

# Editors' Introduction

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This collection is derived from a conference held at the Vanuatu National Museum and Cultural Centre (VCC), during November of 2006. This forum brought together a large gathering of foreign and indigenous researchers to discuss diverse perspectives relating to the unique program of social, political and historical research and management that has been fostered in that island nation. *Afta 26 Yia* (After 26 Years), as the conference was called in the national lingua franca Bislama, marked the silver anniversary of the publication of a landmark edited volume, *Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia* (Allen 1981), one year after Vanuatu gained independence in 1980. The combination of that volume, the beautifully produced *Arts of Vanuatu* (Bonnemaison *et al.* 1996) and a special issue of the journal *Oceania* (Bolton 1999), demonstrates the growth of a vibrant and diverse community of social, linguistic and archaeological researchers of Vanuatu. The ongoing spirit of collaboration and quest to produce productive relationships based on mutual respect that defines this community is primarily focused around the operations of the innovative VCC—first established as the New Hebrides Cultural Centre in 1957 (Tryon 1999: 9)—but has much deeper historical roots. At *Afta 26 Yia* we sought to celebrate that research history, while at the same time showcase the diversity and relevance of past and current research.

Of primary importance was the proviso that the conference be held in Vanuatu itself. Numerous exciting and valuable Vanuatu-specific colloquia had already been held outside of Vanuatu, most recently at two annual conferences of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Oceania (Lihue 2005, San Diego 2006), and before that at an innovative multi-disciplinary workshop called Walking About: Travel, Trade, and Movement in Vanuatu (Canberra 2000), and at a research seminar also held at the Australian National University in 1998 (see Bolton 1999). At the same time, ni-Vanuatu fieldworkers (Bislama, *filwoka*: ni-Vanuatu cultural researchers, advocates and advisors) had been meeting annually at the Vanuatu Cultural Center (VCC) in Port Vila for over two decades (Tryon 1999: 10). *Afta 26 Yia* was to provide a timely opportunity to bring the discussion of this research together for the first time within Vanuatu, and maximise the involvement of ni-Vanuatu researchers and a ni-Vanuatu audience.

The conference was timed to fall between the annual Cultural Centre's women's and men's fieldworkers' workshops, and papers were given primarily in Bislama to provide the opportunity for foreign researchers to make joint presentations with their ni-Vanuatu collaborators as well as allowing for fieldworkers and other

ni-Vanuatu researchers to report on their own research projects. The conference was held at the National Museum in Port Vila and received support from the Australia Research Council-funded Asia Pacific Futures Research Network, the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Friends of the Vanuatu Museum. As stated in the conference announcement, *Afta 26 Yia* sought to engage the following questions: What is the significance of collaboration between international and indigenous researchers in Vanuatu? How does social, linguistic, archaeological and historical research on Vanuatu impact upon or benefit local communities, and how might the benefits be enhanced? How might research on Vanuatu be more effectively communicated to local audiences (in publications, film, exhibitions, school curricula or otherwise)? What new initiatives, strategies and institutional linkages might be developed to further enhance research that is both effective and socially relevant? The papers presented here are representative rather than exhaustive, and reflect the wide range of subject matter, presentation styles, and stages of progress that were apparent across the many projects and initiatives discussed at the actual conference. It is also to be noted that the majority of papers presented by ni-Vanuatu Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (VKS) fieldworkers and staff, and the opening speeches, appear in both Bislama and English. These are translations of the actual oral presentations. For a full description of the actual conference, please refer to the epilogue of this volume (by Margaret Jolly).

It might be said that the history of social, linguistic and political research in Vanuatu stretches as far back as those most early voyages of re-discovery, made on the vessels of Quirós (1606), Bougainville (1768) and Cook (1774). While often avowedly violent in nature, the dialogues that took place in those early encounters produced innumerable written and oral ‘texts’ that did much to shape broader cross-cultural impressions and motivations for both sides (for Quirós, see Mondragon 2006; Jolly 2009). Looking further back in time, given the likelihood of multiple waves of primordial migration to the archipelago, such formative projects in cultural knowledge production no doubt predate even this. We also have the later arrival of Roi Mata, to central Vanuatu, probably some time during the 1600s (Bedford 2006: 19). One can only speculate the degree to which such Pacific pioneers engaged with locally established populations in mutual acts of social, linguistic and political research as they figured out how they might live successfully together.

