

A Brief Overview of the Old New Hebrides

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ABSTRACT A “quick and dirty” ethnography of a specific time and place offers a valuable overview along with many leads for subsequent follow-up research projects. This review of the island chain now called Vanuatu covers some of the basics of pre-independence New Hebridean structure, function and life. As such, this perspective was of enormous value to the researchers involved in subsequent and parallel studies of the John Frum Cargo Cult and the educational system on the island of Tanna in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and various other related anthropological projects.

Ethnography, an important part of social anthropology, has traditionally included a detailed lengthy study carried out in time and space on a particular group of people in their environment (Fetterman, 1998; Wolcott, 1999; see also Ethnography, http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/cs6751_97_winter/Topics/ethnog/, accessed 10 August 2004). Usually for most anthropological research, the group of people studied is limited in numbers, and is often difficult to access. Typically they are studied through participant observation for at least a year. More recently to serve new purposes, a variety of rapid ethnographical field approaches has arisen (Millan, 2000), including those sometimes labelled scoping exercises, pilot projects, case studies, quick sketches, briefs, reviews, preliminary surveys, assessments, or “quick and dirty” ethnographies. Based on limited participant observation, scanning of relevant literature, and assembly of information gained by a quick sketch, focus group interviews, and/or overview analyses, such studies fulfil a valuable place in the anthropological literature, even though they are by nature, less than thorough, and frequently lack detail. In this, as in many studies, the use of the “anthropological present” offers a way to generalize so that the impact of history and time is reduced, while the structure and function of the culture of the people is presented.

The quick sketch that follows concerns the New Hebrides, an island chain in the Melanesian region of the South Pacific. Independence was gained in 1980, and the name of the island group changed to Vanuatu. Prior to independence, the complexities of the political, economic, and social systems in place were reflected in its being

the only locale to suffer three simultaneous governments, including French, British, and a joint local government known as the Condominium or conversely and in jest, the Pandemonium government. Other characteristics and anomalies are described below largely by the Senior Author based on his field work, participant observation, interviews, la vie quotidienne, and attendance at events and occurrences. This overview is of interest to anthropologists for the range of information gathered through a “quick sketch” and the impressions of a specific time and place in the historical development of Vanuatu. Further, it represents a method of work with indications of the types and depths of various topics covered.

GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

The New Hebrides consist of approximately eighty islands, lying 1,500 miles northeast of Sydney, Australia, 600 miles northwest of Fiji, and 300 miles due east of New Caledonia. Total land area of the New Hebrides is 5,700 square miles, and most of this occurs on nine major islands in the group. Only two settlements are large enough to be classed as municipalities in the group: Port Vila, the administrative capital on the centrally located island of Efate, and Santo, a commercial settlement on the northern island of Espiritu Santo.

The New Hebrides are largely “high islands”, volcanic in origin, and have little if any continental shelf area associated with them. They are frequently overlain and surrounded by thick coral deposits. Most of the larger islands have mountains in their interior rising to a thousand meters or more, and several of the

islands (including Tanna) have active volcanoes. Earthquake activity is common also, particularly in the northern end of the chain. Captain James Cook named the chain the New Hebrides, reportedly because these islands reminded him of a similar group off the coast of Scotland.

Climate ranges from tropical in the northern part of the chain to subtropical in the southern part. Because they are located only 15 degrees below the Equator, they have a wetdry seasonal variation rather than hotcold. The wet season begins in November and ends in April. The area north and east is a frequent spawning ground for tropical storms and cyclones, which occur most often during the months of December, January and February. These storms rarely carry winds of much over 100 mph because they are still in their formative stages. On the other hand, the storms can be very large in area (over 500 miles across) and cause serious flooding and disruption of communications for considerable periods of time. About once every fifteen to twenty years, a very large cyclone will strike, and cause widespread devastation.

The soil in the interior of the islands appears to be quite fertile, but because of the mountainous nature of the topography of most of the islands (Espiritu Santo and Tanna are exceptions, they both have some fertile plains) the land is not suitable for mechanized agriculture. Most flat land on the islands consist of the old coral banks that have grown around the perimeter of the volcanic cones and either because of uplift or a drop in sea level, have emerged as dry land. These areas usually have relatively thin topsoil and a limited fertility. Other than the extensive copra plantations located in the coral flatlands, swidden (slashandburn) agriculture seems to be the general practice.

There is only one active mining operation in the Group, a manganese mine on Efate, which at present has almost ceased operation. There is a good possibility that mineral deposits exist on some of the other islands, most notably copper, manganese and iron, but these are as yet unproven. Mineral exploration and exploitation has been severely restricted because of legal questions concerning the validity of many land titles and because of a lack of clear policy and law governing the ownership of subsurface minerals.

The population was estimated at around 100,000 (1976 figures). Births and deaths are

not normally recorded, so firm figures are not available. The South Pacific Commission estimates that the New Hebrides has one of the highest rates of population growth of the Pacific Island groups. Pre-contact estimates of population were much higher than the present number, and indeed there seems to be relatively little pressure on the available land at present. In addition to the normal accompaniments of colonization, an increase in local warfare and the introduction of European diseases, many of the islands were subjected to "blackbirding", mostly for the Australian slave trade.

Currently the population is approximately 90 percent Melanesian, and 10 percent non-Melanesian. The nonMelanesian population is located almost exclusively in the two metropolitan areas, with the exception of isolated religious, administrative and commercial outposts located on the larger islands. The non-Melanesian population is predominantly "European", consisting of French and British nationals connected with their respective Government Residencies and with the Condominium Government; a number of French and British citizens engaged in commerce, a number of Canadians and Australians and New Zealanders, and a few Americans. Other nationals are also represented (Germany, Switzerland, and so on), but not in significant numbers. About 30 United States citizens were resident in 1976, twenty percent were engaged in anthropological fieldwork, the rest either in commerce, land development, or retired.

