Vete: The Emerging Movement on Efate, Vanuatu Politics and Indigenous Alternatives

Dorah L.J. Wilson
Dedication

To Vete Indigenous Historical Association leaders for whom I have so much respect and to whom I was privileged to call “father” [Papa, Popo Kiki]: Chief Fandanumata Richard David and Member of the Parliament [MP] and Vete President Abel David. Chief Fandanumata and MP David serve their communities, The Vete Indigenous Historical Association, and the people of Vanuatu. The roles they play in these levels of society illustrate how elements of the traditional and the western system work together. Chief Fandanumata and MP David have committed their lives to serving the people of Vanuatu by addressing issues affecting the lives of people in the villages, islands and the entire nation of Vanuatu.

Thank you!

Figure 1. L-R Chief Fandanumata Richard David and Abel David Member of the Parliament and the President of the Vete Indigenous Historical Association in Australia
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of The University of Hawai‘i Pacific Island Studies Program, for your support. I would like to thank my committee members Professor and Director of the Center for Pacific Island Studies and committee chair Dr. Terence-Wesley Smith, Dr. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, and Professor of Anthropology Department Dr. Geoffrey White for their support and guidance. I also would like to thank Professor Edvard Hviding and the Research Council of Bergen University for the opportunity to study in the U.S. through the Norway Pacific Island scholarship program.

I also would like to thank all of my informants for their time and the stories they shared with me during my research in Vanuatu: Pakoa Isikiel Ismael, Jimmy Taso, Chief Fandanumata David Richard, Chief Mormor, Deputy Police commissioner Aurther Colton, MP Able David, MP Ralph Regenvanu, David Luders, Robert Jimmy, William Ganileo, Lloyd Hately, Chairman of the MNCC Chief Gratien Alguet, Morris Kaloran, Chief Moses Marakitatanamo Ham, Chief Shem Rarua Masoe Marakimanu, Chief Esly Pakoa Timataso Natamate, Token Pakoa, Lesline Malsungai, Trevor Hannam, The Vete Members [focus study] and other valuable members that I did not mention their names but who have contributed their stories and thoughts. Mi wantem talem bigfala tangio i go long yufala evri wan. Thank you!

I would like to thank Papa Kiki Moses Marakitatano for tok storian -sharing stories with me and for providing me with information about the history of Tongoa, Shepherds and Efate Islands. Thank you Popo Kiki MP David, Papa Chief Fandanumata for your availability and willingness to provide answers to the questions, share the history and documents needed to complete this paper. I would also like to thank Papa Kiki Morris Kaloran for your time during the fieldtrip to see sites that were of significance to the stories and histories of the Vete members.
I would also like to acknowledge my family, especially my father Thompson Joel Lokin Wilson Masoirana and my mother, Rinnah Wilson Leitariliu, who have always supported me. They both have played significant roles in my life as well as during my research. My father helped arrange meetings with Vete members in order to conduct my interviews while my mother always ensured that I had the correct gifts and food to share with the people I interviewed. My sisters also supported me: for instance, while I was in Hawai’i my sister Helen T. Wilson provided me with information that I was unable to access while away from Vanuatu. She verified information with people back home and communicated the information back to me. I thank all of my families and community members! Thank my sisters and brother for their support; Merylin, Felina, Jenny, Helen and Brother Roger Lokin Wilson.

I would also like to acknowledge my friends here in Hawai’i. To Ashley Vaughan, thank you for editing this thesis and other assignments and above all thank you for your support and your friendship. Thank you Mike, Trish, Naomi, and Ron for making me feel at home in your homes and circles of friends. To Annelin Eriksen and Knut Rio in Norway, thank you for reading the draft and providing constructive feedback. Your support is very much appreciated. Thank you!

To all of my families, friends, informants and committee members -thank you tumas and Aloha!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page ............................................................................................................. 1
Dedication ............................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 3-4
Table of contents ................................................................................................... 5-6
List of figures and appendix ................................................................................... 7
List of Abbreviation ............................................................................................... 8

Chapter 1 ................................................................................................................... 9-37
  1.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 9-10
  1.2 Purpose of study ............................................................................................ 10-16
  1.3 Overview of the study sites .......................................................................... 16-22
  1.4 Terms used ................................................................................................... 22-24
  1.5 The roles of the leaders .............................................................................. 24-32
  1.6 Methodology and Positionality .................................................................. 32-37

Chapter 2 Land, Development and Social Movement ............................................ 38-68
  2.1 The Value of Land ....................................................................................... 38-42
  2.2 Independence and the Constitution ............................................................... 42-51
  2.3 Land and Development ............................................................................. 51-60
  2.4 Social Movements ....................................................................................... 60-68

Chapter 3 The Emergence of The Vete Indigenous Historical Association .......... 69-166
  3.1 Who, When and What is Vete? ................................................................... 69-73
    The Objectives of the Vete Association ........................................................... 73
    The Vete Anthem and Flag. ............................................................................ 73-75
    Establishment – when and by whom? ............................................................. 75-79
    Members and Leadership .............................................................................. 79-85
    Meetings and agenda .................................................................................... 85-87
  3.2 Why was Vete Association established? ....................................................... 87-89
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Chief Fandanumata Richard David and MP Abel David</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Content of the Vete Association letter date 7th July 2006</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>List of some of the Vete Association Civil Court Cases</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Map of the Pacific Island</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Map of Vanuatu Six provinces and Islands</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Map of Efate and Offshore Islands and Shepherd Islands</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The map of the Islands before and after the Kuwae eruption</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Content of the Vete Association letter dated 9 July 2006</td>
<td>43-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Vete Cooperative Logo [The Vete-Nest]</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The Vete Association flag</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Chief Fandanumata and MP Abel David at Australia National University</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Kuwae Submarine Cladera</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Some Chiefs and leaders on Tongoa in 1800</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Grave yard of late John Rarua</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Tongoa Taguare Freedom Fighters</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>MP Abel David’s message about Vete Member’s Action</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Vete members painting vacant houses-form of protest</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>First meeting with Korman and Ham Lini</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Chief Fandanumata Richard David intervene in the Police and VMF tension</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Picture of the first noticeboard: South Sea Islanders support</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Vanuatu Australian Connection banner</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Field trip with some chiefs and informants</td>
<td>179-200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Methodology and Positionality</td>
<td>179-184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Content of the MVCC letter and terms of reference</td>
<td>184-185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Content of the Vete Association letter date 28 July 2006</td>
<td>185-186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Content of Vete letter dated 13 November 2007</td>
<td>188-189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Content of Vete letter dated 6 February 2007</td>
<td>189-190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Content of Vete letter dated 17 January 2007</td>
<td>190-191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Chiefs reconcile after 138 years</td>
<td>191-192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Eleven resolution: Black Birding</td>
<td>192-194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>MP Abel David’s speech re: black birding issue</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Eleven Resolution on Unity day: West Papua</td>
<td>195-198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>198-200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**List of abbreviation:**

VIHA- Vete Indigenous Historical Association

MNCC- Malvatumauri National Councils of Chiefs

MVCC- Maraki Vanuariki Council of Chiefs

SHEFA- Islands groups of Shefa province including islands of Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands, Epi, Efate and Efate offshore Islands.

PCC- Provincial Council of Chiefs

CRP- Comprehensive Reform Program

LGD- Local Government Council

VCC- Vanuatu Cultural Center

RCD- Rural Lands Department

PIF- Pacific Island Forum

MSG- Melanesian Spearhead Group

SAP- Shepherd Alliance Party

VAP- Vete Alliance Party

VAC- Vanuatu Australian Connection
Chapter 1

Introduction

Traditionally, the wellbeing of the indigenous people of Vanuatu is directly connected to the land. They depend on the land for subsistence, cultural productions and social relationships. Today, however, many Ni-Vanuatu have become separated from the land, either because they have become urbanized, or because they have been displaced by development projects. Consequently, many Ni-Vanuatu now face economic, social, and physical struggles due to their separation from the land. Since the colonial days, Ni-Vanuatu continues to be marginalized as a result of development policies and processes. In this paper I will examine a social movement actively working to counter this development.

The Vete Indigenous Association (VIHA) is a registered association established in 2006 to act on behalf of several individual and group claimants particularly from Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands. This emerging movement on Efate is the result of land politics where local people are finding indigenous alternatives. The Vete Association revives the similar concerns originated prior to Vanuatu’s independence and in 1981 as the result of customary land claims over areas of Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. The national government of Vanuatu has yet to deal with these claims. In 1982 under the leadership of Walter Lini, the national government went ahead and declared Port Vila to be public land. This declaration did not compensate the custom owners of the land because the area was under dispute, and the custom owners had not been identified. While the custom owners were still never officially identified, in 1992 the Korman government compensated a few villages on Efate, and in 2006, The Ifira Trustee

---

1 Vanuatu people are called the Ni-Vanuatu.
subleased the disputed area to a foreign investment company. All the while, the Vete Association has continued to fight for attention to these unaddressed issues and claims.

The Vete members, people from the Shepherds and Tongoa Island claiming customary land rights to particular area in Port Vila and the island of Efate in general, are commonly known in Port Vila and Vanuatu as simply Vete or ol man Tongoa [man or people from Tongoa]. I will refer to these members as Vete Members.

Vete members are not pleased with the government and the way in which Vanuatu’s national legal system, land lease act and land tribunal act function because they feel that these fail to recognize the traditional and existing land system as well as the history and relationships between the people of the Efate, Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands. Vete members and other members of the general public have acted collectively in effort to force the power holders and the government to address land grievances and to restore the land rights back to customary landowners.

Because Vete members believe that addressing land grievances should be a communal process, the members are asking the government and other claimants involved to work together to solve these land issues.

**Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this paper is to document the history and activities of the Vete Association, a social movement in Vanuatu which emerged in 2006. The association represents several customary land claimants from Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands who believe that they are the customary land owners of certain areas of Port Vila and Efate. The Vete Association

---

2 Believed that Tongoa Island was name after the first plant called Na-tongoa that grew on the Island after the Kuwae Eruption in 1452.
3 Efate Island was originally called Vate Island.
aims to work with the government and other customary land claimants to identify the rightful customary land owners of certain parts of Port Vila and Efate.

In this paper I aim to detail the objectives of the Vete Association. To fully understand the objectives of the Vete Association, it is important to examine not only the emergence and development of Vete Association, but also, importantly, the individual histories of Shepherd Islanders engaged in the Vete Association and the reasons behind their land claims and protests. I additionally aim to examine the Vete Association as an indigenous alternative leadership system; I also aim to address how the Association’s use of peaceful protest contributes to its objectives and effects on policy.

To begin, I introduce a letter written by the Vete Association leaders to the national government, dated July 7th 2006. I begin with this letter in order to highlight some of the factors that contributed to the emergence of the Vete Association in 2006. These factors will be discussed further in Chapter 3 of this paper.

The letter stated that:

“We have found that the Vaturisu Council of Chiefs is directly influencing the government department of land to ignore our claims since independence in 1980. You will recall that when we use to have 11 provinces, our idea came out strongly from Rarua Brothers against the idea of 11 provinces because it fragmented our customary link to Efate we had 1) Efate province, 2) Shepherds and Tongoa province and 3) Epi province, this cause the first political unrest inside VP [Vanuaku Pati] led government so VP reduced the provinces to 6 to restore the CDI (Efate and off shore, Shepherds Tongoa and Epi) to come back. But up until today we have not been able to unite our chiefs to such a thing as we may call Shefa Council of Chiefs this gives the Vaturisu council of Chiefs sole power to control customary land rights as far as controlling the Efate land tribunal and department of lands...The word ‘claim’ could rightly be substituted by the word ‘inheritance.’

The ‘freedom fighters’ in Vila and Santo before independence moved to defend Vanuatu because of this inherited valuable land. South Efate and Efate Rural offshore island did not move forward in the 1979 demonstration except Tongoa Shepherds led by Kalkot Matas confronted the anti-independentists and dispersed when teargas was thrown in the air towards them...this is just one of the many recalled instances...Some chiefs are still waiting for the land tribunal hearing...25 years is a long time to wait...our next move will depend very much on how soon you can re-act to our demand through your government agents...1) We will expect your government to do whatever it takes to formulate the recognition of the Maraki Vanuariki chiefs claim in Port Vila and Efate. 2) We will expect your government to stop agricultural land subdivisions on Efate immediately. 3) The current disputed sight near market house we feel will be better utilized for public use i.e. a) ol mama blong Vanuatu b) ol Public transport and not a rich expatriate for other
“better price”…our aim is CLEAR that we are against the sale of our lands on Efate by the people who do not have the customary ownership…” (Vete Association’s letter addressed to the government, July 7. 2006).

During Personal communication with one of the Rarua brothers he emphasized that the government should recall that Vanuatu used to have eleven Local Governments Councils (LGC) after independence. However, the Shepherd Islanders, especially Tongoa people, and the Rarua Brothers, strongly opposed this idea of the eleven provinces/LGC because it fragmented their custom links to Efate. At that time what is now known as SHEFA province was divided into three different provinces [LGC] 1) Efate Province [LGD] 2) Shepherds and Tongoa Province (LGC) and 3) Epi Province [LGC]. This division caused the first political unrest inside the Vanuaku Pati Vanuatu’s national party and also led the government to reexamine these categories and to later include Efate, the Shepherds, Tongoa and Epi under one province, SHEFA Province.

4 The letter stated ‘Province’ referring to Local Government councils that changed to province and at that time Tongoa and Shepherds, Epi and Efate were going to remain as the three different provinces, however, Tongoa people were against that and therefore combine the three different LGC into one province.

5 SHEFA province- consisted of Efate and offshore islands, Tongoa and Shepherd islands and Epi.

6 Before Vanuatu’s independence, in 1968-1984 New Hebrides 83 archipelagos was divided into four Administrative districts. After independence in 1980 and in 1985-1994 was divided into eleven local government councils and in 1994 to date divided into six Provinces.
This letter demonstrates Vete Association members’ claims against several opponents, i.e., other claimants claiming customary ownership of the same land areas. Vete Members’ beliefs are based on oral collective histories; I will discuss these accounts further in chapter 3. This letter also highlights several factors and incidents in the last three decades and recent years that have been causes of frustration. For instance, while other provinces have a provincial council of chiefs comprised of different councils of chiefs from different islands within the province, Shefa province had not formed a Shefa provincial council of chiefs. As a result Vete members feel that the Vaturisu council of Chiefs dominates the proceedings regarding land decisions effecting Efate. They also believe that Kalsakau families and in particular Chief Kalsakau M. III the chairman of the land tribunal, MNCC and member of the Ifira Trustee and the government offices have acted in their own interests and thus unfairly.

This paper aims to discuss the establishment of local social movements in Vanuatu and their interactions with the State. Here, the focus is on documenting the history and factors that contributed to the establishment of the Vete Association. I do not intend to determine who the rightful customary landowners are. It is not my place to decide. In Port Vila there are several parties claiming the customary ownership of certain areas of Port Vila and Efate Island in general. While this paper will focus on Vete Association, there are other claimants such as Ifira Trustee Ltd, Chief Mantoi III Kalsakau and Vaturisu councils of chiefs of Efate, former members of Vete Association particularly the Shepherd Islanders, and other individual members of Efate villages. The situation is complex, also involving other individuals who have hold titles to leases over specific areas on Port Vila and Efate as well as other individuals from Tongoa and the Shepherds.

---

7 Vaturisu is made up of chiefs from part of Efate Island that dominates land decisions of areas around Port Vila and areas that are currently under customary disputes.
Figure 3. List of some the Vete Association Civil Court Cases.

According to MP Abel David, “Civil Case no. 234 of 2006 referred to the site next to the Market House. Civil Case No. PPV 25/007 referred to painting government properties with Vete signs. Civil Case no. 1 of 2007 referred to Bladenier Estate at Tagabe. Civil Case no. 172 of 2006 referred to Malapoa Area, and Civil Case no. 141 of 2008 is the biggest case where Vete is claiming the Efate Land and Port Vila, [in] which some Chiefs of Tongoa and the Shepherds Islands are the claimants. Note that Ifira Trustee and Ifira Land Tribunal are one body/organization” (Clarification made by MP David 14 July 2011).

This paper will focus on the claims of The Vete Association and how The Vete Association aims to work together with the government and other claimants in order to identify the appropriate [right] customary owners through use of the courts or institutions like Land Tribunal Acts. The government established such institutions to deal with customary land disputes with the goal of ensuring that resources and benefits are shared equally and that the
existing traditional systems and sites are respected according to the history and traditions of the land.

This paper demonstrates that both external and internal factors contribute to difficulties in settling customary land disputes in Port Vila in particular and Efate more generally. An internal factor is the fact that most economic development activities located on Efate and Port Vila take place in the major urban center in Vanuatu, attracting people from other Islands of Vanuatu to Port Vila in order to have access to opportunities.8 One of the external factors is the legal regime imposed through colonialism (Kabutaulaka 2002). “The roots of the Solomon Islands Crisis can be traced to the policies of the British colonial administration and after independence, to the failure of successive governments to address important socioeconomic and political issues” (Kabutaulaka 2002:4). In addition, local leaders’ lack of clear policy directions, e.g., those of the Lands Department, has effectively divested indigenous peoples of their land ownership and property rights.

In this paper I argue that the issue of land and development has resulted in the emergence of a number of social movements in the Pacific and particularly in Melanesian Island nations. Before discussing The Vete Association as an example of a social movement in Vanuatu, I will briefly discuss some factors that contribute to the emergence of The Vete Association. I will discuss the value of land, the Constitution and the land policies set up to protect the indigenous people as well as how people understood such policies. Pacific Island nation’s urban centers are often characterized by crisis and instability. The value and importance of land to the Pacific Islands is significant and has become a locus of competition. The competition is becoming more challenging, especially in the urban centers, as the land increases in monetary value. This

---

8 Idea of urban opportunities that often becomes a burden on relatives living in Port Vila or Luganville (Santo), increase urban populations and interdependency.
competition over customary land claims has lead to the emergence of several social movements in the Pacific Island nations, particularly in the Melanesian region because of the significance of land to the lives of Pacific Islanders.

In telling the story of how and why Vete Association emerged I also tell the story and history of this particular group of people and these particular islands, with their own memories of the past and perspectives on present challenges and hopes for the future.

**Over view of Vanuatu and study site**

Vanuatu is an archipelago situated in the Southwest Pacific Ocean comprised of 83 geographically dispersed islands. The capital of the nation is Port Vila. The people of Vanuatu call themselves Ni-Vanuatu. Within Vanuatu’s population, there are approximately 105 linguistically distinct cultures, each with their own district language. These cultures and histories are preserved in sand drawing, textile designs, dances, and a countless of other cultural forms and expressions. Vanuatu belongs geographically and culturally to the Melanesian region. Prior to Independence in 1980, it was known as the New Hebrides and has an unusual colonial history, being colonized by both the France and the British government together in an arrangement known as the Condominium. Vanuatu adopted the colonial Westminster style of government, and although the legal system is based on English, French and customary law, the State legal system adheres to the English common law system. Land is the exception to this rule.

Map of the Pacific Islands:

---

9 Ni-Vanuatu are people of Melanesia background who live in Vanuatu.
10 The constitution stated that the Government is to enact a customary institution to deal with customary land disputes. This happen several years after independence called the land tribunal act. This legislation is currently being reviewed because of its ineffectiveness or challenges to deal with customary land issues of specific localities.
European explorers began appearing in 1606, and in 1774 Captain James Cook set foot on Tanna and Malakula. In the 1830s the sandalwood traders and whaling ships began to arrive, followed by the first missionaries in 1848 and labor recruiters in the late 1860s. Life in the islands began to change very quickly as a result of these interactions “Many missionaries attempted to stamp out custom beliefs, labor recruiters persuaded islanders to work on faraway plantations in Queensland, Fiji, and a number of other plantation sites, and the diseases of the waetman [white man] ravaged the islands. In the southernmost island of Aneityum, [the] population fell by ninety-six percent by the beginning of the twentieth century” (Spriggs 1997. P. 258).

In 1887 the British and French organized the Joint Naval Commission to provide protection for an increasing presence of British and French planters. “In 1906 France and Britain formed the Condominium (not so jokingly referred to as Pandemonium), and the European
planters had their land claims officially recognized and legitimized” (Scarr, 1967: 227 in Lightner 2005). “The island chain became known as the New Hebrides, and was the only place in the history of the world to be jointly administered by the French and the British” (Miles, 30 in Lightner. 2005). “They became foreigners within their own country and did not even have the right to hold official passports” (Lightner, 2005).

Furthermore, “Massive land grabs occurred, and French and British planters dotted the islands, planting crops such as coffee, cotton, and cocoa but then mainly transferring to copra. When the planters could not find enough New Hebrideans to work on their plantations, they recruited workers from other places” (Bonnemaison 1986: 69). In 1942 the American military occupied the New Hebrides in an attempt to regain control in the Pacific after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. They built military bases on the islands of Efate and Santo and greatly improved the infrastructure of the two main urban centers of Port Vila and Santo Town (Luganville). Buildings, airports and roads remain, reminding people of the American presence in the islands over sixty years ago (MacClancy, 2002. 115). The U.S. military projects also required workers, people from other countries were brought to Port Vila and Santo to work.

Throughout the Condominium years land issues were a major point of contention, and a return of traditional land rights and a preservation of New Hebridean culture became the rallying cry for Independence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Various political parties were formed, some in favor of Independence (mostly Anglophone) and others in support of continued Condominium rule (predominantly Francophone) (Lightner and Naupa 2005:109 in Lightner 2005:18). On 30 July 1980, after over a decade of struggle, the New Hebrides won its independence and became the Republic of Vanuatu. The unusual colonial history of Vanuatu is
woven into the present day society where the influence of the traditional political and economic structures and management of the land is still very strong.

![Map of Vanuatu six provinces](https://www.lonelyplanet.com/assess-on-28-july-2011)

Figure 5. Map of Vanuatu six provinces. Map of Vanuatu. Lonelylanet.com [assess on 28 July 2011]

**Overview of Shepherd Islands**

Before I embark on the literature and the issues surrounding the emergence of Vete Association, it is important to give a brief overview of SHEFA Province: the central location of Vanuatu’s government where a great deal of “development” is happening. This province, the island Efate, the capital of Port Vila and the relationship between the people of Efate, Tongoa and Shepherd Islands is the focus of this study. The historically based restrictions on movement of people between these islands provides a significant context for an understanding why people

---

11 For the purpose of this project, the customary land claims are in Port Vila, Efate Island. These claims are made by some people from Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands within the Shefa province.
from the Shepherds and Tongoa Island, in particular, are claiming customary land ownership of Port Vila and Efate today.

The SHEFA province consists of these Islands: Efate and offshore islands, Tongoa and the Shepherd islands and Epi. Witter suggests that the Vanuatu islands of Tongoa and Epi (since separated by the island of Kuwae) were created in 1453 when a larger island split in two by an enormous volcanic explosion (Witter, 1997).

![Figure 6. Efate and Offshore Islands - Shepherd Islands and associated underwater volcanoes.](image)

The Shepherd Islands are a group of islands lying between the larger islands of Epi and Éfaté, in the Shefa province of Vanuatu. The aggregate land area is 88 km². At the 2009 census the population numbered 3634. From north to south, the principal islands are: Laïka, Tongoa (Kuwaé), Tongariki, Émaé (Mai), Makira (Emwae), Mataso (Matah), and Monument (Étarik). Émaé and Tongoa are the largest islands in the group. The region includes two submarine volcanoes, Kuwae, and Makura. The islands are principally in the outlines of the calderas of these volcanoes. The highest of the islands is Émaé, at 644 m (2,113 ft) above sea level; Tongariki is also above 500 m (1,640 ft).
Kuwae was a bigger Island than Efate, and was surrounded by the smaller islands Emae, Makira and Mataso. These islands existed before the Kuwae Eruption. However, Tongoa, Buniga, Ewose, Nalema, Laika Vatumiala and Epi Island were parts of Kuwae until after the eruption in 1452. According to legends of Kuwae eruptions people from Makura and Efate first settled on the Island of Tongoa after the island of Kuwae erupted. Witter (1977) describes a local legend about tremendous volcanoes and the Kuwae eruption, which separated the large island of Kuwae into the islands now called Tongoa and Epi. Kuwae eruptions around December 1452 and May 1453 resulted in the formation of the small island groups of Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands. Kuwae’s caldera wall is exposed above sea level around both Epi and Tongoa islands and well known for the scuba diving site called the Tongoa wall outside of Lupalea point. The eruption of Kuwae forced young Chief Ti Tongoa Liseiriki to flee for his life and lead his people to safety.
Michelsen (1800) also mentions that during the eruption, people were killed by falling stones and burned to death in their hiding places. Michelsen does not mention any survivors or possible places to which people might have flown for safety. The hilltops of the rent and sunken land are now the small islands Tongoa, Tongariki, Buniga, Ewose, Laika and Tevala. These islands were later named the “Shepherd Group” by Captain Cook. The largest of these, Tongoa, was named after Tongo, said to be the first to settle in its hospitable soil after the eruption was over. Tongo was a native of Makura. Sometimes afterward, other settlers arrived from Emae, and later on from Efate (Michelsen, 1800).

According to an informant, the island of Tongoa was named after the first plant called “wara [Na] Tongoa” that grew on the island after the Kuwae Eruption. Luders (2010) illustrated in mythical stories that the only survivor of this eruption escaped to the island of Makira. The people from Makira, Efate and the small Shepherd Islands began to explore the Island of Tongoa and settle for various reasons, which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

**Terms employed in this paper**

I will use the following Bislama (the pidgin language of Vanuatu) words throughout this paper: Salem (land for sale), tekem graon (land taken), onem graon (land ownership) and pem graon (land purchase). These words are used widely by people, leaders, the media [news papers and radio], and businesses such as real estate companies and leaders and the government officials. In actual fact these words [salem, pem, onem] do not exist in many local dialects in Vanuatu societies and how local people manage their land. Local dialects and languages that are used in local Vanuatu societies does reflect the way the land should be managed as a communal “na vanua” land to sustain the family and importantly to guide it for the future generations. In
addition, technically land is leased, and foreigners[^12] do not own land: they lease it and have the leasehold title for 35-50 years in urban centers and 75 years in rural areas. In reality, land owners cannot afford to compensate the development on their land and as a result, these lands eventually become alienated. There are obvious contradictions, confusions and misunderstanding of words used in relation to land management in Vanuatu.

People commonly use these foreign terms in daily conversations despite the terms not existing in their local dialects or local / traditional system of land management. This is an indication of a lack of understanding of the differences between sold and leasehold title, rented and owned, by leaders and by the public in general. There are no such terms in local languages. In addition, real estate companies put up notices on land and properties displaying such notices “land or property for sale or rent.” But rent to whom? Usually to those who have leased the land but not the custom land owners. The custom land owners are not included in these deals in most cases. I order to explain how these words can be used appropriately, I turn to Bolton’s work as starting point from which to look critically at these concepts and to begin using appropriate terms that make sense and are relevant to the traditional land system and practices.

Bolton (2009, unpublished) argues that “it is high time land tenure in Vanuatu be considered in terms of “investment” rather than “ownership.” Bolton states, “Investment demonstrated, sustains and effects land tenure… Both women and men invest in land by gardening, by building houses, by taking care of…resources [and by having children]. Both invest in their decent group by contributing to exchanges and community fund-raising, and

[^12]: Idea of the concept of foreigners in this paper refers to both Ni-Vanuatu and non-ni Vanuatu. Non-Ni Vanuatu can have lease title for certain period and this similar practice also applies to Ni-Vanuatu where individuals do not own land either, instead they use it and maintain it for future generations. Therefore, there are no such words as taken, own and sale because land is used and maintain and pass on.
participating in events” (Bolton 2009 p.13 in Naupa 2009.p.4). Generally ni-Vanuatu’s focus on land ownership has limited the traditional use and management of land.

Naupa (2009) states that “If we can start to think more along the lines of what Lissant Bolton describes…then there is an increased likelihood that women [men, children and others] will be seen as active rather than passive participations and therefore [the] decision-making process will be more inclusive” (4). The word “ownership” indicates an attitude of Europeans, which still causes problems today over who the correct owner over the disputed land area is. The concept of ownership does not fit in the traditional family and society’s ways of managing and use of land. The Malvatumauri National Councils of Chiefs [MNCC], the governing body of the National Council of Chiefs for Vanuatu and thus the guardians of kastom,13 is also advocating for land tenure to be viewed as a group relationship. Collective land ownership will avoid disadvantaging certain groups of individuals, for instance women. The council urges customary chiefs, business operators, government leaders and, the general public to recognize this challenge, which is especially acute in urban areas.

The roles of leaders

Another important element in this paper is the roles of the chiefs in Vanuatu, especially how traditional leadership has been used to govern The Vete Association. The Chiefs in Vanuatu continue to play significant roles in maintaining peace and order in urban centers and during daily conflicts in the rural areas where approximately 80% of the populations reside. The police often hand over serious criminal cases over to the chiefs, in order for these cases to be handled in customary ways. Often this is because the police are incompetent, are afraid to stir up problems,

13 Kastom is defined as the traditional values, beliefs, institutions and practices. It is a perennial issue in Vanuatu, for practitioners, academics and politicians. A term employed by Margaret Rodman (1986) “Masters of tradition” the flexibility of kastom, the adaptations over time, even the creation of kastom practices for situations that did not exist traditionally.
lack funding to send criminal to the two cities (Vila and Luganville), and/or are not present in the area.

While the chiefs continue to play important roles in their communities and in the nation, their roles have also shifted. Traditional chiefs are stepping outside of their traditional village boundary and are applying traditional ways of solving disputes in state institutional and urban environments. There have been several incidents where the state approached chiefs to help stop conflicts and to restore peace in both rural and urban societies. However, the Chiefs’ interventions in the state conflicts have been challenged.

While traditional ways to maintain and restore peace are significantly vital, it is at the same time challenging to manage people of diverse cultural practices living together in small cities like Port Vila and Luganville. It is especially challenging because many chiefs lack knowledge about new criminal dimensions and are not familiar with the Western law. In addition, there are no clear rules regarding when chiefs should intervene when there are conflicts between the state’s legal system and the traditional system. This situation creates opportunities where ni-Vanuatu can go in between the two systems to try to get favorable answers. And among ni-Vanuatu, the preferred system is the traditional system.

The main problem is how to establish concession between the two systems and create a common land practice in an already diverse society. While some institutions have established the relationship between western law and traditional land systems it is still not clearly defined in Vanuatu; there is definitely room for improvement and great need for communal effort.

Conflict resolution is a global phenomenon and certainly not a new concept in the Pacific, especially in Melanesia. Vanuatu’s Chief Justice said that most Pacific societies are familiar with the concept of “alternative dispute resolution and in particular to Vanuatu. It is in fact consistent
with traditional methods of dispute resolution that predate the introduction of the formalized system of justice” (Hassall 2005, 3). Family, community networks, and the court system provide support and manage disputes in different capacities.

In Vanuatu, the traditional leadership system as a source of conflict resolution is also a source of social resilience, and, as a result, Vanuatu is peaceful and relatively stable. Vanuatu has suffered some political instabilities and some serious violence in the past and certainly faces real threats to social stability and order. Vanuatu is challenged with legal pluralism, having a Western court system based on the colonial system, as well as multiple and diverse indigenous traditional systems. Also, in Vanuatu today, anyone, even those without proper status, can be addressed as “chief,” and, the educated and business people are called chiefs because they often have more wealth (material goods) than the traditional chiefs. There is an issue of self-created chiefly positions which has created confusion and division among people in urban and rural communities. Several scholars have done work on relationships between, chiefs and the state and the functions and leadership styles of chiefs. See Dr. White Geoffrey’s 2000 work on the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia and the 1997 works of Dr. White Geoffrey and Dr. Lamont Lindstrom.

The traditional system varies in Vanuatu societies. Becoming a chief in Vanuatu is determined by how the community and land is structured. Like other Pacific Islands, the institution of chief was introduced to serve colonial purposes. However, chiefs today uphold different local values.

In Vanuatu societies, the traditional leadership system managed by the chiefs is valued in all four pillars of the Pacific Plan but have yet to be incorporated into policies. There have been only a few institutions that have been or in the process of incorporating culture into policies. For
instance, the Malvatumauri National Councils of Chiefs (MNCC) established in 1985 had 22 traditional chiefs from all around Vanuatu to represent the chiefs’ authority in Port Vila. According to Farran, the MNCC Act of 1985 did not lay out the official duties or powers of the council, only, dealing with the composition of the council and traditional land issues.

Interestingly, in the revised MNCC Act of 2006, the functions of the chiefs were expanded to “resolve disputes according to local custom; to prescribe the value of exchange of any gift for a custom marriage; to promote and encourage the use of custom and culture; to promote peace, stability and harmony; and to promote and encourage sustainable social and economic development” (Farran. 2010: 7-8 Sec. 13 of the constitution in Farran).

Importantly, Brown and Nolan stated that MNCC is “a ‘hybrid’ organization, established at independence at the point of interaction between traditional and state forms of governance” (2008:21). They said that MNCC is an effort to link and to represent custom in the state sectors and to contribute significantly to social resilience and to communicate between conflicting groups in order to defuse potential conflict associated with rapid social changes. The MNCC is increasingly seeing itself as a potential venue through which ni-Vanuatu can respond to national problems and challenges across the country.

Approaches to handle disputes vary depending on the nature of the disputes and the availability and ability of the system. In Melanesia, conflict resolution is based on voluntary consensus and agreement. Narakobi (1980) argues that lack of consensus is a product of conflict. Consensus is the Melanesian way of solving disputes. In Melanesia, without consensus, there is no resolution of the conflict. Consensus in Melanesia involves a collective effort in which the majority of the group members agree to a resolution in order to establish peace. Consensus is an important aspect of establishing peace among diverse groups like Vanuatu. While consensus is
an important aspect to establish peace in Melanesia, unfortunately, the dialogue process has not been used to defuse and stop conflict in this situation.

