them following those of Fiji … ah … so many things that we do the dances following the actions of this thing. So I don’t think I can make this story too long, because I don’t know too much about this kind of thing. Its like, my distant uncle … no not distant, a close uncle, it was him who taught me when I was very young. So this uncle of mine took me to to the dance ceremonies so that’s how I learnt the dances … so I learnt the dances but how did I know what the dances meant? So it was like, I thought about it myself a lot, and after thinking about it a lot I noticed that this dance was a special dance – a funeral dance – that the chief would perform. So, from that perspective its not a devil … its us people, specifically the person who died. So in the past, they used to do it like that, but now we have become Christians we still do the same dance but we do it for marriage celebrations, birth celebrations, and for other ceremonies we perform this same dance. So that’s how I think its happening … now its like we are, through Chirstianity, we are taking this dance away from the devil and we are taking it back for people and sharing it together. So that is it … that’s what I reckon. That’s how I think its happened. So thank you very much, I think I will just leave my little story there, that’s pretty much what I know.

(MVI_4602)
Mi nem blong mi, Thomas Vanva, mi kam from aelan blo Meri Lava. Mi kam nomo nao, hemia nao mi kam stap lo ples ia lo Santo, tedei. Ok, lo saet blo danis, lo saet blo danis, emia nao, mi bin tren lo danis lo taem ia mi mi PARPAR nomo, ale wan ankel blo mami blo mi, em nao i stap tijim mi. Mi mi smol nomo ating mi olsem emia, ale em stap tekem mi finis, tekem mi mi ko mi stapfolem em blo danis, koko taem se mi bigwan

My name is Thomas Vanva, I come from the island of Merelava. I have just come now, that’s it, I have come here and now I am staying in Santo. Ok in terms of the dancing, regarding the dancing, that’s it, I have been training since I was little and my maternal uncle and my mother they both taught me. I was very young, I think I was only about this big, and they would take me with them so I could follow them in the dancing … until I became an adult.

6. Leah Wari, 77
Translation

In my life I have always been glad for the opportunity to work. Doing this kind of work I never get sick, because I am good at this stuff, but it's up to ourselves to take care of ourselves, our actions every day of our life.

7. Martin Frazer, 54

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Interview 6 – Leah Wari

Interviewers: OK smile.
[crying baby]
Leah: Me, my name is Leah. My life in this world is [inaudible]. When she was alive my mother taught me: to weave – things like baskets; to work … in the garden; to prepare food for the whole family; how to take care of and raise my children. I have lived a long life and I have worked with whatever gifts God has given to me. I am fortunate to have been healthy all my life and so I have worked all my life. God has taken care of me - every day in my life. My mother is dead – I prepared her body for burial myself. I raised all my children and now they all have their own children. And now they are looking after their own children. I am still with my husband – he is still alive as well – and I think this daily work that has blessed us with such a long life. That’s how it is, we always stay active: working … in the garden, keeping the house, the kitchen, and yard clean, you don’t want your village to be untidy. If you live in a clean and tidy place, then you can be happy.

In my life I have been in this world … I think … I am 77 years old, this year. Thank you very much. God is good and he has blessed me with a long life in this world. So that’s all. Thank you very much for letting me share my story with you … that’s my life. You cant just laze around doing nothing, you have to be active … that’s why I have a body strong enough to achieve what I wanted. So that’s it – I’m just saying … there is a lot more I could say … but this is just a short story for you. Thank you.

Interviewers: What favourite. Thing. Favourite. [trying to speak Bislama]. What is the favourite thing you want to do? What is the favourite thing you want to do?
Leah: Now – you mean, like … every day?
Interviewers: Favourite thing.
Leah: No its like … but…
Interviewers: Weaving … do you like …
Leah: Yes that’s it. Every day I just like weaving all the time. Baskets, for walking around with, or for carrying food inside … I can make any kind of basket. I can use this one, you see this leaf … and coconut leaves, I can make a basket from them, or a mat for sleeping on or sitting on, I know a lot about weaving. Hehe … because I am old and my mother taught me, I have knowledge and experience.

