

An Ethnomusicological Investigation of the Role of Music in the *Nekowiaar* Ceremony

Tanna, Vanuatu 1995

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnomusicological study that describes and analyses the role of music in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony on the island of Tanna, Vanuatu. The *Nekowiaar* is held on a five to six year cycle and serves to transmit local cultural knowledge.

To investigate the phenomenon, I undertook fieldwork on Tanna from July 1995 to January 1996 and gave particular attention to the role of music in the *Nekowiaar* performance. The *Nekowiaar* is regarded as the most important of all ceremonies by the Tannese. Research strategies were guided by a phenomenological perspective and included participant observation, formal and informal interviews, photography and audio recordings, and consultation with four Tannese co-researchers (Giorgi, 1975; Polkinghorne, 1983). These techniques provided a corpus of text and interview material on the ceremony.

To the Tannese people the *Nekowiaar* ceremony is essential to retention of tradition. It is through the medium of music and its performance in ceremony that social, economic, political, and religious knowledge is shared and passed on. The research supported the conclusion that the Tannese continue to employ music as a means of accurately recording and transmitting local cultural knowledge to future generations.

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*long Nekowiaar witem langauge blong olgetta man blong Tanna. Mi sori tumas taem mi
livem yufala. Mi no foget long yu.*

Dedication

To the Tannese people—*mi tink tink kastom blong yufala wan special samting. Mi hope yu holdem tight long nekis generation, mo fulap narafala generation afta.*

To my husband Richard—without whose love and support this project would not have been realised.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

The past two decades have seen tremendous change in the demographic configuration of many countries. Besides the growth of populations, the changes include the movement of people seeking better employment and educational opportunities. International migration for employment once largely directed toward Western Europe and North America in the last few decades, has expanded to include Asia and the Pacific as significant source areas. Such immigration typically involves groups with low socio-economic status and differing ethnicity, race, and/or religion from that of the dominant populations in the receiving country (La Belle & Ward, 1994, p. 35). In North America (as elsewhere in the world) these changes are altering the total population and the student population in our schools.

Immigration from a host of countries (formerly sparsely represented in our populations) has changed the face of society in both Canada and the United States (Leonhard, 1991, p. 4). Although demographics vary geographically, in some areas of the U.S. groups once labelled minority are becoming the majority. For example, California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Mississippi, and New Mexico all will graduate more students from populations derived from outside Europe by the mid 1990s than those of European heritage (Pitsch, 1991). Pitsch also noted that by this time students originating from European populations will account for only 66 per cent of elementary and secondary school enrolment (cited in Myers, 1992, p. 40). As immigration continues, further demographic changes are guaranteed in our societies and

in our school populations. It has become increasingly difficult to meet the needs of students. Schools now responsible for academic, emotional, and financial support are faced with a difficult job; and, for students, an increase in inter group competition and potential conflicts has become a reality.

In Canada we are undergoing a similar experience. Toronto and Vancouver have seen perhaps the most dramatic shifts in populations; however, changes are occurring throughout the rest of the country as well. Immigration of Asian, Indian, and Caribbean families to various parts of Canada has placed a heavy burden on English As A Second Language programs (E.S.L.), and funding to address Francophone and Native Indian concerns about schooling is under constant threat of cutbacks (La Belle & Ward, 1994; Rice & McGregor, 1989). According to the Ministry of Education, for example, the increase in E.S.L students in British Columbia was 334.5 per cent in the last 10 years; 97 per cent of those 66,885 students are based in the lower mainland school districts (Annual Report, 1995/96 pp. 5-7).

Vancouver Island is also experiencing an influx of foreign students. E.S.L. enrolment in the Victoria, Sooke, and Saanich School Districts showed an increase of 4.5, 0.2, and 2.4 per cent respectively in the 1995/96 school year, for an increase of 1,285 students; 953 of those are at the elementary school level. The resulting shifts in group relations and promotion of special interests have created a need for school programs which meet the multicultural realities of today's world. These internal and external pressures are major factors influencing the debates about multiculturalism and education in Canada.

Multiculturalism

A definition of multiculturalism has been the focus of debate over the last 30 years. La Belle and Ward (1994) wrote that

...diverse views of intergroup relations have shaped the concept in different ways. For example, persons who emphasise stratification and equality in intergroup relations define the term in one way; those who view intergroup relations as affirming differences but having integration as an ultimate goal define it in another. In the 1980s and 1990s the definition has generally broadened such that multicultural education encompasses concerns of many additional groups, including women, gays, and lesbians, people with special needs and people of various age groups, including the very young and the elderly. (p. 25)

While a broad definition of multiculturalism may not be universal, some positions are more generalised than others. Pratte (1979) described multiculturalism in two ways. In a descriptive sense, multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of unlike groups in a common social system. In an evaluative sense, multiculturalism supports exchange among different groups of people, to enrich all, while respecting and preserving the integrity of all. It is from this latter position that multiculturalism is viewed in this study.

Responding to the reality of multiculturalism, educators have organised conferences to address the issues; their goal is an attempt to address concerns regarding approaches to teaching and learning in a multicultural society and to emphasise the importance of multiculturalism in education.

In the field of music education, the “Music Means Harmony” conference (1989) brought together Canadian music teachers from the Toronto area with musicians representing the city’s many ethnocultural communities (Rice & McGregor, 1989, p. v). One of the goals of the workshop was to provide opportunities for teachers to share with musicians of representative ethnic musics. An attempt to move ethnic music out of the realm of the *exotic* and into the realm of familiar and participatory, as well as the opportunities to perform were also key issues. The premise of the conference was that music educators and students would benefit from multicultural music programs through enhanced understanding of the musics of other cultures. Charles Leonhard (speaking at the conference) stated that

...the argument for the use of the music of the ethnic groups in the school population is persuasive. Music can serve as a means to understanding the culture represented by the music; it can contribute to appreciation by other students of the musical culture of the ethnic group....music can reveal the soul of a people. (1989, p. 4)

In 1990, the “Symposium on Multicultural Approaches to Music Education” was held in the United States similarly promoting the importance of multicultural curriculum in schools. It also promoted ideas further emphasising the need for teachers to develop confidence in dealing with world music perhaps unfamiliar to them. This conference stressed that through practical and philosophical events, meaningful experiences of music from other cultures could be had. Both conferences were also concerned with how teachers could approach teaching multiculturalism in music and its importance in the school curriculum.

Music education for Canadian teachers has traditionally been based on European models. As a result, teachers' music making and listening practices are rooted in tonal melodies and functional harmonies; European-educated teachers value re-creation over spontaneous creations and emphasise the control of music environments (Elliott, 1989, p. 11). Such teachers, therefore, are ill-equipped to deal with the diversity of world musics now found in our communities and schools, and world music is to a large extent excluded from the curriculum.

Furthermore, even when they attempt to include world music in music curriculum teachers often ignore the social, political, economical, and historical context from which the music originates. Conversely, teachers of academic programs do emphasise these aspects of communities but give comparatively little consideration to the role of the arts. Elliott (1989) stressed that music and music education are not isolated arts or processes grafted onto culture, but part of culture itself. Leonhard (1989) advocated that the vision and experience of a society's own artistic and social integrity must be communicated in the teaching process. He further noted that teachers trained in the European tradition tend to forget that other music traditions cannot be conveyed adequately in collections of printed folk song (p. vii).

While the use of authentic recordings and films helps to bring traditions to life, Elliott and Leonhard recommended learning directly from practitioners of the art. Educators must attempt to learn and observe from sharing the authentic music of the individuals who regularly participate in a given cultural setting. To teach a *meaningful* curriculum it is important to understand, appreciate, and experience both the music and its context (Rice & McGregor, 1989). Those interested in multiculturalism, in

understanding about populations from varying ethnic origins, and in addressing the changing faces of curriculum, must look to different methods to achieve their goals from those traditionally used in Canadian teacher education and in-service delivery. La Belle and Ward (1994) recommend adopting the ethnographic methodologies associated with a qualitative approach to facilitate teacher's efforts in discovering "the knowledge a group of people have learned and are using to organise their behaviour" (p. 184). This objective requires us to raise what is observed to a conscious level and to seek ways to explain those observations from an individual's perspective. We are then better able to appreciate and learn how to build on diversity.

Ethnographic Research

Qualitative research is generally accepted as an umbrella term that includes a number of methodologies that share common characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Much recent qualitative research is conducted from a phenomenological perspective, seeking to illuminate a phenomenon from an insider perspective—an individual's point of view. This research differs from quantitative approaches because it emphasises discovery, description, and meaning as opposed to the prediction, control and measurement of a phenomenon under investigation (Osborne, 1994). Applied in educational research, a qualitative approach can assist teachers in developing an empathetic understanding of their students, analysing and organising curriculum, and meeting the differing needs of students in today's multicultural classroom. The most common techniques used to facilitate qualitative research are those associated with the field of ethnography.

Ethnography is the systematic methodology of observation of people, their language, and customs through daily interaction over time in the field. An applicable model for ethnographic research is based on a phenomenological-oriented paradigm (Fetterman, 1989). This paradigm embraces a multicultural perspective, as it accepts the multiple realities of individuals' experiences, within a given phenomenon. General ethnographic and specific phenomenological approaches share a desire to illuminate the *lifeworld* of individuals (insider perspective), attempt to control predispositions through *bracketing* or stating biases, and stress the importance of unexpected findings (Osborne, 1990). Phenomenologists seek data from participants, through ethnography that involves on site field observation.

In the 1990s, schools were promoted as institutions for the teaching of family values in addition to their regular mandate (La Belle & Ward, 1994). This new expectation along with the increase of multiethnic ethnic and multi racial students in schools has made the jobs of educators more difficult. School personnel need to seek ways to elicit and understand the multicultural backgrounds of students from the students' perspective. Too often what goes on inside a school is not linked to the outside world. What we attempt to teach and understand about curriculum and the ways that students learn are not connected to lives outside of the educational facilities. This is especially the case when the cultural backgrounds of students are significantly different from that of the majority population (La Belle & Ward, 1994).

Demographic changes have also affected the structure of representation of ethnicity and religion for those who make and influence policies regarding education. Previously, minority groups were excluded from educational policy making, their values

and language either limited or excluded from the curriculum. At one time immigrants of successive generations were expected to assimilate into the customs established in a given community; but now those individuals have become academically and economically more successful, and hold positions of influence. These changes have resulted in multiethnic families and communities taking an active role in the creation of their respective educational missions, and schools are now under enormous pressure to reflect the wide variety of social, political, and economic interests caused by these shifts.

School personnel must be able to place teaching and learning into a context and must respect the learner's perspective and background. They must also be willing to provide her/him with a structured transition from what is known to what is to be learned and to temper the potential effect of an imbalance in inter group relations (La Belle & Ward, 1994, p. 113). Desegregation, home schooling, textbook revisions, addition of non-western readings to curriculum, and ethics and gender programs have all been introduced in the schools in an attempt to meet the expectations of immigrating populations.

Considering the shift from individual students accepting what schools had to offer, to schools now being responsible for satisfying differing students' needs and interests, many would say schools have not been able to satisfy expectations (La Belle & Ward, 1994, p. 94). These programs, founded in the spirit of activism, have faced charges that they lack proper scholarship, intellectual rigor, and in addition are facing increasing cutbacks in funding. Despite these problems, most practitioners over the past 30 years

have assumed that cultural diversity contributes positively to society and that formal education programs should help preserve this diversity (La Belle & Ward, 1994).

This view leads to the recommendation that teachers adopt ethnographic methodologies to help them teach a meaningful curriculum. Ethnography, especially with a phenomenological perspective, lends itself to eliciting explanations from an individual's point of view about field observations made by researchers. Such cooperative research helps to develop a more culturally accurate understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In this regard, ethnographic methods are useful for developing curriculum in world musics. As we are able to experience the music in its cultural setting or share the musical genre with someone whose music it is, then we are better able to present a true representation of that music to our students. This experience is one important way that we can come closer to appreciating and learning how to build on diversity (La Belle & Ward, 1994, p. 185).

In my attempt to explore multiculturalism as a music educator, I decided to conduct a study of music in field conditions and thereby witness the benefits of an ethnographic approach. In the winter of 1994, my husband and I were offered an opportunity to work for a six month period (June 1995 to January 1996) in a South-western district of the island of Tanna, in Vanuatu (see Figure 1). While my husband would be employed in a medical capacity, I hoped to conduct an investigation of the role of music in ceremonial activity. During my early readings about the Tannese people I had learned that their social, economic, political, and religious systems depended on the

regular practice of large scale ceremonial activity and that music played an integral role in these practices. Its use and function, however, were not explained.

Much has been written about the role music plays in oral societies, especially concerning the documentation of local cultural knowledge and the passing of this knowledge to future generations (Farrall, 1981; Finnegan & Orbell, 1995). In my review of Tannese studies of Tanna it was evident that this subject had yet to be addressed.

Many tenets of ethnomusicology are found in qualitative research. In general, music in oral tradition and living musical systems are the realms that have held most appeal to ethnomusicologists, and ethnographic strategies such as fieldwork, observation, and seeking explanations from participants, approaches used in qualitative research, are the main techniques employed (Myers, 1992). The Tannese are an oral society who combine music, dance, and storytelling to stage an re-enactment of historical events (past and present) in ceremonial and ritual presentations. A study of one occurrence of this phenomenon, the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, is facilitated by an ethnomusicological study. Prior to a discussion of this methodology, however, an orientation to Vanuatu and the island of Tanna is provided to familiarise the reader with the culture.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu is situated off the east coast of Australia, between Fiji and New Caledonia, and consists of an irregular chain of approximately 74 islands that stretch for more than 800 kilometres in the South-west Pacific Ocean. Formally known as the New Hebrides, this small country gained independence in 1980 from British and French Condominium rule. There are over 100 local languages that evolved over centuries, due to the isolated communities that traditionally existed throughout the archipelago. This isolation kept groups from intermingling, and the need for a universal language did not arise until the traders and missionaries came in the mid 1800s. Harcombe (1991) wrote the Vanuatu claims the highest concentration of different languages per head of population of any country in the world. The two official languages of the Condominium days are still spoken; at the same time, a local pidgin dialect known as *Bislama* allows islanders from all parts of the archipelago to converse easily.

The native people (ni-Vanuatu) are mostly Melanesian, although some Polynesians reside on islands throughout the archipelago; large populations can be found North of Efate and in particular on the island of Futuna in the South. Most islands have their own distinctive cultural features and artistic styles. Dance and music are features of a variety of ceremonial celebrations and rituals, differing from island to island, and sometimes from district to district within the larger islands. Tanna, one of the most southern islands, still retains many traditional ways despite more than 100 years of missionary teachings, and there is a continuity of musical tradition on Tanna.

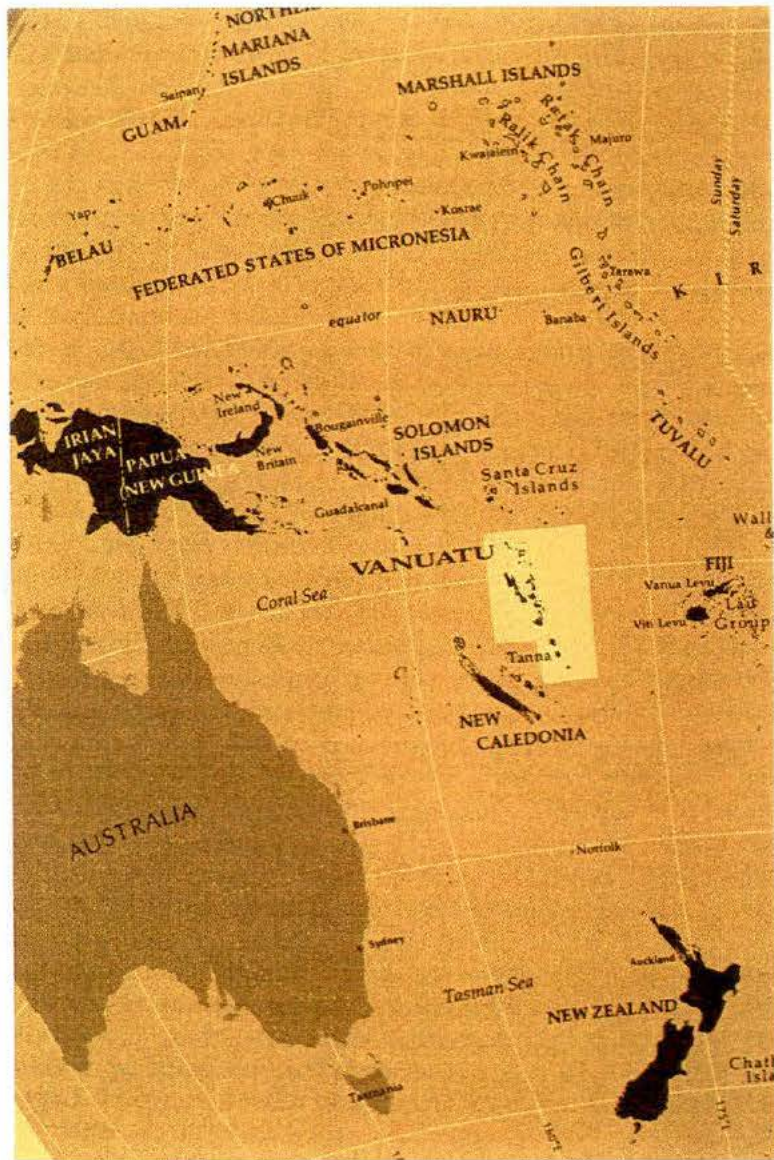
What we know of Tannese culture is contained in ethnographies, histories, and records from missionary accounts in the 1800s (Codrington, 1891/1972; Humphreys,

1926; Rivers, 1914). Other accounts include an ethnographic study by Felix Speiser (1923/1990), which provided a detailed account of ni-Vanuatu culture, and a series of studies by Jean Guiart (1950–1986). These studies are comprehensive accounts of cultural aspects and a variety of ceremonial and ritual *kastom*; they make little or no mention of the role of music, nor are they written from a ni-Vanuatu perspective (Allen, 1981; Harcombe, 1991; Whyte, 1990). Discussions regarding music are limited to observations that instruments were not a feature of island music, unlike on the islands North of Efate where a variety of slit gongs and pan flutes are used; that music is accompanied by the rhythmic pounding of feet and percussive vocalisation of the Tannese; and statements that music appears to play a vital role in ceremonial and ritual practices. It is curious then that further observation and description of this aspect of ritual were not investigated during these early studies. Apart from Guiart's research, little was published in Tanna or Vanuatu during the next 30 years until the arrival of anthropologist Michael Allen.

By the late 1950s Allen had prompted a revival of interest in Vanuatu. Working out of the University of Sydney, Australia, Allen was aware that research conducted in Vanuatu wasn't being published. To correct this oversight he canvassed researchers working in the area and collected articles from the period 1970–1980. The result, *Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia* (1981), is a collection of studies by scholars who continue to work in the field today. Four of the articles deal exclusively with Tanna (Allen, 1981; Bastin, 1981; Brunton, 1981; Lindstrom, 1981). These accounts give more descriptive detail about the musical aspects of ceremonies,

South Pacific Islands

Figure 1. Map of the South Pacific Islands and Vanuatu.



Note: From *The Tree and the Canoe* (p. 6) by Joël Bonnemaïson, 1994, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. Copyright 1994 Joël Bonnemaïson and José Pénot-Demetry.

but again they are generalised descriptions of music in all Tannese ceremonies—not one in particular.

What is apparent in a survey of the literature conducted in Vanuatu is that the island of Tanna has been largely overlooked. Studies of Tanna to date have primarily been accounts of cultural aspects, reports on ceremonial and ritual *kastom*, and brief references to musical activities and instruments. Although all of the studies cited previously stress the importance of music in ceremony and ritual, Layard (1942) and Clausen (1958) have provided the only in-depth music studies to date, and these are based on cultures located in the Northern part of the archipelago. Music plays an integral role in Tannese society. The island of Tanna is comprised of approximately 26,000 Tannese who live in small villages scattered throughout the inland bush and outer coastal areas. Near each village is a *nakamal* or dancing ground where men meet to drink *kava*, discuss politics and the affairs of the village. *Nakamals* are also used for ritual events such as the *Nekowiaar* ceremony which is believed to be a means of ensuring cultural continuity. This patrilineal society is based on equality, and music figures prominently in ritual and ceremonial celebrations. Given that music is a vital part of these practices on Tanna, an understanding of what these practices entail is important before any discussion of music's role in them.

Ceremonial and Ritual Practices

A ceremony is defined as a set of formal acts (rites) proper to a special occasion, each rite following a system of rigid etiquette (Webster, 1979). Two classic works on the study of ceremony and ritual are by Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960) and Marcel Mauss (1922-23/1990). Van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* is an analysis of ceremonies

that accompany an individual's *life crises*—especially funerals, marriages, births, age, initiation ceremonies, and so on. He proposed that such ceremonies are universal in function; though they may differ in detail, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern may be observed cross culturally. In *The Gift*, Mauss sought to establish the idea that no gift is free. Rather, events where things and services of all kinds are exchanged and mandatorily reciprocated are institutions found widely across the world. In Melanesia, cultures are particularly rich in the exhibitions of gift exchanges. These exchanges, defined as the *system of total services*, include “all things and services and all persons....The system is simple; just the rule that every gift has to be returned within and between generations” (1990, pp. viii–ix).

Both works have implications for this study because they support the importance of ceremony and its analysis in situ. Van Gennep insisted that ceremonies, as rites of passage, needed to be examined in their entirety and in the social setting where they are found. In his examination of life crises, three major phases could be identified: separation, incorporation, and transition. It is generally accepted that any examination of a life crises will validate van Gennep's three-fold classification, but he cautions that these patterns are not developed to the same extent by all peoples in every set of ceremonies.¹ Van Gennep also noted that adherence to these practices is linked to

¹ In my review of the literature on Tanna, I found that his descriptions of separation, incorporation, and, initiation were consistent with my findings. In the *Nekowiaar* those dancers who are invited to participate from neighbouring villages experience separation as they are incorporated into another community for the period of time during the performance of *Nekowiaar*. The transition stage is seen in two areas: first when local knowledge is passed through performance to members of the community; and, second when the guest dancers return to their villages with new knowledge that then becomes a part of their every day lives (see chapters II & VI, van Gennep, 1908/1960).

magico-religious beliefs in that non-participation may bring sanctions from spirits, a practice also noted by Mauss (1922-23/1990).

According to Mauss the *system of total services* is an integral component of Melanesian ritual and ceremonial exchanges; these “services” include dance, women, and food exchanges among other services (p. 5)². Mauss believed that “the rule that every gift has to be returned in some specified way sets up a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations...[that]...the whole society can be described by the catalogue of transfers that map all the obligations between its members. The cycling gift system is the society” (p. ix). Mauss also noted that these exchanges are in some cases ones where the return gift/s must exceed the original gift (the North Pacific Coast Indian *potlatch*, for example) but, in other cases, the return gift must be of equal value (as in the Tannese *Nekowiaar* ceremony). The latter structure reflects relatively equal status of the groups involved. More often there is an element of incremental value or quantity of gifts originally given. It is curious then that a society whose hierarchical structure is based on a two tiered system actively promotes the equality of its members through a ceremony of equal exchange, such as the *Nekowiaar*. This may be due to the fact that the big-men phenomenon is a relatively new feature of Tannese society and not part of their traditional culture. In Tanna, the exchange of services creates a balance and symmetry in what may otherwise be an unstable society due to the two tiered hierarchical system: big-men and chiefs.

² Mauss believed that the system continues because of the local people’s belief of repercussions from spirits if the practices are not maintained. His belief was in keeping with comments made to me during the course of my stay on Tanna.

Despite their original import in the field of anthropology, in general, Mauss' and van Gennep's theories had limited influence on other areas of the social sciences. The translation of both works into English had a dual purpose: (a) making available the author's ideas to a larger audience since original monographs limited accessibility and (b) providing a basic requirement for modern fieldwork (concepts regarding economy, kinship, religion, individual, group, and symbolic behaviour in ceremony) (Douglas, 1990; Vizedom & Caffee, 1960). Although there may be criticisms of some of the ideas presented these theories are still relevant to researchers in the field today (Douglas, 1990; Kimball, 1960; Thomas, 1991) and it is my premise in this work they are relevant to the equality of gift exchange practices of the Tannese—in particular the *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

Uses and Functions of Music in Tannese Society

Ceremonies or ritual practices are a reflection of a culture's customs and history. This is also true of written texts (the work of ethnographers), which can record the prevailing attitudes and values of a culture and of song texts (the work of ethnomusicologists), similarly documenting myth, legend, and history (Merriam, 1964). Although the forms of chronicling a culture's customs may vary considerably—music often plays a vital role in this chronicling. The value of ethnomusicology to ethnography is the insight it provides on music's role in culture. Nettl said that “every tribe uses music somehow in its representation of custom in ceremonies” (1956, p. 6); Merriam noted that song is frequently used as an enculturative device (1964). Given the significance of music's role in ceremony it is interesting that the “uses” of music in

human experience and the comprehension of history have not warranted more attention than they have received from researchers (Blum, Bohlman & Neuman, 1991; Coplan, 1991).

The discussions in the literature regarding uses of music and associated terms such as “functions,” “role,” and “purpose” are many. In 1956 Merriam suggested that most primitive music served a particular purpose other than providing entertainment or aesthetic enjoyment. Music has a purpose: its use or function in a ceremony defines its role.³

Merriam defines uses and functions as significantly separate entities. While observing uses of music, researchers directly observe a given phenomenon; when assessing functions, they are then better able to interpret meaning indirectly, through the deeper comprehension of the significance of the phenomenon they study. Uses then refers to the situation in which music is employed in human action (effecting a cure), and function concerns the reasons for its employment and the purpose it serves (emotional relief). Functions are more generalisations that are equally applicable to all societies. Whether music is employed as a vehicle for emotional expression, entertainment, or contributing to the continuity and stability of a culture, the attempt to discover its purpose or function in music (in the widest possible sense) answers to what music does for and in human society (Merriam, 1964).

³ The Tannese believe that the purpose of music is to assist in the documentation of all past and present Tannese *kastom*, that stories told with music and dance are *stret* or straight (Chief *Pita*, personal communication, December 2, 1995).

A more recent examination of uses and functions by Nettl in 1983 concurred with Merriam's conclusions—with one considerable exception. Merriam believed that the use of music was determined by the participant, that the deeper function could be determined only by the observing researcher; function is an unconscious experience for participants.

It was Nettl's view that uses and function were conscious modes of experience that the participant and researcher both could equally determine. Seeger (1992) stated that differing approaches exist but a common goal is to discover how music is used and the function it serves. Examination of uses and functions assists researchers in discovering the meaning of music's role in the community. Uses and functions, although different, are interrelated components in the composition and performance of musical activities. Local informants usually indicate some exterior purpose for their music (Nettl, 1983). Songs, for example, are not simply information documents; they can bring to life the personality or an event from the past and sometimes present. Because music plays a significant role in what van Gennep termed life crises ceremonies, it is crucial to explore the many forms in which people choose to speak and act, and to examine the content of their messages (Comaroff & Comaroff, cited in Blum, Bohlman & Neuman, 1991, p. 46).

Songs in the South Pacific serve as *documents* to islanders (Thomas, 1992). Because they are performed, often danced, they are a more powerful means of allowing the community to re-experience the emotions of past events rather than simply to hear about them. As speech is the most important mode of communication in small-scale societies (where there is a marked absence of traditional literature) most words are

stored in memory or in material objects. Storytelling, among other modes of oral communication, becomes vital to the transmission of culture from generation to generation. This passing of ritual and custom is crucial to the process of socialisation and cultural continuity of communities (Lindstrom, 1981).

In the case of Tanna in Vanuatu, words and songs are central to public events. The ethnographer Lindstrom noted that “speech is the most powerful, most meaningful, and most common mode of communication on [Tanna]” (1981, p. 383). Compared to other islands in North Vanuatu, Tanna is symbol poor in that the Tannese have little tradition in carving, painting, and architecture; however, if we are to consider ceremonial and ritual presentation, they are symbol rich in this aspect of the arts. Despite wide spread literacy, there is also an absence of local written literature; texts are confined to occasional letters, store accounts, and exchange tallies. Oral mnemonic forms are canonical songs that relate stories of local people and places (Lindstrom, 1990).⁴ Along with this repertoire of songs there are the hymns of the Christian Churches, of John Frum, and the songs of string bands. Songs are also commissioned to record events or provide a charter—as in a song that claims the land in a given area (Jolly, 1992; Lindstrom, 1990). All these constitute a choral archive documenting the past and current culture of the Tannese.

The American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) was first to observe that oral genres are a people’s autobiographical ethnography (cited in Coplan, 1991). As

⁴ Mnemonic devices are those techniques that are used in oral cultures to aid human memory. Poetic devices of rhyme, metre, and stanza are such techniques, as well as the use of something which symbolises what is to be remembered such as paintings, dances, or ceremonial objects (Farrall, 1981).

information travels in many guises (speech being only one of these), other communicatory modes must also be considered when investigating a culture. Writing, gesture, painting, tattooing, carving, hamlet architecture, music, song, dance, and ritual are just some of the many aspects that must be considered in these inspections (Lindstrom, 1990). Any number of art mediums can be employed to facilitate the recording of history and passing of culture from generation to generation. Merriam (1964) noted in his study that music, dance, and drama have an inseparable relationship.

The arts play a significant role in the documentation of a culture's history, whether employed singularly as with music (singing songs, playing instruments) or in a combination with other mediums such as art (masks, head-dresses, paintings), and drama (storytelling, dance). The uses and functions of the arts in society cover an enormous range, and they can play either a subordinate or central role. Some cultures use all mediums of the arts, while others employ only some components. Some differences can be attributed to the effects of Western influences and others to the availability of natural materials from the environment.⁵ The Tannese have an oral tradition; they rely on storytelling, song, and dance in ritual and ceremonial practices as a means to communicate and record history.

Focus of the Study

Of the many ritual and ceremonial practices that occur on Tanna throughout the year (initiation, marriage, funerals) the Tannese believe the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to be

⁵ For example when I visited the Cook Islands I listened to gospel singing in the local churches that the locals told me was brought to them by the missionaries. Cultures whose environments are rich in hard woods, for example, often have prolific carvers.

the most significant. Held just once every five to six years the *Nekowiaar* is unique in that its purpose (according to the Tannese) is to document all Tanna's *kastom*, past and present, and serve as a vehicle for the transmission of culture to future generations (Farrall, 1981).

I was intrigued by the opportunity to investigate a phenomenon so unique—one that still functions because of a unified society. In our culture, where the cultural and racial backgrounds are so varied, an investigation, or experience of a single phenomenon representative of society as a whole is rare; therefore, our abilities as educators to deliver meaningful curriculum in this respect becomes more difficult because we haven't had this experience. Although this study is not about the instruction of multiculturalism, my experience on Tanna will have direct benefits to that aspect of teaching in the classroom. My experience as a minority in a culture unfamiliar to me will give me an opportunity to view and help a child who has had no experience of our culture or language in the classroom.

Diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds are a reality of today's societies, and the change is reflected in the diversity evident in the students in school classrooms. Because of this diversity it has become increasingly important for those responsible for the education and well being of children to have an empathetic understanding of the individual students who make up a given environment. This diversity places increased pressure on educators as they seek to meet the needs of the students. Teachers must find new methods of assessing students both emotionally and intellectually, as well as seek ways to deliver curriculum meaningfully. Leonhard and Elliott (1991) recommend

adopting ethnographic methodology to facilitate the instruction of meaningful curriculum.

Regarding multiculturalism, the issue for educational practitioners is not learning about the culture of a given group; it is understanding that culture. Ethnography, stemming from the field of anthropology, is the systematic use of observation, the coming to know individuals, their language and lifeways, through daily interaction over time (La Belle & Ward, 1994, pp. 184–185). When applied to educational practices, the techniques of ethnography (interviews, observations, fieldwork, participant observation—taking a new role in an unfamiliar setting) can raise what is observed to a conscious level. By becoming conscious of what we are doing as teachers we are in effect observing ourselves educate. It is not necessary to travel to a remote society to experience the benefits of such a study. The key elements are to identify a situation that is unfamiliar; observe curriculum we are not trained in, such as observing the instruction of a grade level we are unfamiliar with. By seeking explanations from the individuals being observed, we gain an empathetic understanding (p. 185). Anderson (1991) reinforces the need to understand multiple perspectives:

If students are to learn from a multicultural perspective, teachers need to develop an educational philosophy that recognises the inherent worth of endeavours by different cultural groups. Multicultural education develops the understanding that there are many different but equally valid forms of... expression and encourages students to develop a broad perspective based on understanding, tolerance, and respect for a variety of opinions and approaches. (p. 1)

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an ethnomusicological study of music's role in the traditional Tannese *Nekowiaar* ceremony. A phenomenological perspective and ethnographic techniques will be used to determine its use and function from the perspective of the Tannese. Questions to be investigated are:

What is the role of music in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony? (See Merriam, 1964, p. 209.)

What methods are employed for the instruction of traditional song in the *Nekowiaar*?

Who performs the music and why?

How is music created (composed, rehearsed, performed)?

How are the performers regarded by the members of the community?

What is the source of music (composed, gift, inspiration)?

What is the tone colour and the significance of the choices?

What verification is available to see if the ritual is being performed accurately according to the performer's memories?

Is the music in the *Nekowiaar* specialised to this ritual only?

What are the implications of study in the field for instruction in Western public school music education?

In this study I hope to show, through the broad spectrum of my interviews and field observations, the importance of music's role in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony and the importance of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to Tannese society—how it serves as a means to

accurately record events (past and present) and how it contributes to the transmission of culture to future generations.

Investigations of the *Nekowiaar* have not previously examined the role of music. This study aims to address the gap, and provide the ni-Vanuatu with a written account of the role music plays in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony from their perspective. Through this experience, I also hope to gain a fuller understanding of how the values and beliefs of a culture can be transmitted to future generations. In our multicultural setting today there are few opportunities to observe unique societies who meet for the express concern of unification and verification of cultural values. Recognising that we can both individually and collectively work toward the continuity of passing cultural values to future generations is key to the preservation and in some cases the restoration of our individual ethnic and racial differences. It is my hope that my experience on Tanna will provide me with the opportunity to experience both these aspects. In this way, I believe I will become a more empathetic teacher and that this thesis will offer insight into how a culture struggles to maintain their traditional society in the face of increasing Western influences.

Chapter 2 provides a historical review of musical studies conducted in foreign cultures and examines the development of ethnomusicology as a field of investigation. Chapter 3 continues the review of musical studies, but specifically examines those conducted in Vanuatu; I will also present a profile of Tannese social, religious, economic, and political systems to provide the reader with an orientation to the culture. In chapter 4, I will first review the history of qualitative and quantitative research techniques and then describe the methodology and means of data collection employed

for this study. A personal account of research strategies will also be presented in this chapter to describe entrance to the field, research participants, and data collection. Chapter 5 will first describe the rehearsal and preparatory stages for *Nekowiaar*, then the three day ceremony, and finally *Memuk* (the return gift ceremony). After a presentation of results of the data analysis (from a Tannese perspective) in chapter 6, the discussion in chapter 7 puts forward my findings based on the material from chapter 6 and will examine the role of music in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Chapter 8 will provide concluding comments regarding what the Tannese have identified as important to their future as a traditional society and the role the *Nekowiaar* ceremony will play in the preservation of their culture, the value of ethnographic studies for music education, and identify possible directions of research for future studies of the Tannese people.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Ethnomusicology

This chapter provides an overview of the development of ethnomusicology as a discipline. Because ethnomusicology is a diverse field which is closely associated with a number of disciplines and methodologies, establishing ethnomusicology as a discipline in its own right has been difficult. The discussion to follow will address this difficulty and provide the reader with an understanding of current practices in this field. Beginning with the origin of music studies conducted in foreign cultures and tracing their development through the opposing American and European schools of thought the chapter concludes with the definition of ethnomusicology that will be employed in this study.

Origin of Foreign Musical Studies

The rationale for the formal study of music in foreign cultures originated in Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768/1782). Following the publication of this important work, explorers, missionaries, and travellers became interested in "exotic musics," but resulting reports were often amateur and biased in nature (Nettl, 1964, pp. 15–19). The study of music cultures as an academic pursuit, however, awaited the publication of Guido Adler's *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft* (1885). Adler's work is generally acknowledged as the origin of ethnomusicology, a diverse field that began as comparative musicology (the comparison of foreign musical styles with the European system) in the early 1800s. Adler believed that "comparative musicology [had] at its task the comparison of the musical works—especially the folk

songs—of the various peoples of the earth for ethnographical purposes, and the classifications of them according to their various forms” (cited in Myers, 1992, p. 4). Comparative musicology (now more commonly known as ethnomusicology) includes a number of academic orientations that hold in common the study of and about music in culture (List, 1979, p. 1).

Rousseau’s philosophical foundation and Adler’s definition of comparative musicology were followed by technological advancements that facilitated research in the field. The invention of Alexander J. Ellis’ cents system for pitch measurement (1875) and Thomas Edison’s phonograph (1877) made a scientific investigation of music possible. Subsequent studies conducted by anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and ethnographers resulted in early accounts of Chinese music by Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1735), of Arab music by Guillaume-Andre Villoteau (1809), of Indian music by William Jones (1792), and of Japanese music by Francis Taylor Piggott (1893) (Myers, 1992, p. 3).

American and European Schools of Thought

By the 19th century, scholars working in the field of comparative musicology could be grouped in two camps: European and American. Studies conducted by European scholars were “analytical” in their approach. These scholars rarely conducted fieldwork, giving little consideration to the role of music in a society’s culture. European scholars preferred to concentrate on the analysis of musical recordings (harmonic and rhythmic structures) brought to them by ethnographers working in the field. American scholars were different from their European counterparts in that they concentrated on practical and descriptive analysis of the musical recordings they collected while conducting their

own fieldwork. These studies were more concerned with the documentation of cultures that were “vanishing” and regarded music as an integral part of a society’s culture.

These two positions will now be studied in more depth.

European studies (the Berlin school) were headed by psychologist Carl Stumpf (1848–1936) and philologist and mathematician Erich M. von Hornbostel (1877–1935) at the University of Berlin (Nettl, 1964, pp. 12–19). Their work was based on the study of recordings, artifacts, instruments, song notations, and photographs obtained by German ethnologists working in North American Colonies. Stumpf, for example, studied the music of the Bella Coola Indians in Northern British Columbia (1886). Scholars of the Berlin school worked primarily in the laboratory; they provided analysis of the data and materials collected by others in the field and produced musicological assessments based on the European system of notation; little consideration was given to music as a cultural manifestation at that time (Myers, 1993, p. 5).

European-based field studies were conducted in Hungary by Béla Vikár (1859–1945), Béla Bartók (1881–1945), and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) whose studies, undertaken in the early 20th century, made use of the phonograph to record folk songs in Hungary, Romania, and Transylvania. Bartók’s first notated Hungarian folk song appeared in 1904, and he began his collaboration with Kodály in 1905. In England, Cecil Sharp (1859–1924) undertook his study of English folk songs, advocating their introduction to English public schools. Australian composer, Percy Grainger (1882–1961), emigrated to England where he recorded Lincolnshire folk songs on wax cylinders in 1906; in 1908, he issued the first commercial recording of folk songs with the Gramophone Company, London. These events coincided with the nationalist

movement in Europe, as composers turned to peasant songs to enrich their own compositions (Merriam, 1992, pp. 4–5).

