

7. Discovering One's Past in the Present

Mary Patterson, Koran Wilfred and Ileen Vira

Quite a lot has been written about the nature of fieldwork since I began mine more than 40 years ago. And the world and its institutions have changed. As my entry to the field then was negotiated through the officials of a colonial government, my research now is approved by a committee of ni-Vanuatu who are beholden to no external authorities in their deliberations on its worth or management. Yet George Marcus' comment of more than a decade ago remains valid: 'the regulative ideals and framing presumptions of what it is to do fieldwork very much remain in place in anthropology's professional culture'(1998: 3). Lengthy immersion in a single community, predicated on language acquisition and open-ended agendas, was as much a product of degree time and the institutional context between the 1950s and the 1980s as of unitary models of social organisation that some critics have seen as its driving force. If the *Writing Culture* (Clifford 1986) debates of the late eighties and early nineties did nothing else, they drew our attention to the way in which the epistemological, literary and political are deeply connected. In some parts of the world they also drew our attention to the unexplored history of what came to be seen as novel method in the simplistic way that nuanced debates are often reduced. Multi-sited ethnography in the sense of ethnology in Vanuatu had been established in the work of William Halse Rivers Rivers and even John Willoughby Layard, not to mention the French ethnologist Jean Guiart, well before Marcus extolled a much more complex constitution for contemporary ethnography under this rubric (*ibid*: 14). If in Anglophone universities we now find grant bodies more amenable to shorter periods of fieldwork for our students, and short visits to more places not only more desirable but more likely to enable them to finish their degrees in the ever-decreasing time funded, we are also able to convince such bodies that this is now the method of choice, even if mere proliferation of sites and amended duration is not at all the project advocated by Marcus.

In personalising this piece about the fragmented history of connections to the field, I want to highlight the ways in which issues of representation raised by the 'writing culture' debates form and challenge our notions of how we frame our research, our research methods, and the value of that research through our relationships within and outside the field in apparently mundane ways. I want to talk about the privileged contact I have had in my most recent research in Vanuatu with individuals with whose family I established the kind of emotional bonds that ni-Vanuatu allow us to have with them, even when we are separated

for decades and have intermittent contact. Some time ago, Pat Caplan wrote about the way in which her fieldwork experience was formed and directed by alterations to her status as she entered the community in which she worked as a single woman, returned to the field married and a mother, and variously engaged with feminist preoccupations in her own community (Caplan 1992). Where gender overtly influences daily life experience and access to the world, as it does in Vanuatu, the female anthropologist's status has more than a minor role in her research. As an unmarried 23 year old, without the protection or apparent direction of either father or husband, I was both anomalous and in need of a personal family context, and while its provision was not instant, within the first fortnight of arrival in Fona by colonial government boat, I was 'fathered and mothered' by Wilfred Koran, the chief of the village in which I was domiciled, and his wife Sarah who, as it turned out, was the daughter of the then highest ranking man in North Ambrym and sister of its most notorious sorcerer. I had serendipitously been granted access to the domain of an extraordinary man, his feet firmly located in *kastom* as the yam-master of the origin domain of North Ambrym. Chief Koran was at the same time a talented and energetic modernist, skilfully working his connections to both sides of the Condominium government. While he built up his depopulated domain with neighbours who were mostly Anglophone and Presbyterian, he sent some of his children to French Schools, his son becoming a gendarme in the French colonial force.

Whatever I achieved in this period of fieldwork owed everything to Koran's family and initial access to their extraordinary connections across the entire region and beyond. But I was also in some sense a 'problem child'. My anomalous behaviour, in the context of what was expected of young, unmarried women, was frequently challenged by my relatives, particularly the male ones who admonished me publicly for walking about on my own. I was indeed setting a bad example. Nor did I consider that I should modify the kind of autonomous behaviour that young women were claiming at that time in the West. When I returned for a second time after a year and related how I had become ill on the way home from Ambrym it was entirely as my family had predicted. Sorcery and kinship became much more than research topics in my life, and from the point of view of my Ambrym family, the connections between research and life experience needed no esoteric explanation.

After submitting my thesis, my own close personal encounter with its topic, kinship (in the form of three children under five years old), occasioned a departure from the academy for a decade. When I entered another institution after the award of a post-doctoral fellowship, a return to Ambrym seemed a most exciting prospect given that it was a decade after Independence and all of our life circumstances had changed. Now with a husband and three children,

from whom I was mysteriously parted, I was welcomed back into village life as a different kind of woman. I found the children I had known were now adults with children of their own, and the turbulent history of the pre- and post-Independence period in North Ambrym had affected the lives of my now vastly enlarged extended family in very different ways.

Coming and going throughout the nineties I was mostly accompanied by my sisters Ileen and Martha. Martha had been a close companion during my early fieldwork but now a widow with grandchildren had become a resident of West Ambrym when her husband returned to his origins in that region after the turmoil of pre-Independence land disputes removed many Northern-born West Ambrymese from their homes. Martha's much younger sister Ileen had been long removed from the north. Educated at a French secondary School in Santo, Ileen had married an Ambae man and settled with him in Vila. Her husband was in the British Police Force and stationed in Luganville during the Santo rebellion but it was only during my most recent research that Ileen told me the story of her amazing escape with her baby son from Luganville during the violence of the rebellion. Her narrative was prompted by reading the recently-published Condominium Agents' reminiscences, some of which contained accounts of this turbulent period (Bresnihan and Woodward 2002). Ileen's father, Chief Koran, who had been a Nagriamel supporter during my early fieldwork and had lived with his wife at Fanafo for several months, was treated severely in the aftermath of the rebellion when supporters were pursued to their home islands and publicly humiliated. Wilfred was removed as village chief (see Patterson 2002, 2003 and 2006 for a discussion of this period). I also made my first contacts with other family members now living in Vila, and particularly with Koran Jnr., the grandson of Chief Wilfred Koran, whom I had only known as a child when his gendarme father visited the island.