Interviewers: Do you want it? Little speak? And basket.
Leah: [whispering] I don’t think so, I am going to go over there and get some tasty food for you and bring it over here for you. Then tomorrow I will come back.

Interview 7 – Martin Frazer

Interviewers: [preparing Martin for the interview]

Martin: So you want me to talk about …?
Interviewers: Work.
Martin: Work … ok.
Interviewers: What’s your role … what do you do?
Martin: OK inside the village? OK
Interviewers: Any story that you would like to tell.
Martin: Mm Ok
Interviewers: Favourite song … Perhaps some of the songs or dances have a particular meaning for you that moves you/touches your heart? Something like this. Anything, really! Yeah, ok.
Martin: OK. My name is Martin Frazer. I am from Merelava. When I first came to Santo, I worked in a Chinese store for a long time. Then in two thousand … maybe 2006 – about then – I resigned from the Chinese store … and we got this thing going … we set up the kastom village and so I was recruiting the people who could perform different elements of the activities. While I was doing this, it gave me a different perspective on the work of leadership in community: taking care of people, a nurturing a sense of unity, and harmony … to ensure that everything is right and respectable. So in my view, it is really great that we set up the kastom village. It is really good. I see the evidence of it because it is helping all of us. Every one of us in the community is benefiting from it. So that’s why I say that the way we have set up this project is really wonderful. It makes us all really happy to live here inside this community.
Interviewers: Ok
[sound of water music]
Martin: [vernacular language]
[sound of water music]
Martin: [asking the interviewers] About me now? Inside the village?
Interviewers: Mm
Martin: My interest in being a part of the village …. Because we first set up this project as a tourism enterprise, and it made me really happy because of the opportunities to travel to perform our kastom dances in the rural areas and to some small islands – [which have tourist resorts] like Aore and Ratua – it is really good because through these performances we demonstrate our pride in our culture … it comes straight from the heart. And that’s why I am really glad to be a part of the kastom village and to go to all these
different places to perform our kastom dances. Even though it’s not perfect, we are still really proud of it. And me personally, I love demonstrating our culture in these performances for other people to see. Thank you.

**Interview 8 – Vicky Lerry**

Ok my name is Vicky. I am 17 years old. My father’s name is James. My mother’s name is Melodie. Like I said before, I live here and I learned water music from two of my aunties. So we used to just play around, but it was hard trying to understand how to perform the water music properly. So my two aunties taught me to perform … I am really into it now. So now, I teach my little sisters, I am training them so we can start our own water music group. That’s all.

Interviewer: Do you have a favourite song or dance – perhaps one that has a special meaning for you?

My favourite dance is the women’s traditional dance. And I really like the traditional music.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Well, it’s like I grew up with my grand parents, and the two of them grew up playing kastom music. So they taught it to me. So that’s why I am interested in kastom music and dance.

Ok my name is Vicky. I am 17 years old. My father’s name is James. My mother’s name is Melodie. I have lived here for a fair while – for two years I have been in Santo and I have been playing water music since last year. So this year at the start of the year I have been performing water music. I learned water music from my aunty Winnie[?] … and her daughter … they taught me how to train my fingers to make the different sounds come out. So now I am teaching my little sisters to perform as well so we can start our own water music group. I have seen some of the others traveling overseas, and this has inspired me to get more involved in the water music because I would like to travel too. For me being in the Leweton village, it has really heightened my interest in kastom dance – I don’t really get in to other kinds of music too much, but I really like kastom dance.

[sound of playback from a different device]

**Interview 10**

Young girl: This is a kastom [“traditional”] story. Shall I tell it to you?
There is a man down there who lives [inaudible - name of place]. He is a very old man. He is in the kitchen.

