

## 2. The Research Context in New Hebrides-Vanuatu

Robert Tonkinson

When I began fieldwork in the New Hebrides in 1966–67, late in the colonial period, conditions for research were benign. As is well known, an incompatibility between British and French foreign policies with respect to just about every facet of colonial administration had inevitably given rise to a distinctly *laissez-faire* approach to joint governance, which came to characterise the archipelago beyond the main towns and large centres of plantation activity. The hands that guided research in the Group, at least back then and in the run-up to Independence, were similarly light in their touch—perhaps because the influx of researchers was so small. There was a long hiatus separating the early twentieth-century anthropological pioneers (Speiser, Deacon, Harrisson, Layard, and others) from the post-WW2 era, which began with the commissioned research of Jean Guiart, then Americans Robert and Barbara Lane, who were followed by Michael Allen.

My paper is necessarily some what personal and anecdotal, since it is based heavily on memory, supplemented by what my correspondence and notebooks suggest about the political context of research back in the colonial era. Almost half of my 30-something visits since then have entailed some fieldwork, but in relation to the post-independence era, many other researchers are better placed to comment on research administration in Vanuatu. From personal experience they can attest to the signal importance of the Cultural Centre in transforming the research context. Formerly characterised by individualism and virtual autonomy, it is now one of fruitful collaboration and cooperation between overseas researchers and ni-Vanuatu, directed towards the achievement of a more satisfactory balance of the ‘purely academic’ with national interests and priorities.

In 1980, having attended the independence celebrations in Vila as one of two Australian National University (ANU) representatives, I came away greatly impressed by the manner in which the symbology of this great occasion demonstrated and affirmed for all ni-Vanuatu (and the world at large) a crucial message: that although *kastom* had been elevated to be an integral element of national unity, only those components of it deemed ethically and morally congenial to mainstream Christianity would be supported; in other words, sorcery, revenge killing, spouse-beating and so on were excluded (Tonkinson 1982a, 1982b, 2004a). Creative tension and negotiation would inevitably persist as the new nation dealt with the ambiguities and blurred edges of ‘good’ and

'bad' *kastom*, and so the need for a home-based anthropological presence struck me as compelling. With this imperative in mind, I wrote informally to an old friend, Donald Kalpokas, making a case for the training of some ni-Vanuatu anthropologists and requesting that his government consider sending students to ANU. He agreed with the sentiment, but couched his reply in terms of more pressing priorities facing a newly independent nation, understandably favouring the training of lawyers, accountants and doctors.

This was, of course, before the moratorium on overseas academic researchers was decreed, not long after independence. I suspect that we researchers had all anticipated some flexing of the muscles of autonomy and anti-imperialism on the part of youthful, newly independent nations such as Vanuatu, but the severity and the longevity of the ban came both as a surprise and a great disappointment. Thanks to tourist visas, however, it was still possible for researchers to come back to the islands and keep abreast of developments among those local peoples with whom they had worked. As practitioners of the 'extended case method', those fieldworkers who made frequent returns to Vanuatu possessed language skills and a strong knowledge base that had been forged pre-independence. We enjoyed close ties to 'our' people, so we were able to gain much from these brief visits, over and above reaffirmations of mutual attachment and on-going commitment to our friends-become-kin. Years later, having moved to Perth, I was delighted to hear that Ralph Regenvanu was studying anthropology at ANU, and we all know the rest of that story, notably the subsequent renaissance of anthropological research in Vanuatu.

In 1966, I was recruited from the University of Western Australia to join a large research project involving ten studies of displaced communities in the Pacific, aimed ultimately at enhancing our understanding of social change processes.<sup>1</sup> The project director was a famous US anthropologist, Homer Barnett.<sup>2</sup> He wrote to the British administration here asking permission for me to do research on Epi among recently relocated villagers from Lopevi Island after its volcano erupted and forced them out.

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1 Research Assistants were given two year appointments, with a generous salary, airfares and expenses. After a year or so of field research, the appointee would be expected to spend the second year in residence at the University of Oregon, writing up the results as a monograph. This meant not only a guaranteed book-length publication but also the freedom to use one's data for a higher degree. Ron Crocombe told me that he urged Professor Barnett to advertise for researchers in Australasia because, at that time, Barnett was having difficulty recruiting suitable fieldworkers in North America! Those were indeed the heady days of the prosperous sixties.