Many anthropologists continue the connections with local communities that they established in their early work, but as the context of our work in distant institutions changes, so too does the kind of work we do. When anthropologists write now about collaborative research they probably mean the kind of collaborations that we are all familiar with through the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (VKS) fieldworker program, where a researcher is assigned to a dedicated fieldworker in the area in which they wish to work. They work together on a project and the fieldworker provides access to a network of others who contribute to the project. Or perhaps, as we have seen at this conference, they refer to the kinds of collaborations that anthropologists commonly had before the establishment of the fieldworker program, with particular individuals who acted in much the same way, as navigators in the field terrain. For me, in my early research there were a number of such people; importantly they were both men and women, and indeed children. They were my teachers, nurturers, and

usually patient advisors who put up with endless questioning about what were to them everyday facts of life. They directed my research and made it difficult when they understandably grew tired of my attentions. Occasionally I redeemed myself by being able to sew, translate something, tell stories about my place or lend someone some money. However, when I embarked on a different sort of research project in 2003, that was neither village-based nor as open-ended as previous, I needed a different kind of collaboration. The impetus for the research was a growing concern among colleagues in Australia that the Pacific Island states that most of us felt we knew, were becoming characterised in an entirely negative way, driven by the agendas of powerful neighbours and largely in ignorance of the conditions of daily life of the inhabitants, and the context of their statehood. The initial project was a pilot study funded by the University of Melbourne as precursor to an application for Australian Research Council funding that was subsequently obtained for three years (2005–7).

I needed research assistance since the project aimed in a broad-ranging way to investigate a number of themes around the agendas of external aid agencies, their local reception at a variety of levels in rural and urban contexts, and the factors that were influencing peoples' notions of development, governance and what it meant to be ni-Vanuatu in the contemporary Pacific. My research approval by the VKS did not provide fieldworkers for obvious reasons. The research was so broadly based and multi-sited that it required what I initially thought would be a team of enthusiastic young ni-Vanuatu, if not having some training in research methods, then willing to be trained. And although a number of people had worked on urban research projects, no-one was able to suggest where I would find them. Ileen had accompanied me back to Ambrym in the previous year for the pilot study and she had also used her extensive contacts in Port Vila to arrange focus groups with young people, and interviews with individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and life experience in Vila town and several squatter settlements. I had not yet spoken to Koran because I knew that he was employed with the Peace Corps in Vila. The day after I arrived I took a phone call saying that he had resigned from his position the week before, and that he had a few weeks leave before taking up a new government position. At that point I was not fully aware of all his talents. Anthropologists know anecdotally that many of them are drawn to the discipline by their life experience as outsiders of some sort. Forced to learn the 'rules of the game' through immigration or early contact with other cultures, they frequently develop an interest in studying all things cultural and the way in which societies operate. In Vanuatu, of course, exposure to different languages and a variety of cultures *is* part of normal life experience for many people and over a long period of time; much longer than we usually anticipate as our archaeological colleagues point out to us. Change, movement and culture contact has formed the basis of ni-Vanuatu social life

since its inception in the archipelago. So, if 'natural' social scientists exist, it is here we are most likely to find them. Koran's background, apart from his personal talents, is a case in point.

Critically aware of his North Ambrym roots and his Ambrymese genealogy, Koran grew up with his family away from the island as he travelled with his gendarme father to various island postings. Always returning for vacations and for extended stays with his family he was ritually initiated with his island 'brothers' when he was a young boy. Both Ileen and Koran were outstanding students but Ileen's early marriage removed her from opportunities for further education as a young woman. Koran became a secondary school teacher and with his talent for language acquisition, learned the languages and cultural mores of the places to which he was posted as a teacher.

As soon as I learned that he was available and interested I suggested that we meet to discuss the project and his involvement in it. The next day I outlined the sort of things that the research hoped to uncover, emphasising that a broad range of contacts was necessary in the urban contexts to represent the diversity of the population. It wasn't until I accompanied Koran down the main street, however, that I realised that the good fortune I had had in ending up in his grandfather's domain so long ago was flowing into the present. The main street in Vila is not very long; it takes about 20 minutes to stroll from one end to the other. Traversing it with Koran Wilfred is another matter. We were unable to go more than a few metres without being pulled up by one of his myriad acquaintances. Vehicles would draw up beside us, people would hail him from across the street or he would wave and indicate that he had to discuss something or other with the person who had just disappeared into this or that building. It took us almost an hour and a half to get from the Kaiviti Hotel to what used to be the Rossi Hotel where we had arranged to meet a politician. By the next day, after a discussion of the project, Koran had produced a comprehensive list of people he thought I should speak to in each of the categories I had outlined to him. By the following day we had worked out a schedule of interviews with government officials, both Francophone and Anglophone, politicians, church leaders, people involved in small business and a variety of NGOs. After a week of interviewing around a series of prompt questions, Koran began to participate in the interviews with questions of his own that followed up on particular points drawing out our interviewees on issues that often I was not aware of. On my next trip we arranged to go to Santo with Ileen for a few days, to conduct interviews, focus groups, extend the school survey and visit Fanafo. I had interviewed Franky Steven on a previous trip and Koran was keen to meet Franky to discuss his grandfather's involvement in Nagriamel in the pre-Independence period. As we walked across the tarmac I saw Koran wave to the pilot in the cockpit of the new large plane that Air Vanuatu had just acquired.

As we took our seats, a voice over the intercom requested that Mr. Koran Wilfred should contact the flight attendant immediately. And that was the last I saw of him until we reached Luganville. The pilot was Koran's ex-student, only too happy to have his old teacher in the cockpit for the flight to Santo. We took a taxi to our hotel from the airport with a taxi driver who just happened to be yet another old acquaintance of my extraordinary research assistant. Our trip to Fanafo was arranged on the spot.