A large "floating" (literally) population of Europeans are temporary visitors to the New Hebrides, usually limited to the ports of Santo and Vila. More than 40 cruiseships per year come to the New Hebrides, with a passengerload of 750 to 2,000 Australians or New Zealanders per ship. They stay a day or so in each port, the passengers inundate the town for a few hours, and then disappear, loaded with shells, masks, spears and other trinkets. Long term "floating" visitors, the people in yachts, often spend the cyclone season in port in Vila or Santo. Often the yachting people will take shortterm or parttime jobs for the three or four months they stay. Usually the boats are from the United States, Australia or New Zealand, but occasionally one comes all the way from England or Europe.

In addition to the seven to eight thousand

Europeans, a fairly large (approximately 500) "Oriental" population can be noted, again mainly in the two metropolitan areas. They consist primarily of people of Chinese extraction, often with Hong Kong or Taiwan nonresident passports, (you are a "citizen" but cannot live in the country). They are engaged in banking, commerce, construction and export-import trade. A small Vietnamese population, a residual from the French occupation of Indochina, resulted when the New Hebrides were used for a time as an offshore holding area by the French for certain Vietnamese. At the end of the French involvement in Indochina, most were repatriated to their homeland. During their stay, the Vietnamese had tended to fill an "artisan" role in the economy, they ran many of the repair shops, barber shops, and so on. While the Europeans and Chinese represent the largest group of "foreigners", a number of other subgroups are recognized. Around the two metropolitan areas an increasingly large number of Fijians (mostly of nonIndian extraction) occupy skilled and semiskilled jobs in banking, transportation, construction, commerce, and the tourist industry. Many are attracted by the higher wage rates paid, and some New Hebridean Melanesians resent their entry.

The Melanesian residents of Espiritu Santo and the Banks Islands are recognized by some to be "different" from the rest of the New Hebrides, possibly as a result of past Polynesian immigrations, possibly as a result of the massive American military bases that were located there during World War II. Other groups tend to have some phenotypic individuality too, most notably the big and small Nambas on Malekula, and some of the groups on Tanna. Neither bloodgroup data nor anthropometric data is available, but eyeball data does indicate that the differences may indeed exist.

ECONOMY EUROPEAN STYLE

The cash economy of the New Hebrides is based on the export of copra (dried meat of the coconut, used for its oil), beef, and to a much lesser extent, cocoa. In a slightly different sense, however, it could be said that the most successful industry in the New Hebrides is the importation of aid funds from the two member nations of the Condominium, Britain and France. To a lesser extent, the United Nations, the South Pacific

Commission, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and a number of Church Mission societies contribute as well. The New Hebrides is an economically poor group of islands, with little to sell, and not much prospect at present of increasing export income significantly.

Copra, the main agricultural crop, is one of those commodities that are periodically subjected to wide fluctuations in price on the world market. In the last several years the export price of copra has ranged from a high of over \$600.00 U.S. a ton to a low of \$48.00 U.S. a ton. Much of the cause for the current swings seems to lie in the world availability of soybeans, which compete with copra oil in the manufacture of soaps and other cosmetics. Copra does not store well for long periods of time in the tropics, and thus is especially vulnerable to price swings.

It was the interest in copra that sparked the European colonization of the New Hebrides in the years following the U.S. Civil War. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, much of the flat coastal lands of the islands were purchased, bartered, leased in perpetuity or otherwise procured by French and British nationals for conversion into huge coconut plantations. There was a good deal of competition between the two countries and their trading companies in the New Hebrides, as in other parts of the Pacific. This competition involved not only land acquisition and development, but also what might be termed "gunboat Christianization". The governments "sponsored" the missionizing groups, in part to have someone responsible for looking after the natives' interests during the colonizing period. When conflicts arose between the missionary and the natives, however, the respective government usually sided with the mission, and on at least one occasion sent naval gunboats to back up their position.

During this period of history, a substantial portion of native land was "ceded" to the Protestant and Catholic missions, to be held in trust for the natives. This was a device encouraged by the missions to prevent the duping of the natives, and to keep the land from falling into the hands of untrustworthy speculators, or landgrabbers. Unfortunately no procedure or law was set up to enable the missions to return the land to the groups after the danger of landgrabbing had gone, and so the land remains today in a "public trust" state. Nominally, the

land lies under the control of the missions or of the Condominium Government.

Copra, produced by drying the meat of the mature fruit, is a major product of the coconut palm tree. Nuts are allowed to ripen in the tree until they fall to the ground. Then they are gathered, husked, split, and the meat scooped out to be either dried in the sun (often not a very practical thing in the humid climate) or dried in primitive ovens of corrugated tin. The fire for drying is usually fuelled with the husks of the coconut. The dried coconut meat is then placed in large burlap sacks weighing 150 pounds or so, and stored for sale to copra traders (ships) who ply the islands. The copra traders take the copra to Vila or Santo, where it is warehoused until a large shipload is accumulated and then transhipped to Europe, usually France. Copra production has relatively little government control, and is not subsidized, nor are there mandatory grading practices. As a result, copra produced in the New Hebrides is not of prime quality and brings a relatively low price on the world market.

Coconut trees are planted in rows on the plantations, generally ten to fifteen meters apart. It takes about eight years for a tree to begin to produce nuts, and it will continue to produce for seventyfive to eightyfive years thereafter, although its productivity generally decreases markedly after about sixty years. This leads to an additional problem in the New Hebrides copra trade; many of the large plantations, established in the early decades of the century, contain older trees whose productivity is declining. Because of the instability of the world market, plantation owners have been hesitant to replace old trees.

Copra plantations require relatively little maintenance, other than keeping the brush and undergrowth down so that the ripened coconuts can be seen and easily harvested. In recent years, plantation owners have kept cattle in among the coconut trees, to keep the brush down. Poorly fed cattle do a better job of clearing out brush, and as a result many of the cattle in the New Hebrides are of low quality for meat production. There have been some attempts in recent years to improve the herds, mostly with the introduction of Charlais and Black Angus stock. A program of artificial insemination has also just been implemented. The New Hebrides, a rabies free area, has many of the same kinds of restrictions on the importation of animals that

Britain has, and as a result it is exceedingly costly and difficult to bring in breeding stock from outside.