He is … he says … he is calling out for … because the at this time some people were still practicing cannibalism … he is … there is one of these cannibals … and he is out in the garden tending to his vegetables.

The old man he calls out like this “Taaa-So … inaudible/vernacular language… Taaa-So” [this is the same sound you can hear in the sequence with the men in the warrior sequence]. The wife of the old man comes running and say “What’s the matter?”. He says, “come on, we should go down there”. So they go back down … they go back down, and then …

Laughter/music

Interviewer: And then?

Young girl: And then, their youngest child shoots them [presumably with a bow and arrow], another one shoots them. And then the youngest one shoots again, and then … and then … the other shoots again. After a while, the cannibal dies. After that, they go up to the garden and they kill the old man too. And that’s it.

Laughter

Interviewer: Aah, so that’s a kastom story of Das [not sure what Das is]?

Young girl: Yes

Interviewer: Who told you this story?

Young girl: It was her, that one over there. The one who is tying up the …

Interviewer: Gloria?

Young girl: Yeah. She told me and so I came and told it to you. She knows lots of kastom stories – about snakes … [etc]

Interviewer: She knows them all, huh?

Young girl: Shall I tell you another one? This is one is about a snake. The snake had a really long tail – so long it reached all the way to the nakamal [meeting house]. So, one day the snake asked a little boy, “You go and tell the princess [?] that I want to use [?] a little boy”. So the boy he … he went … he went … he … and then the little girl [inaudible] … and she says to the boy, “Ok lets go”. So the two of them went down there … And the snake tried to go [inaudible] … And one of them was walking in front of the other. So they go on and eventually they kill the snake. So then the boy and the girl called
out for their dog to come. So the dog came and ate the snake. Then … after a while … they went hunting for birds. They got some birds and came back and they saw another snake – a very small baby snake. They killed the snake and called their dog to come and eat the snake and that’s it.

Warren Salathiel, 52
“Leweton is set up - there’s a start, there’s a finish. The finish is the song. The start is the craft. You can feel it straight away. So, yah, that’s how it’s put together. It’s all about the song that they put together for you. That’s the story I put together.

It’s a ladies performance. The ladies do all this water drumming. The role that I play in it, as a man, is in the naming of things in our language. We call it êtêtung (water music) and it is important to give it the right name because there are lots words and lots of meanings in these words. I didn’t learn the water music but when I look at the name of the language and the sound, it’s a big story, you know.”

KG - Is there a water origin myth - a story? of your island?

“Yeah, like I said, it’s a story telling thing. When we collect water from the creek, there’s a - how you say - a god or something about the water. Its really about the connections to our ancestors. So the words in the songs have a kind of poetry and a kind of spirituality. Its like the way that when you read the English language from the time of Shakespeare it sounds like a different language but you can still understand it. Our songs and stories have language like that too – so its difficult for me to explain how the words, the meanings, and the use of them all intersect in relation to mythology/spirituality, etc. We normally think about this in terms of our connection to our ancestors. For example, when you go there and see something in the water it means that you are recognising something in the water. It’s something. It’s the name of a real thing. It’s a real thing that you see. But the connection to the ancestor is also the real thing that kind of brings it into being, Êtêtung is the name we give to the water music and this relates back to him/her (ancestors/god/Qat). That’s a story that picks this up.”

KG - Yes, we heard about the song to bring rain and how it really does bring rain!

“That’s it there you go!

It’s very interesting that you pick it up really easily, but it meaningful in that it’s a song. Now people are starting to ignore things like this, not believing in customs (traditional values) - the church and the education system from outside has come in... But it’s real. The song that I told you the story about with the two kids playing - they're singing this song and they let go the water and release the water running and it’s calling for the rain to come. Yeah, it’s really meaningful to us the way that we sing a song. A song is not just a song. So every single word that is mentioned in the singing of the song is telling something – about this leaf, explaining that leaf/flower, etc talking to this one - talking to that one explaining the connections between these things and the rain.