Typically chiefs are quick to intervene and stop conflict in their communities between conflicting peoples, tribes, and institutions. Traditionally the people would meet in the “nakamal” (traditional meetinghouse) to share dialogues, exchange goods, cry, and shake hands. Then peace would be restored back in the community among the conflicting groups. However, sometimes as seen in Melanesian societies, leaders are reluctant to intervene. Some leaders chose to intervene and stop conflicts in order to gain recognition and status, while others must let people enter war as ‘payback’ and only later to step in and negotiate for dialogue and agreement.

Cultural constraints against public confrontations limit the chances for dialogue between people of different tribes/culture and language areas; as a result conflicts often escalate. As argued by Shuster, Larmour, and Strokirch, public confrontation is not a common practice among many Pacific Islanders and therefore limits debates from occurring, which are necessary for tribes to avoid conflict. They claim that while confrontation style is a “valuable asset to public education in the West- [it] is not, generally, culturally acceptable in the Islands” (1998:129). This is a disadvantage in the Pacific community. The lack of communication thus leads to conflicts as we have seen in recent years in many Pacific Island communities.

The key problem MNCC is now facing is the “slow erosion of traditional authority in urban areas and its multiple pressures” (Kenot and Sakita 2008: 21) as well as chiefly titles being disputed. “Kastom” (traditional culture or custom) custom is an expression of contemporary indigenous and national identity in Vanuatu. ”Kastom” provides stability to societies, which have been confronted and challenged by the impacts of rapid social and economic changes due to globalization as local societies continue to integrate and adopt Western ways.
Unfortunately, many Melanesian countries have been labeled ‘failed states.’ Critics of these “failed states” labels point out that the Melanesia states are considered “failed” because they do not meet Western standards, standards which do not take into account the colonial history of the nations. For instance, Vanuatu’s current government is based on the British Westminster system, a system with which Ni-Vanuatu are largely unfamiliar (Forsyth. 2006). Many state security institutions turn to chiefs for assistance in both rural and urban areas, indicating that the traditional leadership system is effective. According to White, the “recent period of state failure witness a rise of interest in custom and traditional leadership… traditional leadership are evident in many parts of the world, where international intervention seek to recognize traditional modes of authority in rebuilding state structure” (2006:6).

Incidents where chiefs have been called to help the state solve issues affecting the nation have called attention to the state’s challenges. Also, due to the lack of clearly defined roles, chiefs have, as a result, been criticized for overstepping their authority. People prefer the traditional system over the Western system. The coexistence of both a Western and a traditional system results in space for people to chose whichever system they want in order to gain favorable answers. It is worth noting that in some cases the judges are not surprised to see village chiefs standing beside the offender in order to explain the customary fine and values. Courts take into consideration the payment of customary fines. However, what is valued or appropriate is variable due to diverse cultural values; incorporating custom into national policies is therefore difficult.

Moreover, some argue that the custom ceremony is a way of “covering up wrongs.” (Boege and Forsyth.2007) The Judiciary and Police also claim that chiefs are overstepping their authority. At the same time, the MNCC and chiefs lack understanding of the implications of
legal procedures in urban settings, and the MNCC lacks funding and resources. It is evident that people at large prefer the traditional system because the Western legal system is expensive, conducted in a foreign language, and generally not understood by the local people. In addition it takes longer to settle disputes. The traditional system is preferred system by local people because it is available, free, conducted in the local language or Bislama, and it settles issues faster than the Western system.

It is clear that the two systems work together and that the state is beginning to recognize some aspects of the traditional system and incorporate it into state polices. There is an indication that if, police and chiefs worked together this combination of systems would be the most effective. Maintaining law and order and restoring internal peace could only be achieved by the interaction of the state, chiefs, and civil societies. Boege and Forsyth stated that it was the “cooperation of police and chiefs and the combined utilization of state-based and customary instruments of conflict resolution (such as court cases and customary reconciliation) that prevented violent conflict escalation or contained violence” (2007:21). The participation of chiefs in the state system has essentially prevented conflicts from escalating. Yet while The MNCC is very instrumental in both urban and rural areas it lacks some of the training and skills possessed by state officers. Forsyth claims that “Lack of clear guidelines about which system should deal with which case” is the source of the problem (2006:3). Chiefs lack training and are challenged by temptations and corruption. For instance, in some Northern provinces of Vanuatu, chiefs gain their positions through wealth; such practices are posing many problems in contemporary Vanuatu especially in urban areas.

Kernot and Sakita noted, “The chiefly system operates alongside [the Western system] and the relationship between the two can sometimes be strained” (2008, 4). Therefore,
reconciliation appears to be the most effective way to restore peace because it allows people to air issues publicly and freely, thus giving them the chance to express their grievances and participate directly in decision processes and peace-making events. These traditional approaches have been proven very useful in situations where the court system does not work.

In addition, people see the court as “kot blong waetman” (the Court of the white men). The state courts lack legitimacy and is viewed by many as alien system in which people feel unable to tell their story properly. According to Forsyth and Boege, “the system deals with the particular complaint and not background factors [addressed in customary meetings where] people [are able to] talk about the details of the issue” (2007).

Customary reconciliation plays significant roles regardless of state position or status. The Ni-Vanuatu depended on traditional ways. For instance, while they are the leaders of the state, the Prime Minister and his deputy often resort to traditional ways to restore peace when there are political differences (Binihi 2007 in Kenot and Sakita 2008:10).

Walter Lini, warned “jifs” (chiefs) to “maintain kastom’s purity by keeping their noses out of crass politics: jifs must not mix the proper fashions of chiefly work with those of the white man” (Lindstrom and White 1997: 221). The accuracy of this warning was illustrated in the last election where the people and chiefs were voted into political positions in some instances politicians have manipulated the chiefs to get more voters. Chiefs’ involvement in politics has been criticized; many people argue that chiefs should not be involved in politics and only assist the state when necessary.

Over the course of my research it became clear that there were several claimants and defendants in addition to the state and that is a dispute that has been going on before independence. Civil cases involving the Vete Association indicate that these are long standing
disputes. These cases also list ‘other claimants’ as defendants, including the Ifira trustee and Vaturisu council of chiefs. I interviewed several key members of these other groups, including those who left the Vete Association in order to make separate claims.

It was challenging, however, to interview members of these groups due to my close relationship [as daughter] with key members of The Vete Association.

**Methodology and Positionality**

Conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups were the main research methods of this project, which was carried out from May to August 2010. The main informants were Vete members, chiefs, a representative from local Real Estate Company, government employees, a few members of different claimant group, and the public in general. The focus group includes over seventy members of The Vete Association. In addition, I conducted participant observation and did archival research. This paper draws the files and documents on The Vete Association and a variety of scholarly literature on land and social movements.

Informants were aware of issues of confidentiality and were very concerned about the protection of their identities and information. Many were adamant that I record their exact words.

Important to understanding and interpreting the finding of this research is my position as a close familial relative to key members of The Vete Association. I am their daughter; this is through the family line of my father Thompson Joel Wilson Masoirana. His cousins are Chief

---

14 Ifira Trustee, a leading local business trustee in Vanuatu by Ifira people. Vaturisu councils of chiefs represent certain part/area of Efate chiefs. Every Islands of SHEFA province has chief representatives such as Vaturisu, Vanuariki and other representatives of chief’s council form what is called the Provincial councils of Chiefs like any other provinces in Vanuatu. However, to date SHEFA province has not establish such, therefore, Vete Association feels that Vaturisu councils of Chiefs located on Port Vila, Efate dominates the benefiting of decision making that supposedly be communal decision over land management and development of Port Vila within the SHEFA province.
Fandanumata and MP David. Following the traditional kinship system, my five siblings and I are required to address Chief Fandanumata and MP David as “Popo kiki,” which means “father”\(^{15}\). Had we followed my mother Rinah Wilson Leitariliu’s line, we would have addressed him differently. My father also plays an active role in the Association: his role is to ensure that chief Fandanumata have the right type and amount of goods [food, money, animals, mats...] to perform his chiefly tasks. He supports the association, dedicated much of his time and resources to the association.

My close relationship with the leaders was a challenge at times as I struggled with. Maintaining my identity as “researcher” while also being a respectful daughter and being seen as a significant medium through which the members could voice their concerns.

I feel personally committed to document the stories and activities of Vete Association. During the course of this research, I shared their laughter and frustrations, shared food and talked and listened to their stories. My own close relationship with people involved in the Vete Association was a challenge, but it also gave me access to information that would have been difficult to obtain had I been a total outsider. In fact, this relationship made it relatively easy for me to conduct my research, as many members of the Vete network were also in my personal kinship network.

I also faced other challenges while working on this project. The fact that I am a young female researcher working on land issues meant that I had to work across traditional age and gender limits in order to access knowledge. Being both an insider and an outsider made this task even more complicated.

\(^{15}\) Popo Kiki in Tongoa local dialect [Naganamanaga] in terms of kinship relation the term Popo is referred to as father and Kiki is referred to as younger. If they are older than my father, they are address as Popo Lapa- elderst father.
I acknowledge that there are other claimants that have the right to make their claims and that Vete Association acts on behalf of several claimants to voice the concerns of these people. Vete Association essentially is a group of people who have come together due to similar concern, goals, values, and purpose. The group, however, is not homogenous, and there are differences in goals and opinions. In order to allow these differences to come through, I try as much as possible to include members’ views in their own words, not simply through my own projections and analysis.

There were indeed some stumbling blocks along the road. I personally found it very challenging to ask probing questions while at the same time maintaining an appropriate level of respect. There were some issues that I knew were sensitive, so I did not press or push these issues too much. My position as a woman in Vanuatu made this particularly difficult. The space which I occupy is a complicated one, one that I had to personally negotiate in my own way. I am grateful for the assistance I received, especially from my parents. A great deal of sensitivity and understanding was necessary in order to find the correct balance between my roles as daughter and researcher. Indeed, even in the space of an hour long interview, I would find myself maneuvering back and forth between the role of interviewer and a close family member. [Appendix 1 details discussion of personal challenges and experience].

This paper seeks to answer the research questions: Why are men from Tongoa and the Shepherds are claiming land rights over areas of Port Vila and Efate Island? This paper intends to try to uncover the reasons why people from Tongoa Island are claiming customary land rights on Efate Island. While I found some answers to this question, a more complete answer would involve greater dialogue between different claimants, in particular between the people of Tongoa
and the Shepherd Islanders and Efate and would involve the assistance of state and customary institutions in order to offer real solutions to ongoing land disputes on Port Vila, Efate.

Beside the land and internal disputes the Vete members and actions made with the intent to gain the attention of the government, there are other activities that Vete members are engaged in, such as the West Papua independence and rights of those who were taken during Black Birding period. These activities are explained in detail later in the paper. It may appear that Vete Association is anti-colonial because it tries to find ways to help the people of West Papua gain their independence. The purpose of being involved in Black Birding issues is to connect families in Australia with those in Vanuatu.

Vanuatu’s colonial history, the cultural diversity of the islands, and its “development” has resulted in increased numbers of land claims and increasing customary land disputes. The increase in disputes has accordingly led to local people organizing themselves in order to find ways to deal with these land and other social issues. These issues are common in many Pacific Islands but are especially prevalent in the Melanesian Islands with abundant natural resources. Such resources appear to be a major factor contributing to conflict. In the next chapter I will discuss the significance of land and how competition over land resources in the urban centers of many Pacific Island nations has led to several local social movements and has often resulted in conflict.

This paper is presented in three chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to these issues and a brief outline of each chapter. This introductory section provides an overview of Vanuatu, Efate and the Shepherds Islands as well as brief descriptions of the terms that will be used in this paper and the roles and challenges of traditional leadership in Vanuatu. Lastly, Chapter 1
includes a section on explanation of my positionality and relationships to the project and my informants.

Chapter 2 examines the literature on land and social movements and discusses the significance of competition over land, especially in the urban centers of many Pacific Islands in addition to how land issues have contributed to the emergence of several social movements and conflicts in the Melanesian region. I will weave in values associated with land and touch on the constitution of Vanuatu and other important information regarding land and development. I also compare Vete with other social movements in Melanesian region.

Chapter 3, entitled the Emergence of Vete Indigenous Historical Association, explores the emergence of Vete Association in 2006-2010 as an example of a social movement in Vanuatu. It answers the following questions: What is Vete? Why it was established and who is involved in the Vete Association? The People tell their stories about their social and cultural movements between the Islands of Efate, Kuwae and the Shepherd Islands. I will discuss reason behind their customary land claims on certain area of Port Vila and Efate.

Moreover, I will look at how the Vete Association has changed from an association with a more ‘traditional’ [Chiefs] group to one that now participates in modern politics; such participation in modern politics is illustrated by their representation in Parliament and their use of courts to express their grievances. This participation in modern politics, however, is strongly guided by the traditional leadership system. I also discuss the association’s different forms of protest and explore the Vete Association’s interaction with the state and how elements of both of these very different leadership systems are used as different tools from which to approach the land claims.
I discuss the political arm of the Association, its impact in the operations and membership of the Association. I examine the purpose, challenges and achievements of the various activities of the Association. Finally, I discuss how the interactions between traditional and modern systems of governance and leadership have been combined to prevent the Vete members [Association’s] protests from degenerating into violence, especially on Efate Island. The main reason for the frustration among Vete members is what they perceived as ignorance on behalf of the state. Vete Members believe that the Shepherd Islander’s histories, oral traditions and cultural practices support their claims, and they believe that these rights have been ignored by the state.

Vanuatu’s political history, from colonialism to independence and foreign relations are also important to understanding land issues in the nation and the responses of the Vete Association. I argued, however, that local leaders’ decisions regarding land management are the main source of current problems and the frustrations of the Association’s members. Leaders need to take the responsibility for their actions. After 30 years of independence, this is well over-due.
Chapter 2

Land, Development and Social Movement

Land is a significant resource to the lives of Pacific Islanders and has become a center of competition especially in urban centers between and amongst both people of the land and outsiders. Land disputes over customary rights are not a new development concept and issue in the Pacific Islands.

In the last chapter I gave an overview of Vanuatu. The Vanuatu’s colonial history has, in some respects, had great influence over the current situation of land disputes. The condominium administration imposed foreign land systems and resulted in adoption of technical words used in land management, which has become a hindrance to proper land management and a solution to the disputes. Local people have organized themselves in response, with the goal of reclaiming their customary land rights and challenging current practices and social policies imposed by the Europeans, which are continued by local leaders.

Although the state has established institutions to deal with customary land issues it has not been able to solve the problems because it does not take into account Vanuatu’s traditional and culturally diverse land tenure systems and practices. This diversity makes it difficult to decide whose land tenure system should be used as the national system. In addition, development and other external factors further complicate matters.

The value of land

In Melanesia, the geographical and cultural area to which Vanuatu belongs, land is not merely a source of food providing daily subsistence, land also maintains social and traditional values for indigenous people. Land is significant and valuable for many Pacific Islanders; it is central to identity and connects the people to their ancestors. Land is the foundation, roots and
source of life. People use and protect the land for their future generations. Indeed, the Melanesian attitude towards land is one of great respect and pride. According to Sethy Regenvanu, Vanuatu’s first Minister of Lands following independence:

“Land to Ni-Vanuatu is what a mother is to a baby. It is with land that he defines his identity and it is with land that he maintains his spiritual strength. Ni-Vanuatu does allow others the use of land, but they always retain the right to ownership” (Quoted in Van Trease, 1987: xi).

Land has been important to Melanesians for thousands of years and generations before the arrival of spectators and investors. The power to enforce claims to land reinforces one’s identity with the land. Arutangai further describes the Ni-Vanuatu relationship to land as follows: “All Ni-Vanuatu feel that ‘land is everything,’ it is basic to their identity…the foundation of all custom… [Land] represents life itself, both material and spiritual” (Arutangai 1987:262). Without land people have no subsistence base and no identity, as land rights embody genealogy and connectedness to place. Similarly, Ballard stated that Ni-Vanuatu share a special relationship with the land:

“Land to the Ni-Vanuatu is everything they have; it embodies their link to their past, their present and their future. It contains everything they do in life, that is, their daily interactions and their beliefs. … Not only is sacred, but it totally contradicts the imported notion of ‘ownership’ of land. Land is for the people, and it is in custody for future generations” (Ballard 2006).

Moreover, Vanuatu land is communally shared but not owned. Van Trease (1987) emphasized that “Traditionally, land was valued because of what it symbolized as least as much as for what it produced- it was the source of identity for individuals and groups as well as the basis from which almost all subsistence requirement were met” (Van Trease. 1987. P.3)

In addition, Finin and Wesley-Smith (2000) stated that:

“Land tenure and use have always been central to PacificIslands societies and economies, and land issues lie at the heart of many contemporary disputes in addition to providing for their daily subsistence needs, land continues to hold deep social and
spiritual value for most Pacific Islanders. For this reason the permanent transfer or exchange of land is severely limited in all but small number of island societies and changes in land use and land tenure arrangements are among the most sensitive issues for island populations (2000:13).

In Vanuatu and other Melanesian Island nations the individuals are right-holders or guardians who use the land and maintain it for future users rather than true landowners. The word “guardians” is used in other parts of the Pacific, as well; for instance in Marovo Lagoon “the people who ‘look after’ Marovo and are seen as the ‘guardians’ of the lagoon and the land” (Hviding 1996:353). There are many ways of understanding guardianship; a “guardian” can be caretakers who look after the land and make decisions in the absence of the family members while they travel to other villages or islands for a period of time. Furthermore, Hiving, [1996] stated that the:

“Seas of Marovo are, and have been, a crucial focus for cultural and relational continuity and transformation…there are many ways of guardianship, customary law, and counter hegemonic discourse as practiced by many generations of Marovo people. But the flowing waters of the lagoon, as a source of iconic history and as a scene for mobile practice, wide-ranging encounters, and flexible negotiation, clearly provide important clues” (Hviding 1996. p.355)

Similarly, one of my informants who was an influential leader stated that: “We left [Efate] not because we disliked it; we leave but always come back…the people appointed their “olioli-the custodians of our land” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). He used the word ‘olioli,’ the custodian to explain that there were arrangements and agreements made between people who were traveling away from Efate to Shepherd islands with those who stayed on Efate as guardians to look after the land. Outsiders are however striving to establish a complimentary system in opposition to what the people have used for many years to govern their properties (be it land, sea or space). People should use, manage and respect land in the custom manner of the specific area, whether it
is, either under customary law or leased, or whether it is under the government, expatriates or other Ni-Vanuatu.

It is a common practice that a clan member can claim his house or root crops on another clan’s territory, although he may not claim rights to owning the land. Crocombe indicates that Melanesians do not view land as something that can be owned, therefore their concept of land ‘ownership’ or primary rights to land, do not correspond with the Western view of property, where alienation is a key feature and a person may have exclusive rights to a piece of land (Crocombe 1972). Ostrom describes communal property as the absence of well-defined individual rights to land (Ostrom 1990). This is true of Melanesian communal property.

Vanuatu is a developing country that continues to recognize that its culture and its citizens’ livelihoods very much depend on land. There are ties between the land, chiefs, and lineage or “blad laen,” i.e., bloodline. As one of my informant explained:

“Vete mo graon i wok tugeta, yu no save seperetem tufala samting ia from se Vete hemi aboatem graon. Yu no save seperetem kastom man blong graon mo graon blong hem. From taem yu seperetem tufala, graon i nomo gad meaning blong hem. Graon i kam wan samting nating we narafala man i save salem blong karem Vatu [mani] be hemi no gad wan bloodline family i konektem hem wetem graon ia mo i nosave mekem work folem fasin we i kam wetem graon ia” (Pers.Conv. July 2010).

[My own translation] Vete and land go hand in hand; you cannot separate the two because Vete is about land. You cannot separate a man from his custom land, because when you separate them, land does not have meaning. Once these factors are disconnected the land loses its significance and became a commoditized object that could be transferred from one person to another with no family bloodline, relationship, nor responsibilities.

Ni-Vanuatu cannot separate land from their lives: land ties history, genealogy, society, and family together. It links people to their place and identity. It is difficult to associate the traditional tenure system with the Western or cash economy system because Vanuatu traditional systems vary from one island to another. Yet creation of a national system to accommodate cash
economy in urban areas that does not include local land tenure systems will only lead to further frustrations and disputes.

The constitution clearly states that all land should return to indigenous land owners and explains how land should be managed. The use of the word ownership in the constitution has resulted in policies and acts that lack clear regulations or controls over land dealings between Ni-Vanuatu and non Ni-Vanuatu and amongst the Ni-Vanuatu themselves. Because the introduced policies and institutions are not functioning, are without clear specific directions, and are contradictory to traditional land systems of individual localities. Vanuatu is in a position for future disputes between the customary land owners, the government, and responsible institutions.

**Independence and the Constitution**

There was substantial alienation of land in the Pacific Islands nations during the colonial period. The land control scheme came under the colonial administrators. With Vanuatu’s independence in 1980 the introduction of a Western property system altered traditional land rights, as was the case during the colonial period for Vanuatu (1906-1980). During this time much native land was alienated by the European Colonizers, particularly the French and British government. At independence in 1980, all land was returned to indigenous customary land owners, and it was constitutionally guaranteed that the rules of custom shall form the basis for ownership and use of land. The constitution stated that only Ni-Vanuatu could own land in a collective capacity. Customary land cannot be alienated or sold.

Also, the constitution requires the government to arrange for appropriate customary institutions or procedures to resolve disputes concerning the ownership of custom land. However, the question is whose custom should be used as national system to deal with land disputes within such diverse cultural practices? Apart from several cultural groups and practices
there are approximately 105 local dialects or languages spoken in Vanuatu traditional societies.

In Vanuatu there is extensive land rights legislation addressing custom landowner’s rights, where the inalienability of custom land rights and the value of land is enshrined in the constitution.

This was stated in a Vete letter dated July 9, 2006, addressed to Secretary Council of Ministers:

“Art 73: All land in the Republic of Vanuatu belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants.

Art 74: The rules of custom shall form the basis of ownership and use of land in the Republic of Vanuatu.

Art 75: Only indigenous citizens of the Republic of Vanuatu who have acquired their land in accordance with a recognized system of land tenure shall have perpetual ownership of their land.

Art 78 (2): The Government shall arrange for the appropriate customary institutions or procedures to resolve disputes concerning the ownership of custom land.

The Secretary Council of Ministers
Office of the Prime Minister
Port Vila
Vanuatu

09th July 2006

Dear Sir,

Re - PORT VILA / FATE LAND CLAIMS BY VETE INDIGENOUS & HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION.

The above association greatly respect this Council in our Christian and democratic country full of rich traditional, customary and cultural value. The above association is a spearhead of all the paramount Chiefs of Tongoa and Shepherds Islands.

We are writing this letter to this Council to express our deep concerns and disappointment with regards to the above topic i.e. land claims.

1) We understand the difference between Urban and Rural land matters. It is therefore important that we consider and take a viable direction towards this aim. Our aim, which we believe is therefore how to find fasi; but less cost methods in pursuit for our customary lands especially in the urban area of Port Vila where it has been made complicated by the State. Claims of land in and around Port Vila area is complicated in nature therefore many of these complicated aspects needs to be considered very critically.

2) The constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu stipulates in chapter 12 Article 73 that all lands in the Republic of Vanuatu belongs to the indigenous custom land owners and their descendants. Apart from Article 74 and 75 there is no other provision whereby other people could have perpetual ownership to any land in the Republic of Vanuatu. Article 76, gives the state power to categories lands but cannot own them with out the concern of the land owner.

3) Article 76 of the constitution states that parliament may make different provisions for the different categories of the land; however the process was only after prior consultation with the national Council of Chiefs.

4) Article 77 stipulates that Parliament shall prescribe such criteria for the assessment of compensation and the manner of its payment. Unfortunately we have seen that around the year 1992, when the government of the Republic of Vanuatu took the decision to declare Port Vila Urban Land as a public land, it was done contrary without prior consultation moreover without consent from the custom land owners.

5) The mode of which the Government acquires Port Vila Urban Land and declares it a public land is unconstitutional and therefore infringed on the rights of the potential custom land owner.
The action by the Government is an act of unlawful deprivation of properties not belonging to the state therefore, we believe that we as rightful custom land owners should demand for the government to redress.

6) From records, in 1992, without proper assessment and procedure and total absence for any form of proper valuation for the ascertainment and payments of Compensation, the government took liberty, at its own risk to pay compensations to the communities of Erakor, Ifira and Pango on Efate and Purau Village on the Island of Tanna.

We understand that a total of VT 110,000,000 was paid to the community of Ifira, VT 55,000,000 was paid to the community of Erakor, VT 55,000,000 was paid to the community of Pango and VT 5,000,000 was paid to the community of Purau Village of Tanna.

These compensations were made not to custom land owners but to the communities which also contradicts our customary principles of the ownership of land in Vanuatu.

(it is only in Communist/Socialism where we find all lands owned by the state and Vanuatu is not a Communist State).

7) Another question which remains for us to find the answer and the Government to answer is where the Government acquired the money that was used for the compensation payments of the urban land of Port Vila to the above mentioned communities.

We have prove that the Government used all monies acquired through the leases of the urban land through the Urban land Corporation to pay this compensation.

If this is true in reality, the Government did not pay anything but have misused monies belonging to the rightful land owners held in trust for them by the state.

8) We believe very strongly that we have our constitutional and God given rights to fight for them but how to develop the right is something that we have to consider carefully. With respect to the generality of the views and directions that had already been decided upon by this Association we would like if the Council of Ministers consider the following propose directives which is summaries in the following terms.

a) That the demands shall be directed to the Government to consider the matters affecting the urban lands of Port Vila and especially our custom rights ownership.

b) The illegal action of the Government to acquire and declare Port Vila town a Public Land without prior consultation of the custom land owners.

c) The Government to revoke its decision of 1992 to declare Port Vila Urban a Public Land.

d) The Government to repay all money paid out as compensation to the four communities as aforementioned.

e) The Government to set up a commission of inquiry whereby all Claims disputing Port Vila Urban Land may submit their claims for assessment and adjudication by a competent court of law.

f) Work through the land tribuna, system and Supreme Court to ascertain the rightful land owners of Port Vila town.

9) Government to work in collaboration with the potential custom land owners in its deliberation to set criteria for compensation payment.

h) The Vanuatu Indigenous & Historical Association finally initiate that the dialogue be made with the government and work through its framework to get the government and the law to look to our demands.

Thank you very much in advance of your assistance.

Yours faithfully,

David Abel
President,
Vanuatu Indigenous & Historical Association

Signature:-

Chief Marcel Bellina Ino
Chief Fireinumata Busings

Chief Fireinumata Emac

Chief Touloumamari Togariki

Prime Minister's Office
Minister of Justice
Minister of Lands
Minister of Internal Affairs
President— Malvatuamari Council of Chiefs
President— Vatarrari Council of Chiefs
President— Efate Province Council of Chiefs
President— Marakari Vatarrari Council of Chiefs
President— Tabu Mamou Council of Chiefs
Chief Justice — Court Judge
Chief Commissioner — Law Council

Chief Maré
Chief Taiwe
Chief Sairem
Chief Halanga Rualima Epi
In 2001, 21 years after independence, a Customary Lands Tribunal Act was passed. It was established to assist the process of resolving the increasing land disputes both in urban and rural areas.

Many Vete members, especially those that were interviewed, commonly state that “Article 71 of our constitution provides very clearly that all the land in the republic belongs to the custom owners and their descendants.” This article places limits on the government’s right to acquire land. In Article 78 the government is empowered to acquire land in the public interest. In Article 79, the government is authorized to buy land from custom owners for the resettlement of indigenous citizens and communities. This provision is under the urban land category; the constitution allowed the parliament to make different provisions for different categories of land: urban land, rural land and public land. The government can hold a perpetual lease of land under the urban and public land categories, but land owners receive a share of any revenues made by the government.

According to The Vete Association Members, the revenue is not shared equally because 1) the land is still under disputes; the customary ownership has not been identified yet by the Land Tribunal that was established by the government 2) Vaturisu council of chiefs dominates decisions regarding these revenues because there is no SHEFA Provincial Council of Chiefs to make decisions over urban and public land on Efate.

Although, the constitution allows for land to be owned by the government it does not say how the custom owners and disputes are to be determined amongst the claimants within the same island or different islands. Since 1964 there have been land issues. In 1980, with independence, the same issues continued about land disputes and customary land claims. Van Trease explains:
“Chief Graham Kalsakau [from Ifira islands] wrote a letter to the two resident commissioners in 1964 regarding new owners reaping huge profits from their traditional lands being under subdivision and re-sale” (Van Trease 1987:188). In addition to Tongoa Freedom fighters who fought for land rights and independence and currently, the Vete association protest over customary land rights.

Whose custom land tenure system should be used and recognized as the national system in dealing with customary land disputes? The main problem and issue at hand is the merging of different cultural land tenure ‘kastom’ systems from different islands into a ‘national’ system in spite of Vanuatu’s traditional diversity. Due to this diversity, the customary Land Tribunal Act has failed to settle customary land disputes. The Land Tribunal Act was established in 2001. Looking at the past 10 years, it is clear that this system is ineffective. This legislation is currently being reviewed with the intent of making it more useful and strengthening the capacity of local people to determine ownership of land in their local areas. In personal conversations with a Lands Department officer (July 2010) he stated that:

“Vete claims have gone as far as the magistrate court – the claims of Tongoa families that Port Vila sits on their land. Supreme Court defers the case to the land tribunal and Vaturis council of chiefs. Vaturis has not made any claims to look at the issue. There are many issues inside this case. Firstly the municipal area is owned by the government, Korman made compensations to several villages where people felt they were part of the traditional land owners group. But to this stage the cultural center and lands department have not identified the historical places that remain in Port Vila and their belonging to different tribes” (Pers. Conv. July 2010).

His statement raises the question of why the Vanuatu Cultural Center [VCC] is not involved in this matter. It is understood that the cultural center knows a lot about this history that.

---

Example of how land officer also use the word ‘own’.The land on Port Vila was made public land in 1982 by Lini’s government. However, the payment was not made to custom land owners because there were still disputes over Port Vila land. Instead Korman’s government in 1992 announces the payment as compensation to land owners of Port Vila without proper Court order.
Vete members share and could explain why men from Tongoa are making their land claims on Efate. I have not been able to have any conversations, however, with the officers within the VCC.

A prominent leader of The Vete Association suggested that I visit the VCC to ask the director why men from Tongoa are claiming land on Port Vila and Efate. Despite several attempts to meet with VCC staff the meeting did not happen. However, in an email the director Marcelin Abong stated that “Your question about Vete; It is a long story. It begun in 1451 AD. The Roymata saga. The Tinabua mata saga and the stories continue…I did many research about this topic” (Via email conversation. June 29, 2011). This was all he said, and I have not heard back from him since then. I still wonder why the VCC and Lands Department have not worked together with disputing parties and claimants to deal with the Port Vila land disputes. Vete members believe that the VCC could assist in solving the land issues through their recorded history and information of the true custom land owners of area surrounding Port Vila and Efate.

According to The Lands Department officer, in a meeting between the Lands Department and Vaturisu chiefs from Efate, the Chairman of Vaturisu Council of Chiefs and Ifira Trustees, Mantoi Kalsakau III said:

“Land blong man Efate where man Efate live remain graon blong man Efate, graon blong man Tongoa remain graon blong man Tongoa, be yu no save come from Tongoa yu claim long Efate because customs bae oli different. [He continued in English] The constitution in chapter 74 says custom of the place determine the ownership of lands, we can’t mix two Islands that has different customs and come in and said this is my land” (Pers.Conv. July 2010).


Kalsakau’s comment is important, and it is important that this comment be publicized and discussed in an organized forum where these concerns can be addressed by Vete Association.
members and other concerned claimants. This communual dialogue between Vete members, the
government and other claimants is what the Vete leaders wanted to see happen and they have
exhausted every venues, however, this conversation has yet to happen amongst the different
parties. The established institutions such as the Land Tribunal committee should facilitate this
process in order to resolve the customary land issues in an acceptable way. However, the current
method of handling land disputes excludes Vete members and other claimants. Thus, Vete
Members are demanding that the State organized such forums for dialogue among the different
claimants and the different customs that Kalsakau made reference to between Efate and Tongoa
[Shepherds].

The proposed Land Tribunal, however, was according to Pickering (1997):

“Would have jurisdiction over all customary land disputes involving ownership and
customary use, it would not have jurisdiction over such land that had been leased. The
leasing of land is currently governed by the Land Leases Act (Cap 163) of Vanuatu and it
is that such disputes are best dealt with within the established Court structure. This
proposal is therefore concerned with the resolution of disputes over customary land”
(Pickering 1997).

This is the complex system that The Vete Association is encountering. It is difficult to
claim customary land ownership over state public land as declared by the state, despite the fact
that there have been several pending claims since 1981, 30 years ago. Also, while these claims
were handed to the Supreme Court, the cases were transferred to the Land Tribunal committee
despite the fact that the legislation is being under review. Because the Land Tribunal committee
was established to deal with customary land disputes the Court continues to transfer customary
dispute cases to this institution, an institution that is not functioning. This is a very complex
situation and is of course frustrating to the Vete members.
Adding to the complexity and frustration is the lack of proper guidelines and definitions on how to manage the land at that capacity. Paterson, a law professor at the University of the South Pacific in Port Vila, said that:

The Land Lease Act that was enacted to give effect to the constitution does not provide any criteria for determining when land transaction is to be regarded as prejudicial to the custom owners, other Ni-Vanuatu, the community, or the Republic. Without such criteria, Ministers of Lands have no guidance to how they are to exercise their powers of approval or non approval and so not surprisingly they have tended to grant approval to all land transactions between Ni-Vanuatu and non Ni-Vanuatu, which comes before them (Paterson, VDP Issue no. 2818 December 29, 2009: 4).