With the virtual abandonment of coconut harvesting at \$45.00 a ton, it hardly pays to pick up the nuts. As a result, many of the plantation owners have turned to the production of beef. The two commercial packinghouses are located in Santo and Port Vila. Neither seems to be an unqualified financial success, partly due to the poor quality of the beef and partly due to the absence of any readily available market for their product. Most beef is canned, while a small amount is frozen and sold in New Caledonia. Interisland transfer of livestock is a difficult problem. Only at the two municipalities, Vila and Santo, are there docking facilities that will allow direct loading or unloading of live animals. Generally, cargo is transferred between the beach and the interisland trading vessels via the use of large dories or "long boats", powered by outboard motors. If cattle are to be moved, they are usually tied to the boats and "swum" out to the trader, and then hoisted over the side of the ship by wench and boom. This practice often results in the loss of some of the animals.

The two vessels operating in the area include one old WW II landing craft, and a new landing craft, an aid gift from New Zealand. Both are capable of running up onto the beach and loading directly onto and off of their ramps. Use of the landing craft is expensive, for they operate only occasionally, and in many cases are unable to service the plantations because of reefs and sandbars along the coasts.

Cocoa is also grown to some extent in the islands, mostly by individual Melanesian plantation owners, and mostly in small volume. Again, it is a crop whose price can vary greatly on world markets, and one where the drying process for the cocoa bean is of critical importance to quality. A number of other agricultural crops have been grown at various times and in various places, a little tobacco, some cotton, bananas, fruits of various sorts, oranges and other citrus, usually in small amounts. Few have any market other than local consumption. In the last two years or so there has developed a certain amount of "truck gardening" on Tanna. As a result of the formation of several cooperatives, and an advantageous freight contract with Air Melanesia, lettuce, carrots, onions and other fresh vegetables are now

beginning to show up in the markets in Vila. They must compete with fresh produce flown in from Noumea or New Zealand. Tanna has the most temperate climate of any island in the group, a fair amount of flat and fertile land, an active cooperative movement, and much of the productive land is still in the hands of the Melanesians. If the problems of marketing and transportation can be solved, there may be a bright future for Tanna's produce growers.

Fishing has not been a major source of income to the New Hebrides. Reef fishing is done rarely, because this is in the area of "poison fish", an as yet unidentified virallike infection of reef fish that makes the cooked flesh of almost all the species poisonous to human consumers. The problem, of course, is that you can't tell an infected fish from a noninfected one until after you eat it and see if you get sick. A frozenfish plant on Espiritu Santo processes primarily swordfish, and the waters north of the Banks Islands are fished commercially, but not by New Hebridean boats.

Some lumbering is done throughout the New Hebrides. In past times, sandalwood was a major export, particularly in the tea trade with China. Unfortunately almost all of the trees have been cut down. The lumbering that still continues is largely limited to timber for local construction. Some interest was expressed on the part of a Japanese firm about building a woodchip facility on Santo, for exporting pulp to Japan, but at the time of this writing, the project is still under negotiation.

Little could be called "manufacturing" presently in the New Hebrides. Four years ago a wire factory, for the fabrication of nails, was set up in Port Vila, but has since gone bankrupt. It's greatest difficulty seemed to be that the local market was too small to keep it busy, and it was unable to find markets beyond. There are a number of local construction firms in Vila and Santo, and some local boatbuilding activity for the construction of small motorlaunches and fishing boats. There are also a few light fabrication firms, most notably a furniture manufacturing plant and a plant that fabricates culverts and water tanks from imported sheetsteel. These are all for local rather than export consumption.

A wide array of local commercial establishments such as printing firms, automobile and marine repair installations, can

be found, along with a host of sales outlets for automobiles and office equipment and the like. Two large trading companies purchase copra from the plantations and sell at retail the consumer goods used by the plantations. These are BurnsPhilp, an Australian firm and CFNH, a Frenchowned trading company. These two dominate the internal retail market and the export market as well. Not only do they operate the largest retail outlets in Port Vila and Santo, but most of the "stores" on the other islands are owned or stocked by them. In addition to their retail operations (food, clothing, hardware, cement, steel, fuel) they also, through joint ownership agreements, participate in many other local businesses, such as automobile imports and shipping companies.

Independent of BurnsPhilp and CFNH, a number of Chinese owned stores operate, mostly confined to the Port Vila and Santo areas. While these are for the most part family establishments and individually owned, they tend to operate as a commercially integrated block of retail outlets as they do in many other areas of the world where Chinese merchants represent a non-assimilated ethnic and linguistic minority group. It is interesting to note that the Chinese ran their own candidates in recent elections, voted as a block, and were set apart as a separate constituency within the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chinese owned shops tend to sell more to Melanesians than to Europeans. In Vila and Santo, Melanesians are not yet shopping in BurnsPhilp or in CFNH to any extent, and style, quality and price of merchandise is oriented toward European tastes and pocketbooks. The Chinese shops sell merchandise of Asian origin, usually at a lower price, sometimes of a lower quality, and often oriented toward the needs of the Melanesians. An example is that bed sheets sold in some of these shops are only slightly larger than conventional crib sheets and are more suited for traditional Melanesian sleeping pallets than the sheets sold at Burns Philp.

Chinese owned stores open earlier, stay open later, and open on weekends and holidays. Some will also be open during the New Hebrides "lunchbreak", a period of traditional rest in the middle of the day, that runs from as early as 11: 00 A.M. to as late as 3: 00 P.M. Many of the stores seem to specialize in a particular product or product line. Some of the stores whose main line is clothing will manufacture shirts or other

items in their back room, with the aid of three or four of the local Chinese women, sitting at their sewing machines. Others will specialize in customprinted t-shirts, a very popular item with Melanesians as well as Europeans, while still others will concentrate on imported electronic goods, or "dutyfree" tourist oriented items. Most Chinese owned shops, no matter what their specialty, will carry a line of Chinese tourist trade goods, such as carved ivory, carved snail shells, fans, and usually some of the local Melanesian artefacts.

