

**Using film to gain insight into
market vendors' lives in Vanuatu**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master Philosophy of
The Australian National University

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

The aim of this practice-led research initiative was to create an opportunity for women in Vanuatu to be heard. This aim was achieved through the production of an expository documentary film featuring women's voices. The film accompanies a dissertation that discusses the status of women in Vanuatu. Films can convey valuable knowledge, which can be shared with an audience. The purpose of the documentary was to provide an insight into the lives of women in Vanuatu and to highlight some of the challenges they face. Considered the heart of the city, Port Vila Central Market is dominated by women. However, their voices tend not to be heard by policy makers. The goal of this project was to give the women selling fresh produce and working at the market an opportunity to express their views in the film.

Other creative outlets exist in Vanuatu, primarily *Wan Smolbag*, which present theatrical productions that incorporate difficult social issues. Creating the film was an emotional experience for all involved, demonstrating how art can bring people together and create meaningful dialogue. Art plays a vital role in promoting understanding and empathy between people of different cultures and communities. This project demonstrates how art can provide a powerful platform to share stories, break down cultural and social barriers, and foster understanding.

The MPhil thesis that accompanies the documentary film examines women's status in Vanuatu. To explore the current gender dynamics in the archipelago, the thesis investigates a wide range of problems faced by women in Vanuatu in the areas of politics, *kastom* and religion, health, education, and empowerment.

A careful examination of the various issues at play is intended to assist the reader in understanding the complexities of gender relations in Vanuatu and to illuminate potential avenues for improving the status of women in the country. The thesis confirms that women typically have very little opportunity to be heard in Vanuatu. Despite the urgent need to deal with the issues negatively impacting upon women's lives, a lack of representation of women and generally low levels of power amongst women in Vanuatu remain significant barriers to bringing about meaningful change in the country. Therefore, it is essential for initiatives to strive to create a sense of empowerment amongst women so that they can become more involved in decision-making processes. This project represents one such initiative.

Voices from Vanuatu

Voices from Vanuatu is a twenty-five-minute documentary that follows market vendors and their produce from their gardens, using transport, at the market and finally into the restaurant. The film gives women a platform from which they can talk. It is the creative work that accompanies this thesis. The film has high production values and is best screened on a large format platform. The film will be able to be viewed once the participants have done so.

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Acronyms

CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GEDSI	Gender Equality Disability Social Inclusion
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
KPH	Kam Pusem Hed is a clinic run by Wan Smolbag Theatre
M4C	Markets for Change
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MHC	Malampa Handicraft Centre
MP	Member of Parliament
MVA	Market vendor association
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NGO	Non-government organisation
NHNP	New Hebrides National Party
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree
STI	Sexual Transmitted Infections
TVET	Vanuatu's Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women	United Nations Women
VCC	Vanuatu Christian Council
VCC-WD	Vanuatu Christian Council Women's Desk
VKS	Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta
VNCW	Vanuatu National Council of Women
VWC	Vanuatu's Women's Centre

Bislama Language

Aelan dress	Mother Hubbard style dress worn by many women in Vanuatu
Aelan kaekae	Island food
Bisnis	Business
Blak majik	Black magic
Haos gel	A female employed to undertake domestic work
Jif	Chief
Kleva	Men with magic powers
Lokol kaekae	Locally sourced food
Mama graon	Mother earth
Nakamal	Meeting place (see footnote 10 for details)
Nakaemas	Black magic
Rabis saed blong <i>kastom</i>	The negative aspects (or ‘rubbish side’) of <i>kastom</i>
Siloa	Slow
Waetman	White people or foreigners
Wan Smolbag	Influential theatre group in Vanuatu

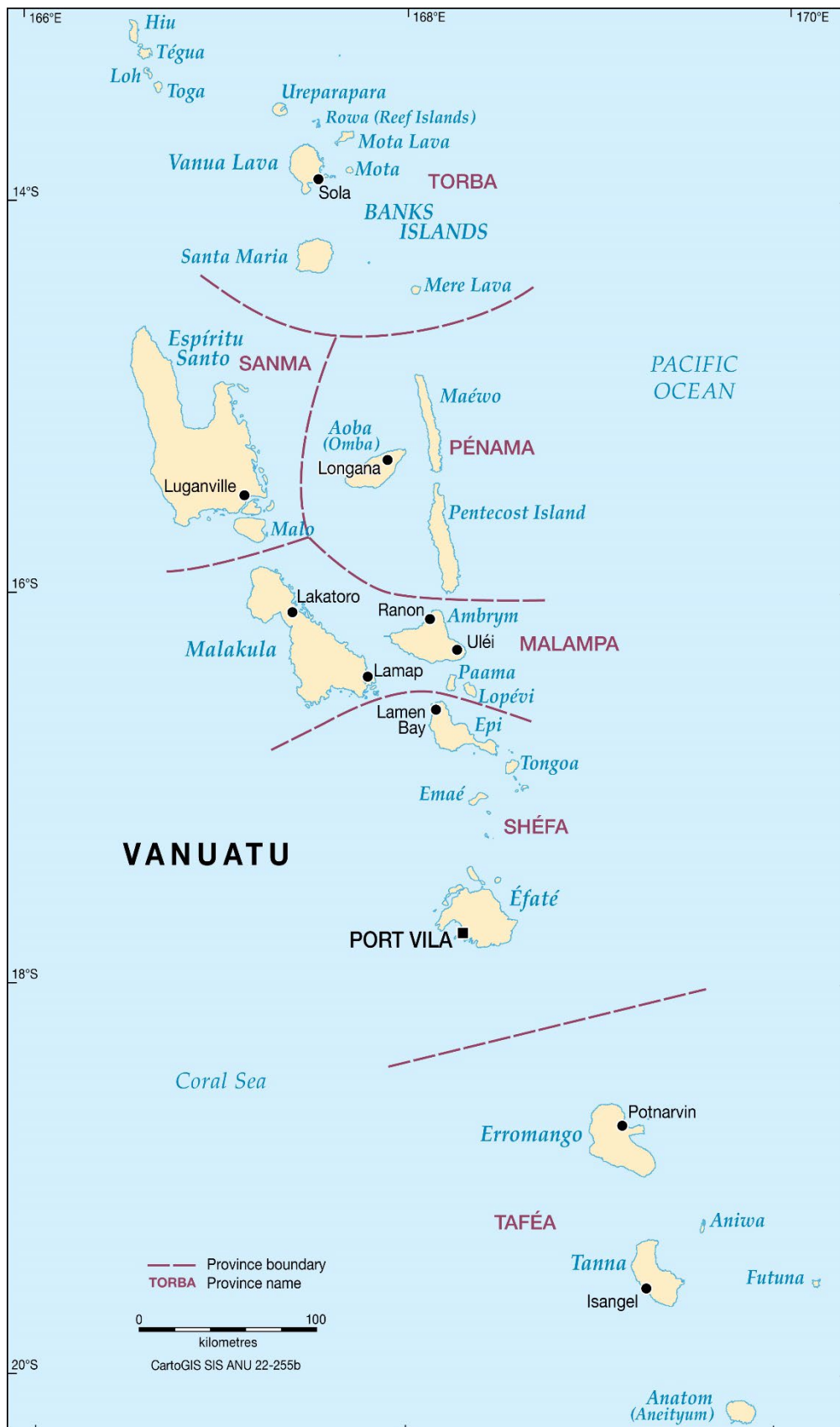


Figure 1. Map of Vanuatu. Courtesy of ANU CartoGIS.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis is the theoretical analysis that accompanies the creative work *Voices from Vanuatu*, a twenty-five-minute documentary film about the women of the central market in Port Vila. Port Vila is the capital of Vanuatu and can be seen on the map in Figure 1. The development of the creative work involved practical fieldwork in the Pacific nation Vanuatu, as well as subsequent film editing processes. The introduction chapter explores the origin of my film before briefly looking at the origins of documentary. It covers the United Nations' (UN) Women's Markets for Change program and briefly looks at the status of women in Vanuatu. The introduction then outlines the remaining chapters of the document.

1.1 Origins of the film

While working for the UN Women's Markets for Change project in Vanuatu from 2015 until 2017, I observed that the central market was at the heart of Port Vila and was overly represented by female market vendors. During my time there I worked closely with the vendors and UN Women. This involved photographing meetings, elections, other occasions, and portraits. One set of portraits were of market vendors coping with the El Niño drought. The drought followed the Grade 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam, which caused major damage to crops. The subsequent drought exacerbated these problems. These portraits were exhibited by UN Women around the world and more importantly in Vanuatu. When the market vendors observed the portraits in Erakor Village it brought tears to their eyes.

The exhibition made me see how visual imagery could be powerful in a development setting especially when compared with the volume of written research in the same setting. Although the central market in Port Vila played an important role in the capital city, it became apparent the market vendors were not always heard in Vanuatu society. Working with the Markets for Change project it was easy to see there was no shortage of strong women and this generated the idea of making a documentary film. I felt the film could give the women an opportunity to be heard and through this a sense of agency and empowerment. The research questions addressed here are:

How do images and film empower people?

How can participation in a documentary film create a sense of empowerment amongst market vendors in Vanuatu?

What factors have contributed to a sense of disempowerment amongst women in Vanuatu?

In an ideal world, it is best to leave behind projects that involve saving people. Instead, we should focus on making the world more just and equitable. Organisations like the UN often have the laudable goal of wanting to improve people's lives. Unfortunately, these projects tend to involve a "white saviour" mentality that can lead to a disconnect from people on the ground and perverse outcomes relating to "development" projects in places like Island Melanesia. This thesis explores how a documentary film helped a group of ni-Vanuatu women who work in the Port Vila Central Market to express themselves, while being critically aware of the role of a paternalistic and privileged gaze inherent to the filmmaking process. Cultural relativism does not preclude asking how, living in this privileged and powerful part of the world, we might examine our own responsibilities for the circumstances in which others in distant places find themselves (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 49). Respect for difference should not be confused with cultural relativism. No one stands outside of the world, monitoring a sea of illiterate, poor people living under oppressive cultures; we are part of that world (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 49).

1.2 Documentary origins

I use the word documentary in the same way as John Grierson when he described a Robert Flaherty film in 1926 (Druick & Williams, 2014, p. 24). A documentary according to Grierson ought to serve a social purpose and be utilitarian, pedagogic, and impersonal (De Jong, 2008, p. 144). Grierson asserts "that it is a basic tenant of documentary theory that the primary search is not for beauty, but for the fact of the matter, and that in the fact of the matter is the only path to beauty that will not wear down soon" (2013, p. 31). In creating a documentary, we strive to reflect the truth according to the facts. Grierson advised documentary makers to be careful when considering which moving images to capture. Further, he warned that asking the wrong questions would result in filming "the wrong answers" (Grierson, 2013, p. 30). Thus, it is important to choose the right questions and facts to tell an honest story and present an accurate representation of reality.

A documentary approach restores the film's fundamentals by selecting, eliminating, and coordinating natural phenomena. The complexity of our lives is expressed in a powerful and captivating way in a film such as *Voices from Vanuatu*, which brings rational and factual together in an inspiring way. Grierson points to the factual when making a documentary, which seems straight forward. Point the camera at the subject and start recording. It should be noted, however, that the lens is not objective since the content excluded as soon as the camera frames the subject is just as important as what is included. For example, in *Voices from*

Vanuatu, I filmed men as well as women. As I wanted to emphasise the women in the film, the edited version only shows a glimpse of men. I edited out most of the footage of two husbands helping their wives to prepare the produce for market because I wanted to emphasise the women.

Elizabeth Cowie (2011) has emphasised how meaning is constructed in a documentary. By re-enacting recorded reality, it distorts the past by excluding other views and people, but because it is derived from the real world, it also extracted from reality. Then through captions and voiceovers, meaning is opened up (Cowie, 2011). We decided that Fiona Morris (my wife) would interview the market vendors as she was a UN Women trained journalist who had conducted many interviews with market vendors while she was in Vanuatu. Having Fiona Morris do the interviews meant that I could concentrate on the film process, in particular the cameras, the microphone and the audio recorder. Also, at the end of each interview when Fiona had finished her questioning I was asked if I had any more questions. Fiona's questions were mainly based on biographical information but were important in getting the participants into a relaxed frame of mind. Each time I was asked, I suggested the vendors talk about the market conditions. Each vendor gave an honest reply, and it was these conversations which made the film. This resonates well with Grierson's statement about the wrong questions. Documentaries often go further than just describing a story and many strong films have conflict as part of the narrative. For film theorist Thomas Waugh some of the attributes of what he calls committed documentaries are taking a specific ideological position. He recommends that films engage with changing the world (Waugh, 2011, p. 6). By criticising the conditions at the Port Vila Market, the vendors changed the trajectory of the film from an interpretation of the world to a film with a more radical political positioning.

1.3 Key modes of documentaries

The key modes for making a documentary as categorised by Bill Nichols are poetic, reflexive, observational, participatory, interactive, performative, and expository (Nichols, 2010, p. 210). Some films are clearly one mode or another whereas others can use multiple modes. Another type of documentary that will be introduced here is ethnographic film.

Poetic documentary does not use a linear continuity to create story structure. Poetic filmmaking arrives at its point by arranging footage in an order to evoke audience participation. Tone, rhythm, and spatial juxtaposition, colour, sounds, and mood are common attributes. Ron Fricke's *Samsara* is a good example. Reflexive documentaries acknowledge the way a documentary is constructed and that it is impossible to show a purely objective and truthful

subject. As Bill Nichols wrote, the reflexive mode will provoke audiences to question the authenticity of documentary in general. *Exit Through the Gift Shop* by Banksy (2010) is a good example. Observational documentaries were first recorded in the 1960s and 1970s by a group of filmmakers (Basu, 2008, p. 95; Cowie, 2011, p. 20). Due to an advance in technologies during this time, camera equipment became easier to use and manoeuvre. This allowed filmmakers more freedom to observe events without being intrusive to their subjects. The phrase “fly on the wall” describes this approach well. Nothing is staged and what you see is completely natural. The documentaries by Frederick Wiseman employ an observational methodology. See *Titicut Follies* (1967) and *Hospital* (1970), both of which are good examples.

Participatory filmmaking also often uses a photovoice methodology where the subjects are given cameras themselves. In participatory film, professional filmmakers act as facilitators, transferring technical skills to participants in order to develop their confidence and self-esteem, to encourage them to express themselves creatively, to develop critical awareness and to provide a means for them to communicate with others (Manni, Ursu, & Hook, 2019, p. 1). This is similar to Verena Thomas’s filmmaking practice in Papua New Guinea where she describes her practice as being community-responsive (V. Thomas, 2011). Interactive film, and particularly the genre of interactive documentary, expands upon the participatory filmmaking process by allowing the inclusion of texts, photographs, and images of websites in order to add depth to the topic.

I felt three weeks was not long enough to do justice to a participatory or interactive film and I was never interested in being a voice in the film as for me it was the voices of the women involved that were most important. Other forms of participatory filmmaking are when the encounter between filmmaker and subject is recorded, and the filmmaker actively engages with the situation they are documenting. The documentaries by Louis Theroux and Michael Moore both use a participatory methodology (see *The City Addicted to Crystal Meth* by Louis Theroux [2009] and *Bowling for Columbine* by Michael Moore [2002]). Performative documentaries encourage the filmmaker’s involvement with the subject. Because the filmmakers tend to be passionately involved, performative documentaries will usually be subjective in one way or another. Unlike many modes of documentary, performative films do not set out to reach a truth but show a perspective or what it is like to be there. See *Supersize Me* by Morgan Spurlock (2004) and Damon Gameau’s *That Sugar Film* (2014) and the films by Michael Moore which also can be seen to be participatory mode.

This meant the film would have to be made in the popular expository style, which meant interviewing the participants and then using the audio as the soundtrack. The audio was synchronised to the interviewee footage and accompanies other footage taken in the women's gardens, during their journeys and at the market. Other films using an expository mode are the films that are narrated with their primary aim being to educate an audience and explain their subject. Examples of expository filmmaking are *An Inconvenient Truth* by Davis Guggenheim (2006) and *Nanook of the North* by Robert Flaherty (1922).

Ethnographic films are made by an ethnographer who immerses themselves in a particular community or organisation to observe behaviour and interactions up close and usually for a long duration. In addition to written reports, ethnographic films enhance other forms of ethnographic research. See *Chronicle D'ete* by Jean Rouch (1961) and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1963).

1.4 Film structure

The outline of the film follows the market vendors and their produce from their farms through to the restaurant. Vanuatu's market gardens embody a local take on the phrase "from the paddock to the plate", which has been used widely by restaurants particularly in conjunction with sustainability. This language has been picked up in discussions about *aelan kaekae* or *lokol kaekae* in Vanuatu where people describe their food as being locally sourced and sustainable (James Flexner, personal communication, 2023). In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, Roline Tahapi emphasises the local organic fresh produce used in her cooking.

1.5 Film process

Prior to filming I already knew the documentary camera is limited by the fact some things are invisible. As Chanan has explained, "the invisibility of social processes is more like history, which refuses to present itself in front of the camera but remains an absent cause" (Chanan, 2008, p. 129). By interviewing and filming just women in particular I would hope that audiences would question the absence of men. It is a common saying in Vanuatu that women do the work while men are absent, and it was this I wanted to amplify in the film. Men do absent themselves from domestic and garden work often because of chiefly or familial responsibilities and, increasingly labour mobility, for example the Recognised Seasonal Employer program run in New Zealand. My objective was to make a film which sits on the border of social documentary and art. In recording a film about rural market vendors, I aimed to strengthen the personal identities of the participants and provide a record for the local community in Vanuatu, in

particular the local market vendor community. In the film, participants can see themselves reflected back to film audiences and may gain a new perspective of themselves as market vendors and an accompanying appreciation of their role in the community.

Having a woman as the interviewer helped mitigate the fact I was a white male. This is important as it was the English and French who colonised Vanuatu (see chapter three), and colonial legacies continue under the auspices of foreign aid from *waetman* (foreigners or white people), with Australia and New Zealand being especially prominent donors. I could have been seen as another representative from the patriarchy or just another male oppressing women (Spriggs, 1993; Strathern, 1988; Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011).

1.6 Film audiences

The film places the women involved front and centre. The participants volunteered to be part of the film. It was planned to take the film back to Vanuatu to show the participants the finished results and survey the audiences however the COVID-19 pandemic has meant this has not been possible. The project design really relies on a physical copy of the film to be shown on location in Vanuatu via laptops or televisions. The large file size means it is unrealistic to send the film to the participants. I am unsure if they could see the film on YouTube as internet connections in Vanuatu are unreliable. Being at the screening also allows the reactions to be recorded and evaluated.

The highest priority audience is that the film is shown in Vanuatu to the participants. The next priority is the Vanuatu Kalljoral Senta (VKS), which requires that a copy of the finished film be lodged as an archival copy. It is an obligation to provide the VKS with the film as part of the research agreements. (See chapter two for further details of the approval process.) However, I have published the film via the internet for which the participants have given permission. The film is published on YouTube with an unlisted setting. This means people with the YouTube link will be able to see the film providing they have an internet connection that is fast enough. I have yet to provide the participants the link as I feel I really need to be present when this happens. Ethically I feel that to evaluate their responses I would need to be present. I intend to travel to Vanuatu in the near future to share the film with participants. It would be very interesting to show the participants the film as it was recorded in 2019 and with time it is possible the participants will have forgotten what they said in front of the camera. They could be surprised about the editing as a lot of film ended up being cut and the finished film is only 25 minutes from about 10 hours of recording. Interview participants were not involved in the

film editing process. As I had no time to edit the footage during the three weeks we were in country, the editing all happened in Wellington. It was very impractical to send footage back to the participants during the editing process.

As Gaunt has argued, “trust and integrity are central to the special relationship that good documentary makers have with those they are filming” (Gaunt, 2008, p. 160). In the case of this project, it was important that the participants trusted me and that the project had integrity. This has certainly affected the output for *Voices from Vanuatu*. My own sense of ethics and the aims of the project dictate that the main audience for the film is the participants. I could have fully published the film onto the internet and looked to screen it on Pasifika TV. Pasifika TV broadcasts to 13 Pacific countries, including Vanuatu, and provides free to air news, sport, and drama. It is funded by the New Zealand Government. But ethically I feel this would be against the spirit of the consent process (see chapter two for a detailed explanation of the project’s human research ethics approval and the consent process employed).

There is a recent example of returning still images to Atchin and Vao, two small islands near Malakula in Vanuatu. John Layard was a British anthropologist based there for a year from 1914 to 1915. He extensively photographed the rituals and life of the communities on the islands. In 2003 and in 2006, Haidy Giesmar returned to the islands with Layard’s still photographs. This process was discussed in the book titled *Moving Images: John Layard field work and photography on Malakula since 1914* (Geismar & Herle, 2009). Haidy Geismar (2006) writes that the images were not just historic documents with nostalgic values. Rather, Geismar suggests that the photographs worked as agents and rekindled aspects of *kastom* that had been suppressed over the years (Geismar, 2006, p. 558).

1.7 The film and Silae Vanua

The resulting film is about strong and brave women. Giving the participants a platform meant they could “speak out about their lives and conditions that oppressed them” (Basu, 2008, p. 102). In particular the women talked about the oppressive conditions at Port Vila Market. The film centres women’s experiences to counterbalance the dominant male voice that has been the focus of much academic study, from politics to ethnography and the patriarchal discourse that is pervasive in Vanuatu. In making the film I was interested in stories of change and if a film can be a little part of that change, I would be proud. The film is part educational and part stories about people’s lives. My objective is to allow deeper truths to emerge, truths about who is doing the work and truths about the absence of men. In a similar way to how Paul Basu describes the films of Kim Longinotto, “I want the audience to think the women in the films

could be their aunt or their sister or daughter” (Basu, 2008, p. 102). I wanted the film to show that women are responsible for more than their fair share of work and although it is tough, women take pride in what they are doing both on the farms and in the market.