Further, there are no clear definitions of what a custom land owner is. Therefore anyone can manipulate this term for personal gain. For instance, the leader of a clan may conduct land deals without consulting his other brothers and claim custom rights because of his seniority within the clan. There are also no specific guidelines for how Ni-Vanuatu should manage their land both in relation to other Ni-Vanuatu and non Ni-Vanuatu. While The Vanuatu Land Lease Act and constitution may appear to have some of the most well-defined and developed land laws in the Pacific, in reality this is not the case. According to Paterson:

Vanuatu has the dubious distinction of having one of the most unregulated systems of land dealing in all the English speaking countries of the South Pacific… land dealing between ni-Vanuatu and non ni-Vanuatu, land dealing between ni-Vanuatu and ownership of customary Land (Paterson, VDP Issue no.2818 December 29, 2009: 4).

According to Paterson, several years after independence the Parliament decided that the ownership of customary land was to be determined by the island courts and, on appeal, the Supreme Court. The numbers of cases coming before the courts were so many that they threatened to drown the courts. As a result in 2001 the customary Land Tribunals Act was enacted to provide local tribunals appointed by chiefs to settle disputes about the ownership of customary land.
Similarly, Jowitt explains that most of the time custom chiefs’ deal with disputes of the particular area using the accepted forms of traditional court system and the impositions of fines while the state rarely gets involved, particularly in rural areas. However, custom is increasingly failing to resolve issues because uses of land are changing, and people are no longer as willing to accept the legitimacy of custom settlements when settlements are not in their favor. This breakdown of acceptance could particularly be seen with the Island Court System that was in place from 1983 to 2001. This system was basically a modified and relaxed magistrate’s court in which issues were adjudicated on by a panel of three Island Court Justices, all of whom were knowledgeable in custom (Jowitt. 2008).

If a custom settlement was not achievable or not to a party’s liking he, she or they would take their case to the Island Court. Every single claim, one hundred percent of the claims taken to the Island court were appealed to the Supreme Court, a supposedly adversarial and foreign judicial body. In 2001 the government created The Land Tribunal to deal with customary issues, but the institution has not been successful, and the legislation was put under review in 2010. This is difficult in such a culturally diverse society where different places have different land tenure system practices: as a result, the Melanesia region remains active in claiming rights to land and other natural resources, especially in developed sites. Typically, foreign agencies without guidelines or institutional support remain in charge of these situations, and both indigenous people and investors consider their actions to be unsatisfactory.

An informant pointed out that, “Anyone can make claims over customary ownership of any land area.” He said this is a major problem. “How is the government going to deal with this issue in Vila and other islands? Chiefs cannot deal with the issues of land anymore in many islands” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). Likewise, another informant, an expatriate and business owner...
in Vila, finds that in “Vila and other provincial centers... anyone could make claims over land that has development potential.” He suggested that court fees be increased and non refundable in order to reduce claimants who are not genuine but rather are interested in the quick profits from the potential developers” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). While this may reduce the number of claimants in a particular land area, it could also be unfortunate for genuine land owners who do not have the means to afford the court and lawyer’s fee to defend their land rights over other claimants who might not be a genuine owner but who can afford court and lawyer fees.

It is clear that the land system has changed due to many factors as the society has shifted from traditional economy to cash economy as well as due to increasing urbanization and interaction and negotiation with the foreign systems and businesses. Hering (1983) reminds us that changes in the land tenure system are not only caused by introduced policies but also that the “traditional land tenure system can be affected by a change in population pressure brought by migration or natural increase” (Hering 1983). The development boom and migration to urban centers has brought competition over land as land values increases in monetary terms.

**Land and Development**

Urbanization and the cash economy of many Pacific Islands nations were typically brought about by colonization. Some would argue that these factors are responsible for land alienation and changed cultural practices. However, national leaders of many independent Pacific Islands nations have decided to continue to operate with colonial laws that do not reflect the many diverse cultural land tenure systems. May (1982) argued that “The land laws [should] be reviewed, repealed or amended ‘to comply with indigenous governance and Vanuatu’s cultural diversity;’... in line with ‘customary practices,’” [and that] the current land lease system [should] be replaced by a system of monthly land rent” (May1982:33). This monthly rent in
traditional land system would not necessarily be paid in cash but in goods and deeds. For instance, in SHEFA province, where the land rent is referred to as ‘na sautonga,’ this translates to giving the first harvest or performing a task for the head chief as an appreciation and return a favor for using the allocated land.

The land area in Port Vila and Efate Island that the Vete members are claiming has been contested and under dispute for many years. Vete members are asking the government to recognize the land owners so that the benefits, in this case and rent, can be shared equally. Efforts have been made toward resolving this issue, but there is definitely more work to be done. Similarly, other claimants have shared the concern over the issues of rent in Port Vila, Efate. A prominent government leader from Ifira stated:

“We are not happy to see other people getting money from our land by selling it. We accept anyone to be in our land, providing that they should rent or pay for it, and to pay us the owners” (Van Tresea 1987:188).

Some of my other informants have similarly commented that they cannot sit and watch their land pass on to other people; they have to do something about it. Although they are trying to take action, there are obstacles that they have to face, be it opposition, other claimants, the state, and/or other members within The Vete Association. It is evident that land is the foundation of life and social interaction for Pacific Islanders. Land, however, has increasingly become a cause of competition among different groups of people who are making customary ownership claims over land, in particular land with development potential. More recently, Independent Pacific Island nations are experiencing new pressures on traditional land rights, due to the temporary abandonment of land used by residents who leave the land to seek paid employment. There is also new pressure from foreigners who wish to expand their businesses typically in urban, developed areas and island resorts.
In short, development of major urban centers has led to contesting claims of ownership of land. Land conflict is a common problem around the Pacific especially in provincials and towns where land has increased in monetary value over the years and where customary land owners have been alienated from their rights and benefits of land leasing. The land under dispute has increased in monetary value as a result of growing commercial developments, multimillion business and creation of resorts in the islands. There are enough evidents particularly in Port Vila and Efate land transactions that indicate misuse of land management system and bribery that involved some local leaders. Changes in how land is maintained in developed areas are the contributing factor to conflict. Thus, colonial influence is not the only factor in the conflicts faced today by Pacific nations particularly in Melanesia. Another significant factor is local leaders’ poor management of land and decision-making that fails to take local people’s interests and concerns into account.

For instance, as illustrated in contemporary Melanesian conflicts, like the Fiji civil military coup, the Bougainville crisis in PNG, and ethnic tensions in Solomon Islands, land issues [land management system] continue to be one of the underlying factors contributing to violent and armed conflicts. It is likely that the actions of The Vete Associations, i.e., protests, could escalate into greater conflicts if local leaders and the government do not handle the situation properly. Several scholars have documented The Bouganville and Solomon Islands crises and have pointed out that colonial influence and failures of the national government to deal with land issues were responsible for the emergence of indigenous groups who felt that they must take action into their own hands.

The notion of “the failed state” helps us to understand the situation in the Solomon Islands Fiji and PNG and to recognize the residual influence and legacy of the colonial era. Colonial
regimes forced thousands of tribes with diverse cultures and languages to become one nation. These nations are made up of such diverse communities explains why Pacific Island nations continue to face many challenges today. Kabutaulaka noted, “Former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni once described the Solomons as a ‘nation conceived but never born’” (Kabutaulaka 2002: 4).

For instance, the Solomon Island tension as Kabutaulaka stated that:

“the roots of the Solomon Island crisis can be traced to the policies of the British colonial administration and, after independence, to the failure of successive governments to address important socioeconomic and political issues; nation-building, land ownership, large scale resource development, the distribution of development benefits, urban growth, internal migration and settlements, inappropriate and inadequate education, and poor economic growth” (Kabutaulaka 2002, 4).

The 2003 Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, RAMSI, was viewed as a problem of national instability and insecurity from the perspective of the international community, while from the perspective of Solomon Islanders (or any Pacific Islander for that matter) the conflicts leading up to the RAMSI intervention were about the issue of land. Further, many Solomon Islanders and Pacific Islanders believe that local approaches should be used to solve such conflicts and that involvement of outside forces such as consultants, development workers or military forces is not the real solution.

Tensions over land were also at the heart of the Bougainville Crisis. Regan (1998) emphasizes the role of “the destructive impact of the mining project on landowning communities, especially in the form of tensions over unequal distribution of land rents and compensation” (Regan 1998:276) and these tensions role in the conflict. Regan also points out that there was inadequate financial compensation, poor decision-making and increasing land shortage for groups around the mine. Bougainville’s close links with the Western Solomons and horrific experiences in the Second World War, and widely-held grievances about alleged
colonial neglect and about the imposition of the mine for the benefit of outsiders also fueled the Bougainville Crisis.

Similarly, Wesley-Smith and Ogan (1992) said that the most deeply felt impacts involved the small land owner groups in the vicinity of the mining operations. They pointed out that they “were grossly disadvantaged from the beginning and no subsequent renegotiation has been able to remedy the situation” (Wesley-Smith and Ogan 1992, 245).

In summary, according to Regan, the impacts of the Bougainville War included: loss of land (virtually all land available for agricultural purposes in the cases of Dapera and Moroni villages); limited and unfairly distributed compensation; diversion of social inconvenience compensation into a 'business arm' which delivered little benefit; environmental degradation; and problems with standards of housing and other facilities in villages re-located due to the mine” (Regan 1998).

The leadership roles of many Melanesian leaders have been mixed with political Western politics making it complicated at times to deal with traditional issues that are governed by traditional laws. Finin and Wesley-Smith (2000) stated that:

“According to historian Brij Lal, exposed the Great Council of Chiefs as "a diminished body of dithering men and women, confused, partisan…. Although perhaps less obvious, the role of traditional institutions of government is even more important in troubled parts of Melanesia like Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, where Polynesian-style chiefly systems have never been a prominent feature of the cultural landscape. Instead, small-scale, loosely organized, and shifting systems of leadership clustered around competitive "big-men" were more typical. These institutions have to a large extent endured in the face of relatively unsuccessful attempts to impose the paraphernalia of a western-style nation-state. Not only do elected leaders struggle to implement "development" and other policies among peoples whom they cannot control or coerce, but they often have to conform to traditional big-man norms and expectations in order to stay in power. Sofar as ordinary people remain very much in control of their daily lives, these systems may operate far more democratically than most "advanced" western political systems”.

Finin and Wesley-Smith (2000) continued to say that:
“The current Solomon Islands crisis frequently mischaracterized as an "ethnic clash," also hinges in large measure on land. Solomon Island scholar Tarcisius Kabutaulaka highlights the fact that over past decades many Guadalcanal males have unilaterally sold rights to customary land around the capital, Honiara. These transactions are strongly resented by Guadalcanal's younger generations, particularly women, who decry the loss of a traditional inheritance that would normally pass down through the female side of the family in this matrilineal society. Customary owners have demanded additional compensation from the Malaitan migrants who reside in these settlements and from the government for the "public" land on which Honiara is built. The people of Guadalcanal generally object to the presence in their domain of large numbers of outsiders, some of whom who reside at a large oil palm plantation on the Guadalcanal plains”.

The point of discussing these other Melanesian conflicts is to draw attention to the need for Pacific leaders and people to recognize their internal values as solutions to their problems and, to encourage them to use local ways to solve issues rather that assuming that solutions is to bring in external forces. Leaders need to compromise, adopt valuable approaches from the diverse cultures, and develop policies that respect traditional values.

Wesley-Smith (2008) recommends that local leaders “create an entirely new path… [which takes into account the fact that] traditional economic formations, ideologies, and identities remain resilient” (40). While administrative and other infrastructures are important for delivery of services the most important consideration should be people’s traditions and the value of land to them.

The Ni-Vanuatu are in the grip of a land development boom. This is creating social problems in Vanuatu and because, like in other parts of the Melanesia region, land is central to identity, food and general livelihood, and social security for a population for whom subsistence is largely outside of the cash economy. As Simo stated “for some Ni-Vanuatu, this view is changing and land is no longer regarded the Mother or Father, but represents an attractive way to earn what is perceived as big money” (2005: iv). This is becoming a common attitude in the urban parts of the Pacific region. This is illustrated by the increasing number of real estate signs
on land subdivisions around Efate and Santo Islands in Vanuatu. These signs read: “Property for sale, land for sale.” Others read “Private property no fishing and No trespass, Private property TABU.”

This urban attitude toward land not only contributes to the increasing land alienation and confusion, but also contradicts the constitutions and land acts and policies enacted to support and protect people’s rights and access to the land. This creates frustrations among the people, especially customary land owners, who begin to realize that their land has been passed down from one person to another by a foreign agency or a local State institution without their consent. In September of 2006 the Prime Minister received a “petition from chiefs demanding the government ban all sale(s) of indigenous land" (VDP Jan 4, 2006). The resulting 2006 Land summit provided awareness to many customary land owners. During this summit they were informed that although they can lease their land, what typically happens is that land owners are unable to get their land back after the lease is up because they cannot compensate for the development of the land. This reality is alienating customary owners from their land and will likely lead to great conflict and tensions when these leases are finally up.

The National Land Summit in 2006 was particularly set up to look at many land disputes and ways to manage these disputes in Vanuatu. It was reported that there were over 1,000 recommendations from this summit; however only 20 resolutions were finalized (VDP, Sept 30, 2006). These resolutions covered a range of matters, including the need to review laws relating to determining the true custom owner of the land; to review land lease conditions; to have leases in national language (Bislama) and to take more steps to ensure the true consent of the custom owners; to regulate real estate agents through mechanisms such as a code of fair practice; to revise land rents; to incorporate social impact assessments into any proposed new leases; to
ensure public access to beaches, rivers, and lakes is guaranteed; and to create a national subdivision policy.

However, the National Land Summit has not quelled all land disputes in Port Vila. For instance, in October of 2006, a group from Tongoa who are members of The Vete Association went around and spray painted phrases, such as “Property of Vete” on various buildings that were on land claimed by the Association. While the targeted buildings have mainly been unoccupied government buildings, some private homes were also marked (VDP, Oct. 30, 2006; PVPO, Dec 6, 2006. Jowitt, 2008).

The dissatisfaction of people from Tongoa is at least, in part, prompted by the handling of a sublease of land near by the Port Vila marketplace. Ifira Land Trustees subleased this land to a private company called Fittler Limited. Some chiefs of Tongoa who thought they had at least some claim to the land, placed namele leaves (cycad palm leaves) on the site in March of 2006. Namele leaves signifying a customary ban or tabu (taboo) on the land. An officer of the Ifira Land Trustees responded by throwing these leaves into the sea. This action, which indicates considerable disrespect for kastom (customary or traditional practices), created an angry response: people from Tongoa cut the fence around the site and attempted to disturb construction work there. By the end of 2006 little construction had taken place on this site. It remains to be seen whether there will be any resolution to this conflict (VDP May 27 and 30 May 2006 in Jowitt 2008:475-480).

In Vanuatu, the enacted Land Lease Act was established to give the right or enable someone else [foreign or non ni- Vanuatu] other than custom land owners to obtain land for residence and business under the leasehold title for 35-75 years. At the end of the lease the land owner can only regain his land if he/she is able to compensate the leaser for the development
he/she has done to the land. Most Ni-Vanuatu end up losing their land because they cannot afford the development cost of lavish coastal residences or expatriates’ homes let alone the multimillion hotels and resorts. While the Land Tribunal Acts were created to give effect to the constitution, they do not provide any criteria for determining how the customary land owner and developer should deal with the development of the land when the lease expires. Increased land values and the development boom over the past years in Port Vila and Efate have created major tensions between the Ni-Vanuatu and non Ni-Vanuatu and between Ni-Vanuatu over customary land ownership. The properties and multimillion hotels built around Port Vila have resulted in increasing land values and are causing land conflicts to escalate and increasing the potential for violent conflict.

The significance of land in the Pacific requires effective and comprehensive systems to deal with land issues. Vanuatu, like other Pacific Island nations, must deal with diverse cultures where each island practices different land systems, Land disputes have become a major concern in both rural and urban areas because these existing and different cultural practices have been overlooked. The members of The Vete Association believe that in 1980, when the nation gained independence, all land was returned to the custom owners. And in the 1980 constitution it was guaranteed that the rules of custom should form the basis of ownership and use of land and that customary land cannot be alienated or sold.

The Vete Association acts on behalf of several other individual customary claimants over the customary ownership of Port Vila and Efate. The Vete Association was formed in response to other claimants leasing land to developers on lands that are public areas that have been under dispute since 1981. These lands are under agricultural land leases but are being subdivided for commercial and residences purposes. These indiscretions contradict the national law and the land
act. The Vete Association thus organized to deal with these issues concerning their rights to land in Port Vila and Efate. The Vete Association aims at making awareness among villagers on Efate and asking the government to stop selling and leasing and urging the government to work with Vete members and other Efate land claimants through established institutions to identify the custom owners of Port Vila and Efate.

Social Movements

The term social movement is defined by S. P. Arya (1988) as:

“Designating any collective effort on a mass scale by the concerned society, aiming to tackle and eradicate some widespread social problem of wider dimensions having existed among the people of the region for a fairly long period... [Arya says that] no particular definition can be given to a social movement because of its diversity. Social movements could be religious, secular, revolutionary, reactionary, co-operative etc. In short, a social movement is a collective action to attain a common goal... [Arya examines] the social movements as the results of various social problems” (Arya (1988: 17-25 in Mathew 2010).

In addition, Wallace (1956) suggested that social movements emerge out of the deliberate, organized, conscious efforts of the members of a society for better conditions; social movements express dissatisfaction, dissent and protest against the existing conditions (in Matthew 2010). Coleman (1960) argued that social movements arise from the needs of the individuals (Coleman 1960in Matthew 2010: 250). These movements are established for different reasons around the world, often because people are not happy with the leadership, administrations and/or policies of their governments. The differences and similarities across the Melanesian regions are due to cultural diversity, different resources and economies, different types of governments, and various colonial histories, experiences. The theoretical questions to be explored will include: under what conditions are movements more likely to appear? What enhances their likelihood of success? What are the common threads between them? How are the new movements different from older movements? How do social movements both represent or challenge the civil society in a
democracy? How are the movement leaders selected? And what do the movements intend to achieve?

Social movements are more likely to appear when local people are not happy with the leaders or a certain policies that the leaders accepted, policies that typically are at odds with the traditional system of the society. It is apparent that many of these movements carry on from past movements that have to do with land rights and freedom from colonial systems and people in power. Usually these movements aim to achieve economic freedom, social and political rights, and/or retainment or reincorporation of traditional systems, in particular traditional systems that govern rights to the land and resources.

In the Pacific Islands Nations, social movements and activism\footnote{Activism is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as (Walker 1984) “a policy of vigorous action in politics” Activism is undertaken by individual or groups who have a case or a sense of grievance arising out of the exercise of power by the legitimate office-holders of that power. The strategy of activism includes lobbying, making submission, mounting deputation and circulating petition. These are socially acceptable...but if the strategy fail, activist may resort to more vigorous action such as demonstrations, pickets, marches, boycotts and occupation of land under dispute...if all else fails resort to extremely vigorous actions which put them at risk with the law. These include painting slogans in public places, damaging properties, illegal occupation of land or property in contention, passive resistance to the force of law as, a last resort, armed resistance”} are not new concepts. Throughout colonial history, there were many social movements across the Pacific; for instance Tonga Ma Tonga Kautaha (Tonga), Sword of Gabriel (Kiribati), Viti Kabani (Fiji), Mau Movement (Samoa) Papua Besena, Mataungan, Ma’asina Rule, John Forum, Nagriamel, and Fallowes to name a few. Particularly the emergence of social movements is common in Melanesian countries. These were reactions to colonialism and Western, cultural and political domination. These movements have often been described as cargo cults, or millenarian movements. Such labels are often misrepresentations, as the movements are reactions to genuine concerns. These social movements also helped contribute to the process of decolonization, and
some persisted long after independence was achieved; some of these social movement groups are still actively pushing for greater autonomy and economic and social rights. The emergence of locally based movements in Papua New Guinea and other Melanesian Islands nations were due to rapid political and social changes taking place in the Pacific Island nations. According to May:

“One of the most remarkable aspects of social and political changes in Papua New Guinea in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the proliferation of spontaneous local movements, differing in their origin and specific objective but sharing a broad concern with the achievement of economic, social, and political development through communal action…. Others were established ostensibly to organized local opposition to particular policies of central government but came to assume wider objectives…” (May 1982: 1)

These movements arose due to dissatisfaction with the government, policies, social and economic development and lack of political autonomy. In addition, May indicated that members of these social movements:

“Demand for material returns, however, cannot be interpreted in simple economic terms. The desire for improvements in subsistence living and for success in modern business is motivated also by considerations of status: Micronationalist groups are anxious to demonstrate that they can achieve for themselves what government has failed to provide for them, and the takeover of foreign-owned plantations and businesses is probably as much a symbolic assertion of independence as an attempt to secure monetary returns” (May 1982: 422).

The leaders were usually young and educated, yet many cultural leaders frequently lack status within the traditional social framework. Often, these groups were using alternative ways to voice their concerns, such as reviving cultural stories and tracing genealogies and customary land boundaries and relationships. Many of these alternative ways involve collecting oral traditions as evidence, information that often had gone undocumented.

A clear example of these social movements is the Bouganville Crisis, which was one of the most tragic conflicts since WWII. Some of the factors leading to this crisis was land disputes between the Bouganvilleans, the PNG government, other PNG ethnic groups; matters escalated
also due to the involvement of an international corporation. Also see Wesley-Smith and Finin's 2000 Coup, Conflicts and Crises: the new Pacific way? and Anthony Regan 1998.

Similarly, Kabutaulaka (2002) and Fry and Kabutaulaka (2008) discuss how the Solomon Island conflict was rooted in reactions to colonization. The social movement in the Solomon Islands called Masina Rule formed due to the local people’s dissatisfaction with the colonial administrators and their rules (Keesing 1989). The objectives of this movement were “decolonization and localization” (Gegeo; 1994, 69). Apart from their focus on socio-political and socio-economic issues, Masina rule members were also engaged in activities such as “compiling genealogies, recording of land and other property ownership, and reaffirmation of the importance of traditional culture” (Gegeo1994: 70) because they felt that the western system that supposed to protect the people was not functioning.

These social movements were crucial in driving some social and political changes. The political independence movement in the Pacific Islands in early 1960s started with the actions of social movements voicing their concerns.

There were, however, other various religious, millenarian and political movements in the Pacific Islands. They were often anti-white and Western people and advocated the abandonment of many social and cultural practices. The other movements encouraged people to stop using money and to return to the traditional life.

While some of the movements “emerged from a background of local cult activity; others were established ostensibly to organize local opposition to particular policies of central government but came to assume wider objectives; still others were specifically motivated by a desire to achieve development through local community action; a few emerged to press for a geographically more broadly based regional” (May 1982: 1). Finin and Wesley-Smith (2000)
note that: “movements for self-determination remain active in most of these places, increasing the potential for instability and violence” (7). They further stated that Melanesian countries remain active in claiming their right to land ownership and that “land issues lie at the heart of many contemporary disputes” (Finin and Wesley-Smith 2000: 13).

In many societies, both past and present, people have established and joined social movements to press for or against certain social changes. When engaging in collective action, groups must make important decisions about the goals, tactics, and organizational strategies of the movement. Often external factors, including the response of the state, availability of external resources, and cultural factors, shape these social movements. Although new forms of administrations, leadership, policies, experiences, and ongoing demand for freedom and equality allow people to push for change collectively not all groups easily obtain access to power or higher institutions.

In the 1930s in the Solomon Islands, The Fallowes Movement, named after Richard Fallowes who was a missionary on Santa Isabel, “pressed for the establishment of a body of local leaders, ‘parliament’, to advise the (colonial) administration on the welfare of Solomon Islanders” (Wolfers, 1983: 149-150 in Gegeo 1994: 68). The Fallowes Movement later withdrew from political activities. Another social movement in the Solomon Islands named the Moro movement was established around 1957. The objectives of the Moro movement were: “1) the establishment of a socio-political organization with its visionary founder as leader 2) the launching of a number of co-operative economic enterprises aimed at elevating the standard of living of followers of the movement” (Davenport and Coker 1967 in Gegeo 1994: 73). In 1977 the Moro members elected David Valusa as a Member of Parliament. The movement supporters continued to spread in Guadalcanal, and in 1980 Moro supporters voted in another
Moro member, Ezekiel Alebua who he later became the Prime Minister in 1986. This was seen as an achievement of the movement.

In fact, social movements often influence each other. One movement may adopt a strategy used by previous movements. For instance, The Solomon Islands Moro movement had similar objectives as earlier movements but were more organized; their ability to effectively organize resulting in successful elections of a member to the national parliament and of Prime Minister (Gegeo; 1994).

In Vanuatu, the social and political changes in New Hebrides in early 1960 to late 1970, involved several social movements related to land issues. Beasant (1984), Van Trease (1987), Worsley (1957) and Kelekele (1977) have given similar accounts of these indigenous movements in New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) up to Independence. Several of these social movements started before 1906. According to Kelekele (1977):

“People subjected to such a system cannot remain silent for long, and historically the first reactions to French and British colonial presence goes back to the early part of this century. This coincided with the return of the laborers from Queensland in 1906 who, having worked on white plantations, knew more about the ways and thoughts of the settlers than the village folk” (Kelekele. 1977:20).

These authors discuss early opposition to European settlers in the 19th and 20th centuries. There were obvious anti-colonization sentiments among the local people. These sentiments are reflected in The Vete Association’s support for West Papua independence: they want the West Papuans to be free, as I will discuss in the next chapter. The support for aspect Worsley (1957) emphasized the local peoples' reactions and attitudes toward colonialism, local people were anti-colonial. There were also a few cargo cults of the mid 1940’s. The members of these social movements were dissatisfied with the condominium government in New Hebrides and were upset by the land grabbing and alienation done by French planters and other settlers. The New
Hebrideans on Santo and Malo, for instance, ceased Christian and European ways and encouraged people to return to their traditional ways and to fight to achieve independence. The Tamata Movement (1947-1952) started by Moli Vali on Malo Island and Santo. The Tamata movement reappeared in 1960s as a reaction to French planters taking more of the land locals used for hunting and collecting food.

One of the most prominent social movements in Vanuatu was the Nagriamel Movement, led by Jimmy Steven. It started in the 1960s in Santo. Nagriamel is seen as an extension of the Tamata Movement and symbolizes “the respect that should be given to custom.” Nagriamel’s goal “was a return to traditional values and way of life free from the contamination of European influence” (Howard 1987:18). Steven, however, combined customary, traditional and Christian elements in the Nagriamel movement. The people of Santo Island were fighting against the French planters who had taken most of the interior lands and were frustrated by the French planters’ racial prejudices, illustrated by the sign “Dogs or Niggers near the gate will suffer the penalty of death” (Howard 1987: 129). The indigenous people were frustrated and insulted when they were confronted with such racial notices stopping them from having access to their lands. These growing tensions between the natives and the European settlers and the condominium government (British and French) led to the development of political parties, which are derived from those early movements. Further, this concern for land ownership paved the way for independence in Vanuatu. For instance, many of The Vete Association's members were active in the Tongoa Takuare Freedom Fighters [movement] to fight for independence.

While Vanuatu technically achieved political independence in 1980 it seems as if in many ways Vanuatu is not fully independent. Independence and the right to manage the land and resources were handed over to local leaders. However, land management has been a challenge
due to many factors. While recognizing that the colonial regime contributed to some of the issues Vanuatu is facing today, contributed from it is important to note as well that the local leaders made the decisions on how the land and resources have been managed and distributed since independence. These leaders have in many cases mislead the general public and have acted corruptly as we see in some of the recent land cases in Port Vila, Efate.

The Vete Association is an example of a social movement in contemporary Vanuatu, which challenges the power holders and the society to address social problems or grievances and to restore land and social values and indigenous land rights. Documenting these movements is essential for future generations to understand the efforts that people are making today. It helps us to understand what some of the major driving forces behind these movements have been and how these groups have chose to handle social, cultural, political and economic challenges. Understanding the history of social movements can also be a guide to policy makers: it can help them recognize why social movements emerge so that they can identify ways to address these social issues and help prevent future conflicts. In the next chapter, I will look more closely at the establishment of The Vete Association who is involved in the movement and why it emerged.

The Vete Association and other contemporary movements in Vanuatu have some of the same characteristics of other social movements prior to the independence of Vanuatu. One commonality is that they are dissatisfied with the leaders of the country, in similarity to Keesing (1989)'s observations of the cargo cult movements and their dissatisfaction with the colonial administrators. The Vete Association also shares a lot in common with the Santo Nagriamel movement against the joint government, the French and British, in which they demanded for independence and for the land and resources to be returned to the local people. Even after independence, local people are facing the same old issues; this is because the new leaders have
not changed or return to the traditional system that governs the indigenous land and resources and although the land rights were supposed to return to the custom owners as stated in the constitution, this law has yet to be truly implemented. The Vete Association, like previous social movements, emerged due to land alienation and land disputes that are largely connected to the government’s mismanagement of land and failure to deal with local peoples' claims to land and the local custom land owners land dealings with foreigners for quick cash without proper awareness regarding custom land owners rights and management of their land and resources in a foreign system.

This raises the question again: is Vanuatu really independent? The desire to regain alienated land was one of the major forces driving New Henbredians to fight for their independence. After 30 years of independence, the issue over the land returning to the indigenous customary land owners remains unresolved. We cannot, however, continue to lay blame only on colonial influence. Vanuatu’s and other Pacific Island countries’ leaders should take responsibility and make changes that are relevant to their respective island nations. We have to accept the fact that now it is the responsibility of the local governments to resolve these issues.
Chapter 3. The Emergence of Vete Indigenous Historical Association

3.1 Who, What, and When

In the last chapter we compared various social movements with the Vete Association and explored reasons why some of these social movements lasted longer than others. I argued that the new movements have borrowed forms and ideas from the previous movements and have developed an elaborate structure of leadership; while some are clearly more organized than others. Some of those that have lasted longer have developed into commercial operations. While there are some similarities between some of these movements and the Vete Association, such as the choice of leadership and relationship to the Western system; The Vete Association differs in its structure of the organization, activities, forms of protest, and membership base. In this chapter I will examine the history, development and the activities of The Vete Association since its establishment in 2006\(^\text{18}\). I will examine, in particular, these questions: what is the Vete Association; who are its members and key leaders? And when the Vete Association was established? I will also discuss the meaning of the word “Vete” and outline the purpose of the association and some of the association's activities.

What is Vete [Vete Association]?

The name “Vete” was derived from SHEFA Province of Vanuatu, and in the Tongoan language\(^\text{19}\) [Naganamanga] Vete\(^\text{20}\) means or refers to “the nest or the place of birth” (Pers.convers. July 6, 2010). Vete it is believed to be the first name given to the island of Efate by the original settlers of the Vate [Efate] Island, who saw the island from the sea as they

\(^{18}\) The initial idea and discussion about forming a body to deal with the ongoing land issues on Efate begin in mid 2005. The Vete Association was formally registered in 2006.

\(^{19}\) Language spoken in parts of Tongoa, shepherds, South Epi and off shore Islands and northern part of Efate

\(^{20}\) Vete Indigenous and Historical Association(VHIA) commonly known as Vete
approached and realized it had the shape of a nest. The name Vete is used as a logo for the Vete Cooperative Savings and Loan Limited [VCSLtd]. VCSLtd is a cooperative that provides financial assistance to Vete members, who save and benefit from the cooperative store. The logo feature pictures of six birds, representing the six provinces of Vanuatu; the birds surround a nest with several eggs inside. Under the cooperative logo is a phrase stating; “Nest-Egg. Putting away a small savings regularly to build up to be used for the future” (Prof. Ron Adams. Feb 11, 2009).

According to the informants I interviewed this idea of cooperation and the nest is the same idea and reason behind why Vete members are taking action to protect their land interests. Efate Island is a place that brings people together to live, but there is a need for more action towards protection of the land and resources for future generations. To Pacific Islanders and Vete members, land is an investment for the future generations. The Vete Association intends to protect the lands of Efate from exploitation by both Ni-Vanuatu and foreign investors. The Vete Alliance policy states that:

“Vete is believed to be the name given to the Island of Efate by the original or first people to this island, meaning the nest or the place of birth. These people, according to
oral history, custom and culture then moved and were spread throughout the Shepherd Group. Vete movement was formed in mid 2005 with intention to protect lands from exploitation by the investors who by then bought and occupied ['own', leasehold title] almost 80% of Efate” (Vete Alliance. July 28, 2009:1).

The Vete Indigenous Historical Association [VIHA] is the official name of The Vete Association. The Association represents and provides a forum in which various individuals, groups, claimants, and families from Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands can express their grievances concerning their social, cultural and economic land rights, particularly in Port Vila and Efate in general. A Vete letter addressed to the Secretary Council of Ministers (SCM) regarding VIHA Port Vila/Efate Land claims stated that “The[VIHA] association is a spearhead of all the paramount Chiefs of Tongoa and Shepherd Islands” (July 9, 2006), [See Figure 8]. Certainly this is a major historical step toward promoting empowerment for the people of Tongoa and the Shepherds Islanders who have lost most of their lands on Efate during the colonial administration and WWII restrictions on travel between the Islands. Members are claiming customary land rights particularly in Port Vila, Efate.