Working with Koran and Ileen raised a number of important issues for me over the kinds of collaborations we anthropologists have in the field. In the 'immersion' kind of fieldwork that we still frequently regard as 'best practice', it is not always clear how collaboration works, particularly when the writing up of a project like a thesis is directed at an audience from which our collaborators are excluded by language and/or academic discourse. This is of course precisely what the designated projects that researchers are given by the VKS are designed to address, but while they do perform a significant counter function in the research process, they do not address the issue of how collaborative our projects can ever be. The lodging of research materials with the VKS contributes materials of historical importance and also reveals how our training and resources have enabled us to access materials that even dedicated VKS fieldworkers may not be able to record. In the case of fieldwork that predates the fieldworker program there are only our records. The task is enormous and of interest to our collaborators as part of their history that we were privileged to witness. The often laborious task of making these materials available in Vanuatu is commonly not assisted by the way in which research is funded and measured in foreign institutions, leaving we anthropologists with a hefty retirement debt.

It is of course a long-standing anthropological truism that projects, however meticulously planned and designed, are inevitably driven in the process of fieldwork by the interests and degree of cooperation of the communities we are working in and of course by our own cultural and academic milieu and training. Anyone who has carried out research in Vanuatu would have noted that language is not all that divides Anglophones and Francophones in our approach to matters cultural; a curious difference in emphasis noted long ago by Mary Douglas, amongst others (Douglas 1975). But even given national predilections, we all like to tell our graduate students that their attachment to a project should always be malleable enough to allow their collaborators to change it. And anecdotes of projects redesigned by field experience are legion. In the contemporary context our project designs, funded not for degree-awarding research, may have very different parameters. It is here that a real collaboration—at the stage of development and implementation of a project—can offer benefits

to all sides when we who are institutionally trained are offered the advantages of collaboration with ni-Vanuatu colleagues whose anthropological attitude has emerged from their own cosmopolitan (in the broadest sense) life experience.

I have been more than fortunate in Vanuatu, in the fictive kinship that was established for me so long ago and in the way that those past connections entered into the present of research collaborations that have contributed in a multitude of ways to the research projects I have carried out, and to the way I hope to continue to work in the future. What follows is a translation of the Bislama presentation Ileen, Koran and I gave at the conference. It reflects a partial view of our encounter in this public context with its own context of representation, which I have attempted to flesh out here. My collaborators speak for themselves, but they also speak for us.

Cultural politics and the politics of culture in Vanuatu

Mary Patterson

Toktok blong mitrifala i gat tri pat long hem. Bae mi stat wetem risej we mi bin mekem taem we mi yangfala nomo long not Ambrym. Afta mi givim smol tok blong risej we mi mekem naoia from 2004 kasem naoia wetem Ileen mo Koran. Tufala ia bae i komen long eli risej blong mi tu. Okei long 1968, taem blong tufala gavman mi go fes taem long Ambrym mi go from supavaesa blong mi Michael Allen hemi talem se, 'Intres blong yu long ol samting blong nakaemas long Melanesia, Ambrym hemi wan ples we yu faenem plante i fulap.' Ale taem ia mi gat twante-tri yia, mi go long not Ambrym. Long taem ia ino gat filwoka projek no oli go long Kolonial Gavman and olsem Vila long taem ia ino olsem naoia an oli askem pemisen long Distrik Komisene hemi sendem mesej i go long not Ambrym oli talem se wan stiuden bae i kam i oraet i go stap long Fona wetem yufala long olfala blong Koran ia olsem bubu blong hem, Wilfred Koran. Hemi talem se i oraet yu sendem wan stiuden mifala i lukaotem hem. Ale afta mi go long Lakatoro mi stap mi talem long Darvall Wilkins se, 'Wan samting nomo we mi wantem, mi wantem go long dei laet, yu dropem mi long ples ia long dei laet.' 'Yu no wari i oraet.'

Long eli moning, mifala i go long wof mifala i wet. Mi no save Vanuatu taem yet, bot i gat wan problem, ale afta oli go sakem mi long sanbis long tudak finis. Olgeta oli no save huia woman ia? Huia woman ia? Wehem papa blong hem i tekem hem i kam olsem ia? Oli putum bokis blong mi long sanbis oli lukluk mi, wan stiuden ia ating; yes be ino man ating oli sori lelebet be mi no man olsem mi woman. Bae mifala i mekem wanem wetem woman ia? Ale afta papa Wilfred

hemi tekem mi i go insaed long haos blong hem, hemi talem se, 'Yu no wari yu no fraet mifala i lukaotem yu gud.' An i tru. Oli lukaotem mi olsem mi gat wan famle long ples ia, mi gat wan famle long Australia, olgeta ia nao taem we mi go fastaem Koran hemi wan bebi mi no save hemi smol smol nomo, Ileen hemi wan young gel. Nao afta long eli risej ia olsem Ogis go bak olsem long taem ia mi talem se ol kastom i stap strong yet mo i gat ol divisen long not Ambrym olsem ol kristen i stap olbaot long stadi mo insaed long dak bus i gat ol man i stap long kastom yet mo i gat plante oli fraet long posen, o long Ambrym oli kolek *Abio*. So olsem mi mekem stadi long samting ia mo mi mekem stadi long ol samting blong famle. Wan intres blong mi bakegen an olsem olgeta long Ambrym tu bigfala intres long olgeta so long taem ia i defren lelebet an mi talem se *politics of culture*. Kastom i strong mo i gat politik insaed long hem; i gat politik blong man i kam big man i go insaed long *namage* i kam hae jif an luk ia hemia Tain Mal i stap hae jif long not Ambrym long taem ia hemi olfala bubu blong olgeta ia. Mo hemi soemaot olsem divisen blong tufala grup ia wan kastom mared i stap long saed ia mo wan kristen mared. Insaed long hem ol mining blong hemi stap semak be ino gat defren wei blong soemaot, sam oli givim pig sam oli no save givim pig oli kilim wan smol pig nomo an bae oli givim plante samting, ol gift oli givim long famle. And hemia tu pija ia olsem hemia angel blong Ileen, Tofor, hemi stap go long wan *namage meliun* long taem ia mo long narasaed olsem man ia hemi kam long Fona long wan dei hemi stap slip wan naet mo long moning olsem kastom i talem se yu mas kilim pig an yu mas givim samting long hem so oli stap wari from bae oli faenem pig blong givim long bigfala angel ia. Oli fraet long hem, Koran mo Ileen bae i komen long eli risej ia.