2 In 1953, Barnett, a distinguished scholar, published *Innovation*; adopting an 'ideational' or 'mentalistic' approach, he made a major contribution to theories to culture change. See Lieber, ed. 1977 for an assessment of the Barnett project's objectives and outcomes.

The quote that follows is from a handwritten P.S. on a letter dated 22 February 1966 from Keith Woodward, the Assistant Secretary for District Affairs, British Residency, Vila, to Barnett.

I am sorry about the delay [in getting permission for me to undertake fieldwork in 1966–67] but your omission to write to both Resident Commissioners has caused some difficulty with the French Residency which is very sensitive about these matters and has in effect declined to take cognisance of your proposal since it was not addressed at the same time as we were. You were not to know this but it is one of the facts of life in the Condominium.

Not knowing, for example, that a major diplomatic flap had once supposedly transpired in Vila from allegations that one nation's flag was flying centimetres higher than the other's outside a Condominium building, my American boss could perhaps be forgiven for the mistake he made in not writing simultaneously to both colonial authorities. Eventually, after Professor Barnett had done as directed, a response, co-signed by both Resident Commissioners (31 March 1966) declared that they 'had no objection' to my project. While leaving the choice of field site to Professor Barnett, they put a strong case for an alternative research location: the village of Maat, on Efate, which had been established by south-east Ambrymese people some 15 years previously. They noted also that the villagers' subsequent purchase of adjoining land suggested an intention to remain there. Not only would the Maat study yield valuable data on rural to peri-urban adaptation, the authorities suggested, but it would also be a useful complement to a socio-geographical study of Vila and its hinterland undertaken the previous year by two Australian National University researchers, Harold Brookfield and Paula Brown (Brookfield and Brown Glick, 1969).

Such talk of benefit was a clear indication that the colonial authorities saw potential value in anthropological research. Since both the Maat people and their village's whereabouts were secondary to the fact of relocation, Barnett was happy to go along with the Maat, Efate, suggestion—and so was I. I had already endured, over a three-year period in Australian's forbidding Western Desert, the trials of remoteness, fundamentalist Christian missionaries, extremes of climate and luxury-free conditions. I was really ready for peri-urban propinquity and all that it promised, including early morning baguette deliveries to Maat village by an excellent Vietnamese baker.

This being the colonial era, permission to undertake research never hinged on a prior approach to the people among whom one intended to study, either back in Western Australia, where I had commenced Honours fieldwork in 1962, or in the New Hebrides. I do not recall receiving any instruction regarding rules or protocols governing the proper conduct of research, or any listing of obligations

and responsibilities, especially towards the people among whom I would be living and working. As far as I know, neither British nor French officials had even informed the villagers at Maat that a European would soon arrive in their midst with a request to invade their domain. This was not surprising, since the French never (and the British rarely) ever visited the place, and professed to know next to nothing about it.<sup>3</sup>

In July, 1966, I sailed from Sydney on the Messageries Maritimes copra-cum-passenger ship, the *Tahitien*, to Vila via Santo. Once anchored in the harbour, we were put ashore by lighter, but because it was a Saturday and the British Residency offices were closed I was unable to locate any officials to let them know that I had decided to continue to Noumea to do some research in the South Pacific Commission's library and archives, and would return to Vila from there in about a week. This no-show vexed the British, as I subsequently learned when I was dressed down about it. Happily, Professor Barnett's gaffe with the letter of application did not put me offside with the French officials, who were amenable and offered me access to files on Maat. This generosity proved fruitless, however, as they failed to locate any, and there probably were none, since the Maat people, as Anglophones, were not their concern. The British made the same offer, but the crucial files on the relocation to Maat and its aftermath were by then in the Pacific Archives in Suva, so I spent a week working on relevant New Hebrides materials while en route to the U.S. in 1967.

It was clear that, since I was a British subject, the British side would be in charge of me, and they kindly installed me in the transit house in the British Paddock (now Independence Park).<sup>4</sup> Once I was settled at Maat, and the villagers had grasped what I needed to learn from them, they were enormously helpful, and data on the variables affecting their relocation poured in. The following year, when it came time for the Ambrym segment of my research, Elders Maxi Solomon and Yonah Taso Vovaen, two of the most respected and knowledgeable southeast Ambrymese leaders, escorted me and rendered invaluable assistance with my enquiries into remaining elements of *kastom* there. The British gave us a lift north in one of their vessels, and I was able to reciprocate by letting them persuade me to take charge of the census exercise in Southeast Ambrym, so I ended up doing my bit for Empire.