The Vete Association is an alternative association to the Western established organization that helps to facilitate individual land claims and assist people who have lost their land due to disputes, warfare, displacement, disputed lease title or migration. As stated in a letter to the SCM, Members are contesting “the mode of which the Government acquires Port Vila Urban Land and declares it as public land [which] is unconstitutional and therefore [has] infringed on the rights of the potential custom land owner” (July 9, 2006). The Vete members are asking the government to assist them solve land disputes on Port Vila, Efate and to recognize the rightful customary land owners.

These individual land claims were going directly to the Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands Chiefs representative in the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs (MNCC) because the
MNCC are considered to be the guardians of kastom\textsuperscript{21} in Vanuatu. The chief representatives, however, approached and asked Abel David, the current President of The Association and a Member of the Parliament (MP) to assist people with these pending and increased land concerns. The Vete Association thus established to provide a space for these land claims to be addressed though a registered body. The Vete Association is working with individual claimants who brought their concerns together to the responsible leaders and an institution. A letter to SCM stated that:

“The Vete Indigenous and Historical Association finally initiate that the dialogue be made with the government and work through its frame work to get the government and the law to look in our demands” (July 9, 2006).

Initially, The Vete Association emphasized allegations toward the government for neglecting Tongoans' customary land claims on Efate. The Vete Association was essentially established as an indigenous alternative because people felt that the government and its Western-based system were failing to protect their land rights. However, this grassroots organization chose to elect a member into the parliament shortly after its establishment. In this regard, The Vete Association is using both the traditional and the Western system.

The key concern for VIHA is the issue of the increased sale of land and the development boom in Vanuatu. This has become a threat and major concern to the people of Vanuatu, especially the Shepherd Islanders who believe they are the customary landowners of Efate Island. VIHA takes direct action to protect the indigenous customary lands of Efate and Port Vila from the Vanuatu government, internal migrants, foreign residents and investors occupying vacant lands. As indicated in a letter to the Prime Minister Ham Lini The Association's main aim is to protect this land:“Your honor, our aim must be CLEAR that we are against the sale of our

\textsuperscript{21} Kastom is defined as the traditional values, beliefs, institutions and practices.
lands on Efate by the people who do NOT HAVE THE CUSTOM OWNERSHIP” (Vete letter July 7, 2006).

**The objectives of the Vete Association**

(1) To assist the process of land claims in Port Vila and the island of Efate,
(2) To develop social infrastructures to benefit the people of Efate, Tongoa, Epi and the Shepherd Islands in Port Vila and to ensure that the people of Efate, Tongoa, Epi and the Shepherds are not involved in criminal activities in the city of Port Vila.

While these are the main two objectives, other objectives have been introduced over the years for specific ongoing activities, such as the creation of The Vete Alliance Party, to have a representative in the government to push the land issues at the national level. The Association also established the Sorovanga Community School in 1998 and prior to that the Tumaroba School on Tongoa. Sorovanga School has become the pride of the community and has allowed space for some Vete members and the public to accommodate for families that cannot afford school fees or bus fares and has provided education for students who did not otherwise have the chance to attend school in the government system. Another objective and activity is the cooperative and saving loan-scheme. This cooperative serves to assist families in saving for future family commitments such as funerals, school fees, marriage and other family ceremonies. Yet another activity is connected to “black birding.” The Association works towards helping reconnect families who were separated during the black birding period. Lastly, another activity is assisting West Papuans gain their independence from Indonesia. Some of these objectives and activities, however, are loosely related to the main objectives and initial purpose of The Vete Association.

**The Vete Anthem and Flag**

*O God who rules over the earth  
Defend Vanuatu our native land  
Land of our birth, land of our pride*
With one and all to thee abide....
With one accord we shall all unite
To fear our God and honor our chiefs
With one accord we shall all unite
To fear our God and honour our chiefs
And honour our chiefs.

This anthem illustrates great respect for the chiefs. The Association utilizes three institutions: the church, chiefs, and the state. Vete members support the idea that chiefs should be the leaders and lead the nation. The president of Vete Association and a Member of Parliament, Abel David said [in Naganamamngaa\(^{22}\), my translation from Naganamanga]:

“The six provinces paramount chiefs, leaders are God’s chosen people. I [David] noticed the issues of today that only the chiefs can solve the problems. Any difficult discussion, thoughts and debates in the nation can only be solved once the chiefs step in. What else are we doing? Crime should return to the chiefs to help solve the crimes / conflicts. For instance, the Vanuatu National Provident Funds [VNPF] riot in 1998 between the police and the people. The police, which are the foreign system, asked the chiefs to step in and the people listen to the chiefs. What else do we want to entertain? If Vanuatu return to our system [traditional chief’s leadership] Vanuatu would be a better place” (MP David interview. July, 2010).

However, it is ironic that The Vete Association says it supports the traditional chiefly leadership only a few months after its establishment of a political arm of The Vete Association. Although the chiefly system is still in place in Vanuatu, local people and members of The Association believe that some conflicts should be dealt with using custom while others be dealt with by using the police and the law.

The Vete Association has also created a new flag.

---

\(^{22}\) Tongoa local dialect-Naganamanga.
The shape of the flag represents the Vanuatu archipelago. The dark green color stands for maturity and knowledge while the light blue color is the color of water that is closer to the island. Yellow represents Christianity, and the six stars represent the six provinces of Vanuatu. The flag features six provinces in celebration of the fact that their previous struggle for Tonoga, the Shepherds, Epi, and Efate to come under one province was successful. This also signifies the significance of the people’s connection to the land on these islands.

**Establishment: when and by whom?**

The Vete Association was formally registered on July 5, 2006, but the initial idea of creating an association begin in mid 2005 when it became clear that a formal group needed to address the increasing land claims issues and pending customary land ownership claim in Port Vila, Efate. In April of 2005, two chiefs of Makira Island (*Makura*), Chief John Katabou and Chief Masoiriki, who represented the Maraki Vanuariki Councils of Chiefs in the Malvatumauri National Councils of Chiefs (MNCC), motivated by a desire to protect the history and rights of
the Shepherd Islanders, approached Abel David\textsuperscript{24} and asked him to form a committee to represent the chiefs' and communities' concerns and interests regarding land ownership in Port Vila and on the island of Efate. MVCC is one of the paramount custom authorities in the SHEFA province, which represents the chiefs and the people of Shepherd Islands. It is the name given to the association of the Council of Chiefs for the Shepherd Islands. It is an entity which meets occasionally to decide on issues affecting The Shepherd Islander community. It has a chairperson and others who are appointed to take up the responsibility of addressing issues affecting the people of The Shepherd Islands.

A representative of the MVCC, often the chair, represents the Shepherds Community in the MNCC, supported the idea of creating an association to help them in furthering cases with which they were being assist.

A group of leaders, local people, and chiefs met and decided to establish a body that would represent individual claimants. The Vete Association was established, and its new members went to the MVCC representative in the MNCC and inform them of their purpose. A letter dated on the 25\textsuperscript{th} October 2006 from MVCC representative to the Vete Indigenous Historical Association (VIHA) indicates that the Association was endorsed by the MVCC. [See appendix 2]. Many members of the association have been pursuing their customary land claims for many years, both before and after the independence in 1980. The Supreme Court is aware of these claims, \textsuperscript{25} submitted in 2006. The third defendant in these cases is the Vanuatu Government. The Association is working to assist members in pushing for their claims (in particular regarding land near the Port Vila Market house) to be heard by the Land Tribunal.

\textsuperscript{24}Abel David is the Vete Association president, Member of the parliament and the second youngest son of late chief Fandanumata. A former government/finance officer and owns and operate Sorovanga Secondary School on Efate.

\textsuperscript{25}The civil case no. 172 of 2006 in the Supreme Court.
While this area is still under dispute, and the case was still pending in the court, the Filter investment Ltd, an Australian owned company, fenced off the area from public use in order to begin construction and development. Ifira Trustee Ltd, who is also claimant of Port Vila, have leased this disputed area to this investor. The Vanuatu Investment Promotion Authority (VIPA) is a body that is responsible for proactively promoting and facilitating foreign investment into Vanuatu; yet the VIPA has no record of a registered company under the name Filter Investment ltd. When Abel David found out that this land transaction was not carried out according to the law, he ordered a group of boys from Tongoa to cut and remove the fence around the site. The case was the first incident that motivated the chiefs and leaders of Shepherds and Tongoa to formally register the association. I will discuss this case further under the forms of protest.

An informant and previous member of Vete Association who moved out from the association due to differences in political views explained:

“Vete is just a name not the claimant, Vete Association alone can’t make the claim, it stands as an umbrella for some indigenous land owners that work with Vete Association to push their issues but Vete Association can’t work alone to fight the case, therefore Vete Association should respect custom owners claims…The leaders and chiefs must be clear on what Vete stands for and that others should not use the activities the association is engaged in on Vete Association’s name for their own benefits” (Pers.conv. July2010).

In addition to endorsing the association the MVCC also in a letter dated October 25, 2006 provided a term of reference, a list of several tasks for The Vete Association to carry out:

Re: Terms of reference for pursuance of Efate Land Claims; MVCC at its 14th conference resolved to approve your organization [Vete Association] as the authorized organization to assist individual land claimant’s of particular parcels of Efate Land in line with our traditional hereditary rights…I encouraged you to continue our common struggle utilizing all available legal means and caution you to refrain from resorting to any illegal activity…VIHA shall keep a record of all claims…make a report to the Maraki Vanuariki Council of Chief’s annual conference” (Tisomorimata. Chairman, MVCC 2006).

This motivated Abel David to take actions to protect the landowners of Port Vila, Efate Island. The civil case no.172, however, has a long and disputed history. In the late 1980s a
number of custom land owners, including some paramount Chiefs of Tongoa and the Shepherd islands, submitted claims to court of Vanuatu challenging ownership of land of Port Vila, Efate. However, the court of Vanuatu has never addressed these cases.

The MVCC supported The Vete Association in its mission to ensure the recognition of Shepherd Islands Paramount Chiefs as the rightful owners of land on Efate. They support this claim due to oral histories handed down from generation to generation. Such acknowledgement and recognition was given based on the wish of the Shepherd Island people to achieve full legal acknowledgement as the rightful owners of all rights and privileges arising out of ownership of land on Efate. MVCC endorses all legal avenues that are available to the association to peacefully secure the restoration of rights and land privileges of Efate to the people of Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands. This is not saying that The Vete Association are the rightful custom owners as the court is yet to decide, and there are other claimants that are also claiming land on Efate.

The association's members feel that they have exhausted all of their institutional or legal options, and there is worry that if there is no other venue to hear Vete members, conflict could result. An influential member and former prominent government member stated that:

“The Supreme Court refers all our cases to Land Tribunal, but this institution is not working…The government is provoking us and the next thing is I pick the gun and shoot them. How will the court judge us?” (Pers. Convers. July 2010).

The Vete president that the “time for shooting is over; we just want to work together with families and government to find out who is the true customary land owner” (Pers. Convers. July 2010).

Initially, The Vete Association utilized the traditional leadership system by appealing to chiefs to deal with the land claims. However, disputes among chiefs within the association disturbed the unity of the association and its ability to present their cases in court. Also, the
complexity of dealing with customary land ownership claims in the legal court system is challenging especially when the established institutions are not functioning effectively.

Who are the Vete Members and Leaders?

Membership:

The membership of The Vete Association varies, and general membership has a very loose organizational structure. Membership is open to public, yet the majority of members are from Tongoa and the Shepherd Island groups. Some members are former independence activists. Some members are registered while others join whenever they wish to participate. Some people join because they are curious and want to know more about the association. Some pay the membership fee while others join whenever they wish or when the activities look attractive to them.

Some members were committed and paid their membership fees of VT 2,000 [exchange rate at 93.66 equals $2.00USD], others assumed, they were already part of the community and contributed and supported the association while other members joined to get to know what Vete is about and participated in activities whenever suited their interest. Later, as the association engaged in other activities such as black birding, West Papua and Australia working scheme, it began to attract people from other islands of Vanuatu.

According to May (1982), these same behaviors are seen among other groups:

“Social movements ‘supporters’, who may or may not be fee paying members, whose attachment to the movement is tenuous; they are there either through communal pressures to conform or because, while not really expecting much of the movement, they do not want to miss out if it does somehow succeed…initiative and leadership came mostly from the younger, better educated and more sophisticated members of the community, though in several cases their main function was to help articulate demands already expressed by

---

26 People of Tongoa and Shepherds- referring to people who believed they originate from Efate but moved to Tongoa.
village leaders and to provide the organizational impetus of the movement…The immediate postwar period new movements were frequently initiated by men whose outlooks had been widened by their wartime experiences” (May 1982:426).

Despite the relative instability of membership, the two key leaders, Chief Fandanumata Richard David and MP Abel David, remain true to their responsibilities and provide stability with in the association. These two brothers play different roles but support each other to achieve the mission of The Vete Association.

**Leadership: Key leaders of the Vete Association**

The chiefs chose the executive members. When it was first established in 2006 there were eight executive members. The leadership of the association has gone through some changes, and although it is now engaging in the Western system, members still uphold and maintain the traditional leadership system within the organization. Brief accounts of MP Abel David and his brother Chief Fandanumata (Richard David) are appropriate here. Despite different experiences, professional roles, and responsibilities these leaders are both dependent on each other to perform certain tasks. I argue that, in fact, their relationship shows how two systems, Western and Traditional/Custom, can work together when used appropriately. Their relationship illustrates relationships between institutions and positions, for instance: chief, nakamal, custom and traditional religion on the one hand and member of the Parliament, politics, courts, schools and church on the other. Both sides provide important tools for address the community's concerns.

---

The two brothers have worked together to accomplish many projects and felt that it is their responsibility to bring people together and protect the land of Efate. MP Abell David had a clear understanding about the government where he had worked from 1990 to 1992. David was the Accountant in the Department of Lands in Port Vila and later was promoted and transferred to the Department of Finance. From late 1992 to 1993, David was the Head of the Internal Audit in the Finance Department; this was during the time of Korman’s 1992 compensation, so David knew about this issue and how the government system operates. This knowledge and experience gave him the confidence to lead The Vete Association, as requested by the chiefs and people of Shepherds Islands and Tongoa.

It is hoped that their brief life stories will be shared with the people and generations who may not have the privilege of knowing and understanding their reasons for leading and

---

28 Note that in 1992 Able David was the Accountant in the Department of Lands in Port Vila and was later promoted and transferred to the Department of Finance in late 1992 where he was the Internal Audit in the Finance Department. This same year the Korman Government compensated some villages [including Korman’s village-Erakor-on Efate and one village on Tongoa [Purau] where Willie Jimmy’s village.
dedicating part of their lives to The Vete Association. Their knowledge of the both Western culture and local culture guides them and enables them to represent people who have felt disconnected from to their rights and space. Their lives remind me of Waddell’s work on the life of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who said:

“any specific group is disadvantaged with respect to power relations and to something that can broadly be described as 'understanding,' it is a natural tendency for its members to withdraw into their familiar cultural and intellectual space, where they are more likely to be intuitively understood” (2008:13).

Abel David was born to a chiefly line on November 22, 1956 in Lupalea Village on the island of Tongoa. From1962 to 1968 he attended Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) School in Lupalea; he went to Ambae the following year. From1970 to 1974 he was in Aore Primary and High School on Santo, and the following year he went to Betikama SDA School in the Solomon Islands. He worked briefly as tour guide for Natano Tour Company in 1976 and later returned to Aore High school on Santo. The following year he travels to Tonga and attended Beulah SDA College. He then transferred to The Atenisi Institution where he studied from 1979 to1981.

From 1982 to1983 he was employed by several organizations, such as PAF Company and Frank King Tour as account officer. From 1983 to1988 he served as the Treasurer for the Efate Local Government Council.

Abel David achieved his professional boxing license from the Vanuatu Boxing Authority in 2005. He has fought and judged in several national boxing tournaments since 1976. He also formed the Atenisi soccer club in Tonga and established the Shepherd Rugby Club of Port Vila in 1985. This club continues to actively participate in the rugby tournaments in Port Vila.

In late 1988 he completed his business studies in Fiji and returned to Vanuatu the following year. From1989 to1990 he was hired as an assistant accountant for the Department of Finance. During June of 1990 he was employed as the Treasurer for the Port Vila Municipality. In 1990,
he noticed huge corruption within the system and vowed that he will fix this problem. From 1990 to 1992 he was the accountant in the Department of Lands in Port Vila and was later promoted and transferred to the Department of Finance.

From 1992 to 1993 he was the Head of the Internal Audit in the Finance Department and attended the Institute for Financial Management and Research in Madras, India. In 1994 he became the Senior Audit advisor within the Finance Department. In 1995 he completed his training in Basic Fraud investigation by the Australian Federal Police. From 1997 to late 1998 he was the cashier supervisor in the Department of Finance. Due to the redundancy program initiated by the Public Service Commission in 1998 as a result of CRP related initiatives and economic necessity, the number of persons employed in Ministries had to be significantly reduced, and the roles and functions of the Ministry also changed significantly. Abel then decided to resign and utilize his traditional and Western knowledge to assist his people with their land claims and to rectify situations where they believe the law had failed. He has been in the system and knows some of the corrupt activities within the system, so this experience gave him the confidence to challenge the government.

Abel David has gained ideas, skills, and knowledge while at the same time serving his community. His transition to community activities was welcomed as he has always been an active member of the community and church. He always supported his community while working for the government. After he resigned from the government, Abel established the Sorovanga Primary and Secondary school. Yet he was still active in political activities, and in 2005, he was the second political advisor to the Ministry of Finance.

In July of 2005, Abel David organized the first congress of the black birding reunion for the South Sea Islanders living in Queensland, Australia with their relatives throughout the
Islands of Vanuatu. At that conference, a list of agreements was written called the 11 Resolutions; these resolutions concerned the recognitions of the South Sea Islander and asked the Vanuatu government to formally recognize the South Sea Islanders and to ensure special travel and residence arrangements. It was signed by the Vete Association and the MNCC.

In 2007, Abel David organized a three day long conference addressing the issue of West Papua in Port Vila, and in 2008 he contested at the national election and won a position as a Member of Parliament. Abel currently holds the position of The Vete Association president. Abel has been influential because of his engagement with the community: he has helped people succeed;

Abel David’s father, the late Chief Fandanumata was the first New Hebridean to start a school. As a chief he had vision to merge cultural “organic institutions” with introduced Western institutions. Abel’s life reflects some of the passion that his late father, chief Fandanumata had. Abel, too, built a school, and created community and agriculture projects, as well as an exchange program as an opportunity for the teachers and students to gain experience in Australia. Abel's life journey from his village of birth Lupalea, Tongoa, to living and learning all over the world: in Australia, India, Europe, Fiji, and Tonga. He followed these routes in search of education work, and skills. While he was mobile, he was, however, at the same time, grounded by his traditions and responsibilities to help others first.

The life of Chief Fandanumata Richard David, Abel David’s brother, also illustrates commitment to community and society at large. Chief Fandanumata – Richard David, is the youngest sibling of eight who took over the chiefly title from his father late Chief Fandanumata. His leadership qualities led his father to choose him to follow in his footsteps as chief, despite him being the youngest son. Chief Fandanumata, a professional boxer, also assisted in easing
tensions on May 19, 1980 that could have easily lead to civil conflict as The New Hebrides prepared for its independence: Fandanumata also intervened and helped keep the peace in tensions between the police and the Vanuatu Paramilitary Force, which could have easily lead to civil unrest in 2002. Fandanumata leads the black birding reconciliation activities in Vanuatu.

MP David’s and his brother, Chief Fandanumata's lives, knowledge, values, and visions reveal themselves to be simultaneously traditional and modern or to be neither, because they are constantly evolving from firmly grounded to their traditional roots into the rapidly changing global community on Efate where they reside. They, thus, live in spaces between these boundaries, from the personal to the community and the nation.

Attention to the people who are involved, especially the leaders, helps one see how the association operates and how it helps the local people work toward a common goal. The Association has strong leaders yet also allows space for individuals and groups to voice their concerns through discussions and meetings. These discussions ensure that strategies are formulated in a peaceful manner.

**Meetings and Agenda**

The Vete Association holds meetings every Sunday, unless there are circumstances that force the meeting to be postponed. The weekly meeting is held at the president’s home in Vila North, Agatis area where the office of the association is also located. The meeting usually starts at 2:00P.M and goes until late evening. Around 60-100 members attend. The weekly meetings are informal; however a lose agenda is announced at the beginning of the meeting.

The meetings begin with prayer and devotion, followed by a welcoming speech, agenda items, and brief updates about upcoming activities and action plans. The meetings are very lively, interactive, and a lot of questions are raised during the meetings. Often members
have heard stories or rumors and ask for confirmation from the leaders and MP David. I was
overwhelmed by the amount of information the members knew and talked about in the meetings.
It was obvious that the members are following the domestic affairs of Vanuatu closely and that
they pay close attention to concerns such as land and politics and the West Papua issue.

In preparation for any specific special occasion or conference, an agenda would be written
up and circulated to members and posted on the office announcement wall. Word of mouth often
works best among the members. The meetings also involve fundraising activities: women sell
cooked food and cookies to raise money for school fees, trips and other activities and donations.
There are specific Sundays dedicated to fundraising for the association to meet certain fees, such
as lawyer fees and other administration costs.

I participated in two meetings at a time when the members were preparing for a trip to
Australia in late July of 2010. I attended the second meeting on August 8, 2010. There were 63
members who attended this meeting. Not all members were present and not all will participate in
this short trip due to short notice. The members met with the MNCC for briefing and to thank the
chiefs for their support. The meeting followed the following agenda: 1) Vanuatu Australia
Connection trip. 2) Awareness about the next trip in July of 2011 3) Fruit picking- seasonal
working scheme in Australia 4) West Papua issues.

The discussion of The West Papua issue was on the agenda due to the fact that while
Natapei, the Prime Minister at that time, has tabled the West Papua issues in The Parliament, he
did not include this issue in the Pacific Island Forum meeting agenda for July of 2010, and he
had said that the issue needed to be discussed first with the Melanesian Spear Head Group
(MSG). Concerns were raised by the members questioning why their representative MP Moana,
at that time Minister for Internal Affairs, did not push for the issue to be discussed by the Pacific forum members.

These meetings involved detailed updates of activities and planning. The members seemed very committed and demanded results, actions, and information from the leaders, especially MP David. This discussion resulted in the MPs deciding to form a new solidarity alliance with the hope that they can support the West Papua issue at the government level. As a result of this meeting, this solidarity alliance was formed later in August of 2010: The “Shepherd/Central Islands Solidarity Alliance” between the Honorable Issac Ham Hamarliu (MP), member of the South Epi constituency; the Honorable Willie Reuben Abel Titongoa (MP), member of the Tongoa constituency; the Honorable Toara Daniel Kalo (MP), members of The Shepherds constituency; and the Honorable Abel David (MP), Member of the Port Vila constituency.

The general public of Port Vila in personal conversations and newspapers articles appear to be predominantly concerned with the protests that Vete members are engaged in. They do not, however, understand why Vete members are engaged in such activities. In the next section I will discuss the factors and reasons explaining why the Vete members are making land claims in Port Vila and Efate.

3.2. Why The Vete Association was established?

The Korman government's decision in1992 to compensate some local villages for alienated land triggered the first actions taken by Tongoa and Shepherd leaders who would later decide to establish The Vete Association. This incident revived some pending land issues around Port Vila; these cases are still pending at the courts and the Land Tribunal. There are, however, other factors which led to the establishment of the Association, which are equally important.
One informant summarizes some main causes that led to the establishment of The Association:

“Samting we mifala i bin faet from blong karem independence blong Vanuatu hemi graon. Be kasem tede gavman i no mekem wan gudfala smating yet. Hemi 30 yia nao Weswe? bae mifala i no save sindao olsem i stap mo lukim graon blong mifala i stap go long hand blong narafala man”

My translation: “What we had fought for to gain Vanuatu’s independence was land. However, to date, the government has not done anything positive. It has been 30 years. What? We are not going to just seat around and see our land handed over to the hands of other man” (Pers. Conv. Vete Member. July, 2010).

This informant explains that the land issues motivating the formation of the Association go back to before independence and that one of the reasons that they fought for independence was to get back their customary land. The reasons given by my informants reflect past experiences, and long-standing frustrations over land rights on Efate.

Resentments among the members of the Association were obvious in the interviews. The members were clear: they wanted me to document Vete Association’s demands. Their demands are simple: they call for the government to identify the customary land owners through a court order29. They believe that the recognition of the customary landowners of Efate Island will reduce and prevent future disputes and conflicts. The Vete members are upset because they feel that their contributions to the independence movement have been ignored and that their concerns about land have been ignored as well, for over 30 years now.

The Association was formed with the intent of calling attention to the actions of local leaders, who are making decisions that are not in line with the customary land

29The frustrations begin when the government of 1992 compensates several villages without proper legal court order or customary institutions.
systems and thus are unconstitutional.

But why are these members, being that they are from Tongoa and The Shepherd Islands, making claims on land in Port Vila, Efate? History and patterns migration and settlement help support their customary land claims on Efate.

To contextualize their stories and claims, I will discuss briefly some previous work that has examined inter-island movement in the Pacific and particularly Melanesia. I will incorporate some stories that the informants shared about their movements and relationships between the islands of Efate and The Shepherds in this discussion in order to shed light on the implications of this social movement.

**Inter-Island Mobility**

Migration is a global phenomenon. In the Pacific Islands, it is not unusual for people to move within islands and out to other islands or metropolitan countries for various reasons (see Chapman 1960, 1976, 1990 and 1991; Gegeo 1994; and Hau’ofa 1994). According to Chapman (1990):

“The myths created by scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are that the People of Melanesia did not move around very much. This myth about the immobility of Melanesian villagers...had of Polynesians...The sea around island was a highway for canoes, which at any moments might carry new settlers, warriors, traders, priests or families going to feast...The ability of Solomon Islanders to move around did not begin suddenly or dramatically with the arrival of the Europeans. The movement of individuals, of families, and of entire communities has always been a part of village existence. They appear in custom stories, they are intricately woven into all family genealogies, they are reflected in the naming sequences of decent groups, and evidence of their past imprint on the landscape can be found in stone walls, settlement platforms, spirit shrines, and pockets of introduced vegetation, all of which indicate abandoned residential sites.” (75-77).

Chapman (1976) and Watson-Gegeo (1991) discuss similar patterns, including reasons behind migration and responsibilities tied to migration, in inter-island and village
movements’ occurring in The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Melanesia in general. Chapman explains that people who moved out from their villages for extended periods typically “make arrangements for the welfare of their families.” To safeguard their land, garden and properties. Migrating does not imply an automatic relinquishment of land claims and rights. Further, Watson-Gegeo (1991) has;

“noticed a pattern of village and inter-island mobility called ‘circular migration.’ where people moved in and out in order to exchange goods, attend feast and traditional ceremonies, marriages, education and visiting kin …migrate with “intentions to occupy land and to gain power and leadership status in the society as commonly practiced in Melanesian societies” (133).

One informant stated that: “We left [Efate our home island] not because we disliked it. We left but always come back…the people appointed their “olioli- the custodians of our land, who married to the imported laborers, this is the problem” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). Another informant stated that “People were recently\textsuperscript{30} moved to Tongoa because of tribal warfare on Efate. They went on anybody’s canoe to survive…now the government said we are trespassing on government properties, we are not trespassing because this is the land of our grandfathers. It is our property… your [government] property is on our land” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). It was emphasized that Vete members are claiming the land. If other people wish to reaimn on the land there is a need for fairness in recognition and negotiation through land rent and consent of the customary land owners.

Bonnemaison (1985) describes the symbolic structure of the Shepherd Islands:

“Where the initial voyage occurred in more recent times and the links with the

\textsuperscript{30} Recently “oli jas move nomo I ko long Tongao” recent referring to the fact that people still talk about this and is still fresh in people’s mind, such as the stories, sites and remains of the Kuwae Eruption in 1452, and the establishment of the Colonial Administration.
present population is clearer. After a volcanic eruption devastated the island of Kuwae sometime in the fourteen century, Tongoa and neighboring islands were repopulated by canoes send by the big chiefdoms of Efate. Each of these canoes alters become a specific local group anchored around a central place-the nakamal or men’s house- and rooted in a territory. The social organization also produces, at the symbolic level of division of power, the organization for the initial voyage” (45).

Vete Members shared similar stories, explaining that they had moved around a lot before the arrival of Europeans, who drew up restrictions resulting in disconnecting the families and relationships between The Shepherds, Tongoa and Efate. Now it is a challenge for traditional land owners to control their land and traditional tenure system because people from other islands and countries have settled in Port Vila and Efate. According to Peter (2000), usually migration studies only give snapshots of migrants' lives and economic activities but “fail to consider [the] deeper values which structure the movement, and deeper histories in which the movements take place” (255).

Moreover, Morrison (1985) discusses the relationship between Tongoans and Shepherd Islanders and their connections to Efate Island. Men from Tongoa still think of themselves as being from Efate because of continuing historical, cultural, and even emotional ties to their homeland. While they live in Tongoa and are called man Tongoa, these people still have emotional and social ties to the land and families on Efate.

“Among the critical indices of a Tongan identity are language, shared custom, and kin relatedness, with relatives’ concomitant responsibilities to fellow- people of north Efate, Nguna and Pele and …other islands around Efate. Many who reside in town. Their language of the North Efate remains the first language. Many children from Tongoa, in Vila speak language but speak Lingua Franca when they speak to public. Part of the identity lies in maintaining the manners of thoughts and behavior unique to that tradition, especially with respect to kinship and the ceremonies surrounding birth marriage and death”(Morrison in Chapman 1985: 153).

Tonkinson (1985) made similar conclusions in his work:
“Foverve Ambrymese, a study case of the Ambrymese indicates another form of movement and arrangement. The state arrange for resettlement due to natural disaster ‘volcanoe’ and some people were motivated to move because of fear of sorcery practices on Ambrym. However, ‘they continue to maintain the relationship with Ambrym homeland through maintain their land... return for Christmas, death and wedding…periodic visits to the villages” (141).

Similarly, Sabine (2009) an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in a village on an island in The TORBA Province of Vanuatu, found a similar connection between land and people. She argues that place and space affect attitudes toward land and cannot be erased from a people’s memory or history.

Schutz (1996) documented stories told in the na ganamanga- Tongoa/Nguna/Pele local dialect about migration from certain villages of Efate to Tongoa and the Shepherd Island Groups. Also, Witter (1997) documented brief history of people settling in Tongoa and other shepherd Islands after the Kuwae eruption in 1452: “the great volcanic [eruption] is believed to have occurred in late 1452 or early 1453 A.D and is responsible for the formation of the 12x16 submarine caldera now separating the islands of Epi and Tongoa…” (1).
Figure 12. The Kuwae Submarine Caldera is bounded by the islands of Epi and Tongoa as well as the islets of Laika, Tevala and Fatumiala Rock. This image was produced using GMT to plot digitized bathymetric data from the R/V Alis cruises of 1991 and 1992 Published in Monzier et al. (1994) in Witter 1997.

Many informants stated that there were constant movements between the Islands and that some people from Efate had traveled to Tongoa after the Kuwae eruption in 1453. People had the spirit and desire to conquer and explore the islands and acquire land for status. An informant mentions that, usually people ‘fought over resources such as pigs, status [chief title] and at times women’ (Pers. Conv. July 2010). In addition, the constant tribal war amongst the chiefs on Efate resulted in some people escaping the violence by voyaging to Tongoa on several canoes\textsuperscript{31}. Many of these people also, 

\textsuperscript{31}The informant referred to several canoes is an indication of different stories amongst man Tongoa. Who first travel to the island and on whose canoe or clan or chief? This specific canoes and times in which they travel is significant to Man Tongoa because it reflects their groupings or differences due to several wars on Efate, chief title and land but also indicate the complexity of how man Tongoa try to deal with customary land issues on Efate with other claimant and factors on Efate thus challenge the situation further.
however, made regular visits to families who had chosen to remain on Efate to take care of the land and properties. They traveled back and forth until restrictions on movement were imposed on them by missionaries and during WWII. During these times people remained on Tongoa, trusting their *olioli* to take care of their land. However, upon return, their land had been occupied by others from the outer islands, and the *olioli* had intermarried with the outsiders. These realities have complicated the land system and have made it difficult for Vete Members on Tongoa to return to what they believe to be their land on Efate.

**Restricted, Removed, and Recruited**

Many informants spoke about other historical circumstances influencing their decisions to be a part of this social movement. One informant mentioned a variety of factors, all of which led to the separation of people from their relatives and land. Some people were forced to move to Queensland while others, who had travelled from Efate to outer islands, were restricted from returning to Efate:

“They [Missionaries and WWII] officials stopped us from traveling between Tongoa, Shepherds and Efate. They [Europeans] took away our old people from our Island and brought them to Queensland, then the colonial administrators brought in people from the outer islands to work on Efate as labors in the British and French Plantations and these people now remain on Efate and said they are the land owners and begin to sell land. They are not. Their names belonging to Tribes and families of Malakula and Ambrym…We are the custom land owners claiming our land” (Pers. Conv. July. 2010).

Oral history, customary and traditional practices are evident: the founders and supporters of The Association believe that they originated from Efate and travelled and spread throughout the Shepherd Island Groups and Tongoa. The Vete members said the people of Efate sailed their canoes from the Maniuro landing site and other specific sites on Efate to travel to Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands. People moved a lot between the
islands until missionaries arrived in 1800 and were very influential from 1845 - 1879 on Tongoa and generally in New Hebrides. The church had new ways of policing people, and after converting the people were not allowed to travel as they would have normally done. Many informants referred to Reverend Michelsen Oscar's role in putting an end to inter-island migration. Reverend Oscar, a Norwegian was a missionary on Tongoa. According to one informant:

“Oscar Michelsen hem wan British Officer hemi no wan missionary. Tongoa hemi divided long tu grup wan hemi 7 villages hemi common wealth, narafala 7 villages [Naganamanga] hemi under freedom fighters. Oscar i helpem wan man Bongabonga we i skul long Australia, tufala i ripotem Manamali (Sam Kora) from i stap tokabaot independence…. (Pers. Convs. July 2010).