As an aside, while we were undertaking the filming process, Morris Kaloran, a chief and someone with six years’ experience working for UN Women, told me that the film would have not been possible ten years ago. He said the women would have lacked confidence. I was fortunate to be making a film after the participants had undergone training with UN Women and had formed the Silae Vanua Market Vendor Association. The association was formed in 2015 as part of UN Women’s Markets for Change project. It represents thousands of market vendors on Efate who are 90 percent women.

Markets for Change (M4C) works with stakeholders, service providers and the market vendors to build and support inclusive, effective, and representative advocacy groups, deliver appropriate services, training and interventions, ensure women’s voices are heard and taken into account at the decision-making level; and to improve physical infrastructure and operating decisions (UN Women, 2015, p. 1).

The training is designed for vendors to understand the functioning of councils and the basic principles of market management. M4C provides support to market vendor associations (MVA) to conduct elections, annual general meetings and improve good governance by providing ‘leadership and communication’, ‘good governance’ and ‘strategic planning’ training and workshops to MVA committee members.

Before M4C started there was no MVA in Vanuatu whereas now there are three. There is Silae Vanua based in Efate, the Marobe Market Vendor association based in Port Vila, and the Northern Islands Market Vendor Association in Luganville. The Vanuatu MVAs have 5133 active members of which 4363 are women (Fleming & Tabualevu, 2018, p. 10). The National Bank in Vanuatu delivers training in financial literacy and improving market business and the Department of Rural Development and Agriculture partners to support the increase of agricultural productivity and income (Fleming & Tabualevu, 2018, p. 10). Another outcome is capacity development: “M4C delivers training to local government, market management and MVAs on a range of topics including customer service, financial management, gender responsive budgeting, the powers of the councillors and the council and the separation of powers and duties, and market by-laws” (Fleming & Tabualevu, 2018, p. 10). M4C also

conducts consultations with MVAs on required infrastructure improvements to increase market sustainability, resilience, safety, and accessibility.

However, not all plans for the project were straight forward. The mid-term report pointed to a lack of coordination between UNDP and UN Women, which limited the outcomes for the project. “Without the two agencies working more closely together the UNDP’s work on advancing women economically remains separate from UN Women’s activities related to empowerment, agency and collective organisation” (Fleming & Tabualevu, 2018, p. 36). The report also said that there is potential for a backlash in Vanuatu, with some stakeholders resisting the apparent exclusive focus on women and stating a preference for a family approach (Fleming & Tabualevu, 2018, p. 44). Vanuatu was hit by Cyclone Pam in 2015 and this impeded project progress and required M4C to respond in different ways. For example, M4C became responsible for seed distribution (see Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2. Seed distribution, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2015.

However, because Silae Vanua is a Western thought program imposed onto the market vendors, those from outside could view it in a negative light or with distrust, with it being thought of as a continuation of colonial rule. Markets for Change, which was a UN Women program run by UN Women and DFAT, was funded by the Australian and Canadian Governments in

partnership with the Vanuatu Government. There is mistrust of the Vanuatu Government, particularly in rural areas (Douglas, 2002, p. 17; Forsyth, 2009, p. 18). As Barbara and Baker report on the Northern Islands Market Vendors Association, it may be seen as a vehicle for foreign interests due to its close connection with a donor organisation (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 999). Silae Vanua, the MVA directly relevant to this film project, may face some similar issues.

1.8 Subsistence farmers

In Vanuatu, a majority of people are subsistence farmers, and women bear an unequal burden of work. Market vendors in Vanuatu face many challenges as they attempt to build a secure livelihood. The majority choose “agricultural entrepreneurship as their route out of poverty” (Saad, 2013, p. 142). This can be seen in Port Vila Market where value added products can be seen. For example, bottles of oil and sticks threaded with nuts. The gendered division of labour appears unaffected by women's increased contribution to smallholder households' cash income. Rural women provide their unpaid time for both food production and cash crops within the household to secure the household's needs. To align household policies with neoliberal governance, cash crops are grown. Besides taking food to the market, women have “key activities including growing and cooking food, rearing children, maintaining kinship and ancestral relationships, and organising collaborative events such as feasts and rituals” (Flexner, 2020, p. 13). This was seen in the interview with Serah Fakao where she stated it was up to her to go to the market and provide for the family whether it was raining or not and whether she felt like it or not. Rural women in Efate and Nguna rely on markets to earn a living, and Port Vila's market is in the centre of town, making it a hub. “However, the location of markets within the informal economy means that policymakers have tended to overlook them as an important economic sector” (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 5).

In Vanuatu, as in other developing countries, women have low status when compared to men. This is not universal among the 85 inhabited islands as there are pockets of matrilineal order. However, missionary interference altered gender roles substantially and Western religion continues to reinforce patriarchal relationships. There is also evidence of female oppression prior to the introduction of Western religion. Matthew Spriggs (1993) talks about oppression of women on Aneityum by indigenous men where chiefs and husbands offered women to white traders in exchange for tools. Spriggs goes further saying the missionaries recorded sexual antagonism and violence against women resulting in their deaths (1993, p. 145). However, James Flexner suggests a more nuanced relationship between men and women in southern Vanuatu by stating that “relationships between men and women were unequal, with men

exclusively holding the highest chiefly titles in these ranked societies” (2020, p. 13). Development partner countries, non-government organisations (NGOs) and other agencies promote women’s empowerment through education, health and gender equality. While education and gender equality are easier to understand, improving health of women can also return large benefits (Saad, 2013, pp. 243-244).

Gender roles in Vanuatu have been shaped by kastom. [...] Kastom can be used to curtail the activities of women. [...] The late Grace Mera Molisa, ni-Vanuatu poet and women’s activist, asserted that women were oppressed both by traditional structures [kastom] and by introduced structures of church and politics. (Bowman, Cutura, Ellis, & Manuel, 2009, p. 22)

Traditionally, and according to the church and to *kastom*¹, a women’s role centres on supporting her husband, maintaining the household, looking after children, tending the family’s garden and animals. Economic empowerment can be seen to be pitted against church and *kastom* by taking the women away from their traditional roles. Statistics around government representation, empowerment, and education for women, paint a bleak picture (Vanuatu Women’s Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011) (see chapters three, six and seven for further details on politics, education and empowerment). Vanuatu is ranked 141 of 188 countries in UNDP’s coefficient of human inequality (UNDP, 2020, p. 1). The happiest country index frequently places Vanuatu near the top of the rankings (Reuters, 2006). This rating is based on sustainability and particularly the subsistence way of living, living without money and the resilience of the people to natural disasters. The authors of this list clearly have not read the 2011 survey by the Vanuatu Women’s Centre and the Vanuatu National Statistics Office.

1.9 Empowerment using visual methodology.

While there has been considerable research undertaken on how to lift the status of women in Vanuatu, there is little known on how to best utilise visual methods in this context. For example, there are numerous research documents on economic empowerment but the only documents I have come across that explore how photography or film can empower women in Vanuatu are from the exhibition I held in Erakor Village and from Vanuatu’s vocational training sector (see chapter seven on empowerment). To my knowledge there has not been a photovoice program run in Vanuatu and the small amount of film I have encountered comes from NGOs such as

¹ *Kastom* in Vanuatu is a pre-colonial political system that is based on tradition. There are *kastom* dress, *kastom* law, *kastom* healing, *kastom* politics and *kastom* marriage. Kava drinking is a big part of *kastom*, as is the killing of pigs. Most often *kastom* is dominated by men but there are some areas in Vanuatu where women can be empowered. For more on *kastom* in Vanuatu, see Cummings (2008, pp. 133-141), Bowman et al. (Bowman et al., 2009, pp. 22-33), Servy (2020, p. 7), Bolton (1999, pp. 51-53) and Jolly (2015, p. 69).

UN Women or the Red Cross and Further Arts or *Wan Smolbag* who make educational documentaries. Few of these films have empowerment of women as their core philosophy. One example is a film by *Wan Smolbag* titled '*Vot long Pati Ia*' which in 1999 addressed "the conflict between the tradition of male dominance and the constitutional right of women to participate in National politics" (Goldsmith & Barber, 2001, p. 308). Carolyn Pedwell (2012, p. 176) suggests:

that rather than turning away from 'representation' and towards 'the empirical' with the hope of accessing a fuller or more immediate affective 'truth', we might reconsider how literature, film and art offer critical interfaces for thinking about the transnational politics of empathy in ways that may not be possible, or easily discernible, through the embodied face-to-face encounter alone.

In the film I made, the women participants talk openly about their challenges with being market vendors including strong criticism of the conditions in the market but were silent when asked about *kastom*. The film was made in an expository style where each participant was recorded in an interview and the remaining images were made in documentary mode. In giving the market vendors a platform to talk and crucially be recorded, the knowledge of the conditions of the market is now public information. The silence I encountered in Port Vila has now been pierced. To my knowledge the participants were proud to be in the film and received a boost to their self-esteem. One of the film's participants Elda Leitap stated that she was proud to represent market vendors. This sentiment echoes those expressed about the portraits I made about the El Nino drought. The women were proud to be photographed and received a further boost when each woman was called to the stage and publicly acknowledged. It is unfortunate COVID-19 has caused a lengthy delay in taking the film back to Vanuatu where I could have evaluated the response to the film.

1.10 Introduction to the chapters

The chapter following this one discusses the project's methodology. The subsequent chapters present the literature examined in this thesis, which looks at the status of women in Vanuatu with the aim of presenting a strong case for these women to be represented by photography or film. In the areas of politics, religion and *kastom*, health, education, and empowerment, it becomes clear that Vanuatu women are marginalised when compared with men. The politics chapter looks at the historical settings that background politics in the present day and finds although independence was in 1980 there are still divisions. The religion and *kastom* chapter explores the history of both and finds both religion and *kastom* have been cast against women's emancipation in most cases. The health chapter explores key challenges to women's

health and wellbeing and outlines legislation that has been passed by the Vanuatu Government, in particular the Family Protection Act. The education chapter finds lack of schools and education that is neither free nor compulsory are among things that hold girls and young women back from fulfilling their potential. The empowerment chapter defines the term 'empowerment' and considers its application in the context of contemporary Vanuatu. The chapter's discussion includes various instances where photos and film have been used to empower women. A conclusion chapter summarises the findings. Overall, this dissertation provides consideration of the status of women in Vanuatu and establishes a rationale for the production of the film.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This thesis is a project by creative works. There are two areas of focus where this research has been explored and at times coincided. The first focus is practical fieldwork – in this case this involved the production of a documentary film – and the second is theoretical analysis, which has culminated in this dissertation.

2.1 Ethics and informed consent

As part of the development of this project, informed consent was a key ethical consideration. The number of my ANU ethics approval is 2017/163. Appendix 1 contains the participant information sheet. As is discussed later in this chapter in more detail, small gifts and payments were given to each community as a gesture of reciprocity and to express gratitude for permission to film there. Additionally, all participants were informed that they would receive a free copy of the film. As a result of low COVID-19 vaccination rates, I have not been able to take the film back to Vanuatu. At present, Jeanette Wallace who is president of Silae Vanua has received the link for the film. After this was sent, I was going to send some evaluation forms to her, but this was interrupted by two cyclones and an earthquake. It is my intention to travel to Vanuatu in the near future to take copies of the film to participants.

Before filming, all participants gave me permission to use their names and their consent for me to film. In addition to the requirement for written consent from interview subjects, my ethics approval stipulated that I must secure oral consent from participants in the informal filming at the market and the gardens. At Port Vila Market, I did secure this oral consent from some of the participants before filming, while others were made aware of the film after it had been recorded and had no objections. In the gardens, I received written consent from all participants.

No child was interviewed. Even though I had informed consent from the parents and grandparents of the children who were filmed, the ethics approval did not cover children. Therefore, the identities of the children have been hidden using a film editing process which involved the blurring of their faces. This is common practice on television where digital privacy is important. For example, a documentary series on Netflix titled *The Casketeers* (Leonard & Lee-Harris, 2018) deals with funerals and the creators always blur the face of the deceased.

2.2 Filming in Vanuatu

The filming period in Vanuatu was three weeks. With the short time available, I cannot overstate the importance of three key aspects. One was the time I had previously worked with the market vendors during my time based in Vanuatu. A number of women knew who I was, which made it easier to gain their trust. Secondly, I had the assistance of Morris Kaloran and Fiona Morris. Morris had worked closely with the market vendors for the previous six years while Fiona had worked on the Markets for Change project with UN Women from 2015 through to 2017. The film project was viewed as trustworthy by the market vendors because Morris Kaloran, Fiona Morris and I were familiar faces for the market vendors. Thirdly, I sent a draft outline of the film to Morris Kaloran of UN Women months before we intended to arrive in Vanuatu. This was circulated around the market vendors so that they could start planning for who was going to be in the film. This was crucial as the market vendors knew we were coming and, due to budget constraints, the film had to be made in three weeks.

When we arrived, four days of rain meant we could run meetings with the market vendors, but we were unable to carry out any film work. The participants in the film had already been chosen by the time we had arrived in Port Vila. It was gratifying to see my draft plan pinned to the wall in a Silae Vanua office. Silae Vanua is the market vendor association on Efate. Prior to starting to film, we had to meet with the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (VKS) and pay the fees for making a film. This was approximately \$930 NZ. The VKS was the first gatekeeper (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, pp. 172-173) we encountered in Vanuatu. This was an extremely important process as the government approval was shown in the villages. The VKS plays a critical role in making sure that all research carried out in Vanuatu is carried out ethically and transparently and benefits the country's people in some way. The VKS would have charged us considerably more, but the VKS personnel saw that I had applied for consent when I was living in Vanuatu and therefore the payment was backdated to 2017 instead of 2019, which meant the charge was significantly reduced. The plan was put in place, and we began filming in the different locations. The interview participants were Hellen Kalo on Nguna Island, Serah Fakao of Epau Village, Roline Tahapi of Port Vila, and Elda Leitap of Epule Village.

Introductions were made and gifts were given to the chief of each village before any filming took place. The reason why chiefs were given gifts was on advice we received from Morris Kaloran and Rachel Merang. Morris Kaloran is a chief himself and Rachel Merang was the president of Silae Vanua, the market vendor association on Efate, at the time. The chiefs were another form of gatekeeper (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, pp. 172-173). Before handing over the gifts, an explanation was provided regarding the film. This was made by the ni Vanuatu

team we were travelling with. Every chief we encountered knew in advance we were coming. The gifts were a woven mat, a children's book about Edmund Hillary climbing Mount Everest illustrated by our daughter, a small amount of cash and some All Blacks memorabilia. We also gave the book to Hellan Kalo on Nguna Island as she went to considerable trouble to host us for the night. There are arguments for gift giving: not giving gifts reaffirms existing socio-economic inequalities while giving gifts expresses one's commitment to the relationship (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014). In Vanuatu it is *kastom* to give a gift to establish good relations with the recipient so not giving a gift would go against indigenous protocols and could negatively affect the project. Exchange is a central part of ni Vanuatu relationships. The transactions that ni Vanuatu make between each other and, I would argue between them and us, have consequences for wider economic and social relations (see also Bailey, 2019, p. 42).

The participants were not paid nor given gifts, but we paid for transport if they needed to travel to meet us and we covered any other costs incurred as a result of their participation in the film project. This approach was recommended by Morris Kaloran and Rachel Merang. This decision was made with strong advice, and it was only after we sought advice from locals that the decision was made. I am a photojournalist and Fiona Morris is a trained journalist by background and in standard journalistic practice it is not regarded as good practice to pay informers. Morris Kaloran also indicated he did not want the film participants to experience any jealousy from other market vendors and that the participants were representing all other market vendors. I would argue that visiting and interviewing the participants could have raised their self-esteem as it legitimised their knowledge because they had not been interviewed previously. Even the process of "visiting poor households/individuals that would normally be ignored by distinguished visitors [...] could help raise their self-esteem" (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, p. 175).

2.3 Positionality

Whether it takes place abroad or at home, and whatever the level of acceptance or depth of immersion the researcher achieves over time, fieldwork produces difference through the very nature of the enterprise, and so researchers must always confront the unusual (Taylor, 2008, p. 30). When it comes to ethnicity, I am a white male, and in Vanuatu being male gives me privileges since Vanuatu is largely a patriarchal society. Although Morris Kaloran, Jeanette Wallace, and Rachel Merang provided enormous support, I was on my own this time. At the time, Jeanette Wallace was Silae Vanua's secretary. As I needed a Vanuatu crew to legitimise the film, this support was crucial. Elinorah Malifa, in her PhD titled *Hollywood in the Pacific* (2022, p. 55) criticised the film *Tanna* for having no ni Vanuatu crew whereas *Voices from*

Vanuatu had Morris Kaloran as an executive producer and Jeanette Wallace and Rachel Merang as producers. I also had great support from the participants. Nonetheless, I remained aware of my own positionality. “The recognition that we belong to various social categories that position us differently within power structures has helped researchers move away from traditional views of impartiality and claims of neutrality in fieldwork” (Moser, 2008, p. 385). Each of us embarks upon research with our own thoughts, which are influenced by our own unique mix of class, gender, nationality, religious faith, sexuality, ethnicity, social class and other identities.

My wife and I were both aware of pros and cons of our relationships with the vendors. In addition to being insiders from our time with the vendors between 2015 and 2017, we were also viewed as outsiders from New Zealand. Being from New Zealand was advantageous in Vanuatu because people were friendly once we transferred that knowledge. This friendliness is largely due to the All Blacks rugby team and the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE). The RSE program has had considerable positive impact for local Ni-Vanuatu people (Bailey, 2019). As a result of our two years in Vanuatu, countless bus drivers and Vanuatu residents told us this. In resorts, we often commented on the contrast between our lifestyles and vendors' livelihoods. Our age was also a factor. We established a comfortable atmosphere because of our similar ages and our marital status. I may have faced some social awkwardness as a single person in making a film about women in Vanuatu. It may have contributed to our sense of insider status that we travelled with Ni-Vanuatu support crew Morris Kaloran, Jeanette Wallace, and Rachel Merang.

2.4 Gender in Vanuatu

Another difference in methodology from the photographers and filmmakers who record ‘the Other’ (see section titled ‘Recording ‘the Other’ in this chapter for a detailed analysis of use of this term) was that the project set out to foreground female market vendors. Indeed, a guiding principle that informed the editing process and the structure of the film was to place the women involved front and centre. All were named, all were provided with detailed information about the project, and all had given written consent. By interviewing only women, I hoped to contribute towards change in a discourse that perpetuates the rhetoric in Vanuatu where women are silenced, and men do the talking. The process of gathering stories and lived experiences of women in 2019 was a political act. In Vanuatu, there are very high rates of violence against women across all provinces, age groups, education levels and religions (Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011). The women who took part in *Voices from Vanuatu* were highly aware of the political nature of the film and they made

considered and strategic choices about what they said. The film gave the women a platform to talk publicly, something that women in Vanuatu seldom have.

In 2016, there was a theatre production in Port Vila Market. The medium of the theatre aligns closely to my film project in that it is a creative outlet. The production gave the women a platform to speak, as was done in the film. In the theatre production at Port Vila Market², the female actors were quoted as saying:

We want all Ni-Vanuatu women to stop being silent. Stop being quiet. We must talk about it. We want all Ni-Vanuatu women not to be afraid (Crosato & Haviland, 2021, p. 49).

The quote makes a point about the women being silenced. The women want to talk. The film allows this to happen, as did the theatre production. In a discussion about the same theatrical production, “an expat with powerful influence in the cultural scene of Port Vila, expressed her disappointment that the show did not tell the ‘hard’ stories of women’s lives” (Crosato & Haviland, 2021, p. 52). This critic shows that Vanuatu society is ready for the participants of the film to speak more openly as “modern business owners, urban dwellers with island roots, mothers, sisters and workers living in the in-between space of contemporary Vanuatu where *kastom* and contemporary life mix” (Crosato & Haviland, 2021, p. 52). It is my view that the film goes further than the theatre production did in that the film gives the women an avenue to tell some of the ‘hard’ stories referred to by the critic.

The concept of gender equality is contested in Vanuatu. Although notions of gender equality are enshrined in parts of the country’s constitution, gender equality “is sometimes disregarded as donor-driven or a Western feminist ideal irrelevant to Pacific cultures” (Bowman et al., 2009, p. 19). This is evident in the make-up of parliament and the national council of chiefs, both of which are steadfastly male. A common understanding is that men are considered to be the appropriate holders of power and knowledge and therefore “political leadership is perceived to be a masculine role in Vanuatu” (Bowman et al., 2009, p. 21).