American studies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were primarily field-based ethnographic accounts intended to preserve an eroding culture (Blum, 1991; Merriam, 1964). The numerous recordings of the indigenous American Indians were practical, descriptive, and based on fieldwork which was different to the analytical purpose used by the Berlin school approach. Jesse Walter Fewkes (1850–1930) was the first American ethnographer to record in the field, working with the Passamaquoddy Indians of the North-eastern USA (March, 1890).

There were also a number of women musicologists working in the field at this time including Alice Cunningham Fletcher (1838–1923), who studied the Omaha Indians; Francis La Flesche (1857–1932), who was the first Native American ethnomusicologist; and Francis Densmore (1867–1957), who studied the Chippewa (1910–1913) and Choctaw Indians (1943).

Foreshadowing a merging of European (musicological) and American (ethnographic) schools of thought, a new generation of students studied an anthropological approach to the study of music under Franz Boas (1858–1942) at Columbia University. Helen Roberts (1888–1985) and George Herzog (1901–1984) studied the “Boasian” approach, a holistic study of musical cultures through contemporary anthropological fieldwork methods (researchers collecting and documenting their own material from living informants) (Myers, 1992, p. 22). Roberts conducted studies in Oceania (1925), but Herzog was the first to combine the Boasian approach and the theories of the Berlin school. Herzog (a German immigrant to the

States) was formally an assistant to Hornbostel; his work, the *Yuma Musical Style* (1928), reflected this synthesis and was influential in setting a new direction in the field of comparative musicology.

Post World War II saw the creation of a number of ethnomusicological societies. The International Folk Music Council was founded in 1947 (becoming the International Council for Traditional Music in 1982), and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) was established in 1955. SEM's founder, ethnomusicologist David McAllester, defined the new field by the musics studied—not on how they were studied:

General consensus favoured the view that “ethno-musicology” is by no means limited music in tribal cultures and is defined more by the orientation of the student than by any rigid boundaries of discourse....the term “ethno-musicology” is more accurate and descriptive of this discipline and its field of investigation than the older term, “comparative musicology.” (cited in Myers, 1956, p. 5)

This definition of ethnomusicology gained popularity during the 1950s, supported by the views of ethnomusicologists Jaap Kunst (1891–1960), Willard Rhodes (b1901), and Curt Sachs (1881–1959). Despite the initial acceptance of this newer view of the evolving discipline, however, a widely accepted and useable definition of ethnomusicology remained elusive for the next 40 years.

By the 1950s American ethnomusicologists' interests were divided. This division mirrored the contrasting approaches of the American and European schools: “Those with anthropological training, represented by Alan Merriam (1923–1980), and those

with a musicological background were led by Mantle Hood (*b*1918)” (Myers, 1992, p. 8). Merriam and Hood were critical of the laboratory-based comparative research of the Berlin school, where “cultural facts were applied more or less indiscriminately to prove the already deduced theory” (Merriam, 1964, p. 52). Merriam felt that fieldwork was an essential part of any ethnomusicological study; he defined ethnomusicology as the investigation of concepts about music, musical behaviour, and musical sound (pp. 32–33). Merriam believed that “music is culture and what musicians do is society” (cited in Myers, 1993, p. 7).

Merriam’s approach flourished as more researchers conducted their own fieldwork aided by advances in commercial aviation following the war; however, many of these earlier studies lacked an analytical component. Ethnographic reports written during the 1950s and 1960s were primarily based on fieldwork. Researchers attempted to document native cultures because they feared the latter were vanishing under the influence of Westernization. Little analysis was conducted as scholars raced to fill the gap on a map of world musical styles (Myers, 1993, pp. 5–7).

The musicological approach, led by Mantle Hood, emphasised the importance of mastering a foreign musical language—“bi-musicality”—through extended stays of a year or more in the field. Hood based his theories on the teachings of musicologist Charles Seeger (1886–1979) “who held that speech and music are incompatible modes of communication” (cited in Myers, 1993, p. 7). According to Seeger, this “... ‘musicological juncture,’ left the scholar, who must use words to describe music, in a curious position” (cited in Myers, p. 7). One must understand what is said in both a culture and its music, rather than assuming that one is explanatory of the other.

Seeger proposed that the study of non-western music was a possible solution to understanding the two modes of communication. In response Hood, recognising that extended time in the field was not always a possibility, gathered a group of foreign musicians from various countries at U.C.L.A. In 1960 he established a program that offered instruction in Javanese, Persian, Japanese, Mexican, Indian, Balinese, Greek, and African musics. Hood (1970) was the first to define ethnomusicology to be the study of any and all musics (cited in Myers, 1992, p. 8). He felt that “ethnomusicology [was] a field of knowledge, having at its investigation of the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon. The [ethno]musicologist is a research scholar, and he aims primarily at knowledge about music” (1957, p. 2). Hood’s views continued to be supported during the 1960s by scholars such as John Blacking (1928–1990), whose work was largely with the Venda culture in Africa.

By the 1970s and 1980s interest had shifted from the collection of repertory for preservation and from strict musical analysis. Researchers were more interested in the examination of the process of musical creation and performance which was reflected in a unification of anthropological and musicological positions. Interests now included new subjects: gender and music (Keeling, 1989); urban music (Nettl, 1978); film music of India and Japan (Arnold, 1985; Skillman, 1986). Researchers’ interests in historical studies were also rekindled; they saw a need to document traditional lifestyles in countries which were experiencing the modernisation and Westernization of their cultures.

Further technological advances also affected the nature of fieldwork. The availability of data from the field through media broadcasts, locally produced records,

and performances of artists around the world have made the field more accessible. As a result, work considered ethnomusicological in nature has changed; in some cases subjects even write their own autobiographies. Examples of the latter are autobiographical accounts written by Navajo Blessingway singer Frank Mitchell (1978), in collaboration with ethnomusicologist David McAllester; Ruth Stone's video recording and playback analysis of musical events among the Kpelle of Liberia (1982); and Simha Arom's technique of stereo recording and playback of music in the field, involving the musicians as collaborators (1976) (Myers, 1993, pp. 12–13).

Although the interest in modern musical life had flourished for a time, a return to studies of remote cultures resumed in the late 1980s. Anthony Seeger investigated the Suyá community in the Amazon (1987); Marina Roseman studied the Temiar of the Malaysian rain forest (1984); and Steven Feld studied the organology of the Kaluli people of highland Papua New Guinea (1988, 1982). Finally, an interest in the biology of music-making united an unlikely field including ethnomusicologists, musicologists, performers, music educators, psychologists, and neurologists (Wilson & Roehmann, 1988, 1990). Collaborative efforts were attempts to understand the music-specific aspects of brain and motor functions. Blacking's work, *How Musical Is Man?* marks an early investigation of this subject (1973).

Ethnomusicology Defined

In the 1990s the debate over a definition of this discipline continues. Anthropologists, musicologists, music educators, music therapists, performers of non-western music, and composers who draw on non-western idioms, use the term ethnomusicologist to describe themselves (Myers, 1992, p. 11). Scholars conduct their

own research in the field to experience the cultures they study first hand. Studies are conducted all over the world and, unlike in earlier times, include Western cultures (Kingsbury, 1988; Nettl, 1995).

Ethnomusicology has been defined as: the “comparative study of musical cultures,” the “study of music as culture,” and the “hermeneutic science of human musical behaviour” (Merriam, 1992, p. 3). In addition, it has yet to be determined if ethnomusicology is an academic discipline in its own right or a division of musicology (Nettl, 1992). Myers’ position is that the fundamental issues in the investigation of ethnomusicology are the match of cultural context to musical style, where researchers use a number of methods and theories from various other disciplines. Myers states, “Many a recent article describes Mongolian or Bolivian or Samoan music in the terminology of linguistics, interactionism, phenomenological sociology, information theory structuralism and so on and so on” (1992, p. 15). For the purpose of this thesis, the term ethnomusicology provides the most comprehensive term for the study of music in foreign cultures that covers all aspects to be included in a study of this nature.

The past half century has seen a proliferation of ethnomusicological studies, graduate works, journal articles, and books. To date, a text has yet to be developed that might offer an “adequate introduction to the subject to serve as a textbook for music majors, be they historians, theorists, composers, performers or educators” (Myers, 1993, p. xxvii). Myers’ works, *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (1992) and *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies* (1993), offer a systematic, historical, and geographical means to examine the music of other cultures. Both volumes are a collaboration of recent and representative musicologists in the field today: the first

discusses theories and methods, and the second outlines the history of ethnomusicology and looks to regional studies throughout the world. Myers noted the volumes do not represent a world survey; they are a comprehensive summary of the literature to date. In her chapter on studies conducted in Oceania (the South Pacific) Myers identifies a number of areas that would benefit from ethnomusicological research. One such area is the country of Vanuatu.

Chapter 3

Introduction to Vanuatu and Tanna

This chapter will provide the reader with a review of studies conducted in Vanuatu to date and then looks more specifically at past research conducted on the island of Tanna. What is apparent after reviewing the published research is that there are a number of gaps in the ethnographic research conducted to date. There has yet to be a study of the music of Tanna. A description of Tannese society and its particular social, religious, economic, and political systems will follow this overview. I have used material from my own observations during my time on the island together with material from published accounts written on these aspects of Melanesian societies to provide an orientation to Tannese history and society today. The description provides the necessary background for an understanding of Tanna's music and ritual components. A complete and current review of the society under investigation gives the necessary context for understanding of the importance of ceremony and ritual in Tannese culture.⁶

Review of Studies

Vanuatu

The country of Vanuatu is located in the Oceania region of the Pacific—an area comprising Australia, New Guinea (Papua New Guinea mainland and Irian Jaya), Island Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia (see Figure 1). The Spanish were the first

⁶ Keesing (1981) notes that anthropologists have not been precise or consistent with their usage of the terms “culture” and “society.” He defines culture as “those socially transmitted patterns for behaviour characteristics of a particular social group... what humans learn, not what they do and make” and society as “the population of a total social system [the social groups that make up communities i.e., families, hospitals who maintain relations over time] whose members share a common language and cultural tradition” (pp. 67–75).

Europeans to find the area in 1606, followed by the French in 1768, and finally the British in 1771. These initial explorations of the archipelago established that a rich supply of natural resources and culture existed on the islands, and traders soon made their way to reap the benefits.

The early 19th century saw the exploitation of natural resources such as sandalwood, bêche-de-mer, copra, and whaling for Asian markets. After traders depleted their sources in Malay, Filipino, and the Indo-Pacific, they looked to Vanuatu for supplies. They were to harvest all products to the point of extinction by the 1860s. The practice of blackbirding (the labour trade of Melanesian men) became the next lucrative trade in the archipelago from 1863–1904. Young men, mostly from the South of the archipelago, were taken to work on the sugar and copra plantations of Australia, Fiji, and in the mines of New Caledonia and Samoa. The activities of traders and blackbirders, as well as the foreign disease they brought with them to the islands, affected the Melanesian population; most islands experienced a decrease of 50 per cent and some as much as 80 per cent of their residents. The blackbirding trade was finally abolished by the Australian Government in 1904; however, the purchase of Melanesian land, teachings of Protestant and Presbyterian missionaries, and imposed rule of the joint British and French Condominium government had begun a pattern that would contribute to a diminishing traditional Melanesian culture.

Some two hundred years later, despite the effects of outside interference, Vanuatu gained its independence in 1980. The former New Hebrides was renamed Vanuatu, derived from the term *Vanua'aku* from the language area of Northern Vanuatu meaning

“my country.”⁷ The newly established nation focused on reclaiming its land, re-establishing *kastom* and identifying education, women’s issues, and economy as a priority for the future.

Sources of information about Vanuatu initially came from the accounts of explorers, travellers, and missionaries (Codrington, 1891/1972; Forster, 1777; Higginson, 1926; Humphreys, 1926; A. Markham, 1873; C. Markham, 1904; Watt, 1896). These early ethnographies (before World War II) were often unreliable; they were based on amateur ethnographies written from a personal perspective (McLean, 1993, p. 392).

Scholarly activity began in 1928 with an ethnographic study by the German ethnologist, Felix Speiser, who travelled in Vanuatu for two years (1910–1912). Speiser’s collection of ethnographic and anthropological material in the field resulted in two books: a popular travel book, *Two Years with the Natives in the Western Pacific* (1913) and an authoritative study, *Ethnology of Vanuatu: An Early Twentieth Century Study* (1923/1990). The latter is a detailed examination of all aspects of culture, society, and colonial history that gives a description of dress, ornaments, and instruments used in ceremonial rituals. Speiser’s work was republished by the Ministry for Culture in Vanuatu and translated in English and *Bislama* in 1990 to reinforce knowledge of old cultures.

⁷ Tryon claims that there are over 100 distinct languages spoken in Vanuatu and classifies these into three language areas: Northern, including Banks, Torres, Maewo, Aoba, North-west Santo, Pentecost, and Northern Ambrym islands; Central, including Santo, Malekula, West and South-east Ambrym, Paama, Epi, Efate, and Shepherd islands; and, Southern, Erromango, Tanna, and Aneityum islands (1976).

The missionary ethnologist Codrington came to Vanuatu in the late 19th century as a member of the Anglican church. Speiser cites Codrington's work, *The Melanesians, Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-Lore* (1891/1972), as the richest source of material, although it is mainly concerned with the "intellectual" culture of natives rather than material culture (Speiser, 1923/1990, p. 2). Codrington's account was largely descriptive, with few analyses, and failed to address the social and political aspects of ni-Vanuatu society. Like Codrington, Speiser claimed to use an ethnographic approach; his sole purpose, however, was the collection of materials (narratives from natives and objects representative of native culture) which are now the property of the Ethnological Museum in Basel, Switzerland. While both studies play an important part in the documentation of ni-Vanuatu culture, they examine the sociological, intellectual, economic, and political aspects of ni-Vanuatu society in isolation.

Speiser mentioned that at the time of his study (1923), he saw signs of an eroding traditional culture: "A great deal, particularly in the class of ceremonial objects, had already disappeared completely" (p. 2). This concern (which prompted the majority of studies during this period) was also reflected in a later ethnographic study by Arthur Deacon (1934/1970). Other accounts of this nature include a number of French and German travel accounts and ethnographies (Brunet, 1908; Daville, 1895; Douceré, 1934; Grignon-Dumoulin, 1928; Imhaus, 1890); however, the lack of English translations has limited their availability to North American researchers.

Academic research continued in Vanuatu after World War II, but little was published (Allen, 1981). Work during the post war period was represented by theses presented for higher degrees, most originating from the University of Hawaii, University

of Auckland, and Australian universities (McLean, 1993, p. 393). Apart from the in-depth studies by Layard (1914) and Deacon (1934/1970), anthropological research did not resume until the 1950s with a series of studies by Guiart (1950–1986). (See Allen, 1981, for a complete reference.)

The 1970s and 80s saw a revival of interest in Vanuatu, largely due to the efforts of Michael Allen at Sydney University. Allen was concerned that research conducted in Vanuatu wasn't being published. After canvassing scholars working in the area, he compiled a collection of essays dealing with varying aspects of Melanesian life.

Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia (1981) is the work of fourteen authors who continue to work in the field today; of these, four (Bastin, 1981; Brunton, 1981, 1989; Lindstrom, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1990; Philibert, 1976, 1981, 1982) deal exclusively with Tanna.⁸

Works cited from the early period touch upon the ceremonial *kastom* of the ni-Vanuatu; however, a musical study wasn't conducted until 1958. Clausen's analysis of the *Layard Collection of Recorded Malekulan Music* modelled the style of the Berlin school, where Hornbostel and his colleagues were conducting comparative musicological studies. Studies of the Solomon Islands and New Ireland (Hornbostel, 1912, 1914, 1922); of Malayan and Samoan songs (Kolinski, 1930); and of the Caroline

⁸ Other accounts of Vanuatu include articles published in journals such as: *Mankind*, *Oceania*, *Journal of Anthropological Research* and *Journal of Pacific History* by authors Spriggs (1985), MacClancy (1986), and Thomas (1992); books by Allen (1981), Bonnemaïson (1986/1994), Docker (1970), Lini (1980), Sope (1974), and Weightman (1989); and, a number of theses (Philibert, 1976; M. Rodman, 1981; W. Rodman, 1973; Tonkinson, 1968; & Wilkinson, 1979). A few bibliographies exist; however, McLean (1977, 1981) is the most comprehensive and recent, with another edition pending. *An Annotated Bibliography of Oceanic Music and Dance with Supplement*, covers 2700 references to books, journal articles, reviews, record notes, manuscripts on file, and theses.

Islands (Herzog, 1932, 1936) were based on material collected by German ethnologists working elsewhere in the Oceania region. These works were analytical in nature and considered music as an abstraction removed from its cultural context.

Studies in the tradition of the American School did not follow until later in the 20th century, with musical accounts by Thomas (1992) and Crowe (1981). Thomas investigated two songs of the blackbird recruiting era on West Futuna, proposing that songs may act as a means of recording history, and Crowe looked at polyphony in choral music, within its cultural setting. Although neither are in-depth musical studies, they reflect the new direction of ethnomusicology—where the social setting and the perspective of the culture are taken into consideration.

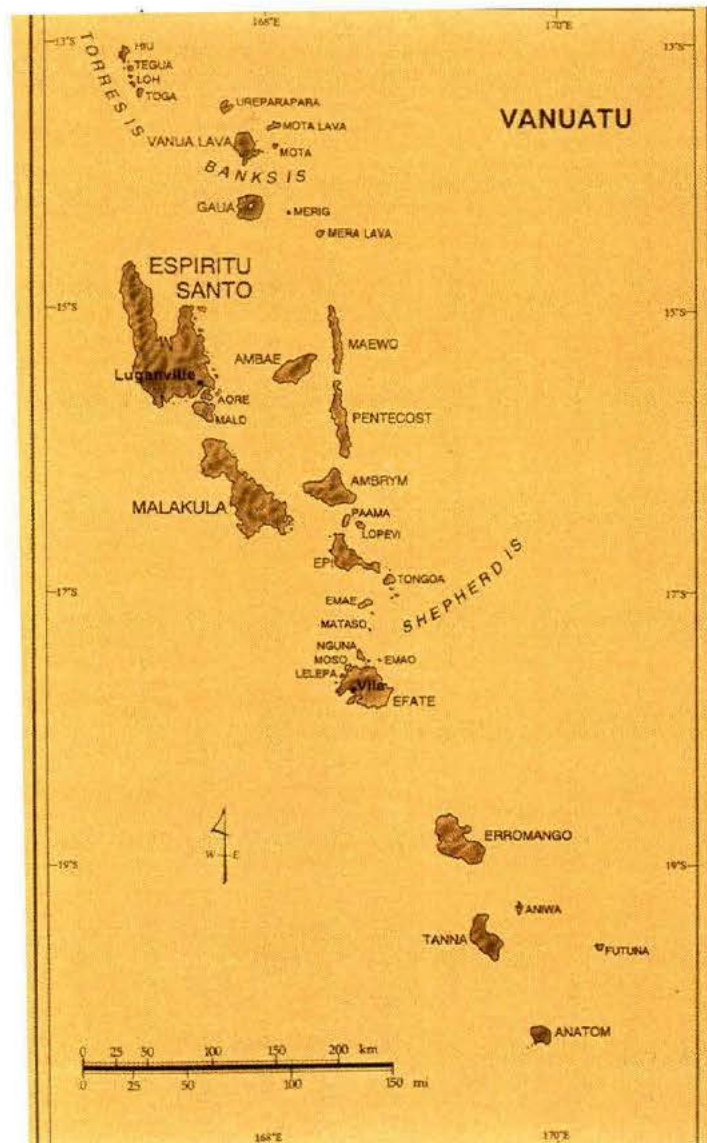
What is apparent in a survey of the literature conducted in Vanuatu is that the role of traditional music is under-researched, and there has yet to be a study of Tannese music (McLean, 1993). There is a gap in the ethnographic record of Tanna: the role of music in ceremonial practices and the implications of the phenomena are absent. The following section draws upon these studies to provide an orientation to the culture of the Tannese people.

Tanna

Tanna is located in Southern Vanuatu; the neighbouring islands of Aniwa, Futuna, Erromango, and Aneityum make up the region called TAFEA Province (see Figure 2).

Republic of Vanuatu

Figure 2. Vanuatu and surrounding islands.



Note: From *The Tree and the Canoe* (p. 11) by Joël Bonnemaïson, 1994, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. Copyright 1994 Joël Bonnemaïson and Josée Pénot-Demetry.

Tanna is the third most populated island in Vanuatu and still enjoys a traditional lifestyle despite the effects of outside influences.⁹

Of the many ceremonies and ritual celebrations practised on Tanna (initiation, pig-killing, grade-taking, marriage, funerals) the *Nekowiaar* is the most important ceremony of the Tannese, one that reaffirms the history and *kastom* of the culture (Bonnemaison, 1986/1994; Harcombe, 1991). Yet of the literature on Tanna, only the studies by Codrington (1891/1972), Bonnemaison (1986/1994, 1986, 1991), and Lindstrom (1980, 1981, 1982, 1987) briefly examine the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Despite several references that speak to the vital role music plays in Tannese ceremonial ritual and *kastom*, there is no account that specifically addresses the *Nekowiaar*, its music, or music in Tannese society.

The traditional music of ni-Vanuatu cultures, in particular that of Tanna, has received little attention by researchers. The most comprehensive studies to date (Bonnemaison, 1986/1994; Codrington, 1891/1972; Speiser, 1923/1990) examine the ethnographic aspects of culture; only brief references to music's role in society are made. Early studies of music (Clausen, 1958) were in the analytical style of the Berlin School; studies in the American anthropological tradition did not follow until the late

⁹ Descriptions of ceremonial and ritual practices are few; missionary accounts by Humphreys (1926), Paton (1889), and Rivers (1909), cited earlier, make brief references to Tanna; Forster (1777), Parsonson (1956), and Docker (1970) provided a personal reflection, and ethnographic investigations are those by Codrington (1891/1972) and Speiser (1923/1990). Studies dealing with Tanna exclusively are by Adams (1984), Bastin (1981), Bonnemaison (1986/1994, 1986–1987, 1991), Brunton (1981), Lindstrom (1980, 1981, 1982, 1987), Lynch (1977), and Rice (1972). Watt's chronicle of 25 years of missionary life on Tanna (1896) and the series of studies by Guiart (1956–1986) complete a review of the literature. All are either amateur descriptions or ethnographic studies of some aspect of Tannese culture. Speiser's description of tribal ceremonies and musical instruments and Bonnemaison's (1986/1994) account of "ethnogeography" (culture and economics) are the most exhaustive accounts; they provide a rich, in depth look at the Tannese culture.

20th century (Crowe, 1981; Thomas, 1992). These studies looked to determine the function of music and its meaning to the ni-Vanuatu. Comaroff and Comaroff said that it was crucial to examine all forms of communication in the investigation and process of understanding a given culture (cited in Bluhm, Bohlman & Neuman, 1991).

During my review of the literature and during the time I conducted research on the Tanna, I also noted that religion is an integral part of Tannese society; it is an aspect of everyday life on the island and of ritual and ceremonial activity. The following overview of Tannese society is based on an assimilation of the literature published on this subject and my own observations made while conducting research on the island, from July, 1994 to January 1995. This overview of the social, religious, economic, and political systems of the Tannese will provide the reader with an understanding of Tannese society which is necessary in order to understand the importance of ceremonial and ritual activities in this culture.

Social Systems

Social Structure

Tannese society is reconstructed to have involved three mythical periods as described by ethnographers Allen, 1981 and Bonnemaïson, 1994. The first society called *Nepro*, or the Society of the Stones, tells of the creation of man, woman, and food during a time of equality and unpartitioned political space.¹⁰ The *niel* festival was the most important ritual of this period and the largest one performed. The *niel* promoted

¹⁰ The origin of man, woman, and food is told in the account of the arrival of the *Yani Niko* (see Appendix).

the exchange of food and the ideal of equality by creating alliances of peace between neighbouring communities.

The Hawk Society was Tanna's second social form in this account. This time was one of partitioned political space and the introduction of a power hierarchy that combined Melanesian and Polynesian principals. The creation of moieties¹¹ and the districts¹² that fell under their political control created unrest among the members of each faction. For the first time, war became a dominant and frequent feature in Tannese society. To return to *Nepro*, the peace of the first society, the *Nekowiaar* exchange was created by the cultural hero Kasiken (see Bonnemaïson, 1994, pp. 146–148). His efforts were unsuccessful, and warfare continued until the arrival of the missionaries in the mid 1800s.

The third society is considered ongoing today, as the Tannese continue the struggle to maintain their traditional culture. Since the arrival of traders and missionaries (1846), negative influences such as disease, commercialism, and religious factions have threatened the existence of *kastom* living. The resulting effects included depopulation and, more recently, the desire for material wealth; both are contributing

¹¹ Moiety is a form of social organisation in two parts, more commonly termed a dual organisation. Tanna's population is based on this dual organisation which is exogamous (marriage across moieties) and, in the case of Tanna, patrilineal in descent (descent in the male lineage). (See Rivers, 1968, p. 17.)

¹² Districts are defined as groupings of up to eight villages or hamlets. The White Grass district, for instance, is a grouping of hamlets on the Western side of the island. Each of the hamlets consists of individual households and belongs to a *nakamal*.

elements in the loss of *kastom* practices.¹³ Positive influences include formal education which has given the Tannese a means to speak publicly and make policy for themselves.

Of all the societies in Vanuatu, the Tannese have been historically adept at rejecting those aspects of European influences not of use to them and adopting those aspects that were. They aborted the missionaries' attempts to live on the island for 30 years (Brunton, 1981), because the missionaries attempted to ban overt *kastom* in their initial attempts to convert the Tannese to Christianity. It wasn't until they accommodated some of the practices of *kastom* that the missionaries were allowed to establish permanent communities. Education was the only practice welcomed by the Tannese without restrictions. They saw education as a way to further empower their leaders by giving them the means to speak for their communities on governmental matters being decided by non ni-Vanuatu.

After nearly one hundred years of interference,¹⁴ the Tannese, tired of European authority and eager to return to *Nepro* (believed to be a way of returning to their traditional lifestyle), began a path of resistance that would eventually lead to a revolt and Independence for all ni-Vanuatu (Bonnemaïson, 1994). The arrival and subsequent allegiance to John Frum in 1940, believed to offer the means of integrating *kastom*

¹³ When missionaries first arrived on Tanna (1842), they attempted to institute what is known as "Tanna Law," which outlawed the practice of *kastom* beliefs held by the Tannese. Tanna Law did not come into full effect until the early 1900s, after the Christians had begun successful conversions of Tannese to Christianity. Tanna Law eventually passed with the introduction of new religious groups who were more lenient toward the practice of *kastom* practices.

¹⁴ The Sandalwood traders arrived in the Southern region of Vanuatu in 1825 continuing until 1865, the Blackbirders recruited locals for the labour trade from 1863 to 1904, the missionaries began their attempts of conversion in 1839 (on Tanna in 1842), and the French/British Condominium was formed on October 20th, 1906.

living and the material wealth of the Western world; the formation of *Nikoletan* in 1968, a local council of chiefs which set policy and settle disputes among the Tannese; and the introduction of formal politics, with the New Hebrides National Party which later became the *Vanua 'aku Pati* in 1970 to the island, are examples of the different factions the Tannese society splintered into during this time of rebellion.¹⁵

Although their bid for Independence in 1980 was successful, the elder Tannese do not believe Independence has brought about a return to the utopian time of *Nepro*, Tanna's first society. Believed to be a time of equality, peace, and unity among islanders, *Nepro* has become increasingly elusive, as members of society join new religious and political groups that create further divisions. But despite this latest trend of division and erosion of *kastom* living, the Tannese continue to maintain many *kastom* practices: they honour the traditional practice of selecting chiefs through patrilineal lineage, live according to rules pertaining to moieties and clans, and affirm cultural values by hosting various rituals and ceremonies. The history of kinship obligations remains strong; mutual help and support are expected of all Tannese and are strictly enforced by the members who constitute a hamlet. This may explain the success of cultural continuity in a society that has been under constant pressure to accept external change (Cranstone, 1961).

Social Organisation

Much has been written about the social organisation of the Tannese, and Brunton's (1989) account of Tannese society cites a number of scholars who have examined this

¹⁵ There were also numerous other factions such as the various religious denominations that were

subject (Adams, 1977, 1984, 1987; Bastin, 1981; Bonnemaïson, 1985a, 1985b; Brunton, 1979, 1981a; Guiart, 1956a; Lindstrom, 1981a, 1985; Wilkinson, 1979). While Brunton favours Lindstrom's work (feeling it is the most comprehensive to date), he has concerns regarding the classificatory system¹⁶ Lindstrom used to describe six levels of social groupings (described below). I found that although different terminology or classificatory systems have been used by scholars in the description of Tannese society, these accounts were very similar to what I observed on the island. Lindstrom's classification is the most comprehensive, but Bonnemaïson's (1994) work examined aspects of Tannese society not discussed by Lindstrom. To provide a picture of Tannese social organisation today, I have synthesised the published material on Tannese social organisation, with my own observations of this aspect of their society.¹⁷ Typical of each of the communities that make up Tannese society is the family home; a bank of titles or names; *nakamal*; the hamlet; the district; and finally the moiety.¹⁸

Nakamals are integral to the social organisation of Tannese life. On Tanna, *nakamals* are the exclusive providence of men, although women may be allowed access in times of ceremonial activities to perform or prepare food. *Nakamals* are circular, or oval-shaped areas of cleared ground that can be 50 or 60 metres in diameter—the size

functioning on the island at the time.

¹⁶ A kinship system of classifying relatives; described in chapter 3, Social Relations.

¹⁷ This synthesis is not as detailed as the accounts listed; however, it offers a capsule picture of the basic organisational structure of Tannese society.

¹⁸ Moiety on Tanna is known as *Niko* in *Bislama*, or canoe in English. There are two: Numrukuen and Koiameta (see Bonnemaïson, pp. 152–154, 1994).

varies according to the status of the *nakamal* in the district.¹⁹ The most important *nakamals* are used for hosting major rituals and exchanges such as the *Nekowiaar* or a *Niel*.

There are also a number of smaller secondary *nakamals* associated with major *nakamals* clustered in the area. Members of secondary *nakamals* are expected to assist in rituals and exchanges; they often consider themselves members of both *nakamals*, but the same is not true of members of the major *nakamals*. There are also minor *nakamals* besides these that are used occasionally for the circumcision of young boys, temporary *kava* grounds, or for hiding during times of taboo.

Each of the *nakamals* (regardless of status) is shaded by one or more *nabanga* trees and has a small hut, of local design, used for drinking *kava*. Men spend two to three hours here each evening drinking *kava*,²⁰ deciding hamlet policy, exchanging stories, and sometimes rehearsing for ceremonial events (Brunton, 1989). On the periphery of most *nakamals* are groves dedicated to spirits and groupings of hamlets²¹ that can house up to ten families.

Traditionally, hamlets were composed of two lineages linked to each other by cross-cousin marriages. Each of the lineages occupied one side of the *nakamals* and was

¹⁹ There are also differences in the status of the major *nakamal* related to specific myths. There are eight *nakamal* of this status; all are associated in some respect to the initial appearance and subsequent dispersion of the political moieties. (See Bonnemaïson 1985, pp. 32-37.)

²⁰ A narcotic substance made from the green roots of a *kava* plant, *Piper Methysticum*. This is a very potent drink; the species found on Tanna, is recognised to be the strongest in the South Pacific. When intoxicated on *kava* men reach a dream-like existence where they can converse with the supernatural.

²¹ Hamlets are the Tannese equivalent of villages.

made of a resident core of agnatically²² related males. This agnatic core, their spouses, and relatives from other hamlets make the membership of the *nakamal* (Bastin, 1981). Groups of *nakamals* are considered districts.

Intersecting the island is a system of major and minor *suatu* (roads) that link hamlet to hamlet and *nakamal* to *nakamal*. *Suatu* are the means by which the Tannese communicate messages, resources, negotiations for marriages, exchanges, rituals, meetings, and warfare; however, only those members of a hamlet whose titles give them the rights to the roads are allowed to actuate or bring them into use. Brunton (1989) wrote that the Tannese are distinctive in the way they constrain all social relations of any significance to the messages passed along these roads.

Suatu are commonly used as a metaphor for alliance. They serve as a channel for a range of communications that deal with varying aspects of Tannese communities. Marriage negotiations, for example, are conducted along *nukulu suatu* that connect two hamlets. The members of the hamlets are said to be related in a *taniel*, or cousin relationship. *Asuul suatu* join two *nakamals* for communications regarding major exchanges and dances—particularly the *Nekowiaar*. The *kualinapwir* are of lesser importance than the previous two *suatu*. Men use them to transfer goods and to relay requests to perform services.²³ The final type of road is the *niko suatu*, so called because

²² Agnatic relationships refer to men who descend by the male line, from the same male ancestor; a feature of patrilineal lineage.

²³ Services may include requests to perform a magical act to bring prosperity to crops; a request to order the composition of a song; or a request to send goods, which may include produce, livestock or mats, etc.,

of its connection with the moieties. The *niko suatu* connect distant *nakamals* that historically offered a place of refuge during times of warfare.

The names of Tanna's two moieties are Numrukuen and Koiameta.²⁴ Their traditional significance was political, and today their role is limited although they are representative of the dualism that is Tannese social structure.²⁵ At the *Nekowiaar* ceremony the moieties are symbolised by the decorations on *kava* plants, which are offered as gifts and on the *kweriya*²⁶ that are presented at the beginning of each dance. The decorations are a visual representation of the moiety affiliation.²⁷ Brunton (1989) indicates that most *nakamal* were divided evenly between the two moieties. Each grouping of *nakamal* (generally eight) within each of the moieties form districts. The creation of these districts is told in the myth of Semo Semo (see Appendix).

There are other divisions to be considered: the inland and coastal groups and a new moiety called Shipimanwawa. The influence of Shipimanwawa seems to have been strongest on the eastern side of the island around White Sands; however, investigations by Brunton (1989), Guiart (1956a), Lindstrom (1981a), and Wilkinson (1979) have all produced contradictory statements from their informants regarding its significance (see

²⁴ Numrukuen and Koiameta *Niko* were formed in the 2nd society.

²⁵ The Tannese believe that their society was originally based on two moieties, Numrukuen or Koiameta, and that all members of their culture can be traced to one of them.

²⁶ *Kweriya* are ceremonial head-dresses that are worn only by big-men (chiefs) and are exclusive to the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. They will be described in more detail in chapter 5, Description of *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

²⁷ I received this information late in my study, but I am tempted to make the assumption that the *kweriya* carried by the chiefs at *Nekowiaar* were decorated similarly, marking an affiliation to their moiety.

Figure 3). The contention between followers of Manuwar and Sipi were claims about which of the groups was first to see European ships arriving at White Sands harbour. Manuwar claimed they had been first and had seen a warship, while Sipi believed they had arrived first, and had seen a merchant ship. The general agreement today is that a ship did arrive in the harbour; what kind of ship and who saw it first remain undecided (Brunton, 1989).

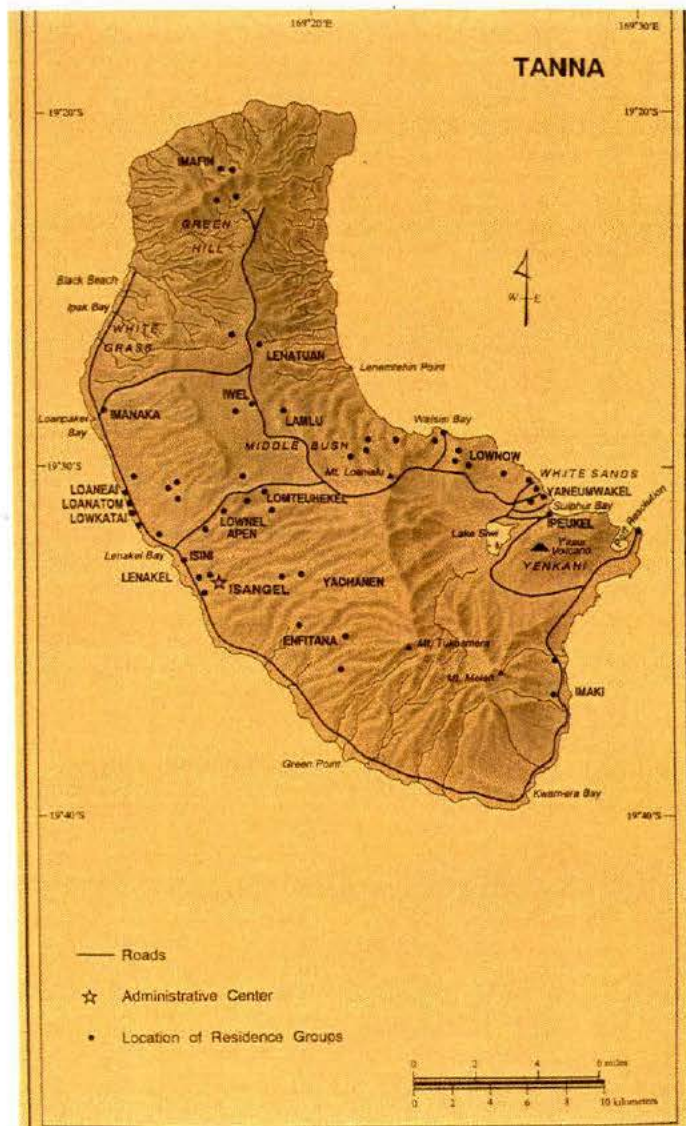
The Tannese place little emphasis on the natural division of inland and coastal communities. It is generally known that the more *kastom* areas of the island are those inland, but this is due more to their geographical position. The inland groups historically have been less exposed to influence from European contact than the coastal groups.

Social Relations

Tanna's social structure was typical of Melanesian societies in the general sense that it was stateless, lacked centralised authority, and was based on a clan system. The local organisation continues today within the new state. Membership in a clan system is determined by patrilineal descent (members believe themselves to be descended from one of two moieties); clans are exogamous (marriage is forbidden within the clan); and members may be spread among several hamlets, or a hamlet may represent a number of clans. Loyalties are strong within the system; members are expected to assist and support one another in all respects for the "good of the clan." During times of ceremonial activities, clans function as a unit; their cohesiveness is seen as a sign of alliance and prosperity. Participation of all members is obligatory to achieve this symbolism (Cranstone, 1961).

Tanna

Figure 3. Map of Tanna showing the main centres of Lenakel, Isangel, and White Sands.



Note: From *The Tree and the Canoe* (p. 107) by Joël Bonnemaïson, 1994, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. Copyright 1994 Joël Bonnemaïson and Josée Pénot-Demetry.

Definitions of kinship or systems of relationships in Melanesian communities are termed “classificatory.”²⁸ This system is different from what we know, because it is founded on a clan²⁹ or social grouping as opposed to the family unit (Rivers, 1968). A term like brother, which is limited in our society to the male children of our parents, is in the classificatory system extended to all male members of the clan (Rivers, 1961). In Tanna, “father” refers to the father, his brothers, and cousins in the male lineage; the children of all “fathers” are called “brothers” and “sisters.” Nevertheless, the division between the physiological and the classificatory fathers is clear. The former receives the respect and obligations due him, while the latter receive an attenuated form. The fathers reciprocal obligations are also treated in this manner. Continuing in this vein, there is no distinction between brothers and sisters or between first, second, or third cousins—*taniel*. It is River’s position that the terms used in this classificatory system denote relationships rather than relatives. This structure creates a network of social ties that are fundamental to the structure and stability of Tannese society (Cranstone, 1961).