Tourism is becoming a major industry in the New Hebrides. In addition to the large numbers of tourists who come on the boats and stay only the day, an increasingly large number fly in via UTA or Air Pacific, to spend five to fifteen days. The two resort hotels in Vila are The Legon, owned by a group of Japanese investors, and the Intercontinental, owned by Pan Am, local residents and a group of American investors. Both hotels are in the medium to uppermedium price range, and tend to specialize in group inclusive tours. In addition three other small, business oriented hotels are located closer to the municipality. Only one tourist grade hotel exists in Santo, and it has a very small capacity. There are no other hotels in the New Hebrides, with the exception of the tourist bungalows on Tanna, operated by Bob Paul.

Tourist attractions in the New Hebrides are not well or extensively developed, and that is perhaps much of its charm. For some strange reason, the height of the tourist season coincides with the height of the cyclone season, November to March. Consequently, most of the activities a tourist can do are "weather permitting". The usual hotel associated things like swimming pools, glassbottom boats, fishing boats and restaurants with floorshows appeal to many, but little else is oriented exclusively for the tourist. The restaurants in Vila perhaps deserve more mention; a number of very small but very fine French restaurants give the impression that eating out is a major recreational activity of the local Europeans.

With the decline in copra export, some plantation owners have attempted to develop tourist oriented facilities on their plantations. Usually they have done this with as little money and as little modification as possible; by and large they have had little success in attracting tourists. The one major exception is the Yasur

Volcano trip to Tanna. This involves a flight on Air Melanesia from Vila to Tanna, then a trip by guided landrover across the island, a quick view of a John Frum village, and an arduous climb up the cone of the volcano (best seen at twilight). The volcano is usually in some stage of eruption, and the return back to the trader Bob Paul's very comfortable bungalows for an overnight stay becomes very welcome. Additional side trips can be made to some thermal areas and a herd of wild horses.

The main constraints on the further development of tourism are the airport facilities in Vila and the lack of tourist grade housing on the outer islands. Bauer Field is located in a valley surrounded by high hills, and has been judged unsuitable for large jet service. As a result, most tourists flying in have to change to smaller planes in Nadi, Fiji or Noumea, New Caledonia. At present, the seatcapacity of the airlines is well below the room capacity of the hotels.

Tourist grade housing is unavailable on the outer islands, but there are usually some sort of accommodations that can be used such as Government "guesthouses" (usually an empty thatched roof hut with some sort of stove and beds) or occasionally travellers can stay in Mission facilities, if arrangements are made in advance. These more primitive facilities are beginning to attract small groups of campers and people who really want to "rough it". The hazards of the trip are sufficiently exciting so that everyone usually enjoys an authentic "experience". One problem with this sort of tourist activity, however, is that it places a difficult and often unrecognized burden on the local population. When a camper arrives in one of the outer islands, the local people have no option but to accept and take care of him or her, partially because custom requires them to share with a stranger, partially because there is nowhere to get rid of the stranger.

The final major commercial group in the New Hebrides is made up of financial institutions. There are probably more banks per unit of population in Port Vila than anywhere else in the Pacific. This has come about as a result of the tax laws, or perhaps the lack of tax laws. This is a "tax free" area, and as a result has drawn a large number of corporate "shells" from Hong Kong, Europe, Australia and the United States, and the banking, accounting and legal facilities to service them.

A further advantage to doing business in the New Hebrides is that they have two legal currencies, the Australian dollar and the New Hebridean French Pacific Franc, which are interchangeable by law, traded freely internally and may be exported without restriction. Because of the "consensus" aspect of the British and French condominium, this affords some protection against sudden devaluations, since it involves agreement by both Resident Commissioners to change the parity between the two currencies.

The taxexempt feature of the New Hebrides financial structure has not brought the heavy inflow of capital that had originally been anticipated. In talking to a number of people involved in the situation, there seem to be several reasons for this. Communications with the outside world, particularly with European and U.S. financial centers, is problematical and occasionally almost impossible. At present no direct link via satellite exists, and all messages must go through Noumea, New Caledonia, for retransmission. Even the movement of mail can sometimes be a serious problem; there is only one international airline (UTA) and one regional carrier (Air Pacific) that service the islands, and they do not have daily flights. Also, the airport is not an allweather facility, and a local storm can cause an over flight which can delay the mails by several days to a week before the route is repeated. As a result, airmail letters and parcels can take from five days to five weeks in transit from the United States or Europe to Port Vila, with little ability on the part of the recipients in Port Vila to predict when or why a particular delivery will be slow.

A second factor mitigating against the growth of taxexempt corporations is the growing political unrest and the probability of eventual independence for the island group, under circumstances where multinational financial interests will not be of paramount importance to the new Government. Both of the indigenous political parties have expressed the belief that the taxexempt status of "foreign" corporations should be modified.

ECONOMY MELANESIAN STYLE

For most of the Melanesians in the New Hebrides, however, banks and manufacturing plants and automobile dealerships are not a part

of their direct daily experience. Village economy is still only a semicash economy. Less than fifteen percent of the Melanesian population is urban, and many of the urban Melanesians are essentially living within the village context.

Most villages will have, or be near, a "store" of some sort. These may range from large, well stocked semisupermarkets such as the trader Bob Paul runs on Tanna, to oneroom or halfroom caches of canned goods that have been purchased by a village cooperative. Most stores, however, are associated with European plantations and are operated and/or stocked by BurnsPhilp or CFNH.