2.5 Recording ‘the Other’

Even though Fiona and I had prepared our trip with advance planning, I realised once we were in Vanuatu that more planning was necessary before filming. What I was aiming for was not an innocent or neutral method of learning about a culture. As a white male, I felt I was following

² I photographed this production and saw it first-hand.

in the footsteps of most photographers and filmmakers who recorded 'the Other'. The idea of 'Otherness' is central to analyses of how majority and minority identities are constructed. It is a contested term and I appreciate that it must be used with care, so as not to cause offence or diminish the standing of certain groups. Even so, the term can be useful. This is because the representation of different groups within any given society is controlled by groups that hold political power. I have come up against the term 'the Other' in photography and film studies and I have been aware of the term for many years. I am very conscious of how other creatives record film and photographs and how this has been done in some instances. The term, and indeed the whole process of producing creative output, can be problematic. Where we seek to be active in the affairs in distant places, we might do so in a spirit in support of people within those communities whose goals are to make women's (and men's) lives better (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Surely, we should respect their complex debates, positions, and institutions. In no way were we trying to rescue the participants, rather we were making the film in solidarity with the women (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

The intention of my film project was to do something different. The fact I am male, filming females, makes them in a sense 'the Other'. In addition, I am from a white patriarchal culture, albeit one in which women's involvement in politics continues to grow as demonstrated by Jacinda Ardern who recently retired from being Prime Minister in New Zealand. However, I was conscious that I was filming women who have very limited opportunity to show political leadership. The film project aims to lift the women up and give them a platform to speak. I put the women front and centre and they had a chance to talk. They discussed topics that had not been heard before in public, particularly criticisms of the way the market is managed. Such critiques are not normally discussed in public.

There are many voices, particularly on the internet, but how many of them are being heard? Numerous voices, especially online, abound, yet the extent of their reception remains uncertain. Jean Burgess (2006, p. 203) contends that the inquiry into 'democratic' involvement must expand beyond just identifying speakers; it should encompass understanding who is actually listened to and for what purpose. The objective of listening, therefore, is to sustain connections facilitating collective action, despite significant inequalities and inevitable conflicts (Dreher, 2009, p. 450). The acknowledgment of participants' voices will only occur upon the widespread distribution of the film *Voices from Vanuatu*.

My intention is to show the finished film to participants and audiences in Vanuatu. My feeling is that it will have a strong impact because it is different to most representations of 'the Other'.

Photographers and filmmakers record ‘the Other’ (usually a race based or ethnically different ‘Other’) and then advance their reputations rather than promote the people they have recorded. I will return the film to Vanuatu in the next few months in order to prevent this happening. The term ‘the Other’ can especially be seen in colonial photography and filmmaking.

As material histories produced for both private and public consumption, colonial photographs and film can be regarded as highly constructed documents that performed distinct discursive functions in the shaping of popular European imagination and, in particular, the production, re-production, and maintenance of European colonial forms of knowledge. (Engmann, 2012, p. 46).

Images of the Other were often used in colonial image making. In its time, colonial images of the Other confirmed “the racial theories and stereotypes that assisted European expansion” (Maxwell, 1999, p. 9). Colonial powers have used images to categorize, define, and measure representations of the Other. Colonial powers used representations of the Other to justify domination and exploitation (Eves, 2006, p. 726). The principal narratives of colonial expansion used images to justify their actions and battle for public opinion. From the 1890s, photography had become affordable and portable and with newly established half tone printing in magazines and newspapers images served as important instruments of international and national legitimisation. The height of European colonial power coincided with the first photography boom. The camera in the hands of the coloniser was a weapon of colonisation. Susan Sontag argues that colonial photography’s main effect is to “convert the world into a museum without walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption and aesthetic appreciation” (1979, 110). She went on to argue that “photographs made the entire world as an object of appraisal” (Sontag, 1979, p. 110). Colonial imagery represents “negotiations between fantasy and identity” (Eileraas, 2003, p. 813). In terms of depictions of “race, gender, and ethnicity” (Eileraas, 2003, p. 813), colonial photography embeds racial and sexual politics (Eileraas, 2003, p. 814), for instance through production of “identity card portraits for purposes of classification, control, and surveillance” (Eileraas, 2003, p. 815).

However, not all colonial representations of the Other were as exploitative. Otto Tetens resided in Samoa from 1902 to 1905 where he had the role of a scientist. During his time in Samoa, he took hundreds of photographs, most of which remained unpublished (Sperlich, 2014). He photographed Samoans in a modern, contemporary way rather than a romanticised, timeless manner that was popular at the time. In this way, his photographs do not represent Samoans as simply passive recipients of modernity from colonial powers (Sperlich, 2014). These photographs show that Tetens engaged with the Samoan subjects of his photographs in a

direct and empathetic manner and that many of the Samoans felt comfortable in his presence and in front of his camera (Sperlich, 2014). In the film I have made, the Other is not only from a different race but also a different gender. Like Tetens, I engaged with participants directly and empathetically. As a white male, Western society regards me as definitely coming from a dominant culture and in Vanuatu being male also affords me privileges others do not receive.

Despite the colonial history in Vanuatu and despite some problematic historical image-capturing activities in colonial settings, “the research experience can be rewarding for participants if they receive genuine respect for them and their knowledge” (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, p. 175). It is my view that participation in this project was a rewarding experience for the women we filmed. We did research in remote areas, so at least “we were likely to be a distraction from the boredom of village life” (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, p. 176). I feel we definitely were a welcome distraction from the normal daily routine at each village but there was a feeling of mutual respect rather than any amusement.

2.6 Non-participant observation method

As a filmmaker, I was very dependent on material gathered in the interviews and non-participant observation. In the non-participant observation method, the researcher remains detached from the unfolding action (Blackshaw & Crawford, 2009). One distinct advantage of non-participant observation is that the researcher can study a situation in its natural setting without altering the conditions but only if the researcher can blend in naturally (Parke & Griffiths, 2008, p. 4). This comes relatively easily for me as I have relied on this methodology for more than 30 years of photography and film making. Non-participant methodology can be linked to unstructured observation, where the aim is to record as much detail as possible of the participants in order to create a narrative (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This approach is sometimes criticised on the grounds that the very fact of their being observed may lead participants to behave differently, especially if the subjects are being filmed. However, this was mitigated by filming multiple participants. Even with only four market vendors, there were common threads when it came to working in the gardens, the experience of using transport, and the process of selling fresh food in the Port Vila Market. “Non-participant observational studies are often undertaken in tangent with other data collection methods, e.g., semi-structured interviews” (Williams, Baird, & Schneider, 2020, p. 1). In this case, I coupled non-participant observation with filmed interviews. However, having three weeks to record the film limited my non-participant observation to hours rather than weeks or months.

2.7 Interviews

For the interviews, my kit included two DSLR cameras, two tripods, an audio recorder, a microphone, 4 lenses, SDHC memory cards, a notebook, and pens. The interviews were both unstructured and semi-structured and were shaped as guided conversations not restricting the participants to a strict set of questions. The list of questions that helped to guide the interviews can be found in Appendix 2. Additional questions emerged during the interaction, which allowed the women to think and reflect on their pasts with a new lens. A good example of this was the vendors' complaints about the market, which came at the end of each interview when Fiona Morris asked me if I had any more questions. The question about market conditions was added to the interview conducted by Fiona Morris on each occasion and was not part of the original interview protocol. The interviews were conducted in a language commonly used by the women (Bislama), apart from one interview that was in English. All the interviews were later transcribed, and the Bislama was translated to English by Simon Bloomberg, Leina Isno and me. I hoped the interviews would generate insights into the lives of the market vendors. The non-participant observation methods applied complemented the interviews. The non-participant observation included filming images from the gardens, the transport system, and Port Vila Market. It was only when I had all the interviews recorded that I realised I would need a substantial amount of footage of Port Vila Market and its surrounds. I did have sufficient time to record these extra images.

2.8 Filming

It was important that the camera was as natural as possible. In my experience of photography and filmmaking, it is easy to intimidate subjects with cameras, lights, microphones, and tripods. I decided not to use lights and use small 35mm cameras to record the film. In Vanuatu, this methodology seemed to work, with no sign of awkwardness or shyness being displayed. Some of this could be attributed to the relaxed environments we recorded in and the friendly manner with which we engaged each participant.

As Lindstrom notes, "to be successful we had to pierce the local discursive order that establishes differential conversational positions and functions, the times and places to talk, certain truths and falsities, domains of knowledge and regions of ignorance, the wise and the silent" (1990, p. xi). We were partially successful in piercing the 'local discursive order'. Of the questions that were asked, most of them were responded to with honest answers, apart from the question about *kastom*, when participants were silent. We would have liked to know about how *kastom* interferes with their lives as market vendors, but they were not prepared to go

there. They criticised the market very openly, which appeared to be a successful outcome of the process. The questions about *kastom* were not successful in that they did not generate responses. Three of the four participants were confident to start with, and Serah Fakao was eloquent once Rachel Merang and Morris Kaloran explained further the purpose of the film. The main questions in the interviews were of a biographical nature and put the participants into a relaxed frame of mind. The questions were designed to encourage the participants to tell stories. It was only when the interviewees were asked about the market conditions that the most useful part of the interview became apparent.

As we returned to Wellington, I was a little anxious I had not been able to gather enough footage to make the documentary even though I had recorded ten hours of film. My initial aim was to make a film no longer than twenty minutes in duration. However, once the editing started and the transcriptions were recorded, it became clear there was enough film to work with. In the footage, there were four interviews with market vendors and one interview with a local restaurant owner in the Port Vila Central Market. The interviews with the vendors included discussion of their relationships with the land and the market. The restaurant owner talks about her livelihood and emphasises the fresh organic produce from Vanuatu. Six months later, I had the first draft ready to view - a film of twenty-five minutes' duration.

2.9 Limitations

We were only in Vanuatu for three weeks, so I understood that the most precious commodity was time. The short timeframe meant some of the documentary images were not taken in ideal light and there was no time to repeat any filming apart from in the restaurant in Port Vila Central Market. The limited budget hindered production of a more compelling film. If I could have spent a whole week with each subject, I could have chosen the right lighting and drawn out more depth in the interviews. I could have travelled north to Luganville and recorded market vendors there with a larger budget. I felt three weeks was not long enough to make a participatory film, and that just relying on fly on the wall observation would leave too much for chance. This meant that the film would have to be recorded in an expository style where interviews are mixed with other images in order to create a narrative. I was also limited in the locations for the interviews. It was difficult to find areas that had no background noise. Cleaning up the audio was one of the more time-consuming tasks when I was editing the film.

The majority of the budget was spent on the VKS fees, the accommodation and travel. We had to book accommodation that gave us a secure base as we had already experienced two home invasions in our time in Vanuatu. Travelling with expensive photography gear could have made

us a target. The photography gear was also heavy and cumbersome, which meant travelling on local buses was not ideal. We could not afford to hire a car for the three weeks and had to rely on transport provided by Morris Kaloran. If we had our own transport, we could have spent longer in each location. One of the market vendors provided a strong interview but when we arranged to meet her at her garden, she was no longer available and was uncontactable by phone. As it turned out, this interview was the least relevant of the five as the participant was not really a market vendor. She had been to the market only three times. Therefore, the decision was made to exclude this interview from the film. When I was planning the film, I thought it would be good to have a range of ages with the participants. Although this participant was noticeably younger, we were unable to use the recorded material. On looking at the vendors in the Port Vila Market, the large majority were in the 40-60-year group, which meant filming a wide range of ages was unrealistic.

2.10 Conclusion

Although there were limitations in the methodology, they did not outweigh the positive aspects, in particular the time we had already spent with the market vendors. The pre-planning was also of great benefit as the vendors knew we were coming and the chiefs of each village were expecting us. The filming went largely to plan, with the main obstacle being the budget. This had a direct bearing on some of the footage, which was not recorded in ideal light. We could not ask Morris Kaloran or the participants to wait for hours for the right light. In one case, I asked the participant Hellen Kalo if we could do the interview prior to going to her garden, which would have meant I could have used a fantastic background. However, she was adamant the garden should be visited first. This meant the footage of the garden was recorded in excellent light but when we came to record an interview the light was disappearing, and this meant we had to reschedule the interview to the next day. The finished film is a documentary of 25 minutes.

Chapter 3 Politics in Vanuatu

This chapter focuses on the political sphere in Vanuatu and considers its implications for the lives of women. This chapter briefly discusses colonisation and land ownership, the background to independence, the Nagriamel movement, and the relationship between politics and *kastom*.

3.1 Colonisation and land sales

Previously known as the New Hebrides, Vanuatu was governed jointly by the French and English governments from 1906 through to 1980 when Vanuatu became independent. The unusual arrangement was known as a condominium and it “overlaid the region’s traditional societies with two contrasting and frequently fractious systems of law and administration” (Hayward, 2012, p. 2). It was referred to as the pandemonium, “a phenomenon most evident in the capital city of Port Vila where different populations were juxtaposed in complex interaction with one another” (Hayward, 2012, p. 2). The two joint governments “comprised two commissioners, two residencies, two postal systems, and two languages, and encouraged two broad kinds of Christianity (Anglo-Protestant and Franco-Catholic)” (Geismar, 2006, p. 530). What is now Vanuatu “was divided into districts, each managed by a French and a British District Agent in conjunction with indigenous assessors and some newly made chiefs” (Geismar, 2006, p. 530). The two governments worked together in cooperation to establish a court in Port Vila “in which disputes over thorny issues of land ownership were heard” (Geismar, 2006, p. 530). Indeed, the historical name ‘Joint Court’, as it is known, still exists today although the building is in ruins. I resided in the suburb where the court is located while I lived in Vanuatu and, from my observation, land ownership is a sensitive subject, as in other countries. In the Pacific Islands, tensions over land are accentuated because there is only a small area of land to start with. Rapid population growth will increase pressure on land ownership.

In 2015, the issue of land ownership in Vanuatu was taken away from the courts and is now being adjudicated by traditional entities. As former leader of the opposition and present MP for climate change Ralph Regenvanu has noted, “we don’t have much else apart from our land and ourselves, and we need the land that we do have to be properly developed in our interest and with our consent” (Vaka’uta & Regenvanu, 2015, p. 1). Critics have said the change has slowed down the resolution of land ownership claims, but I argue that slowing down claims may be beneficial to Vanuatu. Land alienation has a long history in Vanuatu, from the removal of sandalwood trees on Erromango to the establishment of cotton plantations on Efate, Espirito

Santo, Paama and Epi. The first Christian missionaries arrived in the New Hebrides in 1839 when John Williams and James Harris landed on the island of Erromango (Heilanie, 2019). It was notable that they were both killed there the day they arrived (Flexner, 2016, p. 22) or the day after (Heilanie, 2019). This may have been because not long beforehand sandalwood traders had massacred locals on the same island (Flexner, 2016, pp. 17-18; Heilanie, 2019). After that difficult start, European missionaries and traders continued to arrive in what is now Vanuatu. This was followed by agricultural, residential, and tourism developments (Scott, Stefanova, Naupa, & Vurobaravu, 2012).

Significant land loss was a unifying factor and mobilising force for the independence movement in the 1970s that demanded the return of alienated land to the rightful owners. However, “there is no system of *kastomary* land tenure in Vanuatu, and matters have become increasingly complicated by the movement of people, by intermarriage and by changes to *kastom* itself” (Farran, 2002, p. 216). The variety of *kastom* in Vanuatu is held up as an exceptional and astonishing feature of Vanuatu culture (for more on *kastom*, see chapter four). For example, there are more than one hundred languages spread over Vanuatu’s islands (Forsyth, 2009, p. 9). Land ownership, use, transfer and inheritance vary considerably in Vanuatu. The idea that *kastom* can be used as a national system of land administration is fraught with complications even though Article 74 of the constitution promised the rules of *kastom* would form the basis of ownership (Republic of Vanuatu, 1980).

Throughout the 19th century and early 20th century, French, English, New Zealand and Australian interests were built up to a point in the New Hebrides where all parties were desperately trying to buy the best land. This was also happening in New Zealand, where land was being purchased. However, there was one major difference, as a treaty between first peoples and newcomers, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed in 1840 in New Zealand. In my view, the treaty did not hold much sway for a long time, but it is now being acknowledged in contemporary New Zealand society. Vanuatu has no such treaty and is now relying on *kastom* structures to work out ownership.

The New Hebridean people, as they were known, at first ‘sold’ land willingly, trading it for knives, tomahawks, calico and beads (Van Trease, 1987, p. 17). These objects seem of little worth, especially compared to real estate, but to the New Hebrideans, who had no concept of the possession of land, they were of great value.

Some white missionaries expressed doubt over the future of these land claims and indicated that there would be trouble in the future. It became clear that the careful documentation of details relating to land purchases did not guarantee that the transactions were in fact as clear cut as the European buyers would have liked to believe, nor that they would necessarily be accepted by future generations (Van Trease, 1987, p. 21).

Because of misunderstandings between the buyers and sellers of the land, the transactions were invalid. To further complicate matters, sometimes the same land was sold two or three times (Van Trease, 1987, p. 29). On other occasions, vendors sold land that they did not own (Van Trease, 1987, p. 27). The local New Hebrideans had no concept of dividing land into parcels for sale and because of this had friendly relations with the colonialists.

However, harmonious relations did not last. As settlers began to arrive, violence occurred. Some were killed, while others were injured or fled their properties. Land tenure appeared to be “the major cause of the violence” (Van Trease, 1987, p. 33). For example, on Tanna, four locals were killed when the English navy bombarded the island with the aim of causing destruction after a disagreement over land ownership (Adams, 1984, p. 155; Flexner, 2016).

A similar picture was seen in New Zealand. Between the 1840s and the 1870s, British and colonial forces fought to gain land in the interior of the North Island for settlement in conflicts that became known collectively as the New Zealand Land Wars. Sovereignty was contested on the ground, despite the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, and Māori became less willing to sell land to the rapidly growing European population. By the end of the 19th century in Vanuatu, the nationals of France and England were competing with one another, with neither group gaining complete dominance. English or French schools are still available to residents of Vanuatu today. It is not uncommon to find Vanuatu teenagers who speak French, English, Bislama, and their village language fluently. French was spoken by two of the vendors I filmed. This highlights the fact that French is a prominent language in Vanuatu and is still widely spoken today.

British colonial presence in Vanuatu followed the Westminster style of politics and favoured “consensus, orthodoxy and sovereign authority” (Said, 2003, p. 246). The French colonial project depended on close ties to the motherland in France, particularly through the catholic religion (Said, 2003, p. 246). The French authorities lent support to the idea of a confederate

structure for the future republic for Jimmy Stephens and the Nagriamel³ independence movement. However, the French took an ambiguous stance when they also accepted the prospect of independence under the authority of the Anglophone elite.

3.2 Background to independence

Presbyterians believe that Tanna's first general assembly in 1973 ignited the idea of an independent Vanuatu. In the New Hebrides, travel documents were one of the most egregious problems. The New Hebrideans travelled without passports and almost always failed immigration officials' demands. Due to this, they were frequently stopped and harassed by officials at the border. This led to a sense of frustration and helplessness among the New Hebrideans, further fuelling the desire to establish an autonomous nation of Vanuatu. "The 1960s were characterised by an increasing number of humiliating and therefore politicising experiences for ni-Vanuatu" (Gardner, 2013, p. 131). During the 1970s, indigenous New Hebridean leaders travelled extensively to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Australia, France, England, and Germany. Their counterparts from these countries were invited to visit New Hebrides, which enabled a constant flow of ideas. This extensive travel and exchange of ideas enabled indigenous New Hebridean leaders to build a strong understanding of global politics and their place in the world. In addition, they developed a network of solidarity with other indigenous people around the world.

Fred Timakata, Walter Lini and Barak Sope all represented New Hebrides at the United Nations in 1978 (Gardner, 2013, p. 141). Contributing to the exchange of ideas, there were other notable New Hebrideans. This included Sethy Regenvanu who later became Deputy Prime Minister and Grace Molisa who was a poet and activist especially interested in promoting equality for women in government (Napwatt, 2020). The failure of the Anglo/French administration to listen to the increasing protests by educated New Hebrideans created anger and the will to overthrow the colonial government at whatever cost (Hassall, 1989, p. 263).

Political movements for independence formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This did not just happen in a vacuum as this time coincided with major protests in America including the anti-Vietnam War campaign, the civil rights movement, women's liberation, and the student movement. In 1968, both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated. Between 1977-78, Māori people and their supporters occupied Bastion Point for 506 days before being

³ Nagriamel was a protest movement that opposed land alienation on Santo. The movement was led by charismatic Jimmy Stephens. It was established in 1964 and tried to unite landowners according to *kastom* law. See later in this chapter for more discussion of the Nagriamel.

forcibly removed. The protest was against private housing being built on the property. New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal also heard its first land claim in 1975. This period of tumultuous social and political change was marked by the rise of indigenous activism and the emergence of a new era of rights for indigenous people. Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, as did a number of African countries between 1950 and 1975. Land disputes of the 1960s and 1970s and influences from abroad spurred a nationalist movement in Vanuatu that led to independence in July 1980 (Hassall, 1989, p. 54; Van Trease, 1987, p. 128).

3.3 The Nagriamel movement

The Nagriamel movement developed out of protests against land alienation on Santo. The movement, led by Jimmy Stephens and Chief Buluk, explicitly opposed European ways, synthesising various local practices, and espousing them as *kastom* (Lissant Bolton, 2003, p. 12). The Nagriamel movement also had support from right-wing American interests looking for a new country to invest in (Van Trease, 1987, p. xiii). The American based Phoenix Foundation supplied the Nagriamel with weapons, radio equipment and transport and encouraged the Nagriamel to protest in the streets of Luganville (Hassall, 1989, p. 269; Parsons, 1981). The other major political development was the founding of the first indigenous political party in the 1970s, the New Hebrides National Party (NHNP), led by Walter Lini. Walter Lini was an Anglican priest who used small newspapers in Auckland, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to help spread the message (Gardner, 2013, p. 135). The party's aims were to promote, preserve, revive, and encourage New Hebridean culture. The issue that drove the development of the party was land alienation (Lissant Bolton, 2003, p. 13). Although land was a common issue for both the Nagriamel and the new political party, each was suspicious of the other. On Santo, the general support of the Melanesian Mission for local government councils was one reason that Jimmy Stephens, founder of the Nagriamel, withheld support for Walter Lini's NHNP.