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3 While going through old papers recently, I discovered that my 'Permit to Enter and Reside in the New Hebrides' required the University of Oregon to lodge a 'security bond' (amount not specified) on my behalf. I have no idea whose security was being thus guaranteed.

4 The legendary Keith Woodward, an invaluable friend to all researchers, was a great help and a fount of local knowledge, as was Tessa Franklin (later Fowler), who had assisted with an economic survey carried out in the early 1960s.



**Figure 2.1. Elder Maxi Solomon with some of his family at Maat Efate; he was a major force for change in both Southeast Ambrym and the relocated village of Maat**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

Someone back in Australia had told me that, once I'd signed the visitors' book at the British Residency, I would eventually receive an invitation to a Residency occasion, so I should take some formal wear to New Hebrides, which I did. Then it was my turn to be vexed when no such invitation was forthcoming, especially since the then British Resident Commissioner, New Zealander Colin Allan, had a research-based Master's in anthropology, on Solomon Islands land tenure, and would surely be genuinely interested in the relocation research and would therefore wish to be apprised of my progress. Alas, there was just the initial interview-welcome in his office, and then a year later I was summoned for an equally brief and formal exit-interview, with no cocktail party invitations to the Residency that would have given me the chance to don formal wear.

Ironically, it was the French Residency, initially offended by Professor Barnett's oversight, which came to the rescue. Perhaps the fact that one of my dancing partners at local balls was a daughter of the French Resident Commissioner may have had something to do with my invitations to dine at the Residency; from this remove, I cannot recall. However, I clearly remember the day the Mouradians made a visit to Maat, turning up unannounced to say hello and to ask if I would show them around the village. This was probably the first and only time any senior colonial official had set foot there, so the locals were

shocked, and more than a little perturbed at first. Our esteemed visitors spent an hour or so (happily, as far as I could discern) negotiating the muddy paths and chatting with the villagers, while I bent their ears about both administrations' neglect of Maat, and answered questions about how the research was going. M. Mouradian, reputedly a noted historian and scholar, was certainly a gentleman and a great host, even if, as we've since learned, he was heeding President de Gaulle's instruction to oppose any moves towards independence (Van Trease 1995: 15–18).



**Figure 2.2. Colonial Vila: awaiting the arrival of General De Gaulle at the French War Memorial, 1966**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

Two years later, the Ambrymese relocation monograph had been published and copies were sent to both administrations and to the Maat people and other interested parties. I was a visiting lecturer for a year at the University of Oregon, and by then had made the decision to enrol for my doctorate at the University of British Columbia. Since my intention was to base my thesis on Aboriginal material, I was planning a return to Australia for further fieldwork, but with a stopover in New Hebrides en route, for more research there as well. Much to my surprise, a handwritten congratulatory letter arrived from the British Resident Commissioner, concerning the Maat monograph, which he had just read. I responded, thanking him for the kind remarks and announcing my imminent return to Vila.<sup>5</sup> He replied, saying that his Administration was embarrassed by

<sup>5</sup> There were many issues deserving of further research, especially the ambiguities inherent in being identified with both homeland and relocated village (Tonkinson 1977, 1979), and the issues of identity that would be central as long as the Maat people remained in Efate (Tonkinson 1985).

what I'd written about the gross neglect of Maat by the colonial authorities, and would welcome my advice as to how best to assist the village. The long-awaited invitation to the British Residency did ensue after I returned that year (1969); but this time as an author, a Ph.D candidate and a critic of the regime who had been judged worthy.

Out in Maat, my return triggered a minor upsurge of bureaucratic interventional activity. The British District Agent and sundry other British officials, in full do-gooder project mode, dashed back and forth from town, and the poor bemused villagers, wondering what had hit them, were dragooned into community labour every Saturday. They must have been so relieved when I left, because in subsequent letters they reported that the status quo was soon restored and the officials had reverted to their old invisible man routine. Maat once again became 'that scruffy little village behind Mele'.



**Figure 2.3. Maat and Mele children re-enacting at a school concert the arrival on Efate of the first Christian missionaries**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

Having jumped ahead, I now return to the beginnings of the New Hebrides fieldwork and the colonial context. What of my desire and intention to live at Maat? After several meetings and lots of explanation about why a European would want to live in a malaria-infested village some seven miles from town, the villagers acceded to my request. I paid them to build me a two-roomed hut in their midst, and this was quickly done. The reason for their hesitation, I was told at the time, says much about their perceptions of their colonial masters. It

went as follows: the older women, particularly, were convinced that, as whites have thin skin, I would be ravaged by *Anopheles* mosquitoes and die of malaria, whereupon the colonial authorities would blame them for failing to look after me properly, and, as punishment, the villagers would all be sent back to Ambrym.<sup>6</sup> These strong fears spoke volumes about the deep concerns of some older Maat people regarding their security of tenure at Maat and their conviction that they could be sent packing at the whim of their colonial overlords, despite the villagers' purchase of enough extra land to make their village economically viable.