Koran Wilfred

Tangkiu tumas mi nem blong mi Koran mi stap long Ministri blong Intenol Afea ating bae yufala i luk se hemi kam stap mekem wanem long ples ia. Bifo mi stap kolek anti Mary nao bikos risej hemi mekem se mifala i kam wan famle nao, bifo mi wok wetem Mary mi bin wok wetem hem long 2004 bae mifala i tokbaot sam risej mifala i kari aot hemi kam karem mi olsem riseja asisten bat olsem mi talem bae mi traem go bak lelebet long wanem we hemi talem long taem blong visit blong hem taem hemi yangfala gel olsem hemi kam. Mi stil rimemba wan taem mifala i stap an ten olfala grandfata blong mi we mi mi karem nem blong hem, Koran Wilfred, hemi wan bigfala jif long not Ambrym hemi bin talem long mi se yangfala woman ia hemi pat blong famle nao yufala i kolek hem anti from mi karem hem olsem dota blong mi. So hemi wan samting we mi stil rimemba long taem ia we mifala karem Mary i kam insaed long famle olsem pat blong famle blong mifala long Ambrym. Narafala samting we mi wantem mensesem long ples ia, long taem ia hemi veri intresting bikos ol pipol long not Ambrym long taem ia oli no save wanem nao woman ia bae hemi kam mekem, i gat tumas kwestin oli bin askem se, 'Be i kam stap wetem yufala from wanem? Yufala i

faenem hem olsem wanem? Hemi kam olsem wanem? Papa blong hem wia?' Yu save yumi long Vanuatu i gat tisfala famle tae so oli stap traem blong kwestinim mi se, 'Waet woman ia i kam stap wetem jif Wilfred hemi faenem hem olsem wanem?'

So blong talem nomo olsem blong kipim wan bigfala pija se long taem ia risej hemi bin veri veri difikel blong ol pipol oli andastanem yu olsem wan riseja olredi yu gat defren skin an ten yu gat defren kalja taem yu kam yu liv insaed long wan komiuniti olsem hemi bin liv long hemi no bin isi blong hem. Bat wan veri gud samting we mi mas talem long ples ia is long taem ia olsem olredi wetem tufala koloniel paoa we i stap, ol jif oli bin gat samfala aktif rol blong luk afta long ol strenjas we oli kam. Hemia hemi wan, bae mi talem olsem wan strong paoa we hemi bin holem ol jif tugeta long ol vilejes oli luk afterem ol pipol we oli kam aot saed. So hemia nao hemi mekem se taem we anti Mary hemi kam insaed long famle blong mekem stadi blong hem olsem hemi mensenem i faenem tat famle blong mi, hemi obei long hem so hemi mekem se hemi helpem wok blong anti Mary long taem ia blong hemi kari aot risej. Narafala poen we mi wantem mensenem long ples ia long taem blong risej is tat hao ol pipol oli koperetif taem oli andastanem rol blong Mary olsem wan stiuden long taem ia. Mi rimemba taem oli stap go aot long ol vilejes hemi stap go aot long, oltaem bae abu blong mi bae hemi talem se, 'Yutufala i folem Mary from posen'. Olsem hemi stap talem, oltaem bae tu o tri boe i akampaniem Mary i go olbaot long ol vilejes blong hemi go mekem stadi blong hem. So blong givim wan big pija long yumi nomo olsem se long taem ia hemi risej hemi bin had we pipol long tat taem oli no andastanem tumas objektif mo wae nao ol waet pipol ia oli kam stap long vilej bat olsem mi talem hemi bin wan samting we later on smol, wan yia afta oli kam blong andastanem, 'Yes hemi kam blong mekem wan samting ia an ten nao yu save luk ol man oli save kamaot'. Taem yu askem kwestin, ansa i kam i sili bat bifo tat oli holem bak ol tingting from oli no rili andastanem jes bikos kalja hemi defren mebi skin hemi defren so hemi mekem se task o responsabiliti blong ol pipol we oli kam blong mekem risej hemi bin difikal. So mi glad tumas we famle blong mi hemi bin pat long tatifala risej mo mi tink se mi praod long ples ia. Famle blong mi long aelan mifala i pat long tatifala developmen blong risej i kam kam kasem tede bikos mifala i bin akseptem wan yangfala ledi we hemi from Nowei, hemi kam hemi stap wetem mifala antil tede tisfala famle relesensip hemi stap iven sipos hemi go long Australia i kambak i mas go visitim ol famle blong mi long aelan.

Mary Patterson

Okei long risej we mifala i mekem i stat long 2003 wan pailot projek blong wan bigfala risej long wan grant we mi holem long Australia mi kambak long Vanuatu an mi faenem Wilfred we i jes finis long Peace Corps hemi avelebol blong helpem mi long risej ia an hemi wan rili kolaboreta wetem risej blong faenemaot ol

samting we mifala putum long ol kwestin we mi askem long risej. Risej ia nem blong hem *Modernity and Governance in Melanesia*. Kes blong Vanuatu i kamaot long sam konsen blong ol koligs blong mi long Australia, we olgeta politisen long Australia oli stap representem ol aelan long Pasifik long negativ we. Oli tokbaot wik stet, oli tokbaot *The Arc of Instability* oli tokbaot ol samting we negativ samting long Pasifik aelan oli lukluk long plante samting we ino gud long ples ia.