At the beginning, the NHNP published a newspaper and recruited members. Lini was a priest of the Anglican church. It was almost impossible to separate politics from religion. Along with Christianised *kastom*, Lini established Christianity as a state religion. Christianity and *kastom* were thought of as intertwined and "were enshrined in the national constitution and symbolic trappings as ambiguous bases for constructing national unity and identity" (Douglas, 2001, p. 618). As a result of renaming in 1977, the NHNP came to be known as the Vanua'aku Pati. By emphasising the close connection between politics and religion, the Vanua'aku Pati sought to create a sense of national unity and identity that acknowledged both Christianity and *kastom*. The Vanua'aku Pati wanted to ensure that both Christianity and *kastom* were respected and

that both were considered essential for forming a shared identity among the people. They believed that by doing this, they could create a stronger sense of national unity and identity.

Lini had been educated in New Zealand and spoke English, which made it easy for him to talk with his British counterparts. Most of his support came from the English-speaking community. Setting much of its messaging in church values, the Vanua'aku Pati “won ground over the traditionalist Nagriamel movement” (Rio, 2011, p. 246). The Vanua'aku Pati ruled until 1991 and since then unstable coalition governments have been common with inappropriate and even criminal conduct (Ambrose, 1996; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Jowitt, 2006; Van Trease, 2015, 2016, 2017). In 2015, a judge sentenced fourteen MPs to jail for corrupt practice (Forsyth, 2015; RNZ, 2015).

3.4 Women in parliament

The national parliament has 52 members and elections are held every four years (Pacific Women in Politics, 2018). At times, politics in Vanuatu has been unstable: “in a six-month span in 2010-2011, there was five changes of prime ministership” (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 3). Since independence, only six different women acquired constitutional seats in Vanuatu's parliament: Maria Crowby and Hilda Lini in 1987, Isabelle Donald in 2002, Leinavao Tasso in 2004, Eta Rory in 2008, and Julia King in 2022. The low number of female members of parliament suggests “that Vanuatu is merely paying lip-service to the quest of gender equality” (A. Thomas, 2013, p. 71). Indeed, on some measures, the number of women in Vanuatu's parliament is “the lowest in the world, thus drawing attention to ni-Vanuatu women's marginalisation” (A. Thomas, 2013, p. 34) (see also Slatter & Underhill-Sem, 2009, p. 205).

In addition to the prohibitive cost of election campaigns, women have to navigate *kastom* and Christianity to compete with men in national politics (Corbett, 2015). It is common for men in Vanuatu to think that women should not be involved in national politics. According to them, women should focus on family and domestic issues while men should handle the formal economy and politics. Even with these considerable roadblocks, six women have been elected since independence (Stein, 2022). Julia King's election in 2022 signalled that women can be successful in politics despite the gender-based obstacles they face. It is interesting that Ceridwen Spark has noted that in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands young, educated women have formed groups focused on justice and equity, but in Vanuatu this has not happened due to “denigration of young women by older women” (2014, p. 2). So, it is not just the patriarchal systems that women face.

A 30 per cent quota for female MPs in parliamentary elections has been recommended (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a). Women have made some inroads to gaining political positions in Vanuatu. The Decentralisation Act of 1994 mandates the appointment of women as members of local government councils. Since then, some women had filled positions but not all of the women had been formally appointed and they did not have voting rights (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a).

Vanuatu's parliament ratified an amendment to the Municipalities Act in 2013 which guaranteed that 30-34 percent of municipal council seats in Port Vila and Luganville were to be reserved for women (Van Trease, 2015). Van Trease (2015) reports voter turnout in 2014 was low. Nonetheless, thousands of both men and women voted for and elected multiple female candidates to political office for the first time in Vanuatu's political history (Van Trease, 2015). Van Trease (2015) notes that women do not use their numerical power to unite in support of female candidates but rather seem to follow the men in their families (see also Howard, 2020). A political party was formed following the end of the fifteenth national conference of the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW). The party, named *Leleon Vanua Party* (LVP), was launched by the Coalition for Gender Equality in Parliament in 2018 (Sista, 2018, p. 1). The *Leleon Vanua Party* chose not to contest the 2020 election, stating that as a new party they were not ready to contest it but will be aiming for the election in 2024 (Howard, 2020; Massing, 2020 para 1).

3.5 Politics versus *kastom*

The legislative branch of Vanuatu's Government includes the National Council of Chiefs, otherwise known as the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs. It is composed of *kastom* chiefs elected by their peers. It advises parliament on all matters relating to *kastom* and tradition and may make recommendations for preservation and promotion of ni Vanuatu culture and languages (Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute, 2001, p. 1). In Vanuatu, politics is frequently distinguished from *kastom* when discussing the management of public affairs. "People will talk about politics when they refer to what is happening at the national or political party level" (Huffer & Molisa, 1999, p. 103), whereas they tend to associate *kastom* with local issues (Huffer & Molisa, 1999, p. 103). A similar tendency came to light during the filming of *Voices from Vanuatu*. The female participants were happy to talk about the politics of the market but were silent when asked about *kastom*.

In rural areas, "the state is present mainly as an aggravation and an absence, for men and women alike" (Douglas, 2002, p. 17). In his doctoral thesis titled *Politik is Poison*, Michael

Morgan writes church goers often juxtapose politics with the authority of the church. Compared to the supposed naturalness and cohesion of indigenous Christianity, “politics are often portrayed as an external imposition, a practice of white people” (Morgan, 2003, p. 13). Dr Gregor Nimbtik writes that “in Vanuatu people are familiar with *kastom* governance and use it in their daily life, as compared to state-centred government institutions that are alienated from the local context” (2016, p. 3). Women, on the other hand, are largely restricted to domestic and local spheres and enjoy few citizenship benefits: for instance, their constitutional and legal rights to equality and protection against violence are consistently disregarded by the police and the judiciary (Douglas, 2002, p. 17), although this situation may be improving over time (Putt & Dinnen, 2023; Putt & Kanan, 2022).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has summed up the political landscape for women in Vanuatu. It describes the difficulty women have competing with men when most men think that women should not participate in national politics. Overall, it suggests that the political structures in Vanuatu society tend to hinder, rather than support, women’s empowerment. In concluding, I would suggest that there are five key problems with the political system in Vanuatu. Firstly, there is conflict resulting from the Anglophone/Francophone history in Vanuatu, which still causes divisions in society. Secondly, land ownership mechanisms frequently shut women out of ownership. Sale of land is problematic as the constitution does not specify how *kastom* should be applied. Thirdly, the chapter also looks at how women do not get a level playing field when participating in national politics. Fourthly, tensions between politics and *kastom* are problematic when women may feel left out of politics and therefore fall back on *kastom*, which is largely patriarchal. Fifthly, women’s places have been mandated into provincial councils, but they do not have voting rights.

Because of the nature of Vanuatu’s geography and the fact that it still is a country made up of many different villages, it is hard for political parties to gain traction in the electorate. Typically, the size of parties is small, which leads to the formation of coalitions, and this brings a fractured nature to Vanuatu’s parliament. There is distrust of Vanuatu’s government in the rural villages. If women could support female candidates, they may be more likely to gain seats in parliament. For example, Silae Vanua at its peak had 3000 members who were mostly women. Over time, it may be possible for political empowerment of women to be realised but it will be limited unless structures in Vanuatu society change. This chapter has attempted to outline the challenges faced as a result of some of these political structures, including colonial legacies, in Vanuatu society.

Chapter 4 Religion and *kastom* in Vanuatu

Religion and *kastom* are entwined in Vanuatu. A unique blend of religion, *kastom* and nationalism has emerged since decolonisation in 1980. In the 1970s, the leaders of political movements in the New Hebrides⁴ “turned towards a version of liberation theory that linked spiritual freedom to political independence for the oppressed” (Miles, 1998, p. 20). At the same time, “*kastom* was celebrated and was seen as being compatible with the basic doctrines of Christianity” (Miles, 1998, p. 20). A prominent political leader at the time of independence, Walter Lini, pronounced that religion and *kastom* “must be the sail and steering paddle of our canoe” (Forsyth, 2009, p. 11)⁵. Division between Francophones (French educated speakers of French, typically belonging to the Catholic church) and Anglophones (English speaking people who had been educated in English and predominantly were members of Protestant and/or Anglican congregations) became common leading up to independence in 1980 but both promoted religion and *kastom* as the way forward⁶.

4.1 Religious history

After a rocky start during which a number of missionaries were killed, Christianity began to gain traction “on some of the Southern islands of the archipelago [...] in the 1850s and 1860s” (Eriksen, 2012, p. 103). Since then, Presbyterian, Catholic and Anglican churches have all become “major religious centres” (Eriksen, 2012, p. 103), but more recently, these religions have been joined by “charismatic churches such as the Latter Day Saints, Seventh-Day Adventist, Renewal Church, the Holiness Church, Living Wota and the Assembly of God” (Eriksen, 2012, p. 103), all of which have gained popularity, “especially in the urban context” (Eriksen, 2012, p. 103). Approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian: an estimated 31.4 percent is Presbyterian, 13.1 percent Roman Catholic, 13.4 percent Anglican and 10.8 percent Seventh-day Adventist (US Department of State, 2011). Other Christian groups, including the John Frum movement, which is based in Tanna and has 5.6 percent of the population, make up the difference (US Department of State, 2011).

Existing churches protested but the colonial government thought the arrival of additional sects would add more competition to improve the standard of facilities from other religious groups (Hassall, 1989). Soon after the country gained independence in 1980, “conflict between the

⁴ The New Hebrides was the colonial name of the islands of Vanuatu until independence in 1980. See the chapter on politics (chapter 3) for an outline of the process of the transition to independence.

⁵ See the chapter on politics (chapter 3) for a description of Walter Lini’s political life.

⁶ Some suggest that a split between Francophones and Anglophones is still evident in contemporary Vanuatu (Forsyth, 2009).

principles of religious freedom and national sovereignty surfaced” (Miles, 1998, p. 113). Unlike the colonial government, the Vanuatu government stated that there were too many religious sects in the country. However, the Vanuatu government has not been able to limit the number of churches. In 1993, the government put at twenty-one the number of religious sects outside of the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) (Miles, 1998). The VCC consisted of Anglicans, the Apostolics, Churches of Christ, the Presbyterians, and the Roman Catholics.

4.2 *Kastom* in New Hebrides

Religion in the New Hebrides did not supplant *kastom*. In fact, most of the time when colonists attacked *kastom* it backfired and made *kastom* even stronger. For example, on the island of Tanna, an edict that was in place from 1905 to 1925 (Flexner, 2016, p. 97) was an attempt by Presbyterians to get rid of “kava drinking, dancing, and other practices” (Flexner, 2016, p. 5). The edict “resulted in widespread abandonment of church practices, a resurgence of traditional beliefs, and the emergence of the new John Frum ‘cargo cult’ on the island” (Flexner, 2016, p. 5). Even though the church condemned *kastom*, “it entrenched *kastom* in parts of the island” (Flexner, 2016, p. 98). In other locations around the island, *kastom* “was driven underground, as people performed Christianity on the surface while maintaining *kastom* on a deeper level” (Flexner, 2016, p. 98). Some churches also had rules that resonated with *kastom*. For example, the Bible Church advocates female modesty, stipulating that “women are not to wear trousers and must not make up or style their hair” (Eriksen, 2012, p. 112). The church was also reluctant to allow women to possess money (Eriksen, 2012, p. 112). These rules are remarkably similar to rules propagated by the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs (Jalal, 2009).

Christianity diverges from *kastom* primarily due to the inclusion of animistic elements and a profound connection with the physical environment within *kastom* belief systems. Moreover, *kastom* intertwines human and natural realms, as well as physical and spiritual dimensions, along with bridging past and present realities (Flexner, 2022, p. 1368). *Kastom* encompasses both traditional beliefs and practices deeply rooted in island cultures over centuries, as well as influences that may have originated externally (Flexner, 2022, p. 1368). Despite these differences, it is worth noting that Christianity itself still retains some animist elements within certain interpretations and practices.

The John Frum movement on Tanna is an excellent example of this since adherents believe if they continue to worship the vision, an American John Frum will arrive with riches. They have sought alliances with mythical peers on the other side of the sea because, in their view, true power and prosperity can only be achieved through this kind of friendship (Bonnemaison,

1994, p. 309). To this end, they have held and continue to hold ceremonial rituals that forge strong social bonds to demonstrate their commitment to these ideals.

Other animism practices can be seen in the subsistence gardens, which are thought to be powered by magic stones. “The magic stones, usually shaped like the crop that was to benefit from the magical activity, [...] were kept and used by particular individuals to increase productivity” (Flexner, 2016, p. 63). These stones mostly receive offerings of food. This in turn “grants strength in combat, visions of the future [...] and success with fishing or hunting” (Ballard, 2023, p. 7). However, the so called ‘black’ magic stones can also “cause illness and death or summon terrifying cyclones” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1375). It takes specialised knowledge to counter the spells caused by the magic stones (Flexner, 2022). It is no wonder that when some misfortune occurs ni Vanuatu people try to second guess what they have done wrong. Although Christianity is strong in Vanuatu, it is *kastom* that has an undue influence over most people. “Kava is still drunk, dances are held, *kastom* stones are needed to keep the gardens productive and people remain wary of bad spirits” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1380). The discourse of *kastom* has constant “reminders of ancestors, spirits, and stories” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1380). In many cases, *kastom* is evident in the physical environment “such as coral reefs, stone formations, plants, and trees” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1380). These have loaded meanings that have to be negotiated to keep the black magic at bay. “Gardening, fishing, or travelling to socialise and exchange with neighbours” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1380) all have elements of *kastom* that need to be addressed. This daily routine reminds ni Vanuatu people that “every encounter, expected and unexpected, is a reminder that the land and sea are inspirited and laden with the weight of a history that is both present and tangible” (Flexner, 2022, p. 1380).

4.3 Yams and other foods

While filming *Voices from Vanuatu*, we travelled with Morris Kaloran, who is a chief. He stopped occasionally to pay homage to parts of the landscape⁷. We were also told of a rocky outcrop in the harbour of Port Vila which had magic powers. To my knowledge, *kastom* is a gendered space. In all my interactions with *kastom* I have only encountered male practitioners. However, Fiona Morris confirms she heard stories about *kastom* from the women she was working with in Vanuatu, which shows that being a male I was only exposed to other males talking about *kastom*. However, it remains my belief that males control numerous elements of *kastom*. This can even be seen in the gardens where some crops can

⁷ Both Fiona and I knew this was related to *kastom* but were unsure of what aspect of *kastom* it was. This was made a lot clearer once I had read the research by James Flexner (Flexner, 2016, 2022).

be farmed by both male and female gardeners whereas yams may be gardened by both sexes (under the control of men) but when it comes time for a ceremonial event, yams are presented by males only (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Circumcision festival, yams on parade, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.

Yams have particular resonance for men in Vanuatu. The men treat yams as if they were “sacred food” (Strathern, 1988, p. 80). When gardening yams, there is a strict separation of “labour between the sexes, men’s and women’s deliberate cooperation being likened to sexual intercourse, an image in which the yam is seen as the man’s penis” (Strathern, 1988, p. 80). On Tanna, men and women used to share equal work in the gardens but now men only tend the gardens if magic stones require them to (Bonnemaïson, 1991). This suggests that in some settings in Vanuatu gardens are (or have become) a gendered space (Bonnemaïson, 1991). On Aeiyeum Island, Mathew Spriggs (1993) also confirms the gendered nature of gardening. Men control all public presentations of food at circumcison events, bride price ceremonies, births, and deaths. Strathern explains that men “appropriate the yams (and pigs), treating them as their own, rather than shared creations” (1988, p. 80). Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 show the prominence of men at a circumcison festival held in 2016 on Ambrym Island.



Figure 4.2. Circumcision festival, men carrying taro and plantains away from the festival, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.



Figure 4.3. Circumcision festival, men discussing sharing of a dead bullock, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.



Figure 4.4. Circumcision festival, one of the circumcised boys killing a pig, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.

4.4 Christianity

The constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu indicates that the nation is founded on faith in God and fundamental Christian principles, while at the same time *kastom* is also recognised in the document and the constitution. This can be seen in the Vanuatu flag where there is religious design with the colour yellow signifying peace and the light of Christianity spreading through the archipelago (Smith, 2023). There is also an image of a pig tusk, which is a direct reference to *kastom*. Geographical divisions between church denominations have long been informal and fluid although some researchers indicate some loose partitions particularly in colonial times (Flexner, 2016, p. 12; Hassall, 1989, p. 9; Miles, 1998, p. 92; Nimbtik, 2016, p. 85).

Although religion helped with decolonisation in Vanuatu, “some churches opposed the establishment of the National Council of Women in 1980” (Hassall, 2013, p. 400). In 1990, the Vanuatu Christian Council Women’s Desk (VCC-WD) was created (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014, p. 39). It is “composed of church women’s groups from different denominations beginning from the village level through to the national level” (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014, p. 39). The VCC-WD conducts church services and social activities. It also “conducts workshops and inter churchwomen’s fellowship in different municipalities and provinces” (Republic of Vanuatu,

2014a, p. 44). The VCC started work on gender advocacy in 2014 and in 2017 launched its gender resources including a gender policy, a training manual on human rights, and a faith, gender and sexual harassment policy (Sista, 2017). This is good progress, but I would argue it is very late for the council to finally address the big problems in Vanuatu, particularly when it comes to gender and sexual harassment. Graham Hassall argues that

the close association between faith-based organisations and social policy programs in the Melanesian states is appreciated by all concerned, but the low rate of progress with human development indicators, [...] highlights the need to find more effective approaches to agenda-setting, policy articulation and implementation (2013, p. 390).

Each religious denomination was founded on their doctrines and fundamental beliefs. While the churches play an important development role in social sectors, their rivalries can contribute to the fragmentation of communities and encourage resistance to outside influence. The record of religions in promoting the advancement of women has been uneven. Although religions have encouraged women to participate, over time religious policies have obstructed women's advancement.

Interpretations of the Scriptures, for example, have been cited as a major impediment to women's progress where both lay and religious leaders quote the Biblical reference of Ephesians 5:22: 'Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord' to indicate where women's position should be but overlook the previous verse 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Republic of Vanuatu, 2004, p. 14).

In the New Hebrides, Christian missions helped to shield the indigenous population from severe colonial policies, but they also were zealously dedicated to the domestication of indigenous women. On Erromango, Barbara Lawson's research (2001) shows how the missionaries gave women who associated with the church cloth for making clothes, which supplanted an elaborate *kastom* dress that Erromango women used to wear. This in turn led to the mother hubbard dress of today, which is known in Bislama as *aelan dress*⁸ and which is seen all through Vanuatu being worn by most married women as well as unmarried women and girls. Other policies were seen to be successful, especially when the lives of the women were improved, for example, hygiene and health policies. But the missions also "imparted a new model of male domination, where women were devalued as domestic beings while celebrating men as public beings" (Jolly, 1991, p. 45).

⁸ Aelan dress is the Bislama term for the mother hubbard style dresses that ni Vanuatu women wear

4.5 *Kastom* and *skul*

With the arrival of missionaries to Vanuatu in the 19th century, they saw *kastom* ritual as being in opposition to Christian values. *Kastom* was not viewed favourably by Christians and was seen as “the time of darkness into which the light of the Gospel now shone” (Lissant Bolton, 2003, p. 11). Reform, pacification and conversions were used by the state and churches to move the local people’s thinking away from *kastom* and towards Western religion (Taylor, 2010). *Kastom* was seen to be opposed to the missionary project of education and life, otherwise known as *skul* (school). *Kastom* and *skul*, seen as opposites, were different philosophies (Lissant Bolton, 2003). Religious conversion was patchy and in some places the people completely rejected it. For example, in South Pentecost, “*kastom* was seen as resolutely anticolonial, antichristian, anticapitalist, and antigovernment” (Lissant Bolton, 2003, p. 11). So not only did places like Pentecost and Tanna reject Christianity but they also rejected the government and colonial power. “In opposing the ways of *skul*, they are opposing not just schooling in the sense of education, but rather the reconstruction of their religious, economic and political life to conform to European models” (Lissant Bolton, 2003, p. 11). However, where Western religion took hold, elements of *kastom* were suppressed for a time: “dancing, polygamy, and kava drinking gradually declined and then disappeared” (Rawlings, 1999, p. 80). As *kastom* was suppressed, elements of *skul* were taken up and people moved from inland locations to be closer to the coast and to Christianity. Ironically, in explaining to the Tannese that only the Christian God caused illness, the missionaries wound up identified as sorcerers themselves, resulting in violent backlash following epidemics and natural disasters (Flexner & Spriggs, 2015, p. 192). At the end of the nineteenth century, a series of epidemics decimated the coastal villages where the Christians had settled. Two of the new diseases “were dysentery and tuberculosis and this greatly weakened enthusiastic leanings toward” (Bonnemaïson, 1994, p. 75) Western religion. However, in time Western religion took hold. According to Rawlings,

European clothing was encouraged, Western concepts of health, cleanliness, and hygiene were promoted: money entered the system through the production of arrowroot and later copra, and schooling and literacy brought an emphasis on new ways of recording and remembering (1999, p. 80).