My translation: Oscar Michelsen was a British Office, he was not a missionary. The 14 villages of Tongoa were divided into two groups. 7 under the Common Wealth and the other 7 villages –Naganamanga was under the freedom fighters. Oscar assisted man from Bongabonga village educated in Australia whom they reported Manamali [Sam Kora] because Sam Kora was talking about the Independence.
Figure 13 is the pictures of some chiefs and leaders on Tongoa in early 1800. By: Oscar Michelsen 1893. From the above scale on the picture frame: 1. Eldest son of Marimaraki, 2 the late tinabua, 3 Tarisaliu, 4 Matabuti, 5 Maritariliu, 6 Samori and 7 Manambalea.

In response to an earlier discussion about Freedom ighter Tinabua [Kora] In addition, an article in the Vanuatu Daily Post explains how the land was divided on Tongoa into different villages:

“Re: Retired Chief remembers freedom fighter Tinabua…the only thing which I wanted to clarify is the Chain that was said to be stretched to divide Lumbukuti and Bongabonga village. In fact the chain referred to was the length of a chain called the furlong or 220 yards or one eight of a mile which was used by surveyors in the early days to mark out land boundaries. The story was not fully documented but it was a well known fact that the chains were used by surveyors to divide the island of Tongoa into half-seven Kanamanga village and on one side and six Namakura villages on the other. The division was to divide the early believers from the unbelievers. It is believed the division remained till everyone was converted to Christianity the division was no longer necessary today” (George P. Tarimanu VDP Issue no. 2879 March 11, 2010).

The informant said that during the WWII, the officers told people that it was not safe to travel between the islands and they thus prohibited them from doing so. Therefore, people had no choice but to stay and continue to live on Tongoa; they were unable to return to their families on Efate. According to some other informants, some people feared to return to Efate because it was believed that a prominent chief had been murdered and that those responsible for the murder had escaped. Two informants brought up this story but refused to tell the whole story due to its sensitivity.

From 1800 to early 1900, many Ni-Hebrideans were transported to Queensland to work in the sugar plantations. While some of these islanders did so voluntarily on the promise of income, others were kidnapped from their homes. This dark history of human trafficking is politely known as ‘blackbirding.’ The period is still fresh in the minds of many in Vanuatu due to lasting of oral traditions. There are stories about these
kidnappings as well as stories about people who left freely. Some of these people were treated well while others were mistreated. Many Vete members shared their stories of how people were taken from the islands. Nearly everyone in Vanuatu has a story about an ancestor who was “black birded”.

In addition, the colonial administrators and foreign planters needed more workers to labor on plantations on Efate. They recruited people from the outer islands of Vanuatu and the Pacific islands and placed them on several locations on Efate to work on plantations. After the independence, those plantation workers from outer islands and Pacific Islanders, such as the Gilbertese, remained and resettled on some villages on Efate. According to Bedford (1973):

“Recruitment of the Gilbertese for employment on plantations and at a fishing industry in the New Hebrides… These traditional forms of movement were affected by European political intervention in a number of ways. Attempt to control inter-tribal warfare and to delimit indigenous reserves had the effect of restricting the mobility of certain groups (especially the nomadic tribes) and favoring the relocation of others” (8-9).

Over time, the people who were recruited to Efate and other outsiders occupied land on Efate. The consequence of this restrictions, removals and recruitments was disconnection of family kinship and relationships and disturbance of the land management system. Many people began to lose the family ties and were almost forgotten due to long-term separation. The custodians who intermarried with plantation workers from the outer islands during the Condominium government, in particular, are believed to have contributed to land changes and management of Efate Island. However, some informants assert that despite these changes, they know and maintain their custom bloodlines on Efate.

These inter-island movements and settlements overtime become problematic
because other people occupied the land and because the land management systems these outsiders brought with them have influenced the traditional land system on Efate.

Several generations on Tongoa and Shepherds have identified themselves with those islands. While Vete members are claiming land rights on Efate, they continue to maintain their relationship as well on Tongoa and Shepherd Islands. As described by Bonnemaison (1985):

“The field of alliance is the idea of the canoe involves equally the idea of route and of haven. A similar star structure can be found in the shepherd Islands in central Vanuatu, where territorial relationship involves dual allegiance. Chance calls at intervening islands by large sailing canoes making their voyage from Efate to Tongoa planted seeds of alliance by leaving some men with local chiefs...The Shepherd Islander, in receiving a customary title that associates him with other territories, is placed at the center of a knot of interlinked relationships. He will have dual, sometimes multiple, identity and perhaps even be simultaneously chief and subject according to which side he turns to and the road of alliance he takes” (47).

This explains why Vete members are claiming that the chiefly names on Efate and Tongoa remain the same. This relationship continues to be maintained by some chiefs through their oral histories and their connections to their land and titles on Tongoa, Shepherds and Efate.

There has been shown a significant change in languages in different villages of Efate. While the arrangements were made prior to these movements, over time things changed as more people settled on Efate, new policies and systems were introduced further distancing people from their land. However, the Vete Members maintain that despite this disconnection and distance between families, their history and their connection to their land remains unchanged. When the restrictions were lifted men from Tongoa realized that their lands on Efate had been taken and sold to other people. One
informant stated that:

“The confusion is people who have the lease to a land think they own the land and they can subdivide it and sell it…we have come to have friction against the people on Tongoa, shepherds and Efate. Some People who came into Efate as plantations workers do not want to accept the fact that they came to Efate as the laborer…people think they have the chance to sell the land before its too late. Its’ a ‘rat race’ before the genuine owners become recognized” another informant said “People who sell land don’t know custom and importance of mama graon” (Pers. Conv. July 2010).

The stories that some informants share indicate a cultural connection between Efate and the Shepherd Islands; this connection helps explain their claims. Corollary to this is the emergence of Vete Association’s challenge to the government and responsible institutions. Another informant said the history of man Efate has not been well-recorded. He stated:

“My glad yu stap raitem wanem mifala i stap mekem from histri blong yumi oli no bin raitem gud. Histri blong 1800 I kam hemi wanem we ol man we oli kam long Efate blong wok long plantation hemi nao ol white man i raitem. Be oli no save history blong yumi 1800 i go back. From se oli karem aot ol olfala blong yumi i go long Queensland, i no gad man long Efate blong work, hemia nao oli karem ol naraman i kam we naia oli stap kasem tede mo stap talem se olgeta nao oli kastom owner blong Efate. Wan, oli mekem save gud yumi ia be wait, taem mi go long Court bae mi meksave olgeta- oli save nomo histri blong olgeta kasem tri generation. Be mi, mi save seventeen mo moa generation line blong mi. Namba tu, taem we missionary oli kam mo taem blong WWII oli stopem ol man blong no travel olbaot long ol narafala island, hemia nao ol family oli stap long Tongoa oli nomo kam back long Efate mekem se family line ia i broke, be famili ia i save yet who nao ol blood line blong olgeta. Olsem we wan reconciliation i jas happen nomo 32 (Pers. Conv. July. 2010).

My translation: Am happy that you are writing about what we are doing because of our history that they [Outsiders] have not been able to write it accurately. History of 1800 to date belongs to people who came to Efate to work on plantations and it was their history that the white man wrote. However, they do not know or understand our history before 1800. Because they [Europeans] removed our old people to Queensland, there were not enough man on Efate to work that is why they brought in other people to Efate who remain today on Efate and are now saying or claiming they are the custom owners of Efate. They [referred to other claimants particularly Ifira Trustees] have manipulate and disadvantaged us but I will challenge them at the Court. They only know their history up

32Referring to the reconciliation between the two chiefs- Timataso and Manerowa on July 2010.
to 3 generations. But I know 17 and more of my generation line. Secondly, when the missionaries came and during WWII they stopped people from traveling to other islands, therefore the families on Tongoa did not return to Efate as a result the family lines were disconnected. However, these families know who their blood lines are. For instance, the recent reconciliation between the two chiefs after 138 years of celebration.

The above statement summarizes the frustration that men from Tongoa feel when their oral histories often do not match the written documents that the Europeans have recorded about their past experience and history, in particular the period between 1500 to late 1700. The written history is really an account of the island around the year 1800. These accounts are based on stories told by people from different islands who were brought in by colonial administrators to work on Efate plantations. As a result, the oral historical accounts of 1500-1700 do not match the 1800 account. This has become a disadvantage for Vete Members in the court system as some of their stories do not match the “official” recorded histories. This difference between the oral and written histories is challenging when oral histories are told in legal settings. Yet these oral histories have been passed down over many generations, and many informants stand by them, saying that “although they were not written, we continue to maintain it” (Pers. Conv. 2010).

An example of this is the July of 2010 reconciliation between two chiefs, made in front of several people and some chiefs from Shepherds. The reviving of these long lost relationships demonstrates of the longstanding relationships between people of Efate and Tongoa and Shepherd Islands; such relationships are maintained through oral culture:

“Reconciled after 138 years of separation. In 1872 both chiefs’ ancestors lived on Efate. One of the chiefs decided to visit the Island of Tongoa. Prior to his departure; he gave the right to his chiefly brother in-law to take care of their land and people while he was away. While away on Tongoa the white traders arrived on Efate and sort to purchase some land from chief’s brother in-law who consulted with the chief who was on Tongoa, the agreement and approval of the two pieces of land were sold to traders. However, the separation between the two chiefs grew over the years and chief Timataso and Manerowa drifted apart...
causing their people from Efate and Tongoa also drifted apart. The tribal war amongst people on Efate and World War II did not allow the two chiefs to regularly return to Efate in the past century. However, both chiefs maintained their history and kept their people, both on Efate and Tongoa abreast of their ancestral relationship” (Ligo, VDP Issue no.2960. 15 June 2010) See figure 27 for the content of the story.

His story is parallel to several other similar stories of chiefs of Efate, Tongoa and the Shepherds Islands. This act of reconciliation is an acknowledgement of the arrangements that were made between relatives prior to these inter-island movements.

Both of these chiefs were descendants of their chiefly ancestors who lived before them and ruled their people on Efate and Tongoa over the past generations. The reconcile ceremony symbolized the unity between the two chiefs despite the separations caused by their ancestral chiefs in 1872. For many Vete members and other claimants from Tongoa, this ceremony confirmed the history and connections between the people of Efate, Shepherds Islands and Tongoa.

The Vete Association is trying to get other claimants to talk about these different stories and histories of Efate, but these other claimants are avoiding their efforts. It is not clear why meetings and conversations between these claimants is not happening. However, some Vete members have assumed that the Ifira Trustee, Vaturisu Council of Chiefs on Efate and other parties are simply delaying and avoiding the Vete members in hopes that The Vete Association will just give up their claims. The following comment from a leader of a village on Efate explains the situation and echoes this conclusion:

“Vaturisu [council of chiefs] i no wantem sit daon mo toktok wetem olgeta [Vete members] Vaturisu i no respond long Vete wetem ol painting blong olgeta long ol buildings, oli jas letem olgeta i mekem. Neva gat taem blong storian abaotem issue ia [customary land claims]…[mi askem from wanem Vaturisu i no respond long olgeta members blong Vete] hemi ansa se, from mifala i no kilia wetem plan blong Vete, oli stap talesem se graon hemi blong olgeta [Vete members] hemia nao mifala i no wantem sapotem olgeta from bae i soem aot se mifala i stap witnesim

My translation: Vaturisu council of Chiefs refuses to sit and talk with the Vete members. They do not want to respond to Vete about the painting of buildings by Vete members. They just let them do it. They never had time to talk about the issue of land claim of Efate. [I asked him why Vaturisu -also referring to other claimants on Efate- has not responded to Vete members]. The chief said because they are not clear about the Vete members’ plan. Also, Vete members are claiming land on Efate. Therefore, Vaturisu do not want to support Vete members because it might indicate that we are witnessing and supporting what Vete members are doing.

The Vete association is asking for this to change. People will take extreme actions to make their point especially in oral traditional societies. The best way to begin ameliorating this situation is to begin with dialogue: having a dialogue between the government, the members, and other claimants will help heal past injustices and create respect for each other and different cultures.

Many members are currently trying to work with relatives on Efate to “educate” those who are selling land about the importance of the land. Many members also hope to revive connections with their relatives on Efate through their histories and custom practices, such as the chiefly names maintained and traced through bloodline and responsibilities to the land system of SHEFA province. There have been some reconnections, and it is hoped that this trend will continue.

**The significance of the graves**

Two graves, those of Chief Manamali Sam Kora and Chief John Rarua, provide further evidence of the connections between Efate and the Shepherd Islands and Tonga. Sam Kora was a former Queensland laborer who had returned to Tongoa and had encouraged his fellow Ni-Vanuatu to fight for independence during the colonial administrations. Kora was arrested on Tongoa and was kept in prison on Efate until his
death. Prior to his death, he asked his families to fulfill his request that his body be buried on Efate. Today his grave sits on Ifira Island. John Rarua was another influential figure at the time leading to the independence. With his brother, Shem Rarua, he strongly argued that Tongoa, Shepherds, Efate and Epi should come under one province. Rarua also asked that his body be buried on Efate. Today his grave sits in his home yard in Malapoa.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 14. Wife and son of the late John Rarua beside Rarua’s grave at their home Malapoa, Efate. Picture by the author. 2010.**

According to a former member of Vete Association and leader of another group claiming customary land ownership of Efate, said that; returning the deceased back to his land to be buried illustrates the significance of the people's connection to their land.

“These graveyards are validation for their claims because traditionally, men are buried on their land to signify their connection and relationship to their land thus validation of their history that they were originally from Efate. Therefore, John Rarua and Sam Kora ensure that their bodies were buried on Efate. These graveyards were referred to by the claimants from Tongoa as ‘their passport’ they were buried on their land not at the municipal burial site. This is a significant site for the people of Tongoa and Shepherds Islanders” (Pers. Conv. 2010).

Similarly, Watson-Gegeo (1991) stated that:

---

33The Launching of the Vete Alliance party on November 16th 2009 was to mark the date- 16th November when Sam Kora died as a prisoner for fighting for freedom and died on Efate.
“One’s life is unfinished until one completes the cycle by returning to clan held land, the village, and one’s true foundation … one’s body will be taken back to one’s village to be buried…A person died while engaged in wage job is not seen as dying in dignity…Those who were not born in the village or island still have land rights and a village identity through their patriarchal or matrilineal kin, or both…Returning to the village brings feeling of freedom, of being truly themselves, and of ending the suppression of their identity necessitated by living away from the village” (294-295).

Grave sites, names, language, chiefly titles and relationships are “evidence” that different claimants are using to make their claims. Some of these claimants have similar stories, however, and there are divisions within the Vete Association, which make it difficult for the Association to represent these different interests.

**Vaturisu Council of Chiefs dominates decisions on Efate land**

The Vaturisu Councils of Chiefs represent certain areas of South Efate chiefs, includes members of the Ifira Trustee from Ifira Island, and a leading local business trustee in Vanuatu. The Vaturisu Council of Chiefs is also a claimant of Efate land. The Council, however, continues to delay making their claims within the court system. An informant explains:

“When Vete Association wanted to push the land claims through, The Vaturisu Council of Chiefs quickly came up with a resolution in 2006, the resolution stated that man from another Island cannot claim land on another Island’ Ifrahham Kalsakau knew that there was a life case about Efate land but he went ahead and put that resolution to go against our [Vete] case” (Pers Conv. July 2010).

Every island of Vanuatu has what is called a provincial council of chiefs, which is a body made of representatives of chiefs from the islands. The council represents the island chiefs at the provincial level. However, to date the SHEFA province does not have a SHEFA Council of Chiefs.

The Vaturisu Council of Chiefs thus has the sole power to determine customary land rights; it controls the Efate Land Tribunal and influences the Department of Lands
without consulting the chiefs of other islands within SHEFA province. The Association states in a letter dated July 7, 2006 addressed to Prime Minister Ham Lini, “Vaturisu chiefs who called themselves chiefs have no trace of real custom of Efate anymore and instead become a ‘bottleneck' to land claims submitted by the real chiefs. Vete members said the word ‘claim’ could rightly be substituted by the word ‘inheritance’…” (Vete Letter July 7, 2006). The absence of a SHEFA Council of Chiefs has contributed to government’s ignorance and oversight of customary claims in Efate. Many Association members are frustrated because they feel that Vaturisu Council of Chiefs dominates the decision-making that is supposed to be communal.

The failure of Land Tribunal committee to address the Efate land claims shows that the Vaturisu Council of Chief's domination of the Land Tribunal Committee's decisions. Also, one member of this council is also the chairman of the Land Tribunal, and, in fact, the majority of Vaturisu members also occupy government offices. Some members of the Vete Association have expressed concern about these major conflicts of interest.

**Tongoa Takuare Freedom fighters**

“We pledged our loyalty to this sovereign nation through our sacrifices and our National Leaders must Respect this”
One informant mentions that he participated in the independence struggle and was a member of a group called “the freedom fighters.” He, like others, is upset because he feels that the Vanuatu national government has not recognized the freedom fighters’ efforts toward independence. It has been thirty years, and nothing has happen.

An informant stated that:
Men from Mele and Ifira ran away but 165 man Tonga remain to fight [against the colonial administrators] near the current radio Vanuatu station and Fung Kue store [in port Vila] since independence [informant] have not received an award medal yet that Matas Kelekele award many women and children…They forgot about us, who fought for independence. Some of my brothers that fought with me have died without recognition.

An article from VDP 14 Jan 2010 responded to the issue discussed in the news titled:

“Temporary settlement causes worry to Ifira “custom land owners” According to Clay R. David, the article referred to a Tonga community being evicted by authorities from Erangorango and accommodated [temporarily] by another custom claimant from Tonga at Destination about a hundred meter to the airport. While the court is yet to recognize which custom determines custom ownership to lands, I wish to point out my worries on how we are fast losing our lands to foreigners. Why I? I was born several years after Independence. My dad has among his papers some pictures and newspaper cuttings from [of] him and others who participated in freedom fighting back in late ’70s. His group, he told me was one which faced the opposition after two villages from Efate backed out from the orders. Now these villages can talk. They were fighting to regain their lands from the foreigners. They were sacrificing their lives.

From the way things are going now, more lands are being lost to foreigners than colonial days. There are no logical and practical laws to reverse these lands and the benefit thereof to custom owners. With this in mind, that we have secure [temporarily unfortunately] the land by the market place for the public use. The other site is now use for Petanque players. We [our group] do not desire a personal interest in these areas. There must be some green space for public use. Why we? We believe we have custom links to these areas and if we don’t then who will. We will only stop after the authorities establish some logical and practical laws to enable lands belong to custom owners at all time.

We invite the rest of the Shefa province to participate in this project as is the most affected. We must act now before it is ever too late. While there are worries about development, we see the “Development” as one sided towards foreigners which
must be corrected. While our approach may not be welcomed, we apologize but could someone give an alternative. For this long 30 years our authorities are ignorant, greedy and negligent” [Clay R. David. VDP Issue no. 2831 Jan 14 2010].

Land continues to be the most sensitive issue in the Pacific Islands region. In Melanesia due to many of the region’s increasing social, political and economic issues are rooted in land disputes. In Vanuatu for instance, the Land Tribunal Act was created to deal with customary land disputes but it is challenging in a diverse traditional culture. Farran, stated that: “in the final report of the national land summit it states in respect of the identification of legitimate custom land –owner, that one of the problem that there were ‘no clear custom rules available for chiefs to go by’” (Tahi 2006 in Farran 2006: 24).

Finally, although Article 71 in the Constitution states that all land belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants, Article 78 empowers the government to acquire land in the public interest. There are limits, however, on the government’s right to acquire land and in particular to purchase land for resettlement of indigenous citizens and communities (Articles 78 and 79). A letter written by the Association to the Secretary Council of Ministers on July 9, 2006 points out that:

“The Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu stipulates in Chapter 12 Article 73 that all lands in the Republic of Vanuatu belong to the indigenous custom land owners and their descendants. Apart from Article 74 and 75 there is no other provision whereby other people could have perpetual ownership to any land … Article 76 gives the state power to categories lands but cannot own them without the consent of the land owners” (July 9, 2006).

However the government declared Port Vila land to be public land in 1982 . This declaration was made without identifying the custom land owners or obtaining their consent.
The 1992 Compensation

In 1992 during Maxime Carlot Korman’s term as prime minister, the government compensated some villages of Efate for the Port Vila land in question Association's letter stated:

“From records, in 1992, without proper assessment and procedure and total absence for any form of property valuation for the ascertainment and payment of compensation, the government took liberty, at its own risk to pay compensation to communities of Erakor, Ifira and Pango on Efate and Purau village on the island of Tongoa. We understand that a total of VT 110,000,000 [USD 1.17434] was paid to the community of Ifira, VT 110,000,000 [USD 1.174] was paid to the community of Erakor, VT 55,000,000 [USD 0.587] was paid to the community of Pango and VT 5,000,000 [USD 0.0519] was paid to the community of Purau village of Tongoa. These compensations were made not to custom land owners but to communities which also contradicts our customary principles of the ownership of land in Vanuatu. (It is in communist/socialism where we find all lands owned by the state, and Vanuatu is not a communist state)” (July 9, 2006)

This compensation was made for a parcel of land on Port Vila near the market area. The government had declared the land public land, with the government holding perpetual title of the land. This is unconstitutional: The government to this day has never identified or compensated the customary land owners of Port Vila according to law. The claimants, including The Vete Association, claim customary ownership of land within these boundaries of Port Vila. Following the Customary Land Tribunal Act No.7 of 2001, the Claimants applied to the defendant [Ifira Land Tribunal] through written letters and lodged claims in the Efate Island court to have their customary land ownership claim of land boundaries within Port Vila determined. According to the Supreme Court claim file dated September 9, 2008, the letter and notice of claims are as follows:

34 VT divide by 93.66=USD

35 According to the conversation with Vete members, they said Ifira Land tribunal is the same body as Ifira Trustee, Land Tribunal committee and Vaturisu council of chiefs. Because Members of the defendant dominate the membership and chairman of these different bodies and manipulate decisions.
• Claim lodged by Chief Tarisaliu dated July 9, 1993. Note that the original claim was lodged in 12th January 1981 to Rural Lands.
• Claim lodged by Chief Masoeripu Matarulapa Maseirango Balangalualima dated October 8, 2004.
• Claim lodged by Family Toea Matavulap dated April 25, 2005.

After the claimants' applications and notifications of customary land claims, the defendant, through its chairman, has refused and neglected to entertain and process the claimants’ claims. The defendant has only responded once in a letter dated September 5, 2003. The defendant has failed to entertain the claimants’ claims. As a result of the defendant’s action, the claims remain undetermined to this day. The government has done nothing to hold the defendant accountable or to remedy this situation (Civil Case no.141 of 2008 in the Supreme Court September 9, 2008).

The original claim was lodged on January 12, 1981 to the Rural Lands Department (RLD). RLD is an institution in which all customary land disputes can be addressed in their specific locality. A lot of customary land claims were taken to the court in search of favorable answers rather than the RLD. Therefore, the RLD was never effective. In 1985 The Makatea Resolution was passed. The resolution acknowledges the histories of men from Tongoa, Epi, and The Shepherds Islands connections with Efate Island. It also provided some histories and evidence of traditional land marks on Efate. The people of Shepherds islands, Epi, and Tonoga, attended a meeting in Makatea Village on Emae Island to talk about their land rights on Efate.

In 1992, at the time of compensation, Abel David, the current Vete Association president, was the accountant in the Department of Lands in Port Vila and was promoted...
and transferred to the Department of Finance. In late 1992 -1993 he was the Head of the Internal Audit in the Finance Department. It was his job to release the funds. He stated that at the time he knew that it was a wrong deed. He told some employees from Shepherds and Tongoa in the department that this was wrong and needed to be challenged. Other members also realized that this payment was fraudulent. At the time Willie Jimmy, from Purau Village on Tongoa, was the Minister of Finance.

The members felt that the government has failed to recognize previously made land claims and has ignored the cultural relationships and historical connections between The Shepherd Islands and Efate. While Land Tribunal was enacted in 2001 to deal with customary land disputes it has not quelled all land disputes in Port Vila and other customary land disputes in Vanuatu. It appears that the pending claims were transferred to the courts. The court is aware that The Land Tribunal is not functioning and currently under review but continued to transfer the cases back to the Tribunal.

It is apparent that the frustration among The Vete Association Members came about when Korman made the compensation payments in 1992. Chiefs of Tongoa and the Shepherd Islands felt that this parcel of land was still under dispute because the customary land owners have not been identified. Yet the government compensated villages without legal order and the Ifira Trustee went ahead and leased the site to Fittler Investment Limited. The Vete Association argues that only a court’s decision could have officially decided who the customary owners were. They question on what historical grounds gave the government the right to make compensation to ‘land owners’ of Port Vila?

Vete members argue that the payments imply fraud, because the so-called owners
who were compensated were determined by political favors rather than by a court’s decision. Members’ question why the compensation payment skipped other villages and offshore Islands of Efate, Nguna, Pele and Emau and landed on Purau, a small village, North of Tongoa. The Vete Association is demanding that Korman refund the public funds that were used to compensate, as these funds were used for his political campaign. Vete Association members consider these compensation payments to be fraudulent because they were essentially bribes given in exchange for votes.

The government invited some groups to submit additional claims while completely ignoring the preexisting claims of others. Many chiefs were not informed about this invitation, and only a few days after the 30 days’ notice, Korman and his Finance Minister Jimmy broke protocol and personally identified the villages\(^{36}\) and made the compensation payments. Illustrating his awareness of the sensitive nature of the situation, M. Kalsakau III of Ifira initially refused the payment of 110 million Vatu and asked for more time to think about it. A brief message in the Daily Post explains:

“Ifira undecided over VT 110 million…[ it stated that] Land owners of Port Vila, Ifira Islanders after two years are still undecided …when Prime minister made an offer of VT 110 million as compensation for their land when it was declared public land in 1992. The issue to either accept or refuse the amount ignites heated argument on Monday when the villagers gathered to discuss the topic. But when the Prime Minister visited Ifira…he told 300 villagers present that he was under no obligation to present VT110 million to the land owners and bluntly said accept or forfeit it” (Vanuatu Daily Post 1994: see article below). Another article in Bislama in The Daily Post sums up why The Vete Association argued that the compensation was unconstitutional and personally and politically motivated:

\(^{36}\)Ham Lini under the Vanuaku Pati government declares port Vila town as public land but did not pay compensation. Therefore, Korman thought it is important to do so under his leadership - Vanuaku moderate pati- seen by Vete members as an obvious political competition.
"Korman i mekem disisen finis," yu akseptem o yu lusum"…fes ofisiol visit blong hem long Ifira hemi go wetem wan klia mesej nomo “land long Port Vila hemi kam pabluk land finis long 1982.” “Ino gavman blong mi i putum be gavman blong Vanuaku pati. Be taem oli mekem loa ia, i no gat wan man I petisenem kot from loa mo naoia i tu leit. Taem Gavman blong bifo i mekem ol lan long taon hemi no kopenseit. Mifala i kam blong givim mane ia long yufala”. I stap long yufala blong akseptem o lusum from hemia i wan goodwill mane nomo mo hemi poinememaoit se Gavman blong tede i givim mane ia blong kliarem injustis we foma gavman I bin mekem blong no kompensetem ol lan ona be bakegen from bisnis blong akseptem ino go back long 1992…Mo hemi jalensem ol pipol blong Ifira se oli save go long kot blong kuestenem wanem Gavman i wantem mekem be hemi ekspresem fraet se lukaot oli lusum kot mo oli lusum ‘goodwill’ mane ia. Ifira, taem Gavman I stap givimaot mane blong ol graon long 1992 hemi no bin akseptem…mo askem blong i gat moa taem blong tingbaot…[long taem blong visit ia] Jif Teriki Mantoi Kalsakau III taem hemi stap presentem petisen blong hem i askem Gavman blong i alaoem moa taem olong taem oli tingbaot kuesten blong akseptem mane be streit afta Minista Carlot Korman hemi talem se no naoia i nomo taem blong pulum kuesten ia i go long taem tumas be mas mekem disisen ia’tede’…sapose no lusum ‘goodwill’ mane ia” (VDP 2004: See figure 17).

My translation or summary- Ifira has not decided [whether] to accept the compensation of VT110 Million, Korman told some 300 people [that] they have to decide right there and then, there is no more time, his purpose of giving this money which he term goodwill is to clean the injustice made by the 1982 government when Port Vial land was declare public land without compensation. He also cautions the people that they can go the court but her fear that they might lost their goodwill. Although Chief Mantoi III Kalsakau asked for more time to discuss the issue of accepting the money, Korman responded that there is no time to delay, the decision must be made today or they lose their ‘goodwill.”
In light of the histories and experiences of the members, it is clear why these events have contributed to the frustration of the members and have motivated members to take action to get the attention of the government, such as spray painting on various buildings of which the association claimed had customary ownership. These properties were on their claimed land or were for rent or sale under real estate’s companies.

The 1992 compensation raised old land issues connected to new developments and renewed frustrations among the Vete Association members. They feel that the government and general public are aware of the true customary land owners of Efate but do not want to entertain it and hope that The Vete Association will give up at some stage.

In the next section I will introduce other actions of The Association and its forms of peaceful protest, particularly on Efate Island. These protests are aimed at getting the governments attention and at the same time encouraging interaction between local people, chiefs, and the government as a way to deal with customary land rights on Efate.

3.3 Forms of Protest and the Government reactions

“Vete action, a protest to government, says Abel…When asked about the intention of the association spraying, painting and occupying government properties. MP Abel explained that their [Vete Association] action was a protest to the government, saying it is
part of the customary land claim. ‘Vete is claiming customary land rights over the areas of Port Vila, but our [Vete Association] claim is not solely for the people of Tongoa and the Shepherds Islands but for all custom owners. We have a case; civil case 141 of 2008 but up until now our lawyer has given no response. The case is legally registered in the Supreme Court so I think the operation is unacceptable. We have our reasons for residing in these properties” Manrango. Vanuatu Daily Post Thursday November 6, 2008).

In the last sections we looked at few factors that contributed to the emergence of The Vete Association, including the informants' past experiences and histories, the challenges they faced with other claimants and the government in addition to other internal and external factors. The Vete members' direct actions aim to protect the indigenous customary lands on Port Vila, Efate from the government, internal migrants, foreign residence and investors. In this section we will see how these factors prompted the protests that The Association members have engaged in since its establishment in 2006.

There have been several peaceful demonstrations staged as an attempt to gain the attention of the Vanuatu government and other claimants and to highlight the Shepherd Islands chiefs’ claims surrounding Port Vila and Efate Island. The protests are against sale of land and further development until the government identifies and recognizes the rightful land owners of Port Vila, Efate. The protests involve in spray painting and illegal occupation of government and business properties by the members of the Vete Association.

---

37 Pending civil cases at the court and land tribunal in figure 3 list of civil cases
Here, I will focus on four different cases, the forms of action taken, their purpose, significance and outcomes, in particular, how the government responded to association’s demands. I will relate these methods of protest to traditional ways of interacting with the state. The Vete Association members continue to look for ways to get the government’s attention through letters, meetings and occupying land and vacant houses.
In a letter dated July 9, 2006, addressed to the Secretary Councils of Ministers, the Vete Association stated that:

“We believe very strongly that we have our constitutional and God given rights to fight for the (custom land owner).” The Vete Association asked the Councils of Ministers to consider the following terms:

a) The government to consider the matters affecting the urban lands of Port Vila and especially “our custom rights ownership”
b) The government to revoke its decision of 1992 to declare Port Vila public land.
c) The government to repay all money paid out as compensation to the four communities aforementioned
d) The government to set up a commission of enquiry whereby all claims disputing Port Vila urban land may submit their claims for assessment and adjudication by a competent court of law.
e) Work through the Land Tribunal system and Supreme Court to ascertain the rightful land owners of Port Vila urban land.
f) Government to work in collaboration with the potential custom land owners in its deliberation to set criteria for compensation payment.

The Vete Indigenous and Historical Association’s primary objective was to initiate dialogue with the government in order to arrive at a fair and just remediation of the situation.

“The chiefs are now formally informing you that they will take some action which will not necessarily be against you’re good government…our next move will depend very much on how soon you re-act to our demands through your government agents such as the Ministry of Justice, Lands, Internal affairs, Vaturisu and Shefa province (Vete Letter July 7, 2006).

Spray-painting graffiti on building walls around certain areas and outskirts of Port Vila was a new form of protesting. The Members of the Association spray-painted on walls phrases, such as; “our right”, “customary owner’s right,” and “Vete Association.” They also often painted the phone numbers and name of the Vete president to be contacted regarding the land claims of Port Vila and Efate. A letter dated July 7, 2006 to the Prime Minister Lini states Vete Association’s claims and reasons for the establishment
of Vete Indigenous Historical Association (See Figure 1).

In this section, I will discuss 4 issues and cases involving: 1) Fittler Investment Limited- Civil Case no. 124 of 2006; 2) occupying vacant houses and painting houses; 3) sub-Divisions on Agricultural Land Leased Titles Din Van Than, which led to Civil Case No. PPV 25/007; and 4) the former Vanuatu Commodity Marketing Board (VCMB).

All of these cases and protests are an attempt to get the government to deal with the Association's major ongoing court case: is Civil Case no. 141 of 2008 registered in the supreme court of Vanuatu. The case is between six individual claimants, all under The Vete Association and Ifira Land Tribunal as the defendant. The claimants are paramount chiefs of Tongoa and The Shepherds Islands in the SHEFA Province; these chiefs are claiming customary ownership of land boundaries of Port Vila.