Projek ia, i wantem save wea ol negativ samtingia i tru o no. Mi wetem koligs blong mi i go wok long PNG mo Solomon mo hemia long Vanuatu. So risej ia wan defren kaen risej i veri defren from eli risej we mi mekem long aelan nomo. Koran mo Ileen i mekem kolaboresen ia wetem mi long pilot projek afta mifala i mekem ol fasen blong mifala olsem inteviu mo fokes grup olsem yu save filwoka ating yu save finis we yu faenem sam yangfala o olfala o olsem wanem sam grup blong olgeta yu tekem hem yu inteviu hem long wan ples and mifala inteviu plante defren kaen pipol politisen, olgeta long sivil sosaeti, NGOS, VANGO mo i fulap long ol defren samting we mifala i mekem. Mo wan samting tu mifala i mekem long wan kes stadi long Nagriamel from developmen blong hem afta long independens i veri intresting from i gat insaed long hem sam influens blong aotsaed an wan pat blong projek ia i askem kwestin se ol polisi blong aed dona we oli gifem aed, oli putum bigfala intres long hem i stret long Vanuatu o ino stret, i stret long ol sosaeti long Pasifik o ino stret. Hemia nao mifala i wantem se mining blong sivil sosaeti mo gud gavanens oli andastanem olsem wanem. Mifala i wantem lukluk long resistens long sam polisi we maet ino stret long aelan komiuniti so ino gat plante risej we i lukluk long ol samting ia; i gat sam be ino plante. Hemia nao mi givim bak long Koran mo Ileen from oli storian mo long kolaboresen blong mifala blong wokemaot difren kaen projek ia.

Ileen Vira

Gud moning evriwan mi nem blong mi Ileen, mi tu wan memba blong famle we olsem Koran i talem finis yufala i harem. Mi, Mary Patterson we i stap long ples ia hemi kam tru long New-Hebridis bifo mi bin gat ileven yia. Taem hemi kam mi mi stap skul long Santo mi go holidei afta mi stap wokbaot wetem hem long ol risej blong hem afta mo tan twenti yias naoia hemi kambak blong mekem risej. Hemia nao olsem mitufala mo Koran mitufala i travel plante wetem hem go bak long Ambrym mo Santo blong mekem inteviu. Olsem hemi talem finis ol pipol we long ol defren sosaetis mifala i mitim olgeta long aelan mitufala i go long Ambrym las yia mitufala i go mitufala i givimaot fom olsem risej blong hem hemi dil menli wetem sivil sosaeti hemia nao mifala i wokbaot plante long hem mifala i mitim ol lida blong ol komiuniti. Mitufala i jes pas raon long olgeta skuls long Ambrym distributim sam foms long ol prinsipol blong ol studen blong oli save fulemap blong yufala i save luk long pija antap ia mifala stap wetem ol tija blong Ranon sekonderi skul we fulap i stap harem an long pija antap ia i gat

wan Nagriamel tu we Mary hemi bin inteviu hem Olsen Kae we stragol blong indipendent yumi stap kasem, man ia tu hemi stap insaed. So ating mi no gat samting mo blong talem. Mi stap wok long *Secret Garden* olsem wan Franis tua gaed. Ating mi dil plante wetem turis long saed blong kastom we mifala i save eksplenem an blong kolaboret mo long saed blong famle hemia Mary i bin talem finis mi mi wan angel blong wan big jif longwe hemia jif Tofor we evriwan i save long hem. Mo mi wantem tu se taem Mary hemi kam mifala i helpem long saed blong kastom blong mifala from mifala nao mifala i save go klosap long kastom vilej ia we hemi Fanla i gat strong kastom i stap long hem be tru long mifala nao Mary i save kasem mo samting mo histri long Fanla vilej. So ating hemia nomo tangkiu blong lisin.

Koran Wilfred

Ating bae mi, mi go on smol bakegen long risej we mifala i bin kari aot olsem risej assistant long taem ia hemi long 2004 spos yu luk long pija ia ating hemi wan projek we VKS hemi givim long Mary blong hemi risej long hem. An mi talem long hem se hemi wan veri veri intresting projek we mi bin involv long hem bikos hemi tokbaot wanem nao role blong kastom hemi kam insaed long divelopmen blong Vanuatu an long kwestin we mifala i stap askem blong talem lelebet pipol long Vanuatu oli tisfala wod nomo 'kastom' olredi i gat fulap definisen blong hem we wan i givim defren wan, wan i givim defren wan. Yumi no tokbaot ol fren blong yumi we oli kam ova sis, definisen blong olgeta long kastom tu hemi olsem wanem so hemi mekem se mi talem risej ia hemi veri intresting long mi bikos mi stap traem blong luk wanem role nao kastom hemi plem long divelopmen blong kantri blong mi olsem wan Ni-Vanuatu.

Bifo mi go long hemia mi tokbaot lelebet hemia mi jes givim niu bref deskripsen nomo long wanem hemi bin hapen taem Mary hemi kam taon i stap lukaotem wan risej asisten ten mi askem hem, mi se mi mi gat koneksen lelebet long ples ia. Mi save sam man long gavman, mi save sam man long jos sam man long komiuniti long Port Vila. Hemi se, 'Okei mi nidim yu blong yu kam yu helpem mi blong wok blong mi blong yumitu kari aot risej ia.' So wetem asistens blong mi mo samfala koneksen we mi gat long Vila i mekem se mifala i kari aot wan gudfala risej long ples ia spos yu bin luk long ol privius pija we i go mifala inteviu ol politisen, mifala inteviu ol daarekta generol sam gavman ofisas i kam taon kasem sam yut mo mifala i go long skul ol sekonderi skul mo mifala i toktok tu wetem ol prinsipel so hemia nao lelebet long ol pipol we mifala i traem blong toktok long olgeta ating long metod we mifala i bin yusum.