KG - When did you learn Bislama?

For myself, I moved from the [Merelava] island 1971. I moved into Santo just before the independence. I go to school there and start to learn my english. It was not nice to speak in pidgin back then (Sandy is referencing the fact that teachers would whip students for speaking in Bislama at this time). I learnt from the 1980s when I picked it up really good - start speaking in the kindergarten. I just practiced my Bislama. // massive truck sound //

KG - How important does climate change feel to you?

Well, climate change to me is like... you know, in 2000 and something all these stories blew up. Back in the day of my old stories - what happens when things have been good everywhere and people have been moving around talking different languages - and for me I believe climate change starts with humans. When they disrespect the culture, they disrespect the language, they turn away from the importance of the meaning of the language. So you could say that climate change
starts from there. That’s the cause of the whole thing. I’m not afraid to say that. Climate change starts from the human. So this is part of the reason behind why I have started the Leweton village. So say, if I (for example, … “I” here means “someone/anyone”) change my island and go to a different island I’ve changed my whole story of my environment and belief. And if I look at things on this island - instead of planting more trees, I’m cutting them down. I’m making new things out of the trees: I disrespect the interdependence/balance. The more we do it, the more we cause the climate change. Could be in the ocean as well. *Its kind of in response to these kinds of issues that have informed our decision behind the establishment of the Leweton village….its part of keeping everything in harmony* (Can’t hear this )

KG question to Tom —– I understood this as : the route of the climate crisis is linked to forgetting the truth of words – yes, or as Sandy says. “the importance of the meaning” of the words, the stories, the place of nature? Yes the harmony/balance/interconnectedness of these things. And this happens when you arrive in a new place and are uprooted from knowing the sacred nature of the life forms in the new place and then acting in a way that seeks to utilise resources rather than respect the natural cycle ie. not looking at conserving the continuance of the life but for what I can gain. Is this a correct reading? I can’t hear the Australia point. Yes I think you are interpreting this ok. He doesn’t say Australia at all. Right at the end he says “…like if the climate change comes to hit big.” Together, Sandy and I reworded this as simply “keeping everything in harmony (so as to avoid the negative impacts of climate change”).

KG - If you think of a future that you would like to live in - where the language was respected, where people said what they meant - can you describe what you would like to happen in Santo and on the islands.

I think everything like…. after setting up all this stuff like Leweton …like I say, it’s a beginning of a story where things have been changed (viz. the changes he mentions in the previous paragraph ie people moving from one island to another – in particular, in response to colonization and other related issues). One example of this is Bislama – it is a strange language (that is a result of the coming together of Europeans and indigenous people of the place). It’s like the beginning of the show (the performance in the village). We’ve got the warrior dance. We try and challenge (we don’t know what the exact word he uses – but it’s a re-enactment of contact stories between islanders and Europeans) the Europeans – to come inside the village because originally, they were kidnapping the islanders to work on the sugar cane plantations. That’s the thing that’s going to be changing. When they shift in coming … it’s a story, right. And this is going to be the thing that changes climate change when I look at all the stories.

TOM – the point above is the connection between climate change and the colonial practices such as blackbirding and slavery and other forced migration …

Now, it comes to a time when Tom stepped in and helped me out. The thing that I’m looking at that we can change by doing … me and Tom are working on .. DVDs, tourism attractions, … all sorts of things. Just a message to tell them - this is the value of the culture, this is the value of these trees, the leaves, the kava. These are the things - *if we can not respect this - we keep breaking up the climate change and we’ll loose heaps of the environment.*

So what we just spoke about before when we were sitting down here. By creating about these … - it’s a message. If we make money out of it then the money has to go into something else and create more. That’s the only thing I’m interested in: generating that knowledge to meet whatever we’re working on. That’s my aim. That’s where my **base** is.

KG - Sharing knowledge and creating value and remembering this relationship with the world?