Land is held both individually and communally. Title is passed through the patrilineal line and is bound to a stock of personal names owned and allocated by the hamlet. Linked to the title is the ownership of land, political and ritual office, magic and ritual knowledge, and rights to *suatu*. The rights to the use of a plot are awarded to the

²⁸ Rivers, in his account of Melanesian Society, gave a detailed description of the classificatory system as it functions in Melanesian society (1968, pp. 6-15).

²⁹ A clan is defined as an exogamous group within a community or tribe where all members are related to one another and bound together by a common tie. This may be a belief of common descent from an ancestor who is real, mythical, or a totem. In the case of the Tannese, the clan’s lineage is usually traceable back to one of two moieties: Numrukuen or Koiameta.

first member (of title) who clears it and his subsequent heirs; however, he does not have the right to dispose of it.³⁰ In the case where a lineage becomes extinct, the land will revert to the clan.

While it may appear that chiefs control group property, they do not have the right to transfer it outside of the clan. This situation is sometimes complicated by two factors: first, the trees on a property may be owned by persons other than the occupier of the land, and second, *kastom* dictates relatives or fellow clansmen can request the loan, or gift of anything they require. This system of reciprocity ensures that the balance of wealth is equal within each community. The obligations also extend to other communities through kinship relations established through marriage. In this way, theoretically, no hamlet can advance itself beyond the status of another. A system of balance between property rights and obligations is thus achieved (Cranstone, 1961).

There are seven indigenous languages on Tanna; three are widely spoken. Of the three, each is represented by the main regional divisions of the island: the North and North central area of Tanna speak related dialects; the South central area also speak related dialects; and, the area from Mt. Tukosmera and Mt. Melen southward speak a third dialect (Bonnemaison, 1994; Lynch, 1977, Tryon, 1976). *Bislama*³¹ is the local language used to communicate between tribes and with expatriates living and

³⁰ For further discussion of succession and inheritance, see the discussion of Social and Economic systems in this chapter.

³¹ *Bislama* originated with the sandalwood traders in the 1830s. It evolved as a means of communication with foreigners, and its use was further perpetuated with the arrival of missionaries in 1842. *Bislama* is now recognised as the national language, and while commerce and governmental business are conducted in English and French, *Bislama* is used in parliamentary debates (Harcombe, 1991).

working on the island. It is commonplace for a child to speak four languages: the dialects from both the mother and father, *Bislama*, and French or English—now being taught in the public school system. Children who attend high school are instructed in French, if their elementary education was in English and in English, if their elementary education was in French.

Social Activities

Despite constant interference and influences brought by foreign cultures, a traditional lifestyle is very much intact on Tanna. The only visible signs of Westernised living are vehicles and a few houses built of concrete blocks, near the government buildings in Isangel. Daily activities centre around domestic chores: collecting water and preparing food; ceremonial activities, involving the preparation and performance of ceremonies and rituals; and, for the men, tending gardens and evening *kava* drinking. A brief summary of the local authority structure and the typical daily activities of the Tannese will help explain how society and the people who form it function.

The traditional authority structure is based on hereditary chiefs whose position of authority is achieved by succession. The most powerful are *Yremera* and *Yani Niko* who have their own distinct areas of governship. Matters concerning land, marriage, and all peacetime affairs (large scale ceremonies promoting alliances between the hamlets) are the province of the *Yremera*. The *Yani Niko* is responsible for communication (between *nakamals*) along specially designated roads called *suatu*. It is said that his authority was

paramount during war time and extended beyond his *nakamal*. This power is bounded by the individual attributes and limits of affiliations the chief is able to recruit.³²

A marked division is evident between the sexes: women are relegated to tasks involving child bearing and rearing; food cultivation and preparation; household maintenance;³³ and collecting water, firewood, and vegetables from the garden. Men, besides their time in the *nakamals*, spend the day working in their gardens and are often away from home for eight to ten hours each day. Although this division of labour exists, the importance of acquiring wealth can bring men and women together to achieve a common goal such as paying school fees or covering medical costs. In this case, wealth is seen as important for the advancement and social welfare of the hamlet. Although the acquisition of wealth is important to the Tannese, little time is spent on acquiring it for individual use. The society is one based on equality, and wealth is used to ensure its future.

Local organisation is based on the hamlet, and individual households consist of a husband, his wife, and their children living under the same roof (Lawrence & Meggitt, 1965). Each family has at least two homes: one in the hamlet of the women's family and another in the man's. There is sometimes a third home, depending on whether the family has been relocated for employment. Government assignments, for example, often have housing attached to the position the family member holds. In this case, the mother and children return to their hamlet on weekends and school breaks. On extended

³² See chapter 3, The Role of Chiefs, for a description of attributes associated with the acquisition and maintenance of a chief's title.

holidays (Christmas, Easter, summer break), male children are sent back to their father's hamlet—especially if he is from a different island. Daughters remain behind and accompany the mother to her hamlet; if they are older, they will be expected to stay behind to cook for their father.

Housing in hamlets is of equal size regardless of rank. The most common type of domicile is rectangular with a dirt floor and walls made of woven pandanus.³⁴ The roof is usually constructed from grassed thatch (some homes are now using metal corrugated siding), and there is generally one room entered through a single door with no window. As a result, the huts are dark and have poor ventilation. With the exception of mats for sleeping on and hooks on the walls for hanging a few articles of clothing, furniture is non-existent. Any valuables (these consist of photographs or small items of jewellery) are usually hidden inside the thatch of the roof. Dug out beside the bed is a pit that is kept burning throughout the night for warmth.

A separate building exists for storing food and pots. This is the place where most of the families' social life takes place. Food is always prepared outside. The Tannese cook in a pit where they build a wood fire and then place fire stones on top. When the fire dies down, they rake the stones level and then cover them with a layer of papaya leaves. On top of the leaves they place the food which has been wrapped in parcels of leaves. Pigs or goats are put in whole and then covered with additional hot stones

³³ For more on the role of women, see the section on Women's Roles under Economy, chapter 3.

³⁴ Pandanus, which is sometimes called "screw pine" because of the coiled shape of the stems of the tree, is similar in shape to a palm tree, but shorter and more stout. The leaves from the tree are very strong and long lasting; they are used for making thatched roofs, baskets, and sometimes the inside walls of shelters.

handled with bamboo tongs. The cooking times are generally two to three hours for roasted vegetables and four to six hours for pigs and goats. Food is eaten by hand, and liquid is found in coconuts.

The main meal of the day is taken in the afternoon and is freshly cooked. All other meals consist of leftovers from the previous day; pieces of bread for breakfast (bought from local bread makers), or fruits from trees in the gardens where people are working. There is little protein in the diets, and staples consist mainly of vegetables, fruit, and starch.³⁵

The activities described above are typical for members of all hamlets—even for those who live in more developed or Westernised housing. The latter families (who usually have one member working in a government position or someone who is successful commercially), benefit from a number of conveniences not typically found in a traditional home. In this case, small pieces of wood furniture (tables, chairs, bookcases) and sometimes a VCR (run off a portable battery system) are owned. There may be tapped water in the house, or at least a tap on the property, and sometimes toilet and shower facilities. These modern conveniences are poorly maintained and rarely in working order because maintenance is foreign to the Tannese. The result is many instances of non-functioning discarded equipment. Much of the equipment seems to be overused. In keeping with the local belief of equality, each article must be made accessible to members of the hamlet and their relatives. While some homes possess modern facilities and equipment, the instances are few; generally, owners are those who

³⁵ Starches include potatoes, manioc, kasava, etc.,

benefit directly from elevated positions in society such as government or those who are political appointees.

Religion

Lawrence and Meggitt (1965) and Chowning (1977) wrote that it would be difficult to make a generalised statement about the religion of Melanesian cultures. Because of the varying degree of both traditional and modern religious practices in various communities, information resulting from the investigation of these practices varies too widely to make cross cultural comparisons; however, there are some consistencies. Research on the subject shows that there is a firm belief in magico-religious ideas and practices (embodied in a wealth of explanatory myths), while at the same time subscribed membership to a number of modern religious groups. There is no clear line of distinction between magic and religious practices (Humphreys, 1926; Cranstone, 1961; Habel, 1979; Lawrence & Meggitt, 1965; Oliver, 1989).

Myths are explanatory narratives that deal with the assumptions people make about the creation of the world (cosmogony) and the origin of man and women and land divisions (material and non-material phenomena). Myths concerned with cosmogony are not common in Melanesia, because the people believe that the sky, sea, and land always existed (Habel, 1979; Dixon, 1964). Creation of specific territories,³⁶and of the origins

³⁶ See Semo Semo's Myth, Appendix.

of man, woman, and food,³⁷ however, are frequent themes. There are also accounts telling of the exploits of cultural heroes and the creation of Tanna's culture.³⁸

Cultural heroes (along with spirits, ghosts, and other deities) figure prominently in Melanesian myths; this is the case in Tanna as well. These heroes are divine ancestral figures who discovered or introduced significant cultural phenomenon. Cultural heroes are essentially human but have capabilities beyond those of man. Although they did not create the world, they possess the power to shape its superficial features and are responsible for various aspects of human society and culture. The activities of cultural heroes are often related through stories of the exploits of twin brothers, one who is good, and the other who is evil (Bonnemaison, 1994).

The Tannese are prolific story tellers, and their generalised belief in spirits and tales of culture heroes are too numerous to detail here. They have myths that tell about the creation of Mt. Yasur and myths of how rites, ceremonial practices, and kinship systems originated. Semo Semo's myth, for example, describes the original division of land into districts.³⁹

Religious Practices

Ritual practices are numerous and occur regularly on Tanna. They are a prominent feature of social activities on the island and may be divided into three main categories:

³⁷ See *Yani Niko* Myth, Appendix.

³⁸ The myth of Kasiken, for example, tells of the origin of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony and of its significance to the Tannese.

³⁹ See Appendix for a full account of this myth and others that describe the feats of Tanna's cultural heroes.

rites of passage, which include birth rites, initiation rites, marriage and death rites; rites of renewal, which are concerned with the process of periodic restoration of the social order;⁴⁰ and, rites for directing power or magic.

Magic plays a significant role in the life of the Tannese, and while I did not observe specific magic rites, I was told of them. The ability to compose music, was one such story described to me by Chief *Pita*;⁴¹ rites performed by agrarian magicians (for the fertility of gardens) also figure prominently.⁴² Synonymous with magic practices is power. The expertise of those who practice it results in the ability to affect behaviours or practices which, in turn, are believed to control the social and economic welfare of the Tannese.

Belief in magic is general. Magic is either “white” or “black” depending on how it is used. White magic is practised for the good of society and may promote the success of crops, ensure good weather, or heal the sick. Black magic, or *netuk*, however, is a negative practice that is feared by the locals—even today.⁴³ The Tannese believe that the intention of sorcerers who practice black magic is to harm individuals to whom their activities are directed. Their work can cause sickness, or in extreme cases, death. Black

⁴⁰ The *Nekowiaar*, which confirms unity, fertility, and social structure, and the *Niel*, which celebrates the fertility of gardens and alliances of hamlets are examples of these rites.

⁴¹ See Roberts-Johnson, 1995 Interview with Chief *Pita*.

⁴² Without the care of these agrarian magicians who are responsible for planting and tending gardens, there is little hope of a productive harvest.

⁴³ Black Magic is performed by obtaining a fragment of the victim’s food, nail parings, hair, or anything closely associated with them. A spell is then worked and an immediate result is obtained (Cranstone, 1961).

magic is believed to be the reason for unexplained causes of misfortune (Bonnemaison, 1994).⁴⁴

Magic practices are the providence of experts called specialists; they possess the power and specialised knowledge to manipulate spirits for either constructive or destructive purposes (Oliver, 1992). Chiefs have some knowledge of magical spells, as do priests and other persons of status: sorcerers, traditional healers who use *kastom* herbs and knowledge to heal, and agrarian magicians who are responsible for the fertility of gardens (Habel, 1979). Magicians and specialists acquire specialised knowledge through succession; the extent of their knowledge is linked traditionally to their title and/or name. Once they attain a position, they are qualified to act as a mediator between the living and the spirit thus effecting positive and negative acts of magic. Individuals who do not possess these criteria must ask a specialist to act for them.

Magicians' tools are stones that are "worked"⁴⁵ for both positive and negative effects. These stones are the exclusive property of magicians and are passed from father to son in each generation; use by individuals other than their owners will result in

⁴⁴ During my time of Tanna, the principal of the local high school was accused of illegally practising black magic. He did not possess the credentials for such practices and shortly after the accusations came to a head, he died. The locals were convinced that his death had been the work of sorcery, even though there was evidence of a coronary attack. To ward off further evil spirits his home was stripped of all contents, his livestock killed, and his body returned to his island of origin for burial. His house remains empty today (September, 1997).

⁴⁵ The sorcerer must first obtain an article belonging to the individual he wishes to harm—usually the skin of a fruit recently eaten or scrap from an article of clothing. The article is then ground to a powder or broken into pieces and mixed with leaves from certain trees before it is buried in the ground. After a period of time it is dug up, and rubbed onto special stones that are then suspended over a fire. If only minor injury is desired, the powder is rubbed onto the stones and allowed to partially burn; if the powder is completely burned away, the result is death (Humphreys, 1926).

misfortune. Stones come in any variety of shapes and are used for a number of reasons. Those suggesting the shape of fruits or vegetables are called *narak*; they are placed in gardens to promote the prosperity of crops (Humphreys, 1926).

Stones are usually thought to be inanimate, but there are special circumstances when they are thought to have life. A stone that is stationary but unusual is assumed to have moved to its present position from elsewhere. In this case, the Tannese would say that it was once animate, that a spirit being or perhaps human form may be present inside, giving it the ability to move (Lawrence & Meggitt, 1965). The stones owned by sorcerers are used for black magic only. They are “worked” by sorcerers to cause harm or the death of an enemy.

Spirits and ghosts figure prominently in Tannese society; some aspect of all ceremonial activity is to ward off spirit beings (Lawrence & Meggitt, 1965). Spirits are believed to be numerous and may appear anywhere, at any time. They are capable of assuming human forms or inhabiting lakes, trees, forests, and other forms of nature. Spirits have varying degrees of power and interests that are most often used for malicious purposes (Habel, 1979).⁴⁶ However, if regular offerings of food and traditional ritual and ceremonial practices are observed, these spirits will act in ways beneficial to the community (Cranstone, 1961).

Ghosts are also spirit beings. The Tannese believe they are the keepers of deceased souls and that they remain in or around homes for eternity. Depending on whether the circumstances of a death were natural or violent, ghosts may be neutral, helpful, or

malicious (Oliver, 1989). It is the malicious behaviour of spirits that is most feared. After death, it is *kastom* for family members to stay close to the body to ward off evil spirits who will take possession of an unattended corpse (Cranstone, 1961).

While *kastom* and organised religion (as we know it) appear to be opposing ideologies, they continue to function side by side throughout Vanuatu. On Tanna, where *kastom* practices are particularly strong, the onset of religious affiliations, following the abolition of “Tanna Law”⁴⁷ have had little effect on the practice of *kastom* practices. The Tannese saw organised religion as a means to acquire a “new” kind of knowledge. When they paired the new knowledge with traditional knowledge local chiefs discovered a new power.

Knowledge, synonymous with power, is key to the acquisition and maintenance of leadership (Brunton, 1989; Bastin, 1981). Initially this dual power caused an imbalance in the hierarchical structure, as only those belonging to the Presbyterian Church had access to formal education (Bastin, 1981). With the spread of Christianity, in the early 1800s, opportunities for education increased; however, education was organised solely by religious denominations who chose students based on criteria established by church leaders, not on the traditional practices of the Tannese. The situation caused disruption in the local authority structure and wasn’t rectified until the British introduced a public

⁴⁶ Spirits are particularly angered by breaches of traditional *kastom* and are likely to punish the offender by sickness or misfortune (Cranstone, 1961).

⁴⁷ “Tanna Law” was known as the time *kastom* went into hiding. The Presbyterian Missionaries found many of the local *kastom* practices unacceptable and forbade people to practice them. The Tannese responded by taking *kastom* into “hiding,” continuing their practices in the bush out of the eyes of the missionaries (Brunton, 1981, pp. 366–371). Religious denominations functioning currently on Tanna include: Presbyterian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Baha’i, Assembly of God, and Seventh Day Adventist.

school system in 1971. Leaders who acquired their positions through the church hierarchy (outside of the traditional system of succession) were no longer more powerful than traditional chiefs. Education was now available to all, negating the imbalance of opportunities.⁴⁸

Of the many religious denominations functioning on the island, the John Frum Cargo Cult has the most influence on contemporary social and political life. Introduced in the late 1930s in the Green Point area of South-west Tanna, the imaginary American figure, John Frum, was believed by the Tannese to be a real spirit who appeared in almost total darkness and spoke in an unrecognisable falsetto voice making exciting promises and encouraging the island men who came to see him to revive the traditional *kastom* that had been prohibited by the missionaries. Brunton (1989) claims the Cargo Cult was an “attempt by pagans to halt and reverse a process of progressive social disintegration which came about because Tannese Christians refused to participate in traditional marriage exchanges [as opposed to] the standard explanation [that] sees the John Frum movement as an expression of Tannese desires for a better material life and freedom from oppression at the hands of Europeans” (Brunton, 1981, pp. 357–358). Whereas most cargo cults throughout the Pacific have been short lived movements which lose credibility when prophecies fail, the John Frum movement on Tanna has become firmly established (Allen, 1981). The promise of continuing a *kastom* lifestyle

⁴⁸ Although access to public primary schools is available to all, only 20–25 % of children have access to junior secondary school; secondary enrolment is only 17 %.

while someday acquiring the wealth of modern cultures is a powerful ideology that binds members to this community.⁴⁹

Despite the numerous religious groups practising on Tanna and the prevalent followings of local Tannese, the practice of local *kastom* remains prevalent.

Economic Concerns

Tanna's economy is based primarily on subsistence agriculture. The entire population cultivate gardens to supply food for personal consumption and ceremonial activities. Few commercial ventures have been successful; the export of copra ceased shortly after 1929, and the future of Tanna Coffee is questionable at present. Today, tourism brings visitors to the island to see the John Frum Village and to visit the active volcano Mt. Yasur. However, visits are usually limited to one night, and land disputes (regarding access to the mountain and land where local resorts are operating) have been disruptive (Bastin, 1981).

The economic concerns of the Tannese have traditionally been tied to the local authority structure and how it functions in the realisation of Tannese social welfare. There are many levels of this structure, but the highest order of chiefs are recognised as the governing power of matters concerning traditional *kastom*. The success of their activities, in both national and local political affairs, and in their maintenance of traditional cultural life are paramount to the social welfare of the Tannese.

⁴⁹ See Brunton (1981) for a discussion on the origins of the John Frum movement on Tanna.

The Role of Chiefs

A Tannese chief, or big-man, was traditionally called a *Yremera*. Today the Tannese generally use the term chief to refer to anyone with the title of chief unless the status of the chief is in question; in this circumstance the chief will be identified as a big-man or *Yremera*. Tanna has approximately 1,000 chiefs; one for each hamlet, and another (big-man) for each grouping of four hamlets (Harcombe, 1991, p. 135). Achieving the status of big-man is determined by two factors: succession and certain criteria.

Succession is inherited through a patrilineal lineage that can be traced back to membership in the *Yani Niko* Canoe.⁵⁰ Members of this lineage are considered to be directly related to the origin of man on Tanna and are therefore bestowed with honour and respect. Although leadership titles are hereditary, the criteria for these positions are the possession of specialised knowledge and the ability to exercise it. Magical knowledge is used to increase the welfare of the hamlet; ritual knowledge is necessary so the chief can lead the members of his *nakamal* in times of ritual ceremony; and the knowledge used by mediators is employed to protect the group in times of war.

At the time of European contact, hereditary succession of leadership became threatened. Bastin (1981), in his investigation of Weasisi hamlet on the East coast of Tanna, described how three Tannese achieved the position. The first individual was

⁵⁰ Traditionally, the *Yani Niko* canoe was said to represent three powers: the *Yremera* who governed land, marriages, and peace time affairs, through the staging of large scale ceremonies; the *Yani Niko* who was responsible for governance of the roads of alliances (*suatus*) and of *nakamal* during times of warfare; and the *Naotupumus* who worked the magic of agrarian stones, assuring the prosperity of food. (See *Yani Niko* Myth, Appendix).

recognised through his patrilineal lineage and had the support of his hamlet; the second had a claim to traditional position in the area but was able to recruit further support from more than one hamlet; the third (who had no claim to traditional leadership) used his Western education and position in the church hierarchy to create a following based on his ability to promote economic welfare for his community.

Chiefs on Tanna today may or may not possess a combination of the criteria described above. During my observations, like Bastin, I found evidence of the three types of leadership functioning on the island—each had a local following. Tannese who have been converted decide individually which leadership to follow and live in hamlets governed by their religious affiliation or ideology. What is interesting, though, is that within this context there is also a traditional chief, and a big-man still has the authority over the hamlets associated with his traditional position. This was especially evident during ceremonial functions or land claims. Only big-men are allowed to be part of the councils that debate these issues.

A chief must meet a number of criteria to maintain his position. Although he may have inherited his position through his lineage, he must earn the respect of his those in his hamlet by demonstrating his specialised knowledge. The ability to act as an advisor on all traditional *kastom* practices is paramount: he must prove himself capable of documenting local cultural knowledge, possess the ability to educate others in his hamlet, and be able to actualise this knowledge by hosting large scale ceremonial events. Once a chief achieves this position of respect, he has the authority to regulate the behaviour of his villagers and will use magic skills that are known only to him to achieve the desired behaviours.

Chiefs maintain their power by accumulating exclusive knowledge of cultural practices, magical spells, and successful mediation of alliances⁵¹ in their areas of governance. A new factor to emerge in this generation of chiefs is the acquisition of skills from formal Western education: the ability to read and write in English and French. These skills have further enhanced their ability to accurately record local cultural knowledge, ensure permanent documentation, and provide opportunities to represent the position of Tanna in matters of politics and acquiring economic wealth (Bastin, 1981).

Women's roles

Women also play a vital role in the economy of Tannese society even though their position in the community is relegated to household duties. Tannese women work considerably harder than their male counterparts, and their life expectancy, as a result, is generally shorter.⁵² Duties include fetching water, an onerous task that may involve up to walking 5 km, filling containers, and then carrying them home and all aspects of domestic housework, gardening, and child bearing.⁵³ These activities are what sustain the community.

⁵¹ Alliances such as personal relationships, marriages, warfare etc.,

⁵² Harcombe (1991, p. 40) states that elderly ni-Vanuatu women over 60 are outnumbered by men three to two; 80% of women are under age 35, and 57% are younger than 20.

⁵³ Today the average number of children born by one woman is six to seven. In the previous generation, as many as 12-15 children could be considered the norm.

The bride price of a woman is based on her lineage, kinship, and attractiveness. These factors may determine a price of several hundred thousand *vatu*,⁵⁴ two to three *kava* plants, and five to ten pigs. The marriage of women serves two purposes: (a) the bride price she brings is a means by which her family can enrich themselves, and (b) her work for her husband (tending gardens, providing food, and bearing children) contributes to the successful increment of his assets and social position (Harcombe, 1991). In some cases, the bride price can be avoided if two men exchange sisters. Today the practice of polygamy is, to my knowledge, non existence.⁵⁵

Gardens

Tanna's gardens are closely associated with both the economic and religious beliefs of the Tannese. Gardening on Tanna is still based on a traditional model; gardens are harvested for food and for the production of goods used in the gift exchange of ceremonial events. Land on Tanna is particularly conducive to agricultural production, and the Tannese are often heard to say "Anything will grow on Tanna."

Crops such as kumara, yams, pawpaws, bananas, and *kava* are grown on *kastom* owned plots of land located a short distance from the hamlet tended by family members. The location is often determined by exposure to sun and access to water. Livestock (pigs, chickens) and fruit bearing trees (mango, pawpaw) may appear to be unattended; however, all are the possession of specific hamlets. Helping yourself is considered an

⁵⁴ Approximately \$300 in 1997 Canadian funds.

⁵⁵ This practice was common among those of position in the community before the arrival of the missionaries who viewed this as an inappropriate practice.

offence and should be avoided. At the same time, growing a surplus of food enables survival through times of drought and distribution during gift exchanges.

With the cultivation of less traditional crops introduced by Europeans, modern gardens are becoming more popular; they require less of the specialised skills of agrarian magicians in their production.⁵⁶ Modern gardens still cultivate traditional foods such as yams and taro, but new additions can include manioc, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes, pineapple, potato, and cucumber (Cranstone, 1961). Foods produced in both traditional and modern gardens (in excess of what is needed for the hamlet) are sold at the market in Lenakel two days a week.

Employment

With the onset of education, more Tannese have acquired the skills needed to apply for jobs off the island. While this may mean relocation to Vila and in some cases relocation to other areas in the South Pacific, such opportunities are seen as a positive development. There are few employment opportunities on Tanna, and the reality of funds needed to pay school fees and sometimes health care costs make money income necessary. Jobs on the island are mainly positions in locally run commercial ventures (rooming houses and shops), and government positions (hospital and political offices). In the case of the latter, assignments are most often based on political appointments,⁵⁷ not on qualifications.

⁵⁶ Moneys received from the sale of produce is minimal but would go to the hamlet. Uses include school fees or transportation for sick family members to the capital of Vila, on Efate Island.

⁵⁷ Political appointments are based on kinship and lineage. At times, assignments are appropriate, but in many instances they are not. Many individuals abuse the privileges associated with a position (for example, misuse of government vehicles, monetary funds, goods, etc.).

Those working in Vila and in some cases New Zealand and Australia are expected to send home money for their hamlet monthly. These funds are used to fund the education of another child who has shown promise. In most cases the child is male. While this obligation may be of benefit for those on Tanna, the financial hardship for their relatives working away from the island is problematic. Tannese in these positions find living costs high and are often unable to make ends meet. Given these circumstances, many Tannese will return to the island, take up residency in their hamlets, and work on the land.

Politics

Government

At the time of my departure (January, 1996) the political climate was highly charged. A local and national election had been held and the results of both were undecided. The local election had occurred two years previously, but an accusation of misappropriation of the handling of ballots had been charged. The result was an overthrow of the local TAFEA government⁵⁸ who had yet to vacate offices during my stay on Tanna; expectations were that with completion of the national election, the local council would be forced out by incoming elected members.

The Republic of Vanuatu gained its Independence from the British/French Condominium on July 30, 1980. It has a single legislative chamber, which sits in Vila and is comprised of 46 members who are elected to a four-year term. The prime minister and eight members of the Council of Ministers [all of whom must be elected members

of parliament] make up the cabinet. The head of state (Vanuatu) is the president, who is elected by an electoral body composed of members of parliament, and presidents who represent the 11 regional (local government) councils. There is also a national Council of chiefs called the *Malvatu Mauri*. This body advises on all constitutional matters related to Vanuatu's traditional *kastom*. Locally there is the *Nikoletan* (local island council of big-men) that functions similarly for Tanna (Harcombe, 1991).

There are three main political party groupings in Vanuatu. The majority party, since shortly before Independence, has been the *Vanua 'aku Party*; however, during the 1995 election, opposition parties were expected to be successful in their challenge. These parties include the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), National Unity Party, (NUP), and Unity Front (formerly *Vanua 'aku Pati*).

The judicial system is based on British law, with most routine legal matters dealt with before the magistrates courts; there is a Supreme Court for more serious cases. At the lower level, there are six island courts presided over by big-men.⁵⁹ They deal with minor offences, disagreements over interpretations of local *kastom*, and land ownership disputes.

The Tannese are serious about politics; large scale campaigns, lengthy speeches by prime ministerial hopefuls, and daily meetings of men (at their local *nakamal*) to discuss political developments are typical during election time. Candidates are chosen by the

⁵⁸ TAFEA is the name that represents the five islands that make up the Southern region of Vanuata. The islands of the region are: Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango, and Aniwa.

⁵⁹ This is known as the *Nikoletan* on Tanna. The presiding chiefs were big-men chiefs of lower rank would not meet the criteria for this position. Only those with direct lineage to the *Yani Niko* meet the criteria for this council.

attributes described as necessary for a big-man, and government officials, in fact, are seen in much the same light. Their power rests in their ability to do things for their respective communities.⁶⁰

Lenakel District

Case Study Area

The area of investigation that I focused on for this study is known as the Lenakel district which is located in the South-western region of Tanna. The local dialect is the Lenakel dialect (see Bonnemaion, 1994; Tryon, 1976); however, many of the locals are versed in *Bislama* and those of the younger generation also speak some English or French depending on the school they attend. The Lenakel area is considered the main area of Tanna for commerce and political activity. Situated in or nearby the small village is the airport, hospital, and local government offices at Isangel. Lenakel is more modern compared to inland villages which are more traditional in all aspects of culture because of its coastal location. Historically these areas (including White Sands on the South-eastern coast) were more assessible to missionaries and traders because their location provided easy access to newcomers. Inland centers such as Middle Bush were unlikely to be approached because their remote location may hamper efforts to flee in the event of a hostile reception. Today, Lenakel continues to see the effects of Western influence due to the influx of tourism and this is also where expatriate volunteer workers are located.

⁶⁰ For instance if a *man-Tanna* were elected to a federal position, it would be expected that good things would come to Tanna as a result of that appointment.

Although Tanna is not a large island (561 sq km) it is the most populated in Vanuatu with more than 20,000 residents in 1995 (Bonnemaison, 1994). The birth rate is high (32 per thousand per year), and overpopulation has become an issue with land shortages, particularly in the coastal areas where many of the younger Tannese like to relocate. My investigations were conducted in this region, with distances between Isangel, Lenakel centre, and the villages of Lénamer, Létawus, and Ikaoras separated from each other by an hour's walk. The site for the *Nekowiaar* ceremony and the site for *Menuk*, however, were both located further away from these areas. Each required an hour's drive with an additional 10 to 15 minute walk to reach the Ipai *nakamal* and the Lownapik Mita *nakamal*.⁶¹ Although the Lenakel area may be considered the more modern centre of the island, few modern influences are seen. Modernities include some small homes fashioned from concrete building blocks (mostly in areas established for expatriate workers), locals clothed in Western styled t-shirts and pants, and more wide spread usage of *Bislama*, French, and English although the latter is spoken primarily by local politicians, school teachers, and members of the younger generation who are learning vocabulary in the English schools.

In regards to local cultural activity Lenakel remains as active as the Northern and South-eastern areas of the island, and there is a strong belief in the need for continued *kastom*. It is my belief that while there is a desire for *kastom* to continue the Tannese also wish to obtain some aspects of Western society, particularly the ability to read and

⁶¹ Even though the distance to the Ipai *nakamal* is only a little further than the rehearsal villages, that necessity of using a vehicle to reach the *nakamal* requires even more time to cover the distance due to the state of the roads.

write in English and mathematical skills. But while these skills are considered assets to society, there is also a fear and resentment of their ability to be influenced negatively by Western influences. Traditionally this has been the case for Tanna, the coastal areas adjusting to the effects of Western influences, and the inland areas more traditional in their lifestyle because of the lack of direct contact with outside influences.

My observations occurred most often in the early morning at the villages, before the sun became too hot. Each of the villages is located a five to ten minute walk in from the road. Each of the villages consisted of five to fifteen thatched one room huts and was surrounded by immense *nabanga* trees which provided much needed shade throughout the day. Beside each of the villages is a small *nakamal* for local meeting and drinking of *kava*, and close by there is a larger *nakamal* which serves to host neighbouring village members during ceremonial and ritual events.

I found that the villages were most active in the mornings when both the men and women were present. Rehearsals began early and concluded usually by early afternoon. At that time the village members would often re-locate to their gardens to collect food for the evening meal and also go in search of water to carry back to the village. At the end of the day the men go off to drink *kava* and the women, and children walk to the ocean to bathe and wash clothes. Fresh water is a rarity on the island and this time at the local beaches serves to be a social gathering for women, apart from their daily chores, and play time for children.

Despite the differences between coastal and inland communities the Tannese remain a unified society in many respects. During my observations in the villages where I conducted my field work and in inland villages when I accompanied my husband on

his medical rounds, I noted that the *Nekowiaar* was equally revered and uniformly believed to be representative of what is believed to be Tanna's *kastom*. The origins of the *Nekowiaar* are based in the first society, *Nepro*, when the network of relationships that make up the society were based on an obligatory system; individuals were expected to take part in a reciprocal relationship with all members in their hamlets and with relatives in neighbouring hamlets. No one individual could advance to a position of wealth or power over another unless it was for the good of the hamlet. In turn, the hamlet was then expected to contribute its new found wealth to the district, which ultimately benefits all of members of Tanna's society.

While in theory this reciprocal relationship may be eroding, my observations show it to be relatively intact today with the emphasis on a *kastom* actualisation of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony; how long this can continue, however, is uncertain. In this present generation there are signs of unrest: young Tannese are regularly leaving the island for work and not returning; material wealth [in the form of western goods] is becoming more evident; and, there has been a marked increase in fence building, reflecting disputes over land claims. In these instances, some individuals are becoming wealthier than others. The effect is an erosion of reciprocity culture that I expect will continue.

Despite this new threat to *kastom*, the Tannese continue to nurture the preparation and performance of ritual and ceremonial practices such as the *Nekowiaar*. Because they believe the ceremony to be representative of all Tanna's *kastom* and the most accurate record of their past and present history, maintenance and documentation of the ceremony become vital to the continuity of culture.

As it becomes increasingly difficult for the Tannese to maintain a *kastom*-oriented lifestyle, the chiefs of *Nikoletan* look for ways to obtain permanent documents of local *kastom*. In my role as a researcher I was able to provide the technical and academic skills needed to produce such a document—one that would record the events of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Mindful that I was acting as a facilitator I employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology. Discussed further in the following chapter, this interpretive methodology aims to study the phenomena in their context and to understand the phenomena from the frame of reference of the participants.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) use *qualitative research* as an umbrella term referring to a number of strategies that share certain characteristics. Data are collected from interviews, conversations, and observations providing descriptive accounts from the perspective of the individuals involved. In this application, an attempt is made to study the phenomenon in its context, to establish a focus rather than test a hypothesis, and to be concerned with understanding the behaviour from the subject's own frame of reference. Approaches employed in qualitative research include: *ethnography*, *participant observation*, *interviewing*, *case study*, *interpretation*, and *description*. While these strategies may be considered qualitative in their approach, the techniques employed within each may vary depending on the user and location of the study. In the theoretical differences between approaches, many qualitative researchers reflect some aspect of a phenomenological viewpoint (Bogdan & Biklen). This study of a Tannese ritual uses a phenomenological perspective as described by Martin Heidegger (see Osborne, 1994, pp. 167–189).

In phenomenological research, the researcher makes a focussed attempt to understand the meaning of events from individuals' perspectives. Researchers try to "bracket" their presuppositions about the experience investigated and set aside their biases in an attempt to understand the essential meaning of the experience from the participants' views. Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying: "They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of

their subjects to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 34). This approach provides an “insider perspective.” Sources of data are primarily written protocols, such as interviews, observations, diaries, and autobiographies that are descriptive of the experiences investigated. Analysis is inductive, using a constant comparative method (hermeneutic circle) and self reflection by the researcher. The final product is a synthesis of the essential experience in the form of a written narrative.

If fieldwork is considered to be the most critical stage of ethnomusicological research—the eyewitness report, the foundation upon which all results rest—then the selection of a methodology that will facilitate this process is critical (Myers, 1992). Fieldwork is also a key concept associated with phenomenology and involves the collection of data from living informants, unlike historical musicology which is based on data collected from archives and libraries. Nevertheless, researchers in both disciplines work with recordings, transcribed interviews, field notes, photographs, film, and video materials, in an attempt to draw a picture of the phenomenon they investigate.

Each qualitative study is individual in nature; all projects, however, share certain features. For ethnomusicologists, the field may be a geographical or linguistic area; an ethnic group; a hamlet, town or city; a desert or jungle; a tropical rain forest; or Arctic tundra. All fieldwork may include performance, both musical and cultural (rituals and ceremonies of traditional life) as well as performances staged especially for the scholar (informal conversations, interviews, and recording sessions). For phenomenologists the field is the world of the participant, the everyday situation in which the person functions. The primary concern is the illumination of the phenomenon investigated—the insider

view. This perspective is achieved by time in the field and involves an aspect of performance. Finally, both ethnomusicologists and phenomenologists collect data by recording written accounts of their observations (field notes), music recordings, cassettes of interviews, still photographs, film and video, or by an informant through a variety of interview models. An informant is an older term for a person who supplies information and, in phenomenological studies, today generally is called a participant or co-researcher (Myers, 1992, p. 23).

Ethnomusicological research is enhanced by phenomenological methodology. Its strategies—fieldwork, interview, participant observation, and bracketing—facilitate access to the participant's world and an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participant Observation

Participant observation has traditionally been a methodology associated with the natural sciences. Jorgensen (1989) stated: "there is nothing to prevent the reader from using participant observation simply as a method of collecting data within an otherwise quantitative conception of theory and research" (p. 9). This methodology also can be a strategy for gaining access to phenomena that are usually obscured from the non-participant standpoint; participant observation is an especially appropriate means for relatively non-intrusive collection and observation of data in anthropological and social sciences research.

Jorgensen (1989) stated that participant observation is appropriate for research when little is known about the phenomenon and when the phenomenon is somehow

obscured from the view of outsiders. Jorgensen also defined and illustrated seven distinctive features to this methodology:

1. A special interest in human meaning and interaction is viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of a particular situation and setting.
 2. The foundations of inquiry and method are the everyday life situations and settings of the phenomenon under investigation.
 3. The theory of such investigations stress the interpretation and understanding of human existence.
 4. The logic and process of investigations and analysis are open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and require constant redefinition of what is problematic. The research is also based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence.
 5. An in-depth, qualitative, case study approach and design is used.
 6. The performance of a participant's role or roles involves establishing and maintaining relationships with the natives in the field.
 7. Direct observation is used along with other methods of gathering information.
- (1989, pp. 12–14)

Direct observation is the primary means of collecting data in participant observation; however, the researcher generally employs other strategies as well. Jorgensen also states that data collected through informal and formal interviews, casual conversations, documents, and artifacts are additional valuable sources of information.

These strategies provide means of gaining an understanding from the insider's perspective. It is important to note that, from a phenomenologist's perspective, structured interviews or prepared questionnaires are particularly inappropriate as these methods tend to impose a structure on the context of response. The phenomenologist's ultimate concern is entrance to the inside world and the attempt to bracket assumptions (Giorgi, 1975).

As the ni-Vanuatu of Tanna have not been the focus of many studies, attempts to gain an insider's perspective have been problematic. Largely a function of traditional culture, their ceremonial and ritual *kastom* are a personal and private experience. Male initiation rites and the male *kava* ceremony are examples of rituals from which an outsider is excluded. Some celebrations (such as the *Nekowiaar* festival) are open to outsiders, but even this ceremony is known mainly by rumour. The actual date is announced just before the event, by word of mouth, making it difficult for an outsider to be present.