**Fittler Investment Limited**

The first protest occurred near the market area where a parcel of land called Leasehold title 11/OD24/041 was being fenced off for development purposes by the Fittler Investment Company. Civil Case no. 124 of 2006 is registered in the Magistrate Court between: Fittler Investment Limited as claimant and the Minister of Lands as the first intended party and Ifira Trustees Limited as the second intended party and The government of The Republic of Vanuatu as the third intended party and David Abel, Philip Thompson, Henry Taiford, Stephen William, Pierre Selwin and Toara S. Parong as the defendants. This case is the result of the first protest that resulted in the emergence of Vete Association. The protest had received the full blessing of The MVCC (Maraki Vanuariki Council of Chiefs) from Tongoa and The Shepherds, who wanted the Association to represent the views of the chiefs of Shepherds and to help them move
towards creating awareness on the issue of land rights in Port Vila.

The land in question was further subleased between Ifira Trustees Limited (as sublessor) and Fittler Investment Limited (as Sublessee). It is the leasehold title 11/OD24/041. However, “the lessee Fittler Investment Limited has not complied with statutory requirements in respect of investment policies; VIPA approval, Environment impact assessment, town planning and zoning and building” (Abel David. Note of caution/opposition).

On April 25, 2005 Abel David signed and sent the first land claim of Port Vila, Efate, to the Chairman of Ifira Trustee regarding the leasehold title no. 11/OD24/041 where the developments were taking place. There was no response from Ifira Trustee to the first letter. A letter dated May 23, 2006 addressed to Korman, Minister of Lands at that time, served as a notice. It stated that:

“We, the undersigned, the parties concerned over the land by the market house, intended for development, wish to register our concern by ways of a peaceful demonstration towards the government, the municipality and the developer in the next two days from the date of this notice should a meeting be refused on us” (David 2006).

Consequently, on May 26, 2006, MP David, advised the chiefs about his plans of actions and arranged for the members and some chiefs to place namele leaves (cycad palm leaves) on this parcel of land. Namele leaves symbolize a kastom ban on entry to a place or on harvesting food. They are used to as a sign of tabu (taboo) to protect a place, ensure conservation of resources or prevent people from trespassing. This kastom was disrespected when a security officer from Ifira removed the namele leaves and threw them into the sea. According to Jowitt (2008):

“The first protest in 2006 was to demonstrate the people of Tongoa’s
dissatisfaction about the handling of a sublease of land[^38] by the Port Vila marketplace that was made by Ifira Land Trustees to a private company. The chiefs of Tongoa who thought they had at least some [lay] claim to the land placed namele leaves ...signifying a custom ban on the site, only to have these leaves thrown into the sea by an officer of Ifira Land Trustee... This action which is considered a huge disrespect for custom, created an angry response. (Vanuatu Daily Post Jan 27, May 30, 2006).

In response on June 2, 2006, two days later, Abel and boys from Tongoa interrupted the construction work by cutting and removing the fence. The government’s initial reaction was a show of force: the police were dispatched to come down to the disputed site to deliver a Court Order for David and the boys to stay 50 meters away from the site. David ignored this order and ordered Clay David to complete the removal of the fence surrounding the development site.

This protest drew public attention, and the general public, especially the market users and transport owners who used the space for parking, were not pleased that the public spaces had been taken over by a developer from Australia. Local people and Association members described this protest as one of the biggest acts to challenge foreign business and the state since independence. The Association gained many supporters due to this act; and Abel David’s leadership motivated the members of the Association and gave them confidence. It was just after this protest that the Vete Indigenous Historical Association (VIHA) was established and registered. The VIHA’s official launching was on June 25-26 of 2006, days that also marked the first hearing at the Magistrate Court in Port Vila[^39].

[^38]: A green space - public parking area for transport drivers and market users was fenced off for development - displacing the public in general.

[^39]: The president and informants said that the court ordered Abel David to pay a fine of VT100 ($1USD).
Abel David consulted various government departments regarding the development and found several inconsistencies about the Filter Company Ltd. First, the Fittler Company Ltd. failed to follow the proper VIPA investment procedures by not registering the company to invest in Vanuatu. VIPA is a body that is responsible for proactively promoting and facilitating foreign investment into Vanuatu since its establishment in 1998. VIPA stated in a letter dated July 21, 2006 Re: Fittler Investment Ltd that:

“VIPA records …confirm no records of this company as an Approved Foreign Investor. There is No VIPA Certificate Number in the name of Fittler Investments Ltd according to advice from our certificate division…VIPA has no power over land in Vanuatu and our advice to investors is that it is best that they get the Consent of Custom Owner before they invest on land belonging to Custom Owners so that they avoid trouble and problems with Custom Owners… VIPA is aware of other land sites that Vete is protecting for public use, [parks that is], the land areas are “green space.” VIPA has no records of proposed development in Fatumauru Bay, or at Nambatu Nelson Mandela Park, [other parks that Vete is also trying to protect from development] or even the National Library which we understood has been decided, is supposed to be Green Park Areas reserved for the public use and enjoyment” (Chief Executive Officer, VIPA, July 21, 2006).

Fittler Company Ltd. also breached the 2002 Environment Conservation and Management Act that stated that any commercial development needs an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) of biological, economic, social and cultural impact of that particular area before any work and development can start in coastline areas. A letter dated July 21, 2006 from Earnest Bani Head of The Vanuatu Environment Unit stated:

“Vanuatu Environment Unit (VEU) has not yet received any development proposal from Fittler Investment Ltd for the site next to the market house to make the determination for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as required by the Environmental Management and Conservation Act. No. 12 2002…The VEU also has the mandate to stop any development if it does not comply with the requirements of the EIA” (Head July 21, 2006).
In addition, Noel T. Hunagi of the Municipality of Port Vila wrote,

“We refer to your letter 20th July 2006 and advise that the Municipal Council had not issue any building permit for any building development at the seafront (Hungai. July 21, 2006).

Finally, a letter from The Garae Land Registry Unit “served to confirm that as of today (July 21, 2003) the claimed sublease is an unregistered property” (Garae Land Registry Unit July 21, 2003).

Civil Case no. 234 of 2006 is a follow up of the civil case No. 124 of 2006. In reference to this case, the Magistrate Court Interim Orders dated May 30, 2006 stated that “The defendants and any associate and/or any person claiming through them restrained from coming within 50 meters of the Claimants property being leased hold title 11/O2D24/041”.

However, the civil case no. 124 of 2006 between Fittler Investment Lt (Applicant) and David Abel, Philip Thompson, Henry Tayford, Stephen William, Pierre Selwin and Toara S Parong (Defendants) state that the application was struck out or overturned on the grounds that:

“The claimant’s claim is frivolous, vexation and or without basis. The claimant has no locus standi to commence this action against the defendants. The claimant is not the registered proprietor of leasehold title 11/O2D24/041. Since the claimant is not the registered proprietor of the leasehold tile 11/O2D24/041, it does not have any permits whatsoever to commence any construction and or development in the said title. Furthermore, the Claimant has not met statutory requirements such as possessing any Environment Impact Assessment Report etc. (EIA) to commence any sort of development in the leasehold title 11/O2D24/041” (filed by Kilu, Daniel and Warsal Lawyers June 21, 2006).

Although the site was again fenced, the development was suspended. The

David Able, Philip Thompson, Henry Taiford, Stephen William, Pierree Selwin and Toara S. Parong
Magistrate’s Court order stated that “The claimant and any associates and/or any person claiming through them be restrained from carrying out any further works on leasehold title 11/OD24/041 pending the final determination of this matter” (July 19, 2006).

This case illustrates how leaders and institutions such as Ifira Trustee bypass the requirements of registering and subleasing land to foreigners. It demonstrates how easy it is for local people, foreign corporations, and the Western court system to trample on the rights of the customary owners. The current legal land management system is a very loose system where anyone can sublease land without going through proper procedures and institutions. Ifira Trustee Limited arranged to sublease a land that was still under dispute to a foreign company without approval from The EIA or The VIPA. The Vete Association was set up with the support of all the custom chiefs of Tongoa and The Shepherd Islands to remedy this situation, and they will continue to protest until the government helps them.

So far, however, it is obvious that the government is refusing to address the issue. Although it was suspicious of The Association all along, it was not until 2006 that the government started to realize that the movement was more than a simple gathering of a few disgruntled men from Tongoa and The Shepherds. The event that finally made the government realize the seriousness of the Association was the gathering of Association members in government and business properties and private and vacant homes that were for sale and rent by various real estate companies.

The Vete Association initiated this set of protests in January 2007. At this time Korman was again the Minister for the Land Department. Association members had a meeting with him regarding the Efate Land issue, and David confronted him about the
1992 compensation. The members then requested that all land leased be stopped until the government identified the rightful customary owners of land in Port Vila and parts of Efate.

The meeting accomplished nothing: the government still refused to address these issues. The Vete Association's members responded to this inaction by vandalizing Din’s properties in the Tagabe area. They chose this location due to Din's subdivision of agricultural land for residence and business purposes. According to Molisa (1991), “Din Van Than, a Vietnamese family, has been adopted into the Lini family making one Din Van Lini Dynasty” (11). Spoke about the people’s right to know why Walter Lini terminated some government workers from their government jobs after the 11th independence anniversary and recruited members of his family and Din’s family. Molisa stated that “Hed ofis blong kafman we Walter Lini i lidim hemi medap long ol stret famili blong hem nomo, advaes is kam long Bisinis fren blong hem nomo” (July 1991). My translation: “the government’s head office lead by Lini was made up of his family members and his business advisor was his friend Din.”

Two months after the occupation of Din’s properties, the VIHA members extended these actions, sit-ins, occupations, and graffiting to other areas of Port Vila. Jowitt (2007) said, “While the target buildings have mainly been unoccupied government buildings, some private homes were also marked” (30). The painting of premises was a protest stating that Port Vila is on customary land and the rightful owners need to be identified.

The Vete Association has written numerous letters to the government authorities over their concerns, seeking dialogue and responses, but, again, nothing has been done. I
have pulled out few samples of letters dated from May 29, 2006 to November 13, 2007 that were addressed to the government and copied to several institutions. These letters stated their reasons for making their claims, asked the government to look into the matter to avoid future conflicts, and expressed their frustrations over some acts that were going on that were supposed to have been dealt with at the time of independence in 1980. Despite the laws, policies and institutions set up, the government continues to fail to effectively deal with the customary land disputes.

In one letter dated July 7, 2006 the Vete president requested that the government respond within two weeks. However, since nothing happened, another letter was sent to the government on July 28 [see appendix 3], further emphasizing the same subject in the previous letter. The letter stated “that the high chiefs of Tongoa and Shepherd islands are concerned and disappointed about the customary land ownership claims” (Vete Letter July 7, 2006).

Furthermore, the Association asked the government to ensure that:

“The ministers responsible must stop their work and stop personal corrupted ideas and conflict of interest such as Korman Maxime Carlot Minister of land is doing [compensating the five villages without proper court order] and sir our next move will depend very much on how soon you can re-act to our land demand... your honor, our aim must be “CLEAR” that we are against the sale of our lands on Efate by the people who do NOT HAVE THE CUSTOM OWNERSHIP” (7. July, 2006).

A letter dated July 28, 2006, listed 11 points demanding explanation from Korman regarding the 1992 compensation, such as where he got the money from and why he had called this act ‘compensation’ of specific land area of Port Vila yet had not identified the custom owners. The letter also specifically demanded that Korman terminate the Ifira trustee’s lease of the land next to the market house and put an end to construction taking
place there by Fittlers Investment Limited.

The first meeting held between the Vete members and the government was around August of 2006 with the Minister of Lands Mr. Korman. The same points addressed in the letters [see appendix 4] were brought forward and discussed with the Minister. Members also demanded that all land transfers, subdivisions, and removal of sand from the coastline be stopped until the declaration of custom ownership of Efate was made known.
Figure 19. Pictures of the Vete Leaders and some members including Shem Rarua, Chief Fandanumata Richard David and MP Abel David during their first meeting with Korman and Ham Lini - 10/08/2006. Picture by Abel David.

A letter dated October 22, 2008 from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to Paramount chief Fandanumata of Lupalea Village, Tongoa asked the chief to attend to an urgent meeting on the 23rd of October:

“Mi askem yu blong kam long wan meeting long conference room blong Public
Service Commission long Thursday October 23 2008, hemi long 3.30pm. Kavman hemi askim yu mo nara Paramount chiefs blong Tongoa blong kam long miting ia blong tok baot ol activities blong Vete Association” (George Bongiri. FPA).

My translation: I (Bongiri on behalf of the government) ask you to attend a meeting at the Public Service commission conference room on Thursday October 23, 2008 at 3.30pm. The government is asking you and other Paramount Chiefs of Tongoa to attend this meeting to talk about the Vete Association’s activities.

Moreover, a letter was issued after the meeting from the office of the Prime Minister dated October 30, 2008 to The Vete Association:

“I gat some Ni-Vanuatu we oli stap raitem ol graffiti long wall blong olgeta house mo oli stap illegally occupying ol private properties round long town. Oli stap mekem ol action ia blong drawem public attention long land claims blong olgeta we i stap long court. Hemia i matter we i entirely private between olgeta land claimants wetem olgeta lawyers blong olgeta mo court. Be government bae i no save letem ol illegal activities i go head from hemi againsem ol legal mo civil rights blong owners long ol properties ia mo police bae i mekem sure se oli illegal activities ai oli stop immediately folem loa” (George Bongiri Prime Minister’s Office).

My translation: “There are some Ni-Vanuatu that are writing on walls of houses and are illegally occupying some private properties around town. Their action is to draw public attention about their claims that are in the Court. It is a private matter between the land claimants and their lawyers and the court. But the government cannot let these illegal activities go ahead because it is against the legal and civil rights of these property owners and the police will make sure that these illegal activities will stop immediately according to law.”

Upon receiving this letter, the chiefs informed the Association’s president. The President and other members cooperated with their lawyer and the police to have the members vacate the properties. According to the Deputy Police Commissioner:

“MP Abel David and the Vete Lawyer cooperated with the police and told all the Vete members that were occupying the houses moved out…this was a court order through a complaint from the government. They cooperate with the police and no one is occupying the house now…However, it is the fear that this will stir up fights and lead to conflict because Vete has exhausted all communication and places for assistance and this is where things can get ugly, problem arise due to frustration but not Vete’s fault because he (David) has exhausted all
avenues…recommendation and these various parties must meet and talk and sort it out, either their claims are disputed they should meet and talk” (pers. conv. Deputy Police Commissioner; July 2010).

The Deputy Police Commissioner agreed to the Association’s concern about the lack of respond from the state and other claimants’ side and emphasized that the main problem was lack of communication between The Association, Efate chiefs, The Vaturisu Council of Chiefs, and the government. The Lands Department was fully aware of this issue as was the police department, which had received several letters.

The Vete Association’s members listened and cooperated with their president and respected the chiefs who did not want any illegal activities. While the members may have been labeled “illegally occupants,” they believed the land that other peoples properties [houses] are build on is theirs due to their customary rights. The Vete Association is claiming the customary land rights. These events, however, did not settle the issue: the Vete members vacated the buildings, and then the government went on ignoring them.

**Vanuatu Commodity Marketing Board- VCMB**

In late 2007 Association members carried out another protest and occupied the former Vanuatu Commodity Marketing Board (VCMB) dock, a government property that had been put up for sale. This property is located right across the road from the Vete President’s home. This property has been vacant for some years since copra and kava prices had dropped. The Vete members occupied this property and used the space to host meetings and conferences, such as West Papua conference in 2008, and for political campaigns in preparation for the 2008 national election.

The Vete Association members believed that they were the rightful customary
owners of the land where the VCMB dock was built. It was believed that the land area connects their claim of 1) Tagabe Area and 2) the area east of Port Vila Bauarfield international airport, where some Tongoa people had resided for some time and which they also believe is their customary land.

“An enforcement warrant, Civil Case no. 10 of 1998 registered at the senior magistrate’s Court between Edward Crowby as Claimant and Chief Nunu Naperiki Mala, John Berry, Peter Berry, Kalpieere, Jimmy, Gothy Waiwai, Samson Harry, Paul Harry, Joseph, Jack Berry, Norly and Alick Loa as Defendants. On a leasehold title 12/0643/001 situated East of Port Vila Bauafield international airport, Port Vila, Vanuatu. The Claimant was authorized to “Enter the land leasehold title 12/0643/001 and houses within the premises which the defendants, their servants and all occupants associated to Defendants presently illegally occupying and continued to occupy the subject leasehold title 12/0643/001, deliver up vacant possession of the mentioned land and premises to Edward Crowby…the warrant ends of 3/7/2010” (3/7/2009. Stephen D. Felix Chief Magistrate).

The VCMB land area was not part of the land declared public land in 1982 when the government declared certain parts of Port Vila as public land. Therefore, the VCMB premises remain customary property. The government, thus, had no right to sell the property without consulting the customary owners.

A letter dated November 13, 2007 [see appendix 5] to the Ombudsman re: Ex VCMB Dock & Land Area stated that:

“Vete is suing the government, the land Tribunal and Ifira Trust firstly for failure to respond to claims while land sale continue to sell land on Efate but a specific case evolve around the market place and ex- VCMB dock as two examples of interests by Vete to press government to respond. Vete is seeking to invalidate the declaration of Port Vila as Public Land and to challenge the payment of compensation process as fraudulent. The provision in the national constitution Chapter 12 land on behalf of custom owner’s rights remain universal whether it be Vete or whoever, that of owners’ consent of transfer is still abstract, that universal right is what we are seeking but first to emphasize to government’s awareness that our motives is not anti-government or “terroristic” and merely a constitutional right of expression. VCMB dock has been decided by a “Tender Board” to go for sale without identifying custom owners for their ‘consent of transfer’ and we believe we are. That somebody who may be fooled by the tender board to purchase just might not be successful in scaring Vete Association members out of the
VCMB property and again embarrassed our government. We advise to freeze everything until court has decided on owners of Port Vila land to be fair to buyers and owners alike. We [Vete members] are asking the Ombudsman to investigate the payment process of compensation to which the current Minister of Finance, Willie Jimmy and Maxime C. Korman were deeply involved in, a clear conflict of interest. Leadership code Act? By copy of this letter we are asking the Electoral Commission chairman to take note of and keep in mind the outcome of the court. If the decision falls in favor of Vete and the nation at large, there will be pressure to prosecute the two Ministers also be disqualified to go for re-election and also seek dismissal of tender board members…” (VIHA Nov. 13, 2007).

The government responded by ordering a joint operation of the police and Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) to arrest the members on the VMF camp for illegal assembly on government property. The members voluntarily surrendered to the police while some voluntarily walked to the VMF camp. The Vete Association members stayed overnight at the VMF camp and were released the next day.

In the legal setting, Vete Members are illegally occupying a property be it a public or private property. A form of protest or gathering without a permit and is enough reason to be arrested. However, in a documentary the Vete members gather at the Sorovanga School compound to express their frustrations.

A clip of this is shown in this website called “Revolutionary Anti-Colonialism Anti-Capitalism in the Pacific” website which reported on “Vete and the struggles for land rights in Vanuatu” (Uriohau 2009). One informant, who is also a chief and member of the Association mentioned when interviewed in this link, that the “Vete Association members were arrested without warrant of arrest, or any order from the Home Affairs to give right to the police and VMF to arrest them” (Uriohau 2009). Vete members believe that the arrest was a political move made out of anger by some politicians frustrated by the efforts of the Association.

Many members believe their support of West Papua independence has contributed
to their arrests. They argue that the government is embarrassed because local people are taking the initiative when the government should have been instead. The Association's resolution regarding West Paupua developed at the first conference held at the VCMB area was in fact adopted by the government, which promised to deal with the issue, only to later tabled it in The Parliament. The issue was never discussed at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) or The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) meeting in 2010, creating further frustration amongst the Vete members.

**BLADENIER ESTATE**

The final protest that I will discuss is Court Civil Case no. 1 of 2007. It is ongoing. The case involves spray-painting of properties of Din Van Than and government and vacant houses and other properties of subdivided land area. In 2007, members began moving into Bladenier estate, an agricultural land leased by Din Van Than; they occupied the subdivided blocks of land and made gardens to grow food. The purpose of this protest was to speak out against the government entertaining subdividing land for residential homes and businesses when the law states that agricultural lands are for agricultural purposes only.

The government had subdivided other agricultural land for other commercial purposes, as well, including car dealing companies, grocery stores, mechanic shops, kava bars and a wholesale warehouse store. As clearly stated by Rarua, these lands, part of the Blatenia Estate are on an:

“Agricultural land lease…is an agricultural lease but where are the goats, cows…coconuts?...you are not farming you are bringing people here…but this is our good land, agricultural land…Bladenier Estate has not reach the 75 years of lease. The problem is that when a person has the lease they think they own the land and can

Often subdivision happens on agricultural leases, sometimes without the owner’s consent, even though the law states that anything that happens on the land must first have the consent of the land owners. The law stipulates that agricultural land must be used for agricultural purposes; this law, however, is not being enforced.

A letter addressed to Ham Lini and Korman dated February 6, 2007 [see appendix 6] regarding Mr. Din Van Than Sub-divisions at Tagabe Area stated:

“From alienators oli dividem ol graon ia stat long solwota kasem hill blong Rangorango long plante titles mifala i wantem specifically nomo area we subdivision I stap gohed long hem. Hemia stat long Salili due east kasem airport mo kasem ples we Din Van Than istap long hem…” (Vete Letter February 6, 2007).

My translation: The alienators divided the land from coastline to the hills of Rangorango providing several titles. We wanted specific areas that are currently under subdivision. Areas starting from Salili due east and toward the airport and the area that Din Van Than currently occupy.

Korman did not deal with the previous letter dated January 17, 2007 [see appendix 7] regarding the issue. The February 6, 2007 letter was a follow up to the same issues of January 17, 2007:

“To dismiss and replace current Minister of lands” Vete members argued that because Korman failed to act on what Vete members and Korman had discussed in August of 2006. Instead of providing assistance to stop land leasing, there were more land subdivision. For instance, Korman was seen on Television talking about Big Bay Matantas in Santo as Free Trade Zone project and said land involved there being freehold. Vete question if Lease hold has been replaced?” … Vete members asked Korman if the previous “my land my life riot by Erakor, Ifira and Pango a legal mass damage or Korman’s memory has slipped?” (Vete Letter, Jan 17, 2007).

As a way to get Din’s attention, David planned on building a temporary house at Bladenier estate; David hoped to challenge Din in court. The Association asked Din to meet with them, but this has not been successful either. On one occasion, Din’s lawyer,
Jerry Boed, attended a meeting with Vete members but only to say that he has nothing to say, and was only there to listen. David “asked Boed to tell Din that David went inside Bladenier Estate, playing my (David) right…he (Din) can challenge me (David) at the court” (Pers. Conv. David2010). Din reacted by organizing some people to destroy the garden: root crops were damaged and bulldozed. However, this action did not stop members from continuing to garden in this area. Another letter dated August 28, 2006 addressed to the central police station concerning Joshua Kalsakau, the man believed to have organized the destruction of the gardens, stated that:

“Sam ripot i stap kam long association antap se MP Kalsakau istap usim sam man Tanna blong damage ol food gardens blong ol man island mo Tongoa…Police mo Court i mas stopem Kalsakau from hem ino custom land owner be i stap mekem damages long areas we i stap long ol claims blong chiefs blong Tongoa finis” (David August 28, 2006).

My translation: Some reports have came up to the Vete Associations' attention: that Kalsakau have used some man from Tanna Island to damage food garden of some people from Tongoa…Police and the Court must stop Kalsakau because he is not the custom land owner of land areas that are under claims of the chiefs of Tongoa.”

A prominent Vete leader stated that, the members of the Vete Association wanted the government to stop the sale of land. They were prepared to help the government stop land sale, the Association members “fear though that violence may not be very far away and we do not want it” (Pers. Con July 2010). The Supreme Court again asked the Land Tribunal to do their work and to identify the customary landowners. The case was handed over to the Land Tribunal to respond to claimants within 21 days, but to date the Land Tribunal has not done anything: they remain silent. They have exceeded 21 days; it has been a long time, but they have not responded. David has asked his lawyer to present another application to the court to call on the Land Tribunal to respond. According to MP
David “At the supreme court they said Land Tribunal needed to do their work, meaning they need to declare the custom land owners” (Pers. Conv. David, 2010). In addition, another member noticed that:

“Despite their illegal actions through forms of peaceful protest some of the Vete incidents where some members could have been easily gone to jail. The government has done nothing against the Vete members. Law would say that Vete trespass on certain properties such as, at the destination and Bladenier Estate. But then independence meant some people are prepare to break the law so if land has to come back to custom land owners, there will be people willing to sacrifice in order to secure the lands. [He further stated] the incident where Vete members were occupying the vacant government, business and private houses. The real estate reactions resort to law for the court to take the action but the laws are not effective. Once you trespass you go to jail but with these actions that Vete was engaged in, the court did not take action against Vete to pay fine or go to jail. For example, cutting fence people think the boys will go to the jail but after several court hearings the fine came down to 100vatu[$1USD] … this is a good sign to see that this action is worthwhile and worthy. The cases of trespasses so far none has been charged and no one from the members of the Vete Association has gone to jail. The incident where the members were arrested went to the court … unlawful assembly here (VCMB) there was no prove that it was unlawful assembly… this shows that ‘wan’ something good is working in favor of the movement” (Pers. Conv. 2010).

Apparently, these protests have not escalated; perhaps because, as the members commented, the chiefs are leading these activities. The members feel that certain people in the government are provoking them by continuing to delay responses. It is not clear if things will remain as calm as they are now. It could escalate into a conflict in the future. There are incidents where the government intervened by removing members out of government properties and where members were arrested.

The chiefs’ claims have been brought to the notice of the chairman of the First

---

41Referring to a force SHEFA people believe that two deceased paramount chiefs of Shefa province ‘nawota kiki and nawota lapa are working with them and guiding the Vete association and their actions. They also believed that few shepherd islanders mysterious deaths is because they have talked and worked against the Vete Association and its purpose.
Defendant, but again, nothing has happened. So far there has not been any Land tribunal committee meeting to try and sort out the various claims. It is the Association's view that despite the fact that there has been declaration of the public land within the boundaries of Port Vila town, this declaration should not prevent their customary land claims from being entertained according to law.

The Vete Association's members believe that the government is delaying the process of these land claims because they hope that they will give up or run out of support and money. The members, however, commented that they will not give up. They will continue until the government makes a legal decision. According to a prominent Vete member and leader: “Vete is genuine to get up and we fight the government over it legally and nothing is wrong with that…” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). The government's ignorance is only fueling the Association. One chief from Efate Village said he is aware that there has been several letters addressed to these institutions but “they do not want to respond to Vete because they (Vete) are claiming Efate land” (Pers. Conv. July 2010).

Another informant said, “Now Vete members have been questioned by others, where do they belong?” (Pers. Conv. July. 2010). These people believe that they have social and emotional attachments to their land on Efate and are seeking justice and recognition by the government. However, is difficult because the Western institutional practices often do not understand and recognize the traditional significance of the peoples’ history and their relationship with their land. The arranged meetings between the claimants never occurred: they only reacted when Vete members protested. The Vete members see the government’s reaction as unacceptable; they want dialogue between the government and other claimants instead of unjust reactions by the government.
Despite all these limitations, frustrations and confrontations between the government and Vete members, there was no physical harm or retaliation against the police and government members. Instead, the Vete members followed the peaceful orders of The Vete President and chiefs. Their cooperation is an indication of the strong leadership roles of the chiefs in directing the Vete members. Some of these actions could have easily escalated into violence, but they did not.

3.4 The elements of the alternative system

“The Tradition and Christianity are the two factors that the situation has not gotten worst. The future, we can’t predict- could be anybody’s case. They [Vete members] always want discussion to take place. Once communication broke down then we will have civil unrest. Chief’s leadership in Vete association plays significant roles. The boys listened and obeyed the chiefs. If they say to do more than what is already been done, they would anytime- they would listen to the chief, this respect is still strong in Vanuatu compared to the other Melanesian Islands” (Pers. Conv. July 2010).

My own father cannot attend a funeral or wedding without first seeing the chief. He attended marriage, funerals and traditional functions together with the chief. My father often says:

“Ol man we oli stanap nomo afata go long maret o ded i soem se oli no gad respect long Chief blong hem o olgeta, mo oli no mo save role blong olgeta. Fasin hemi stap, komuniti memba i karem ol mat mo kaikia blong hem i go luk Chief afata oli stap long wan ples bifo oli go atendem ded o maret wetem jif blong olgeta.”

In the last section we looked at different forms of protest by The Vete Members, who tried to get the attention of the government in various ways. We have seen how the

42[My translation] people who attended funeral and marriage individually indicate that they do not have respect for their chiefs and or do not understand their roles. There are ways of doing things. People bring their gifts together and attend the funeral or marriage with their chief.
Vete members and how the chiefs were trying to contact the government and how the chiefs were very influential in maintaining peace.

A traditional leadership system initially as governed the Vete Association. This system provides insights into why Vete members are not happy about how land on Efate is managed and distributed.

The Association, however, now uses both the traditional and Western land management systems. The Association now has the political arm that operates within the Western System. Both of these systems has been effective depending on when and where they were used.

The ‘organic law’ traditional system, in which the chief exercises this power, is the appropriate system to use in dealing with the customary land disputes because of the way the land tenure-system is constructed in SHEFA province. This system is being challenged by the Western institutions. While the constitution required the government to create an institution to deal with customary land issues, the Land Tribunal Act established several years after the Independence has not been able to fix these land issues. It has been polluted by the influence of Western law and politics. While the Western law is there to serve its purpose in the global economy and interaction with the rest of the world, often local leaders manipulate the system to suit their personal interests. It is obvious that Ni-Vanuatu have blamed the Western system when the problem in fact is their corruption and their use of the Western system.

Shepherd governing and leadership system

“System blong shepherds or Shefa i olsem Royal Blood line.
Ol pikinini boy blong wan paramount Jif i mas maretem wan girl blong wan paramount Jif.
Warrior or Takuari i mas maretem girl blong Warrior or Takuari
My translation:” The system of Shepherds or Shefa province is like a Royal blood line. The male child of one Paramount Chief must married to the daughter of another Paramount chief. The son of a warrior must married to the daughter of a warrior. The son of the spokesman must married to the daughter of a spokesman. The son of the priest must married the daughter of the Priest. The Sovereign son must married to the daughter of the Sovereign.”

The respect that people have for their chiefs is demonstrated among the Vete members. The people will listen to their chief’s order during tension and only take actions when instructed. Yet some Vete members have expressed concern that other members may not share the same respect that Shepherds people have for their chiefs and that this may create potential confusion and tension. According to Bedford (1973):

“Titles are usually transferred by direct inheritance through the patrilineal line…elective principle also operates. Transfer of any title is controlled by major chiefs of the fara [meeting house] concerned, and allocation of titles in one village may involve chiefs from another communities… networks of allegiance link communities on Tongoa, Emae, and Makura in a series of customary exchange relationships which transcend kinship, village, and language affiliations” (62).

In the ‘big man' system in Melanesia societies, 'big men' earn status through the accumulation of wealth or power. However, this is not the traditional practice in the Islands of SHEFA Province, where land and relationships are inherited through the kinship system, which structured through paternal blood-line. It is not by choice, but rather a person’s destiny in the community, is determined even before he is born. The Shepherds system is maintained in the Vete Association. It is what makes the Association unique.

---

43Either because of the death or prolonged absence of its holder.
In addition, within the Shepherds community structure, a chief also has subordinates, whose roles and responsibilities are also determined by their blood-line. Their responsibility is to assist the chief in governing the community depending on the role they are bestowed, such as peace maker, warrior, chief’s spokesperson, chief’s closed aides or advisors to name a few. These duties are granted by the chief and are passed on from generation to generation in line with the land they used.

This form of leadership and structure of the societies in the Shepherd Islands and Efate is different from other parts of Vanuatu. In other areas, leadership is determined through the amount of wealth the individual may possess. For instance, in a pig killing ceremony, the pig signifies the amount of wealth, and a man gains power and prestige by holding these ceremonies and killing pigs. This is a common practice, particularly in the northern provinces of Vanuatu. A person moves up the rank in the society based on how many pig killing ceremony he performs. In SHEFA province there are these traditional forms of wealth, such as pigs, mats and other root crops. They are displayed in the ceremony, however, to recognize the ordinance of the chief not to increase the rank of the individual, for as stated before, rank is inherited.

Furthermore, it is common that the chief does not own a great deal of land in the Shepherds. A greater portion of land in the community is owned by senior subordinates of the chief who then distribute it to members of the clans within the community. The title bestowed upon the member of a clan determines how big the portion of a land he has as well as the responsibility that comes with the land. This is termed “Na Vanua,” and how much Na Vanua is granted depends on what one’s title determines.

Regardless of the size of the land and resources the chief has, it is the duty and
sole responsibility of the chief’s subordinates to ensure that the Chief is given ample recognition, respect, and share of their resources. For instance, it is a common practice that village members would provide their first harvest of their garden for instance the yam harvest to the chief as a way of respect. These roles and duties, a sort of rent or payment for land, is called “Nasautonga". Another form of recognition is where the community would often assist in planting a whole garden for the chief; they would also carry out any other duties required by the chief or determined by the senior subordinates of the chief from time to time. According to Bedford (1985):

“In return for the customary rental…the title-holder was receiving nasautonga and Vakasakore payments for its use” (Bedford; 63. 1975)

Similarly, Bonnemaison stated that “This power is manifested in Tongoa by the nawotalam conferring custom title on his nare and by the periodic payment of personalized tribute to the chief- the nasautonga” (Bonnemasion 1985. p. 45).