It was some years later when, over a few drinks, a southeast Ambrymese friend who taught school suddenly asked me if I knew the 'real' reason for the strong opposition of the older women to my request to live at Maat. He said it wasn't the weak skin story, but one that arose from my unsettling ability, as a total stranger—and a paleface to boot—to know the names not only of spouses and children but long dead forebears as well. What had happened was that, while still living in town, I had obtained from the British District Agent some census details about Maat so that I could know its approximate population and begin to familiarise myself with the villagers by learning some names. On my first ever visit to Maat, with two Ifiran friends, one of whom had taught there and was happy to introduce me, I repeatedly referred to the census material to identify people, and in a few cases also identified their deceased parents. I am sure that I had told my listeners where the information was obtained from, but probably did so in English, and as rumours later spread this fact would have been obliterated. Since only a returning spirit of the dead would possess such knowledge, and since these beings can be highly dangerous (earning them the label *temat*), the last thing these women wanted was a potential murderer loose in the village. So the 'real' reason entailed some strong continuities in 'traditional' beliefs despite decades of Presbyterianism, and was anthropologically more compelling, though less relevant to the present discussion than the first explanation.

I had no difficulties with the British administration, and enjoyed fairly frequent informal contacts with Keith Woodward; after all, for most of the 13 months I was living close to town, had an old car, played and danced at the tennis club and divided my leisure time between village and Vila, so there was ample contact for the British to feel that they had their eye on me, and the French too for that matter, since many of my fellow tennis players were Francophone. My only brush with the French, if it can be called that, arose immediately after a visit I had made to Santo, during which I went to a French-owned copra plantation one Sunday afternoon to say hello to a large group of Southeast Ambrymese who lived and worked there. No one was at the homestead when I arrived there

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6 A few widows were even reported to have begged their sons to remove corrugated iron from their roofs and store it, ready for transportation to Ambrym—much to the amusement of the men who related this to me, though their laughter sounded a little forced.

to announce myself, so my friends took me through to the workers' quarters. There, over two or three hours and in the course of asking scores of questions on all sorts of topics so as to gain some idea of what their lives as migrants in Santo were like, and what their residence intentions were for the future, I must have included a question about their wages.

Back in Maat, Efate, a day or so afterwards, a French Residency vehicle pulled up in the village and Hubert, a friend of mine who worked as a radio broadcaster, sought me out: had I just been in Santo, he asked. Yes. Had I been on such-and-such plantation asking questions? Yes. He then informed me that the Residency had received a complaint from plantation owners on Santo that an English-speaking *agitateur* trespassed on their property and, they alleged, was stirring up the natives by asking provocative questions. The complaint was discussed that morning at the Residency, and he guessed that, from the description of the villain and the fact that he was talking to people from Southeast Ambrym, it could well have been me, so he was sent out to check on it. My reactions were mixed; this news was ominous but also amusing. I assured my friend that the wages question was one of a great many, and had been asked for comparative purposes, not to foment a revolution! Thus reassured, Hubert returned to the Residency to inform the officials that all was well, and nothing further came of it. The incident, however, was a powerful reminder of how very small the colonial world was in New Hebrides at that time, and how, breaching basic tenets of colonialism by living among the colonised, anthropologists were often under suspicion of inciting them to resistance.



**Figure 2.4. Maat village, Efate: the village choir in an open-air performance of hymns**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

The ways in which that world had moulded attitudes were brought home in other ways, illustrative of the fact that colonialism's worst single feature is its imbuing of subject peoples with a consciousness of their own inferiority. Being called 'masta' in the Vila market, though, was initially both troubling and funny, because after firmly scolding the vendor: '*Mi mi no masta blong yu; nem blong mi Bob,*' he would invariably follow up with '*I gud Bob, mi glad blong mitim yu...nao masta, prais blong bananas ia i gud tumas!*' During my first visit to Ambrym, when I visited other villages, there was mild panic whenever I sat on the ground, as people raced around in search of a chair, then insisted I must sit on it, because only black people sit on the ground, and whites must be positioned above the locals.<sup>7</sup>