Clearly, however, the specific methodological, pedagogic and institutional roots of the research projects discussed here are more historically proximate. These emerged as a part of the colonial activities of European powers to the Pacific region, and continue as a part of what might be described as neo-Colonial interests today; including especially the joint British and French ‘condominium’ administration of the New Hebrides, and more recently Australia and New Zealand. However misguided their methods and agendas may have been, both

the evangelical and ethnological work of missionaries, such as the Anglican Reverend Robert Henry Codrington (1891) or Marist Father Elie Tattevin (1929–31), necessarily proceeded on the basis of dialogue, and on the desire to foster some degree of mutual religious, linguistic, social, cultural and political-economic understanding. Indeed, missionaries sought to educate the European public 'back home' about the ways of 'native island life', just as they sought to educate and convert those populations to their own ways. Like them, the work of early social scientists such as W. H. R. Rivers (1914), Felix Speiser (1923), John Layard (1942), Bernard Deacon (1934), or the mercurial Tom Harrisson (1937), was undertaken with at least the partial aim in mind of safeguarding aspects of local social or cultural life, if not the physical health and very survival of local populations as a whole.

As noted by Bob Tonkinson (Ch. 2), a significant hiatus separates those nineteenth- and twentieth-century pioneers from the research that followed World War Two. It is through the substantial combined efforts of specific individuals during this pre-Independence period that the current collaborative ethos most clearly emerged (see Bolton 1999; Tryon 1999). That many of these passionate and untiring pre-Independence researchers of Vanuatu language, history and culture are now household names in Vanuatu—whether across Vanuatu as a whole or in the immediate regions in which they worked—is testament to the high esteem in which their efforts are held. In this volume, and providing a most interesting counterpoint to Bresnihan and Woodward's account of *Tufala Gavman* (2002), the remarkably candid and evocative testimonies of three anthropologists who undertook research in the post-war/pre-Independence New Hebrides show something of the influence that both the joint British and French condominium government and local ni-Vanuatu community leaders had in directing research during this period. Both of the colonial authorities evidently encouraged social scientific research, and in both Michael Allen's and Bob Tonkinson's cases, played an important hand in defining their research projects and sites, if not the direction of research itself. By contrast, in Ellen Facey's case (Ch. 3), as in Michael Allen's (Ch. 1), we witness the growing power of ni-Vanuatu to curtail or otherwise control projects within the context of a fast approaching political independence.

Following Independence in 1980, the new Vanuatu government sought to promote *kastom* alongside Christianity as a part of a specifically 'Melanesian socialist' vision. However, given that the governing party had been formed, in the words of its leader Father Walter Lini, on the basis of the struggle against 'any form of colonialism, and any tendency towards neo-colonialism' (1980: 27), a moratorium to block foreign research was established in 1985. While this no doubt came as a disappointing impediment to most foreign researchers of Vanuatu at the time, in hindsight it can be seen to have had the positive effect

of spurring on the current collaborative turn. While some foreign researchers simply undertook shorter research trips on tourist visas, others came to Vanuatu to undertake projects that were approved on the basis of their national importance, collaborative methodologies, and for their inclusion of provisions for local training or knowledge production. Linguists working in Vanuatu at the time, including Terry Crowley, John Lynch and Darrell Tryon established long-term research projects in a number of parts of the country (see Phillip Tepahae this volume on his project in Aneityum with John Lynch) and fostered a new generation of linguistic research students. The further development of the national fieldworkers program during this time through the inclusion of women's *flwokas*, developing out of the collaboration between Lissant Bolton and Jean Tarisesei on the Women's Culture Project (1991–92), represents a case in point (see Bolton 1999; Tryon 1999; also Chs 8 and 9 in this volume). So, too, does the World War Two Ethnohistory Project, coordinated by James Gwero and Lamont Lindstrom (1987–89) (see Lindstrom and Gwero 1998, and Ch. 4 and Ch. 5 in this volume). The recent publication of a path-breaking collaborative ethnography, derived from the Vanuatu Housegirls Project (Rodman *et al.* 2007, and this volume), leads the way in demonstrating the profound value of Vanuatu's unique collaborative turn to readers and researchers internationally (compare, for example, Lassiter 2005).

The moratorium lasted for just under a decade, from 1985 to 1994, and was ultimately lifted to help fulfil the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's mandate 'to preserve, protect and develop *kastom*' through the encouragement of collaborative projects between foreign researchers and local communities (Regenvanu 1999: 98). While not diminishing the importance of individual or sole-authored methodologies, project-centred collaborative approaches have today become a defining characteristic of Vanuatu's unique research environment. This emphasis on collaboration has emerged from an ongoing awareness across Vanuatu's research community of the need for trained researchers—both ni-Vanuatu and foreign—to engage directly with pressing social and ethical concerns, and out of the proven fact that it is not just from the outcomes of research that communities or individuals may be empowered, but also through their modes and processes of implementation, as through the ongoing strength and value of the relationships they produce. With this in mind, it is hoped that the papers presented here, in their collectivity, go beyond the mere celebration of collaboration by confronting Vanuatu's specific environment of cross-cultural research as a diffuse set of historically-emergent methodological approaches, and by demonstrating how these work in actual practice.

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