Sandy nods.
TM_ What’s the name of the god in … (Banks) … “Qat”?

Qat. Qat is in the islands of the Banks. We have the original dance. Which is how we pay respect back to him. Qat. Qat is a lot. Meaning everything. Qat is the ocean, Qat is the water, Qat is the environment: all under this umbrella. That’s what I get when I look at the stories. Some times people make up something, but then when you look at the word that you say, it doesn’t match that name (meaning). That’s why I’m going to make some more recording. That’s why I’m working with Leah, it’s really important to record this person, to record that person. Because that god of our island - it’s the god called Qat. It’s an umbrella connecting/belonging to the people of the Banks. To protect our own environment and resources of the home island. They display this dance - on our head (with headdresses), on our body, on our dress (costumes) - it’s telling you - no no, the beauty, the value, it’s all displayed, the language, the singing, the movement, yeah.

KG I feel like there is a big hunger for that kind of knowledge and that there are new ways of expressing this kind of knowledge.

TG This is something that we found in the Paris climate talks that we went to, not that I have been to those talks before, but that I have heard about what happened. What was interesting to me was the level of recognition of indigenous perspectives because basically every indigenous tribe that is living to its own ways is an example of a sustainable culture. That's clearly something we need to learn about given that ours is not sustainable at all. So yes, I agree there’s a hunger - or at least a turning of opinion - from “there’s nothing we can learn from indigenous cultures” to “we absolutely need to learn all we can”. Are you experiencing that?

“Yes. The talk that I am doing at Griffith with you (Toby) and Leah on the 6th of April is going to be a chance to explore that. I really want that. To put a message out there. I go that feeling about what I’m doing that it’s really important. That’s why I just do it – with Leah and Tom and Miranda – that’s why I do it the right way going around and paying respect to the chiefs, etc following the right processes that maintain the value and sharing what I am doing. I’m going to tell the story of what I’m doing. I want this thing to be. And I want the chiefs to understand and approve. And I want it to be passed on.

As long as it is the right story. It’s really important. I don’t want to start creating another wrong/false story. These things that are popping up in this world now. Everybody has got their own culture. In person we have different beliefs and different practices. But its all related to one thing (its all connected/contingent/relational). When we start talking around like this we always come to a solution - one thing - that we’re looking for. Now you come in - and I’m thankful for this.

KG It feels like any activities organised to tell these stories have to originate from the community.

One thing I noticed in Paris was that there was this big indigenous protest to begin the day on the 12th December outside Notre Dame - people from New Zealand, South America, Europe, Alaska - people connecting and understanding each other through their differences and standing together and that was a really positive thing. There was a strength in that that I’d like to make more visible.

After this interview Tom, Sandy, Toby, my daughter and me headed in to the museum to see the Yumi Danis exhibition at APT.

We spoke a bit more about where the collaborations and creative initiatives were heading. Sandy told me of travelling to the Banks islands to interview people with kit provided by Leah - and plunging into the ancient knowledge and sharing it so that people could hear it. We talked about numbers and their meanings it brought to mind Apela’s interview with Hale Makua.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liDIYA8hrZw I shared some of the work that I’d been doing for Apela at WISN http://www.wisn.org/

We also spoke about the link between dreams and water, that the living waters rise through all of our sleeping minds. This incredible dream that Sandy had about going into the water and it coming down on him and then after this dream, the next time he went into the sea, bumping his head badly. He had a scar on his head as a reminder! I remembered my own dreams of falling in the jungle as a teenager, which was then followed by falling in the Amazon when I was 18 and the sense that I did not have those vertiginous falling dreams again. We shared the sense that all was alive in a fluid interconnectivity - precognition of events that later occur flowing in mysterious ways though the streams of waking and sleeping. And the possibility opened that when the connection to one’s own cultural old stories had been lost, that storied bubbled deep in our biology and DNA and threaded through our experience.