The *Nekowiaar* is a celebration of restoring old friendships and making new ones. It also brings together clan leaders from neighbouring hamlets to arrange marriages between young people. These negotiations can continue for several months after the ceremony is finished. The outsider, of course, is able to observe the role that music plays in the ceremony (its use) and from this observation attempt to analyse and interpret its functions.

As explained in chapter 2, Merriam (1964) explored the definition of uses and functions in music and held that there is an important distinction between the two: **uses** refer to the situation in which music is employed in human action (accompaniment,

means of documenting local *kastom*), and **functions** concern the reasons for the use of music, and the contributions it makes to the total picture (for example, entertainment or contribution to continuity and stability of culture). He also referred to two authors' perspectives on this theory of function: Nadel and his viewpoint from the social sciences (1951) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and his standpoint from the anthropological stance (in Merriam, 1964, pp. 210–220). Merriam suggested combining both perspectives and proposed ten functions of music as distinguished from the uses of music. He believes that what ethnomusicologists are searching for are answers to what music does for and in human society. The functions Merriam described or listed are:

- emotional expression
- aesthetic expression
- entertainment
- communication
- symbolic representation
- enforcing conformity to social norms
- validation for social institutions
- religious rituals
- contribution to the continuity of culture
- contribution to the stability of culture
- contribution to the integration of society

In summary, to Merriam music provides a point around which the members of a society gather to engage in activities that require the co-operation and co-ordination of the

group: “Every society has occasions signalled by music that draw its members together and reminds them of their unity” (p. 227).

Music’s use in the *Nekowiaar* appears to provide accompaniment to the dance segment of the festival (Harcombe, 1991); its function, however, is something at which we as outsiders can only guess. Is it a function of entertainment, communication, or does the music play an active role in the unifying aspect of friendships from neighbouring clans? The insider perspective—the reason and contribution that music makes to the ceremony—is not directly accessible to the outsider. Efforts to access the insider perspective are possible only by extended time in the field and by ethnographic strategies such as participant observation and interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an objective means of systematically searching and arranging data derived from written documents, transcriptions of verbal communications, and other material accumulated in qualitative studies. Data analysis involves working with data and breaking them down into manageable units, searching for patterns, and discovering what is important to be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The process can be applied to either quantitative or qualitative studies but can also be used for a combination of both (Berg, 1989). The methodology employed in this study in particular is the phenomenological perspective of Giorgi (1975). Giorgi states that there is no *a priori* definitive method for analysing a protocol; the researcher must be free to modify the methodology depending on the phenomenon under investigation.

Polkinghorne (1983) described the process of data analysis typically used in phenomenological literature (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975). Referred to as

thematization (the thematic analysis of data) this methodology is the process of searching for essential structures that identify themes that appear in descriptions related to the phenomenon under investigation. In his article, “Phenomenological Research Methods,” Polkinghorne listed Giorgi’s steps of thematization:

1. The researcher reads over the protocol (transcribed text) to become familiar with the data and get a sense of the whole.
2. Each protocol is then reduced to simple paraphrases, meaning units (see Table 1). This process requires the researcher’s judgement in seeking natural divisions in the text, not those imposed by expectations of a theoretical position.
3. The theme of each sentence is then interpreted and clustered in a way similar to rational factor analysis “1st transformation” (see Table 1). Transformations are re-descriptions of meaning units. The researcher tries to state as simply as possible the meaning that dominates the natural unit. This is the first time the researcher’s words are used to interpret the phenomenon.
4. At this stage the meaning units and themes are questioned in relationship to the phenomenon being investigated. The question under investigation is applied to each unit and its accompanying first transformation. This process is known as the “2nd transformation” (see Table 2) in which the researcher draws from each unit of the protocol those aspects that are related to the topic under investigation and re-describes these aspects in the language of phenomenological science.

5. Once the meaning units have been transformed, the researcher works to tie them together into a descriptive statement. This synthesis involves integrating the list of final transformed meaning units into a consistent and systematic general description of the experience under investigation. The statement should be an essential, non-redundant intuitive “grasping” of the whole.
6. This step is the development of a description at the generalised level. The particulars reported in the protocol are left out. The description focuses on those aspects of the experience that speak to the *generalizability* of the experience as it applies in most situations of most people.
7. Giorgi advocated the use of multiple participants to illuminate the essential structure. He believes that in variation and subsequent analysis we will be better able to see what is essential. (1983, pp. 53–55)

The final step in the case of multiple analysis of protocols may be addressed in two ways: (a) the researcher moves through six steps with each protocol, developing a description at the generalised level for each; and (b) the meaning units can be directly transformed from the various protocols into a final description. This process is called a within person analysis.

8. The final synthesis (general structural description) may be presented in tabular or written format. Most important in this final step is the sharing of the synthesis with the participants. (1983, p. 55)

The following tables present Giorgi’s perspective of thematic analysis as described by Polkinghorne (1983). (See chapter 6 for examples of the use of this analysis.)

Table 1: Emergent Themes in Original Protocol, 1st and 2nd Transformations

Meaning Units	1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation

Note. The 1st column represents the natural meaning unit from the verbatim transcript. Column 2 presents emerging themes (1st transformation) and column 3 presents the re-clustered 2nd transformation.

Table 2: 2nd and 3rd Transformations

2 nd Transformation	3 rd Transformation

Note: Following the delineation of emergent meaning units from the original transcripts the themes identified in the 1st and 2nd order transformations, are again clustered into a 3rd transformations.

Table 3: 3rd and 4th Transformations

3 rd and 4 th Transformations

Note: Prior to discussion of the findings a final table is developed in which 3rd order themes are clustered into four dominant themes (4th transformation) supported by the 3rd order transformations as subheadings. Caution is exercised to refer continually to the

original protocol to ensure validity of the findings in synthesising themes into the narrative.

The questions of reliability and validity in qualitative studies are addressed by a number of scholars (Berg, 1989; Maxwell, 1992; Wertz, 1986). Problems associated with reliability and validity stem from assumptions based on natural science standpoints. Natural science is based on explanation, control, and prediction, while phenomenology seeks the meaning and understanding of human experience.

Reliability in phenomenological studies depends on the researcher's ability to argue a particular interpretation as persuasively as possible, supported by reference to the data. Reliability is always context bound. Although there may be different perspectives on the same phenomenon, a unified description can be found. Stable meaning can transcend variable facts (Osborne, 1990). The final judgement is that of the reader, who determines whether the position taken by the researcher is supported by the argument presented (Kvale, 1983).

There are four major ways in which validity can be addressed in a phenomenological study. First, by a process termed bracketing. In this process researchers shelve their presupposed ideas of the phenomenon by describing their "presuppositions" or "foreknowledge."

Second, during the collection of data and the process of analysis, it is important to check for "goodness of fit" with the participants. This process ensures congruence of the researcher's interpretations, with participants' accounts of their experiences.

Third is the “juridical process” of checking interpretation of the data. In the generalised description, the researcher’s arguments must be coherent and convincing. Readers must be convinced that interpretations are supported by the data.

Fourth, it is important that the interpreted synthesis resonates with the experiences of other people not in the study who have experienced the phenomenon. Variances will appear, but an overall generalizability should be apparent (Osborne, 1990).

Research Strategies

This study of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, then, employs a qualitative approach that emphasises discovery, description, and meaning, as opposed to stressing the importance of prediction, control, and measurement used in quantitative approaches. Ethnography, participant observation, interviewing, case study, interpretive, and descriptive strategies are used with a phenomenological perspective to facilitate a study of people and their *kastom* in relationship to the *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

While strategies associated with a qualitative approach are best suited to a study which seeks the insider perspective (lifeworld) of a phenomenon, a study of this kind can be difficult at the onset. Obtaining permission to conduct the study, securing access to the field of study, and locating co-researchers were a challenge. The following is a personal account of my experience in Tanna as I attempted to gain access to the field and locate co-researchers for this study.

Entering the field

When I first arrived on Tanna (July 4, 1995) I was concerned about gaining access to the field and how I would be received by the Tannese. I had been told, before leaving Canada, that the *Nekowiaar* was set to occur sometime during the six months my

husband and I expected to be on the island. We were also aware that this *Nekowiaar* was of particular importance to the Tannese. When we arrived, locals told us that the previous year's *Nekowiaar* (held in the central region of the island) had been organised as a tourist affair. The traditional leaders were upset with the organisers because many of the *kastom* practices associated with the festival were not observed. The importance of this year's *Nekowiaar* was to recreate the ceremony strictly observing all *kastom* and not for commercial reasons.

Within our first week on the island I conducted an informal interview at a soccer game my husband and I attended. We sat with Pastor Willy Koriza⁶² and his wife Estelle (who works as a nurse at Lenakel Hospital) throughout the game. When I expressed my interest in the *Nekowiaar* they happily talked with me about the ceremony. Willy confirmed what I had heard about *Nekowiaar*—that last year's ceremony had been organised for tourists. He said he was concerned for the continued practice of *kastom*; he said it was very important to maintain traditional ways.

By the end of the soccer game, Willy had given me an outline of what to expect at the upcoming *Nekowiaar*, what had not been traditional at last year's event, and what it took to prepare properly for a traditional *Nekowiaar* (W. Koriza, personal communication, July 8, 1995). I also received an invitation to attend rehearsals for the women's *Napen-Napen* that were occurring close to his hamlet at Lénamer. The practices were scheduled for three days a week, beginning at 9 a.m. and finishing at 3 p.m.

⁶² Pastor Willy Koriza is a former Minister of Health with the *Vanua'aku Pati*.

The following Monday I asked Dorry (our house girl) if she thought it would be all right for me to attend the rehearsals. Even though I had received an invitation, I felt uncomfortable about going. Dorry assured me that it was fine and suggested we go together the next morning. She thought it was amusing that I was interested in attending the rehearsals but agreed to help me anyway. She confirmed Pastor Koriza's information that the rehearsals were held at Lénamer. The hamlet was located just below hers (Lownapik Mita), and both belong to a general grouping known as the Airport hamlets.

The next morning (July, 18) we set out for Lénamer. I packed my recorder, notepad, and camera; I wasn't sure if I would be able to use the equipment but thought it best to be prepared. The drive there was interesting. After passing the town centre, we drove a further 10 minutes before turning off on a small road that looked more like a trail. Shortly after that, we started to climb steeply, and I considered putting the jeep into 4-wheel drive; however, the road evened out unexpectedly, and we found ourselves at the edge of a *nakamal*.

The *nakamal* was an area 50 to 60 metres in circumference, with a hard dirt packed floor surrounded by three immense *nabanga* trees. At one end was a small thatched roof building with walls made of woven *pandanus* leaves. There was a crude table fashioned outside the front door of the structure on which sat a number of hollowed out coconut shells. (I later found out that these shells were used for drinking *kava*.) In front of the hut there sat a few old men smoking rolled cigarettes. The method of lighting was ingenious; at their feet were sticks of wood that burned bright red at the ends. Periodically the men picked up the sticks and re-light their cigarettes; then they placed the tips of the sticks back in a small fire that burned in a dug out pit at their feet.

Other than the old men who sat inside the *nakamal*, the area was deserted. Dorry looked puzzled and told me to wait while she asked around. When she returned to the car, she told me that a small boy had fallen from a mango tree and died. Members of the hamlet would not practice today because of his death, but we could come back on Thursday. On the drive home we stopped every time we passed groups of women wearing traditional clothing. Dorry passed on the message that the rehearsal was cancelled and would resume on Thursday. This was my first experience with passing information along traditional roads of exchange of communication, that are termed *suatuk*. In Tanna this is a traditional practice (see Brunton, 1981, pp. 361–366 & Lindstrom, 1981, pp. 388–391).

The following Thursday (July, 20) we set off again for Lénamer. I was feeling better about going since I had already been at the *nakamal* on one occasion—initially I had found the experience intimidating. This time, when we arrived at the *nakamal* it was empty, and so was the hamlet. While Dorry went off on a small trail to try to find out what was happening, I took advantage of a chance to explore the *nakamal*. It had a mystical feeling about it, a kind of calm. I walked around the outside, through the middle, and then went to explore the *kava* hut. Inside, the remains of a fire glowed in a pit surrounded by stones, and the dirt floor was covered with woven mats. The only other articles were a variety of hollowed out coconut shells used for drinking *kava*. The side of the *nakamal*, facing the road, was lined by large palm leaves attached to a makeshift fence of tree branches. Dorry (with a wry expression) explained that the fence was for keeping women from looking in. I had read that women were not welcome on the *nakamal* and now realised this was true.

We headed back down toward the main road to look for anyone who might know why there was no rehearsal; Dorry thought that perhaps they had changed the rehearsal location. We stopped at the school yard at the bottom of the road and asked a small group of children. They were eager to tell us anything that could be perceived as helpful—pointing in all directions, talking at the same time, and all equally sure they had the information we were looking for. We thanked them and moved on. Farther down the road we stopped to ask an old man; he indicated a road off to our right, just after the Lokatia bridge. I thought it looked unlikely and I wasn't eager to make the attempt to get up it. It was a path that had been bulldozed clear of brush; what remained was silt red clay that is difficult to drive on when dry and impossible to negotiate when wet.

We decided to give up and drove to the airport to collect a parcel. While there we met three men who were family of Dorry's. After we told them of our troubles in locating the rehearsal, they tried to convince us that the rehearsal was at the location we had just come from. When we informed them we had just been there, the men pointed off to the right and said the location had been changed—it was somewhere on top, way on top. Neither Dorry or I felt that the men had any more information than the children we had talked with earlier, so we decided to call it a day and return home.

This pattern (of looking for rehearsal sites) continued for the next several weeks; I began to feel I was not welcome and thought I had somehow interfered with their rehearsals. I knew from my readings that preparations for *Nekowiaar* were closed to the public and that they were conducted in secret places in the bush. Despite Dorry's assurances and a variety of plausible reasons for cancelled rehearsals, I became

convinced that I would not see one. I resigned myself to conducting interviews (after the ceremony), and soliciting information from the local Tannese.

During the next few months (before *Nekowiaar*), I conducted a number of informal interviews with local Tannese that resulted in a surprising amount of information. I found that people were quite happy to talk to me and tell me their version of what *Nekowiaar* meant to the islanders. Information about certain aspects of the ceremony such as which dances were danced, how the names of the dances were spelt, and the date of the final event varied widely. The only information with which everyone agreed, was that *Nekowiaar* was the most important *kastom* ceremony on Tanna: it represented all Tannese *kastom*. My main concern, however, was gaining access to the rehearsal sessions and establishing co-researchers before the performance of *Nekowiaar*. I felt that prior knowledge of the purpose and structure of the ceremony was vital. I needed to have an understanding of what I would be experiencing, to put it into context when I saw the performance. For the same reason, I hoped to conduct my formal interviews after the ceremony when I thought I had a basis from which to work.

I continued to drive to Lénamer three times a week (on the days that the rehearsals were scheduled to occur), hoping that one day they would resume. The reasons given for their cancellations did seem appropriate, and my contacts always made the effort to explain the reasons behind the cancellations—I felt obligated to return in kind. During the next two weeks a second child was reported to have died falling from a mango tree, and an old woman passed away. We now had a new house “girl,” Mary, who was quick to encourage me to keep trying to attend the practices, even though my attempts had been futile for the past three weeks. She informed me (as had Dorry) that it was *kastom*

when a death occurred for Tannese villagers to mourn for one full week; after the period of mourning, a feast for the entire hamlet and extended family would be held. Now I understood why there had been three weeks of cancelled rehearsals.

Tuesday morning we set out for Lénamer with assurances from Mary that rehearsals for both men and women would go ahead as scheduled. Mary's mother, who was a master teacher of the women's *Napen-Napen*, had left early that morning for Lénamer. True to her word, as we made our way along the small road leading up to the *nakamal*, we passed many women and men walking along in traditional costume carrying grass skirts and parcels of *lap lap*. When we approached the *nakamal*, I saw it was full of men; farther along the road, the hamlet centre was full of women.

My reception was warm and immediate; I was offered a grass skirt, a basket, and invited to join the rehearsal. Feeling overwhelmed I politely asked if I could watch for a while and join them later. Having previously experienced so much difficulty in observing a rehearsal, I was concerned that I wouldn't get another chance to record my observations if I joined them. The women agreed, pulled out a mat for me to sit on (at the edge of the dance area) and told me I could take pictures. They thought it would be a good idea to get a group photo of the women at the end of the rehearsal. I was more than happy to meet their request and delighted with the opportunity to take photographs. I asked Mary if I could record the singing, and she said that would be fine too.

That Tuesday marked the beginning of my introduction and subsequent acceptance to Lénamer hamlet. Although Chief Simon (who is the chief of the hamlet) welcomed me to Lénamer, it was Chief *Pita*, the residing big-man of the airport hamlets, who had the authority to allow me access to the rehearsals. During the next four months, I spent a

great deal of time at Lénamer and the surrounding hamlets of Lowikao, Ikaoras, and Lownapik Mita in the company of my new found co-researchers: Mary junior, Mary senior, Manu, Chief *Pita*, Chief Simon, and Chief Gaout, and various interpreters assigned to me by the chiefs of the *nakamal* I visited.

Research Participants

For the six and a half months I lived on Tanna, I spent the largest part of my day with Mary, our house girl (see Figure 4). Mary was in her mid twenties; however, this is a “guesstimate” on my part, because she couldn’t tell me how old she was. Mary told me that it is the responsibility of the older brother in the family to record the family members’ ages but, Mary explained, her brother had been negligent of this duty. For similar reasons I was also unable to record the accurate ages of my other co-researchers. The ages I have used are approximations.

Mary and I spent a minimum of five days a week together (sometimes more, especially during *Nekowiaar*), and many of our conversations were informal. Because she was with me throughout each day, I found it easy to verify information with her as I worked through the data I was collecting during my stay on Tanna. Mary is a single mother of two who lives with her father and mother at Letawus hamlet. She is outgoing, always has a ready smile, and can speak three languages. One of the second generation of Tannese to attend primary school, her English verbal skills are good. She has, however, no ability to write in English, and her reading capabilities are very limited. Mary also spoke the Lenakel dialect of the North central part of Tanna and *Bislama*,

which proved to be a considerable asset to me when I needed to translate data collected in the field (Bonnemaison, 1994)⁶³.

When we first spoke about the possibility of this study, Mary seemed excited and eager to assist me. She explained that her Uncle, Chief *Pita*, and her mother Mary Senior were master teachers of the dances for *Nekowiaar*. Mary's brother (Manu) would also be dancing in the ceremony. I was particularly interested in working with Mary as she had the ability to act as a translator for me and was also helping me to become more fluent in *Bislama*. When I stressed that I was interested in investigating the *Nekowiaar* from the perspective of the Tannese, she informed me that this was good. Mary said that many things had been written that were incorrect. She also explained that Chief *Pita* was interested in recording the ceremony in a written format, because there was concern about the loss of *kastom* on Tanna.

Later in the week, Mary and I drove to meet Chief *Pita* at Lénamer hamlet. Chief *Pita* is one of the two big-men on the Western side of the island and is considered the main source of knowledge and master teacher of all aspects of *Nekowiaar*.

Chief *Pita* is a small man, approximately 5'5" with a slight build, whom I judged to be in his early 60s. Despite his size, he emanates an aura of power—one that speaks of authority, calm, and a high level of energy. It was obvious from the way people

⁶³ Bonnemaison notes three major linguistic areas identified by Lynch (1977): North and North central part of Tanna include the related dialects of White Sands, Lenakel, and North Tanna; the South central area including the related dialects of Nivhaal, Imreang, and Nivai; and the area South of Mt. Tukosmera and Mt. Melen, from Green Point to Port Resolution where the Kwamera dialect is spoken. See Figure 3.

responded to him that he was highly respected, and I was impressed with the intensity of his performances at the rehearsal we were watching (see Figure 6).⁶⁴

When the men's rehearsal finished, Mary and I were invited into the *nakamal* by Chief *Pita*. We sat down to talk, with Mary acting as our interpreter. I explained to the him what I hoped to accomplish with my study. He spoke of his concerns about information that had previously been written about *Nekowiaar* and his frustration at misrepresentation. He said, "*mi wantem stori tol stret.*" He asked me if I could do that, tell the story straight, and I expressed my willingness to help him. We went on to discuss when the rehearsals would take place, what methods I could use to collect data, and how I would ensure that the final product would be *stret*. We agreed that we would exchange information in a final recorded interview and that my findings would be passed on to him in written format. He would have the opportunity to review that information and then I would make any corrections he felt were needed. I also agreed to put together a photo album which would mark the progression of rehearsals to the final event of *Nekowiaar*.

With an agreement reached, Chief *Pita* assigned me an interpreter and invited me to stay and observe the rest of the rehearsal. This routine was repeated at all subsequent rehearsals, and I found myself welcome at any of the hamlets I visited. I had been introduced to the inner circle of the hamlets the chief resided over, and there was never

⁶⁴ Although an authority figure, Chief *Pita* was also very charming. When I asked him about his family, he thought about it for a while, and then said he was the father of eight children. Moments later, he informed me he wasn't sure about this number of children, but thought it was about right.

any question as to why I was there during the next few months I was conducting my field research.

As the weeks passed on, I found that the informants assigned to me became familiar faces. When I attended the women's rehearsals, it was Mary's mother who welcomed me. Mary senior was between 40 and 50 years of age and was clearly in charge of the rehearsals of the *Napen-Napen* (see Figure 7). Mary's grandmother also attended the rehearsals but found it difficult to manage the entire day because of her age. Mary senior was also charismatic, with much the same sense of leadership Chief *Pita* emanated. Her manner, however, was quieter. At the close of each sectional rehearsal, she gathered the group in a close circle and spoke in quiet undertones to them. Then they would run through the section again. Although her discussions were understated, her performance was not. Mary senior performed each dance with a conviction that made you feel you were observing the performance itself.

Manu is Mary senior's son and brother to Mary, our house girl. Manu is second in line in his family, and I would estimate him to be in his early 30s (see Figure 5). His desire to be chief one day was apparent in the way he approached his role at the rehearsals and by how seriously he took the role of the eldest male son in his hamlet. As mentioned earlier, his older brother was indifferent to this *kastom* role, and much of the responsibility had been passed on to Manu. During my time at the men's *nakamals*, it was Manu and Chief *Pita* who greeted me. They would show me to an area to sit where I could observe the rehearsals and assigned me an interpreter to assist me in interpreting the dances and songs I was watching. Manu also came to the house to inform me which rehearsals were important to attend, to tell me when the best times to get recordings

were, and to confirm the actual dates of the *Nekowiaar*. Although Manu acted younger than his age at times, he took his role seriously; he was already gaining the respect of his peers. Manu was also active on the local political scene supporting members running for government positions and sat on a number of committees: children's rights, cultural preservation, and continuing education.

There are of course many other individuals who assisted me with gathering data in the field. They are too numerous to mention here, but will be referred to throughout the paper and credited in the acknowledgements. Chief *Pita*, Mary senior, Mary junior, and Manu were the people with whom I had daily contact and who provided me with the data required to investigate the transmission of cultural knowledge in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. They were able (as a function of their positions in the social hierarchy) to give me valuable insight and accurate information regarding the *kastom* practices associated with *Nekowiaar*. I also received assistance from Pastor Willy Koriza, Chief Simon, and Chief Gaout; although I spent less time with them, they were instrumental in my collection of data in the field.

Co-researchers for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 4. Mary Junior Iaiofa.

Figure 5. Manu Iaiofa

Co-researcher for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 6. Chief *Pita* Nimaulul.

Co-researchers for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 4. Mary Junior Iaiofa.



Figure 5. Manu Iaiofa



Co-researcher for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 6. Chief *Pita* Nimaulul.



Co-researcher for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 7. Mary Senior Iaiofa.



Data Collection

As mentioned previously, my initial collection of data in the field was through informal interviews. These took the form of conversations with local people while I watched soccer games, walked, or visited at various ceremonial functions. More detailed information came with my acceptance at the rehearsal sites where I was able to record the information passed to me by my informants (field notes). While I initially felt intrusive using a tape recorder and camera, I was encouraged to do so, and eventually felt comfortable. The dancers also became used to me and did not seem bothered by the audio visual equipment. In fact, the camera was so popular that I was continually asked to take pictures of various family groupings.

I continued this method of collecting data during the latter part of June and from July to November. Each of my observations was followed by a conversation with Mary when we returned home. She was able to confirm spellings with me (by use of a large map) and assist me in interpreting the data collected.

Data from informal recorded interviews were collected on three occasions:

1. December 6th, 1995 Chief *Pita*.
2. December 20th, 1995 Mary Junior.
3. December 21st, 1995 Mary Senior.

My opening question to each of my co-researchers was formulated as a request. I asked them if they were willing to talk to me about *Nekowiaar* and if they would describe their role in the ceremony. Due to the constraints of language, comprehension,

and cultural norms,⁶⁵ a direct question about music's role in the ceremony and what the ceremony meant to the Tannese would not have been appropriate in this situation.

Data collected in the form of photographs, field notes, and musical recordings were accumulated during my observations of rehearsals and the final events of *Nekowiaar*. While the data from formal interviews and field notes were used primarily for the analysis of this study, photographs and musical recordings were used to supplement and confirm my findings. I also used photographs to highlight various aspects of my descriptive narrative throughout the study. The data collected in this study were more than I expected and could be used as material for a number of studies concerning Tannese society.

Prior to my departure from Tanna January 12, 1996, I gave each of my co-researchers two copies of their interviews, in taped and written format (both in *Bislama*). I asked them to make any corrections they felt necessary and return one of the copies to me. I also made a presentation of four photo albums: three to the local hamlet chiefs of Lénamer, Letawus, and Lowikao and one master volume to Chief *Pita*.

Presentation of Self

Looking back at the time my husband and I spent on Tanna (July, 1995–January, 1996), the memory of how difficult I found the initial process of proposing this study and continuing the process of collecting data for my fieldwork has remained vivid. I had read about the difficulties that are unsettling for researchers who undertake fieldwork in

⁶⁵ By cultural norms, I am referring to what is perceived as "normal" in this culture. Asking direct questions or conducting lengthy interviews or conversations is an abnormal behaviour for the Tannese. Conversations occur in segments and are often conducted over an extended period of time.

unfamiliar situations but believed that my prior experience of travel in third world countries would prepare me. I was mistaken in this assumption. I found that travelling and working in unfamiliar environments are very different experiences. Myers (1992) identifies four predictable stages researchers experience when entering the field and discusses each stage at length: entry, culture shock, data collection, and leaving the field (pp. 32–43). I experienced each of the stages, and because we were in large part cut off from outside communication, it was difficult to resolve many of the anxieties and frustrations I felt with someone (other than my husband) who shared the same language and cultural values.

One of the most difficult aspects of the project was my concern about the veracity of what I was told. In my position as the *Dokta's* wife, I felt people would feel obligated to give me information. That concern became negligible as soon as I realised I had a role to play in facilitating a written record of the *Nekowiaar* but was replaced with the worry that I was being told stories about *Nekowiaar*. As more people found out what I was doing, information was offered to me constantly. Having no experience with the beliefs of this culture or their *kastom* ways, I found many of the stories “fantastic.” This aspect of the research I had not anticipated—I had assumed what I was told would be believable and factual.

Toward the end of our time on Tanna it became clear that the stories were authentic and not imaginative renditions of familiar tales. During my fieldwork, I was careful to record each observation and conversation in detail despite my scepticism and was surprised to see the consistency of the stories when organising the data I collected. The Tannese have a remarkable memory for detail in all aspects of their communication

be it musical, verbal, or dramatic—a lesson to be learnt about oral transmission in traditional cultures, being that each component is essential to the actualisation of events.

The other aspect of this study that proved difficult for me and to which I gave little consideration when I left Canada, was my position as a woman. My experience, (and the experience of women on Tanna) could be the material for another study but bears mention here. I was treated with respect (rare for a woman on Tanna) because of my position as the *Dokta's* wife and because of my role in documenting the *Nekowiaar*. Outside these areas, however, I felt displaced. At times I was looked at in a hostile manner and at other times accepted openly. The contradictory behaviours were difficult to accept, and I became more tentative about my reception throughout our stay. The issues that fostered hostility were directly related to my independence. Driving a vehicle, buying liquor, and banking, for example, are acts limited for most men and prohibited to all but a few women. Interacting with men in formal and informal conversations proved most difficult for me because I would at times experience open hostility from the women when I was conducting these conversations.

While I expected to experience some of these situations, the most difficult aspect was in learning how to cope with the emotions they stimulated. Even though I had become reasonably fluent with the language (*Bislama*), the gulf between cultural norms was too large to allow for true communication and understanding. By the time I left the island I was both angry and sad, again a confusing situation. In retrospect, the most positive aspect of bringing closure to this study was to put away the data while we travelled for an additional six months after leaving Tanna. This time allowed me to work through many of my emotions. I learned that you don't have to adapt perfectly in

every situation and that you have not failed as a human being because of it. In my case I have chosen to reflect on the meaning of my experiences rather than pretend they did not happen. Merely accepting my anger would be asking myself to be someone else. Being reflective allowed me to examine the source of my anger. The turmoil I felt occurred because I was not able to experience a familiar degree of social comfort in this unfamiliar culture, and that feeling was influenced by both being a minority and a woman on Tanna. While I believe my husband, as would other men, also experienced social discomfort in this unfamiliar situation—there are significant differences for women. Despite their nationality, expatriate men still belong to an elite group exclusively composed of men who determine how society functions. In patrilineal societies women do not participate in men's affairs, and while expatriate women are given more respect than are women, the division is made clear. On many an occasion I found myself uninvited, after it was understood by the locals that my husband intended for me to be included in an invitation; or I would find myself excluded from a group conversation, when the men moved themselves between my husband and me and I found myself standing outside of the circle.

Prior to my experience on Tanna I believed myself to be a person without racial prejudices; however, the reality of being a minority and living in a situation as a minority is quite unlike thinking about it. Having had this experience, I expect that the next time a student who doesn't speak English and is ignorant of our customs is placed in my classroom I will be empathetic. I will have a better idea of what is needed to make a student's unfamiliar experience with our culture a positive one by reflecting on my own.

Chapter 5

Observation of *Nekowiaar* Ceremony

The information provided in this chapter originates from the observations I recorded while attending rehearsals for the women's *Napen-Napen* and men's *Numauoi* dances, of the dress rehearsals leading up to the final performance, and of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony itself. The data were collected over a three month period, checked for accuracy with my co-researchers, and then written in a narrative account. The account serves two purposes: (a) to document accurately the preparatory events prior to and including *Nekowiaar* from a Tannese perspective and (b) to provide a written record of these events. Along with the data collected in the interviews conducted with my co-researchers, these data will form the basis for the presentation and conclusive comments in chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Rehearsal Observations (August 8, 1995)

My first observation of a rehearsal occurred shortly after my arrival on Tanna. This occasion marked my official acceptance to the rehearsal site at Lénamer and subsequent rehearsals at neighbouring hamlets. Observing the rehearsals gave me an opportunity to learn about the text of the songs, the choreography of the dances, and the symbolic meaning of *Nekowiaar*. This chapter will provide a synthesis of the data I collected from my observations of the rehearsal I attended⁶⁶ and from the performance of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony in its entirety.

⁶⁶ The other dances that are part of *Nekowiaar* (*Toka*, *Kosusiva*, *Nao*) were also being rehearsed at this time, but at other hamlets throughout the Western region.

Napen-Napen

At our first rehearsal for *Napen-Napen*, Mary and I settled onto mats that had been put out for us to watch the women prepare for their rehearsal. While we waited, we watched the women put grass skirts over their island dresses and skirts and stuff a variety of leaves into the small leaf woven baskets they carried. The few women who wore thongs removed them. The women then gathered at one end of the clearing, with Mary's mother second in line and her grandmother in front. When the group walked into the clearing (in a single line), Mary's grandmother moved toward the centre of the clearing, leading the group into a circular formation. She continued to walk in this way, with the others following her, until the group stood at four circles deep.

After the women had settled, this first of two sections of the *Napen-Napen* began when Mary's mother called out the first few bars of the song.⁶⁷ The call appeared to serve as an orientation to remind the women of which song they would sing. At the upcoming *Nekowiaar*, the women would be expected to sing up to 150 songs that reflect some aspect of history, current events, or phenomena of nature significant to their hamlet. The *Napen-Napen* is also considered to be a celebration that ensures the fertility of the women who dance it (see Bonnemaïson, 1986/1994, p. 110). A call and response mode, between Mary's mother and the group, followed the opening call and continued for the duration of the song. The ending was clearly marked by an increased tempo, more emphatic banging of the baskets, foot stomping, and higher pitched singing (see Figure 8).

The *Napen-Napen*'s first section is divided into two parts marked by a change of tempo. The first division is a slow dance in 2/2; the dancers move around the circle counter-clockwise while moving their upper bodies right and left at half the tempo. The second division is signalled by three short vertical hops after which the women bend at the waist, concluding the third beat with a sharp hit on their baskets. Following a four beat pause, they break into a fast 4/4 for a short period, then return to the slow tempo of the first part of the dance. The slow section represents what could be called the verses of the song, and the fast section, the chorus. The conclusion of the first section is signalled when the women bend at the waist and turn their face and bodies into the circle. They remain in this position while sustaining a single note for one to two minutes.

The second section begins with less formality; the women organise themselves into four pairs of lines that face one another, and the dance moves from one end of the clearing to the other. By the time the group reaches the opposite side, the song is finished; then the women walk back to the original starting position to begin the sequence again. This sequence is repeated until the song is finished. The final closing gesture is the same movement used for the first section.

While Mary and I watched the rehearsal, she told me that the song following the opening call pertains to the caller. The lyrics of the song tell the story of some significant event in the caller's life. Mary also said the songs are used in more than one *Nekowiaar*, and new songs are often composed to include more recent events. While the body of songs for *Napen-Napen* may change, the choreography and music that

⁶⁷ There is a third section, but I did not view it at any of the rehearsals I attended. (See *Nekowiaar*

accompany the dance always remain the same. Accuracy of the performance is assured by master teachers (elder women, big-men, and local chiefs) who monitor the rehearsals to assure that traditional practices are being followed.

Numauoi

While the women were resting, we heard men's voices from the *nakamal* below the clearing where we sat. Mary suggested we go down and look, and I eagerly followed. When we reached the clearing we stood on the outside edge to watch the men dance. After a few minutes (in-between one of the songs), Chief *Pita* motioned for us to come down into the *nakamal*. We were seated with David, a teacher at the local elementary school, who was assigned to us to act as an interpreter. David was well informed; he provided me with a running narrative about different aspects of the dance we were watching and was able to answer my questions.

The *Numauoi* is danced in two sections, the first, in the line formation the ladies used in the second section of their dance. The men begin by entering the *nakamal* in a single line, forming continuous circles, until everyone has entered the *nakamal*. Once inside the clearing, the men face inward, in a formation four circles deep. After a short whistle is blown, they raise a small handful of leaves over their heads, shuffle quickly back from the circle and then quickly shuffle forward into their original positions. This movement is punctuated by a quick shake of the leaf bouquets and a percussive "huh" sound produced vocally.

After this opening gesture, the men separate and are organised into four pairs of single lines that face one another. This formation is directed by Chief *Pita* who runs in and out of the pack physically directing the dancers into lines. Once again the bouquets are raised high over the heads of the dancers, shaken to create a rustling sound, and then a single voice calls out. A call and response pattern between the men and the caller follows, while the men set the beat with their feet stomping the dirt floor. Their voices sing of past and current events, as do the women in the *Napen-Napen*. The closing of this first section is signalled by an increased tempo, a more pronounced beating of the ground, and heavily accentuated singing.

The second section of *Numauoi* is different from the first. The men form a circle, all facing inward, and beat out a fast 2/4 beat with their hands and feet. Each of the verses is dramatised by one or two actors who leave the circle from opposite sides, then sprint the entire circumference of the circle before coming face to face with one another. They act out their scene, dancing at half the tempo of the main group, then return to the circle and their original positions. During the closing sequence (of this second section), the men turn to face one corner of the *nakamal*; they walk toward the end of the *nakamal*, as a group, imitating the motion of a wave surging in and out of the shore (see Figure 9). When they reach the end of the *nakamal*, they bend at the waist for one to two minutes, while sustaining their last note. After, they stand with the bouquets of leaves raised over their heads, shake them, then lower them to their sides. The final gesture is performed by Chief *Pita* who places two pieces of sugar cane across one another on the *nakamal* floor and then covers them with a small log. This gesture is traditional at the start and finish of each rehearsal and is known as ritual blocking. At the end of the

rehearsal Chief *Pita* asked me to take a group photo; I took several. Mary and I spoke briefly to Manu then walked back to the hamlet where the women were still rehearsing.

I remained at the hamlet for the rest of the morning recording the singing and taking pictures of the dancers. Mary and I decided to return home at lunch hour (11:30–1:30 p.m.) as this is a traditional time of rest for the Tannese. When we drove out past the *nakamal*, Chief *Pita* stopped us to invite the *Dokta* (my husband, Richard) and me back to the *nakamal* for Saturday’s rehearsal. The women had also invited me to attend their Thursday rehearsal—providing I agreed to dance with them.

In the weeks to follow, I attended rehearsals on Tuesdays and Saturdays at Lénamer hamlet.⁶⁸ The week before *Nekowiaar*, however, I attended whatever additional practices were scheduled (these practices were often held at locations other than Lénamer). One Saturday morning, after we had watched a rehearsal at Lénamer, Chief Simon asked Richard and me if we would like to attend a rehearsal at a neighbouring hamlet. We accepted and, with two of the elder men as guides, left (in the jeep) for Ikaoras hamlet. We were greeted by Chief Gaout (the chief of Lowikao, an adjacent hamlet) when we arrived and seated with an interpreter (Tom) at the edge of the *nakamal*. We spent the day at Ikaoras, observing a different group of women rehearsing the *Napen-Napen*. Chief Gaout encouraged me to take photographs and assured me it was all right to record the women singing.

⁶⁸ The ladies also rehearsed on Thursdays, but as this rehearsal was often cancelled, I opted to attend when I knew they would be present.

Napen Napen and Numauoi dance rehearsals

Figure 8. *Napen-Napen* dancers rehearsing for *Nekowiaar* at Lénamer hamlet.



Figure 9. *Numauoi* dancers rehearsing for *Nekowiaar* at Lénamer hamlet.



Napen Napen and Numauoi dance rehearsals

Figure 10. *Napen Napen* dancers pose for group photo at Lénamer hamlet.



Figure 11. *Numauoi* dancers pose for group photo at Lénamer hamlet.



Preparations for *Nekowiaar* (August 17–24, 1995)

A week before *Nekowiaar* (when out walking, driving and attending rehearsals at Lénamer and Ikaoras), I began to see men in “pre” *Nekowiaar* costume.⁶⁹ Manu had told me about this *kastom*; he said that it is an indication that *Nekowiaar* would soon begin. I felt relieved, and my confidence was again restored in my co-researchers—in the preceding month, I had become suspicious of the information I was receiving. When I asked questions about the ceremony, specifically the date of *Nekowiaar*, I received conflicting information. Repetitive requests for dates elicited responses such as “Just keep asking” and “Soon, I think.”⁷⁰ I became increasingly concerned I would miss *Nekowiaar*; however, my suspicions turned out to be unfounded. My co-researchers were, in fact, just as concerned as I, that I attend the ceremony. In retrospect, the information they gave me was accurate.