Mifala i yusum intaviu, kwestin ia long ol skuls mifala i mekem sam rikoding an ten tu mifala i jes kam an diskas, toktok storian jes storian mo mifala i go bak putum ol tingting tugeta. So hemia nao samfala metod we mifala i yusum wea ples mifala i mekem risej. Well mifala i doim fastaem long ples ia long Port

Vila an ten mifala i go aotsaed lelebet long Port Vila olsem Sisaed, Freswota etc an ten mifala i go long Santo blong mekem tu samfala storian long Santo an long Santo mifala i mitim samfala pipol tu longwe, mifala i toktok wetem olgeta blong oli givim tingting blong olgeta long tifsala topik. Mifala i go kasem long Fanafo mo yu save luk pija ia hemi mi wetem Franky Steven an spos yu lukluk gud han blong mi, mi holem ino tufala eg blong faol ia hemi tufala koen we mi stap karem. Mi wantem talem smol long ples ia se bubu blong mi Koran Wilfred oli veri veri klos wetem jif Jimmy Steven oli bin veri klos i kam a taem i gat smol rao bitwin ol pipol long aelan ten mekem se Olsen Kae wetem abu blong mi Koran Wilfred oli go bak long aelan bat tingting blong olgeta se tifsala koen we yu stap luk long pija long ples ia se koen ia taem yumi karem indipendens koen ia nao bambae yumi yusum an veri intresting, bubu blong mi hemi bin stap talem mi ol storian ia an long taem ia long 2004 mi bin gat janis blong holem tufala koen ia long han blong mi so hemia nao bae yu luk Franky Steven hemi stap long nakamal blong hem hemi stap toktok and mi mi gat janis blong askem tufala koen spos mi save holem an hemi bin givim. Tingting blong hem long saed blong kastom in komiuniti developmen long Vanuatu sipos ripot i kamaot bae hemi wan veri intresting ripot blong luk wanem nao rol we kastom hemi plem?

Olsem mi stap talem lelebet i gat toktok ia kastom fulap mining hemi kamaot. Samfala ansas we mi stap karem we i stap wetem mi long ples ia se sam ni-Vanuatu i talem se, 'Kastom hemi wei blong laef'. Okei narafala tingting oli talem se, 'Kastom hemi Melanesian wei, hemi minim olsem nomo se hao yumi rispektem pipol, hao yumi helpem pipol etc'. So lelebet hemia long olgeta definisen we oli stap givim taem mifala i stap karemaot risej ia. An taem yu luk long hao nao yumi ol koligs blong yumi long aotsaed oli defaenem toktok ia kastom bambae hemi defren lelebet long wanem we yumi stap traem blong difaenem long tingting blong yumi ol ni-Vanuatu, nao long risej ia mifala i faenem se fulap defrens long ol opinions long topik ia we mifala i stap kari aot risej long hem an insaed long Vanuatu yumi gat olredi ol defrens, i gat defrens blong inta-aelan, yumi gat defrens blong lanwis, sam oli tok Inglis sam oli tok Franis so i gat ol defrens ia finis plas kastom bakegen insaed.

Yu luk hemi no isi se pipol oli faenem hat, traem blong luk wanem rol nao kastom hemi pleim insaed long wan komiuniti o insaed long Vanuatu. Okei ating fulap we mifala i intervuiem olgeta oli talem se kastom hemi wan samting we hemi divaedem, i divaedem komiuniti mo mi no save givim ansa blong hem sipos i raet i rong mi no save. Be hemia hem i wanem we mifala i karem from ol pipol we mifala inteivuiem olgeta. Nao ating majoriti nao oli talem se kastom hemi wan gud samting bikos hemi yunaetem yumi an wetem yuniti ia nao developmen i save go.

Insaed long Vanuatu, Vanuatu hemi wan yunik kantri we kastom blong hem hemi stil strong mo hemi help blong givim developmen long nesen ia. Ating hemia nao long big tingting we mi mi olsem wan asisten riseja, mi luk olsem nao se yumi yunik long Pasifik iven wetem kastom we yumi gat yumi save helpem yumi blong yumi save mekem developmen long kantri ia an ating las toktok nomo mi wantem talem olsem se mi glad long toktok blong daerakta hemi talem olsem se hemi bildim kapasiti bilding mi mi no ekspektem nating se bae mi mi save mekem wan risej olsem be mi sapraes long mi taem we Mary i givim long mi ol aotlaen ol samting olsem wanem blong mekem i jes kam fil, long Franis oli talem 'à l'aise' nomo blong mi kari aot samting ia. Bikos nomata mi no gat skil long hem bat wetem smol we mi bin lanem hemi helpem mi spos long fiuja wan riseja i kam long Ambrym bambae mi hapi blong wok wetem hem from mi gat smol skils ia finis so ol risej we yufala i bin mekem long pas i kam i stap helpem ol risejas blong mekem wok blong olgeta long kantri. Tangkiu tumas.

Cultural politics and the politics of culture in Vanuatu

Mary Patterson

There are three parts to our introduction. I will begin by talking about the research I began when I first came as a young student to North Ambrym. Then I will briefly discuss the project I have been involved in since 2004 with Ileen and Koran. Both of them will also comment on my early research and on our subsequent collaboration. In 1968, in the Colonial period I first went to North Ambrym because my supervisor Michael Allen said, 'If you want to pursue your interest in sorcery in Melanesia you should go to Ambrym because it is notorious for it.' I was 23 years old when I first went to North Ambrym. Research permission then, was dictated by the colonial government who, if they approved your presence contacted the District Agent in the area you wanted to work in. A message to inquire if a student could come and carry out research was sent to chief Wilfred Koran of Fona village in North Ambrym, the grandfather and namesake of Koran. The Chief agreed and said the student would be looked after. I left Vila for Lakatoro, the headquarters of the colonial district of CD2 where the British District Agent was an Australian named Darvall Wilkins. I had one request—'Please can we arrive in Ambrym in daylight,' I said. 'That's fine,' he replied.