From the 1950s, the missions increased involvement “in the condominium politics of the New Hebrides which prepared the way for the ascendancy of the Melanesian political clerics three

decades later” (Hassall, 1989, p. 139)⁹. Most churches in the New Hebrides helped with decolonisation in some way but it was the Presbyterian church that gave indigenous New Hebrideans sufficient training in religious matters and more importantly in a political sense (Hassall, 1989). By the 1970s, most of the Presbyterian Church leaders in the New Hebrides were Indigenous New Hebrideans (Hassall, 1989). Along the same lines, Walter Lini, who was an Anglican priest, became Vanuatu’s first prime minister. The religious missions reasoned that, since they were forbidden from holding either French or British nationality, indigenous New Hebrideans had to develop their own sense of nationality (Philibert, 1982, p. 105). Thus, it could be said that the churches contributed to the processes that led to the first legitimate election in 1980.

However, as colonial rule in Vanuatu ended, some elements of *kastom* were held onto so as to define indigenous identity. In the 1970s in New Hebrides, *kastom* undertook a renaissance in the media and in political debate. Referring to *kastom* allowed indigenous New Hebrideans to establish an important difference to their colonial masters and use this to underpin nationalist discourse (Tabani, 2019). Two of the *kastom* activities, the drinking of kava and the killing of pigs, were held onto but at the same time women were excluded from these activities, which was a continuation of how things were in pre-colonial times. *Kastom* and religion are often used as an excuse for the suppression of women, especially when it comes to decision-making in the family, the community or the government. Ni-Vanuatu women are generally not considered to be equal to men. Contemporary religious beliefs exist alongside *kastom*, with varying degrees of conflict (Flexner, 2016, p. 12; Hassall, 2013).

Despite nationalist celebration of Christian kastom, the attitudes toward kastom of the churches and their parishioners vary widely: from qualified approval by Anglicans and Catholics, and the gradual rehabilitation of selected aspects of kastom by the previously hostile Churches of Christ, to the ambivalence of the Presbyterians, the ongoing opposition of the Seventh-day Adventist and Apostolic Churches, and the fundamentalist intolerance of most new evangelical and Pentecostal groups (Douglas, 2002, p. 19).

In local communities, you find most people holding traditional beliefs and engaging in traditional *kastom* practices, while also following a Christian religion. In most parts of Vanuatu there is a stringent partition of responsibility and privilege between men and women, with men considered to be inherently superior. A woman may help her husband in terms of gaining

⁹ See the chapter on politics (chapter 3) for an explanation of how political clerics such as Walter Lini were influential in the moves towards independence.

prestige by tending pigs in particular, however, when it comes to gaining a name, it is the business of men only.

In Port Vila, which is mostly patriarchal, ideas of movement and place are challenged. Port Vila is a cosmopolitan port town with people from all over Vanuatu. Young girls are advised to stay home indoors. "Adult women might be seen selling vegetables in the market, working in offices, or as teachers, but can rarely be seen just walking around" (Eriksen, 2016, p. 262). In 2016 Eriksen argues in Port Vila, it is important for women to remain inside their houses and to remain immobile: "Men move, women do not" (2016, p. 262). Margaret Rodman describes life on Ambae where unlike girls, who stayed close to home, boys on Ambae ran freely through plantations, gardens, and forest (1992, p. 649). According to Margaret Jolly in South Pentecost, boys are allowed to roam around in gangs and engage in other distractions, while girls are not (Jolly, 1994). Jolly further states that men actively prevent women's access to the outside world. For example, women were also prevented from learning Bislama (Jolly, 1994). This has led to gender inequality, and to a society in which women cannot fully participate. However, in Port Vila during festive events, I observed that plenty of women were in attendance, although normally dressed in baggy shirts and long board shorts. This seems to be a new trend that has emerged over the last 10 years, probably driven both by increased access to information about the outside world (widespread access to mobile phones, internet, Facebook, etc.), and increased mobility and opportunities for cash employment. For example, young women finding jobs as waitresses, *haos gels* or cleaners. There has been some relaxation in general about strict gender roles in the urban environment. We also saw women at *nakamals*¹⁰ in Port Vila and Luganville actually drinking kava.

Despite the changes over the last decade or so in urban centres, the average woman is mostly not involved in any decision-making related to the home or community. *Kastom* politics remains determinedly male: most chiefs, like almost all national politicians, are men. However, some women have autonomy living in Port Vila. In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, Roline Tahapi owned and worked in one of the local restaurants at Port Vila Market. She stated that she enjoyed working for herself, making money and being independent while her husband had retired.

¹⁰ A nakamal is a meeting place which can be in an urban space or a ground in a village. It is usually an area where the drinking of kava takes place. While I was living in Vanuatu, it was said that you might discuss business during the day, but it was over a shell of kava that you settled the deal. Women are increasingly drinking kava in the urban spaces but the nakamal can also be seen as a gendered space in some rural settings.

Research has shown *kastom* to be biased against women (Forsyth, 2009), but other research shows a small glimmer of empowerment for Vanuatu women. In some cases, women speak and can be heard in the *kastom* system. However, this is uneven throughout Vanuatu (Forsyth, 2009). For example, it is well known that women in Tanna do not get a chance to speak in the *nakamals* but in other parts of Vanuatu this is not the case. The experiences of Tanna “are quite different from a matrilineal community such as in the island of Pentecost and Mantatas in Santo where women hold powerful positions as *kastom jif*¹¹ and have the same privileges as other *kastom jifs* in patriarchal communities” (Nimbtik, 2016, p. 212; Toulmin, 2017).

The work of Foucault is influential in understanding how power is disseminated in society. In Foucault's view, language is one of the most significant forces shaping our experiences (Foucault, 1997). Language is seen as language in action, or as a window through which we see and understand things. In Vanuatu, the discourse of *kastom* is very strong. In Vanuatu, *kastom* provides a discursive window or explanation that shapes a person's understanding of the world. In Vanuatu society, it guides their ability to discern the appropriate manner in which to interact. Language is a pre-existing system of symbolic choices through which people discover themselves and all talking follows pre-existing rules and conditions (Lindstrom, 1990, p. 14). In Vanuatu as it does elsewhere, ownership of land brings power. However, ownership can be difficult to work out in Vanuatu. For example, principal rights to land sometimes go to women in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, especially when there are no male heirs (Van Trease, 1987). Male relatives may gain access to land through the status of women (Van Trease, 1987). In some parts of Vanuatu, it is possible for a woman to bring with her into a marriage rights to land which then can be used by her husband and family (Van Trease, 1987).

Although women theoretically have rights in their natal land equivalent to their brothers, the fact that they can rarely pass on these rights to their children, nor rarely use them because of the residential practice whereby women move to live with their husbands, makes it difficult to exert equivalent control (Jolly, 2002, p. 61).

4.6 Conclusion

Most women are Christian and abide by the rules of *kastom*. In most parts of Vanuatu, women do not have rights over land ownership. They are excluded from the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs, and they are mostly excluded from national politics (see chapter three). The church protested against the formation of the National Council of Women, and it took until 2016 for church leaders to commit to ending violence within their own families. This was the first time

¹¹ *Jif* is a Bislama term for chief.

church leaders had addressed violence as an issue in Vanuatu's culture (Radio New Zealand, 2016a). The Family Protection Act was made law in 2008 but it took years before it was acted on by the justice system. Opposition to the act came from "powerful groups, including the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs and the Vanuatu Christian Council who argued that the legislation contradicted Melanesian and Christian values, would erode the authority of chiefs, and would promote the breakdown of families" (Kanan, 2019, p. 2).

The Vanuatu Women's Centre has challenged the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs in the past, saying edicts from the council were often unconstitutional and against women's rights to equality. "Much of what is classified as *kustom*¹² practice, is often a hostile response to the growing assertiveness of women and their changing roles, as well as to rapid economic change" (Jalal, 2009, p. 5). "For women in Vanuatu and in other countries that have similar systems, most will find their interactions with *kustomary* law harmful" (Jalal, 2009, pp. 5-6). *Kastom* in Vanuatu is strongly biased against women and the Western justice system is rarely used: "an estimated 98% of cases of violence against women and children do not reach the stage of being charged by the police, let alone prosecuted by the courts" (UN Women, 2016, p. 13). At least for this reason, women in Vanuatu need more agency when it comes to *kastom*. There is a large disconnect between the state, formal laws, and rural villages in particular so when issues arise women mostly must traverse the *kastom* regime, which heavily favours men. *Kastom* must be navigated in everyday life, in the gardens as seen with yams, in the way women are forced to dress, in women's restricted mobility both in a micro and macro sense, and with violence usually perpetrated by men.

¹² *Kustom* and *kustomary* are the spellings used by Jalal (Bislama has a non-standardised orthography).

Chapter 5 Health in Vanuatu

In this chapter, a number of topics related to the health of women in Vanuatu are discussed. The chapter covers domestic violence, maternal health, cervical cancer, legal protections and supports for women, sorcery, bride price, prostitution and *siloa* food. This chapter highlights the importance of understanding the complexities of Vanuatu's culture and the various ways in which gender inequality is addressed, including legal and social measures. This chapter is placed alongside other chapters that discuss politics, religion and *kastom*, as well as education and empowerment in Vanuatu.

According to 2020 statistics, Vanuatu is a country of 300,019 people situated in the South-Western Pacific (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2020). The country is made up of 83 islands, the majority of which are inhabited. Around 75% of Vanuatu's population live in rural areas with poor roads, a lack of vehicles and costly transport. We experienced this when filming on Nguna Island: the roads were terrible on the island and there was very limited transport, with the available options being expensive. This was the case even though Nguna Island is only 30 minutes from Port Vila providing there is available transport that is on time. The unreliable transport makes it difficult to provide adequate health services. Further barriers to health service delivery include lack of health and nutrition literature, poor literacy, physical remoteness, and costs. People with non-communicable disease (NCD) symptoms often have a limited capacity for early recognition and therefore present to health services at advanced stages of the disease. NCDs, especially diabetes and obesity, are on the rise in Vanuatu as they are in other parts of the world, particularly in low-income countries (Ndubuisi, 2021). Vanuatu's health sector faces important challenges: health workers are scarce, health infrastructure is inadequate, and many people have poor access to health services. In Vanuatu, people who live in Port Vila or Efate or near Luganville have better access to health services than people in rural areas¹³.

5.1 Domestic violence

Women, however, face additional pressure when it comes to determining health outcomes. In particular, women are more likely to suffer from breast cancer, reproductive health problems, and domestic violence. "Despite women living longer than men, the common belief is that they are healthier when in fact they are more likely to suffer from illness" (Jackson, 1998, p. 496).

¹³ There is a study in Papua New Guinea that also explores poor health services in rural areas (Wiltshire, Watson, Lokinap, & Currie, 2020).

In 1998, Jackson found that “35 percent of ill health among women between the ages of 15 and 44 was caused by rape, domestic violence, and reproductive health issues” (p. 496). Physical and sexual violence against women occurs in both urban and rural communities, affecting nearly two-thirds of the female population of Vanuatu (MFAT, UNFPA, & UNDP, 2015). This is an overwhelming statistic, considering that violence against women can lead to a range of physical, mental, and emotional consequences. To add to this, violence against women also affects the safety and security of their communities and undermines the stability of society as a whole.

5.2 Maternal health

Approximately eight percent of all female deaths in Vanuatu result from maternal health conditions (Carter et al., 2016, p. 1). In other parts of Melanesia there are also problems. Papua New Guinea has a maternal mortality rate that is described as “alarmingly high” (Watson, Sabumei, Mola, & Iedema, 2015, p. 121). This compares to New Zealand where the rate is .056 percent and Australia where the rate is .0064 percent (Dawson, 2020, p. 148). A study by Family Planning New Zealand in rural Vanuatu found “low levels of knowledge on basic anatomy, sexual activity, STIs [sexually transmitted infections], reproduction, and family planning” (2019, p. 4). Embarrassment about discussing family planning prevented people from learning about maternal health (Burry, 2017). As a consequence of a rapidly growing population, there has been an increased demand for maternal and child health services. To meet the health care needs of a growing population, Vanuatu must invest in innovative approaches to tackling maternal and child health issues. It must also significantly reduce the current mortality rate.

The leading causes of maternal death are similar to those reported globally: postpartum haemorrhage, preeclampsia, obstructed labour, puerperal sepsis, and complications of unsafe abortions (Rahman, Haque, Mostofa, Tarivonda, & Shuaib, 2011, p. 1). Traditional medicine is also used widely, which complicates maternal healthcare delivery. Karen Lane describes some of the difficulties in Vanuatu.

Attempts by governments in developing economies to centralise maternity care within a Westernised medical model have been only partially successful in Vanuatu. In Vanuatu, for example, where the biomedical model and Western cosmologies compete with traditional cosmologies, such as animism and pre-modern natural pharmacopoeia, kastom leaf, women balance various elements of both depending on their circumstances (2015, p. 363).

5.3 Cervical cancer

A study into general health in Vanuatu pointed to “reproductive health issues such as uterine cancer, and urinary incontinence post-childbirth [that] were amongst common health problems for women” (Ibell et al., 2015, p. 9). Cervical cancer and breast cancer rates are high when compared to New Zealand and Australia where screening programs operate. In 1990, a project with the aim of finding out if signs of breast and cervical cancers contribute to death rates and sickness of women in Vanuatu was implemented. According to Piau-Lynch, “women with breast and cervical cancers usually presented at such late stages of development that nearly all cases were fatal” (2007, pp. 25-26). In Vanuatu, the widely dispersed population and the remote nature of many villages mean health messaging is difficult. A 2010 study into cervical health awareness showed that a limited number of screening programs were conducted for members of the ni Vanuatu community between 1996 and 2008. However, no studies have been carried out on the level of awareness of cervical health amongst ni Vanuatu women (Fotinatos, Warmington, Walker, & Pilbeam, 2010). Women's health education is also hindered by embarrassment, particularly in rural areas. Embarrassment is prevalent in Vanuatu society due to *kastom* and cultural taboos. In Vanuatu, nurses are the most popular sources of information about women's health concerns, while families are least popular (Fotinatos et al., 2010). We encountered rural women from West Santo at the Northern Market Vendors inaugural election. From an extremely remote part of Santo, they were largely illiterate and benefited from the photographic voting papers. In 2021, Rotary Australia and New Zealand teamed up with UNICEF in order to vaccinate 100,000 children in the Pacific Islands, including Vanuatu. The vaccine that is being provided through this initiative aims to “prevent deadly diarrhoea, pneumonia, sepsis, meningitis and cervical cancer” (Godfrey, 2021, p. 1). The program runs for three years, and it would be fascinating to find out the geographical spread of vaccine delivery and the education strategies employed. Further research is warranted on this vaccine roll out, but this is outside the scope of this study.

5.4 Legal protections and supports for women

Fertility levels of women increase with lack of education. The higher the level of women's education, the lower the number of children per woman (Jayaraman, 1995). Women and children are protected by Vanuatu's 2008 Family Protection Act, which makes domestic violence a criminal act. The introduction of the act was to address high rates of domestic violence, because “three in five women (60%) who have ever been in a relationship have experienced either physical or sexual violence or both by a husband or intimate partner” (Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011, p. 55). The Family

Protection Act has been controversial and has lacked implementation, although this situation may be improving over time (Putt & Dinnen, 2023; Putt & Kanan, 2022). As a general rule and as has been the practice for decades, “both police and abused women prefer to deal with abuse cases through local chiefs or within the family, village or church rather than the formal law system” (Biersack, 2016, p. 314). Piau-Lynch points out:

Violence against women and children is a yardstick by which one can measure the violation of all human rights. It can be used to gauge the degree to which a society is governed by aggressivity, dominated by competition and ruled by force. Abusive practices against women have frequently been and are still being justified in the context of kastom and religious beliefs (2007, p. 7)

Vanuatu became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or CEDAW in 1995. Articles 2, 5, 7 and 13 of CEDAW require state parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations and practices that constitute discrimination against women. In the case of Vanuatu, this may include consideration of *kastom*. The articles aim to get rid of “prejudices and other practices based on the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes” (Nagarajan & Parashar, 2013, p. 91). The articles also aim to “eliminate discrimination around financial areas such as bank loans and mortgages” (Nagarajan & Parashar, 2013, p. 91). Article 7 states all should take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the public and political life of the country (United Nations, 2005).

Vanuatu's constitution favours *kastom* laws, which are inherently discriminatory and conflict with CEDAW. Although Vanuatu has laws protecting and promoting women's rights, they are not enforced by the police and judiciary, and many of the convention's objectives are omitted or ignored (Biersack & Macintyre, 2016), although this situation may be improving with implementation of the Family Protection Act (Putt & Dinnen, 2023; Putt & Kanan, 2022). The violence against women in Vanuatu is prevalent and tolerated, according to Macintyre (2017, p. 13). The *kastom* system, religion, and bride price in Vanuatu oppress women, whereas domestic violence is condemned and criminalised in New Zealand and Australia.

5.5 Sorcery

Throughout Melanesia, including in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, women face violence and other repercussions due to sorcery accusations (Forsyth & Eves, 2015; Taylor & Araujo, 2016, p. 204). In Vanuatu, the word “sorcery is most closely associated with the use of *blak*

majik known as *nakaemas* in Bislama” (McDonnell, 2015, p. 137). One can imagine Christians finding sorcery abhorrent and totally against what they preach both in colonial times and in contemporary Vanuatu (McDonnell, 2015). Sorcery is also known as the “*rabis saed blong kastom*” (the rubbish side of *kastom*) (McDonnell, 2015, p. 142). However, *nakaemas* is a closely guarded secret that was in the past “connected to powerful men and embedded in specific places” (McDonnell, 2015, p. 143).

Powerful men used sorcery to keep villagers from disrupting rules and social behaviour. People who wield sorcery in some villages are known as *kleva* (clever) in parts of Vanuatu. “A *kleva* is often described as someone who prescribes, makes, and distributes traditional medicine [...] *Kleva* are also spiritually divine, and may use prayer and massage to cure illness as well” (Burry, 2017, p. 89). In contemporary Vanuatu, sorcery is unrestrained and less controlled, particularly in urban areas and this creates fear. In Port Vila and Luganville, ni Vanuatu people look for explanations of unexplained deaths and extreme weather and may find them in the form of sorcery. In the cash economy, jealousy and personal envy give rise to sorcery and/or sorcery accusation related violence. As sorcery has become more loosely controlled, the use of “*kastom* hitmen” (McDonnell, 2015) has been increasing.

As in Foucault’s theory of discourse, “sorcery primarily appears discursively, in the constant flow of talk, comingled in everyday gossip and conjecture” (Taylor & Araujo, 2016, p. 205). Foucault states that control of representations is not aimed at uncovering “a hidden truth that would be the subject itself; rather, it finds in these representations, the occasion for recalling to mind a certain number of true principals concerning death, illness, suffering and so on” (1997, p. 104). In the past, sorcery was viewed as largely positive, controlled by chiefs and a part of *kastom* law, whereas since colonialism and the breakdown of *kastom* structures of governance, sorcery today is now viewed as a largely negative agency (Taylor & Araujo, 2016). The results of a large scale survey into the status of women in Vanuatu found that “of all forms of violence, ‘violence due to sorcery’ was of the greatest overall concern for respondents” (Vanuatu Women’s Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011, p. 54). In another study that was commissioned by the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs, “it was discovered the fear of black magic was stronger than that of violent attack from other individuals” (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2012, p. 68). Sorcery is frequently carried out by young urban men in pursuit of material gain or sex and often operates outside of both formal law and *kastom* practice (Taylor & Araujo, 2016).

The patriarchal system in Vanuatu already suppresses women, making sorcery accusations against them problematic. It has been argued that sorcery is part of more general processes that involve “oppression, surveillance, and violence against women” (Taylor & Araujo, 2016, p. 213). Forsyth and Eves argue that women in Vanuatu are often more vulnerable to sorcery accusations and violence than men as they come from a less powerful position in society and have less status as many do not have “land or income” (2015, p. 7). As Christianity and Western culture spread, colonisers believed sorcery and other *kastom* practices would diminish. However, sorcery is widely practiced in Vanuatu society today. Sorcery, although illegal under Vanuatu State Law, is part of *kastom* and “its unruliness and problematic moral position draw it into relationship with both Christianity and the law” (Geismar, 2013, p. 226). Already the Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood is said to be dedicated to sorting out spiritual, demonic, and sorcery problems. In my time in Vanuatu, I was informed about the Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood. The Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood is “an action-oriented branch of the Anglican Church. They wear black robes as uniforms, and all brothers have a powerful walking stick that is highly respected and widely reputed to perform miracles” (Eriksen & Rio, 2014, p. 194).

While living in Vanuatu, I experienced sorcery next door to where we were living. Our ni Vanuatu neighbour Belinda reported bad spirits on the roof of her house. She was expecting to be told of her scholarship to Papua New Guinea to train as a doctor, but it was delayed long enough for her family to suspect sorcery. The family called in a healer in order to remove the bad spirits. Once he had done his ‘magic’, Belinda was told of her success with the scholarship the next day (Belinda Sahe, personal communication, 2017). Another person was experiencing mental health symptoms and a healer came in and lit fires at each corner of the house and in the house. There was a great deal of smoke, but the symptoms persisted in this case. Regardless, it was an example of good sorcery trying to remove the bad spirits causing the health problems ([name withheld] personal communication, 2017).