The village store and its operators, often a nonMelanesian family brought into the area, function as culturebrokers and as the communications center for the village and the area. If there is an electric generator in the area, it is likely to be at the store compound. If there is an Air Melanesia landing strip nearby, the store manager will be in charge of meeting each plane, and of maintaining twoway radio contact with the airport in Vila. The store will usually have a bakery attached, where they make and sell fresh bread several days a week. They will also frequently arrange to sell fresh meat, when a bullock is killed locally. The store will also have the only refrigeration available to most Melanesians, used mostly to cool the beer and soft drinks that are a standard part of the local diet.

The store fills the needs of Melanesians for such staples as polished white rice, whisky, cocacola, sugar and salt, tea, candy, endless boxes of crackers (the standard breakfast), matches, cigarettes, and stick tobacco, batteries, tins of canned beef and cheap fish and sweetened fruit, and generally a bewildering assortment of leftover and hardtosell canned goods items accumulated from years past. In addition, the store stocks many hardware items such as knives and machetes, kerosene and gasoline and oil, Coleman lamps and cooking utensils, enamelware plates and cups, string, seeds, fishing line, stamps and paper, thread and cloth, and sparkplugs, and a few tools, whatever seems like it might find a buyer, or whatever had to be ordered in quantity, but sold by the item. Other than the fresh meat, none of the items in the store are of local origin. The store inputs manufactured goods to the village and outputs cash to Port Vila.

Cash flows into the village through a number

of channels. Probably the largest amount comes from the sale of individually owned crops of copra and cocoa, which the villager will market through the local store or British French sponsored cooperative. Generally the crop is paid for in two instalments, half when the produce is shipped from the store or coop, the rest when it is transhipped out from Vila or Santo. On occasion some produce will be sold within the village, but this is relatively rare, since everyone has about the same agricultural resources and raises the same crops. Some cash comes in from agricultural wage labor, usually on a European owned plantation. With the decline in copra prices in recent years, there has been a corresponding decline in the need for agricultural labor, and many of the former plantation workers have either gone back to their villages or to Vila and Santo to seek work.

A second and growing area of wage income to the villages is within the Condominium bureaucracy itself. There is an expanding need for and use of Melanesians in the construction and maintenance of roads, governmental facilities, schools, and medical facilities. Both the British and French governments have been active in training the local villagers for these jobs, and as the level of education rises in the outer islands, more of the labor force in unskilled and semiskilled jobs is hired locally.

An increasingly large number of comparatively well educated young Melanesians (high school certificate or above) are being employed in the two Residencies and the Condominium Government headquarters in Vila. The beginnings of a Melanesian middle-class are evident, particularly in housing and entertainment. Wage rates for this new group are relatively high by Melanesian standards, between \$375.00 and \$500.00 U.S. for white collar workers. Living costs in Vila and Santo are exceptionally high, even by European standards, and as yet, no "middle" standard of living between the native standard and the European standard, has evolved. As a result, relatively little of the cash earned flows back out to the islands and the village of origin.

Other sources of wages for Melanesians in the urban centers are in domestic work, laboring and construction jobs, and working on the small boats that ply between the islands of the group. Often these jobs will be temporary or periodic, while the worker attempts to accumulate enough

money to go back home and build a house or buy pigs for a marriage ceremony or a "gradeceremony". Wage rates for this type of work run between \$35.00 and \$100.00 U.S. per month, while living expenses in the town may run from a dollar to two dollars a day. Again most of the money earned by this group stays in circulation in Vila or Santo.

Nonwage sources of income for Melanesians in the urban areas come mostly from the marketing of produce in the local markets in Vila and Santo (this is almost exclusively a woman's occupation) and from the sale of larger and more expensive artefacts, particularly those from Ambrym and Malekula, and to a lesser extent, Santo. Artefact sales to European dealers can sometimes involve fairly large sums of money, often in the thousands of dollars, in the case of North Ambrym slitgongs, or masks and figures from the big and small Namba on Malekula. Prices are still negotiated in terms of "pounds", a reference to the British Pound that is no longer traded. Instead, two Australian dollars are used as the equivalent.

In recent years these exchanges have become increasingly complex and sophisticated, with the outer islanders checking prices both between shops and dealers in Vila and Santo, and through word of mouth on the international market. Occasionally a group of Melanesians will bring suit against an artefact trader for underpayment or nonpayment of his "bill", and win in the courts. The days of the beadsblankets and stick tobacco traders are gone from the New Hebrides.

Land can be owned individually, but seems most often to be owned by a kin or village group. "Ownership", however, is an unsatisfactory concept, since a whole series of residual rights and interests in land, largely customary, uncodified and subject to modification by group action, can be maintained by various members of the kin or village group. As an example, a man may inherit a piece of land from his father, without inheriting (1) the right to dispose of the land; (2) the right to use or determine the use of the land; (3) the right to particular trees or the fruits of those trees; (4) access to particular houses or gardens on that land; and (5) the right to determine succession in that land. The kinship or village group appears to be, with respect to land, an expandable concept, depending on the issues involved. The net result

of this is that there tends to be, at the village level, endless flexibility in decisions involving land use and ownership, and in questions of leadership also. The endless flexibility means endless disagreements, too.

Village economy seemed to be part of the more general interrelationship of the kinship obligations, leadership obligations, and land ownership, succession, and use. The distribution, availability and use of cash within the village tends to be corporate rather than individually determined; it is a community resource rather than privately owned capital. Cash, like the exchange of goods and services and honors, tends to function as a means of insuring social conformity and solidarity within the group, rather than encouraging individualism and entrepreneurship. Exceptions to this general rule tend to be "outsiders", such as individuals not linked into the kinship, leadership or land ownership systems of the village.