Kastom dictates that in the week before *Nekowiaar*, the dancers of *Numauoi* are expected to wear their traditional calico, paint their faces black, and wear leaf head-dresses. The men must also remain hidden in the bush (out of sight of women) for the entire week; however, Westernization has introduced commitments to work and other activities. One of the few days I saw Manu that week, he was dressed in Western clothes (pants and long sleeved shirt). He was attending a three day conference (organised by an Australian man who had previously sponsored locals for six month training courses in

⁶⁹ Particularly in the Middle Bush region, the strongest *kastom* area on Tanna. “Pre” *Nekowiaar* costume included the men painting their faces black and wearing a band of leaves around their head, in the fashion of a crown. They were expected to remain hidden in the bush, particularly from the eyes of women.

⁷⁰ I was often given a different answer by my co-researchers, when I questioned them just a day later.

Australia) to be held at the main co-operative store in Lenakel. Manu told me he was not happy about coming out from hiding but he felt he had no choice. His solution was to attend the course in partial costume (he wore his head-dress and kept his face painted) and return to hiding at the end of the day.

During this period, men were also required to maintain a strict diet—a *kastom* taboo. Only baked foods are permitted: yams, taro, and manioc. *Kava* is allowed at night, but water is not permitted. The *nakamals* become home to the men and are transformed into communal shelters to house each of the groups who are to dance. Additional poles for support walls are added to the existing *kava* huts. The new walls are made from woven pandanus leaves and bamboo reeds, and the roofs are constructed from thick layers of coconut palms. The men use candles for light at night and they must also prepare their food because it is taboo to eat anything touched by women. Comings and goings are by way of the *suatuk* (small roads) that lead from the North, South, East, and West sides of the *nakamal*.

The women remain in their hamlets the week before *Nekowiaar*, making a few final preparations for themselves and preparing gifts of food parcels for the men, to be presented at *Nekowiaar*. But mostly this is a time of rest for the women, since much of their preparation has been completed months before. Many aspects, such as harvesting crops and making costumes, require long periods of time to complete. The process of making grass skirts, for example, is complicated and requires a number of steps:

1. Measure the woman's body from waist to ankle.
2. Cut several branches from a tree that equal the previous measurement.

3. Scrape the bark from the branch until it is white.
4. Scrape the end of the stick until it splinters and pull off strips as they appear.
This must be done before the branch dries.
5. Tie the strips together with root vine, bury in shallow salt water, weigh down with large rocks, and leave for one week.
6. Remove from water, ring dry, and hang out in direct sunlight in individual strips (see Figure 12).
7. Leave hanging for two to three weeks, until sun has bleached strips white and dry.
8. Attach individual strips onto a thin braided belt (braided leaves in a narrow strip). A slip knot is used to attach the strips to the belt (see Figure 13).
9. Use shorter lengths underneath to give the skirt volume and longer strips for the outside layers to achieve a uniform effect.
10. Twist the skirt continuously until formed into a tight bundle (like wringing out a wet garment).
11. Paint desired colours in complete rings (when the skirt is opened a uniform circle of colour is achieved).

The dyes used for the skirts can be bought at the main co-operative store in Lenakel, and only small amounts are required as they are concentrated. A teaspoon of powdered dye is mixed with one to two litres of boiling hot water (boiled in tin containers on open fires), allowed to cool (to which coconut oil is added), and then

painted on to the skirts with feathers. Despite this long and difficult process, the life of a skirt is limited; it becomes brittle with age, and the dyes fade.

Face painting has long been a *kastom* of the Tannese, and the same dye⁷¹ and process used for the preparation of grass skirts are employed. During the six months I lived on Tanna, I saw the paints used only for *Nekowiaar*; however, I observed the same head-dresses and arm and knee bracelets in other ritual ceremonies (initiations, grade taking, marriages, funerals). The paints are applied in intricate patterns of deep reds, bright oranges, yellow, and black; this application is used for both men and women.

Other preparations for *Nekowiaar* include making or repairing instruments used by the dancers of *Nao*, *Toka*, and the women's *Napen-Napen*. When the men dance *Nao*, they use sheaves of sugar cane tied together (approximately 2.5 metres long), to hit the ground rhythmically; the *Toka* dancers use a stick painted white and shaped like a beak at one end (1 meter in length), to mimic the taking and receiving of presents; small paddles (shaped like swords) are used by the actors of all the dance groups to assist in their acting segments, and the women of *Napen-Napen* use small baskets of green woven leaves (stuffed with a variety of other leaves inside) to make a percussive sound when hit with the hand.

The food presented to dancers of *Nao*, *Toka*, and *Numauoi* is prepared the day prior to final festivities of *Nekowiaar* (Day three). Pigs, *kava*, and yams, however, must be nurtured over a long time to be ready for the event. *Kava* plants, for example, are

⁷¹ I was to later discover, in Mary Senior's interview, that there are two dyes employed: one specifically for the face and one for the painting of the skirts. (See Mary Senior Interview, Roberts-Johnson, 1995)

ready for harvest only after a minimum of two years growth (three years is preferred), and pigs can take a similar amount of time to reach the desired size. The dancers must also be prepared; they will have practised for four to six months, three times weekly, perfecting the dance choreography and songs they will perform at the festival. Close to the time when all the preparations have been completed (which has been generally agreed upon by the chiefs), the big-men communicate with one another along *suatu asuul*.⁷² Once the representative chiefs of each of the participating hamlets have communicated that they are ready, a performance date for *Nekowiaar* is set and passed by word along the *suatu asuul* throughout the island.

Description of *Nekowiaar* Ceremony

The week before *Nekowiaar*

Nekowiaar 1995 was held at the Ipai *nakamal*⁷³ (dancing ground) located on the West Coast of Tanna. Because the date of the ceremony was announced only a few days in advance, I did not have the opportunity to visit the site before the ritual. I knew before my arrival on Tanna that I would have difficulty finding information about the date for the ceremony but I was not prepared for how seriously the Tannese guarded this information—and was surprised to discover they were equally uninformed. The performance date of *Nekowiaar* was decided and then communicated to the Tannese by the local chiefs and big-men.

⁷² The *suatu asuul* are the highest in the hierarchy of *suatu*. They are controlled and used only by chiefs or big-men for means of communication regarding a major festival or events such as a war.

⁷³ Ipai is one of the eight most prestigious *nakamal* on Tanna. See the Semo Semo myth for a history of its origins and importance.

Preparations for *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 12. Material for the construction of grass skirts are laid out on the rocks to be bleached white by the sun.



Figure 13. Grass skirts partially constructed are hung for final bleaching in the sun before being painted for *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

When I arrived on Tanna in July, I immediately began asking whomever I met when the *Nekowiaar* would take place. Initially I received vague answers: "I'm not too sure; sometime soon I think" and "Yes, somewhere around August, when things are ready." Everything being ready meant preparations for the event: *kava* and pigs grown to an appropriate size for harvest; yams and *lap lap* cooked for the gift exchange; and grass skirts, sticks of sugar cane, bamboo poles, head-dresses of leaves, tinsel, and brightly painted cloth, prepared for the dancers' costumes.

Feeling somewhat daunted by what I felt were evasive answers, I reasoned to myself that as I was living here, it would be difficult for me to miss the actual event. Keeping this in mind, I continued to ask when the *Nekowiaar* would occur; eventually the answers were a little more exact: "I think soon now," or "Maybe in the next two or three weeks," and "Before the end of August." One man whom I questioned at one of the rehearsals suggested the best way to be sure was to keep asking every day, because the date was getting closer, and preparations were almost complete. The next day I observed a number of posters at the main market, post office, and local government office. Not only did the posters specify a date, but the location and an entrance fee were also included.⁷⁴

I felt better that a date had been set and settled down to wait for the day of the event. Chief Simon was particularly helpful in the week before the *Nekowiaar*; he kept us informed about what was happening and told us about extra rehearsals that were

⁷⁴ I was surprised to see a fee posted but was informed that the handful of tourists who attended would be expected to pay a fee. I was unable to determine for what purpose the money was used. Richard and I were exempt from the fee; Chief Simon had told us there would be no charge before the ceremony, and we were welcomed as guests of Chief *Pita* at the gate to *Nekowiaar*.

closed to the public. These rehearsals were in addition to the regular rehearsals held three times weekly at the individual *nakamals*. From what I observed, these appeared to be dress rehearsals; a form of costume was worn, and the entrance and exiting procedures were quite formal. It was during this time that the date, which was set on the posters, changed. In fact, during the week before the *Nekowiaar*, the date changed three times. Luckily for me, I was in constant contact with my co-researchers Chief Simon, Mary, and Manu who were dancing in the event and would be aware of any changes.

Knowing the performance could be any day, I made sure I had a supply of equipment ready: batteries for my recording equipment, flashlights, plenty of film (for day and night exposures), notepads, extra pens, extra clothing, bug juice, and a blanket. The event was to occur over a period of three days; the final day was to begin at 6 p.m., and run until sometime late the following afternoon.

Approximately 8,000 to 10,000 people were expected at the site; food would be available at stands (*lap lap*, bread, juices, sugar cane, fruit), and we were warned by a number of people to stay back from the crowds—apparently things could get rough on the dance ground. I expressed some concern about this aspect of the event but was assured if I remained outside of the *nakamal* floor I would be safe. Richard and I would also be amongst friends: Margaret, her husband Tom, and their two children planned to camp at *Nekowiaar* for the evening, and I had also asked Mary to accompany us for the final night.

During my initial observations at rehearsals, I concentrated on gathering specific data on the *Nekowiaar*. I wanted to know as much as possible about the schedule of events and how the three days would be structured. Again I received a variety of answers

that were similar but different enough to make me question the accuracy of the information I was receiving. I continued to ask the same questions repeatedly, and carefully recorded the answers I received. I knew I would be feeling overwhelmed at the performance because attending the rehearsals had been an exhausting experience.⁷⁵ The rehearsals had been in the company of 30 to 40 people: over 8000 were expected at *Nekowiaar*. It was important to have an idea of what to expect; I felt an outline would give me an opportunity to apply what I had learned at the rehearsal sites and assess what I had read previously about the ceremony to what I would be observing.

One afternoon, while I was sorting through this information, Mary announced that the ceremony would begin the next morning. We had been waiting daily for word and when it finally came it was hard to believe it was going to happen. The abruptness with which the final date was announced confirmed that this was an event for the Tannese—not for tourists or for ni-Vanuatu from other islands. Previous attempts (on my part) to affirm dates from locals and from tour companies on the main island of Efate had all been unsuccessful. The tour operators I spoke to expressed frustration; they said it was very difficult for them to arrange for visitors to see *Nekowiaar*—one year a couple waited for three weeks to see the event. This was just one of the many times I realised how fortunate I was to be the *Dokta's* wife on Tanna. I was enjoying a status I would not have been otherwise granted. The Tannese considered Richard and me part of their community; we were living here and contributing to the island.

⁷⁵ At the rehearsals I was unsure of my reception. I did not wish to offend anyone and worried constantly about whether I would be able to get all the information I needed.

Nekowiaar Day One (August 24, 1995)

Given the experiences thus far we set our alarms for 5 a.m. to prepare early for the first day. Mary had suggested things would begin early, between 8 and 9 a.m., and we did not want to miss anything. Before leaving to pick up Mary at her *nakamal* (near the airport) we made sandwiches, packed water, and other articles to deal with weather and insects. On the way to Ipai, we also picked up Sarah (a nurse from the hospital) who was dancing in *Nekowiaar* and had missed her ride. Ipai is located about a half hour drive, or an hour walk by small roads (*suatu, nukulu*),⁷⁶ from the main centre of Lenakel. This made for a considerable walk for those planning to attend the ceremony from the Lenakel area. Spectators and participants from other areas of the island had arrived several days in advance. Some had walked for two to three days and camped at the site, and others had hired a taxi (of which there are few) and arrived the previous evening. Mary explained to me that it was important for the participants to arrive early because they would need to build shelters around the outside of the *nakamal* clearing. The shelters would be used by the women and children to rest, eat, and prepare their costumes for the next three days.

Napen-Napen

Although we arrived at Ipai shortly before 8 a.m., we were late. The dancers had started at 7 a.m., instead of the scheduled 8 to 9 a.m. because there was an unexpected number of women dancing. In keeping with the tradition of the Tannese, we approached

⁷⁶ Small roads, (see chapter 3, Social Organisation, for a description of *suatu* system).

the site on foot, by way of *suatu nukulu*.⁷⁷ After walking for an hour through a maze of paths dotted with hamlets, Richard, Mary, Sarah, and I approached the *nakamal* at Ipai. I was aware we were close, because the ground had begun to vibrate, and there was a distant high pitched wailing coming through the trees. As we came closer, we abandoned the trail and made our way through the trees guided by the increasing sounds ahead of us. We approached the *nakamal* from above. When we arrived at the outside edge, we found ourselves amidst thousands of ni-Vanuatu spectators. Below us were hundreds of woman divided into eight pods, moving in circular formations chanting, shouting, and wailing. Their actions stirred up the dirt floor of the *nakamal* into thick swirling dust that was sometimes too thick to see through. I had expected to feel overwhelmed, but nothing would have prepared me for this initial site or the sounds that accompanied it (see Figures 14–15).

The *Nekowiaar* is always held at a *nakamal* (*Bislama*) or *Yimwayimw* (language) of significant importance (see Ipai's Power, Bonnemaïson, 1994). Bonnemaïson wrote that "Ipai means 'to plunge.' The site plunges steeply down into the earth, which is the source of all powers and magic" (p. 144). The Tannese believe the *nakamal* was dug out by hand. We stood at the edge of the West side looking into an area approximately 50 to 60 metres in size, bordered by three enormous *nabanga* trees in which tree houses had been built as viewing platforms.

⁷⁷ See Bonnemaïson, 1986/1994; and Lindstrom in Allen, 1981; for further discussion regarding *suatus*.

Nekowiaar Ceremony 1995 Day One

Figure 14. Women's *Napen Napen* performance at *Ipai nakamal*.



Figure 15. Women dancers of *Napen-Napen* complete their performance with a final bow.



What we observed there was eight groups of 50 to 60 dancers performing simultaneously. Because we had arrived late, we did not see the start of *Napen-Napen* which had begun at staggered intervals: after the first of each group's song finished, another group entered the *nakamal* and began their *Napen-Napen*, until they were all on the *nakamal* floor. What we were watching was the second stage, when the eight groups of *Napen-Napen* dancers were all on the *nakamal* floor in full performance—the result was dissonance, chaos, and wonder. Although the melody employed for each of the eight groups was the same, each group had lyrics composed specifically for their *Napen-Napen*. The melody, individual sections, words, and dance choreography were all lost in the performance: all one could do was take in the overall spectacle.

The costumes were brilliant: feathers of a multitude of colours; tinsel from Christmas decorations adorned heads; face painting primarily of orange and black; grass skirts painted the colours of rainbows; and, bright coloured *calico* (cloth) draped over one shoulder and tucked into the belt of the skirts. It was difficult to discern the ages of the women with the overall effect of the costumes. The children, however, were easier to identify because of their size and where they stood in the groupings. Children in both the women's and men dances were always placed on the outside of the circle, or line formations.

Amidst the confusion, on the floor of the *nakamal*, were a number of men with each of the performing groups. I had not observed this during rehearsals and was at first confused. Then I recalled that Dorry told me a chief (usually one presiding over the hamlet rehearsal site) was responsible for ensuring an authentic presentation of the *Napen-Napen*. The chief (*jif*) was also accompanied by up to three elders who further

ensured accuracy. Elders are old men who are awarded a position of status because of their age and knowledge of life. History according to their recollection is considered fact. The Tannese believe they are the holders of *kastom* knowledge and history and that they are responsible for its transmission to the next generation.

Each *Napen-Napen* performs up to 150 songs during one presentation. The women begin early in the evening of the final day of *Nekowiaar*; the number of songs performed is determined by the amount of night time hours. The dancers are expected to keep performing until the men make their way into the *nakamal* at dawn to begin their dances. After the staggered start, when each group of *Napen-Napen* dancers has completed its repertoire of songs, the women made their way out of the *nakamal*. Eventually one group remained, the last to begin, and the women's portion of the festival was finished.

On the first day of the festival, which acted as a dress rehearsal for the following Friday evening, the first group of *Napen-Napen* began at 7 a.m., and the second finished at 12:30 p.m. Dusty and dirty, the women made their way back to rest in the shelters erected around the outside of the *nakamal*. There were eight areas (bordered off by a makeshift fence, and with roofs made of bamboo and sugar cane) set up, one for each of the women's groups. On closer inspection, I observed the ground was completely covered with hand made mats. They were made from pandanus leaves and had a variety of blue, red, and yellow colours woven throughout. Added to this spattering of colour was a profusion of brightly painted skirts, faces painted in intricate designs, tinsel, and feathers. There were children and adults of all ages sleeping, eating, nursing, and *storying* (telling stories, a Tannese pastime). The atmosphere was warm and tranquil—

which is unusual in the daily routine of Tannese women. The next day, the women return to their hamlets to prepare baked food gifts. *Lap lap*, yam, and taro are wrapped in leaf packets for the men of the host village (dancers of *Nao*, *Numauoi*, *Kosusiva*) to present to their guests (the *Toka* dancers).

Watching the women perform *Napen-Napen* at Ipai was different from what I had observed at previous rehearsals; there were more women dancing at Ipai, and their ages ranged from the very young to the elderly. It was a gruelling performance to watch. For hours the women stomped out the beat on the ground and banged their hands repeatedly on their baskets, which created a hollowed out sound that echoed through the air. This beating was punctuated by a rhythmic singing, sometimes like a wail and at other times low and guttural—a primal sound. The performance was longer and more intense than what I had previously witnessed. I also heard the different dialects of the islanders' native language; each group used the dialect specific to where they live on Tanna (see Bonnemaïson, 1994; and Tryon, 1977 for a complete description of language dialects.)

At the start of each dance segment, the men (chief and elders) established the beat with long sticks. The sticks were also used to pull away any debris on the dancing ground and to ward off over enthusiastic spectators who interfere with the dancers. These spectators are called *kawua* and are similar to court jesters. They mimic the women's dance and attempt to confuse them by singing incorrect lyrics. This was most apparent in the third section of the dance; when one or two women acted out scenes the main group sang about it.

The women who were acting began at one end of two lines formed by the rest of the group. The scene was acted out while they moved down the length of the line. The *kawua* followed closely behind them mimicking their movements. Their behaviour seemed to be tolerated, as I observed it happening with all the groups but it was closely monitored by the chiefs and elders who were standing close to each of the *Napen-Napen*. The antics of the *kawua* were popular with the ni-Vanuatu spectators who roared with delight at their antics and cheered them on throughout the ceremony. Despite the activities of the *kawua* (who were at times rough), the women continued to perform unhampered by their interference. They also managed to ignore the interruptions of the elders and chiefs who shouted the lyrics of their songs over their own voices while they were performing.

As the final group finished, Mary told me their exit (through the North-east *suatu*) was an *asuul suatu* of considerable importance. This was also the place where the *Toka* (the feature dance of *Nekowiaar*) dancers would make their entrance. Shortly after 1:30 p.m., on our way back to the *suatu nukulu* we arrived on, we stopped to talk with Chief Simon, Manu, and a few other dancers we had come to know. They stressed the importance of arriving early the next morning for the men's dress rehearsal. They were concerned that I had been unable to get a complete recording of the *Numauoi* and knew that tomorrow would be my last opportunity to record in a relatively quiet setting. They also thought it was possible to tape the other dances: the *Nao* and the *Kosusiva*. After promising to arrive early and bring my camera and recorder, we walked back to our vehicle. We arranged to collect Mary the following morning at 6:30 a.m.

Nekowiaar Day Two (August 25, 1995)

After spending a restless night, worrying about the events to follow the next day, we set out the following morning to collect Mary. Manu had planned to come with us but had to take a taxi as we did not have enough room for him. Mary brought her 12 month old with her because her mother and grandmother were busy preparing food for the men of the host village.

The rehearsal site for *Numauoi* was at the Ikaoras *nakamal*, which was on the same road that led to Ipai. When I asked why there was a different rehearsal site, I was reminded it was important for the women dancing *Napen-Napen* not to see the men the week before *Nekowiaar*. The male dancers had at this point been hiding in the bush for one week.

Numauoi

The *Numauoi* was one of three dances we expected to observe on this second day of *Nekowiaar*. After watching the first rehearsal, we were invited to two other *nakamals* to observe *Nao* and *Kosusiva*. I was delighted with the invitation, as I had yet to observe the latter two dances. I had hoped for an opportunity to see them before the final evening of *Nekowiaar* because my observations of *Nao* and *Napen-Napen* dress rehearsals had proved so valuable. I had a clear understanding of the performance, the meaning of the songs, choreography of the dance movements, and was familiar with the music. This understanding proved invaluable when I found myself confronted with the cacophony of new sights and sounds at the dress rehearsal. I expected the final evening to be much the same.

When we arrived at Ikaoras hamlet, early the next morning, we were greeted by Chief Gaout. The chief was responsible for the training of the women's *Napen-Napen* from his hamlet, Lowikao, and for the surrounding hamlets of the immediate area; he was also a dancer for *Numauoi*. While we waited I observed the costumes of a few men who were waiting in the *nakamal*. They wore green arm bands, but their head-dresses were now replaced by white bleached leaves which I suspected were achieved by the same methods used by the women in preparing the grass skirts.⁷⁸ The face painting techniques employed were similar to those used by the women: primarily orange, accented by black. They also wore a single *kweriya* (hawk feather) tucked into the band of the head-dresses, a band of green leaves attached just below the knee, and another (a mixture of green, red, and white) held by hand. The big-men wore a *tapa* belt (*tut*), made from the bark of ebony, paper mulberry, or breadfruit trees (see Harcombe, 1991, p. 275) (see Figure 16).

Shortly after our arrival, the men left the clearing to join their group, who waited in the bush for dancers arriving from neighbouring hamlets. We settled into the roots of a *nabanga* tree to wait for their return. It was a rainy day and we were glad of the shelter the tree gave us. Unlike our experience with the rehearsal of *Napen-Napen* the previous day, we found our wait was a long one.

⁷⁸ This process is described in chapter 5, Preparations for *Nekowiaar*.

Nekowiaar Ceremony 1995 Day Two

Figure 16. Big-man's *tut* belt. Representation of highest power in local hierarchy of chiefs.



Figure 17. *Numauoi* dancers in performance at Ikaoras hamlet dress rehearsal.



Although the men did not return until 10 a.m., I was able to make use of my time talking with Mary and Yakin (a local store manager). Yakin was unable to participate in the events because he had drunk water the previous day—taboo for dancers. Yakin told me the chiefs expected approximately 10,000 people at Ipai *nakamal*, which was hard for me to imagine. It seemed like a large number of people; however, the population of Tanna is close to 26,000 people, and extra flights had been added to the airport's schedule in the past week.

At 9 a.m. we were still waiting, and the weather had worsened. The rain was now coming down steadily but it didn't deter the locals who continued to arrive and find shelter under the immense trees. Previously it had just been Yakin, Mary, Richard, and me waiting and watching a man sweeping the *nakamal* clear with a bush broom (made from leaves of a palm tree). Shortly after, two ni-Vanuatu gentlemen from Vila joined us (one who was *man-Tanna*, a native of Tanna). As we continued to wait, they told me about *Nekowiaar* and *Numauoi*. They advised us to be at Ipai by 3 a.m. if we were not planning to camp there for the night, otherwise we might miss the *Toka*. This was a special year for the dance, because three *Toka* would be performed. Each would be danced singularly—not together as *Napen-Napen* was performed. Yakin explained there were 131 *Toka* dancers expected, and that the same number of pigs would be killed in the closing ceremonies as gift offerings to the guest dancers.

The *Nekowiaar* is similar to our the Northwest Coast Indian *potlatch* in the feature that the host gives gifts to their guests who are then expected to return in kind at another ceremony some time later. One of the differences in Tanna is that the return of gifts by the guests dancers at the *Nekowiaar* must be equal in number and value: It is an insult

of the highest order to deviate from this *kastom* practice of reciprocal exchange. The host hamlet, in this case Ipai, invites three hamlets to dance the Toka. In appreciation the hosts present their guests with gifts of *kava* and pigs. The dancers of *Kosusiva*, *Nao*, and *Numauoi* are considered part of the host hamlet and also receive gifts; at a ceremony preceding the ritual killing of the pigs, they exchange large packs of *lap lap* prepared by the women of their hamlets. Some months later, the dancers of the *Toka* are expected to return the same number of pigs and *kava* plants in a *kastom* ceremony. This return ceremony is called *Menuk*.

At 9:45 a.m. there was finally some activity by the entrance across from the *nakamal*. A large group of men from *Numauoi* stood in a long single line waiting. A further 15 minutes passed, before they made their entrance into the *nakamal* where we were waiting. When they entered the *nakamal*, lead by Chief *Pita*, they walked in a continuous circle until every one had entered and stood in four circular formations, one inside the another. Chief *Pita* was in the innermost part of the formation, and the *pikinini* made up most of the outside ring. The performance to follow was more intense than those I observed earlier at the rehearsals, and I found the experience quite emotional. Because few ni-Vanuatu had ever seen *Numauoi* (this was the first time it had been performed in three generations), this performance was a special event. *Manu* told me Chief *Pita*'s grandfather had told *Pita* the story about *Numauoi* around the fire when he was a young boy—to ensure the passing down of tradition (see Figure 17).

Watching the ceremony, I noted the format was the same as what I had observed at the rehearsals (described earlier in this chapter). The one difference was a small group of women, dressed as they were for *Napen-Napen*, who formed a small group outside

the men's circle. The women at times sang along, their high pitched voices cutting over the lower pitched rhythmic chanting of the men. Throughout the performance they would reinforce the beat by jumping up and down in a small hop fashion. The weight of their bodies created a soft percussive thump clearly audible with each beat. Sometimes this motion was a straight vertical jump, and at other times the women would twist their upper bodies right and left with each jump.

When the men finished, approximately an hour later, Yakin informed me they would be allowed to take a small amount of water in preparation for tomorrow's performance; during the previous 24 hours, they had only been allowed only *kava* in the evening. He also told me that many of the *Numauoi* dancers were also dancing *Kosusiva*, and we would have to hurry to the next *nakamal* if we wanted to watch the rehearsal.

Kosusiva

We made our way (by jeep) toward the Lownapkaméi *nakamal* for the dress rehearsal of the *Kosusiva*. Most people set out on foot, but others took advantage of the taxis heading in that direction. The taxis [a typical form of transport on the island], and large groups of people and produce are often overloaded in the back cab. After we had driven for 15 minutes through increasingly thick forest and roads overgrown with weed, we came to a fork in the road; Mary directed us to the right. Shortly after, we were suddenly faced with a hill that plunged straight down for about 100 metres. On the opposite side, there was an equally steep stretch that went up and around a corner, blocking any view of what else was to come. There was already one vehicle stuck below, so we abandoned our jeep and set out on foot. Ten minutes later we found the Lownapkaméi *nakamal* and began the wait for *Kosusiva*.

Lownapkaméi *nakamal* is considerably smaller than Ipai's and about half the size of the one at Ikaoras. We waited for a further hour before the rehearsal began, but the wait wasn't as fruitful as the one at Ikaoras. I was unable to get any information about the dance because Mary had never seen it before, and neither had Yakin. I hoped it would be similar to *Numauoi* so I would recognise the format.

At 12:15 p.m., the *Kosusiva* dancers entered the *nakamal*, repeating the same circle formation the men's *Numauoi* and women's *Napen-Napen* used in their opening gesture. I asked Yakin if this was a ritual performed before the dances, and he confirmed it was. I was inclined to take him at his word because this was the same observation I made at the previous rehearsals I had attended. Chief *Pita* was also responsible for the training of this group, but this time he came in at the back of the line. At the centre of the circle was another chief who appeared to be leading the group.

The men's costumes were similar to the women's used in the *Napen-Napen*; they wore bright coloured calico wraps, but did not wear shirts. All the men were extremely fit, regardless of age, and this time carried a stick resembling a sword rather than the bundle of leaves the men held in *Numauoi*. They also wore a head-dress with a single *kweriya* feather tucked in the back, and some men wore an additional ring of leaves around their necks similar to a choker. There were a large number of children in this group whose average age was younger than the children who danced *Numauoi*. The youngest child I saw was two years of age, but it was difficult to determine the age of the senior members. These men had little idea how old they were, and when I asked their eldest children, they were equally unsure.

The dance began shortly after the lines of the first section were formed by a chief who ran in and out of the circle each time the sharp blasts of whistles were sounded. The format was identical to *Numauoi*. The first section of the dance was performed in a duple metre (2/2), almost a dotted eighth note pattern. After this short opening section, the tempo changed to a slow compound duple metre (6/8), and the format changed to the same format as the second section of *Numauoi*. The actors acted out stories about local *kastom* and past and current events. Each new segment was started by one dancer running out of the circle, in a straight line, to a designated point at the edge of the *nakamal*; then he turned back to face the dancers, lowered his sword, and ran back into the group. This action signalled the actors to leave the circle (from opposite sides), to sprint the entire circumference, before coming face to face with one another in an area just outside the group. Once they completed their acting scene, they returned to their original positions in the group.

The second and third sections of *Kosusiva* repeated the format of the first, with two exceptions: (a) the tempo remained the same, but the beat was more accentuated and (b) the adult actors were replaced by *pikinini* (children). This section concluded when the swords were snapped up into the air with the right hand. It was also apparent when a section was coming to a close because the dancers' steps became increasingly agitated. The tempo increased (sometimes doubled), and there was a lift to each of the steps that punctuated the rhythm of the singing. The only instruments were the voices of the dancers and the percussive sound achieved by the pounding of feet on the dirt *nakamal* floor.

The fourth and final section of *Kosusiva* was in simple quadruple time (4/4). It began slowly and increased to a fast tempo shortly after the opening segment. This final section was lead by Chief *Pita* who stood at the centre of the same circle formation employed by the *Numauoi* dancers in the second section of their dance. The tempo of this section alternated between slow and fast throughout. The slower section was the shorter of the two and seemed to signal the start of a new segment or song. The crowd enjoyed the faster tempo and showed their appreciation by cheering and sometimes chanting along with the dancers. The close of the dance was again cued when the men raised their swords over their heads; a resounding “huh” was produced vocally, marking the final beat. This was a long performance, lasting 90 minutes.

When the dancers left the *nakamal*, we made our way back to the car hoping to make it to the dress rehearsal for *Nao*; however, we were too late. When we reached Lownik’s *nakamal*, the dancers had long since finished. It was after 3 p.m. so we decided to return home for a short break. We only had four hours before the final evening of *Nekowiaar* began and needed to pack food and supplies for the long night ahead.

***Nekowiaar* Day Three (August 25–26, 1995)**

The final night of *Nekowiaar* began with the women’s *Napen-Napen* at 8 p.m.; the last group finished at 2:45 a.m. Mary had left for Ipai early with her mother, so we arrived on site by ourselves. Local friends of ours (Margaret and Tom) called out to us as we made our way onto the edge of the *nakamal*, so we decided to sit with them for the first part of the evening. Their two boys were sleeping soundly in the women’s rest area just behind us. Margaret and Tom planned to wake them up for the *Toka* because

they felt this was the most important part of the evening and wanted the boys to see the dance. Although all of the dances were well attended by spectators throughout the evening, there was no doubt as to which was the feature dance; when the *Toka* dancers entered the *nakamal* they were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd. When I looked around, I saw a visible increase in the numbers of spectators—particularly women and children. Margaret told me the *Toka* was considered to be the most significant of all the dances we would see that evening.

As I surveyed the *nakamal*, I realised the estimations of the number of spectators *Yakin* had made were correct. There were virtually thousands of people: babies, young toddlers, teenagers, young adults, parents, grandmothers, and grandfathers. The women's rest areas outside the *nakamal* were full; people were buying food from the stalls that had been set up outside the compound; and the tree houses and shelters that had been built into the *nabanga* trees were full of spectators.

Just before the *Toka*, we moved to the east side of the *nakamal* to stand inside one of the shelters perched above the *nakamal* floor. From our new position there was an excellent view of the dancers below. With a notebook in one hand and my tape recorder in the other, I settled in to wait for the *Toka* to begin; Richard took charge of taking photographs. He shot periodically from our viewpoint but also walked down to the *nakamal* for each of the dances to get close-ups. Because of his height he was able to take a number of shots of the dancers, over the heads of the spectators. I planned to chronicle the progression of rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and the final performance of *Nekowiaar* (see Figure 18).

Toka

At 3 a.m. the *nakamal* cleared, and the 1st of the *Toka* groups (from North Tanna) entered. The same ritual opening for *Numauoi* and *Kosusiva* was performed; then Chief *Pita* organised the dancers into four lines, each group of two facing one another. The men held sticks in their hands with ends shaped like beaks and painted white (*gerinamen*). When the dance began in a slow 2/2, the sticks were thrust forward and back; each thrust was interspersed with a hopping action. The choreography was meant to parody the action of attracting presents (thrusting of the sticks) and the dancer's joy in receiving them (the hopping action). As the sequence repeated itself, the formation of dancers moved across the *nakamal* floor, from the South-east corner to the North-west side. Each time they reached the opposite side, they moved back to their starting place, and began again. The close of this section was marked by an increased tempo, agitated movement of the dancers, and finally a motionless crouch.

The second section was in 6/8 at a moderate tempo. The dancers moved into a circular formation, but were then divided into pairs, while one or two actors left the group to act out a scene at the edge of the group. Each scene was cued by one of the dancers who ran from the circle out to the North-east corner, paused, and then ran back to the main group. While the main group was singing and dancing (about the scene that was being acted), the sticks were held in a horizontal position that formed one continuous line. They were thrust forward and back in time with the beat that was established by the singer's voices and feet pounding the floor of the *nakamal*. It was difficult for the actors to make their way out of the main group because they had to duck and negotiate their way through a maze of dancers and sticks to reach the outside. It was

even more difficult for them to make their way back to their original positions once they had finished their acting scene. The singing was divided into two sections—the slower 2/2 tempo and the accelerated 4/4.

The third and final section of *Toka* is different from its two preceding sections. The dancers formed one large circle facing inward and establish a tempo in 2/2 that was clearly amplified by their voices and foot stomping. As they moved into the circle, the beat accelerated; when they moved back from the circle, the tempo decreased and returned to the original beat. This in and out motion continued until the final closing when the women joined in for a frantic 4/4. The final beat of *Toka* was punctuated by a “huh” sound produced by the men’s voices (see Figure 19).

The second *Toka* followed in short succession after the first; these dancers were residents of the Middle Bush area (Central Tanna). The format and costumes were identical to the first *Toka*; however, this group was larger, with approximately 40 to 50 dancers. The total number of men dancing the *Toka* totalled 131. The Middle Bush group finished at 5:40 a.m., making way for the third and final group from the White Grass area (West Tanna).⁷⁹

Arriving through the *kastom* gate at the North-east corner of the *nakamal*, the third, and final group made their way slowly into the *nakamal*—but in a different formation than the preceding *Tokas*. The dancers again stood in a circle (facing inward) with their sticks pointed up at an angle, but this time their sticks supported two massive

⁷⁹ I was initially confused as to why there were three groups dancing the *Toka*, as I had assumed there would be one group that represented the guest village. In the case of this *Nekowiaar*, however, the three groups from Middle Bush, White Grass, and Ipai represented West Tanna, who represented the guest village. This was the largest *Nekowiaar* to be held in years.

kweriya on top of their chief's head. It was impossible to see inside the circle, but the *kweriyas* were clearly visible—they stood three metres vertically above the heads of the dancers in the circle. The procession moved to the centre of the *nakamal*, where the dancers lowered their sticks. The *kweriyas* were removed from the chiefs' heads, taken to the edge of the *nakamal*, and then driven into the ground. They remained there for the duration of the dance and were taken out with the dancers when they had finished their performance. This last presentation of the *Toka* finished at 7:20 a.m. (see Figures 20–22).

Numauoi

At 7:25 a.m., with the last of the *Toka* completed, the *Numauoi* dancers entered the *nakamal* from the South-east corner. Again, I was surprised by a new addition to their performance; they too carried the symbolic *kweriya*, but this time only one was carried. I also noticed Chief *Pita* wore a traditional grass skirt, decorated by the ceremonial *tapa* belt. I had observed that the chiefs of the other dances also wore this attire rather than the bright calico (cloth) of the dancers.

The audience was peculiarly quiet throughout the performance, and I wondered why the change. I asked Yakin, who was standing with me, and he reminded me *Numauoi* had not been seen by the majority of people in the audience or by the majority of dancers. When I looked around, I realised he was right. Not only was it very quiet, but many of the dancers had come into the *nakamal* to watch the performance.

Nekowiaar Ceremony 1995 Day Three

Figure 18. Co-researchers Mary Senior, Manu, and family members pose for group photograph after final 24 hours of *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

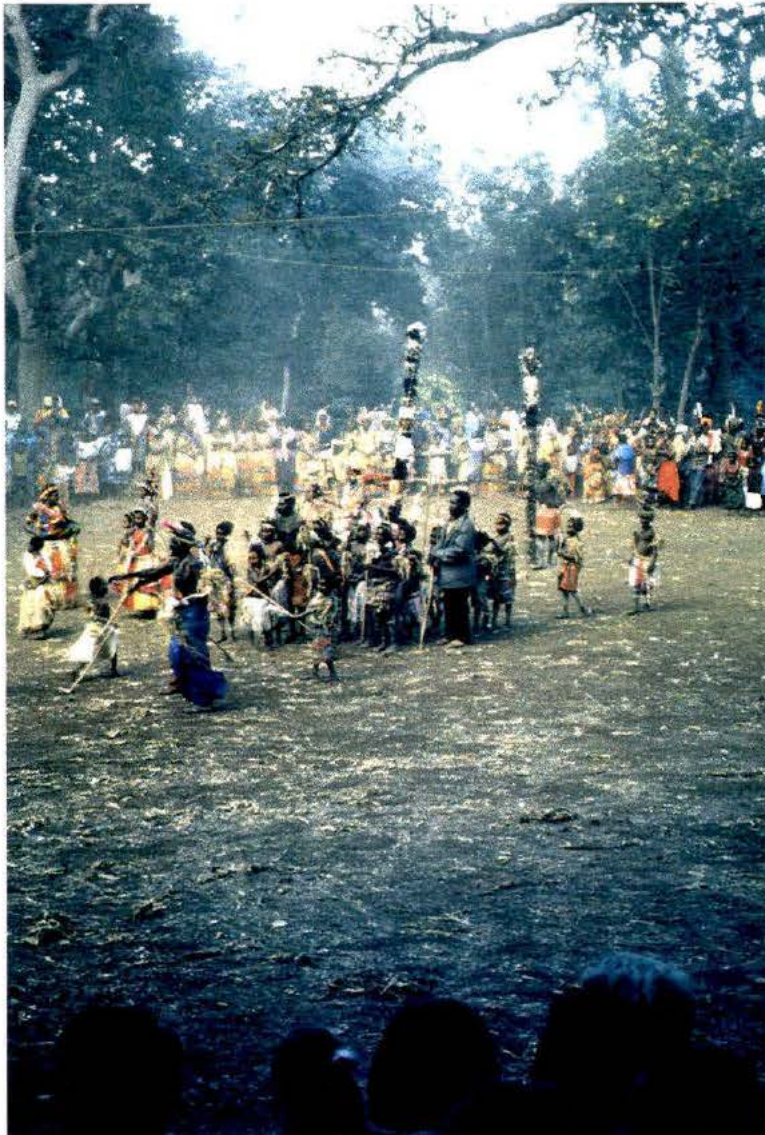


Figure 19. *Napen Napen* dancers lead out *Toka* dancers from *nakamal* to make way for another group of *Toka* dancers to perform.