Early the next morning I headed for the wharf to wait for the boat that would take me and Paul Binihi, a colonial government official to Fona. I didn't yet understand 'Vanuatu time' so the wait was much longer than expected and when we reached the shores of Ambrym it was already nightfall.

There were people on the beach who had come to see who was arriving. None of them knew who I was. What is this young woman doing here and how has her father allowed her to come here? My belongings were put on the beach while everyone inspected me. A student perhaps? But why hadn't they sent a man! Whatever are we going to do with this woman? Chief Wilfred took me to his house and said 'Don't worry or be anxious, we will look after you well.' And indeed this was true. I was cared for as a member of Wilfred Koran's family.

When I first arrived Koran junior was just a baby and Ileen was a young girl. At this time *kastom* was very strong and there was a division between Christians and those who maintained *kastom* restrictions. Many were afraid of sorcery that is called *abio* in North Ambrym. I did make a study of sorcery but at the same time I also studied kinship and family. Another interest that I had which was also an interest of Ambrymese, was the 'politics of culture'. *Kastom* was strong but it had its own politics, which was a bit different from the situation today. The politics was around competition between men in the *mage* (this is the North Ambrym word for *namange*) about who would have the highest rank. At this time, Tain Mal of Fanla was the highest ranking Chief and he is Koran's great grandfather (his father's mother's father) and Ileen's grandfather (her mother's father). There were other ways that the division between Christians and *kastom* people made life complicated at times, especially in family relations and weddings where there were differences over the exchange of valuables like pigs. Ileen's uncle Tofor (Tain Mal's son) took the grade of *Meleun* during this period. An example of the difficulty caused by the division between Christians and *kastom* people is illustrated by an incident that happened when Ileen was a girl. Tofor slept in Fona one night, the village of his brother-in-law Wilfred who was married to his sister. According to *kastom*, his presence dictated that a pig should be killed and the pork presented to him. Everyone was worried about where they would find a suitable pig at such short notice. Another factor was that Tofor was feared for his reputation as a sorcerer.

The following picture shows the family standing around the gift of vegetables and meat given to Tofor that morning in 1968.



Figure 7.1. The unexpected discovery that Chief Tofor has spent the night in the village requiring presentation of food and meat caused consternation. Koran's father Jonsen stands on the right, Tofor, facing away from the camera is wearing the striped calico over his *nambas*. Fona Village 1968

(Mary Patterson, photographer)

Koran Wilfred

Thank you. My name is Koran and I am employed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I expect you will wonder what I am doing here. I call Mary 'Aunty' now because research has turned us into a family. I worked with Mary in 2004. Before I talk about the research I did with Mary in 2004 as her research assistant I want to go back a bit to what she has said about the research she did first as a young woman. I still remember when my grandfather whose name I carry, Koran Wilfred, who was a big Chief in North Ambrym, said this young woman is part of our family now and you should call her 'Aunty' because I will treat her as my daughter. This is something I remember from the time Mary became part of our family in North Ambrym. Something else I would like to mention is that the people of North Ambrym at that time had no idea what this young woman was doing and asked lots of questions. 'Why has she come to live with you?' 'What is she like?' 'How does she come to be here?' 'Where is her father?' In Vanuatu we have strong family ties so there were lots of questions I was asked to answer, 'What does Chief Wilfred think of this white woman who is living in his village?'

To put this in perspective, during this period research was very, very difficult for people to understand; to start with, your skin is different and then you have a different culture. It was not easy to live in a very different community. But one thing I would like to note here is that during this period, the chiefs with the colonial powers of the time had an active role in looking after any strangers who might arrive on their shores. She is an example of the way that the chiefs were held together by this ethic of hospitality to outsiders. So when 'Aunty Mary' arrived, as she mentioned, she found that our family was very helpful in carrying out her research. Another point is that at this time when people found out that Mary was a student they were pleased to cooperate. I remember when she used to visit lots of different villages and my grandfather would say 'you go with Mary to protect her from sorcery'. So, just as he directed us, each time two or three boys would accompany her to the villages as she carried out her research.

So to mention the context again, during her research, people didn't have much of an idea of research objectives or why white people came to live in villages with them, but as I've said it wasn't long before people gained an understanding. 'Yes, she has a project and now you see how others will follow on.' When you asked questions, you might get silly answers but initially people held back their real thoughts because of lack of cultural understanding, making the task of researchers difficult at this time. So I'm really glad that my family was part of that research and I can say here that I'm proud of that. Because we accepted a young lady from an unknown place, my family in the island is part of the

development of research that has emerged today. She came and stayed with us and our relationship remains so that whenever she goes back to Australia and returns she must visit the family in Ambrym.

Mary Patterson

The research that we began in 2003 was a pilot project for a bigger study that was supported by a research grant from Australia. I found Wilfred just as he had finished working for the Peace Corps and he was available to help with the research. He was truly a collaborator on this project helping formulate the research questions. The name of the project was Modernity and Governance in Vanuatu. The research came out of concerns shared by many Australian colleagues that in Australia, Pacific Islands were represented as 'weak states' which were part of an 'Arc of Instability' producing a very negative depiction of the region.