5.6 Bride price

Historically, bride price is an exchange of gifts between families or clans which recognises the value of the woman. It is “performed widely around the world, particularly in countries in Asia, Africa and Melanesia” (Sista, 2016 para 1; see also Servy 2020). However, the contemporary bride price in Vanuatu has been linked to cash payments and this has created controversy. It reinforces the view that a woman is a commodity belonging to her husband because he has bought her in a way that is similar to buying a commodity in a shop (Biersack, 2016, p. 14; A. Brown, 2007, p. 4; Burry, 2017, p. 37; Hedditch & Manuel, 2010, p. 18; Jolly, 2002, p. 138;

Miles, 1998). According to Jolly, the practice of 'bride price', and the increasing inclusion of money and capitalist commodity values in 'bride price' payments has distorted the practice and its meaning (2015). However, marriage does not always involve bride price. In the south on Tanna, people generally still practice "sister exchange" (Lindstrom, 2017). In this case, the boy only marries a girl if one of his sisters will marry into his wife's family (Lindstrom, 2017). The *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs announced an 80,000 vatu limit on bride price to stop larger amounts of money changing hands in April 2005 (Jalal, 2009, p. 9) but later rescinded the limit, stating that each island could determine a price depending on the island's *kastom* (Cullwick, 2014). In 2014, the Efate Council of Chiefs dictated that cash payments were no longer in force and that bride price should align with *kastom* practices, with payments "to be made in traditional currencies" (Sista, 2016 para 2; see also Servy 2020). Nonetheless, cash payments are still used in some parts of Vanuatu. For example, it was reported in 2014 that a "groom's family from Pentecost paid 600,000 vatu and 10 pigs at a bride price ceremony" (Mahit, 2016, p. 34). Lavinia Mahit reports that a male ni-Vanuatu journalist expressed concern about the use of large amounts of money in traditional ceremonies:

We should not mix these cultures together because they do not resemble the authentic culture our ancestors had. Otherwise, people will only focus and base future kastom exchanges on money and eventually drift from our local ways (Mahit, 2016, p. 34).

A young male government worker also saw the "use of cash with *kastom* as unacceptable, as it dilutes the cultural integrity of traditional practices and reflects Western values rather than the 'pure' ni-Vanuatu" (Mahit, 2016, p. 34).

Traditional items were typically exchanged for *kastom* weddings in Vanuatu both in colonial times and in contemporary society. "Pigs or mats were both typically objects of home production, created by both men and women [...] thus women could be seen to be assisting to produce the wealth which was then exchanged against their sexual, productive and procreative value" (Jolly, 2002, p. 138). A study of ni Vanuatu women in 2011 pointed to a large majority (84%) of women who think "bride price has a positive impact on marriage; however, 36 percent of women living with violence also agree bride price is a good reason for a man to beat his wife" (Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011, p. 80). Women whose "bride price has not been fully paid are more than 2.5 times more likely to experience violence than women whose marriage did not involve bride price" (Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011, p. 87). Richard Eves notes that violence against women is really about keeping women in their place while asserting that men make the decisions and men hold the power (cited in Biersack, 2016).

5.7 Prostitution

There is evidence that prostitution exists in Vanuatu even though it is illegal (Radio New Zealand, 2016b). The government has been working to offer services to sex workers. For instance, it has partnered with *Wan Smolbag*, an NGO in Vanuatu, which has been “operating the *Kam Pusem Hed* clinic in Port Vila which offers reproductive health services and counselling” mainly to sex workers and men who have sex with men (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a, p. 33). One program that worked with female sex workers in Port Vila stated there were “90 female sex workers who participated” (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a, p. 33). There is no legislation that protects against the exploitation of underage or non-consenting adult sex workers nor any legislation to protect the occupational health and safety of sex workers (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a).

The services offered by *Kam Pusem Hed* (KPH) are well known, which suggests the Vanuatu Government already condones prostitution, therefore it would only be a small change to legislate new laws to encompass sex work. Sex workers are particularly vulnerable to the transmission of STIs, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), unwanted pregnancy and other threats to health. “Such ‘other threats’ include a lack of legal rights and protection in the case of rape, and other abuses, including murder” (Burry, 2017, p. 27).

In her thesis *Selling Sex in Luganville*, Kate Burry argues sex workers operating on the edge of the law may be vulnerable to sexual assault, violence, harassment, and coercion (2017). Because sex workers do not fit the “dominant patriarchal” (Burry, 2017) system in Vanuatu, they may feel unworthy. The perception of sex workers and their rights is problematic. Female sex workers live in the city environment and are attracted to the sophisticated commercial urban spaces. As a result of their earnings, they can sustain their livelihoods and participate in society. Despite this, the church and *kastom* do not tolerate sex workers, whom they view as causing disruption of the traditional roles that women assume (Burry, 2017). It is their work that places them between traditions and modernity, between the village and the city, or between life in the village and life in the city (Burry, 2017, p. 121). Despite a lack of legal protections for sex workers in Vanuatu, sex workers claim their rights informed by their own histories, which include colonisation and *kastom* (Burry, 2017).

5.8 Siloa Food

Traditionally, food is very important to the ni-Vanuatu, both as an integral part of their lives and of Vanuatu society and culture. Furthermore, it is increasingly argued that it is necessary in

light of the increasing availability of unhealthy imported foods (such as white rice, instant noodles, tinned meats, and breakfast crackers). It is important to note Vanuatu is a very vulnerable country, and when a disaster strikes food aid overrides the healthy eating messaging (Wentworth, 2020). Since 2009, VKS has promoted a *Siloa*¹⁴ Food Movement, which has subsequently grown into *Siloa* Slow Food Vanuatu Association. Food sovereignty reigns supreme in the Vanuatu way of life as it defines cultures, traditions and identity with Mother Earth or *Mama Graon* (Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, 2023).

The film *Voices from Vanuatu* may not change the world, but it will lead to incremental changes towards gender equality. This has become even more important with the emergence of the *Siloa Kaekae* festivals, which are not only educating the public about the importance of healthy eating, but also encouraging people to appreciate local food culture. These changes are necessary to counter the potential health risks associated with increased availability of unhealthy imported foods, as well as to support the growth of the *Siloa Kaekae* festivals, which contribute to an established movement dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed issues that relate to women's health in Vanuatu. In concluding, key points are summarised. In Vanuatu, the average age people die is about ten years less than New Zealand (World Bank, 2022). Since 75% of the population are subsistence farmers and live remotely, I am surprised the gap is only ten years. Looking at women in the Pacific, the major causes of death are cancers of the cervix, breast and thyroid (Blot, Le Marchand, Boice, & Henderson, 1997), maternal health, and NCDs such as diabetes. All the cancers can be treated with early detection and, in the case of cervical cancer, by receiving vaccines. However, Vanuatu women are poorly educated regarding health issues, particularly cervical cancer. The remoteness of parts of the population means many women will not present to hospital until the late stages of cancer, which makes it very difficult to treat. In order to reduce maternal mortality, a stronger health system is needed. Increased family planning may also prevent some of these deaths.

Set up in 1992, the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) has been instrumental in having both the CEDAW Act and the Family Protection Act passed into law. Initially, the VWC operated on a very limited budget, but it was the only organisation dealing with violence against women. Domestic violence was not addressed by the government, churches, or cultural groups at this

¹⁴ Siloa means 'slow' in Bislama.

time. Vanuatu police now conduct a training session with all new recruits. In addition, the VWC have trained chiefs to be male advocates. Several of these chiefs are now members of the Island Court and *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs (Tahi, 2022). Family Protection Orders are now issued by both the police and these chiefs. Counsellors at the VWC provide a confidential and enabling environment. VWC translated the Family Protection Act into Bislama so that people could understand it (Tahi, 2022). This has allowed more people to access justice, and to protect their families from domestic violence. This helps to ensure that women and children in Vanuatu are provided with a safe space to talk about their experiences with domestic violence and to seek help. It also helps to spread awareness of the family protection laws, and to make them more accessible to those who may not understand them in their original language.

Of note, CEDAW has been recently discredited in development circles (Nagarajan & Parashar, 2013) and has been replaced by Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Gender Equality Disability Social Inclusion (GEDSI) (Geoff Elvy, personal communication, 2023). Social inclusion means ensuring participation that reflects maximum diversity including “different groups of women, men, girls and boys; people with disabilities; people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity; and indigenous peoples and ethnic minority groups” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023). If implemented, this will instil a greater sense of dignity and ensure equal participation in all areas of Vanuatu society. Already in Vanuatu, GESI is operating in the business world and is funding small businesses run by women or people with disability (Business Link Pacific, 2023). CEDAW, on the other hand, has become out of step with society with its patchy implementation and emphasis only on women (Jolly, 2016).

Sorcery accusations threaten Vanuatu women. As Taylor and Araujo argue, most sorcery accusations involving sexual assault perpetuates “gender-based inequalities” (2016, p. 200). As a form of disciplinary social justice, this discourse implies that women's empowerment is being denied by “normalising the use of violence” (Taylor & Araujo, 2016, p. 201). Development discourses and practices in Vanuatu have avoided sorcery because of its problematic nature. According to Taylor & Araujo (2016, p. 222), sorcery reinforces unequal relations between men and women by undermining “state power and its legal mechanisms”. To combat sorcery and sorcery accusation related violence, it seems to me that health providers, the education system, law enforcement, NGOs, and churches could work together.

In my view, bride price is inherently problematic. I feel that as soon as price is linked to a bride, it is easy to understand the assumption that she is a commodity. However, Chief Willie Plasua of the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs said in 2021, a bride price is not a large sum of money but is simply a symbolic gesture of recognition for both families to develop a meaningful relationship or “build up a bridge” (cited in Tokona, 2021 para 4). Nonetheless, money is transferred along with *kastom* objects such as pigs, mats and root vegetables. Each Island Council of Chiefs is able to endorse its own bride price based on each island’s individual *kastom*. The *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs went further and stated that the council has not turned a blind eye to the important issue of bride price and would make a decision as soon as possible (Garae, 2021). In parts of Papua New Guinea, the bride price payment is then cancelled out by an equivalent payment to the groom (Meki, 2021). From my perspective, bride price in Vanuatu might adopt a similar approach to certain regions of Papua New Guinea. Alternatively, it could be eliminated altogether and substituted with straightforward gift-giving to both the bride and groom. New Zealand takes the latter approach, which I consider successful, and while people in Vanuatu should be left to make their own decisions, there are models for female empowerment in Western democracies that could be explored and adapted to the local context. It will be interesting to see over time whether communities in Vanuatu choose to make any revisions to the *kastom* of bride price.

Wan Smolbag has been conducting health and education programs targeting young sex workers such as the KPH clinic and a peer education program. The education program advises sex workers about health matters such as STIs, HIV, condom use, and general safety. The peer education programs target young people and *Wan Smolbag* has also worked with sex workers and men who have sex with men (Republic of Vanuatu, 2013, p. 14). As I understand it, sex work in Port Vila is related to high unemployment and to a shift from a village way of life to a more urban existence. Women may consider sex work to be an option in an urban environment where they are away from the support networks in rural villages and thus they require cash to survive. As in New Zealand, the Vanuatu Government could accept that prostitution exists and legalise sex work. My sense is that this could help to address, and perhaps improve, the health and wellbeing of a range of people who live in urban areas and engage in sex work.

There are numerous challenges regarding women’s health in Vanuatu. The aim of this chapter has been to elucidate some of the key challenges and highlight how these relate specifically to women. Combined with the other chapters, this paints an overall picture of the disadvantage of women in Vanuatu, when compared to men.

Chapter 6 Education in Vanuatu

This chapter focuses on the education sector. The reason for focusing on the education sector is to illustrate the inequities faced by women in Vanuatu. The chapter begins by looking at practical barriers to accessing schooling, including school fees, scholarship allocation, push out rates, languages, and distance from school (and related risk of sexual assault). Cultural barriers are then discussed, including teenage pregnancy and *kastom* marriage. Girls face discrimination in terms of the legal age for marriage (Murphy-Graham, 2008; Piau-Lynch, 2007, p. 24). Societal benefits of education are discussed (including as these benefits relate to gender equality). The chapter also looks at gendered roles in society and debates around the benefits of schooling versus the damage it may do in reinforcing existing gender roles. This includes the hidden curriculum. Overall, the chapter posits that girls face an unfair future in terms of education due to various factors, including families prioritising boys' education.

There is no shortage of students beginning an education in Vanuatu. Of 80,800 students entering kindergarten, primary and secondary, there are 38,597 females (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a). For every 100 males at primary, secondary and tertiary, there are 91, 93 and 50 females respectively (Naidu, 2010, p. 2). According to UNICEF:

Primary education in Vanuatu consists of six years (Years 1 to 6) and commences at the age of 6. Secondary education consists of a further eight years (Years 7 to 14) and commences at the age of 12. Neither is compulsory or free under Vanuatu law, and it remains the responsibility of parents to send children aged between 6 and 14 to school (2017, p. 72).

Mean years of education are 7.1 in Vanuatu, which can be compared with neighbours Fiji and Samoa who have 10.9 and 10.8 respectively (UNDP, 2020, p. 1). Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Niue all have compulsory education (Naidu, 2010, p. 10).

Practical impediments to the education of girls and women

6.1 School fees

In Vanuatu, education is expensive but not compulsory. In a country where the majority of people work as subsistence farmers, it is no wonder there are problems with payment of school fees. The government funds primary schools and junior secondary schools but schools still ask parents for extra money. This happens in other countries as well. For instance, in New Zealand, schools are funded by the government, but extra money is required for things like

extra-curricular activities or educational trips. In Vanuatu, secondary schools from year nine onwards do not receive any funding from the government. Nor is there funding for tertiary education apart from government contributions to education providers such as the University of the South Pacific.

In Vanuatu, subsistence farmers who make up 75% of the population must now devote some of their crops to the cash economy. It is likely that subsistence farmers may struggle to cover all of the required educational expenses for their children. This is particularly so with regard to senior secondary and tertiary education: “the market vendor’s average earnings per week is five thousand vatu whereas the fees payable for secondary schooling is thirty-five to fifty thousand vatu every trimester” (A. Thomas, 2013, p. 235). The situation likely worsened with an economic downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic as there was no inbound tourism taking place (Moore & Gurry, 2021; Pechan, 2020; Pechan, Aru, & Tumukon, 2022; Westoby, Loehr, & Fleming, 2021). Dr Andrina Thomas argues that when women work for money they “become socially dysfunctional, deflecting their spiritual and physical energies, focus, and efforts away from their traditional networks” (2013, p. 238). In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, which was recorded in 2019, it was clear that the participants were proud of the work they were undertaking and seemed closer to being entrepreneurs than being socially dysfunctional. Income generation has been seen to improve their status domestically. However, the degree to which Vanuatu women can benefit from higher incomes also depends on household transactions and the degree to which women can retain control of additional incomes.

6.2 Scholarship allocation

In New Zealand, tertiary education is not free, and students take out loans. Such loans are not available in Vanuatu. So, for most students, tertiary education in Vanuatu is reliant on gaining a scholarship. However, there are divisions in Vanuatu between Francophone and Anglophone, island versus island and province versus province that affect the allocation of scholarships (Nimbtik, 2016). Tertiary education is possible for only very few.

Dr Gregor Nimbtik has reflected upon his time as a scholarship officer in the Ministry of Education. In his role, he encountered conflict between Francophone and Anglophone people regarding the allocation of scholarship awards (Nimbtik, 2016). He writes that he “witnessed politicians and State Ministers who worked through the Minister of Education to influence the process and policies of the scholarships in favour of their relatives and immediate families” (Nimbtik, 2016, p. ix). A role for Michelle Levy in 2015-2017 at the scholarship office led her to describe a similar pressure as Dr Gregor Nimbtik encountered (Michelle Levy, personal

communication, 2017). She also described meetings where the rift between Francophones and Anglophones was apparent whenever a disagreement took place (Michelle Levy, personal communication, 2017).

6.3 Push out rates

A serious concern is the push out rates for both boys and girls at Years 7, 11 and 13 as a result of the Year 6 and Year 10 national examination and the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate examination at Year 12 (Piau-Lynch, 2007, p. 19; Strachen, 2004, p. 32). Lack of places in schools is problematic as there are not enough secondary schools built in Vanuatu. This prevents children who pass through primary school from progressing to higher levels of education. Close to 46,000 primary children enrolled in Vanuatu in 2015 compared with 20,568 secondary enrolments (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a, p. 8). There are 433 primary schools compared with only 96 secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a, p. 8). In 2011, the enrolment rate in year 13 was only 13.6 per cent of those enrolled in year one (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a). An earlier study by Jane Strachen indicated that, in 2001, 7,500 students enrolled in year seven but by the time they reached year 13, only 133 were left (2004, p. 32). Student enrolment in the secondary level is limited by the number of available classrooms, places in secondary schools and a lack of specialised facilities and equipment, for example science laboratories and textbooks (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015b, p. 23).

6.4 Language barriers

The official languages of Vanuatu are French, English, and Bislama. Three different teachers might teach three different languages at the same school. There are over a hundred local languages in the country, most of which do not have written forms, so it is difficult to estimate literacy rates. Literacy in Vanuatu is complicated by the different spelling and usage of Bislama. Additionally, French and English, which are the official school languages, are rarely used outside the classroom, particularly in rural areas. Most communities speak their native vernaculars instead of one of the official languages (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015b, p. 25). This means that the majority of communication in the country is conducted in a language other than the official school languages, creating further literacy challenges.

6.5 Distance from school

The wide geography of the islands also causes problems, with twenty two per cent of pupils having to walk more than forty five minutes to get to school (Mullins, 2018, p. 55). This is another cause for concern as some parents see their girls walking long distances and being possible targets for sexual assault.

Cultural barriers to education for women and girls

6.6 Teenage pregnancy

If a girl in Vanuatu becomes pregnant, this often means that she is forced to forgo educational opportunities and chances of personal growth. As a result, she may be unable to reach her true potential and provide a better future for herself and her family. By foregoing these opportunities, she is denied the chance to achieve her full potential. The rate of birth for women aged between 15-19 years in Vanuatu is 81 births per one thousand women, which is similar to Solomon Islands but is more than twice as high as Fiji, Tonga and Tuvalu (McMillan et al., 2021, p. 6; see also Naidu, 2010, p. 7) As a result, teenage girls in Vanuatu can face a unique set of challenges that limit their chances of educational, personal, and professional success.

6.7 *Kastom* marriage

My understanding is that communities in Vanuatu often expect girls to marry as soon as they reach puberty (UNICEF, 2017, p. 88; Walsh, 2015). Further, if a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock, it can bring shame to the parents, as well as the school and the community as a whole. These social pressures can cause disruptions in education and may have significant potential adverse effects on girls socially. At present in Vanuatu, the age at which a child can marry is 16 for girls and 18 for boys. If the legal marriage age for girls was raised to eighteen in Vanuatu, it may help to reduce the risk of teenage pregnancies and could allow young women to further pursue education. Additionally, raising the legal marriage age for girls would also help protect them from physical and emotional abuse, as well as exploitation, which are often associated with child marriages. As UNICEF describes:

Marriage before the age of eighteen is a fundamental violation of human rights. Child marriage often compromises a girl's development by resulting

in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at increased risk of intimate partner violence (2020 para 1)

And yet the constitution has kept the discriminatory age of marriage of 16 for girls. Between 2012 and 2018, it is estimated that 3% of women aged between 20 and 24 were first married by age 15, while 21% of women were first married by age 18 (UN Women, 2022, p. 1). Vanuatu has one of the highest rates of contraceptive use in the Pacific, but many women are unable to access contraceptives (New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade Aid Program, UNFPA, & UNDP, 2015). Also, a woman's decision to use contraceptives is often made under fear of "physical and/or sexual violence from her partner" (Servy, 2020, p. 10).

In these same communities, *kastom* marriage dictates that a woman leaves her parent's house after marriage and becomes part of her husband's family. Research by Naidu shows that:

Many families consider girls to be lost out of the family and would rather spend money on their son's education than the daughter's. [...] Male children are considered assets to the family who will be a support to their parents during their elderly age, and so spending money on their education is considered worthwhile (2010, p. 9).

Through the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, we assembled a film crew that enabled one woman in particular to visit an aunt on Nguna Island whom she had not seen for twenty years even though she lived a short boat ride away. Women moving away from their home village when they marry is seen to be one of the key reasons for girls to drop out of school, particularly at the highest levels of secondary education and tertiary education.

6.8 Education system and gendered roles in school

Vanuatu has ratified human rights conventions guaranteeing equal opportunity for all children regardless of age, gender, or race. Further, "Vanuatu's constitution establishes equal opportunity for female children to formal education" (Naidu, 2010, p. 3). In the early decades of Vanuatu's independence, there had "generally not been evidence of active and effective policies or programs to encourage girls and women to pursue higher levels of education or paid employment" (Wallace, 2011, p. 506). However, Vanuatu's Education Act No. 9 of 2014 aims to eliminate educational disadvantages arising from gender or ethnicity of a child, or a child's geographic, economic, social, or cultural circumstances (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014b).

Equity in education is particularly important since education is the foundation of all other aspects of personal and national development. The benefits include improved health, more employment opportunities, and a sustainable use of the environment. The higher the level of education, the fewer children a woman has, which is also positively associated with a decrease in population growth (Pradhan, 2015). Quality education can have a long-term positive impact on economic growth and poverty reduction. It can also encourage gender equality, peace, and democracy.