Nekowiaar Ceremony 1995 Day Three

Figure 20. *Pikinini* held safe from *Napen Napen* and *Toka* dancers as they make their way out of the *nakamal*.



Nekowiaar Ceremony 1995 Day Three

Figure 21. Presentation of *Kweriya* crown as *Nao* dancers enter *nakamal*.



It was a different feeling to any of the other performances we had seen during the evening, and the dancers responded with a stirring presentation. I had observed many *Numauoi*, but I was impressed with the emotional performance the dancers gave on that final day of *Nekowiaar*.

Kosusiva

Kosusiva entered from the South-west corner at 8:18 a.m. The same ritual presentation of the *kweriya* was performed and was followed by the *Kosusiva* dancer's performance. It had been light for approximately two hours now but it was quite cool. The dancers (men) had been hiding out in the bush since 6 p.m. the previous evening, and these last groups looked tired. At the close of *Kosusiva*, I knew we only had one more performance to watch, but the exchange of gifts and the pig ritual were to follow as well—a long day ahead. I was tired of standing and hoped I would make it to the close of the event.

Nao

At 9:25 a.m., the *Nao* dancers entered the *nakamal* from the North-east corner (same entrance as *Numauoi*) carrying two *kweriya*. They performed the same ritual as the dancers of the third *Toka*; they moved back from their chief and planted the *kweriya* in the ground at the edge of the *nakamal*. This time, however, the *kweriyas* were supported by long sticks of sugar cane that the dancers would use to beat out the rhythm.

This performance was the final dance of the evening, and it held a position of importance second only to the *Tokas*.⁸⁰

The *Nao* was performed in four sections, or three, as the third repeated the first. It began in a slow 2/2, as had most of the other dances; the sound of rhythmic chanting and foot stomping was amplified by the hollow, almost brittle, rattle of the sugar cane poles. The atmosphere was electric, despite how tired everyone was; I could see why this dance had been chosen to conclude the *Nekowiaar*. It was visually stunning. The sounds of the brittle sugar cane, coupled with the men's deep voices, was unlike any of the other performances we had seen.

Each of the poles was of equal length, except for those used by the *pikinini* whose poles were cut in proportion to their height. There were at times intricate movements performed with the poles, and I was impressed with how well the children managed them. The entire group was perfectly synchronised; exact precision was required when the poles changed hands, were swung from right to left, and when they hit the ground accentuating the beat.

The opening section was choreographed in the same circular format used to open the other dances; however, the dancers moved in and out of the circle, as in the third section of the *Toka*. At the close of each sequence, the poles were gripped with both hands; then crossed with their neighbour to the left, meeting in the middle; and finally crossed with their neighbour to the right, again meeting in the middle. The image was

⁸⁰ Although the dancers of the three *Toka* were considered privileged, those who danced the last *Toka* received the highest regard. This honour was awarded because these dancers were from the village of Ipai, the host *nakamal*.

vivid. The close of this first section was cued by the dancers when they planted their poles in the ground beside them. They bent at the waist and then shook the sticks in a tight rattle, producing a sound similar to a rattle snake.

For the second section, the dancers formed a line similar to the line the *Toka* dancers employed for their second segment; however, this time the lines were staggered. They continued to dance in 2/2, but the tempo had increased. The poles were now held horizontally, and the dancers stood crouched and bent over from the waist. They remained this way for the entire section, shimmering the sticks, as they continued to stomp the ground while singing. Each new song was cued when a dancer ran out away from the group toward the North-east corner. Once he reached the end of the *nakamal*, he would pause, turn to face the group, and then run back to join them. This sequence had been employed by the men in all the previous dances.

The third section was the most interesting. It involved a combination of movements danced in an aggressive 4/4 tempo. The dancers began in four even single lines, pounding out the beat with the poles. This movement was followed by a single step that in effect staggered the lines; the first line walked left, the second walked right, the third left, and the fourth right. Every time the sequence was repeated, the dancers snapped the poles against the facing group's poles when they reached the end of their lines. Each movement, to the left and to the right, was the equivalent of three beats; on the fourth beat, the poles were snapped against one another. At the same time one, or two dancers moved apart from group to dramatise the songs of the main group.

The fourth and final section was a repeat of the second, but this time the acting continued outside of the main group, instead of the dancers returning immediately to the

circle. The closing gesture involved the dancers moving into the circle, pausing, and then shaking the poles in a tight quick rattle. The conclusion of *Nao* marked the close of the performance portion of the *Nekowiaar*. It was 10:43 a.m., and we had now been standing for almost 15 hours.

Exchange of Gifts

The closing ceremony of *Nekowiaar* is the first of two parts of a gift exchange. The hosts give gifts of *lap lap*, pigs, *kava*, and yams to their guests who danced the *Tokas*. A presentation of food was laid out in two large piles, and the dancers formed single lines to first shake hands, and then move on to the piles to pick up their gifts. This procession took well over two hours as the host dancers numbered 131. Even though the gifts were prepared by the women, the latter were not included in this ritual, or visible around the *nakamal* during the gift exchange. By this time most people had gone home, and only the dancers and a handful of spectators remained.

Once the hosts received their gifts and hands were shaken in an expression of good will, the pigs were brought forward to the *nakamal*. Each of the 131 pigs presented were either tied to long wooden poles or had their feet tied together front and back. The men of the host hamlet dragged them into the *nakamal*, and a few designated men clubbed them to death. After the pigs were killed, they were arranged in a long single line. Large *kava* plants (decorated with ribbons and flowers) were placed along side them, as well as sacks of yams. The *Toka* dancers walked through the gifts and claimed their prizes (see Figures 23–24).

The exchange of pigs, *kava*, and yams concluded only the first half of the gift exchange. *Nekowiaar* would not be complete until the guests (*Toka* dancers) returned

their host's hospitality. This concluding half of the gift exchange is called *Menuk* and is held some months after the *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

Description of *Menuk* Ceremony (October 7, 1995)

In the months following *Nekowiaar*, I again experienced difficulty trying to find out dates, but this time for *Menuk*. No one was entirely sure when it would be; all they could tell me was that “things” were being prepared—things meant fattening pigs, growing *kava*, and yams. I persisted in asking my co-researchers for dates regularly, and over a month later, Mary arrived at the house to inform me *Menuk* was the next day. She wasn't sure where it was but had a general idea it was somewhere in the Middle Bush region;⁸¹ all we had to do, she said, was drive to the area and ask for directions. Later on in the day, I spoke to Manu at the market and he gave me the same information. He also thought this would be another opportunity to take pictures for the photo albums I was working on.

We set out for Mary early the next morning, arriving at her hamlet at 7 a.m. I was concerned about finding the location and thought additional time would be needed to locate the *nakamal*. On our way we picked up Chief Simon's younger brother, Johnny, who had missed his taxi and needed a ride. He suggested we follow a small road that ran behind TAFEA Junior Secondary School, to make our way to Middle Bush.

The drive through Middle Bush (and eventually out to the main road leading to North Tanna—because we got lost) took us about two hours to complete. During the

⁸¹ The Middle Bush region is one of the oldest on the island and traditionally known as the strong hold of *kastom*. Tribes from this area were able to remain separate from much of the European influences that came to Tanna's coastal hamlets.

drive we passed small groupings of hamlets and observed sweeping views of the coastline on the East and West sides of the island; unfortunately, we were not successful in finding *Menuk*. Thinking we had gone too far (we were now out of the Middle Bush area) we turned back.

Shortly after returning to the inland dirt track, we passed a gentleman walking a large pig. When we asked for directions, he told us the *nakamal* we were looking for was just ahead—we were to turn left at a large *nabanga* tree. The conversation was conducted in an island dialect, and luckily for us Johnny was able to translate for us. Considering the number of *nabanga* trees on Tanna, I thought it unlikely we would find the “large one” we were to turn at; fortunately we were lucky. Shortly after we resumed driving, we passed a group of women dressed in *Nekowiaar* costume at the foot of one such tree. The road they sat beside, however, looked more like a foot path; it was overgrown with long grass nearly a meter high. Although the women assured us this was the road to the *nakamal* we were looking for, I was doubtful when we turned onto the road and drove down toward *Menuk*. At times the going was rough, and at one point we had to drive off the side to let a passing taxi by with large pigs and decorated bundles of *kava* in the back—at least knew we were headed in the right direction. At the end of the road we were rewarded with the sight of people and a large *nakamal*. We drove back up the road a short way, parked the jeep and returned on foot.

Arriving at the *nakamal* we were unsure of our reception. Both Manu and Chief Simon had told us we would be welcome, but as we approached the *nakamal* all eyes seemed to turn our way. At first I was conscious I was the only female present, that Richard and I were the only foreigners present, and that everyone else was ni-Vanuatu.

Fortunately we only stood at the entrance for a few minutes before Manu approached us with an elderly man. Manu introduced us to Chief Tuman, repeating several times that the chief was a big-man and that his *nakamal* was one of the most important on the island. We were to find out later that afternoon why it was considered to be important enough to host *Menuk*.

Chief Tuman welcomed us warmly, told us it would be all right to take photographs, and asked Manu to show us where we could sit. From this point on, the rest of the day became difficult for me. I was to experience, for the first time, what it was like to be treated as a woman Tannese style. I had been enjoying an elevated status, prior to *Menuk*, because I was both foreign and the wife of the *Dokta*. We made our way across the *nakamal*, closely watched by many who had never seen us before and were shown to two areas to sit. I had previously thought there were no women at the site, but I was mistaken. At the back of the *nakamal*, under large trees in an area not cleared, sat a dozen or so women; the men were seated closer to the front edge of the *nakamal*, on ground that had been cleared. I had only Mary to talk with, because the other women spoke a dialect that I couldn't understand. Richard was seated with Chief *Pita* and Chief *Simon*, both of whom could speak *Bislama*. They spent the afternoon telling Richard stories about the *nakamal* and various aspects of *Nekowiaar* and *Menuk*. I consoled myself with knowing I could at least get the information when we returned home.

The day was intolerably long. We arrived at the site shortly after 9 a.m. At 1 p.m. the ceremony had still not started. Everyone was restless, hungry, and hot; fortunately the bugs were not too bad. Mary and I had little to talk about because she had never seen *Menuk* before and wasn't familiar with the Middle Bush area. The only prior

information I had was from an earlier discussion with Manu. He told me they would club 131 pigs at *Menuk*, to equal the number the *Toka* dancers received at *Nekowiaar*. When I asked how the guests (now the dancers from *Nao*, *Numauoi*, and *Kosusiva*) would identify which pigs and *kava* were theirs, he explained that the markers left on the gifts at the *Nekowiaar*, were now on the gifts for today's presentation. When the time came to claim their presents, all the guests needed to do was locate the tags they used at *Nekowiaar*.

Looking around me I observed a noticeable absence of young girls; young boys, however, were well in attendance, sitting with their fathers. As the day dragged on, people went in search of coconuts for juice; a few lengths of sugar cane were passed around; and an occasional *lap lap* appeared at different groups. Each of the dance groups seated around the *nakamal* was organised into sections according to the dance each had performed at *Nekowiaar*. Throughout the morning and into the afternoon, taxis arrived at the entrance of the *nakamal* unloading pigs and *kava* of a various of sizes. Mary told me that because the location of the original site had been changed only yesterday and that was why so many men were arriving late. Because there are only a half dozen taxis for transport on the island, the logistics of moving pigs and *kava* to a new location are extremely difficult, especially when the distances can be at least an hour drive one way. The result was a long wait for those of us who had arrived early that morning.

After sitting for four hours, Chief *Pita* got up and motioned for the men from the various groups to come and locate their *kava*. It was now 1 p.m. Once the men located the plants designated for them, they needed the help of four or five men to drag them

back to their sitting area because they were so heavy. Then the men cut down a large stick from one of the surrounding *nabanga* trees and whittled its end down to a point to dig at the dirt clinging to the base of the plant. Once the roots of the plants were exposed and the green leaves on top were cut away with a machete, they were divided into small bundles that were tied together with a thin piece of root vine.

We waited another hour before a small group of men and women entered the far side of the *nakamal* singing. Following them was a larger group who carried a makeshift stretcher. On top of the stretcher sat two young boys supporting a large decorated *kava* plant while the procession walked around the *nakamal* singing. Periodically the women broke away from the group to swat large bundles of leaves at the crowd. The crowd roared with delight at each of the women's attacks but moved back from the *nakamal* edge each time to avoid being hit. With each passing, the crowd returned to their original positions until the women came back to swat at them again. The effect was visually similar to the sound of surf surging in and out from the shore line.

The sequence was repeated twice with *kava* carried on top and twice with pigs carried on top. Each time the procession completed a turn around the *nakamal*, the *kava* was lowered to the ground, and the pigs were clubbed to death. Shortly after this opening ceremonial procession the activity increased, and more pigs were dragged into the *nakamal*. At first they were brought in one at a time and clubbed, but before long several men were dragging them in—in quick succession. The men designated to club them used large logs of no particular shape; they aimed for the snout first and then the head. The pigs were of an assortment of sizes, the smallest may have weighed 20 kilos or about 40 lbs., and the largest perhaps 90-100 kilos or 200 pounds. The large pigs were

more difficult to kill. The men had to swing their clubs well above their heads and bring them down swiftly a number of times (see Figure 24). During the act, the women continued to move around the *nakamal* singing and waving their bundle of leaves. The crowd cheered on the men who were clubbing pigs and those who were dragging them into the *nakamal*. One hundred and thirty one pigs were killed—in just under an hour.

At the close of the ceremony the crowd began to disperse. The *kava* had been reduced to manageable sizes, but it still took several men to drag and then lift the plants into the back of the taxis. At most the taxis could carry two small pigs. Generally one pig was loaded, and the family whose hamlet it was for also got in. It was now 3 p.m., and I expect it took well into the evening to transport all the pigs back to the hamlets.

We returned to our vehicle and made the long trip back to the hospital. We dropped Johnny home first because there wasn't enough room for him in the taxi going to his hamlet. When we arrived, the taxi was already there unloading eight people and a very large hairless black pig. It was unlike pigs I had seen before, and Manu told me it was a *kapia* pig. He explained that the Tannese consider them to be the most valuable of pigs. We took a group picture of the Manu's family, with the pig, and left them to begin preparation for their celebration dinner. Looking out from our window later that evening (on top of the hill housing the hospital employees), we watched the lights of bonfires flickering along the coastline. All the hamlets that received a pig at *Menuk* were celebrating with a feast of pig, *kava*, yams, and manioc. *Kastom* dancing would conclude the celebration and run through to the early hours of the next morning.

Looking back at the events that transpired during my time on Tanna, I realised how fortunate I was. Although this was my first experience at conducting fieldwork, I

was sure the willingness of the people to assist me and the wealth of information I was able to collect would not have been as easily obtained by someone else on Tanna.

My position, as the *Dokta's* wife gave me access to areas traditionally taboo to women and foreigners: I was able to spend time at the exclusive men's *nakamal*, observe rehearsals generally reserved for the Tannese, free to photograph and record, and was assigned an interpreter at each of the practices I attended. In one instance, when there was not one, the chief apologised. Except for one instance, *Memuk*,⁸² I was treated as an equal. I feel fortunate and honoured to have had this opportunity to experience such a significant part of Tannese culture.

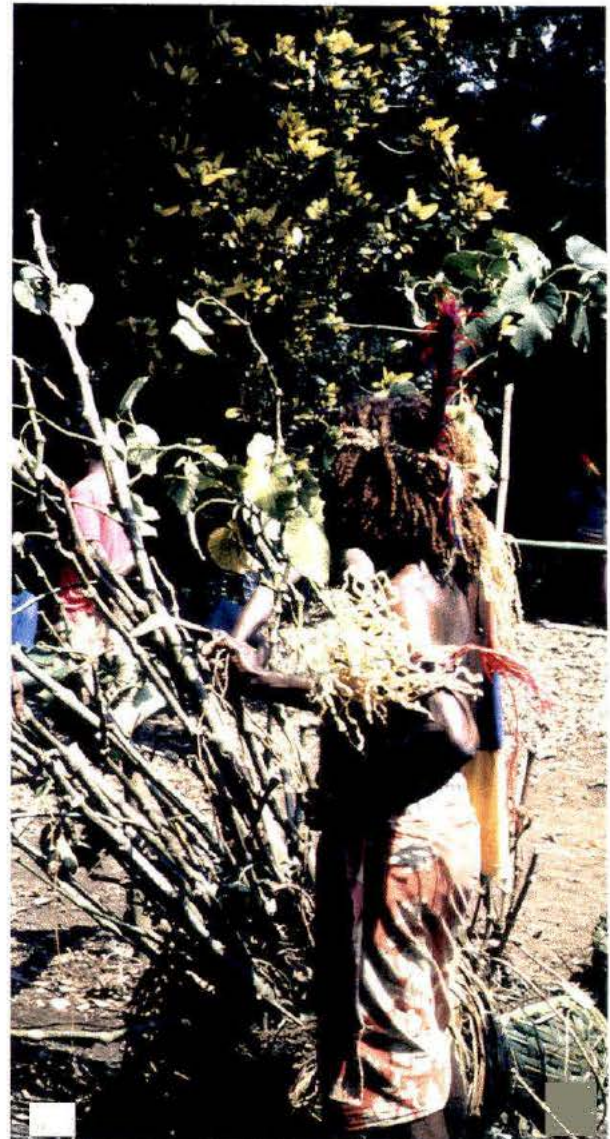
⁸² At the *Memuk* ceremony, I was unable to converse with any of the men, nor would they acknowledge my presence as they passed by where I was seated with the women.

Exchange of gifts *Nekowiaar* Ceremony 1995

Figure 22. Children wait by *kapia* pigs to be claimed by their families.

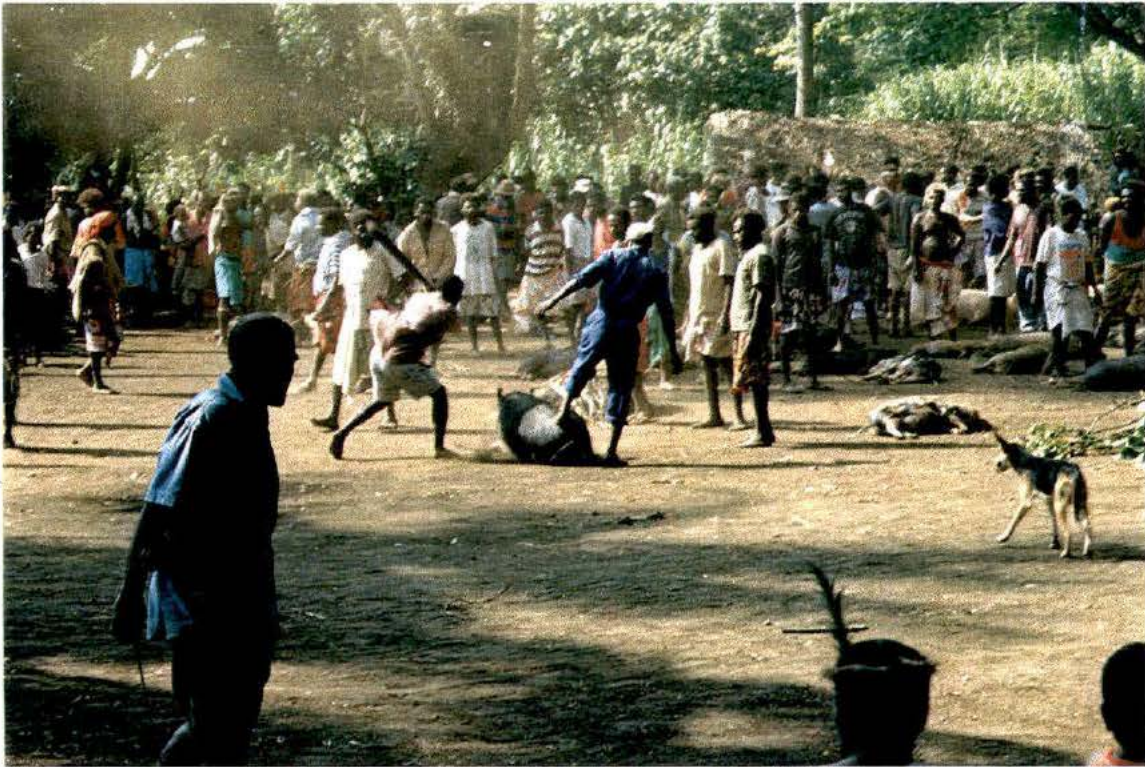


Figure 23. *Kosusiva* dancer has claimed his *kava* plant.



Menuk Ceremony 1995

Figure 25. Killing of local *kapia* pigs in *Menuk* ceremony for presentation to *Nao*, *Kosusiva*, and *Numauoi* dancers.



Chapter 6

The Significance and Purpose of the *Nekowiaar* Ceremony

from a Tannese Perspective

This study employed an ethnomusicological approach with a phenomenological perspective. The techniques of ethnography, participant observation, and interviews have all been employed in this examination of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Data were collected from July 1994 to January 1995 in the form of observation notes (presented in a narrative format, chapter 5) and three taped interviews: December 6th, December 20th, and December 21st, 1995 (Roberts-Johnson, 1995). The musical recordings and photographs were also collected during my field work; however, these data will only be used to highlight and illustrate the narrative material. Given the richness of the material contained in the audio and visual documents, these data warrant a separate study whose purpose is to address the formal musical analysis of the structure and form of Tannese music. Included in this chapter is the presentation of the data analysis of the three interviews. The interpretation of this material and my conclusions regarding this study are presented in chapters 7 and 8.

Generation of Codes

The process of data analysis has been described in chapter 4. However, as each application of the method is unique to the material to which it is applied, I have included a description of the process I followed for the analysis of the interviews (see pp. 88–90).

The first stage of conducting data analysis is to transcribe any audio-taped interviews into a written transcript (protocol). In my study there were three interviews. I listened to each interview once, without the transcript, then once with the transcript, and

finally I read through the transcript without the aid of the tape to determine the natural “meaning units” as expressed by my co-researchers. Following each reading, I noticed that more information presented itself to me. My next step was to divide the transcript into natural blocks (meaning units) (see Giorgi step 2, p. 88). These units were then re described in the 1st transformation (see Giorgi, step 3, p. 88). During this process I tried to state as simply as possible the meaning that dominated the natural unit. This is the first time my words were used to interpret the phenomenon.

The following table is an excerpt from Interview 2 (Mary Senior) that shows Giorgi’s steps 2 to 4 of the process used in the data analysis of the three protocols used for this study. The protocols are available in full format (Roberts-Johnson, 1995). The 1st column represents the natural meaning unit from the verbatim transcript—where the original text has been divided into thematic statements or meaning units. Division occurs when one idea finishes and another begins. Column 2 presents emerging themes (1st transformation) which are objective statements that describe as simply as possible the idea presented in the meaning unit (column 1). Column 3, the 2nd transformation, presents the label I assigned to describe the emerging themes in the 1st transformation; this is the first time I used my own words to describe the meaning of the original thematic statement. The process of moving from meaning units to 1st and 2nd transformations assisted me in making a final objective statement, or label, that described the essential meaning of the original protocol. I continued this process until I thought I had grasped the essence of the data.

**Table 1: Emergent Themes in Original Protocols 1st and 2nd Transformations
Excerpt from Interview No. 3 Mary Senior**

Meaning Units (Participants statements and explanations)	1 st Transformation (indication of:)	2 nd Transformation (meaning of:)
<p>There was one song they sing at that time but before there was one they make one <i>Nekowiaar</i>, before before, at Ipai. Then some people from Up, there's Bethel, this side of <i>Bethel</i>, they dance one kind thing like <i>Numauoi</i> but they are holding small pieces of killing, killing with sticks and they sing one song. They sing about all the tribes from there, out to North, where the Imafin is, and that way up to Ipai.</p>	<p>- <i>Napen Napen</i> song describes location of local tribes in the Northern region of Tanna</p>	<p>- method of recording accurate cultural knowledge - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i></p>
<p>All the different villages and tribes. And they sing that song and dance <i>Napen-Napen</i> and we say what the people here, when they hear that song, they like to listen to the song and when they listen to the song they can... Yes, hear about the tribes and the names of the villages,</p>	<p>- song describes the tribes and the villages they are from</p>	<p>- method of learning - method of recording cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction</p>
<p>and what they do is, it reminds them that they must ask which tribe is this and which tribe is this so they sing the song.</p>	<p>- songs remind the Tannese of who the tribes are</p>	<p>- method of learning ensuring accurate cultural knowledge</p>
<p>It was very hard for them to... Yes lots of names, but we tape it, Steven's father sings the song, Chief Sanga, then we gave it out and what we do is bring the tape down to Lènamer we play the tape and they start singing with the tape.</p>	<p>- Chief Sanga uses audio tape to record words of song for <i>Napen Napen</i></p>	<p>- ensuring accurate cultural knowledge - method of recording accurate cultural knowlege - knowledge of positive Western knowledge - integration of positive Western influences</p>

(continued)

Meaning Units	1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
That's what we do here. If anything from before, the history comes usually from the song. When any dispute or anything we just sing the song then it reminds us where you run from here...this one here.	- songs are used to record events in Tannese history	- ensuring accurate cultural knowledge - method of learning - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i>
We can tell the stories but then if the man did not agree with what you tell in the story, then you sing the song again. The same song where it can happen, the thing happened that day. So he can remember. He can simply understand what you are telling him.	- singing songs helps people remember more than telling the story	- ensuring accurate cultural knowledge - method of learning
Ah, you can tell the stories, but there is some people they high minded and they just refuse what you are telling them. So what you do is you sing that song again then he listened to the songs and the stories and he balance them together he can just hear it, understand that this is same thing that he is telling me and he sing the same song about.	- if the story and the song balance, then the information can be understood	- ensuring accurate cultural knowledge

Note: Due to the length of the protocols, Table 1 presents only an excerpt of interview 3 to show the original process of steps 2 through 4 of the data analysis process described by Giorgi. Following is a modified form of Table 1 in its entirety. Table 2 presents the 1st and 2nd transformations of protocols 1–3 (Chief *Pita*, Mary Junior, Mary Senior); column 1 (meaning units) has been omitted.

Table 2 presents a summary of the 1st order themes and 2nd transformations of the protocols transcribed from my co-researchers' interviews (Roberts-Johnson, 1995).

Themes that repeat themselves in the 1st and 2nd transformations have been omitted. The data are a representation of the original meaning units of each of the three protocols.

**Table 2: 1st and 2nd Transformations of Original Protocols (Summary)
Interviews Nos. 1–3: Chief *Pita*, Mary Junior, Mary Senior**

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dancers perform <i>Nekowiaar</i> • dancers observe <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	- method of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1994 <i>Nekowiaar</i> tourist promotion 	- negative Western influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • big-men holders of <i>kastom</i> knowledge • senior women instruct <i>Napen Napen</i> • ability of performers for <i>Nekowiaar</i> depends on training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction - leadership qualifications method of recording cultural knowledge - method of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • costume preparation for <i>Nekowiaar</i> is exclusive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony - symbolic representation of local leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>lap lap</i>, <i>kava</i>, yams, and pigs are presented as food gifts at <i>Menuk</i> ceremony • gifts are returned in exact number at <i>Menuk</i> 	- purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those with ceremonial knowledge help others • <i>lap lap</i>, <i>kava</i>, yams, and pigs are presented as food gifts at <i>Menuk</i> ceremony • gifts are returned in exact number at <i>Menuk</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - methods of learning - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dye for face paints bought in store 	- negative Western influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dancers eat special food/no water • dancers hide in bush/see women taboo • dancers use <i>kastom</i> roads for all activities concerning <i>Nekowiaar</i> • women prepare food for gift presentation • women burn practice materials • <i>lap lap</i>, <i>kava</i>, yams, and pigs are presented as food gifts at <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction - symbolic representation of local leadership

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meaning of songs for <i>Nekowiaar</i> are about politics; French/British condominium and Independence • sing song about Semo Semo myth • spectators learn local <i>kastom</i> by listening to the stories the songs tell • songs are recorded by the big-men and brought to rehearsals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method of learning - method of recording accurate cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • songs are composed only by Chief Sanga and instructed by big-men • songs tell about the past and present history of Tanna • singing/dancing songs ensures the story is told accurately • stories are checked for accuracy by adding song and dance • living for old people; what they do is <i>kastom</i> living • songs are sung repeatedly in each generation • feet, basket pounding, voices are instruments for <i>Nekowiaar</i> • <i>kastom</i> and <i>Nekowiaar</i> has full participation with performers and spectators. • dancers can begin as soon as they can walk and continue into old age • acting out songs ensures understanding of performance to spectators • practice of <i>kastom</i> food taboos give women ability to perform for ten hours • <i>Nekowiaar</i> is about <i>kastom</i> living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - methods of recording accurate cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction - performer's method of learning - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living in Vila is not <i>kastom</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative Western influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tourist <i>Nekowiaar</i> poor attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative Western influence

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of dancers for <i>Nekowiaar</i> is increasing • unable to dance <i>Napen Napen</i> but included in rehearsal • performer train for <i>Nekowiaar</i> • watched rehearsal for <i>Nekowiaar</i> dances • watched two <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremonies • listened to songs for <i>Numauoi</i> repeatedly • tried to learn songs for <i>Numauoi</i> • watched <i>Napen Napen</i> to learn dance • learned ceremony structure from big-women • learned ceremony structure from observation of performances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - method of instruction - method of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nekowiaar</i> hosted at Ipai, Isangel, Middle Bush <i>nakamals</i> • Ipai <i>Nekowiaar</i> performed at Ipai, Isangel, Middle Bush <i>nakamals</i> • big-women instructors determined by gender, hierarchy knowledge • more people danced in 1995 <i>Nekowiaar</i> than in previous years • more spectators watched 1995 <i>Nekowiaar</i> than in previous years • <i>Numauoi</i> danced first time in 3 generations <i>Numauoi</i> new dance to <i>Nekowiaar</i> in 1995 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - symbolic representation of local leadership - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performers dance different dance each <i>Nekowiaar</i> • children dance <i>Nekowiaar</i> beginning at age seven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • music men are big-men chosen through succession • only one music man composes songs for <i>Nekowiaar</i> • ceremonial structure is known only to big-men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - big-men's method of instruction

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • took pictures of <i>Nekowiaar</i> performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integration of positive 20th century influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isangel <i>Nekowiaar</i> tourist event (not chiefs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative Western influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school education is modern (math, English) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of positive Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children excused from <i>Nekowiaar</i> rehearsals for school studies • parents teach <i>Nekowiaar</i> dances at home after school • students studying in Fiji return home to train for <i>Nekowiaar</i> • students show <i>kastom</i> dance in Fiji school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integration of positive Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • big-men at <i>Nikoletan</i> solve Tannese land disputes, host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • local chiefs solve village problems • Big-man <i>Pita</i> main teacher of <i>Nekowiaar</i> for West Tanna • Chief Sanga only composer of music • chiefs must perform <i>kastom</i> ritual for big-men to gain permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • big-men blow conch shell to signal permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • gifts given in <i>kastom</i> ritual must be returned by big-men if permission is granted to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • dancers closest to <i>kastom</i> road of <i>Nekowiaar</i> hosts dance <i>Toka</i> • messages about permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> are sent by big-men along <i>kastom</i> roads • chiefs who have danced previous <i>Nekowiaar</i> train dancers in their villages • big-men visit villages and oversee rehearsals • big-men talk about <i>kastom</i> living say what it is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - symbolic representation of local leadership - big-men's method of instruction

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • songs for men's dances must be ordered by a big-men • fowl and <i>kava</i> must be given when song is ordered • each practice must be blocked with symbolic representation of how many songs have been ordered (five leaves = five songs) • <i>Nekowiaar</i> must be requested by messages sent along <i>kastom</i> roads • travel to practice rehearsals must be along <i>kastom</i> roads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method of recording accurate cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction - leadership qualifications - symbolic representation of local leadership - ensuring accurate cultural knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • songs tell of Tannese cultural event • songs are used again in successive <i>Nekowiaar</i> • songs are added for each <i>Nekowiaar</i> • men and women use new songs for each <i>Nekowiaar</i> • <i>Nekowiaar</i> performed in 1995, 1994, 1972 • gifts must be returned equally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - big-men's method of instruction - methods of recording accurate cultural knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student worries because he can sing song, but not dance it for Fiji school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - methods of ensuring accurate cultural knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rehearsals for <i>Nekowiaar</i> take-up to four months • preparation for <i>Nekowiaar</i> involves learning songs, dances, acting, costume preparation, gifts for exchange • people come from other islands to watch <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method of learning - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nekowiaar</i> important because it teaches about local power (big-men) and local <i>kastom</i> of the Tannese • knowledge about <i>kastom</i> comes from <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolic representation of local leadership - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> documentation

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • big-men at <i>Nikoletan</i> solve Tannese land disputes, host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • local chiefs solve village problems • Big-man <i>Pita</i> main teacher of <i>Nekowiaar</i> for West Tanna • Chief <i>Sanga</i> only composer of music • chiefs must perform <i>kastom</i> ritual for big-men to gain permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • big-men blow conch shell to signal permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • gifts given in <i>kastom</i> ritual must be returned by big-men if permission is granted to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> • dancers closest to <i>kastom</i> road of <i>Nekowiaar</i> hosts dance <i>Toka</i> • messages about permission to host <i>Nekowiaar</i> are sent by big-men along <i>kastom</i> roads • chiefs who have danced previous <i>Nekowiaar</i> train dancers in their villages • big-men visit villages oversee rehearsals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - symbolic representation of local leadership - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nekowiaar</i> important because it teaches about local power/<i>kastom</i> • knowledge about <i>kastom</i> comes from <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symbolic representation of local leadership - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - documentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people watching <i>Nekowiaar</i> don't know what <i>kweriya</i> or <i>tut</i> are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative effects of Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • big-men are trying to record <i>kastom</i> in written format • old people know what <i>kweriya</i> or <i>tut</i> are • modern education is helping big-men to record Tanna's <i>kastom</i> • Big-man <i>Pita</i> and Tom 1st generation to attend public school • Manu, Mary, 2nd generation attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integration of positive Western influences - leadership qualifications - ensuring accurate recording of local cultural knowledge

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not enough secondary schools for children of 2nd generation parents • government determines how many school there are • 3rd generation 1st to attend secondary school • some secondary students attend senior high school in Fiji (U.S.P.) • locals who leave the island like to return • families want members working in Vila to remain there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of positive Western influences - knowledge of negative Western influences - leadership qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locals working in Vila invite family to visit them for several months a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integration of Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locals lose <i>kastom</i> when living in Vila • hard to practice <i>kastom</i> when living away from the island • pressures of going to night-clubs makes you lose your <i>kastom</i> • living in Vila is by money • living in Vila is hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of negative Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when you return to Tanna it is easy to get your <i>kastom</i> back • living traditional lifestyle helps you get back your <i>kastom</i> • most people who leave Tanna come back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you must have modern educational skills to live in Vila • you must have modern educational skills to get a job • modern skills are writing and speaking English and French and math • Big-man Tom learned skills working as tourist guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of positive Western influences

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English school is better than French school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of negative Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big-man Tom important because he can read and write in English politicians speak good English and write good English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> before training for <i>Nekowiaar</i> dances performers must watch first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - methods of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> group performance must be very good at performance individual dancers don't have to be good to dance at ceremony it is important for young people to dance at <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - method of recording accurate cultural knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dancers must perform dance assigned to area where they are from (South, East, West, North) music men are chosen through succession in patrilineal lineage in each of the areas (South, East, West, North) in the case of the absence of a son in the line of succession a son of the daughter or brother is chosen C.P. wants recording of <i>Nekowiaar</i> dances C.P. teaches men's and women's dances (except <i>Toka</i>) CP. describes structure of <i>Numauoi</i> <i>Karu</i> section of <i>Numauoi</i> is for acting out songs story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - method of recording accurate cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> men attend rehearsals throughout the week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method of learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> children attend rehearsals on the weekend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of positive Western influence - integration of positive 20th century influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grandfather told C.P., story of <i>Numauoi</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - methods of recording accurate cultural knowledge

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ikaoras dancers ask C.P. to teach them <i>Numauoi</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - methods of performer's learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C.P. told music men story of <i>Numauoi</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief Sanga (music man) composed new songs for <i>Numauoi</i> C.P. remembers songs and dances for <i>Numauoi</i> C.P. has danced all dances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Numauoi</i> danced in 1995 <i>Nekowiaar</i> because they wanted <i>kastom</i> performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction - knowledge of negative effect Western influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> songs re-enact scenes from fishing, gardening, making honey, caring for livestock etc., 131 pigs will be killed 131 <i>kava</i> plants must be presented at <i>Menuk</i> and <i>Nekowiaar</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - symbolic representation of local leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C.P. must make sure dances and songs are performed accurately when C.P. present at rehearsals attendance is good when C.P. present at rehearsals attendance is not good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - big-men's method of instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C.P. lectures dancers for poor attendance C.P. tells origins of <i>Nekowiaar</i> (Ipeukal Myth) <i>Yremera</i> is the highest order of power <i>Yremera</i> doesn't speak; <i>Yani Niko</i> (big-man or chief) speaks for him <i>Yremera</i> are chosen through patrilineal succession next family member chosen as <i>Yremera</i> must fulfil his obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - leadership qualifications - method of learning

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nekowiaar</i> came from a stone found near Yasur volcano • <i>Nekowiaar</i> is the largest <i>kastom</i> ceremony on Tanna • <i>Nekowiaar</i> celebrates the symbols of <i>Yremera</i> power (big-men) • <i>Yremera</i> wears <i>kweriya</i> at each dancers presentation • <i>Nekowiaar</i> important because it unites people; a time of peace • <i>Nekowiaar</i> important because it unites people; a time of peace • <i>nakamal</i> are special because of their size and the occurrence of a significant event in Tannese history • <i>Nekowiaar</i> formed because Tanna grew many villages; needed ceremony to hold large numbers • C.P. tells origins of <i>Yremera</i> aristocracy (<i>Yani Niko</i> myth) • when chiefs decide to make <i>Nekowiaar</i> all villagers participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> - symbolic representation of local leadership - leadership qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ipai</i> village/<i>nakamal</i> functions as meeting place for smaller surrounding villages/<i>nakamal</i> • hawk feathers, sugar cane, and <i>kastom</i> woods, bark, are used in making dancers instruments • stones are manipulated for production of various foods/trees • leaves used for arm and head decorations in men's dances are from special trees (<i>nesei</i>) grown on big-men's land. • big-men ensure <i>kastom</i> procedures are used in preparing dancer's instruments • instruments can take up to two years to prepare (hooks for <i>Toka</i>) • gifts take up to three years to prepare(pigs, <i>kava</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring accurate cultural knowledge - big-men's method of instruction - leadership qualifications

(continued)

1 st Transformation	2 nd Transformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hooks used in <i>Toka</i> are passed on to sons through successive generations • grass skirts life expectancy is short; must be made for each <i>Nekowiaar</i> • long hair in braids is a traditional hairstyle/not modern • dancers must follow ceremonial taboos for one week before <i>Nekowiaar</i> and during length of ceremony • hiding from women, swimming before dawn, no water intake, men cook food, roasted yam, taro, banana, no fruit, no soup, fainting faces black, wear sarong only • taboo restrictions are lifted after <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony is finished • C.P. teaches acting roles • small groups are chosen to observe taboos in strict form • jobs prevent all dancers from observing strict taboos • Tanna <i>kastom</i> strong because big-men talk strong when Europeans came to island 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big-men's method of instruction - methods of learning - symbolic representation of local leadership - leadership qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • younger generations of dancers are painting decorations on their instruments • jobs prevent all dancers from observing strict taboos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge of negative Western influences - negative effect of Western influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • men who act out stories to songs volunteer to take the role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - performer's method of learning

During the initial process of breaking down the transcripts into natural meaning units (see Table 1) I was careful not to over analyse early divisions; I made decisions as immediately as the thought came into my head. Considerably more thought was given when I identified the themes in the 1st transformations. Once the table was formatted, I put it away and revisited it two days later. When I revisited my table of themes, I made

changes where I felt necessary and then looked for emergent clusters of higher order themes in relation to the phenomenon in question. Once the emergent clusters were reorganised a new label that described the meaning of the themes as simply as possible was assigned to each of the reorganised groups. This process is identical to the steps used in the development of Table 2. The restructured set of themes is presented in Table 3. Column 1 presents the reclustered 2nd transformations from Table 2, and column 2 presents the new label assigned to the reclustered 2nd transformations in column 1 (see Giorgi step 4, p. 88; Table 2, pp. 169–179). Again I revisited the table, making adjustments where I felt necessary.