This project was designed in collaboration with colleagues working in PNG and Solomons, with my research in Vanuatu and a short period in Solomons. An edited volume based on this work is in preparation for publication next year (Patterson and Macintyre n.d.). This project was very different from the early project that was just focused on North Ambrym. Koran and Ileen collaborated in the pilot project where we used interviews and focus groups. Focus groups consist of asking questions of a group of youths or older people or whatever is appropriate to the information you want to discover. We also carried out interviews with representatives of many different interest groups, politicians, NGOs, peak bodies like the Vanuatu Association of Non-Government Organisations (VANGO), representatives of 'civil society' with a number of different approaches. We also carried out a case-study of Nagriamel and its development after Independence which offers a very interesting demonstration of external influences. One part of this project was to discover how the policies of Aid donors are viewed in Vanuatu, as appropriate or not to local life. Are external policies appropriate in the Pacific or not? We wanted to discover how the policy of promoting 'good governance' and 'civil society' was locally understood. We wanted to investigate resistance to such policies because there has not been a great deal of research in this area.

And now over to Koran and Ileen to discuss in more detail our collaboration on this different kind of project.

Ileen Vira

Good morning everyone. My name is Ileen and I am also a member of the family Koran has talked about. Mary Patterson arrived in the New Hebrides when I was eleven years old. At this time I was at School in Santo but during my

holidays I often accompanied her as she did her research. After more than 20 years she returned to carry out more research. Koran and I travelled around a lot with her doing interviews in Ambrym and Santo. As she said, we met many representatives of different parts of society and people in the islands. Last year we went to Ambrym to do a survey of peoples' views mainly about civil society. We interviewed a lot of community leaders. We also went to schools in Ambrym where we distributed a survey form to principals to give to students. You can see me in the picture at Ranon Secondary School (Figure 7.2). We also interviewed Olsen Kai a Nagriamel leader involved in the struggle for Independence. That's about it from me. I work now in the Secret Garden (Mele) as a French-speaking tour guide where I have to do a lot of explanation about *kastom*. In relation to the collaboration Mary was speaking about with our family, the famous Chief mentioned, Chief Tofor, was my uncle. We were able to help Mary because we had access to the *kastom* village of Fanla where *kastom* was extremely strong. Mary has been able to document the history of Fanla village.

Thank you for listening.



Figure 7.2. Ileen Vira with three of the teachers at the Ranon Secondary School North Ambrym

(Mary Patterson, photographer)

Koran Wilfred

I would like to say something more about the research we carried out where I was the research assistant in 2004. The picture below is from the project that the VKS gave Mary as a research project. I said to her 'this is a very interesting project that I'm involved in because it is about discovering the role that *kastom* has in development in Vanuatu.' The questions that we asked made us realise that for the people of Vanuatu, the word *kastom* already carries many different meanings for different people. I'm not talking here about our overseas friends but what was interesting for me was finding out, as a ni-Vanuatu, what people thought the role of *kastom* in development was all about.

Before I take this any further I want to talk a little bit about how I came to be the research assistant on this project. I told Mary, 'I have a few connections round here.' I know people in government, in the Churches and in the communities of Port Vila. She said, 'OK I need you to work on this research project with me.' So with my help and my connections in Vila we did some really good research as you will see from the previous pictures of interviews with politicians, director generals, government officials, youth groups, secondary school principals and students.

We used various methods, interviews, some recordings were made at schools, and sometimes we just had discussions and got people talking, after which we would go back and put it all together. First of all we worked in Port Vila, then outside the centre a bit at places like Seaside and Freswota and then we went to Santo where we had the same sort of discussions on the topic. We went as far as Fanafo and you can see the picture of me with Franky Steven (Figure 7.3). If you look closely at my hand, you will see that I am not holding two eggs, but two coins (Figure 7.4).

I want to tell you a little bit about this place. My grandfather Koran Wilfred was very close to Chief Jimmy Steven until there came a time when there was a dispute with the island people (of Santo) which meant that Olsen Kai and my grandfather Koran Wilfred went back to their island. But they knew that these coins that you see in the picture would be used one day when it was time for Independence. This is very interesting to me because my grandfather told me this history and then in 2004 I got the chance to hold these two coins in my hand. We were talking to Franky in his *nakamal* about this period and I asked him if I could hold the coins and he agreed. His opinions on the role of *kastom* in community development will make very interesting reading in the report on this issue.

I want to talk a little about the many meanings of *kastom*. Some of the answers I got from ni-Vanuatu were '*kastom* is a way of life'; others said '*kastom* is the Melanesian way, meaning how we respect people, how we help them and so on.'

These were the sorts of definitions we got when we were carrying out this research. If you examine now how our overseas colleagues define the discussion

of *kastom*, we will find that it differs a bit from the meanings given by we ni-Vanuatu. And in this research we already found many differences on this topic in this country: inter-island differences, language differences, those of English and French and so on.



Figure 7.3. Franky Steven with Koran Wilfred at Fanafo October 2004

(Mary Patterson, photographer)



Figure 7.4. Koran holds one of the coins minted for Nagriamel (left) and another for Solomon Islands

(Mary Patterson, photographer)

It is no easy task to discover what role people think *kastom* plays in a community or in Vanuatu. Many of the people we interviewed said that *kastom* is something that divides people, it divides communities. I cannot say myself whether this is the case or not. But this is something that we took from the people we interviewed. The majority however, said that *kastom* is a good thing because it unites us and with unity development is able to proceed.

Vanuatu is a unique country in which *kastom* remains strong and assists in developing the nation. As a research assistant this was the central idea for me. I see now that we are unique in the Pacific; even with the *kastom* that we have we are able to help ourselves go forward in the development of this country. Finally, I want to say that I am pleased by what the Director (of the VKS) said in his speech about building capacity. I had never ever expected to be doing research but I was surprised at myself when Mary gave me the research outline that it felt quite comfortable, in French we would say 'à l'aise', that I should do this research. It did not matter that I wasn't trained but what I have learned will enable me to collaborate should a researcher come to Ambrym in the future. Having acquired some skills, I would be pleased to assist. The research that all of you have carried out in the past remains to help all future researchers in their endeavours in this country. Thank you.

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