The way duties and responsibilities are passed down through the society within the Shepherds; it is the duty of the chief to make final decision on issues affecting the community. For instance, when there is a tension affecting the community, it is the chief that decides whether the community enters into a conflict with another community or group of people, whether the conflict is settled peacefully. Under circumstances of a conflict, often the designated people of the chief would carry out such duties, which may mean direct confrontation on behalf of the chief. Such practices are still very much

---

44 Rent payments in forms of food, wealth, task and responsibilities.

45“Nausautonga and vakasakore hemi 2 different things, vakasakore hemi time oli go putum kakaeanasautonga] then bae wan special man (atafi) bae i go touchem ol kakaepia first time before oli givim I go logn jif.

46 The paramount Chief.
evident today even in Port Vila, for instance, the way chiefs intervene in assisting the police in removing the Vete members from occupying vacant properties. When the police arrested the Vete members, the chiefs demanded that all the members present at that time meet at the VMF camp without any words and or actions against members of the VMF or the police force.

On several occasions in the past, the chiefs of the Shepherds were called in to settle conflicts, confrontations and riots, in Port Vila when the public law and order system had become ineffective. For instance, during the Vanuatu National Profit & Fund (VNPF) riot in the mid 1990s Chiefs from the SHEFA and TAFEA provinces were called to assist in bringing back law and order in the country.

They were asked to intervene as well during the 2002 Stand-off between the Vanuatu Police Force and the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) Paramilitary. This was a disagreement between the newly appointment of the police commissioner and many high ranking police officers. There were court orders and several arrests made among the police members. This created division within the police department. Members of the “VMF troops surround the Police headquarters in Port Vila to helped settle the issue, this could have escalated had the chiefs not intervene… Ben Bohane said, a chief from Tongoa displays his anger in the midst of armed VMF troops” (VTP: 10/8/2002).

Similarly, Forsyth and Boege said, “Chief Fandanumata (Richard David) of Tongoa was quoted as addressing “the silent heavily armed soldiers. ‘Where are you taking our country to now with those guns? I am your chief and I say there is a better way, our own Melanesian way of resolving problems. Guns are not the way!’ he cried” (2007: 9). This shows that the state institutions were obliged to listen to the chiefs, but
they do so if they cannot see any other way out.

Figure 20. Chief Fandanumata Richard David intervened in the tension between the Vanuatu Police Force and Vanuatu Mobile Force in Port Vila, 2002.

Empowering chiefs in Vanuatu through the Western governing legal system is a subject that has been discussed a number of times in Vanuatu, a subject which has been raised by the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs (MNCC), the highest national body representing Chiefs of Vanuatu (Also see White and Lindstrom's 1997 collection *Chiefs Today*). Empowering chiefs in my opinion may not be a wise thing to do. It would undermine recognition of the traditional governing system of the Vanuatu society, which is already enshrined in the National Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu. I believe the society in Vanuatu is structured in such a way that respect for chiefs is already strongly evident in Vanuatu, and this is evident in the role chief’s play in the Vete Association.

The advantage of the Shepherd system is that it allows for the segregation of duties and responsibilities in regards to ownership of resources and power. The chief has the power bestowed upon him through blood-line, but he does not necessarily own the biggest resources within the community that is land. This means one does not necessarily
have to be a chief to achieve fame. Being a chief is about leadership not ownership.

Significantly, land ownership is closely linked with the traditional title system. Land associated with title is generally inalienable and access rights are transferred with it through the inheritance system. The land that is acquired through agreement remains the property of the original title holder. Therefore, Vete members believe that land is not for sale; it is a communal resource and remains the property of the original owner. The people of Shepherds practice this system, and although it is becoming complicated in certain places such as Port Vila, the Shepherd islanders and Tongoans continue to believe that the land remains their right as the original title holders.

According to Bedford (1973), “Tongoa is the only island in the New-Hebrides for which special legislation\(^47\) has been enacted to control land alienation, and intra and inter-village land disputes have been endemic over the past thirty years”(65).

This brief history illustrates how chiefs are consulted about land and how land has not been entirely returned to the customary land owners after the independence although stated in the constitution. It also illustrates the relationship between the Shepherd Islands and Efate and specific areas that Vete members are claiming. Finally it illustrated how the arrangements were made between the chiefs and their custodians “olioli” while they traveled to other islands in the Shepherds.

**Brief history blong man we i salem graon long Tagabe eria.**

---
\(^47\)This legislation followed a petition in 1939 by the chiefs of Tongoa to the joint Administration to prevent further sales of land to non-New Hebrideans. Joint Regulation No. 3 of 1939, as amended by Joint Regulation N.4 of 1965, controls land purchases on Tongoa. In addition the French and British District Agents have, since 1953, arbitrated in fourteen major inter-village disputes over land; disputes in which all villages on the island have been involved at some time.(Bedford 1973)
“A brief history of the man who sold land on Tagabe area in 1845, at that time the people were constructing the nakamal [meeting house] belonging to Chief Marik Atelang Manarewo in Ifira Tenuku at that time there were some white men who came to Efate and wanted to purchase land at Tagabe and Malapoa area. At that time, the two Chiefs who own these lands were on Makura Island, they were Chief Fubawan Burubu Malae Matokopeatau and Chief Tapau Marikoro Manusa. Chief Marik Atelang Manarewo sends Chief Johnson Masoeripu Balangalualima Matarulap to go to Makura and ask the two chiefs to come and sell the land on Tagabe and Malapoa area on Efate. Upon their arrival Chief Fubawan Burubu Malae Matokopeatau as a custom land owner sold Tagabe area and Chief Tapau Marikoro Manusa sold Malapoa area as a custom owner. Today there are evidences of the existence of these lands that were sold. The evidences are remains of Nakamal, graves, bubu shells and other items identified as claimants of the land. The person who currently occupied the area on Tagabe is a French settler Mr. Lulu Frouin currently resides in this area” (Vete Association. 2010).

This same Chief named ‘Manarewo’ made reconciliation with Chief Timataso Mata in Port Vila on June 15, 2010. [See appendix 8].

In my conversation with Chief Fandanumata, he said that everyone is related through one bloodline but through marriages they begin to think that they are from different bloodline. In our conversation he made mention of these same chiefly names, which I try to explain here. Chief Fandanumata is related to this bloodline: he explains how they maintained the chiefly names as they traveled between these islands over several generations.

**Brief Family history of Timataso and Marakipulemata**

“Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae is Timatasomata’s brother who was left here in Efate to look after the Marope Land [Areas from Airport, Rangorango, Black sands, Holen and other areas of Port Vila] when the families were on Tongoa. On August 22, 1872 he sold the land to William Busset an Australian business man who bought the land by giving Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae an axe, cigarette and other stuff but not cash. Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae is Timatasomata’s bloodline which Chief Fandanumata is also the bloodline. With this

---

48 Sold refer to lease. However, many lease payments are not benefitting these custom owners.
relationship Chief Fandanumata acts as the spokesperson on behalf of the Vete members through their land claims on Efate because they believe that they are also part of that same bloodline. Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae went to South Epi and in Miaiara now known as Port Quomi [Quimie]. Paramount Chief Timatasomata died during a tribal war on Tongoa in Meriu village; he was killed by the people of Bongabonga Village. Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae then return to Tongoa and took up the chiefly title of his brother- Timatasomata.

Chief Fubawan [Vupawan] Matokopeatau Malae [now Timatasomata] had two children; one of them is Timataso Mataputi who had a daughter by the name of Hassel. Hassel married to Tariliu from Bongabonga village. Hassel and Tariliu had two children-the daughter is Leikarie and the son is William Tariliu. According to Chief Fandanumata, he said he is related to these Chiefs’ through his late mother Leiwia Masoi Leitaripoa [we, the children addressed her as Tua

Leiwia Masoi Leitaripoa: Leikarie [is form Timatasomata bloodline] who married to Mararua Sasamaki from Pele [who is from Marakipulemata bloodline]. Mararua Sasamaki is one of the first born sons of Marakipulemata Manatuatua. Leikarie and Maraua Sasamaki had children and they are: Willie Tivaitim, Karie Sasamaki and Lewia Maki Leitaripoa Masoi [Tua Maki].

Chief Fandanumata: Leimae is one of Marakipulemata Manatuatua’s daughters. Leimae married to Supa Tisa from Kurumabe Malalakimuri. Their children were Leipakoa Malala, Kalotapu Fandanu [Tia Chief] and John Manusei Tipoloa. Kalotapu Fandanu [Tia Chief] married Lewia Maki Leitaripoa Masoe [Tua Maki] their children were: Leipakoa (deceased) Willi Solomon (deceased) Thompson (deceased) Ruth, Robert Karie, Silas, Janet, Isaiah (deceased) Richard David – who was bestowed the Chiefly title of his late father Chief Fandanumata and Abel David – current Vete president and Member of the Parliament” (Chief Fandanumata May 2011).

This brief family tree shows how Chief Fandanumata and MP David are from both family lines and are connected through the relationship between all these different families that are making separate claims. Chief Fandanumata said that if they look closely at their history and bloodline they will realize that they actually come from the same family line of the chiefs and if this relationship is understood by every chief there would be no division within the Association. Vete members believe that such acknowledgement and recognition will help the Shepherd Island people to achieve full legal

49Tua and Tia are referred to grandparents on father’s side...Tata and Pua referred to as grandparents from mother’s side.

Marakipulemata Manatuatua had 50 wives and ate was believed to have eaten his own brother before he became a Christian.
The Vete Association’s objectives change over time as new activities are incorp-}
{orated into the association. One major change was the integration of a Western style political leadership system into Vete Association, an association that was requested, initiated and led by chiefs. One informant stated that ‘the major emphasis of Vete was ‘for the government to recognize the customary land owners of Efate.‘’ However, in 2008 Vete members elected one of its own members and president of the association Abel David, who successfully gained numbers and won a seat in the Parliament. This was a success for The Vete Association, but members of The Association fear that once the government sees its successes, it will continue to put barriers in their way (Pers. Conv. July 2010). Therefore, the Vete members continue to protest, and they will not stop until the government settles the concerns.

**Political arms of The Vete Association and the internal disputes**

“In 2005 I [Abel David] was the Second Political Adviser to the Ministry of Finance. On July 2005 organized first conference for the South Sea Islanders/Black birding families in Queensland Australia. Eleven resolutions were made at that time. 1st of January 2008 was the launching of the Shepherd Alliance Party where I held the position as the party president. September 2008 I contested the general election and secure a seat…16th November 2009 was the launching of the new party “Vete Alliance”. 5th November 2009 -the Port Vila municipal election the Vete Alliance secured one seat/candidate in the council. November 2007, organized a 3 days conference for West Papua and signed the eleven resolutions” (Personal note, David July 2010).

The above quote sums up what I will try and explain here about the Shepherd Alliance Party (SAP). SAP was the political arm of Vete Association, established in 2008 with the support of the leaders and members of the Vete Association. However, shortly after Abel David became the Member of the Parliament, Kaloran who was one of the executive leaders of the Association moved out.
The political arm that was established also has a personal dimension: it should come as no surprise that critical social movements contain struggles for power and authority. After David was successfully elected as a Member of the Parliament (MP) there was some disagreement between the SAP executives. Following a split in the leadership and growing disillusionment amongst its members, the party changed its name from SAP to the Vete Alliance Party (VAP).

The SAP executives split came about from a “bai” snap election to elect MPs from Rural Efate constituency due to a bribery case against two MPs. The National alliance was in favor to elect Roro Sambo to contest the bai election because he still has the supporters and has a clean record. Abel David and some members of SAP supported the idea; however Kaloran and other SAP members disagreed and instead wanted to elect their own candidate to contest the bai election. Kaloran proposed his sister Alice. However, David supported Roro Sambo since he was already a member of the Alliance in the Efate Rural Constituency, and given the short time for the bai election he thought it made more sense to re-elect Sambo. Alice on the other hand had no prior political affiliation. This is where the disputes started: Kaloran later went public about the disagreement and the fact that he was the founder of SAP and written all its policies and platform. MP Abel David decided to give the name to Kaloran: Kaloran accepted it and left the Vete Association.

Vete Alliance Party

---

50Case where Barake Sope made against MP Kaltonga and Kalsakau resulted in the bai election. Although Roro Sombo is not involved in the bribery he was in the Efate rural constituency and therefore vacated his seat to participate in the bai election.
Member of the Parliament and Vete President, Abel David along with other key members and chiefs then decided to form the Vete Alliance party (VAP). VAP was established on July 27, 2009 under the leadership of MP Abel David as the Party President with the support of the chiefs and Vete members. They supported Sambo; although Sambo lost by a very short margin and did not win his seat back, The Vete Alliance party did secure a seat in the Municipal town election.

The focus of the party, to address land issues, has remained unchanged. The party is established under a constitution that details the operation of the National Assembly, National Executive Committee and affiliated associations. The official outlook and policies platform is broader and includes:

- Review of tax systems, strengthen the Land Tribunal
- The party also supports amending the constitution to: allow for the President to be elected by Chiefs, the Prime Minister to be chosen by the President, and the Prime Minister to appoint the ministers
- Chiefs to decide who can stand for election to the parliament
- Direct that any bill must be presented to MNCC before being tabled in Parliament
- Removal of provincial government in favor of area or village level representation,
- Re-establish cooperative system,
- Abolish school fees for classes 1–8,
- Reserve business under 100 million vatu for ni-Vanuatu,
- Increase minimum wage and improve/protect working conditions,
- Promote women in business, establish means for ni-Vanuatu to access loan funds from commercial banks,
- Include kastom in legal system,
- Establish a port of entry in Tanna and the Banks islands,
- Encourage sport and music.

It is the “Vete Alliance belief that while globalization may and can bring along wealth, individual cultures, rights, freedom and talent must be protected and promoted at all times” (Alliance policy 2008). A positive outcome will depend on the support and solidarity of the Vete members and the leaders.
Chiefs' leadership in the Vete Association is an alternative system and institution to deal with the Vete Association customary land claims on Efate that the Western institution and law has not been able to settle. However, shortly after its establishment the Association established the political alliance. The irony is that the Association has gone back to use the Western system that they initially were not in favor of. In addition, the political arm of Vete has further divided the VIHA members in additional ways. Morris Kaloran left the association with SAP and some members. He then began saying that the Association had emerged from another organization called Makoi Vea Rua Wia. The members of this group claim that they have more evidence and oral histories to trace customary ownership of Efate land than anyone. This new group however has not been able to bring forward their claims to the court. Some have returned to work with the Vete Association.

Furthermore, the objectives of the Vete Association under the MVCC were specific to land claims on Efate. MVCC initiated The Vete Association. However, the political focuses were broader. For instance, the Vision of the Alliance pati states:

“Yumi mas luk save identiti blong yumi mo okonaisem yumi blong manejem, kontrolem mo stopem ol developmen we i save spoilem laef blong plante netif pipol long Vanuatu” other wider areas that the Alliance pati mention were such as, “governance, graon, sosol, tax, jastis, employment…” (SAP campaign brochure. 2008).

My translation: we recognized our identity and organized our self in order to manage, control and stop the developments that are causing damaged to the lives of the people of Vanuatu… including governance, land, social, tax, justice, employment.”

Apparently, both the political and traditional elements of the leadership system have been challenged in both the Western and the traditional or customary institutions. But respect the traditional land tenure system of Efate and Shefa Province. On Efate,
where land is contested and where the land system is managed by different institutions it makes sense to utilize both systems to meet the needs of various people and situations. The Association realized this and have tried to use both systems to deal with these issues. It appears, however, that both systems have their own challenges. The traditional system did bring people together and should have and could have been easily supported and utilized by the Land Tribunal. However, the Land Tribunal is not functioning and is politically manipulated.

It is unfortunate to see how people use their social, political and economic power to suppress their own people and promote ignorance. One informant told me: “It seemed though that the government and people in certain institutions are not responding, hoping that Vete would just give up their effort” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). However, MP Abel David said that despite all of these problems, “Vete will continue to fight and their “last hope is to go through families [or] bloodline [s] this indicates how Vete leaders are going between the two systems to solve the land issues. The members will continue to fight by raising awareness among families about their land rights and the issue of land ownership on Efate.

In this section we look at the struggle the Vete members, especially the leaders are facing as they try every possible ways to get their issues to the government. We see that The Vete Alliance party although it was established with the hope that their representative would fight the land case at the national level. Although, there has been some effort, and MP David is using his network to push the issue. In the final section I will introduce some of the secondary activities that Vete Association and members are engaged in and continued to high light the leadership roles of chiefs and the member of the parliament in
these activities. The objectives of some of the activities are related to the Association's original focus while others provide new opportunities for the members or helped hold the Vete members together.

### 3.5 Other activities under the Vete Association

In this section I will briefly introduce other secondary but important activities that Vete members are engaged in and how they have contributed and supported the main objectives of the Vete Association.

The members of the Vete Association are engaged in activities, such as, the co-operative store, women's association, and a work scheme for parents who cannot afford to pay for the school fees where parents either worked in the garden or general work on School compound. In addition, the Association is addressing black birding and established the Vanuatu Australia Connection (VAC) limited.

VAC ltd is an organization established to reconnect South Sea Islanders and their relatives in Vanuatu; it also creates opportunity for Vete members to work in Australia. VAC was initially supported by MP David and led by Chief Fandanumata, who eventually worked closely with other MVCC and MNCCA to support the issue further at the national level. This activity merges into Vete Association and is supported by the chiefs and the Vete member. According to Chief Fandanumata “compensation that others are talking about for black birding is not necessarily cash, it can be in other forms such as, granting Visa to the people of Vanuatu to find job opportunities in Australia and through other forms of social and economic development. Importantly, to connect the people of Vanuatu with their families that were black birding slaveries” (Pers. Conv. Chief Fandanumata; 2010). Finally, the West-Papua Independence concern which
attracted many supporters. These activities were initiated by MP David and some Vete Leaders, particularly Chief Fandanumata. Although some of these activities have fallen through the Association continues to identify other projects to support the Vete members, Sorovanga School and the community.

**Sorovanga Community Self-support School**

The Sorovanga School was established in 1998. It is owned, operated and managed by MP Abel David. The school is a community initiative project that has become a major source of Vete members' pride. MP David engaged the community and The Vete Association's members in the operation of the school. Their involvement created an atmosphere of ownership and involvement in the school activities. The school also created space for community gathering and a meeting place for Vete members (before the opening of the Vete office in Vila North, in MP Able David’s home. The community church is located on the school compound and is surrounded by community people. The school certainly provided education opportunity and space for the disadvantaged people. The school has united the people.

Sorovanga School established its pre-School and primary Sector in 1998 due to high demand for secondary courses. Due to the limited facilities and spaces existing in the national secondary schools, it was necessary to consider an extension of the school and upgrade its facilities to cater for secondary school courses the following year. The school is not financially supported by the government. The teachers are paid by whatever the school generates. The school accommodates students whose parents cannot afford school fees in cash. Therefore, work schemes were made available. The school also

---

51 Burning or bright flame- Naganamanga –Tongoan language
accommodates students who are left out of the government system.

The school authorities requested to adapt the national school curriculum through the Department of Education and approval was granted on the fact that many more students may receive opportunities for future education. It was also considered as an appropriate development after the migration of islanders to Port Vila. Many parents living in urban -suburb of Port Vila are facing financial difficulties and are thus unable to send their children to urban schools. Sorovanga Community self-support school is located in a sub-urban district of Port Vila with a heavy population of people living in squatter settlements, in which education opportunities are very limited and in which many parents cannot afford to send their children to school by buses every day.

The community school expanded quickly. In 1998 at the beginning the primary school had only 70 students enrolled. It increased the following year to 200 students with the establishment of year seven. From 2000- 2006 Sorovanga School was an established primary and secondary school. 2002 marked the first year that the year 10 students took part in the national examination and 2006 marked the first year that the year 12 students participated in the Pacific Senior Secondary School Certificate (PSSC). Sorovanga has received an impressive report on its academic achievements since its establishment. Many students were selected on merits by the National Education Commission after the national examinations. For instance, the 2003 year six examinations record a total of 24 students selected to continue their studies in Junior Secondary school out of a total class enrollment of 34 students. This figure indicated that the school was only 10 percent short of getting a 100% pass rate.

Moreover, the year 10 examination results indicated improvement for Sorovanga
as compared the previous year’s academic record. The school has opportunities for further development, and the teachers deserve the recognition for their contribution in improving the academic performance and school in general. The community members also deserve recognition for their support in taking the ownership of the school through supporting the school in whatever ways they can despite the lack of the government support. The school committee, through the established network of MP David and Chief Fandanumata, briefly engaged in an exchange program with Somerset school in Australia. This provided opportunities for both teachers and students from the two schools to visit, support and transfer skills among each other.

The government through the Education department recognized Sorovanga School as indicated a letter from the Secondary Education Office and Distant Education:

“Under the 2001 new education Act, Sorovanga is a registered school, which is capable to operate and provide education service to the students without discrimination of gender, age or religion… this include, Sorovanga as an education institution that will provide the space to accommodate students from the national schools and examinations entering years 7 and 10. (Department of secondary, distant and future Education 19 January 2003).

However, to date the government has not provided any financial assistance to the school. The school continues to be a self-supported institution. The government has not include Sorovanga in the government staff payroll or provided any financial support so that the school could also enjoy the government benefits, such as improvement of school facilities and training and salaries for the teachers. The school continues to operate entirely through the effort of the community members, teachers, students and parents through the encouragement, support and management of MP Abel David and Chief Fandanumata.
VETE Co-operative savings and Loans Society limited (VCSLS ltd)

Registered in February of 2008, the co-operative was established in Sorovanga community to benefit the Sorovanga community, Vete members and the parents and students of Sorovanga Schools who wished to join the VCSLS ltd. The by-laws of the VCSLS ltd include the acts, rules and membership and other information regarding the operation of the co-operatives. The objectives are:

“To promote the social and economic interests of its members in accordance with co-operative principals with the following: a) by encouraging thrift and regular saving among members b) by providing an organization which will receive and invest their savings and / or lend them to members under a sage system of lending c) by granting loans to members for necessary or productive purposes on reasonable terms repayment without risk to the saving members d) by promoting education in co-operative principles and practices and e) by doing such other things that are necessary for the fulfillment of these objects” (By-laws of Vete 2008:1).

The idea of the cooperative illustrates the theme and name of ‘VETE (Nest) of eggs,’ as stated by Professor Ron Adams: it means “Putting away a small savings regularly to build up to be used for the future”. The goal of the cooperative society is “to receive the savings of the members, invest such savings and other funds of the society and grant loans to members and to raise loans and call for deposits from members or non-members” (By-laws 2008:p 2).

There were seven established and operating co-operatives within its first few years of establishment in 2008. However, by 2010 there were only three cooperatives functioning. An informant said “the co-operatives fail because of “debts and managements need strengthening” (Pers. Conv. July 2010). The cooperative however, aim to created opportunities for Vete members to save money for the future and have funds available to meet school fees and other family commitments and expectations such as death, marriage and other important social traditional functions. The majority of Vete
members do not have formal jobs; they are engaged in casual jobs in Port Vila. Therefore, it is a problem when management is weak and people borrow more than they can afford to repay.

Finally, Vete Association was granted the seasonal employment license in April 2010 under the name Vete Co-operative Savings and Loan society Ltd. This will be an opportunity for people to work for better income in Australia and better economic benefits. Vete hopes to improve their arrangements by learning from other current seasonal workers. Currently, Vete is in the process of arranging work with the farmers in Australia and organizing the applications, air fares, visa and passports for the interested members.

**Black Birding**

Black birding is an issue that every island and families in Vanuatu are concerned about. Chief Fandanumata Richard David shares his memories of when he was growing up hearing about these stories [kidnapping people from the islands to Australia] and how these stories have motivated him to take up the issue to trace and connect the families. There are individual families who have been trying to make the connections with their families in Australia. In 2005 it became an interest for many people and led by Richard David and financially supported by Abel David. They established an office at Namaba tu area in Port Vila. A notice board in front of the office reads: “South Sea Islander Black birding and Slavery, Vanuatu Counter movements.” In 1984 MP Abel David sent Chief Fandanumata and a cousin brother, Charlie Robert to go to Queensland.

This was the first trip to trace and meet the families of South Sea Islanders. During their stay in Queensland, they participated in a Seventh day Adventist camp. At that time
they were recognised by families that made prior arrangement while in Vanuatu to go and stay with them during their visit. The story went on about how he meets several south sea islanders. Chief Fandanumata said it was a very emotional experience for him to meet them and listen to their stories.

Chief Fandanumata through Vete Association earned the recognition of his effort and supported by the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs to peruse this important task has resulted in the establishment of the Vanuatu Australian Connection Inc.

The conference on the 19-22 of July 2005 was supported by the MVCC and MNCC. The first Pacific Black Birding eleven resolutions were developed from the conference jointly held at the Chiefs Nakamal in Port Vila. At that meeting it was resolved that the:

“Congress be held every year, one year in Vanuatu and the next year in Queensland and so forth…programs such as exchange cultural programs…Vanuatu government to ensure special travel arrangements for the south sea islanders…Vanuatu government seeks ways to demand parties concern to pay reparations for the damage and injuries in connection to the kidnapping…MNCC to be the coordinating institution of the implementation of the recommendations and office to be open in Vila and Queensland to address issues relating to Black Birding” (Resolution 2005) [see appendix 9]

The Association further supports and developed activities to meet these resolutions through Vanuatu Australia Connection (VAC).
The vision and objectives are “promoting the interest of the people of Vanuatu positively recognising their significant historical part in Australia history and life for the past, the present and into the future, raising awareness, being a voice and acting as a
advocates on matters of concern in the interest of ongoing friendly relations between both the societies of Australia and Vanuatu” (VAC Constitution 2010:2).

In July 2010 sixty members travelled to Australia to celebrate and officiate the establishment of VAC. This included members of Vete Association, MP Abel David [see MP David’s speech in appendix 10] and Hon. Moana Carcasses, Chief Fandanumata and Pastor attended the meeting in Captain Wish Ave, Caboolture South-East Queensland Australia. In the opening of this first meeting, many stories were told. One Sea Islander shared his story: Redcliffe Herald titled Caboolture once made sugar stated:

“The 2,000-acre property has two-mile…the old mill once process cane. The labourers who worked on the plantations were Kanaks. Mr Fountain of Caboolture, who recently conducted members of Redcliffe Historical Society to the area, showed them the remains of the Kanakas’ barracks and remnants of a punishment cell…The party was also shown the headstone of a grave (99 years old almost to the day) on the river bank.” (Redcliffe Herald October 23, 1968 pp. 24).

Moreover, a fax message date July 2010 from Ann Wallin stated that:

“Indigenous Consultants, Native Title and Cultural heritage procedures, facilitation and management52. The message faxed to the attention of Chief Richard David and MP Abel David dated April 2010 indicating that “ the histories of Vanuatu and Queensland are inextricably entwined from the time when people were brought from your islands to work from the early 1860s…People were certainly brought to Southeast Queensland from Vanuatu and other islands well before the introduction of the Polynesian Labourers Act 1868, which was design to give a better working condition and immigration conditions…Wish commenced growing sugar prior to 1867…John Campbell gave evidence that his son had gone to the Sandwich Islands(Vanuatu) to get labourers for Wish and Trevellan…This letter is to respectfully request your permission to make application to the Australian Government for funding to research the links between Vanuatu and Queensland…particularly aim of detailing how and when… where they worked, and their history into the 20th century…research would include the recognition of the important role people from Vanuatu have had in the development of Queensland, and understanding of the social impacts of this history both in Queensland and Vanuatu”

52…Ann Wallin Embraces all facets of archaeological and historical survey work, excavations and Aboriginal community consultant…included major range of local and state Government agencies” (http://www.convergehc.com.au/ann-wallin)
Vete leaders responded to Wallin’s message addressing to D. Phil Habgood of the Converge. They stated in the letter that:

“We are pleased to accept an invitation from the Association-Vanuatu Australia Connection Inc in Australia, to come to Australia and represent the people and Government of Vanuatu, so as to learn what is currently known about this important site and its history. The intention to undertake further studies and work to appropriately recognise and record this history, and how we could assist the process with the provision of current oral history that is still accessible from those who reside in Vanuatu” Letter sign by Chief Fandanumata Richard David - representing six chiefs of the provinces, MP Abel David on behalf of Vanuatu Government, Pastor Iadh and Aiwyawi for VAC inc.in Australia (6th May 2010).

This meeting was commemorating the site of one of Queensland’s first sugar plantations to use Ni-Vanuatu labourers:

“There is possibility to expand its commercial operational through the use of labourers from the Republic of Vanuatu. This commemoration attended by Ni-Vanuatu families who are directly linked to those who came in the nineteenth century. The chiefs and parliamentarians from Vanuatu, represents the acknowledgement of the crucial role played by Ni-Vanuatu indentured labourers in the development of Queensland’s sugar industry in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Without the efforts of Vanuatu’s labourers, Queensland’s economy would not have experienced such livelihood and prosperity. The commemoration of this site thus takes on great cultural significance as it serves to strengthen for the future the eternal bond that ties two nations with an interconnected past-Australia and the Republic of Vanuatu” (Caboolture July 24-25, 2010).

In addition to this, in a statement of interest from Norman Chambers in Queensland, Australia he explained that there could be many different opportunities including:

“Processing small mills for the production of virgin coconut oil… cultivation of vegetables and… encouraging small local farmers to grow local root crops and …encourage vocational training for the youths”. Norman asked that there will be a “need of 5 hectares of land needed with access to running water, power and

---

53Dr. Phil Habgood. Converge. 369 waterworks rd. Ashgrove Qld 4060.
proximity to the sea and wharf” (Norman Chamber. 2010).

From this list, vocational school and saw mill operated only briefly due to Vete members’ lack of interest and finance. There was no clear intention for these activities. Here are some unfortunate stories where some South Sea Islanders (individuals and as groups) travelled to Vanuatu but could not find their families. VAC hopes that the initiative of bringing in representatives from each provinces in Vanuatu to Australia will assist facilitate the process. Some however do reconnect with their families and are very welcomed by Vanuatu family members. Ann Naupa speaking to The National Film and Sound Archive shared her own family stories of reconnection in Erromango saying, “It’s like piecing together a cultural puzzle for this region, and it’s very touching”(Naupa 2005. http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/365/)54 They are happy to reconnect with their heritage because they are often long lost relatives. VAC is established to re-strengthen this family connection.

The first meeting in July 2010 established a program to send members from the six provinces to Australia to help identify the families in Australia. MNCC provided a list of chiefs from each six provinces that Vete could communicate with in order to facilitate the selection of 10-12 members from the provinces. They want representatives from the chiefs, women’s group, youth and church group to go to Australia in September 2011 to participate in this activity. The representatives will assist families with identifying and reconnecting with their families in Vanuatu as well as finding opportunities for members to learn about their cultural heritage.

The establishment of VAC has created some problems for MP Abel David. For

instance, in 2008 he was denied a visa to Australia to attend a cultural show at Hervey Bay for the Fraser Cost Cultural Festival. The news reported “Abel David speaking from Vanuatu have travelled many times without a problem…he did not understand why his visa was revoked. It is very disappointing especially since the motivation appears to be political (Harvey Bay the Chronicle March 23, 2008).

In summary of these activities Chief Fandanumata stated that:

“People might be thinking of recognition as receiving money, it does not necessarily mean money but other forms of assistance such as our families in Australia and Vanuatu have free travel entries to both countries, allow Ni-Vanuatu work opportunities in Australia and other assistance other than money. People need to understand that, it is a way of strengthen the working relationships between Australia and Vanuatu” (Pers conv. Chief Fandanumata. July 2010).

**West Papua Independence:**

The government of Vanuatu's involvement in helping the Melanesian brothers in West Papua has been an ongoing concern. It was one of the priority concerns during the government of late Walter Lini. On November 29, 2007, The Vete Association representing the MVCC and Dr. Jacob Rumbiak signed an eleven resolution document. It was called:

“the Unity Day Port Vila Vanuatu Declaration, stating among many other request, the resolution stated that Vanuatu government and the Parliamentary Opposition group sponsored West Papua onto the United Nations Decolonization list in 2008 …list West Papua as a full participant of the Melanesian spearhead group… as an observer at the Pacific Island Forum and Africa Caribbean Group…” (November 29, 2007 pp 255) [See appendix 11].

Moreover, in a letter dated July 2, 2010, MP David stated that:

“The sitting of the Vanuatu Parliament Ordinary Session on Saturday June 19th 2010…the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu Officially has declared to

---

Unity Day port Vila Vanuatu Declaration by Maraki Vanuariki and Port Vila town councils of chiefs. 29 Nov. 2007
register the West Papua Case to the UN Declaration Committee (Com.24) on… July 16th 2010 … in June 19th extraordinary parliamentary sitting, the head of the government, Hon Prime Minister Natapei and the leader of the opposition Hon. Maxime Carlot Korman Jointly sponsored a motion in parliament to clarify Vanuatu’s foreign policy regarding West Papua. It was passed with bipartisan support to become an Act of Parliament. The initial move was proposed by Independent Member of Port Vila, the Hon. Ralph Reganvanu MP. In May 13 ordinary session Hon. Reganvanu tabled a petition of the people of Vanuatu calling for a clear foreign policy on West Papua…“a motion was introduced into the Vanuatu Parliament that strongly supports West Papua’s independence…A policy was made clear the passing of the landmark wantok blong yumi (our close friend) act56. This was a support of a demonstration in Port Vila, Vanuatu in support of West Papua independence on March 5, 2010” (Abel David MP for Port Vila Constituency, July 2 2010).

In addition, on June 22, 2010, a letter from the collective leaders of The West Papua nation stated: “Requesting the support of People and the Government of Vanuatu.