Two features of New Hebridean village economy are of special note. One is the central place pigs hold as a medium of exchange and accumulation of wealth, and the other is the concept of "copyright" that exists for intellectual and artistic inventions that a particular person or group will develop. Pigs are a central feature in most New Hebridean ceremonies. They are exchanged to acquire a wife, killed to advance a man in grade, their skulls are hung in a sacred place as part of the ceremony to commemorate the death of a person, and they can be used to "square" the taking of another man's wife, usually punishable only by death. Pigs are raised in almost every village, and run wild in the interior of most islands. On occasion, they are raised for the purpose of growing great spiral tusks (the upper canine is extracted and the pig is hand fed while the lower canine is allowed to grow through the upper lip and around to meet itself in the back of the lower jaw). These become prized decorations, both among the "big men" and European women. A pig's tusk arm bracelet that formed a complete circle easily brought \$400.00 U.S. or more in Vila. One "double Circle" bracelet was so valuable that no price could be put on it, and so it was given to the Queen of England when she visited the islands several years ago.

The concept of "copyright" is strong, especially in the central islands of Malekula and

Ambrym, where many of the older rituals, ceremonies and associated artefacts still flourish. Particular styles of carving masks, slitgongs or puppets are acknowledged to be the property, by virtue of invention, of particular individuals or villages. If any other group wishes to carve or create in that way or style, a fee is due to the copyright holder, usually in pigs or cash. Similar conditions of ownership hold for stories, songs and dances. It is interesting to note that while ownership of land is never absolute, ownership of ideas may be.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

The educational systems in the New Hebrides have been the primary intentional acculturating mechanisms used by the Europeans, particularly over the last three decades. They also reflect, in large measure, the intentions and goals of the European groups sponsoring them. The schools in the New Hebrides are generally of two types: (1) the British financed and run Primary and Secondary system, with its ancillary Protestant run primary and secondary Mission schools; and (2) the French financed and run "Ecole" system and its ancillary Catholic mission schools. The duality of the Condominium organization is expressed in their schools, some teaching in English, some in French, and the curriculum tends to reflect the colonial objectives of the two Condominium members, be the subject World History or Occupational Education.

The British schools can be thought of as being committed to mass education. They comprise by far the largest number of school units, and have the largest enrolment. The language of instruction is English. Heavy emphasis is placed on language acquisition and completion of a primary education by large numbers of students. Commitment is to local, "day" schools rather than boarding schools at the primary level. Teaching is frequently done by Melanesians trained in the British or Mission systems, although upperlevel administrative positions are usually held by British civil servants. Mission run schools make heavy use of volunteer teachers from Britain and other Commonwealth countries. Both British and Mission systems function as feeders into the British Secondary.

The British Secondary System has a much smaller capacity for students than its Primary system. In a recent selection process (1975) it

was reported that for each five students who graduated from the Primary system, there was room for only one in the secondary system. Consequently the selection process is a stringent and difficult one, with teacher and principal recommendations being of paramount importance. Representatives of each school gather in Vila in late November and early December (the end of the term there) to make Secondary School selections.

Certification as having completed primary or secondary school in the New Hebrides is a "local" process, in that it is based on local levels of competence, rather than on British Primary or Secondary School standards prevalent in England. A separate certificate can be earned, through passing standardized tests that is equivalent to the English certificate. It is common for students who go on to University from the New Hebrides to undergo an additional one or two year college preparatory course, before matriculating into the University.

While relatively few Melanesians from the British system go on to a University career, an increasingly large number are going through a teacher training institute in Port Vila, or are taking courses in the Agricultural Institute, to be trained as Agricultural Officers for the Condominium. A number of graduates also go to theological schools established for the training of Melanesian ministers. In recent years, several Melanesians have been sent overseas for technical training programs in a variety of occupational areas, from Aircraft Maintenance (trained in Scotland) to Health Worker (trained in Fiji). A number of regional and international agencies are becoming increasingly active in sponsoring these students, in addition to scholarship funds that are provided through the British and French Residencies. Primary among them are various agencies of the United Nations and the South Pacific Commission.

A large majority of the students in the British Secondary Schools are Melanesian, and only a small number of Europeans attend British schools in the New Hebrides. This is in part explained by the fringe benefits or "perks" attached to overseas service for the British Government. If you work overseas, and there are no "suitable" schools, the Government pays for secondary education for your children at a British boarding school in England, complete with two roundtrip air tickets a year.

Englishspeaking Europeans who don't work for the British government seem to send their children to boarding schools in Australia, if they are in a financial position to do so, or to send them to the local French "Ecole". They perceive the academic standards to be somewhat higher in French than in the British schools.

The French school system seems more designed for the education of French children rather than Melanesian children. It should be pointed out that there are indeed many more students of French parentage. Teachers in the French system are more likely to be of European origin, or to have been trained in Europe. Academic standards and objectives tend to correspond more closely to those of Metropolitan France. Students who complete the training are able to go on for further training in Noumea or to take the National University Examinations for admission to a University in France. French primary schools tend to have a large Melanesian enrolment in the first few years of instruction, but by the time students advance to secondary school level, most of the Melanesians have dropped out, and the classes are largely made up of Europeans. Those Melanesians who do stay on tend to be the very superior students, and are likely to go on to further education in Noumea.

The British system seems to have as its primary goal the creation of a large number of Englishspeaking New Hebrideans. Every attempt is made to get students to attend a primary school, and the emphasis is on making the children fluent in English. A secondary emphasis is placed on the more traditional educational areas, and on teaching things "New Hebridean"; the traditional Melanesian crafts, folklore and occupational skills. Occupational education is important at the secondary level, to train people to work in the Condominium Government or the educational system. The English system seems to have been bent to fit the Melanesian context.

The French system, on the other hand, seems to have as its primary goal the education of Frenchborn students, within the context of the Metropolitan French school system. Much less modification is made in the standards or objectives to fit the Melanesian context. Secondary education is oriented toward University attendance, and indeed a large number of students who complete the Ecole do go on to Noumea or Paris.

An interesting phenomenon regarding school system selection by a number of Melanesian families is a tendency to send alternate children to different school systems, a first child is sent to the British system, the second to the French, the third to the British and so on. One consequence of this, particularly for families living in Vila and Santo, where the local village languages are often not spoken any more, is that the “communications” language within the family becomes the trade language, Bislama, particularly between siblings going to different school systems.