Table 3: 2nd and 3rd Transformations of Original Protocols
Interviews Nos. 1–3: Chief *Pita*, Mary Junior, Mary Senior

2 nd Transformation	3 rd Transformation
Purpose of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • documentation of Tannese <i>kastom</i> • unification of Tannese culture • creation and renewal of alliances • establishing reciprocal gift exchange 	preservation of Tannese culture
Methods of recording accurate cultural knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • song, dance, acting, instrumentation, storytelling, • photography, audio recordings, composers Big-men as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers • recorders • advisors 	documentation of Tannese <i>kastom</i> practices
Knowledge of negative effect re: Western influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governship • tourism • materialism 	fear of losing <i>kastom</i>
Knowledge of positive Western influences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education • employment 	desire to acquire skills for political leadership
Symbolic representation of local leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentation of <i>kweriya</i> head-dress, tut belt at <i>Nekowiaar</i> • use of <i>kastom</i> roads for communication of events concerning <i>Nekowiaar</i> • ceremonial taboos 	transmission of local cultural knowledge
Big-men's method of instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintenance of oral traditions • actualisation of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony • ensuring accurate <i>kastom</i> practices 	preservation of Tannese culture

(continued)

2 nd Transformation	3 rd Transformation
Spectators methods of learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation of rehearsals • observation of <i>Nekowiaar</i> ceremony 	transmission on local cultural knowledge
Performer's methods of learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desire to participate • observation of rehearsals • willingness to train • respectful of instruction from big-women • respectful of instruction from big-men 	transmission of local cultural knowledge
Leadership qualifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gender (male), hierarchy (big-men/<i>Yremera</i> status), land governship(one of eight main <i>nakamals</i>), ceremonial knowledge (practical/cognitive), magic knowledge (stones), modern knowledge (English written & verbal skills) • gender (female), hierarchy (achieved through marriage or lineage), ceremonial knowledge (practical/cognitive) 	ensuring local governance
Integration of positive 20 th century influences and traditional lifestyle	independence

Giorgi's 5th step in the phenomenological analysis involves synthesising the meaning units into a descriptive statement (situated descriptions) that can be presented in either a tabular or written format (p. 89). His final step is described as a description at the general level of the protocol. The statement should be an essential, non-redundant intuitive "grasping" of the whole. The particulars reported in the protocol are left out. This information is presented in tabular form (Table 3) and as a written summary in chapters 6 and 7.

As stated in Colaizzi's article "Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Views It" (1983) there is no definitive method for analysing a protocol. The researcher

must be free to modify methodology depending on the phenomenon under investigation. At this stage in my analysis of the three protocols, I re clustered the 3rd order themes from the each of the protocols a 4th time to formulate Table 4.

Prior to discussion of the findings, a final table was developed in which 3rd order themes (see Table 2) were clustered into four dominant themes to provide an outline for the concluding summary. The headings in this table represent the dominant themes of the three protocols, or the intuitive “grasping” of the whole in tabular format. The subheadings are the 3rd order themes that support this final restructuring. Caution was exercised to refer continually to the original protocol to ensure validity of the findings in synthesising themes into the narrative.

Table 4: 3rd and 4th Transformation of Original Protocols—Final Transformation Interviews Nos. 1–3: Chief *Pita*, Mary Junior, Mary Senior

3rd and 4th Transformation
frustration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western influence/governance
fear <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of <i>kastom</i>
desire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • documentation: Tannese <i>kastom</i> • preservation: Tannese culture • modern education: English written/verbal skills • transmission: of local cultural knowledge to successive generations
motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self governance • independence

Summary of Findings

The process of data analysis is “the process of systematically searching and arranging the [data] that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan & Biklen,

1992, p. 153). Although the process is long and the researcher can feel overwhelmed with making sense out of the collected data, the effort is worthwhile. The analytical task assists researchers in “working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesising them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, [and finally in] deciding what you will tell others” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 153). This is the third time I have conducted data analysis in a qualitative study, and each time I have experienced frustration with the work involved—and often wondered during the process how useful the technique is. However, each time I have conducted an analysis (completing the final reclustering of themes, 4th transformation) I am continually surprised at the result which, as Giorgio describes it, presents a tabular representation of the “intuitive grasping of the whole” (p. 89). What is surprising is that the presuppositions you made at the beginning of a study are often different to the conclusions you reached by the end. Time in the field and data analysis of the material collected change many of your early assumptions. In this study for instance, I assumed that music played a role in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, but the extent of the differences between the use and function of music were a surprise to me.

In this analysis of protocols Nos. 1–3 (interviews with Chief *Pita*, Mary Junior, Mary Senior), Table 4 supported many of the conclusions I reached after conducting a seven month field study and a subsequent ten months analysis and organisation of the data to develop a narrative summary of my findings. I found that the process of data analysis helped synthesise my findings, validated some of the assumptions I made early in the study, and lead me to the conclusions I reached in the end. The four themes that dominated the interviews with my co-researchers were: frustration over, fear of, desire

to, and motivation to manage the negative and positive influences introduced by Western society while ensuring the preservation and continuation of Tannese culture. These themes were evident in the role of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony and are a synthesis of what the Tannese have identified as the importance and meaning of this ceremony to their traditional society.

Chapter 7

A Personal Interpretation of the Tannese Perspective

While chapter 5 provided a description of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony (based on the observations I recorded in the field during my time in Tanna), chapter 6 presented data (derived from the data analysis of interviews Nos. 1–3) that offers insight into the significance and purpose of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony from a Tannese perspective. In chapter 7, I will interpret the material in chapter 6 as well as examine music's role in the ceremony.

Interpretation of the Data

The purpose of this study was to conduct an ethnomusicological study of music's role in the traditional Tannese *Nekowiaar* ceremony, to examine its use and function from the perspective of the Tannese. Before I undertake a discussion of music's role and the significance and purpose of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to the Tannese, I would like to explain why this ceremony was chosen as the focus for this study.

Merriam (1964) wrote that an examination of ceremonial or ritual life is the reflection of a culture's customs or history, particularly in oral societies. In the absence of the ability to record written texts, members of oral societies rely on methods such as symbolism in art, storytelling, and varying forms of music such as dance and song to assist them in chronicling their customs. Nettl (1956) stated that music is employed by traditional cultures to provide a representation of their customs in ceremonies, and some years later Merriam (1964) also noted that song is used as an enculturative device by traditional societies. The views of Merriam and Nettl regarding the use of music in

ceremonial and ritual celebrations are true of Tannese society, where music dominates the many ceremonies performed on the island of Tanna throughout the year.

According to Arnold Van Gennep (1908/1960), ceremonies and rituals for initiation rites, births, marriages, and funerals are events in traditional cultures with which we are familiar. He proposed that the function of these *life crises* are universal to all societies so that, to some degree, a similar pattern always exists in these more universal rituals and is one that we can identify or call typical of any given event. The *Nekowiaar* ceremony, however, is unusual. The *Nekowiaar* differs in that an entire society takes part in the re-enactment of events that have occurred in their past and present history. The performance elements are exclusive to the ceremony, as is the agreement the hosts and guests of the ceremony enter into whereby they are obligated to exchange gifts in exact kind. This exchange creates alliances between all participating villages that ensures peace and a balance of power between them in the years to come. Because of the multicultural aspect of our Western societies a ceremony of this kind is highly improbable in Canada with the exception of First Nations communities, but on Tanna where a homogeneous society still exists, the *Nekowiaar* is an event that continues to unite the society and is held in the highest regard by the Tannese.

During the first few months of my stay on Tanna, I was aware of the importance of the ceremony but initially I was unable to determine why it was so highly valued. Secrecy abounded; while locals would speak of the upcoming event with reverence and wonder, they would not offer any explanation or answers to my questions regarding the importance of the ceremony. Closer to the time of the event I was told that *Nekowiaar* is everything and that it represents all Tannese *kastom*. Initially I didn't understand what

people were telling me but, after time in the field observing rehearsals and hearing the translations of the stories the dancers sang, I began to understand. The songs and dances performed in *Nekowiaar* are used to create an re-enactment of past and current events that have occurred in Tannese society. The result of these performances is an opportunity to present local cultural knowledge to members of the community, thereby ensuring the transmission of this knowledge to the next generation. Thomas (1992) noted that songs “dramatise experiences: the songs allow the community to re-live the experiences...songs [when] coupled with stories or speeches render their meaning more explicit” (p. 235).

That *Nekowiaar* is everything, is all Tannese *kastom*, became clearer with each passing day during the time I conducted my observations in the field and is also the theme that dominated the interviews I recorded after the ceremony was performed. In keeping with what we know of oral traditions, the Tannese, in the absence of the ability to record local events in a written format, use song, dance, and dramatic re-enactments in ceremonial and ritual practices to document their *kastom*. This method of documentation has been cited by many researchers interested in this aspect of traditional cultures, and I was interested in whether this view was one the Tannese held (Blum, Bohlman & Neuman, 1991; Coplan, 1991; Farrall, 1981). When I asked Chief *Pita* about the meaning of the songs sung at *Nekowiaar* he told me they were about past, current, and future events. Initially he was reluctant to expand on that explanation, but eventually when I agreed to give him a copy of the recordings and to tell the story of *Nekowiaar* “*stret*” he assigned me a translator during the rehearsals. Chief *Pita* explained to me that “*evri sam samting em i mas be stret*” for performers, and for people

writing about *Nekowiaar* (Chief *Pita*, personal communication, December 6, 1995).

When I asked how he made sure, he told me the big-men (chiefs of the highest ranking on Tanna) of Tanna employ three methods to ensure accuracy:

1. if a story can be sung, danced, and acted then it is *stret*.
2. the teaching and rehearsal of song and dance must be by big-men.
3. *Nekowiaar* must be hosted so that each generation receives the same information at the same time (Chief *Pita*, personal communication, December 6, 1995).

The structure of song and dance contribute to one another; they provide reminders as to the text of a song and act as mnemonic devices (Farrall, 1981). It is the use of techniques such as rhyme, metre, and stanza that assist the dancers of *Nekowiaar* to memorise hundreds of song texts. Each component contributes to the other in an interrelated partnership that creates a structure that cannot function unless all the individual parts are working together. To further enhance the transmission of knowledge to the spectators, a dramatic component of the performance is often included. Thomas (1992) noted that performances that are danced and that include a dramatic role, allow the community to re-experience the emotions of past events rather than simply hearing about them. During *Nekowiaar*, the actors leave the circle of dancers and perform scenes from the songs that are being sung outside of the circle. There were scenes depicting a honey bee pollinating the garden, eagles soaring in the sky, a fight between two wild *kapia* pigs, men preparing the soil for planting, and women collecting firewood and cooking.

One of the most important aspects of *Nekowiaar* is that the ceremony is used as a vehicle to present *kastom* knowledge and to ensure the accurate transmission of that knowledge to the next generation. The following excerpt from Mary Senior's interview describes one of the stories sung in the women's *Napen Napen*, how knowledge is transmitted to members of society, and how memory is aided to ensure accuracy. Punctuation in this excerpt of Mary senior's interview and other excerpts that follow, is employed to reflect the inflections of the co-researchers' voices in their interviews.⁸³

T So let's say...if I asked you to tell me maybe about one song, could you tell me, tell me maybe or could your Mum tell us what the words might be for one song, just for an example, what would one song be about?

M She said she can tell us one, that she been dance *Napen-Napen* with that song, but they sing about politics.

T Oh? Politics? *Hemi dangerous lelbet hein?*

M One *sing sing* before Independence.

T Oh before Independence.

M Yes we struggle for Independence and what they do is, they chase us and we run from the UMP. Myself and some of the brothers we were going down with the food, to cross the airport, chase up from there, run up back to radio at the airport and the person who is looking after the radio has to get up and take us from there to the village. They sing more songs about many things happen and we have to run to move from the airport down to Bethel, that's why.

T Now you've lost me. So the time that you ran up to the airport, what were you running from?

⁸³ Due to the difficulty of communicating in three languages, the translated conversations do not adhere to conventional English grammatical rules. The text of the protocols is a combination of three languages: English, *Bislama*, and Language (the Lenakel dialect of the North central area of Tanna). English will be indicated by regular font, *Bislama* by italics, and Language by (Language). In this excerpt T is Treacy (the interviewer), I is Mary Junior (the interpreter), and M is Mary senior (the interviewee).

- M From the people from UMP which is...
- T Oh the people from UMP. So you aren't UMP people?
- M No.
- T You're Unity Front?
- M Yes. But at that time we call *Vanua 'aku*?
- T *Vanua 'aku*. Right. So you were running away?
- M Yes.
- T Is this what the song was about?
- M Hmmmm.
- T Oh I see, OK. So that's something that happened for your family?
- M Yes.
- T So that's one song that you would sing about?
- M Hmmmm. They sing a song about what we do, at the beginning and out from the village, walk along the road up to Bethel.
- T OK.
- M To hide away at where Tanna Beach is and behind and before Tanna Beach is here and further on, on the whole of the stone there were lots and lots of people stuck up there.
- T And why is it that you hide from UMP?
- M They were trying to *kill* us, they were trying to *kill* us, so one of them would step up at. They were trying to shoot Koriza, Willie Koriza with muskets.
- T But they did shoot someone didn't they?
- M Yes.
- T They shot Mikael Kapalu, his brother.
- M Yes, hmmm. I've got...
- T So this was all before Independence?

- M Yes.
- T Very serious time?
- M Very very touchy.
- T So that song is a serious one?
- M Yes.
- T So, can you tell me a story about another type of song? Maybe a different one?
- M She's thinking.
- T *Tumas* songs?
- M She wants to pick out one simple song. There was one they sing at that time but before there was one they make one *Nekowiaar*, before before, at Ipai. Then some people from up, there's Bethel, this side of Bethel, they dance one kind thing like *Numauoi* but they are holding small pieces of killing, killing with sticks and they sing one song. They sing about all the tribes from there, out to North, where the Imafin is, and that way up to Ipai.
- T So all the different villages and the tribes?
- M Yes, yes, different villages and tribes. And they sing that song and dance *Napen-Napen* and we say what the people here, when they hear that song, they like to listen to the song and when they listen to the song they can...
- T Hear about the tribes?
- M Yes, hear about the tribes and the names of the villages and what they do is, it reminds them that they must ask which tribe is this and which tribe is this so they sing the song. It was very hard for them to...
- T Oh, lots of names?
- M Yes lots of names, but we tape it, Steven's father sings the song, Chief Sanga, then we gave it out and what we do is bring the tape down to Lènamer we play the tape and they start singing with the tape.
- T Oh, so they remember them all, very hard to remember.

- M Yes very hard, but they say that was a good song.
- T That song was a good one because you heard all about the different villages, but hard to remember all the names. So when you don't have a history book, when you have a song, is that a good way to remember all the different names?
- M That's what we do here. If anything from before, the history comes usually from the song. When any dispute or anything we just sing the song then it reminds us where you run from here...this one here.
- T Why singing Mary, and not just telling stories?
- M We can tell the stories but then if the man did not agree with what you tell in the story, then you sing the song again. The same song where it can happen, the thing happened that day. So he can remember. He can simply understand what you are telling him.
- T So singing, singing the stories is different than talking the stories?
- M Ah, you can tell the stories, but there is some people they high minded and they just refuse what you are telling them. So what you do is you sing that song again then he listened to the songs and the stories and he balance them together he can just hear it, understand that this is same thing that he is telling me and he sing the same song about.
- T So if I knew a story and I told you and your Mom, you might not believe me?
- M Mmm.
- T But if I could sing the story you would believe me because they would match it, they would see that it is the same.
- M Yes.
- T So have stories always sung on Tanna?
- M Ah yes there are lots.
- T But they always, they always have song stories, here or?
- M Umm, there's songs that form up, when something happens like politics then they sing some songs about politics. So generation

to generation if one is hearing stories about the Independence how the Independence was started or begins, so then he sings then when he tell the stories then he sings some songs about it and when, and he says, told the kids that this what we sing about with the Independence. (Interview 3, see Roberts-Johnson, 1995)

Nekowiaar plays a highly significant role in the transmission of *kastom* knowledge. The Tannese must be able to actualise the ceremony, as its success is dependent on maintaining a traditional lifestyle and preserving the structure of the local hierarchy of power (big-men, chiefs). The preparation involved in growing the food gifts of pigs and *kava* alone requires a minimum of three years growth (providing cyclones do not obliterate a crop). Local villages must continue to plant and tend their gardens, and the succession of big-men must continue to ensure that the knowledge about all aspects of preparing for and realising *Nekowiaar* is preserved and accurately followed. In the absence of written texts, the knowledge is held by these chiefs—which makes them Tanna’s most valuable human cultural resource. A death of an elder big-men is second only in significance to the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, as the Tannese fear the repercussions of the loss of *kastom* knowledge that the big-men hold. In most cases a son is chosen by his father at a young age and schooled by his father throughout his younger years. He is repeatedly told stories of the *kastoms* of Tanna and accompanies his father to all meeting and events pertaining to *kastom* in preparation for his role as a big-man. Should his father die before this training is completed successfully, his knowledge of *kastom* will be incomplete. In this circumstance there is no-one to fill this void, and most importantly, the information regarding land ownership that is usually held back until the initiation of a son to big-men status is lost forever. The result is months of negotiations

with the elder chiefs and regional big-men to determine where ownership applies in regard to land claims.

Knowledge of *kastom* is exclusive to the big-men of Tanna, and the Tannese are respectful of this quality in their leaders. This was most apparent to me during my observation at rehearsals when Chief *Pita* directed the various performances. When he attended rehearsals, they were charged with energy, and the dancers performed with conviction; but in his absence, I noted a lack of attendance and a less motivated performance. I mentioned my observation to Mary (co-researcher) and she made the following comments (in an interview with Chief *Pita*) about the importance of Chief *Pita* ensuring that the dances are instructed accurately and that he monitor the rehearsal practices. Chief *Pita* also comments in this excerpt that the dancers have little enthusiasm to rehearse when he is absent from the rehearsals and that he must have “strong” talk with them about their responsibilities to prepare for *Nekowiaar*. This excerpt is from Chief *Pita*'s interview who is identified by the letter C. As indicated previously T represents Treacy the interviewer and M indicates Mary Junior the interpreter.

T So *i* important *yu*, *taem mi watchem* dance, *mi see fulap* rehearsal *mo Nekowiaar* and every time *mi see wan* dance, dance the same. *Ino diffrent?* So *mi tink* that you, how would you say... it is very important to make sure it's right...how do you say that?

I He (Chief *Pita*) *mas mek sua oli stret*.

T Yeah, *oli stret*. So *hao yu save se yu mekem stret*, because *yu teachem?*

C Yes.

T So *yu mas watch?*

I Yes.

C *Mi luk olsem wanem i kam oraet.*

T So you tell. *Mi tink taem mi first go, yu stap long Vila. First taem mi go long rehearsal, mi go witem Mary, mi tink yu stap long Vila o samting?*

I Santo.

T Oh, Santo.

C Santo.

I He went for cultural meeting.

T Not too many men. *Man i...*

(Language)

T *Taem yu kam back, yu karem fulap man.*

C *Mi go, oli no wantem oli kam. Mi kam oli wantem.*

T Then *yu have wan strong talk wan taem witem men. Maybe they no save wanem thing they do taem yu no stap?*

I Yes.

T Same thing for women?

I Yes.

T *Woman i no...Oh sam women i stap. Mi tink taem mi go mi kam bak?*

C *Wan man i go tok long ol woman oli no wantem. Oli no save teachem olgeta.*

I Because he teach them and he sings the song.

T Oh so you sing the song?

I Yes. But others they just go to see, watching them, no singing. But he teach, what he said, to this day they do he sing the song with them. If the women don't know the song, he must teach them how to sing that song. (Interview 1, see Roberts-Johnson, 1995)

To ensure that the Tannese continue the practice of hosting *Nekowiaar*, a reciprocal gift exchange becomes an important feature of the ceremony. This part of the festival is called *Menuk* and can be hosted up to two months after the *Nekowiaar* event. The dancers who attend *Nekowiaar* as guests are expected to return to their hosts the exact number of gifts (*kava*, yams, and pigs) they receive at *Nekowiaar*. Furthermore, an alliance has now been created between the members of the guest and host villages—one that is equal in power, illustrated by the equality of the gift exchange and an understanding that the guest performers will host the next *Nekowiaar* (Bonnemaison, 1994). The hierarchy of power has also been made clear to all those who attended the ceremony by the symbolic presentation of the *kweriya* crown during the performances. At the beginning of each dance, the performers enter the *nakamal* in a circular format facing inward with their sticks raised high over their heads to support the five to six metre tall cylindrical *kweriya* crown worn by the big-man of the region they represent. The big-man also wears a belt fashioned from bark (*tut*) to indicate his status. The symbolism of the towering crown worn by the big-man or *Yremera* (language) and held in place by dancers from his village is that he is only as powerful as the support he receives from his village. Without the support of the dancers sticks, his crown would fall to the ground (Brunton, 1989). The big-men of Tanna are seen as superior only in the respect that they are the holders of specialised knowledge that may be manipulated to better serve their society. In all other respects they are regarded equal among the members of their hamlets and extended communities; they are expected to harvest food, reside in standard housing, and own no more than any individual of their respective

hamlet or other individuals on the island. Big-men (who represent the highest local power on Tanna) live and work as equals with the members of their society.

The *Nekowiaar* ceremony is an event that provides an opportunity to ensure that transmission of knowledge about Tannese history, their future, and local governance is presented accurately and that the participants of the festival are obligated to host subsequent *Nekowiaar* to ensure the continuity of Tannese culture. This excerpt is from Chief *Pita's* interview and confirms the meaning of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to the Tannese people.

I He [Chief *Pita*] says it [*Nekowiaar*] must be a big thing because it combines the people together, or unites them together.

T Like *Nekowiaar*?

I Yes, like when we are doing something like quarrelling or something or...

T *Wan* disagreement?

I Yes, disagreement in anything like politics. But when we do *wan* of that we decide to do *wan Nekowiaar* that must unite all the people together. Like this *wan* they do at Ipai, it was, everybody was united together to do that.

T *Fulap* people. (Interview 1, see Roberts-Johnson, 1995)

The desire to continue a traditional lifestyle is paramount to the Tannese, and in order for Tanna's society to continue as they know it, the maintenance of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony is essential. The ceremony serves as a vehicle to provide opportunities to:

- a) ensure traditional practices and lifestyle,
- b) create alliances between members of neighbouring villages,
- c) present and actualise knowledge of local cultural events, and

d) promote local power hierarchy.

Each of these elements is essential to the maintenance of the ceremony, and their purpose is to ensure the unification and stability of Tannese society, which in turn will ensure the preservation of their culture. During *Nekowiaar*, performers and spectators are united for a period of three days for the express purpose of staging a re-enactment of events that have occurred in their history. Having established the importance and purpose of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to the Tannese community, I will now examine the role that music plays in this event.

The Role of Music in the Nekowiaar Ceremony

In chapter 2, I reviewed the positions held by Merriam (1964) and Nettl (1956, 1983), regarding the use and function of music. Merriam suggested that the “use” of music is how it is employed in a given situation, and the “function” of music is the reason or purpose for its use (pp. 15–17). The example used by Merriam to define the two terms was that use can be seen as effecting a cure, while function provides the emotional relief. Some years later, Nettl (1983) confirmed Merriam’s position, and in 1992 Seeger made a statement summarising the theories put forth by all researchers regarding this subject. Seeger stated that despite a number of differing approaches regarding the use and function of music, what was held in common by all researchers interested in these phenomena is the importance of discovering the meaning of music’s role in the community. The use and function of music may be different but they are interrelated components in the composition and performance of musical activities and they should be examined in context of the society from which they originate. Careful

attention must be given to include the social, economic, and religious aspects of a culture in an investigation of their music (Rice & McGregor, 1989, p. v). In the case of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony music has both a use and a function. Music is used in the *Nekowiaar* to provide structure, accompaniment, entertainment, and as a mnemonic device to ensure the accurate communication of local *kastom* knowledge. The reason, or function of music, is to promote unity and stability in society through the actualisation of the ceremony which in turn provides a vehicle that assists in the preservation of Tannese culture.

While the social and economic aspects of the ceremony were made clear to me in conversations with my co-researchers, the use or function of music in a religious context was not. I was told little, and any questions I asked regarding religion were always met with some confusion. Mary's comment was "what we do here, this is our religion" which she repeated each time I asked her for clarification of what she meant (M. Junior, personal communication, December 1995). My understanding of her statement is that the daily "going ons" of life on Tanna is their religion.

Generally Melanesians believe in a multitude of spirits who affect human life at every point. There are two kinds of spirits: ghosts of the dead and spirits who have never inhabited a human body. A belief in gods does not exist. Spirits are generally helpful if approached in the proper way and appeased with offerings of food and the regular maintenance of ceremonial activity. Ghosts, who are also thought of as positive figures, are believed to be the keepers of deceased souls; however, if the circumstances of one's death is violent, ghosts are feared.

The concept of *mana* (widely spread throughout Melanesia) is considered the basis of most religious belief and practice (Cranstone, 1961, p. 29). *Mana* is described as a supernatural power which can be controlled and used by man to further his ends but which is dangerous in the hands of those not adept. *Mana* is most often found in spirits and ghosts but may also be found in inanimate objects of unusual form such as irregular shaped stones, fruits, or vegetables. "The bones or teeth of notable dead are infused with *mana* as would be a stone shaped like a yam. *Mana* provides an explanation for outstanding success, or persistent good fortune" (Cranstone, 1961, p. 29). The opposite of *mana* is taboo. A chief may put a taboo, for example, on a particular *suatu* which will bring serious consequences to whomever breaks it. Spirits and ghosts then generally co-exist and can be helpful to the prosperity of man but, they are all potentially malevolent if angered by breaches of *kastom*.

Given this understanding of Melanesian religion, I find the comments made by Bonnemaïson (1994) regarding the religious purpose of ceremonial activity in keeping with my own observations and subsequent conclusions. In his book *The Tree and the Canoe* Bonnemaïson notes that one of the purposes of ceremonial activity is to ward off spirits and ghosts who seize the opportunity to inhabit human forms during the night. Most ceremonial celebrations run the course of an entire evening, and it is believed that the fires and noise made by the dancers are a deterrent to such spirits. It was also noted in this work that the *Toka* dance (which is a dramatisation of the planting of a yam garden) and the exchange of gifts at the conclusion of *Nekowiaar* are offerings to spirits that are believed to ensure a prosperous crop in the coming year. I could not validate these conclusions, however, on the basis of my visit with the Tannese. Whether this

absence implies that spirituality does not play a prominent role in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony or that the focus of my co-researchers was on the social and economic aspect of the ceremony I cannot say. This is an area that warrants examination in future investigations of this ceremony.

During my discussion of the purpose of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony I examined music's use as a structure and as a mnemonic device (see pp. 199–215). The application of both elements are important to the ceremony as they provide a means for the Tannese to ensure that stories telling of past and current events are presented accurately. This is essential given that the material presented in *Nekowiaar* is rarely performed. The songs are exclusive to the ceremony, and there must be a way of ensuring that this knowledge is preserved and not lost during the years the ceremony is not performed. Franz Boas was first to observe that oral genres are a people's autobiographical ethnography (cited in Coplan, 1991), and Margaret Jolly (1992) and Lamont Lindstrom (1990) also noted that songs are often commissioned to record events. Such songs create a choral archive documenting the past and current culture of traditional societies. Thomas (1992) also noted that of all oral media

songs are potentially the most conservative and unchanging...and can therefore be relied upon to be accurate in a way in which oratory and narrative (with only an outline structure in which the contents change) may not be. A song is composed in fixed rhythm, poetic metre, and intonation. (p. 235)

Before any further discussion of the uses of music, the source of music in Tanna must be determined. Composition of music for ceremonies such as the *Nekowiaar* is specific to a “music man” who receives the title through succession. He is considered the only one capable of composing music for *Nekowiaar*, although members of the community do create songs for other ceremonial events. The process of “ordering” a song for *Nekowiaar* is very specific, and it wasn’t until the end of my stay that the procedure was explained to me by Chief *Pita* who was familiar with the process not only because of his status as a big-man, but because the music man, Chief *Sanga*, is his brother. The following excerpt from our interview describes how music is composed.

T *Yu save hao i mekem song?*

I He was *wan* of the old man and our grandfather, or his father was *wan* of the men who was making the songs, the *kastom* songs, so maybe they got some think like they used to think the song, some *kastom* way of getting a new song.

T Oh some *kastom* way *sipos yu wantem wan new song*

(Language)

I When he was sitting at his village, he doesn’t know what to do, but they get some *lifs*, the people from *Ikaoras*, they get any *lifs* of all the trees around, ties it up with a rope, then bring it up to the village, with *wan kava*, *wan fowl* or chicken, they brought him up to his village, then they put the, they give to him, (to Chief *Pita*) then he took that from them and he pass it over to the old brother, his father, then when he pass it from him, then he gets up, then tomorrow, or after tomorrow onwards, he gets to hear that new song is coming up for him to sing.

(Language)

I They roast that chicken where they drink the *kava*, they drink that *kava*, then when they drink that *kava* they roast the chicken, then maybe they make something like praying or what, they pray a *kastom* way.

- T Then they *save wan* song
- I Yes. Then tomorrow onwards he can feel that there is a new song coming for him to sing.
- T So *taem i doem wan sing* he *getem kava, mo roastem wan* chicken, and they drink *kava*. I *wan song no mo, i mas doem* each time *sipos i wantem wan niu* song or *i doem fulap* songs?
- I It depends on the *lifs* how much *lifs* they got.
- T OK. So *taem i karem faef* (five) *lif, i mekem* five songs?
- I Yes.
- T Very interesting.

(Language)

- I When he started singing the new songs, then you must remember, the person who brought the *lifs* up must remember to bring another chicken and another *kava* up to *blok*.
- T Oh *mi* see. So time you rehearse *yu mas mekem wan blok*?
- C *Karem wan jiken bakegen witem wan kava, kam blok*.
- T OK, now I don't quite understand. So first time, *yu wantem niu* song, *yu mekem niu* song, *wan man i kam* from Ikaoras, brings leaves, *mo fowl mo kava*, and he *bringem* to you, you *tekem long* brother *blong yu*, then *yu mekem niufala* songs. Then *taem yu* practice *niufala* song, *taem yu teachem niufala* song for man *i* dance, then is that when they bring the new *lif*?
- I After when he is singing the new songs, then they know that it's enough for *faef* or how many leaves they got they brought it up.

(Language)

- I When you brought the leaves up to the person the first time, you must promise, you have to tell him that there must be *tri* or *faef* songs.
- T OK.
- I So when he sings the song enough, then you must *blok*, if not, he keeps on singing another one, and another one going on. But you must *blok*, when it's *tri* or *faef*, you promise—it's your promise.

- C *Sipos i no blok bae mi bitim.*
- I Do you understand?
- T Of course. So *mi save, taem yu bringem* five leaves, *yu say mi wantem* five song?
- C Yes.
- T But then, *wanem taem yu mekem wan blok? Taem yu bringem lif* first time or time when *yu startem* rehearsal?
- I When he starts singing the song.
- T So, when he first, *taem* he make wan song, then he sing a song?
- I Yes.
- T Then *yu mas mekem wan blok?*
- I Yes about *tu* or *wan* week.
- T OK now *mi save*.
- I About *tu* or *wan* week, when he sings the song, then he started to sing, until when he knows the song about *faef* then he ask, *yu mas blok*.
- T OK *taem blok i go finis*, then *yu save faef* song. But *sipos wan narafala man i no mekem wan blok ino gud. Sipos i gat faef* leaves, *yu sing faef* songs, then *ino gud?*
- I Yes it's over, so they must *blok* within *faef* songs. He must *blok* when he hears *faef* songs.
- T *Taem* he *harem faef* songs, then he *givim faef* leaves before he *mas mekem wan blok*. *Sipos* he *givim tri* leaves, *taem* he *harem tri* songs he *mas mekem wan blok*.
- C Yes.
- T So *hao mas* songs for *Numauoi*? *Mi tink yu mas* have more than *faef* songs?
- I Yes, *fulap*.

- C *O yu wantem tu no mo, blok, finis. O yu wantem tri, fo, faef...from oli promis tu no mo.* (Interview 1, see Roberts-Johnson, 1995)

Once the song has been commissioned it belongs to the man or group who commissioned it. Over time the ownership of that song will revert to the members of the local *kava* drinking group for the area. The men will add the song to a collection of songs they already own, and this collection of songs will be used in a future *Nekowiaar* that is hosted by their region.

The music of *Nekowiaar* includes no formal instruments, only singing. The beat of the songs is established by the pounding of feet on the dirt floor of the *nakamal* and hands on woven baskets packed with leaves. I also observed the use of hollowed out sugar cane and bamboo sticks to accent the beat established by the dancer's feet and hands, but this use was unique to the *Nekowiaar*. This use of music is essential. The song structure formed by the musical accompaniment must be one that the words of the songs correlate with, or can fit inside of. As Chief *Pita* stated, stories are only *stet* if they fit with the song and the dance. While the beat of the music is established by the pounding of hands and feet, the melody is performed by the men's and women's voices. The men's voices are low pitched and have a resounding quality that is resonant, melodic, and percussive. At times the sound of the young boys' voices pierces the air, and although in such cases the sounds are higher pitched, there is still a melodic quality to them that is pleasing to the ear. In sharp contrast to the voices of the men, the women's voices are strident, shrill, and difficult to listen to for extended periods of time. Their physical performances appear and sound strained, as opposed to the smooth and tranquil quality associated with the men's performances. I found it odd that the men's

and women's voices were so different in a performance situation, because the tonal quality of women's speech has the same resonant, melodic, and percussive qualities of the men's in performance. My personal view of this dichotomy is that life for women on the island is difficult, and I believe the music to be a reflection of this hardship.

The stories the women sing about are mainly of hardship, and although responsibilities such as bearing children and maintaining a household are the source of great pride and achievement for Tannese women, they are also physically exhausting and eventually take their toll on women's health, given the primitive working and living conditions. The lifestyle for the men of Tanna is somewhat more comfortable than for the women and becomes more so with each generation that passes. Many men, particularly those who are members of the elder generation, continue to practice traditional *kastom* such as tending gardens, hauling water, and other arduous tasks, but men of the younger generation have become less committed to these duties as Western influences have introduced other means to provide food and clothing. As a result, men having found new interests and are less involved in traditional activities; women have had to assume more responsibility for domestic chores. Modern gardens that are more easily planted, for instance, are replacing traditional gardens which are labour intensive and require care throughout the growing season. Wells with pumps are also a new addition and those that have been installed in villages negate the need for men to walk for several kilometers to obtain water, and carry the heavy containers home. Modern gardens and water pumps have made it physically possible for women to take over the responsibilities of planting and collecting water and now these jobs, once the responsibility of men, are the responsibility of women. The lack of interest of today's

generation of men in their twenties and thirties in traditional practices can be directly attributed to the opportunities opened up by modern education and employment. The two are interrelated as the skills to read and write in French and English have made employment a reality for members of this younger generation. Those of the elder generation do not possess these skills. Exceptions include big-man Tom Numaki (Council of Chiefs *Nikoletan*) and a handful of men who have been involved in the political arena. Their training in most cases would have originated with the missionaries and in other cases with Europeans living on the island. Employment opportunities have brought about a more worldly understanding and exposure to political issues, material wealth, and new *kastom*. To what extent this new knowledge of Western influences is obtainable or appropriate to this traditional society is misunderstood by many Tannese. Those who have had Westernised educational opportunities or have had experience in the political arena can make educated decisions regarding the positive and negative effects of new knowledge. In some cases afternoons spent under *Banyan* trees telling stories and evenings in the local *kava* huts dreaming of better things to come is more the reality for those who have not had these opportunities.

My assessment is not made lightly. During the five years my husband's association (ViVa) has been providing health care on the island, these changes have been noticed along with a marked increase in the availability and use of alcoholic stimulants. Just in the year since our own departure, a liquor store has been opened in what used to be the local branch of the Westpac Bank. There are also many changes occurring for women on Tanna, and in Vanuatu, with the rights of women represented by two offices. The Office of Women's Affairs (OWA) is a government office located within the Ministry of

Justice, Culture, and Women's Affairs and has an advisory and co-ordinating function for the non-government Vanuatu National Council Of Women's organisation (VNCW). The VNCW has established 79 councils throughout Vanuatu (including Tanna) and aims to ensure that women are treated fairly and that they achieve greater representation in all decision making bodies from local village to national political and advisory positions (Fallon, 1994). While women have won the right to representation on a political level, the reality of achieving these rights and opportunities will need many years of support and education before substantial changes are seen. I asked if there were any songs about the VNCW council on Tanna in the ladies *Napen Napen* but I was told there wasn't. The council is a fairly recent addition to the island, however, and the group of women involved in its representation were located some distance from the village where the dancers of *Napen Napen* resided. While this may be a logical conclusion as to why a song had not been composed about the council, I still wondered whether this issue had more to do with traditional culture opposing the advancement of women's interests. It would be interesting to examine the songs of the *Napen Napen* in the years to come.