I still remember one young man in Utas village, where I normally reside in Southeast Ambrym, telling me knowingly that, although I pretended to be ordinary in Ambrym, I was a big man back in Australia, being driven around in a large car and protected by my own bodyguards. One thing I need to tell you at this point is that no Europeans live in Southeast Ambrym, owing largely to its exposed windward aspect and lack of good anchorages. Official visitors were also rare; in one eight-year period (1946–54), no District Agent or other colonial officer is said to have visited the region. No wonder small children either fled in panic or froze, transfixed with fright at the sight of me; here at last is that white man their parents were constantly warning would come to kill and eat, or abduct, them for bad behaviour.

Back in Maat Efate, it took a while to dawn on me that I was not only the first European to live among them but, for most I was the first European they could get close to and freely touch (at that time, very few worked as 'house-girls' in town and minded their employers' children). After all, colonialism, as we well know, relies for its reproduction on the maintenance of strict social and spatial boundaries—the very things that we as anthropologists are intent on abolishing in our quest for rapport and empathy. While visiting Santo, I was hanging out with a group of southeast Ambrymese friends when they suggested we go to see a Western movie at the open-air picture theatre. On arrival, they confronted me with the question: did I want to sit in the rear section with the Whites, and pay 100 francs, or sit in the front with them, and pay only 50? On social rather than financial grounds (of course), I opted for the latter, but then, to my horror, I realised that all the locals were cheering for the cowboys. I remember shouting to my friends above the din, 'No, no, don't you realise, *you're* the Indians?!' To which my good friend, policeman David Persi, replied, with a big grin, 'We *know* that, but the Indians always lose!'

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<sup>7</sup> This makes one wonder what the British were doing when they decided to put their Residency down on Iririki Island; the French, perched way above, on the hill overlooking the harbour, certainly got that one right!



**Figure 2.5. Southeast Ambrym: loading copra, the area's major cash crop**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

One advantage of working in a colonial situation is that it quickly confronts you with the defining power of the colour of your skin: you are rich and influential by definition, and both respect and fear are implicated in the views of you held by the colonised, regardless of your personality. As anthropologists, we can be made extremely uncomfortable by such perceptions. The other issue is our inability to define ourselves adequately to the world. To this day, the vast majority of Southeast Ambrymese do not understand what I've been up to these past forty years, despite my earnest attempts to explain my discipline and my mission to them. '*Ongelxiax?*' they say, 'So you're on holiday.' Their understanding of *polien* 'work' does not include asking countless questions, scribbling in a notebook, chatting to a tape recorder and wandering from village to village. In the early years they were certain I would not come back, but my riposte about investing so much time and effort in language learning gradually eroded their certainty on that score. It all came down to trust rather than any understanding of my motives, and never once have I been asked to explain why I asked a particular question, or what I planned to do with the answer. Whatever I do or have done, they have not seemed perturbed or threatened by it. By the same token, however, as a woefully neglected people living in one of the least developed areas of the nation, most could well ask what my periodic presence among them has done for their material welfare, outside the few villages where I sleep and a circle of decades-old exchange-relationship beneficiaries. I did not

undertake collaborative or directed applied research aimed at bringing about some much-needed developmental change in Southeast Ambrym, though I certainly offered plenty of advice and suggestions.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2.6. Southeast Ambrym: Bonne Annee celebrants, early New Year's morning, 1978**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

Also, in the Maat Efate case, despite my criticism of the authorities' neglect of the village, one conclusion I drew from a comparison with the other nine communities studied in the same project was that this relocation was among the most successful, to a great extent *because* the government played no part in it (see Lieber, ed. 1977; Tonkinson 1977). The absence of bureaucratic interference maximised villager initiatives aimed both at addressing the many challenges consequent upon relocation and taking advantage of the opportunities for innovation that it enabled. In the Maat case it was the Presbyterian Church, and its officers and parishioners on Efate, whose support, particularly in the

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<sup>8</sup> Excuses: My appointment to the Chair in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia (UWA) in 1984 meant a large expenditure of time and energy in rebuilding, restructuring and running the Department and its programs. Also, the Vanuatu research moratorium, combined with my relocation to the west coast, directed my attention strongly back to the Western Desert. For a decade from 1992, I was senior consultant anthropologist on the Mardu land claim (later Native Title claim) by the people among whom I'd worked since 1963. This culminated in my writing the bulk of the Connection Report, the documented bases for claim, on which the 2002 decision to grant them native title over the bulk of their traditional homelands largely rested.

campaign that saw the villagers pay off their land purchase loan, was crucial to the economic viability and prospects for permanency of the relocated community at Maat.