One of the more positive aspects of sending alternate children to different school systems is that the family is able to make a “double bet” in economic terms. Schools taught language competence and the language spoken often would determine whether or not a person got a particular job, especially in the city. Job opportunities in commercial and retail establishments most often required French, while those in tourism and the civil service required English.

Education, and the language of education, is becoming politically sensitive. The dual school systems are an expansive luxury in a developing area, and the language spoken seems to inevitably tie a person to a particular group. It also tends to tie a person to a particular religion (Catholic if French, Protestant if English) and very likely, it also affects politics. The National Party (Vanuaaku) is largely Englishspeaking, while the UCNH Party (the union) is largely Frenchspeaking.

The language problems of the New Hebrides will not be easily resolved. Many suggestions have been made, including the creation of a “synthetic” New Hebridean language based on Bislama and some of the more common words in the various linguistic subgroups. However, as long as the area is a Condominium, and the French speak French and the British speak English, little progress seems likely.

HEALTH SYSTEM

When you look at the health systems in the New Hebrides, you find a striking number of similarities to the educational systems. Once again they are set up as competing parallel systems, a Britishand-mission system and a Frenchand-mission system. Each provides

medical services in its own language, often at locations quite near to each other. The British system, predictably, tends to use more Melanesian paraprofessionals than the French system.

Both systems seem to have welltrained physicians, the French draw many of their doctors from France, where service in the New Hebrides is an acceptable alternative to service in the armed forces for doctors. Most islands have at least two hospitals, one British, one French, and usually several smaller clinics. They seem well equipped, and there are facilities to send patients requiring more extensive treatment on to the main hospitals in Vila, or if necessary, to major medical facilities in Australia (British option) or Noumea (French option).

Both the French and the British systems are underused by Melanesians. One of the British doctors indicated that his feeling was that about 15 percent of the Melanesians were getting excellent medical services, including pre and postnatal treatment. Well baby clinics, family planning, and so on, were available but a very large portion of the remaining population were using the medical facilities only as a last resort. As a consequence, many of the cases that come from this group were terminal. This, of course, did not improve the image of the medical services in the eyes of the local population.

In addition to the British and French systems, the United Nations and the South Pacific Commission maintain medical teams in the area, as do some churches, most notably the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The WHO team functioned as a group of consulting specialists, helping in such areas as malaria eradication, family planning, infant health, sanitation and paramedical training. Church-sponsored teams came from the United States, Australia or New Zealand, usually for a set period (one week to three months) to concentrate on a particular medical problem. For example, an eye surgeon would come over and do several hundred operations, and the next time a dentist or orthopedic surgeon would be sent. In addition to this traveling specialist service, church missions usually maintained a clinic facility staffed by a doctor or nurse, and several native paramedics.

ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

The ongoing existence of the Condominium

Government of the New Hebrides for the better part of a century is a monument to the British and French Diplomatic Corps, and to the efficacy of protocol. It survived two World Wars, several world depressions, the decolonialization of both mother powers, and a huge American "presence" during the early 1940's, and is still functioning, alive and well, today. A very deep and heartfelt respect is due to the members of both Residencies and of the Condominium for their ability to govern, and govern jointly.

The concept of the Condominium, developed in the late 1800's, was one of joint administration rather than one of divided responsibility, and that concept has continued on down through the years. The plans, pronouncements, programs, activities, advisories and attitudes of the two Residencies and the Condominium have been clearly stated in the various Joint Regulations, Annual Reports, Condominium Rules and Regulations, Findings of the Joint Court, and the British Newsletter (published by the British Information Office) and the French Newsletter (published by the French Information Office). That information will not be summarized here because of its length and complexity.

The government of the New Hebrides is composed of three parts: (1) the British Residency; (2) the French Residency; and (3) the Joint Condominium Government. The British Residency is composed of a British Resident Commissioner, and a series of Administrative and Operations positions. The French Residency is set up in a similar way. The Joint Condominium Government is made up of Europeans and Melanesians, none of whom have any official position with the British or French Residencies.

The Joint Condominium Government is responsible for administering programs and regulations approved jointly by the British and French Residencies, such as Public Works, Harbors, Voter Registration and Elections, the Airport Authority, Price Control, Census Bureau, and others. The Condominium is funded jointly by Britain and France, on an annual basis, and also receives some funds from licensing, port use fees, and other operations.

The Condominium structure seems to have given rise to a bureaucratic process called "Twinning", particularly at the two Residencies. For every French Assistant Secretary for Agriculture there is a British Assistant Secretary

for Agriculture; and for every British Deputy Assistant Immigration Officer there exists a French Deputy Assistant Immigration Officer. And so it follows up and down the line at both Residencies, each person has his or her own counterpart.

This, of course, facilitates Joint Action (or at least joint activity), because there is always someone of the same exact rank and status in the other Residency with whom to consult. Consultations sometimes take a fair amount of time in the New Hebrides, because communications in English must be translated into French before they can be responded to, and then the French response must be translated back into English to be considered. It has been reliably reported, however, that when British and French counterparts encounter each other by accident, out in the bush, and no bilingual translator is available, that the two are able to talk quite comfortably in Bislama without any diplomatic repercussions.

Language is a very serious matter. When the new Joint Condominium Elected Assembly met (it is under the Joint Condominium, since it was created by a Joint Decision), it had three official languages, English, French and Bislama, and elaborate simultaneous translating facilities. The simultaneous translator is reported to be one of the highestpaid Condominium employees.

Parity between the two Great Powers extends well beyond the occupational and professional structure of the two Residencies. It is reflected in the two currencies in circulation, and even in the sign that greets visitors at the Airport that reads, "New Hebrides Condominium Nouvelle Hebrides". Even the local Rotary Club is bilingual, alternates French and British speakers each week, and provides a summary of the talk in the alternate language. It is said that the Tricolor flag that flies over the French Residency on the mainland is exactly the same height as the Union Jack that flies from the masthead at the British Resident Commissioner's home on a small island in Vila Harbor. This one anomaly, that the BRC lives on an island, has introduced the only flaw in the symmetry of the two Residencies. The BRC is thus entitled to a "Navy" composed of two small motorlaunches manned by several Melanesian sailors, complete with bellbottoms and white caps, to ferry him and visitors the two hundred yards from the dock to the island. Britannia Rules!