The education system may unintentionally engage in the conditioning of young women and girls into accepting values of femininity, subservience, and domesticity. Although the Vanuatu Government is updating the curriculum (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020, pp. 23-24) as far as I know, the educational programs do not address gender issues in society, do not question sexual stereotypes and provide a very limited sex education. Vanuatu society has gendered roles. Consequently, any Vanuatu women practising outside their prescribed roles, for example aspiring to leadership positions, educational attainment or active lives in the public sphere, are perceived as going against the norm and they may face serious repercussions such as domestic violence or general violence at the hands of their own communities (Warsal, 2009). A similar situation was seen in reactions to the women playing in the Fiji national women's rugby team, including public mocking, vilification, physical degradation and even assault (Kanemasu, 2017, p. 8).¹⁵

Gender inequality exists in Vanuatu due to a dominant patriarchal society. This can lead to women having fewer opportunities to reach their full potential. Education and skills development may be beneficial, although Jeffery and Jeffery point out some possible pitfalls of the education system:

Calling schooling education bathes the whole topic in a warm positive glow and draws attention away from the circumstances in which children are socialised and learn about the world around them. Since schooling is only a small part of this learning process, talking casually about differences between educated and uneducated women ignores the ways in which

¹⁵ This was a similar reaction to women playing rugby league in Papua New Guinea. They faced similar harassment to the Fiji women's rugby team. Among the hurdles was intense sexism, a lack of funding, and national prejudice. *Power Meri* is a documentary film (similar to *Voices from Vanuatu*) about the team going to the 2017 World Cup in Australia and has had considerable impact where it has been screened around the world, according to the impact report available at <https://powermerifilm.com/impact>.

unschooled women are nonetheless highly educated in the specifics of their social worlds (2000, p. 248).

In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, the vendors were highly knowledgeable in the context of their professions but lacked schooling or had limited formal education. In the film, the female interviewees all showed independent thinking, especially when they criticised the operation of Port Vila Central Market. Although it was outside of the scope of the interviews conducted for this project, it may be that they have some ideas about how structures enable or limit their ability to contribute to national politics and how they face discriminatory attitudes from men in daily life through the structures of *kastom* and religion.

Educating girls does not always lead to self-determination. There will be clear roles defined for girls and women in the curriculum if the curriculum reinforces traditional roles for girls and women, and parents mainly want their daughters to marry suitable partners. Educating young women can be beneficial, but it may not necessarily empower them. A ni Vanuatu woman/girl cannot be empowered by education if she remains within a religious and *kastom* system that restricts her ability to think independently. This is a critical point as in Vanuatu patriarchal structures in villages can overrule a girl's education, leaving a girl with few options apart from marriage and children. With rural to urban migration, women may see urban structures as promising. For instance, if they can gain paid work, this may enable women to educate their children (A. Thomas, 2013). However, urban centres are away from women's family structures and gardens so they "become deprived of natural resources from the land from which they could sustain and maintain themselves" (A. Thomas, 2013, p. 65).

Despite possible drawbacks or limitations, schooling must be protected "in terms of women's rights to literacy and numeracy, even if schooling does not necessarily enhance their autonomy" (Jeffery & Jeffery, 2000, p. 253). A young woman's risk of experiencing violence decreases with her education level (Vanuatu Women's Centre & Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2011). In addition, education can have economic benefits as well (Tull, 2019). It has been shown that an increase in the proportion of women with secondary education can result in a 0.3% increase in a country's annual per capita income (Tull, 2019, p. 13). It is essential to empower women and to protect their dignity in the workplace to ensure a more ethical and productive business (Tull, 2019, p. 3). By having access to menstrual management, women are able to further access education, which can lead to improved productivity in the workplace, as well as a greater sense of safety and well-being (Tull, 2019).

It is wrong to think that empowerment is always the result of schooling. This relationship depends on the content and context of the education. “This is problematic because educational systems reflect prevailing social attitudes and can serve to reproduce rather than challenge the social status quo” (Murphy-Graham, 2008, p. 33). Schools and other educational programs do this through both the explicit and the hidden curriculum (Murphy-Graham, 2008, p. 33).

6.9 Hidden curriculum

Parallel to the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum includes lessons that are not explicitly stated (Murphy-Graham, 2008, p. 46). In addition to behaviour in the classroom, values, beliefs, cultures, and perceptions are included. Reading a text that depicts boys and girls in traditional roles is an example of hidden curriculum. A teacher may devote a lot of time to one subject while overlooking another. There will be a difference between a textbook that has an attractive design and one that does not. Furthermore, a hidden curriculum can reinforce messages about the “inferior status of girls and makes them experience negative learning experiences, leading to low self-esteem and low aspirations” (Kabeer, 2005a, p. 17). The goal of education should be to promote women's empowerment and the idea that women are not inferior to men. Students must be taught that gender roles are socially constructed, especially by the church and *kastom*. For critical thought to develop, there needs to be a secure and physical space where new ideas can be shared and debated, as well as a place where minds can grow free of those who may seek to control them (Stromquist, 1995). In order to facilitate meaningful debate, students must be provided with access to diverse sources of information and knowledge as well as a safe learning environment that facilitates meaningful engagement.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the problems for young women progressing through the education system in Vanuatu. In concluding, I would suggest that there are nine key problems with the education system in Vanuatu. There are school fees, limited scholarships, poor educational attainment when compared to neighbours in the Pacific, push out rates, language barriers, distance from school (and related risk of sexual assault), teenage pregnancy, *kastom* marriages, and problems with curriculum content. The chapter also looked at the Education Act and whether schooling is necessarily a good thing.

It is my view that free education and compulsory attendance are key to increasing the educational attainment at school. At the moment, school fees represent a large proportion of

income for subsistence farmers and make it difficult for them to send their children to school. In the 2009 census, 10 percent of students had never been to school. UN Women reported in 2016 that nationally, seven out of ten women aged over 15 years have either no education or have only completed primary education (2016, p. 51).

Grants to improve attendance in primary schools have indirectly improved access in three ways (IIEP, 2013). The grants have increased the interest of children in attending; opened access to preschool and secondary school as parents were able to redirect their funds away from primary schooling; and improved access to education at the correct age for primary school. This chapter has explained that push out rates in Vanuatu are a major obstacle to educational attainment. The issue may be addressed by building more secondary schools and training more secondary teachers. UNDP estimates Vanuatu's average number of years of education to be 35% lower than the averages in other Pacific countries (UNDP, 2020). Some of Vanuatu's Pacific neighbours make education compulsory, while in Vanuatu it is neither free nor mandatory. To ensure progress, Vanuatu must invest in the expansion of its secondary school system and provide its teachers with quality training to foster an environment of educational equity. Furthermore, it must consider the implementation of policies to make education both free and mandatory to reduce the risk of students dropping out.

Education can be an effective tool for empowering women, particularly at the tertiary level. Such empowerment is exemplified by Dr Andrina Thomas, who chose to run in the 2020 National Election of Vanuatu upon completing her Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) at Waikato University, New Zealand. At present in Vanuatu, the age at which a child can marry is 16 for girls and 18 for boys. This discrepancy has real-world consequences and prevents some girls from continuing their education as once married they are expected to have children. Efforts must be made to reduce the gender discrepancy in education, so that girls can access the same educational opportunities as their male counterparts and have their rights protected, regardless of their marital status. Dr Andrina Thomas is an inspiring example of how tertiary level education can be utilised to empower women, and her election campaign serves as a reminder of the important role education can play in ensuring gender equality. This chapter has demonstrated the difficulties young women face when it comes to education in Vanuatu. Some are systemic and others logistical or legal. There is no one fix for the problems.

Chapter 7 Empowerment of women in Vanuatu

This chapter looks briefly at the definition of empowerment before looking at empowerment of women in Vanuatu. It explores the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Malampa Handicraft Centre and finds both organisations have targeted or motivated men to work alongside women. The chapter also looks at how photographs and video profiles can be used in different ways to empower women. The chapter then covers the Markets for Change program and the market vendor elections. It also looks briefly at neoliberalism. The phrase 'economic empowerment' was popular in development circles before development practitioners have been tempered with the knowledge overall empowerment needs to address the power structures in a community. In Vanuatu, power structures are tied into religion and *kastom* (see chapter four). The chapter discusses empowerment with these societal structures in mind and considers whether it may be valuable to educate or involve men in initiatives aimed at empowering women and/or activities that women are undertaking.

7.1 Empowerment definition

What is empowerment? It was in the latter half of the twentieth century that the word 'empowerment' became political when it was adopted by "liberation theology, popular education, black power, feminist and other movements engaged in struggles" (Batliwala, 2007, p. 558) to help the oppressed. The United Nations sustainable development goal five aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, 2021). Empowerment is a process where individuals take action to improve their lives. Empowerment is about extending "what people imagine themselves being able to be and do" (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 3) but it is also "a complex process" (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 1). Policies such as economic empowerment cannot promote women's empowerment because they fail to "address the structures by which gender inequality is perpetuated over time" (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 8).

7.2 The Vanuatu Women's Centre

In Vanuatu, gender inequality comes up against patriarchal attitudes prevalent in society. Governments and development agencies would do better if they enabled the environment for women's empowerment and supported those who take on "deeper-rooted issues of power that impede transformative change" (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 8). One such example may be the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) run by Marilyn Tahi. Based in Port Vila, the VWC

coordinates branches in Torba, Sanma, Malampa and Tafea and has a rural network of 44 committees that work with and advocate for survivors of gender-based violence, particularly violence against women and children. Notably, VWC also has a national network of male advocates trained to apply awareness of women's human rights to their work within various sectors, organisations and communities (Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2016).

7.3 The Malampa Handicraft Centre

The Malampa Handicraft Centre (MHC) is located at Lakatoro on Malakula. As can be seen in the map (Figure 1), Malampa province is north of the province where the capital city Port Vila is located. The MHC appears to be a sound example of an enabling environment for women's empowerment, as suggested by Cornwall & Edwards (2010). Opened in 2014, it planned to "grow from a community-run store within one province to a sustainable and profitable social enterprise by 2020, facilitating domestic and international trade" (Pacific Women, 2018, p. 1). However, like other tourism operations in Vanuatu, COVID-19 would have handicapped these visions for growth. Stocking handicrafts from local women, the building was extended in 2018 to make it accessible to rural women and people with disabilities (Roberts, 2018, p. 1). In 2018, the centre had a new toilet and bathroom for women to visit as well as a new office space with computers to send emails to customers, a showroom display area for products, storage for wholesale orders and a water tank (Roberts, 2018, p. 1).

More than 300 local producers participate in the MHC, of which "90 percent are women" (Pacific Women, 2018, p. 1). The centre's success has inspired men to collect the pandanus leaves for the weaving, which was previously regarded as women's work, reflecting a form of permitted empowerment (Pacific Women, 2018, p. 1), which is defined as "an exchange of power" (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 996). According to some assessments of the use of the term "permitted empowerment", the notion of power is presented as a finite resource and therefore "any advances for women must be made at the expense of men" (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 996). Martha Macintyre notes that empowering women "often means wrestling power from men so that women might represent their own interests" (2012, p.247 cited in Gibbs, 2016, p.153). Funding for the MHC has been in partnership with Vanuatu's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program. TVET runs skill enhancing programs in the tourism, agriculture, horticulture, cooking, creative and building sectors in Vanuatu with an emphasis on gender equality (Ministry of Education & Training, 2023).

7.4 Empowering women through photographs and videos

The Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening Program (TSSP), funded by the Australian Government, was “an innovative model for demand based provision of TVET in rural areas” (DFAT, 2014, p. 3). One strategy used by TSSP was to “promote the value of women’s participation in the TVET system” (DFAT, 2014, p. 4). As a way of disseminating this message, “photographs of women as entrepreneurs and in nontraditional jobs (such as construction) were used on promotional materials to demonstrate that women could do these jobs and that it was acceptable to do so” (DFAT, 2014, p. 4). In addition, “video vignettes of women who had successfully completed training were developed to show that TVET worked for women” (DFAT, 2014, p. 4). An assessment was made that photographs and videos were “more important than [written] reports in changing ideas” (DFAT, 2014, p. 4).

Another example of photographs providing empowerment was in 2016 when a series of portraits of rural women in Vanuatu effected by an El Nino drought were exhibited in Erakor Village near Port Vila. One of these photographs can be seen in Figure 7.1. The subjects were able to see large prints hanging on a wall in the village and were also invited on stage where they were acknowledged and received a copy of their portrait. A feeling of empowerment “can emerge from the very process of the group coming together” (Jolly, 2003, p. 140). The very act of travelling to the exhibition encouraged a sense of dignity for the women. In the case of an earlier activity focused on women, “it was a tremendous advantage for the women to meet other women from different villages and accumulate a sense of shared worth as mothers and wives” (Jolly, 2003, p. 140). In this case, the women developed an understanding of the shared hardship during the drought. Margaret Jolly has written about the worth of women’s groups who come together, in particular referring to Catholic women in Malaita in the early 1990s (2003, p. 140) and I saw a similar uplifting feeling displayed at the exhibition in 2016.



Figure 7.1. Portrait of Hellen Kalo in her kitchen, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.

7.5 Markets for Change program

As seen in Vanuatu with the Markets for Change (M4C) program, economic empowerment was achieved. We saw this firsthand when one of the vendors realised that buying a fridge would increase her income. However, it should be noted that overall empowerment is a more difficult target to attain unless the men themselves are also empowered. Therefore, development programs must seek to involve men in the empowerment process in order to achieve maximum long-term results. Empowering men to become more engaged in the economic process is key to reducing gender inequality and achieving economic empowerment for all. This can be done through education, training, and other initiatives that promote gender equality and give men the skills and confidence to take part in decision-making which involves

women. To this end, it is essential to ensure that men are provided with the resources and support necessary to become active participants and to ensure a more equitable future for all.

Increasing women's economic empowerment is promoted in today's development circles as a means that can “produce extraordinary results” (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 1). This is the case because it has the potential to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities by opening up resources and creating opportunities. The United Nations strongly recommended economic empowerment of women as a protective factor against violence towards women in its Beijing declaration in 1995 (Dalal, 2011, p. 35). Women's empowerment is often “extolled as the solution to a host of entrenched social and economic problems” (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 1). However, there is “no silver bullet to grow the productivity of subsistence producers” (Buvinic & Furst-Nicols, 2016, p. 70). Because the very poor often live in regions with few resources, it can be difficult for agencies and the government to deliver services. With *kastom* dominating, empowerment, self-confidence, and self-esteem cannot be taught. They must come from the ground up and can be aided when women are involved with the planning and implementation of projects.

It is against this backdrop that the Markets for Change (M4C) project operated. UN Women, the Australian Government, the Canadian Government and UNDP and the Vanuatu Government worked together on the project. Started in 2014, the initiative aimed at ensuring that marketplaces in rural and urban areas in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu were “safe, inclusive and non discriminatory environments, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment” (UNDP, 2014, p. 1). According to the United Nations, markets are important because “approximately 80 percent of all market vendors in the Pacific are women, and their earnings make up a significant portion of income for many poor households” (UN Women, 2017, p. 1). Despite the importance of women's earnings, “women are often excluded from market governance and decision making” (UN Women, 2017b, p. 1).

While based in Vanuatu, I had the privilege to photograph M4C meetings where I saw women gaining confidence and realising that collective strength came from attending and running these meetings. As was found in an earlier instance, I observed that “the very act of travelling to meetings and learning to speak out at such gave a sense of dignity, a desire for literacy, and broader horizons” (Jolly, 2003, p. 140). As seen in Figure 7.2, the M4C training encouraged ni Vanuatu women to participate in organisational meetings in order to fulfil governance requirements.



Figure 7.2. Salome Perkone talking at an M4C meeting, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.

7.6 Market vendor elections



Figure 7.3. Silae Vanua election, photography by Murray Lloyd 2015



Figure 7.4. Women voting in the Northern Market Vendor Association election, photography by Murray Lloyd, 2016.

Part of this process was to hold market vendor elections at Port Vila, Marobe and Luganville markets in Vanuatu. In Port Vila, hundreds of women and men turned out to vote in the Silae Vanua election (see Figure 7.3). In Luganville, around 90 percent of voters (Morris Kaloran, personal communication, 2016) turned out in Vanuatu's first Northern market vendor election in 2016. The Luganville election saw photos used when my candidate photographic portraits were used again as actual voting papers (see Figure 7.4). This was to enable illiterate voters to vote with a clear understanding of whom they were voting for. This was another example of empowerment using photographs. This creative use of photography showed not only empowerment, but an effort to accommodate those who may have otherwise been disenfranchised due to a lack of literacy. This photography was a great example of how photographs can be used to ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to participate in the electoral process. It was a powerful demonstration of how photography can be used to achieve social justice and empower those who are traditionally underrepresented.

7.7 Neoliberalism

The consensus now is that the market is seen as the bringer of all good things. Thus, the tendency is increasingly to identify empowerment with consumer choice in a commodity

market. This can be seen in Vanuatu. My understanding is that the thinking regarding the M4C project is that economic empowerment will flow through society and create additional empowerment for women. It could be argued that the pathways to empower women outlined above are neoliberal in intent. All political and social life is enveloped by market rules in a neoliberal world: “neoliberalism reflects the expansion of market logic into all areas of political and social life, as well as governmental efforts to encourage individuals and institutions to act according to market norms” (Calkin, 2015, p. 3). *Kastom* contrasts with *bisnis*¹⁶, which involves “the commercial transactions designed to make a profit” (Gosden, 2004, p. 98). Instead of politics, religion and *kastom*, neoliberalism suggests that the focus should be on success, as measured by “new units of production and consumption in this more market-orientated world” (Gosden, 2004, p. 98).

The hallmarks of neoliberalism are “individualism, corporate and personal wealth and personal responsibility” (Keddie, 2010) (see also Bargh, 2001; W. Brown, 2005, 2015; Lerner, 1997; Madra & Adaman, 2010; May & McWorter, 2016; Sandbrook, 2007; Slatter & Underhill-Sem, 2009; United Nations, 2020), which oppose collective action that is founded on shared values and beliefs in society. Cornwall & Anyidoho suggest that “neoliberalism peddles in gender myths that portray an image of the good woman as the deserving object of development assistance” (2010, p. 145). This is in contrast to ni Vanuatu ideas of empowerment, which promise change through collective action, such as through elections of women to committees. The female business woman is what the development industry focuses on (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010), which fails to address *kastom*, the church and the patriarchal attitudes in Vanuatu society (see chapter four for detailed discussion of these issues).

Is promoting economic advancement the way the development industry wants women to achieve gender equality and empowerment or is it “development on the cheap” (Chant & Sweetman, 2012, p. 521)? Even though economic advancement may be a tool for empowering women, it is important to make sure that it does not come at the expense of their overall well-being and rights. Detailed analysis of this debate is beyond the scope of this research project. I am not able to imagine a future where economic growth means poverty is reduced and gender equality is achieved, based on my experience observing and interacting with households and communities in Vanuatu. Without reform of *kastom* and the churches whose roles shape their lives, “women and girls are set up for exhaustion and failure” (Chant & Sweetman, 2012, p. 524).

¹⁶ *Bisnis* is the Bislama word for business.

7.8 Conclusion

Empowered women are not only able to “access resources, or participate in politics and public life, but also enjoy bodily autonomy and integrity, and freedom from violence” (Sen & Mukherjee, 2014, p. 190). Unfortunately, decades of international development efforts and reflection have identified that “there are no magic bullets, no panaceas, no blueprints, no readymade formulas which bring about the radical structural transformation that the empowerment of the poor” (Kabeer, 2005b, p. 4718) requires, and I feel that the situation is similar for female vendors in Vanuatu.

Men must be empowered along with women. If income is coming from the women only it can create problems. Women may be forced to hand over the income to men. It is better all round if all members of a household can contribute economically (Armendariz & Roome, 2008). In *Voices from Vanuatu*, the film I made about market vendors in Vanuatu, two of four husbands were working hard with their wives and family. They were working as a team to maximise profits from the farms. Research has shown that the inclusion of men in the entrepreneurial activities may be positive for both women’s empowerment and their income, because it does not create conflicts between wives and husbands (Robbins, 2016, p. 2).

When men view the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, they may see the men in the film as role models of supportive husbands. Men need support in changing attitudes, roles, and privileges that are currently discriminatory against women (Mayoux, 2006). The men can also work on gender issues, while the women can approach male institutions such as *kastom* structures and the church with their concerns (Mayoux, 2006). The Port Vila Market is staffed almost entirely by women. I am sure if men helped in the market, conditions of the market would be improved immediately. The women in the film criticised the market on several fronts including theft of produce, sexual harassment, lack of space and the lack of toilet and bathroom facilities. It was pleasing to learn that the toilets and bathrooms in the market have been upgraded since *Voices from Vanuatu* was recorded. The plan for the work included five toilets and three bathrooms (Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities, 2017), which is up from two toilets and two bathrooms. If improvements in the market can continue, it will go some way towards a future where women and the work they do are valued.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This chapter wraps up the discussion and considers the answers to the guiding research questions, which were:

How do images and film empower people?

How can participation in a documentary film create a sense of empowerment amongst market vendors in Vanuatu?

What factors have contributed to a sense of disempowerment amongst women in Vanuatu?