**Figure 2.7. Southeast Ambrym: preparing Sunday *laplap* puddings, Endu Village**

(Robert Tonkinson, photographer)

Had Dr. Barbara Lane been able to attend this conference, she would have focused her talk on a theme that I have not been able to address via the Ambrymese, either in their homeland or in the Efate village, since in both locations officials were scarce;<sup>9</sup> namely, the manner in which the people in south Pentecost used the two-government rule effectively to free themselves from any disruptive interference in their affairs by either administration. The astute political strategies via which the traditional villages, in the region where Barbara and her late husband Bob did their research, managed to preserve their culture is a fascinating story that we hope Barbara will in time publish.

In a brief but excellent discussion on the responsibilities entailed in long-term research, written shortly before his untimely death, Roger Keesing (1994: 189–91) posed a set of questions, most of which would be quite familiar to us. One that perhaps is not so common, though, concerns the effects of an anthropological penchant for studying atypical and unrepresentative ‘traditionalist’ communities

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9 The sole and very important exception was British District Agent Darvall Wilkins, who persuaded the British to use Australian aid money for the building of a water supply, airfield and road—apart from clinics and schools, until today the only visible evidence of any official interest in Southeast Ambrym. Despite this dismal history of neglect, the southeast Ambrym region has never been a locus of millenarian thinking or activity (cf. Tonkinson 2004b).

that plays into Western cravings for 'romanticised primitivity and exoticism', and more recently for 'ecological and spiritual wisdom', when the realities of life reveal the vast majority of Melanesians as committed both to modernism and to Christian life. Roger fessed up as a culprit, given his work on the pagan Kwaio in the Solomon Islands, and so do I for reconstructing 'traditional life' among the Mardu Aborigines of Australia's Western Desert (Tonkinson 1978–91).<sup>10</sup>

I conclude with some observations that I hope will be relevant to Vanuatu's present circumstances, based on my hidden part-time role as an expedition ship lecturer since 1981. What the mostly aged, predominantly American travellers crave more than anything is a reassurance about the 'authenticity' of their brief experiences ashore. Many are disquieted about the status of *kastom*, and will ask, for example: 'Is the Rom performed other than for tourists, and is the secret society still functioning as it would have done in the past?' 'Would the village be this clean if they hadn't known we were coming?' 'Do women bare their breasts in public when there are no tourists around?' 'Does the shipping company pay the community for the trouble they go to for our visit?' As much as they enjoy the dance spectacles put on for them, seventh heaven for a surprising number is when we are forced to move to Plan B, perhaps because the landing site at Plan A is too hazardous on the day, and they are put ashore in a village that has virtually no prior warning (past the scout boat that takes the Expedition Leader and me ashore to ask permission for a visit). Once in the village, most tourists are both pleased and eager: this, then, they are certain, is village life as it is normally lived, so they are in absolutely no doubt that 'what we see is what we get'. Of course, if *all* the 'cultural' landings were like this, without colourful artistic performances or artefacts for sale, many would soon be grumbling about boredom, but I can say with absolute conviction that nothing brightens the expeditioner's day like making new friends among the locals, thanks to that universal Melanesian ability to draw strangers rapidly and warmly into 'family' relationships. The afterglow of this, when people come back on board, is palpable.

For me, the shipboard work has added an interesting and different dimension to my experience as an anthropologist. Having observed a colonial situation in which I at times found myself interpreting the one to the other, I now deal with a highly privileged minority bent not on ignoring or changing a subject people but determined, however briefly, to engage in what they hope will be an authentically exotic and interesting encounter with fellow humans. I began in the days of colonialism, saw the transition to independence and now, in my

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10 Defence: that was *after* writing a monograph on the clash between Mardu and Christian fundamentalists at a remote mission (Tonkinson 1974), and many articles about social change processes since 1963. Also, my work in this country has been with long-time Christians who, by the 1960s, had grown very comfortable with a view of their pre-European past as all darkness and evil, and remembered very little of their old religion.

'retirement', am still somewhere in the middle, but find value and satisfaction in being able to facilitate, albeit fleetingly, some communication and understanding between two sets of people, for each of whom the other holds some fascination.

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