The New Hebrides is a country with two complete yet separate colonial administrations. Each speaks a separate language, occupies the same identical location, and attempts to govern and administer by consensus; and on occasion (by consensus) to establish a third administrative group (the Joint Condominium) to deal with some particular section or issue in the governing of the islands. Police powers are reserved to the Residencies. The Vila Police Force has two chiefs, one British and one French. The officers and men are equally divided between British and French uniforms, and British and French allegiance. The two powers rotate assignments such as traffic duty. Each Residency maintains its own prison system, too. By agreement, only French police may arrest citizens or visitors who have entered under French immigration, and only British police may arrest those who came in under British immigration rules. The laws of the governments of the respective Residencies define offences and offenders are tried in British or French courts, as may be appropriate, and if judged guilty, go to the appropriate prison.

For the native New Hebridean people, a choice of systems is open. He or she may request either British or French jurisdiction, an important consideration if one has committed murder or adultery. You are “presumed innocent” of murder under the British rules, and adultery is a lesser crime under the French rules, or, for some offences, you may request trial in the Native Court, which is a third Condominium-court system set up to handle “custom” or traditional Melanesian law. The King of Spain traditionally appoints the presiding judge over the Native Court. There are also, of course, a few individuals around who have dual citizenship, i.e., who hold both valid British and French passports.

Corporations established under the Condominium must be set up under either British or French law, and it is not infrequently that individuals under British jurisdiction operate as French corporations. There is a widespread belief that the French are more probusiness and easier to get along with on rules and regulations. No cases of individuals under French jurisdiction who formed British corporations were noted. While corporations are either British or French, the Condominium sets licensing fees and administers the price control board. Complaints are filed with the appropriate

Residency for legal action. This often takes a great deal of time and enforcement tends to be slow because of the complexity.

The Postal Service, including telephone and telegraph communications, is under the Joint Condominium. To accommodate the Condominium spirit, the Post Office issues duplicate sets of stamps, identical in all respects other than that on some of the stamps, the legend is in English, while on others it is in French. The “currency problem” has been negotiated with true creativity, stamps were issued in denominations of “Gold Centimes or Centimes d’Ore”, as the appropriate case may be, rather than in dollars or francs.

The two municipalities of Port Vila and Santo are administered by City Councils. They have no taxing authority and are dependent on funds from the Residencies to operate. The City Councils are elected in local elections held separately from the National Election.

Beyond Vila and Santo, administration is in the hands of British and French District Agents (BDA’s and FDA’s) who administer their areas jointly. Usually two DA’s, Assistant DA’s, Police Units and medical facilities are found in each District. The French and British DA’s, sitting jointly, function as a grassroots level Native Court, to settle disputes or punish minor offenders. Their judgment, of course, is always subject to review and appeal to the Native Courtproper in Vila. The DA’s are responsible for the execution of the policies of their respective Governments as it applies to their Districts, for the maintenance of public order, and are expected to be a twoway channel of communications between the local residents and the Residencies in Vila.

Communications within the New Hebrides present some unusual problems. The mail system, which depends on Air Melanesia flights and local boat trips, can break down, particularly in bad weather. A major tropical storm in the area can cancel flights for eight to twelve days at a time, and they are frequent occurrences from December to March. As a result, much of the communications that takes place is done via the short or medium wave radio. Radio Vila, the official Condominium Government station, broadcasts approximately six hours a day, two hours each in French, English, and Bislama. It is receivable throughout the islands in good weather, and offers as a regular service the transmission of messages for individuals and

announcements from groups such as schools and churches. In addition to Radio Vila, Mission stations throughout the islands have short wave radio equipment and routinely communicate with each other and Vila at specified times each day. Air Melanesia has airport facilities on most of the larger islands, and they routinely report in concerning flights, passengers, freight, weather conditions, and so on. Planes in transit are in regular contact with Bauer Field, although sometimes the contact has to be through Noumea, New Caledonia, which has more powerful radio equipment. In addition, both Residencies and the Condominium have their own radio connections to their District Agents and out island facilities, and several of the larger commercial establishments like Burns Philp and CFNH have their own transmitting and receiving equipment. Several "hams" can be found in the islands, and most boats of any size have twoway radio equipment.

The result of this is that the air waves, particularly the shortwave frequencies, are fairly busy around the New Hebrides. Even telephone calls from one island to another go by shortwave. There are, of course, many more receivers than there are transmitters. This is where the problem in communications comes in. Many messages are sent via oneway communications, where receipt is necessarily assumed, because the other party does not have any transmitting capability. The other problem is that with so many shortwave receivers about, there is very little privacy or confidentiality in radio communications. Almost every village or compound has at least one batteryoperated receiver.

AN ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

A quick sketch or rapid ethnography is valuable for providing a broad overview or "big picture" of the people of a locale at a given time. The material presented above was actually used to provide a background and framework for intensive fieldwork on Tanna, specifically about the emergence, development, and status of the John Frum Cargo Cult (Gregory, Gregory and Peck, 1981, 1983; Gregory and Gregory, 1984) and studies on education (Gregory and Gregory 2000, 2001, 2002) as well as a number of related topics including health, botany, conflict resolution and so on. The quick sketch method is especially useful for examining the backgrounds and history

of issues that are conceptually or theoretically of interest to subsequent detailed analysis and study. An additional value would be to provide a baseline for subsequent follow-up studies, sometimes decades later.

NOTES

John Gregory Peck, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus and Retired from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, passed away on 28 June 2004. An obituary has been submitted to The Anthropology Newsletter outlining his contributions to anthropology. This article serves as a final example of his work.

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