8.1 Empowerment using film

The process of making the film *Voices from Vanuatu* and writing the thesis has answered these three questions to some extent and more importantly has pierced the silence I had earlier encountered in Port Vila Central Market while living in Vanuatu. During the filmmaking process, the participants all relished the chance to speak openly and used their time in front of the camera to condemn the conditions in Port Vila Market. The literature review explores the status of women in Vanuatu and develops a case for women to be empowered. While there is a great deal of written research on how to empower women, particularly economic empowerment, there is little research on how images and film can do the same. I recommend further research on film and image making in Vanuatu as I argue these tools are a powerful conduit in a society used to seeing creative works that explore issues. The theatre projects created by *Wan Smolbag*, a non-government organisation in Vanuatu, are exemplary in this regard. Ni Vanuatu also increasingly produce their own visual content, both fiction and non-fiction, through platforms like Television Blong Vanuatu. A good example of this is a series called *Love Patrol*, a longstanding soap opera which also broaches issues in Vanuatu society.

8.2 Voices from Vanuatu

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant I have been unable to take the film back to Vanuatu where I could have evaluated responses from the participants and audiences. Of note for other filmmakers and researchers was the importance of the existing relationships that I had in Vanuatu, developed during the period of time when I worked in country prior to making the film. This was crucial as I relied on networks that already existed to make the film.

The first research question was: How do images and film empower people? People who are empowered by imagery rely firstly on the maker of the photographs and film recording them in a dignified manner. This includes naming of the subjects. Susan Sontag argues that “a portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of the celebrity that has fuelled an insatiable appetite for the opposite sort of image: to grant only the famous their names demote the rest to their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights” (2003, p. 94). History shows that as well as naming subjects, methods for returning the work to the participants are equally important. In Vanuatu, I had seen first-hand how photographs could go some way to empowering the viewers when I exhibited a set of portraits of women who were facing an El Nino drought (this earlier project is described briefly in the introduction chapter). In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, the female participants were empowered throughout the process. Initially, each woman volunteered to be recorded. The camera and sound recording provided a platform for the women to talk publicly, an opportunity that had been absent from their lives up to that point.

8.3 Humanist ideology

The film could be seen as a product of humanist ideology. “Humanist imagery has a mission: it aims to use images in the service of a human cause. Humanist approaches stress that documentary film and photography can provide access to facts and feelings” (Bleiker & Kay, 2007, p. 146). Humanist imagery expresses a combination of description and emotional affect to both inform and move the viewer. It is praised for expressing humanist values such as empathy, solidarity and mutual respect between the camera person and the subject. Any documentary mode (see chapter one) can be regarded as humanist. Compared with still photographs, a documentary film can access facts easily and can also give the viewer a conduit to feelings. This enables empathy between the viewer and the subjects of the film. Still photographs mostly need text to supply facts and feelings, whereas in a film these are delivered in other ways. In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, it is the words of the women that supply these.

8.4 NGOs in Vanuatu

The second and third research questions were: How can participation in a documentary film create a sense of empowerment amongst market vendors in Vanuatu?

What factors have contributed to a sense of disempowerment amongst women in Vanuatu?

Market vendors in Vanuatu stand to benefit from efforts to improve their sense of empowerment, this being a “process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged individuals or groups to challenge and change (in their favour) existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, social, and political positions” (Dyer, 2017, p. 204). From my time living in Port Vila, I could not understand how such an important part of the city had so little voice. Working for UN Women at the time on the Markets for Change project, I was privileged to see how with training the market vendors grew in confidence and had more agency. This is not always true for foreign aid money spent on training activities, particularly in rural Vanuatu. NGOs often send people to train communities through various development projects, but most are temporary and lack follow up. However, in Port Vila contacts are more sustained, which lead to more successful outcomes. In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, the vendors described their livelihoods and were empowered to criticise the market operations. Because the market vendors are mostly women, my research focuses on women in Vanuatu. In the thesis chapters about politics, religion, *kastom*, health, education, and empowerment I have explored how women are both discriminated against and face well-established inequality in Vanuatu.

8.5 CEDAW and Family Protection Act

The international treaties that have been ratified by the government of Vanuatu are on paper but have not been implemented in full. If the treaty commitments were realised, the path to empowerment would be easier for women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was ratified in 1995 and the Family Protection Act was passed by parliament in 2008. Both of these look good on paper. The 2008 legislation criminalises domestic violence and provides for protection orders (Putt & Kanan, 2022). Just under half of Vanuatu’s population are aware of this act and eighty percent know that domestic violence is illegal (Putt & Dinnen, 2023, p. 26). The protection orders must be handled by police, but the remote nature of Vanuatu means there are no police on some islands. In this case, authorised people are nominated who are permitted to give temporary orders of fourteen to twenty-eight days (Putt & Kanan, 2022, p. 35). However, the United Nations are “deeply concerned” (United Nations, 2016, p. 5) about the domestic violence rates in Vanuatu. In addition, they highlighted “the lenient sentences for perpetrators regardless of the severity of the offence” (United Nations, 2016, p. 5). Nine years after the passing into law of the Family Protection Act, UN Women reported “violence against women and girls is pervasive across the Pacific” (UN Women, 2017a, p. 14).

8.6 Politics in Vanuatu

National politics and *kastom* law are resolutely male. Only six women since 1980 have been elected to government. You do not need to look far to find a solution to the low representation. In Samoa, a law commonly known as the ten percent law guarantees places for women in government (Australian Government, 2016, p. 1; Motusaga, 2016, p. 136). There are also reserved seats for women in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Baker, 2014, pp. 1-2). I think that if a similar law was applied to Vanuatu, it would be beneficial to women. Women in Vanuatu would have every reason to stand for election if such a measure was in place, knowing that the top polling female candidates would have seats in parliament. There is a precedent in Vanuatu for quotas, given that the Municipalities Act of 2013 introduced a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in the municipal councils of Port Vila and Luganville, even though the positions did not have voting rights (Republic of Vanuatu, 2014a). Even so, "attempts to promote national-level quotas have faced significant resistance" (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 4)

8.7 *Kastom*

Kastom favours men and boys in Vanuatu. While there are some female chiefs, they generally do not possess the full powers available to males. The *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs is one hundred per cent male and has never had a female member. It "aims to preserve and promote culture and languages, support and encourage *kastomary* practice, uphold *kastom* and tradition and ensure the effective operation of *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs through appropriate resources" (Republic of Vanuatu, 2022). The council is elected every four years and sits twice a year. It has made controversial decisions, for example, in 2001, the council endorsed the banning of shorts and trousers for women (Cummings, 2008, p. 144). The contentious debate over the dress of young women in Vanuatu society largely revolves around the clash between indigenous and foreign modes of living. Ni-Vanuatu women asserting their individuality and femininity are considered to be a threat to the patriarchal elite of Vanuatu.

Kastom is often invoked in nationalist imaginings of Vanuatu as the commonsense, static, and timeless cultural bedrock upon which national sovereignty is built [...] Because kastom is characterised as that which distinguishes the indigenous from the foreign, changes that are perceived to be the result of foreign influence, such as rapid urbanisation, an increasingly cash-based economy, blatant displays of sexuality, and even the availability of "new" styles of clothing, are perceived as being a threat to kastom (Cummings, 2008, p. 133).

8.8 Religion

Vanuatu is a very religious country. This was quite noticeable while I was living in Port Vila and coming from New Zealand where 48.2% of the population regard themselves as having no religion (Stats NZ, 2019). “While Vanuatu’s most recent census in 2009 reported eighty three percent for Christian affiliation, the actual proportion of the population self-identifying as Christian is closer to ninety six percent” (Clarke, 2019, p. 162). With this in mind, an observer might think there would be harmony in society. However, the churches have played their part in dividing villages and opposing legislation such as the Family Protection Act. In some villages, there can be ten denominations in a village of 100 people (Nimbtik, 2016, pp. viii-ix). In such circumstances, there is significant opportunity for conflict, defined by different religious beliefs, practices and, most profoundly, the religious clash with traditions known as *kastom*.

8.9 Health

Women in Vanuatu face challenges in trying to achieve better health outcomes. Some of the problems lie in the fact that there is no screening for common cancers. Better education about cancers would mean women would present earlier and therefore have a better chance of surviving. Good health empowers women (and men), allowing them to participate fully in Vanuatu society. Another area of concern in Vanuatu is the rate of diabetes, which can be linked to diets that rely on imported, processed food such as rice, canned food, noodles, and breakfast crackers instead of fresh vegetables and fish. It is possible that Vanuatu’s markets will become more important to public health as the incentive to buy imported food increases, especially with cheap prices and substantial supply. To promote good health and prevent diabetes, it is important to increase access to fresh, local foods that are provided by Vanuatu’s markets. This could potentially reduce reliance on imported, processed foods, and provide a better source of nourishment for communities, which would help to ensure food security and self-sufficiency for Vanuatu’s citizens. Healthy food is in the Pacific backyards, farms, markets, and traditional dishes (Pacific Island Food Revolution, 2023 para 4). In my estimation, the country can ensure that its citizens enjoy healthy and safe food that is embedded in the local culture by utilising the resources available from Vanuatu’s local markets and farmers. Once again, better education would be beneficial to women. From a young age, children need to be educated about exercise and nutrition in school.

8.10 Education

In the education chapter, my research has shown girls face barriers when compared with boys. Although the Vanuatu Government is updating the curriculum, most efforts have been around improving numeracy and literacy (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020, pp. 23-24). Further work may be needed to develop school materials that contain good role models for both females and males. Young minds are very impressionable, and it seems to me that if classroom materials reinforce what the children see played out in their villages the children will not be enlightened about the inequality between the sexes in Vanuatu. There is some awareness of this issue. In the 2009-2014 National Law and Justice Sector Strategy, it stated that work would be done with the Ministry of Education to include legal and human rights awareness in the school curriculum (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2014, p. 9). Also the 2020-2030 strategic plan for the education sector specifically mentions work needing to be enacted around gender equality and security for girls and women (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020, pp. 9-10).

8.11 Sorcery and bride price

As I have explained in this thesis, it is my view that sorcery and bride price are two other problem areas that women in Vanuatu face. Bride price is problematic, especially in cases where men think their wives are commodities. In my view, it would be advantageous to women if it was abolished.

In Vanuatu, sorcery accusations are commonly made by men and against women in order to gain benefit, a practice that “subverts the effects of state power and reinscribes unequal relations between men and women” (Taylor & Araujo, 2016, pp. 221-222). In Vanuatu and other postcolonial settings following independence, “there was an impressive increase in cases of poisoning and sorcery in general – or at least in accusations of sorcery” (Dousset, 2015, p. 170). Sorcery can be used for good (for example, to exercise power over the elements to encourage success in gardening and fishing or to help in matters of health). Sorcery can also be used for harmful practice and today is mostly associated with issues of jealousy and envy (Forsyth, 2006, p. 5). To eliminate sorcery accusations and related violence would require concerted efforts by multiple agencies and NGOs. Efforts to increase the employment rate of young people may help to reduce sorcery accusation related violence in Vanuatu. While outside of the scope of this thesis, future research could look at the correlation between sorcery and employment. According to the last census, in urban Vanuatu (Port Vila and Luganville) the

unemployment rate is 12% (Kraemer, 2017, p. 8). This rate is higher for 18–24-year-olds, particularly those living in urban areas.

8.12 Neoliberalism

In Vanuatu, the majority of people are subsistence farmers who live in local communities on remote islands (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 5; Bowman et al., 2009, p. 24; Nimbtik, 2016, p. 70; A. Thomas, 2013, p. 205). Even though they are a large group, such people operate in the informal sector and use *kastom* to resolve issues rather than the State. Previously in Vanuatu, all crops were grown to feed families and supply food for village ceremonies such as marriage, circumcision, or death. However, with the advent of commerce prior to independence and during the neoliberalism period in the 1980s, a pressure to make money has emerged. Thus, many families have decided to sell crops at the market in order to make money. Typically, this activity is carried out by female vendors. This trend has been viewed by some as having “worked to undermine communal spirit and promote individual competition and accumulation” (Hess, 2009, p. 183).

8.13 Market vendors

The vast number of vendors are women. Their market duties are on top of other responsibilities such as cooking, domestic chores, and bearing and raising children. Some of the money is then spent on imported products and convenience items such as rice and breakfast crackers. Other income is put toward school fees, healthcare, improving living conditions, and “community fundraising for the building and maintenance of schools, clinics and churches” (Underhill-Sem, Cox, Lacey, & Szamier, 2014, p. 308).

In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, four market vendors are interviewed about their livelihoods and life in the market. As well as the talking-to-camera footage, there is other footage covering the gardens, transport, the Port Vila Central Market, and the local restaurant. The purpose of the film was to empower the participants. Although the Port Vila Central Market is centrally placed in downtown Port Vila and is of a considerable size it “exists in a political and economic space which is marginalised” (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 311). This marginalisation is “linked to the dominance of women as marketplace vendors and has led to general neglect” (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 311).

In the thesis, my research summarises the place of women in Vanuatu. Prior to starting this research, I heard various rumours while living in Port Vila from 2015-2017. The anecdotal talk

usually included statements like “the women do all the work” (Douglas, 2002, p. 12), “the men just drink kava” and “domestic violence is very high”. In making the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, it was clear that two of the four male partners of the women shared the gardening work. However, when it came to running the market stands men were largely absent. The thesis explores what women in Vanuatu face from day to day and finds that they suffer from “entrenched discrimination and inequalities” (UN Women, 2017, p. 12).

The thesis and the film enhance one another. The written research indicates an unfair playing field for women in Vanuatu. This includes facts such as the high rate of domestic violence, barriers to schooling and lack of political representation. The film backs this up by showing intimate details about the inequality’s women face, particularly at the market. In the market, gender-based violence is prevalent, particularly at night because the market vendors sleep at the market until they can return to their village. This was explained by more than one market vendor in the film (also see Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 307). The film shows the hardships that women face in their efforts to make their livelihoods, particularly the conditions they garden in, the expensive transport, and the poor-quality roads.

In 2014, a report on marketplaces in the Pacific argued for “a radical empowerment of women approach” (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 307). The authors stated that “the gender lens employed in the design, implementation and monitoring of change is not radical enough to address gender equality and facilitate women’s empowerment” (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 316). They argued that there should be changes to the “structures and practices that lead to inequality and harm” (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 316) and not just improvements to market buildings.

However, in the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, the participants clearly state that the lack of infrastructure is a concern for them. They describe an insufficient number of toilets and bathrooms. They talk about the sleeping arrangements and associated difficulties, particularly when it rains. Further, they express concern about a lack of space for selling fresh produce. The picture conveyed by the women in the film is that all of these infrastructure deficiencies work against the market vendors. Therefore, despite the points made by Underhill-Sem et al. (2014), the market infrastructure was identified as a negative issue by the women themselves.

8.14 Markets for Change

The Markets for Change project run by UN Women is helping to improve the infrastructure of the markets and empowering the market vendors. However, while there has been impressive

economic empowerment, there has been less empowerment in general (Cristina Bare, personal communication [UN Women], 2019). Marketplaces provide livelihoods for the most marginalised women and have the potential to flourish (Underhill-Sem et al., 2014, p. 316). However, there are multiple contexts that influence development and “it is difficult for market vendors to organise and challenge the power of entrenched economic and political interests, limiting the prospects for reform” (Barbara & Baker, 2020, p. 1). Pleasing developments are the advent of the Leleon Vanua Party (see chapter three) and the formation of the market vendor associations (see chapter one). These developments have enabled the market vendors to strengthen their position and may make it easier for them to make changes in the future. In the film *Voices from Vanuatu*, the participants all received a platform from which to talk. The film *Voices from Vanuatu* will be returned to Vanuatu in 2024 to enable the participants to view the film. This will provide an opportunity to evaluate the success of the project and to reflect on what the film has actually done for female market vendors, or could do in the longer term.

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Appendix 1

Participant Information Sheet

My name is Murray Lloyd, a postgraduate student with the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, College of Asia and the Pacific, the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. I am currently working on a study titled **How can visual imagery be used to empower women in a development context?** The purpose of this study is to examine the strengths of image making in a development context to give more clarity to the direction of visual recording in the future.

It is intended that this research will inform existing bodies of research and assist governments, donor agencies and NGO's on how visual imagery can enhance and add to development projects. An expected outcome of this study is to give voice to fresh-produce vendors; a sector of Vanuatu's community seldom heard from.

Project Title: To gain insight into market vendor's lives using film

General Outline of the Project:

The aim of this research will be to make a documentary film, recording the livelihoods of rural market vendors in Vanuatu.

As part of this study, we want to conduct in depth interviews with rural market vendors. We are especially keen to hear stories from both men and women about their working day, their weekly routines, life in Vanuatu and any business relating to the market. The film will focus on all stages of the fresh produce cycle, from the garden to the marketplace and the restaurant.

We want to gather information in two ways:

1. One person video interviews with 4-6 rural market vendors.
2. Video of all stages of the market cycle. This includes recording work in the gardens and the home, all preparation and transport involving taking produce to the market. It also includes filming in the market itself. Some extra film may be recorded of wider village life including church services and events such as weddings and circumcision festivities when and if they occur during the time the filming is taking place.

The study will ask interview participants to tell us about your current situation, particularly about work relating to the market and how you feel about it. We will also ask about your home life, your relationships with your partner and decisions about money in the household. Some questions will be asked about your village and about your life in Vanuatu.

The study is entirely voluntary and only people who choose to will be interviewed. Confidentiality will be protected as far as the law allows and researchers will seek to ensure that all information will be collected, stored, and handled in a completely confidential and secure manner. The recordings and any notes taken during the research will be locked in a secure cabinet in the Primary Investigators office.

It is not the intention to cause distress or discomfort, but some may arise during an interview. If this occurs the participant is quite free to stop the interview or not answer questions that may be uncomfortable for them.

Participants are also free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the production and distribution of any reports, film or publications. If a person chooses to withdraw, any data that was collected from them will be destroyed. There will be no negative repercussions should a participant choose to withdraw either during the interview or later.

We can arrange to do the interview at the most convenient time and place for you but the venue must be suitable for video and audio (quiet) recording. If you are involved in an individual video interview it will take approximately 30 mins to 1 hour. All going well the interview should only have to be recorded once. However once editing takes place, it may be seen to be necessary to record some questions a second time.

The interviews will be transcribed and translated to English subtitles where necessary. The film interviews will be edited and used as part of the soundtrack of the final film. All the interview participants will also be seen in the final film but for a relatively short time in relation to the rest of the film. Only a small part of each interview will end up in the final film. The interviews will not be returned to the interview participants unless requested.

If you are involved in other informal filming, for example, in the garden or market, you will be verbally informed. At this point you can choose not to be recorded, or to be recorded in an anonymous manner. For example, the film could include just your hands working in the garden or the background (where you are standing), could be out of focus. These informal videos will mostly be short and provide images to mix with the audio of the interviews and other audio recordings.

The recording will be kept in a safe, locked location and not shared with anyone else. Once the fieldwork is completed only the Primary Investigator will have access to the primary fieldwork data. Once the publication of film and research is completed, the data will be archived in the Primary Investigator's office.

Use of Data and Feedback: The results of this study will be used to inform governments, donor agencies and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) about how visual recording can enhance existing bodies of research. To work well, the film and video will need to record as much of your livelihood as a rural market vendor as possible.

We need to listen to you and other people like you so that we can understand your life experiences. The study will produce a film and a thesis that will be circulated to partners who work with the rural market vendors in Vanuatu. The film will be released in Vanuatu as widely as possible (Tana Cine, Unity Park and other village based venues will all be considered), and copies will be distributed to the interview participants at the very least. The final film will be published on the internet via YouTube. The raw video files will be digitally archived securely in a locked office

Incentives: Participants will not be paid for their time. However, during my work embedded with communities it may be appropriate to contribute small gifts, such as groceries or payment to the community as a gesture of reciprocity. This may also be the case if I am invited into peoples' homes, or to community events.

Costs outlaid by any interview participant for travel and accommodation will be refunded. Food and refreshments during meetings will be covered. A copy of the film will be distributed at no cost to each formal interview participant.

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The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics Manager
The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee
The Australian National University
Telephone: +61 2 6125 3427
Email: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au

Appendix 2

Film Interview questions

Interviewer introductions

Biographic information

What is your name?

Your age? Or birthdate?

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Were you able to go to school when you were young?

If so what level did you finish with school?

Do you have a husband or partner?

Do you have children? How Many? What age?

Household

Describe the house you live in?

What role do you have in the household?

Could you describe your day?

What time do you get up?

Where do you get water for your home?

What do you do if one of your children in your household gets sick?

Garden

Please can you describe your work in the gardens?

How old were you when you began working in the gardens?

How long have you been gardening?

What do you grow?

Where does the food go from your gardens? Do you eat it? Or is it just for the Market?

Is this your garden or do you share it with others?

Where do you get your seeds?

Where do you get water for your garden?

What are the challenges of gardening here?

Market

How often do you go to the market?

How do you get to the market?

How old were you when you started going to the market?

Where do you work/stay overnight when you were at the market?

Tell me about working in the market?

What happens to the money you make in the market?

Who makes decisions in your house about money? School fees?

What are the market conditions?

Life

What value or beliefs do you live your life by?

Tell me about Kastom in your life?

Which church do you go to? How does religion affect your life?

What has been your biggest influence on your life in the last two years?

What qualities make a good women or man?

What qualities make good wives and husbands?

What are the best and worst things about living in Vanuatu?

Do you think this is a good place for kids to grow up?

Can you describe to me some key events in your life?

Film

How do you feel about being in this film?

Why did you choose to be in this film?

What do other people think about you being in the film?

What do you think about telling your story?

Do you think it might change your life in any way?

Have you been in a film before?