The rhythmic pattern of the music for *Nekowiaar* is simple, either a slow 4/4 time that accelerates to a fast 2/2 for closing sections of songs or a rocking moderate 6/8 tempo that is used specifically with the men's dances. This 6/8 tempo was not a feature of the women's dances, a difference for which I found no explanation. When I spoke of metre or of other musical concepts to my co-researchers they did not understand my questions even though they described their songs in terms of chorus and verse. The presence of organised religion on the island since the 1800s could account for their knowledge of these terms. Primarily, the familiarity with the structure, rhythmic, and

melodic aspects of music is an innate knowing. The source of music is never questioned (from the supernatural) and neither is the ability of big-men to hold and teach any knowledge that pertains to the *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

The structure of the songs in *Nekowiaar* follow a simple but long format of a number of verses followed by a chorus which is then repeated. The longest of the men's songs takes up to 60 minutes; the women's performance however is longer and can continue for six to eight hours. The women are responsible for up to 150 song texts which are performed to the same music repeatedly until they have completed their repertoire. The men's music, although repetitive, does vary for each of their performances, as does the cast of dancers. In total there is one women's dance—*Napen Napen*—and four men's dances—*Kosusiva*, *Nao*, *Numauoi*, and *Toka* (see chapter 5 for a description of the dances). I have included here the text from the opening excerpt of the men's dance *Numauoi*. The text is the dialect of the North central region of the island (Lenakel or Language) and, unfortunately, a translation is not available. I had discussed the possibility of obtaining texts for the songs of *Nekowiaar*, but this request was initially met with resistance. Eventually I was told it would be a "good idea"; this approval however came in the last month of the study, and our attempts to find someone who could write the text in language for me and then provide a translation proved impossible in the limited time I had. The day before I left the island a slip of paper was handed to me with this excerpt on it. While the language is impossible to translate, the text does give an indication of the form and repetitive nature of the structure of the songs used in *Nekowiaar*.

*Numauoi***Section 1 Karu**

(repeat each verse 3x)

Verse 1

Weuvi boxin' aol pilei lan, weuvi boxin', weuvi boxin'

Mol pilei lan (repeat 3x)

Rol pilei lan nangeage ruosiraip ruosirap

Rol bilok lan (repeat 3x)

Verse 2

Raliko mouai Ientare (repeat 3x)

Raliko mouai ranail le niespaw, wuep ilau uin,

Usuep ilau uin weai uenia (repeat 3x)

Verse 3

Waruin - net uiniah nau la (repeat 3x)

Rai-pas-pas la rai-pas-pas la

Ruvi rop la (repeat 3x)

Verse 4

Ruvi rop raiu renia (repeat 2x)

hoai-ie-he-ao, hoai-ie-he-ao,

Raiu renia, raiu renia

Waiel cow-ia (repeat 3x)

Verse 5

Yarasasau uerirapi ianarisia rusianginia

Wasiuenia niarau-ia-rau ianginia

Rus uararan (repeat 2x) Rusuakawan

Verse 6

Niarai-rap relakini, Niarai-rap, Niarai-rap relakini

Niarai-rap relakini, Niarai-rap, Niarai-rap relakini

Rati uanguin rikish iangi (repeat 3x)

Verse 7

Rasir-rasir binbin yiaupi (repeat 4x)
Riuvik-iuvik ualu ueai
Uasariangi (repeat 3x)

Verse 8

Heuvik- 'euik nahi-uenia (repeat 4x)
Tewe ruvi uaurou ilau
Nieuvi- 'euvi (repeat 3x) (Manu Iaiofa, personal communication, January, 1995).

This excerpt is an identical reproduction of the paper that was given to me, and while language inhibits a direct translation, some words can be identified. The meaning of some of the stories had already been translated to me during my observation at rehearsals. Words such as *boxin'* and *cow-ia* I know are stories about a boxing match, which is a popular sport on Tanna, and a story about a cow, which is becoming increasingly more popular as a source of meat on the island. The interest in this excerpt is the number of repeats specified by the writer. I was aware of the repetition during observations and wondered at the time whether it was only the music that was repeated. After examination of these data, it is clear that not only is the music treated to repetition, but so is the text. This is a further validation of how music, text, and dance are used to aid the memory of the performers in presenting an accurate presentation of cultural information. Farrall (1981) stated:

In oral cultures, the words themselves may not be as important as they are in a literate culture, because they are always transmitted in a face-to-face situation which allows for other forms of communication to take place....accurate transmission is dependent on accurate

memory....[various] techniques have been used to aid the human memory and these have been given the technical name, ‘mnemonic device.’ The poetic devices of rhyme, metre and stanza are such techniques....[and] paintings, dances, or natural phenomena can be used in this way. (pp. 72–75)

Music’s use as entertainment is not as essential a component as those mentioned previously but it is an important feature of its use.⁸⁴ As a spectator, with little prior knowledge as to the inner meaning of music’s role, I was entertained by the music of the ceremony as were other spectators in my position. This is an important aspect of music’s use in the performance and should not be taken lightly. Elliott said that it is vital to consider all aspects of a music when presenting it for instruction, as did Leonhard in that same year when they presented their views regarding the study of world musics at the Music Means Harmony Workshop in Toronto, Canada (1989). Elliott stressed that music and music education are not isolated arts or processes grafted onto culture but part of culture itself, and Leonhard advocated that the vision and experience of a society’s own artistic and social integrity must be communicated in the teaching process. It is all too easy to choose music for instruction because we should include it in our curriculum or because it sounds interesting. If we teach music from this perspective then we are

⁸⁴ Even in early discussions with my co-researchers, I was aware that music’s role was an important one. When I asked Chief *Pita* about its specific use, he was emphatic that music was a means to aid the accurate recording of past, present, and future events. He explained to me that you could tell a story, but that if you could sing and tell the story it would be “*stret*” or correct. If some words were forgotten and replaced by new words, he would know the difference because new words would not fit into the music. When I asked him how he remembered the music, he told me that the dancing, the music, and the words must all fit together (C. *Pita*, personal communication, December, 6, 1995).

presenting only part of the whole and only from our perspective. The most vital and valuable lesson has been missed; how music functions and the reason why culture has need of it. In the case of the Tannese this need is communication, a means to transmit local cultural knowledge to members of their society. For those of us who were invited to attend *Nekowiaar* and were not Tannese, music's purpose was more entertainment. For the Tannese, music's purpose is threefold: it serves as entertainment, is used to transmit local cultural knowledge, and functions to accurately document local cultural knowledge and promote a unified society.

Although all teachers are not all able to travel to remote communities to experience the inner workings of music, this should not preclude us from making an effort to examine the characteristics of a culture before presenting the music. If music is a capsule of a culture, then we must take responsibility for presenting an understanding of these values and beliefs when we teach world musics. While we may not have a full understanding of the inner meaning of a music from the perspective of the culture to whom the music belongs we will at least present some understanding of the source of the music, identify the inspiration which lead to its creation, and come to a closer presentation of an authentic performance. This presentation should include an understanding of the text and an appropriate application of rhythmic and melodic components. In this way we would be making a responsible attempt at communicating the values and beliefs of other societies.

Music is used in the *Nekowiaar* to provide structure, accompaniment, entertainment, and to assist as mnemonic devices to ensure the communication of local *kastom* knowledge. The uses of music, however, do not act alone. The function must

also be considered. The function of music in the *Nekowiaar* is essential to the realisation of the ceremony. Its use—how it is employed in the ceremony—allows for three specific functions:

- a) accurate documentation of past and present events,
- b) presentation of local cultural knowledge, and
- c) continuity and stability of a traditional society.

The *Nekowiaar* ceremony is an important opportunity for Tanna's big-men to unite their society and transmit their values and beliefs to an entire culture, simultaneously. Given the infrequency of the ceremony and other opportunities to unite Tannese society as a whole, the presentation of accurate knowledge becomes paramount. Music's role in this aspect of the event is crucial and provides the means to ensure that generation after generation the history of this culture and its desires for the future are communicated accurately. Lindstrom (1982) wrote that "The abolition of the Christian/*kastom* opposition has recapitalized *kastom* knowledge, restoring its political value. Men are now organising the [*Nekowiaar*] ceremony...with increasing frequency" (p. 324). In South-east Tanna the first *Nekowiaar* since 1926 took place in 1978 at Ikurupu village, and in the Western region of the island a ceremony was held in 1972 in Middle bush, and in 1995 at Ipai village. The pursuit to re-establish *kastom* has renewed interest in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony which is evident in the frequency with which the event has been hosted in the last 17 years. Although by many people's standards three *Nekowiaar* in 17 years is infrequent, one must take into consideration the logistics of motivating an entire society, producing gifts that require years of maturation, and co-

ordinating the performer's rehearsals and performances for the event. Provided the Tannese are able to maintain the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, they will ensure an opportunity to address the members of their society as a whole and to continue to promote the resurgence of *kastom* knowledge.

The *Nekowiaar* ceremony is a reflection of all that is Tannese and presents to those who are part of this society a capsule of Tannese culture. The maintenance of the ceremony is important to the society not only because it provides a means to transmit information about local *kastom*, but hosting the ceremony also necessitates that the Tannese live a traditional lifestyle which creates alliances among members of neighbouring communities and contributes to the continuity and stability of the society. This statement relates directly to the four themes that dominated the interviews I held with my co-researchers. As a society, the Tannese desire to maintain a traditional culture in the 20th century; their frustration is a result of the interference of Western influences; they are motivated to achieve self governance and independence; and they fear the loss of their traditional culture. The *Nekowiaar* is vital to the continuity of Tannese society, and music's role in this pursuit is twofold: its use provides a structure that assists the memory and presentation of accurate *kastom* knowledge and its function provides an oral record of local *kastom* knowledge that will assist in the transmission of this knowledge and ensure the preservation of this culture.

Chapter 8

Synthesis of a Tannese and Personal Perspective of the Role of Music in the *Nekowiaar* Ceremony

This investigation of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony has looked to identify the role of music in the *Nekowiaar* ceremony as well as the significance and purpose of this unique ceremony in the preservation and continuity of Tannese culture. Chapter 1 presented background information to assist the reader in identifying the focus of this study. Chapter 2 provided a historical review of musical studies conducted in foreign cultures and examined the development of ethnomusicology as a field of investigation. Chapter 3 provided an introduction to Vanuatu, and more specifically the social, religious, economic, and political culture of Tannese society. The methodology employed in this study was described in chapter 4, followed by a descriptive account of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony in chapter 5. In chapter 6 I examined data derived from the interviews I conducted with my co-researchers (regarding the importance and significance of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony) from a Tannese perspective, which I then re-examined from my own perspective in chapter 7. In this final chapter I will summarise my findings regarding what the Tannese have identified as important to their future as a traditional society and the role the *Nekowiaar* ceremony will play in the preservation of their culture, examine how what I have learned from this study will influence my teaching in the classroom, and also identify topics of research that could be investigated in future studies of the Tannese people.

Summary

Will the Tannese be successful in their pursuit of maintaining a traditional culture in the 20th century, and if they are, will the *Nekowiaar* continue to play a role? When I completed my fieldwork on Tanna in January 1996 and the subsequent examination of the data I collected in the field in January 1997, this question remained foremost in my mind—and remains, I believe, in the minds of the Tannese people. Following the data analysis of the interviews I conducted at the end of my study, four dominant themes were identified by my co-researchers: fear, frustration, desire, and motivation. These findings also accurately summarised my own feelings regarding the future of Tannese culture in the 20th century and the role the *Nekowiaar* ceremony will play in it. The themes identified are a delineation of the responses my co-researchers gave to my questions about the meaning of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony to Tannese society and why stories are performed (sung, danced, acted) as opposed to narrated. The following summary notes the dominant and supporting themes from the data analysis of interviews No. 1–3. The information is included here for the reader’s benefit but has previously been presented in chapter 7.

Summary of dominant and supporting themes: Interviews No. 1–3.

- a) fear of a loss of traditional lifestyle
- b) frustration related to negative Western influences (materialism, employment, tourism, British/French governance)
- c) desire for
 - accurate documentation of *kastom* practices (written/oral English language skills)

- preservation of Tannese culture
 - acquisition of modern education skills (reading, writing, math)
 - ensuring transmission of local cultural knowledge to future generations
- d) motivation
- self preservation (actualisation of *Nekowiaar* ceremony)
 - self governance (succession of traditional leadership)
 - independence (integration of traditional and modern knowledge)

The themes identified here are a reflection of what the Tannese have identified as important to them.⁸⁵ I would be naïve in believing that I have successfully identified the innermost thinking of this traditional culture. I do believe that because of the way I conducted my study I have come close to identifying what is important to the Tannese in this coming century. The data validated the conclusions I reached prior to conducting the interviews. In some cases my conclusions were incorrect, often a misunderstanding due to cultural differences; and in other cases information that seemed insignificant to me was significant to my co-researchers. Because these misunderstandings occurred throughout the study I found that establishing a system of gathering data and then seeking confirmation from those familiar with the culture proved to be an invaluable process.

⁸⁵ While the themes identified are a reflection of what my co-researchers identified in their interviews, their comments are in keeping with the information I collected during informal conversations with locals when I lived on the island. I present this information as themes identified as important to the Tannese as a collective society.

At the beginning of my study, Chief *Pita* expressed his concern regarding how information I gathered would be used and in particular how it would be interpreted. He had already experienced how information can be misinterpreted and was determined that the story be told *stret*. While I was able to determine such aspects as the structure of the ceremony, the rehearsal schedule, the process of making grass skirts, who instructed the dances, and how songs were composed, the purpose of the ceremony and the use and function of the music were questions I hadn't thought to ask and aspects of the ceremony for which I had an outsider's perspective. These shortfalls were addressed in the interviews largely in part by my co-researchers. Throughout my interview with him, Chief *Pita* was insistent about the themes identified here and repeatedly asked me if I understood what he was telling me throughout our discussion. One might conclude that the themes identified were those of interest to Chief *Pita* and not those of concern to all Tannese people. In some respects this is true.

One of the qualifications of big-men is to advance themselves politically by recruiting a larger following; one of the ways they do this is by realising events such as the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Key to their success as big-men, however, is an ability to hold the knowledge of all aspects pertaining to the realisation of the ceremony accurately. The ability of a big-man to present and teach the *kastom* knowledge he holds is under the scrutiny of the big-men of the North, South, West, and East, regions of Tanna who are also keepers of this knowledge. Also one must keep in mind that the senior members of Tanna's society have performed in as many as three and four *Nekowiaar* and are familiar with many aspects of the ceremony. The desire of the Tannese is to ensure a means to document their *kastom* in order to preserve their culture against the increasing

encroachment of Western influences. In their attempts they have looked to skills that can be acquired in the fairly recent addition of public school education, believing that an ability to read and write in English will give them the power required to maintain their own governance. However, with the acceptance and implementation of Westernised schooling on Tanna it becomes difficult to determine what influences are positive for Tannese society. Acquired English and French writing and speaking skills have meant access to employment off the island, funds sent back to the island, and opportunities to represent Tanna on the political front. The negative effects are an increased awareness of material goods, a desire to have them, and the ability to obtain them. The result is an affirmation of the elder's fear of a loss of *kastom* for future generations and a further frustration with the influences the Western world has brought to Tanna since the early 1800s.

Despite these concerns, Tanna has remained a unified society which has successfully survived previous onslaughts from the Western world. The attempts of explorers, blackbirders, missionaries, organised religions, and foreign governance have been unsuccessful in dominating this culture. The Tannese are unique in this respect; this claim cannot be said of other cultures in Vanuatu. I have yet to decide whether the Tannese will be successful in retaining a traditional way of life, but I do believe that maintenance of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony is essential to this goal as it validates Tannese culture. The pursuits of independence and self governance are motivated by fears of Western incursion, and the Tannese remain committed to realising their goals despite changes that appear to be having adverse effects and that are occurring at an increasing rate.

Customary living is changing as education increases and employment opportunities become available to those who have acquired these new skills. The obligation on those who leave the island for work to send money home creates a lesser need to maintain gardens for food, continue traditional weaving practices to provide clothing and housing materials, and pressure to promote promising children to excel in the modern public school system. However, as Bonnemaïson commented “money fascinates, of course, but as a “whim” that never reaches the essential core of *kastom*money is part of the whites “*kastom*.” [Tanna’s] *kastom* is based on the values of land and magic, and European money cannot buy either”(1994, p. 306). In their desire to use modern means such as written word or audio/visual methods to accurately document *kastom* practices, the Tannese may eventually no longer need the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Its loss would threaten to erode the vehicle the Tannese have traditionally employed for the transmission of local cultural knowledge to promote unity and stability in their society. I am not sure that a written or visual record can substitute for the power of a three day event in which the entire society simultaneously takes part in an re-enactment of their history and visions for the future. What strikes me most as the most destructive consequence of the disappearance of a *Nekowiaar* would be the lost opportunity to address society as a whole and the loss of the power of transmission achieved using the elements of song, dance, and drama in the re-enactment of history.

My comments are a reflection of a juxtaposition of two conflicting experiences: I am a member of a society where individual independence is the goal. I have now experienced a society where conformity and obligation to the society are valued. Perhaps all societies evolve to hierarchical, individualistic societies, but I will be most

interested to see how the Tannese will evolve. They are acutely aware of what is at stake and I believe have identified what they must do in order to preserve and maintain their culture. They have already won many battles for cultural preservation on a local level, and on a national level they won a formidable battle to gain their independence from French and British rule in 1980. Given these successes, the Tannese's motivation to preserve traditional knowledge about their culture by actualising the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, their efforts to promote local governance by ensuring traditional leadership through succession, and their belief that independence can be achieved by integrating traditional and modern knowledge may be the successful ingredients needed in order to determine their success in retaining their culture in the 20th century.

Conclusions

During the early stages of this study, I was acutely aware that I was investigating a musical event of a culture foreign to my own and that one of the focuses of my study was to examine how this investigation would influence my teaching of music in the Western public school system. When asked how this focus would change my teaching I was at a loss to give an answer that appeared scholarly or one that I could validate. Of course I had read about how the experience of living in a culture unfamiliar to you can contribute to your ability to empathise with students, who after immigrating to Canada find themselves in a similar position when placed in classrooms with little or no English speaking or listening skills. I had also read of how personal experience with world musics can be of benefit to my understanding of how that music can be instructed in the classroom and that my experience would help me develop an understanding that a

society must be examined in its entirety in order to understand the music itself. These views are familiar themes in books about multiculturalism and education.

Following my seven month field study in Vanuatu, a subsequent six months of travel, and this past year of analysing, organising, and formulating this thesis, I am no longer at a loss to validate this aspect of my study of the *Nekowiaar*.

When asked what have I learned I now find it difficult in some ways to articulate how I have benefited. In fact perhaps the most interesting observation is that as more time passes I feel that I am learning more about my experience. Being back in the classroom and working simultaneously on this thesis has been an interesting process, and I have found that I am continually re-evaluating what I am doing in the classroom. I have become more reflective about how I develop and deliver curriculum and how I observe and evaluate how children are learning in the classroom. In other words, I now watch myself educate. Bogdan and Biklen wrote that:

When practitioners' employ the qualitative approach, they systematically try to understand the different people in their schools as they see themselves. The approach requires that educators be more rigorous and observant in collecting information in order to recognise their own points of view and to break through the stereotypical images that may govern their behaviour toward others. In addition, the perspective calls for noticing patterns of behaviour and features of the physical environment in order to be more analytical about regularities that may unknowingly govern their lives. (1992, p. 216)

Education in the '90s has been a time of integration of students with special needs and what seems like endless new curriculum and methods of teaching to implement in the classroom. Despite a negative predisposition toward these aspects of teaching, I now find myself more open to what I previously viewed as problems being introduced to an already intolerable situation. As a qualitative researcher I have learned to look at each new situation in a different light. Instead of "[taking] the 'real world' as an unalterable given, as existing out there beyond [my] influence" I know that in daily interactions with my students we "can be active in shaping and changing the 'real world.' [We] can change, and [we] can affect others... within the limitation of such things as the school hierarchy, availability of resources, and common-sense cultural [and social] understandings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pp. 216–217). There remains the frustrations that come with no resources for new programmes, the increasing demands on teachers as the individual educational needs of students in the classrooms becomes more and more diversified, and the reduction of support staff continues but we can work together to negotiate a more acceptable and productive environment. Today's difficulties in the classroom are a reality, and it is within this reality that we must all work together to create a learning climate that is conducive to learning within the limitations that are set upon us.

Having made these comments about what I have learned about my experience as a qualitative researcher in Tanna and about how this experience can be of benefit to how I conduct myself as a teacher in the classroom, I will now comment on the advantages of teaching world musics in Western music curriculum.

In “The World of Music in Education” Wiggins (1996) examined music pedagogy in relation to world musics. The basis for Wiggins’ work is research he conducted in Ghana (1994-95). I found his comments fascinating because many of the experiences and conclusions the author reached were similar to mine, despite the fact that I investigated the Tannese culture of Vanuatu, rather than the Dagaare people of Ghana. One of the most vital points Wiggins made is that the meaning of music is lost when transmission occurs outside its culture. What then is the point of teaching world music in our classrooms?

The process of transmission is a theme that figured prominently in my investigation of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony. Chief *Pita* emphasised the importance of relaying accurate knowledge of past, present, and future history of Tannese society to a unified society. This transmission of local cultural knowledge is foreign to how the process of transmission is conducted in Western cultures, where a formal process exists that includes organised classes and individual tuition (Wiggins, 1996, p. 24). In this situation, people can be told what the music means, but “lost will be most other levels of extra-musical association: occasions on which a piece of music would be heard [such as the *Nekowiaar*]; or the use of music as a badge of identification [what reflects the uniqueness of a culture]” (Wiggins, 1996, p. 24). What results then are questions about whether and how world musics should be studied. As discussed earlier the instruction of world musics must take into account the context of the society from which that music originates. Attention must be paid to the social, religious, economic, and educational aspects of a culture to better present a fuller understanding of what the music represents. Still, there are problems with what is being learned. Music in most non-European

societies is transmitted orally, and teaching this music from principals based on Western analytical methodology is problematic. Because each system has been developed within the structure of a given culture, the application of one system to another cannot take into account the intricacies that have been part of that development. We must then ask ourselves if teaching world musics in our Western music curriculum is appropriate.

Despite the fact that learning traditional aural musics from Western notation can affect the accurate performance and understanding of world musics, I believe that in recognising what the limitations are and in being responsible about presenting a cultural picture of a given society, we can come close to a creditable representation of world musics thereby increasing the awareness of non-western musics. Anderson commented at the 1991 Music Educators National Conference (MENC) that:

Upper elementary, middle school, and secondary school students are at a pivotal point in the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward music. They possess the co-ordination and strength needed for performing vocally or on instruments. They can think in abstract, critical, and analytical ways. They are often intrigued by the new and unfamiliar and may be fascinated by a comparison of “new” to “known” phenomena. These students have the potential to examine musics and cultures beyond their immediate surroundings....Through guided performance and listening, students can eventually understand that music is not just an American or European phenomenon. In addition, students can learn that many musical styles of the world are represented in the United States [and Canada]. This [time of increased

immigration to North America] provides ample opportunities for discovering the music, the arts, the cuisine, and various customs of the world. Students who have experience with a variety of what now constitute “[non-western] musics” may gain a new understanding of the [multiculturalism] of their own country. (pp. 4–5)

The inclusion of world musics in the development and instruction of music programmes is important because it can foster an understanding of the many cultures of the world, increase the awareness of multicultural backgrounds of students who are represented in our classrooms, and develop in students an interest in music of all cultures. “Through an interrelated study of many aspects of a culture, students develop new and important understanding of other peoples, and they begin to realise the integral place of music and the arts in other cultures” (Anderson, 1991, p. 7).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note that the qualitative approach can be incorporated into educational practices in a number of ways: (a) it can be used by teachers in their interactions with students to become more effective; (b) it facilitates teachers becoming more astute observers of the total school environment; (c) it can create a setting where teachers and students negotiate a productive learning environment within the limitations that are set upon them (pp. 215–217). Even within the constraints of school timetables that allow for 30 and sometimes 45 minutes of music instruction per week, the seemingly random inclusion and omission of music curriculum in the public school system, and the lack of trained music specialists instructing programmes of music consistently during the development of students’ educational years, it is worthwhile to

continue to pursue the responsible teaching of all musics in our Western school curriculum. While the situation is far from ideal we must continue to negotiate with our students the best learning environment within the “reality” of our world. “We cannot make pupils members of another society, we have to try to give them as complete a picture as possible, but this should be a prescription not a proscription....An essential part of most African music is the dancing, and experience of this will inform the learning of the sonic element” (Wiggins, 1996, pp. 28–29). From my study of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony, I have learned that the essential feature of ceremonial celebrations is the music. Experience of this will inform the learning of music’s function and use: the accurate recording and transmission of local cultural knowledge in the 20th century.

Directions for Further Study

Looking back at my first days in the field on Tanna, my concerns regarding the collection of “enough” worthwhile data were unfounded. I have found that while organising and analysing the data collected for this study of the *Nekowiaar*, new themes presented themselves and in some cases data collected were well beyond the scope of this study. I will identify the themes and data not addressed in this study that may be topics of interest for researchers conducting future investigations on Tanna.

First and foremost in regards to possible studies is the translation of this document into *Bislama* which would make the document more accessible to the Tannese. I have discussed this possibility with Chief *Pita* and I look forward to realising this project. The photographs and audio tapes of music collected throughout my observations of the *Nekowiaar* are also worthy of investigation. They have been used here as validation of

my findings but have merit of their own for an in-depth examination of the structure of music or an investigation that looks more toward an anthropological view of the social, economic, and religious aspects of this study. Finally, I became more aware through my own experiences of the possibilities of an investigation of women's issues and concerns on Tanna. Margaret Jolly is already conducting research in this area in other regions of Vanuatu, but a study has yet to be conducted on the Tanna. Finally, there are numerous opportunities for investigation of this culture despite recent research by Ron Bastin, 1981; Joël Bonnemaïson, 1994; Ron Brunton, 1989; and Monty Lindstrom, 1990. My only reservation in identifying possible directions for study is that I, as others, have introduced to the Western world a society who have previously received little ethnographic notice. My hope is that those who may undertake a study of some aspect of this culture will firstly, seek permission from the local authority of big-men at the *Nikoletan* regarding the possibility of a proposed study; secondly, work with the Tannese in deciding an appropriate direction of investigation that is not only of interest to them but of benefit to the Tannese; and finally, be responsible in how they use their data and in how they present their findings by taking into account a Tannese perspective.

Ceremony and *Kastom*

Ceremonial and ritual activity are essential to the preservation and continuity of Tannese society. The actualisation of the *Nekowiaar* ceremony in particular is identified by the Tannese as a conscious effort to convey cultural meaning and values to their society simultaneously and as a means to document past, present, and future events of their culture. The musical aspect of performance (structured by the accompaniment of voices and percussive sound made by feet and hands) plays an integral role that ensures

each member of Tanna's community is provided with an opportunity to physically and mentally participate in the re-actualisation of events pertaining to this society. Musical accompaniment also functions as a mnemonic device that aids big-men in their roles as leaders and teachers to ensure that texts are recalled and performed correctly.

An investigation of this kind also has important implications for the teaching of ethnic musics in the classroom because it shows how social, economic, religious, and economic aspects of societies are essential components of ceremonial and ritual activity. These components must be taken into account in any investigation or teaching of a culture unfamiliar to us. For the Tannese a total performance is necessary: leadership safeguards *kastom*; music provides the structure for accurate documentation; participation ensures the preservation and continuity of this culture.

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Appendix

Myths

Bonnemaison (1994) wrote that “Tannese history is revealed through diachronic myths embedded within one another” (p. 109). Tanna’s myths provide us with an understanding of the creation of the world; then of the creation of man, woman, and food; and finally of how territories were divided and society formed. This body of myths goes under constant renewal as society meets new challenges and adjusts to incorporate new influences. I have included here an overview of the development of Tanna’s society from conception to its state today. The summary is not detailed and must be studied in depth to gain an appreciation of the complexities involved. The work of Bonnemaison (1994), Allen (1981), and Humprehys (1926) give excellent accounts of the many myths that document the development of Tanna’s societies.

Origin of *Nepro* Society

Creation of the World

The Tannese believe that the spirit Wuhngin created land. Wuhngin, who has never been seen by anyone, created land and then stones to shape the land into islands. His spirit now inhabits Mt. Melen which is located on the Southern region of the island and is visible from all parts of Tanna. Mt. Melen is the first of Tanna’s sacred sites, and its summit is a taboo place from which foreigners are strictly prohibited. Only a few Tannese are allowed to climb to its summit.

In the beginning, land started its journey at the North-east tip of Tanna, moved Westward and Southward, and finally back to its point of departure. As land travelled, the island took on the outline and dimensions it has today. When land finished its

journey it prepared *kava*, drank it, and then rested. At this point land dove into the sea, disappeared, and re-emerged North of Tanna. Land then gave birth to the island of Erromango and continued North, creating islands as it moved along. The Tannese believe that all islands created after Tanna are daughters of the Tannese. The one exception to this is the island of Aneityum (South of Tanna) which was born before Tanna.

In the beginning land was bare and lifeless, so the spirit Wuhngin sent stones or *kapiel*. The stones travelled throughout the island creating its geographical features.⁸⁶

Origin of Man, Woman, and Food

Stones were not only responsible for the geographical features of Tanna, they also gave birth to biological and agricultural life. The story of their creation is told in Wuhngin's Myth.

Wuhngin's Myth

After the creation of land (or of the world as the Tannese believe) Wuhngin's shaping stones remained behind on the island. Eventually they became restless and began to roam continuously around the island. They had no name nor did they have any specific powers. As time passed the stones settled down and sank into the soil, received names, then turned into places. Some of the stones gave birth to animals who later became man, and others gave birth directly to man—both were a non-humanised form. Man did not appear as he does today until later on in Tannese history.

⁸⁶ This is a brief description of the origin of Tanna, taken from Bonnemaïson's 1994 account of Tannese society. For an in depth discussion of the origin of Tanna see pp. 109–122 in this account.

The first men of Tanna lacked women, hot food, and *kastom*. They also were not organised; therefore no relation existed between them. Eventually lichen from on top of a rock was nurtured by rain, and a Banyan tree grew from it. Men (in the form of animals and stones) gathered under the tree and made their home. This process repeated itself throughout the island, and eventually Tanna became populated with coastal and inland vegetation under which man lived. Men who had been watching this metamorphosis learned which stones corresponded to the various plants that now grew on Tanna. Then they chose the stones that were useful to them and manipulated them to encourage reproduction; however, there were still no women or hot food.

The story of the creation of woman, the arrival of hot food, and the humanised form of man is told in a number of stories. The account told here originates from the Eastern side of the island.

Yani Niko

One day a canoe arrived at Port Resolution on the Eastern side of the island where Captain Cook himself would arrive in 1774. The cultural hero Mwatiktiki was at the bow of the canoe, and with him were a crew of male stones know as *Yani Niko* (voices of the canoe) who steered the canoe from the stern, while the female stones, or *naotupunus*, sat in the centre. The canoe also carried food stones (taro roots, yams, fruit trees, fish etc.) that would later be used to prepare hot food.

Later that night, after the travellers arrived in the bay, Mwatiktiki, who was tired from the long journey, fell asleep on the beach. The female stones took advantage and stole the food stones and ran away. When Mwatiktiki awoke and discovered the women's betrayal he cursed them "You stole the food stones! From now on, you are to

be the only ones to make use of them, you will feed the others.” (Bonnemaison, 1994, p. 129). Eventually the stones dispersed throughout Tanna. The places where they reside are considered sacred and the spirit of Mwatiktiki resides within them.

Now that man, woman, and food had been created, Tanna’s first society, *Nepro*, was formed. Semo Semo’s myth tells of the events that lead up to the formation of Tanna’s second society. This new period in Tannese history was a move from equality among man and unpartitioned space, to inequality among man and partitioned territories. Also new to this period were the symbols of a new power: the *kweriya* and the *tut* belt.

Origin of the Hawk Society

Semo Semo’s Myth

Tanna’s first society was one of unpartitioned political space called *Nepro*. The only visible signs of division during this period of society were roads and the natural banks of rivers and oceans. The myth of Semo Semo tells of the time when Tanna’s second society was formed—when unpartitioned space became split into territories and a new power was discovered.

Semo Semo was a devil who lived on the island of Aneityum, South of Tanna. He was very tall, fond of eating people, and had a voracious appetite. Before long, Semo Semo had eaten everyone on Aneityum so he began to travel to other islands in the region looking for more food. One of the islands he visited was Tanna. After he filled his stomach with food, Semo Semo returned to Aneityum to rest. Before long he became hungry again and returned to Tanna in search of more food. When he arrived, Semo Semo discovered he had eaten everyone except a woman and her child. He ate the

woman, left the child, who wasn't worth his bother, and returned to Aneityum in search of more food.

Left alone on the island the child sustained herself initially on *nia* (kangaroo grass) and eventually grew into a young woman. As she became stronger she began to walk around the island. Before long she discovered the gardens of the men who had been eaten by Semo Semo, the ocean and the wealth of food that lived in it, and the *nekam* stone whose magical power is to give fire. She also learned how to make a fire by adding dry grass and wood bits to the spark created by hitting the *nekam* stones together.

One day, while swimming, the young girl discovered a *nolu* vine and began to play with it. The vine penetrated her; she became pregnant; and gave birth to two boys. Several years passed and when the boys had grown into strong young men they asked their mother why they were the only people on such a large island. Their mother told them how Semo Semo had come to the island and eaten everyone and then she asked them if they would be strong enough to kill him if she called him to the island. The eldest boy was afraid and did not answer, but the youngest said he would.

The mother and her sons lit a fire which alerted Semo Semo to their presence on the island. When he appeared they threw their many spears at him and ran away into the inner region of the island. The first spears thrown were only meant to injure Semo Semo so he would become irritated and chase after them further into the island. As they ran, the mother shouted back insults to make sure he would continue to follow them to what is now known as the Ipai *nakamal* where they had planted their last two spears. They raised them and threw them at Semo Semo when he appeared at the head of the clearing. The spears found their marks, one in each ear, and killed the giant. The boys then carved

up the body releasing all the animal life (who were the actually the men Semo Semo had originally eaten) that were caught inside his huge belly.

To assure themselves of Semo Semo's death, the brothers dismembered his body and then they distributed the parts equally to the men who had been released from the devil's stomach. Each of the body parts that were distributed represented a new territories that were initially all of equal status; men watched over their communities, and women fed them. Exchanges like the *niel* (where neighbouring villages exchanged food with one another) were the only link or form of communication that existed between the communities. But soon a new period would appear.

While the brothers were dividing up Semo Semo's body parts they had made two piles: one for body parts, and the other for the intestines. They kept back the intestines for themselves and inside discovered the symbols of a new power which brought about Tanna's second society: the *kweriya* crown (hawk) and the *tut* (ritual belt). Both were symbols of a new aristocracy. Men today who wear either symbol are of a higher status than the common man, who walks behind. Tanna's second society (Hawk) emerged with the discovery of the two symbols; the time of peace and equality of *Nepro* came to an end.

The Hawk Society was rife with war. The arrival of several cultural heroes brought new alliances and powers that created inequalities among the Tannese. The tradition of ritual warfare and honour was abandoned as rivalry, competition, and the acquisition of firearms from traders became a reality for man. Stories of the exploits of some of these cultural heroes follow.

Kasiken

Kasiken was the son of Mwatiktiki, the father hero of foods. One day, while listening to the wind, Kasiken was inspired to create the *Toka* dance. He went to his village, danced the *Toka*, and then gave three piles of presents to his hosts. There, for the first time, he showed the new symbol of power—the giant *kweriya* crown decorated with hawk feathers and the *tut* belt.

The neighbouring village, upon hearing of this presentation, became jealous and killed Kasiken. However, after they had dismembered his body and buried it in different parts of the island, Kasiken's voice could still be heard spreading the message of the new power. Kasiken's brother, Kalpapen, also continued to spread his brother's message throughout the island. He travelled to all of the great dancing grounds (*nakamals*) spreading the message in the form of large scale “*Toka*” ceremonies, a sophisticated form of the original “*niel*” food exchange. These festivals became known as the *Nekowiaar* ceremony.

This new ritual began as a celebration of a new power. Its purpose was to honour the power of the *kweriya* crown and *tut* belt which symbolised a new aristocracy. The “*niel*” exchanges of *Nepro* had become obsolete as they were neither formal enough or large enough to accommodate members of the newly formed Hawk Society. The *Nekowiaar* became the vehicle to create new alliances, renew old ones, and honour the new power. Historically only those who descend from Mwatiktiki's line are allowed to host the ceremony and only at one of the eight most important *nakamals*. These *nakamals* are designated as more important than others because of the history associated with them and their size—some can host up to 10 villages.

The Hawk Society was a time of many new changes. Not only was the introduction of a new power found in the *kweriya*, ceremonial crown, and the *tut*, ceremonial belt; magic and further territorial divisions were also introduced.

Karapanemum

This new hero brought to the shores of Tanna four stones. The first two represented a pig and evil magic and were called Bega and Netuk; the remaining two stones represented two moieties and were called Koyometa and Numurkuen. To welcome the latter, the men of each of the eight great *nakamals* chose to align themselves with one of the stones. Each of the *nakamals* subsequently became equally split: one side following Koyometa and the other Numurkuen. Koyometa's followers were less powerful because this stone was the younger of the two and was impulsive and aggressive in character. Koyometa often acts without thinking and is therefore associated with instigating warfare. Those who followed Numurkuen, however, were more powerful. Seen as the older of the two stones, Numurkuen owned other stones that were capable of magic. He was also the keeper of many secrets which the islanders believed to be knowledge of their *kastom* ways.

As the second society developed, rivalry between the two moieties became more intense and eventually erupted into war. This war, known as Shipimanwawa, occurred at the end of this period, coinciding with the arrival of the Europeans in the late 1700s.

Shipimanwawa

This last great war pitted the arrival of the merchant ship against the arrival of the war ship. The merchant ship became associated with Numurkuen, representing material

goods and men with new powers; the war ship was associated with Koyometa, representing artillery and warfare.

Following the arrival of the Europeans, new powers and influences were introduced to the island. The move to an aristocratic power, a society split into two moieties, an awareness of material goods, and a decline in acts of *kastom* ritual warfare made an already hostile environment even worse. *Kastom* warfare had previously been conducted between two men who represented each of their village's interests. While their comrades watched, the two men would engage in fight until the first blow was landed. This would signal defeat of the victim's village and would conclude the hostile interaction. With the arrival of the Europeans, fighting now included the use of firearms, and surprise ambush attacks became common instead of the laws associated with ritual warfare. The island was in turmoil. Only the arrival of the missionaries brought about an uneasy truce.

During this relatively short period of respite, Tanna's big-men began a move to revive *kastom*. They believed that if Tanna could return to a time of *Nepro*, peace would return. They felt that all the elements of the second society were evil and dangerous, with the exception of the *Nekowiaar*. Return to a time of equality in exchanges and unpartitioned space was desired by all Tannese, but now they had a new enemy to fight in the form of missionary rule and, later on, French and British governance.

Tanna's last battle was for Independence in the late 1970s. Tired of sanctions by the missionaries against *kastom* practices and European rule by the French/British Condominium government, the Tannese, along with all ni-Vanuatu throughout the country fought successfully to achieve their Independence from Condominium rule in

1980. Today society is peaceful although the desired return to *Nepro* has not been fully achieved. A new struggle has emerged as the Tannese search to find a way to integrate the desire to retain *kastom* ways while embracing the power and knowledge of Western societies.

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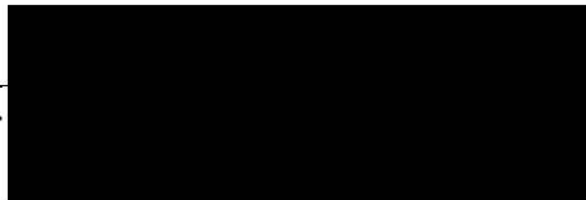
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