We, your Melanesian brothers and sister believe this decision will help to save us from the fear pain and suffering of Indonesia’s genocidal intentions, and further our liberation from foreign colonialism”. Some members of the Parliament were not pleased by the way Natapei was handling the West Papua issue although it has been tabled in the Parliament. The West Papua issue became part of the agenda of motion 2 of 2010 with the purpose of a motion of no-confidence against the Prime Minister Natapei. It stated that;

“Hon. Natapei after attending the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly failed by deliberately subsiding to represent a 9th Legislature motion that was carried unanimously for the Freedom of our Melanesian brothers and sisters of West Papua…This is a direct mockery to the decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Vanuatu” (motion sign by Hon. Iauko and Ravou on 25th November 2010).

In addition, Hon. Natapei failed to take the issue to the Pacific Forum and MSG.

---

56 West Papua National Councils of Liberation, “a motion on Foreign Policy on West Papua has been passed in the Vanuatu Parliament’, WPNCL press release, June 20, 2010. Get up, stand up: West Papua stands up for its rights by Jim Elmslie Camellia W. Gannon with Peter King. The center for peace and conflict studies. University of Sydney, July 2010
Meanwhile, the Vete members were not happy that West Papua did not make it on to the Pacific Forum Meeting agenda. Chief Fandanumata Richard David said the:

“Silence over the West-Papua issue at the two meetings could easily be misinterpreted as “deliberate” especially after both government and opposition and the people throughout the country have been galvanized into a unanimous support for the case…a delegation from Indonesia arrived in the country last Sunday the concern is that it may lobby the MSG and PIF against the West Papua case: (VDP no. 3002 August 4. 2010).

Director General for Foreign Affairs, Jean Sese responded saying that “the heavy Indonesian representatives of up to 15 officials in Port Vila were because Indonesia was a dialogue partner in the forum” (Daily post no. 3004 August 6, 2010).

The Vanuatu Daily post reported that:

“Indonesia pulls strings as Melanesia divides on W-Papua…Tiensten, PNG representative to the Pacific Forum said West Papua has its own issues that its government is dealing with…if there was a push for decolonization …by Vanuatu then that is a matter for discussion later on. PNG’s stand shows that Vanuatu has a long way to go to rally support in the MSG to support the freedom of West Papua. And Vanuatu’s firm support for West Papua is marred by the fact that while it wants Indonesia to give up the people of West Papua political freedom, the Vanuatu Police have recently received new uniforms for the 30th anniversary that were donated by the Indonesian government…Indonesia embassy in Australia showing photos of political representatives of the government from the Alliance group inspecting the uniforms in Indonesia” (The Daily Post no.3004 August 6, 2010).

The Vete Association's members expressed their frustration in a meeting saying that it was member of the Alliance that had initiated the motion of west Papua in the Parliament; however, the Alliance did not help push for this issue to be on the agenda but rather were entertaining Indonesian interest in Vanuatu.

Finally, Vohor, Minister for Utilities shared the same concern that:

“While the country is concerned for the freedom of the people of West Papua, it is also enjoying friendly relationships with the oppressor of the people of West Papua…ties should be cut between the two countries. He called upon members of the parliament not to compromise the motion that was passed by parliament by succumbing to freebies given by Indonesia…this has happened in the past where Vanuatu was in the height of
support for the people of West Papua but this was compromised by some leaders who played into the hands of Indonesia to water down the support for the cause of West Papua” (R. Willie VDP. No. 2965. June 21, 2010).

It is apparent that these activities have very minimal support toward the Vete Association initial objectives and aims. However, this issue plays significant roles of maintaining the Vete members' support and unity. It seemed that this and other later activities helped the Association establish the political arm and got David elected into the Parliament.

Finally, these activities play significant roles by preoccupying the frustrated Vete members' while they are waiting for response from the government and other claimants. Also, these activities minimized their participation in protests, helping prevent this situation from escalating into civil unrest. My observation is that although many of these activities may not be related directly to land claims that, it certainly helps people from engaging in illegal activities, and it helps keep the people united towards a common cause. On the other hand, some activities have created problems within the association and often people concentrate more on other economic activities that benefit their personal needs and pay less attention to the Vete Association’s main focus.

**Conclusion**

What is the likely future of The Vete Indigenous Historical Association? It is not clear what will happen. Will the Vete members give up and, will the association disappear? Will the court entertain their claims or will the protests intensify into larger conflicts? Unless the Land Tribunal Act, the court and the government institutions recognize and respond to these social and political grievances the potential for conflict is high. Obviously the future depends largely on the way in which the government responds
to The Vete Members and the dialogue between the different claimants about the customary land ownership claims of Port Vila, Efate.

Although, the stories, histories, language, kinship relationships, chiefly titles and reconciliations demonstrate the relationships between the Shepherd Islanders, Tonga and Efate. This paper does not conclude that The Vete Association's members are the customary land owners of Port Vila and Efate. It is not the purpose of this paper or my place; rather, this paper sought to document the activities of the Vete Association since its establishment. [See appendix 12 the chronology of the Vete Association] The Vete leaders and members also made it clear that they want the government and the court to decide, so that all the people who have the custom rights to Land of Port Vila and Efate share the benefits of their resources.

It is obvious that both internal and external factors contributed to the emergence of Vete Association, and from the discussion it is clear that in order to reach the decision of who the customary owner of Efate is, there must be communal effort and cooperation of the parties and institutions involved. We saw that the major challenge that Vete members have faced is the lack of response from these other parties and institutions, especially the government.

The Vete Association is an example of an indigenous alternatives and what local people at the grassroots level can accomplish when they reconigize that the Western system is not working and decide to organize themselves. Alternative systems however, as I have shown, can also face many challenges both internal and external.

In addition to the challenges of combating an inoperational, neglectful Western legal system, some of the other major challenges are the internal divisions and rivalry
amongst the people on Efate that resulted in the massive movement between Efate and Tongoa and the secrecy of oral histories causing disunity amongst the Vete members. The confidentiality of these histories was one of the challenges of my research. Some chiefs claimed that their histories were more authentic than others and therefore refused to share those stories. They prefer to go to the court instead and tell their stories. However, these individual claimants do not have the means to meet the legal fees and therefore rely on Vete Association to facilitate the costs. Recently some of these claimants who had moved out from Vete Association are returning to work under Vete Association again.

In addition, some conflicts are results of the traditional system not being respected and observed; this especially occurs when traditional leaders are engaged in their own politics. Many military and government leaders no longer see the traditional system as any different from the state system because the traditional chiefs and the church leaders are involved in politics. The traditional leaders should remain in their traditional roles. The chiefs can maintain their power as traditional leaders but support the political representative within the association. They should only intervene in state issues when necessary.

Empowering chiefs in Vanuatu through the Western governing legal system is a subject that has been discussed a number of times and raised by the MNCC. In my opinion, it may not be a wise thing to do. It would undermine recognition of the traditional governing system of the Vanuatu society, which is already enshrined in the National Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.

The societies of Vanuatu are structured in such a way that respect for chief is strong and currently evident in Vanuatu society. While, Vanuatu is a republic, people
should know that both custom and Western law exists and should utilize them appropriately. It is important to recognize chiefs' efforts in upholding traditional ways and respect both laws rather than misusing both systems. Due to the nature of the complex operation of conflict management in Vanuatu, the chiefs are the last resort to turn to when state law fail and therefore, should remain a separate institution and continue to support social and economic development as a way to alleviate disputes and provide security for the nation.

Land is a sensitive issue in Melanesia and Vanuatu and always will be an important issue because land is a valuable resource to which people are physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually connected. Indigenous social movements will continue to emerge until the government and local leaders can work together to deal with the root of the problem rather than pointing fingers at the outsiders. There is a need to have firm land management laws that respect the customary land tenure system of each island society. These custom systems of specific islands should then be used to guide development and outsiders who wish to use the land. The government through the Department of Land should ensure that these custom systems are being implemented.

Ultimately, the problems we witness on Efate today among the members of the Vete Association, other claimants and the government can only be cured when the customary landowners are properly identified and recognized. This will happen when appropriate system of the land is used and, natural resources are returned to the people, such that they may restore and benefit from the traditional land practices that first granted them well-being, and that they may have equal participation in development opportunities.
The question remains: “how to get along?” There also needs to be recognition that this must be a communal effort. The governments need to lead this process but do so with the assistance of traditional leaders. Most importantly, a space for dialogue needs to be created, in which people can tell their stories and heal their past injustices, for only after this healing has occurred can genuine compensation take place.
References:


Chapman Murray .1991. Pacific island movement and socioeconomic change: metaphors of


Gegeo, David.W. 1994."*Kastom and Bisnis: Toward integrating Cultural knowledge into rural development in the Solomon Islands." University of Hawai‘i.

172


**News clips and articles:**
- Member of the Parliament David Abel and Vete support for the West Papua issue - Video clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hHChun1sHo. Accessed to website July 21 2011.
Appendix

1) Methodology and Positionality

Interviews were integral part of this project. I conducted several individual interviews over summer of 2010. A great support from my informants, many were my close relatives who were involved in The Vete Association. The individuals such as Vete members, chiefs, real estates, member of the Vaturisu council of chiefs, community members, leaders, and director of Malvatumauri National Councils of Chiefs [MNCC], expatriate business operator, women leader and personnel at the Lands Department and the Deputy Police commissioner. I also conducted a focus group study that included more than seventy members of The Vete Association. The other information’s were extracted from the news paper articles [Vanuatu daily post and the Independence news papers], observations and The Vete Association files. Conducted literature reviews from various scholars on land and social movements. In addition, one of the methods that I initially intended to use was to do a video recording, however, the chiefs and leaders of Vete Association decided against the idea because of the division amongst the chiefs. Other chiefs and claimants were hesitant to disclose their histories and stories and protection of the information in terms of different stories and claims that are protected by different claimants which they were not willing to share their information unless done in the court setting.

Moreover, it was challenging to speak to other claimants after several attempts. While other interviews were successful, others were challenging. The informant’s reservations of expressing
themselves about what they think of the Vete association because of my close relationship with the Vete members.

When I asked my informants: what they think about The Vete Association? Before they answered the question they would ask me, which Island I come from? I was prepared for such reactions and hesitation from people I interviewed, therefore wished to protect their identity. Other interviews though, asked me to ensure that I write down what they said. These were challenges and lessons learned.

This proved to be more of a challenge than I had imagined, partially because of my relationships with these women, the academic necessity of simultaneously maintaining my other identity of “researcher.” And while I so desperately wanted to let their own voices be heard, I also had to accept the fact that I was not solely a vehicle for them, and that I, too, was an integral component of this project.

Questions:
1) Why men from Tongoa are claiming land on Efate?
2) What impact would this customary land claims have on the identity and land rights of the future generations?
3) How The Vete Members continue to maintain their land, responsibilities, chief titles and relationship with Land and people on Tongoa at the same time making customary land claims on Efate?

Personal note / positionality:

A personal note is appropriate here to provide the context from which I address this issue. My relationship with The Vete Association and the community on Tongoa and Efate and thus personally committed to document the stories and activities of Vete Association. During the course of this research, I shared their laughter and frustrations, ate and talked and listened to their stories. Because of my close relationships with the Vete members it does impact how I approach them and the gifts that I gave my informants depending on my relationship with the informants. Each night, my parents would ask me for names of people I will interview the next day. As I mention names such as; Popo Kiki, Papa, Tia, Loloa and Tai [father, brother and uncle]. My father would ask my mother for mats so I could use, or asked me if I have money to thank the individuals. Sometimes, instead of gift giving, my parents would ask me to invite people to come home for dinner. My mother would prepare food for us to share together and food and vegetables for our visitors to take home to their families.
The approach and means of showing appreciation for each person varies depending on my parents the relationship with those individuals. Sometimes, I would tell my parents that it was not necessary to give anything to certain informants. There would be this long silence between me and papa…then he would look at me and said, “Yu undastandem?” [Do you understand?] This research helped me understand and appreciate the appropriate approach toward certain individuals in the community based on my parents and my kinship relationship with them. It was important for me to understand the appropriate gift given to certain group, or individuals for certain purposes. Thank you. I have learned, acknowledge and appreciate the significance of performing my role and maintaining the relationships and appreciating the values and system of the society.

It was a challenge although my relationship with the key members I thought it would have been easy to conduct my research. When Vete begin in 2006, I was not interested at all but my father would talk about Vete at home and what Vete Association is about and what the members are trying to do. I ignored and did not pay much attention about what is Vete and Why Vete Association was formed? When I received the scholarship and meet with Ralph Regenvanu about the opportunity to study at the University of Hawai’i under the Norway Pacific Island Scholarship. At that the meeting we talked about possible research topics and Ralph suggested the Vete Association. I could not remember if I agreed at that time.

When I came to the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai’i, I had already known that I was going to conduct research on Vete Association but I was not so keen and certain. Reason being, I did not know what it was really about and therefore not too interested. However, the discussion with Professor Wesley-Smith, I began to realize how much they would appreciate it and I thought since it was my own people it would be easy to conduct a research among my own people. Also, I began to realize how much Vete Association could influence the younger generation and their sense of belonging to which Island if question ‘yu blong wea?’ as much as it is already confusing for me, what about the young generation [Tognoa Parents] born and raised on Efate.

I decided to base my project on Vete Association, which, I was quite happy about, thinking, they are my families and it would be easy. In December 2009 I went home for holidays and begin to pay more attention to the stories that my father would share with us at home. Also, read news about land issues and Vete. I visited Vete office and took photos of paintings on couple of houses and listen more to conversations after church and Sunday meetings.
In summer of 2010, I went back to do my research with more intention and guides [set of questionnaires] recorder. Yes, I can do this, I thought, which I revisit and schedule meetings. It didn’t take very long to become aware of the difficulties of getting information’s and meeting people I had wanted to meet. My positionality, the close relationship web of Vete members and myself in Vanuatu is obvious and is problematic: the majority of people I schedule interviews with know who my parents were, uncles or smol [small] papa the chief and who is married to whom and so forth.

During my interviews, in some ways it was challenging: I was an “insider” member of the family involved in Vete Association and member of the community but felt like an “outsider” trying to fulfill the academic expectations. I strove to find an acceptable balance as a researcher and as a family and community member, both in the eyes of my community members and my academic overseers, as we shared and listen to their stories, frustrations of the past and the future.

As a young female researcher researching on land issues, it complicated the insider/outsider role. I faced my own challenges while working on this project with the Vete members. I desperately wanted to provide a way in which the Vete members and non-members could tell their own stories and thoughts about Vete Association, and I wanted the informants to be more than just “informants.” An article by historian Peter Hempenstall, entitled, Sniffing the Person: Writing Lives in Pacific History. Hempenstall states that, “Most Pacific biographies tend to be more about the surfaces attached to the lives of their subjects than the inner curves of those lives themselves” (Hempenstall. 2001, 36). And while this project was not envisioned as a collection of biographies, I weave in brief background of the Vete key members to understand reasons they were selected to help individual customary land claimants of Efate and the issue of black birding. This project aims to document the history of Vete Association and weave the stories and their histories into a web that exemplifies the lives of contemporary man Tongoa and Shepherd Islanders in Port Vila, Efate using their history to make customary land claims on Efate Island. I did not want this project to use Vete associations’ existence as a vehicle for division amongst individual claimants that Vete is representing at the same time, I strove to recognize that there are other claimants that have the right to make their claims, and Vete Association acts on behalf of several claimants to voice the concerns of these people as a group of people who have come together because of similar concern, goals, values, and purpose.

In this project, I wanted to ensure that the informants voices were shared through their own words, and not solely through my projections and analysis of why and what Vete Association is about. This proved to be more of a challenge than I had imagined, partially because of my relationships with
the Vete members, and the academic necessity of simultaneously maintaining my other identity of “researcher.” And while I so desperately wanted to let their own voices be heard, I also had to accept the fact that I was not solely a vehicle for them, and that I, too, was an integral component of this project.

This all became a bit complicated because of my close relationship, more appropriately, utmost respect for them; there were indeed some stumbling blocks along the road. I personally found it challenging to navigate in the most appropriate fashion. There were some issues that I knew were sensitive, and I did not press or push when I felt that it was not my place especially as a women in Vatuatu. For example, question back the chiefs, the why question “from wanem”? However, I learn to find ways to do this respectfully. Also, desperately wanted to speak to some people like other claimants and the Vete Association lawyer to hear other side of the story, it was not possible and I respected those boundaries in which, as a researcher and even a family member or opposition to Vete Association, I did not belong. Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses similar challenges in Decolonizing Methodologies. Her work focuses primarily on indigenous researchers; I feel that her points speak to the issues that I faced in my complicated insider/outsider situation. Smith states that, “Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble...because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships...” (Smith. 1999,139).

The space which I occupy is a complicated one, one that I had to personally negotiate in my own mind and grateful because of my parents assistance. I feel that my sensitivity and understanding was necessary in finding the correct balance between families and researcher. Indeed, even in the space of an hour interview, I would find myself maneuvering back and forth between the role of interviewer and a close family member. Listening to the recorded interviews I was shocked by some of the questions and how I question some of my informants who are families, male counter parts discussing land rights. I was always navigating my own ways. To guide me in this challenging process, I also turned to the words of Vilsoni Hereniko, in Woven Gods: Female Clowns and Power in Rotuma. Hereniko analyzes his own insider/outsider relationship while conducting research on his home island of Rotuma. “In many instances, I felt torn between different subject positions: insider, outsider, or a synthesis of both? Should I remain betwixt and between? ...the bottom line for me was that if a decision had to be made as to whether my data or my relationship with other Rotumans was more important, the latter would prevail” (Hereniko,1995, 7). By reading and analyzing the dilemmas and challenging situations faced
by other academic researchers, I realized that I was not in a particularly unique situation. This provided me with a certain amount of comfort, and a feeling that, if others could do it, so could I. Many researchers before me had faced similar issues, and while it perhaps problematized the process, it did not render it impossible. The insider/outsider relationship is a complex one, and one that cannot simply be explained in such a binary. In a sense, that is the key point that makes it even more challenging, and perhaps the process of constant balancing and re-negotiating contributes to the richness of individual issues and stories, whether we are reading about Rotuman clowns or members of the Vete Association in Vanuatu.

Finally, I thank the informants for their time and for sharing the information. The assistance of my committee members, lecturers, friend and my families is much appreciated. Thank you!


25 October 2006
Maraki Vanua Ariki Council of Chiefs
P.O Box 639
Port Villa

Chairman
Vete Indigenous Historical Association
Port Villa
Vanuatu

Dear Chairman,

Re: Terms of Reference for Pursuance of Efate Land Claims

I am pleased to inform you that the Maraki Vanua Ariki Council of Chiefs at its 14th Conference resolved to approve your organisation as the authorised organisation to assist individual land claimant’s of particular parcels of Efate Land in line with our traditional hereditary rights.

To aid the effective carrying out this important task I attach herewith the specific Terms of Reference approved by the 14th Conference.

Please note that this authorisation can be withdrawn by the MVCC Executive anytime, at its discretion. However such withdrawal shall at all times be subject to the MVCC Executive satisfying itself that your organisation has engaged in activities that are outside of the parameters of the Terms of Reference.

I encourage you to continue our common struggle utilising all available legal means and caution you to refrain from resorting to any illegal activity.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph Kalo Tisomorimata
Chairman, MVCC
3) List of demands from Vete Association to Korman on July 28, 2006
Vote Indigenous & Historical Association
Po Box 232 Port Villa
Vanuatu
Phone 25559

Honorable Ham Lini Vanaarorna
Prime Minister
Vanuatu Government
Republic of Vanuatu

28th July 06

Dear Prime Minister

Re: Land Issues of Port Villa/Efate

We thank you for your attention in anticipation that you have read our letter of 07th July 2006 on the same subject above. We would like to reflect further to the above letter.

1. We repeated that Mr. Korman explain where he got some money from (vatu275,000.000) to pay what he termed “compensation” of Port Villa land to custom owners.
2. Who and how he proved were true custom owners before he paid them.
3. We want him to be responsible for finding immediately the replacement of those funds he paid out as soon as possible as they were funds collected from our land rents and not government fund and therefore our land is still ours.
4. Korman to terminate the ifira trustee’s lease of the land next to market house and no construction will take place there by the Australians who call themselves Filders Investment Limited. They did not go through the normal channel (VIPA).
5. All sub-divisions on agricultural lease lands and others being being considered for sub-dividing must stop and periods of leases be reviewed.
6. Foreigners must not be encouraged to make money on land sales such as Kaillard Kador.
7. A duplicate internal air port at Takara, Efate be stopped to save land. It shows no forward planning. Show fare sharing in development to other provinces.
8. Government must not allow the re-sale of ex-OP & Better Price wharf. It must be re-purchased by the government from the leaser for public use, i.e. landing for tourists etc.
9) There will be no buildings along the sea-front from market house to Roger Brand for environmental protection reason.

10) Government must strictly follow the land tribunal act and the customary ownership right under the national constitution.

11) All land rents be reserved for customary land owner's capital investment fund. Department of lands to facilitate an office for custom owner’s direct collection of outstanding land rents.

Honorable Prime Minister, we hope you will consider our concern seriously for the sake of our new nation's well being.

Thank you very much

Yours faithfully

Able David
President
Vete Indigenous & Historical Association

Chief Masoe Maramanu Efate.

Chief Tariniuamata Buniga

Chief Tarilimata Emase

Chief Titongoamuri Tongariki

Chief Maraki Bulomata Tongoa

Chief Timatasomata Mataso

Chief Masoeripu Makira

Chief Baliana Rualima Epi

Cc Ministry of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Lands
CEO VIPA
Lord Mayor Port Vila Municipality
Police Commissioner
Fittlers Investment ltd Iririki Resort
Kira, Wacal & Daniel lawyers

4) Follow up to the meeting points with Korman
URGENT

Vete Indigenous & Historical Association
P.O. Box 232
Port Vila
10th August 2000

Hon. Ham Lini Vanaunota Prime Minister

Hon. Maxime Korman
Minister of Lands, Geology, Mines, Energy & Rural Water Supply
Vanaunota Government

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Port Vila & Rural Estate Land Matter

Thank you for Minister bloong lands long recent meeting ween mifale chiefs bloong Tongoa Shepherds bloong long office bloong you.

Mifale istap confirm mae we yumi i followin up process bloong achieve ains ia.

Points we yumi i discuasen:

1. Kapman i ma processens mo declarem custom owners bloong Port Vila Land bloong Efatim rural land bloong Land title transfer mo sub-divisions long ol agricultural land long Efatim i stop fastetam maeia kasei karae declarement i kara aot. Minister bloong Land i ma custom wan letteia moi maisham Director bloong lands bloong stepem ol man wo ol hokom land title under agricultural lease bloong stepem sub-divisions mo title transfer. VHA bae i expecten receipt long copy bloong letter a within two weeks time.

2. Kapman i reviewem land leases act bloong includem recognition, right mo benefit bloong custom land owners.


4. Naan Department bloong lands i discuasen mo setemap wan body quick taem bloong step collectem land rents.

5. Minister bloong lands i unikem of lease from Hira Trust long site we Fittlers text. Leti i interest long kara renting market place. Hira Trust we Fittlers Investment Ltd i ma removeem fence long two weeks time aopu no mbbe VHA i exterem removal.

6. Kapman i declarem ex-ship whatiai kara public land mo peem back vanu bloong Ditek Vanu mo kopom tidy sea access long olagea tourist No ahiis long placea.

7. Kapman i declarem ex-agriculture show ground mo Mandela Park i stop public land.

8. Kapman i karaem environment assessment long fresh wot land no safety bloong water supply source bloong Port Vila quick taem.

9. Stopem sand showtai bloong long blacksand bloong environment purposes karaem tam custom owners declaration i kara aot.

Shipping Registry: Kapman i agi bloong giveaway shiping registry long VHAA Kapura i yanua millennium challenge fund bloong nikim quick, audit expenses bloong shipping registry mo replace em after we accounts been finalized. Vete Indigenous & Historical Association rewe i takebo shipping registry ween ol provinces wotem wan gadafa contract agreements.

Thank you.

David Abel
President

cc. Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Director of Lands

5) Content of the letter dated November 13, 2007
Vete Indigenous Historical Association
P.O.Box 232, Port Vila, Vanuatu
13th November 2007

The Ombudsman
Ombudsman’s Office

Dear sir,

Re: Ex-VCMB Dock & Land Area

The above property and several other government properties were seized by Vete as protest for Government’s payment of compensation by Korman & Willie Jimmy for Port Vila land not to land owners but to certain communities including Erakor VT110m, Pango VT55m, Ifira VT110m and Purau VT5. Payments imply fraud as only a court’s decision would have proved who were owners and not by a political favour as it was while other claims were denied.

Vete is suing the government, the lands Tribunal and Ifira Trust firstly for failure to respond to claims while land sale continue to sell land on Efate but a specific case evolves around the market place and ex-VCMB dock as two examples of interest by Vete to press government to respond.

Vete is seeking to invalidate the declaration of Port Vila as Public Land and to challenge the payment of compensation process as fraudulent.

The provisions in the national constitution chapter 12 land on behalf of custom owners’s rights remain universal whether it be Vete or whoever, that of owner’s consent of transfer is still abstract. That universal right is what we are seeking but first to emphasize to government’s awareness that our motive is not anti-government or “terroristic” and merely a constitutional right of expression.

VCMB dock has been decided by a “Tender Board” to go for sale without identifying custom owners for their ‘consent of transfer’ and we believe we are. That somebody who may be fooled by the tender board to purchase just might not be successful in scaring Vete members out of VCMB property and again embarrass our government. We advise to freeze everything until court has decided on owners of Port Vila Land to be fair to buyers and owners alike.

We are asking the Ombudsman to investigate the payment process of compensation to which the current minister of finance Hon. Willie Jimmy Tapangararua and Hon. Maxime C. Korman were deeply involved in, a clear conflict of interest. Leadership Code Act?

By copy of this letter we are asking the Electoral Commission Chairman to take note of and to keep in mind the outcome of the court. If the decision falls in favour of Vete and the Nation at large, there will be pressure to prosecute the above two ministers also be disqualified to go for re-election and also seek dismissal of tender board members.

So sir we seek your good advice and assistance urgently on the above likely “fraudulent case.”

In anticipation of your prompt attention to this matter, sir we thank you in advance.

Yours faithfully,

David Abel
President


6) letter dated February 6th 2007
Vete Indigenous & Historical Association
P.O.Box 232
Port Vila
17th January 2007

Hon. Ham Liais Vamanoroa MP
Prime Minister
Prime Minister’s Office

Dear Prime Minister, **Sub-divisions on Agricultural Land Leased Titles Dinh Van Than**

With respect we write to express our right and serious concern on the above subject.

We are very disappointed to see that after the land summit, Mr. Dinh Van Than is still sub-dividing agricultural land and TBV Chairman Mr. P. Crowby in your office told us that sub-division has been stopped while Lalo Ltd. is still advertising on TV on sale of sub-divided lands in Rantapao and Club Hippic areas. This is mockery to chiefs of Shepherd.

Hon. Korman was on television about the Big Bay Matantas Free Trade Zone project saying the land involved there being *freehold.* **Has lease hold law been repealed?**

In August 2006 we wrote to you on this same subject and had lengthy discussion on it in your office with members of Vete & Mr. Korman, Minister of lands specifically on Vila market place project. That was stopped but sub-divisions on Efate continues. We see direct conflict of interest.

Painting on premises by Vete is protest gesture that Port Vila land is still customary land until court decision comes out on who are true custom owners. Mr. Korman re-acted by calling this criminal trespass and pressing for arrests. Was “my land my life riot by Erakor, Ifira & Pango a legal mass damage or Korman’s memory has slipped?”

Vete wants sub-division of land in Shefa to stop. We are not a continent. Department of local authority to be involved as sub-division encourages urban drifts and more problems on Efate. We will help any government of the day and we are not rebellions.

We fear that violence may not be very far away and we do not want it. The cause maybe that land ministry and department are not doing their work.

Prime Minister, we demand that:

a) government must replace the funds paid out for Port Vila land as mis-used fund.
b) you dismiss and replace current minister of lands,
c) Ombudsman’s office to follow up the project in Big Bay/Matantas especially free hold title part and have the responsible minister disciplined or convicted for abuse of power.

We would like to discuss this with you as soon as you are available.

Yours sincerely

David Abel
President.

cc. Ombudsman, Lands Ministry. Director of Lands, Dept. of Local Authority. Mr. Dinh Van Than.

---

9) List of the 11 resolutions-Black birding issue
FIRST CONGRESS OF THE PACIFIC BLACK BIRDING REUNION
19 - 22 July 2005

RESOLUTION

At their first ever meeting, organized by the “Vanuatu Indigenous and Historical Association VIHA”, and “Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs – MNCC”, held at Chiefs Nakamal, Vila and attended by representatives of the South Sea Islanders, it was resolved that:

1. The Congress be held every year, one year in Vanuatu and the next in Queensland and so forth,

2. The exchange programs of culture, educational sports, special labor trainings, investments etc be draw up by related bodies and be monitored and updated by this Congress during these Congress,

3. The Government of Vanuatu formally recognizes the South Seas Islanders and to ensure special travelling and residence arrangements for them,

4. The Government of Vanuatu installs Mr Daniel Mucken Awyawi Narum, a member of South Seas Islanders, a descendant and Chief of Erromango and a liaison officer for the South Seas Islanders in this congress to be the Ambassador of Vanuatu to Australia and to have his main office in the state of Queensland,

5. The Government of Vanuatu seeks ways to demand parties concern to pay reparations for the damages and injuries in connection to the kidnapping and slavery of those days and which have the effect to this day,
6. Mr. Moana Carcasse Kalosil is elected as the Parliamentarian leader in reunion and reparation process.

7. Two representations from Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs to assist Mr. Kalosil in the solidification of reunion and reparation process.

8. Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs shall be the coordinating institution of the implementation of the recommendations.

9. Vanuatu in addressing the Vanuatu South Seas Islanders issues shall also take onboard other Pacific Countries South Sea Islanders in Queensland.

10. Offices are to be opened both in Vila and Queensland to address issues relating to Black Birding.

11. The Queensland Sugar Industry is to pay Vanuatu Chiefs an annual turn-over rate of 2% each year.

Name  | Signature  | Date  
------|------------|------
Jef Peter Ninauli | Peter | 22/07/05
Simon Keatane |  | 22/07/05
J.L. Maladé Tamwane |  | 22/07/05
PHILIP RUTUA Tawaiwai |  | 22/07/05
CHARLES BICE |  | 22/07/05
Francis Amy |  | 22/07/05
10) Speech made by MP Abel David at the VAC. ltd. First gathering in Australia

Hon. Abel David’s Speech
Honorable
Honorable
Honorable
Dr.
Dr.
Office bearers of Vanuatu Australia connection incorporation

Ladies and gentlemen,
It is an honor to stand before you today.

It is the 30th Independence anniversary of Vanuatu and we are proud members of the Vanuatu Australia Connection.

It is an honor also to stand on this land, a heritage of ours, you and us.

While individuals have contributed in one way or another to the successful establishment of this Association, I wish to tell of my small part.

To me this was the time the seed of this Association was sown.

It was back in 1984 that I financially sponsored my brother chief, David Richard Fandamunata and my other cousin for a trip out here.

It was during this time that a lady by the name of Brigitte invited them to perform a custom ceremony, a kind of food prepared for exchange of gift.

She said she would reveal something to them in connection to black birding activity.

They prepared the food at by then home of by the commissioner of the South Sea Islander, Noel Fatunaona.

The food was baked in an underground oven and was handed over to her.

Mrs. Brigitte who claimed to work for a government agency in Canberra started on her subject.

We would like to know the where about of this wonderful lady.

She mentioned something concerning compensation towards descendants of those kidnapped to work in the sugarcane plantation and demanded that the two returned immediately to Vanuatu and make the issue a government business.

Talks and lobby took place with much opposition for over twenty years before Hon. Moana Carasses whom we are privileged to have him here with us, by then the minister of finance decided to host a first ever conference of reunion between the South Sea Islanders and their brothers and sisters back in Vanuatu. This was in the year 2008.

The conference was a big success with government backing.

Working committees were then established with Chief Daniel Awiyawi being customarily appointed to his rightful chiefly title in order to carry out his official duty.

Chief Awiyawi worked hard with other individuals to establish this association.

Several years ago when the Australia authority announced its recognition of this group, it was to our joy and hope that opportunity equal to all other citizens of Australia is also given to this group.

Chief Awiyawi and his team had managed to channel to Vanuatu already much social and economical benefit.

As we celebrate together this 30th Independence Anniversary of Vanuatu with the newly established Vanuatu Australia Connection, may we guard racial discrimination of any form.

May we strive also to see that the Association achieve its broad aims.

This said, like any other establishments we no doubt will face friction in one way or another but let us trust in the divine guidance.

On behalf of the Vanuatu delegation would like to thank the officials out here for their invitation and the warm reception.

We aim to make this an annual event and we look forward for the prosperous achievement of the Association.

11) The 11 resolution in supporting the West Papua Independence. 29 November 2007.
UNITY DAY PORT VILA
VANUATU DECLARATION

By

MARAKI VANUARIKI COUNCIL OF CHIEFS
AND PORT VILA TOWN COUNCIL OF CHIEFS

29 November 2007

BACKGROUND

After West Papua has been taken over by the government of Indonesia since 1963, Indonesian
government promised to develop West Papua in all aspect. But the reality showed us big different.
Indonesian government faced to faced with huge of the problem. Why? Because the government
policy been blocked by the majority Papuan have been demanding the political rights (Integrasii
Politik di Indonesia) (Dr. Nazaruddin Syamsuddin, Gramedia Jakarta, 1999, p.90; Pemberontakan
Organisasi Papua Merdeka, by John RG Djopari, MA., 1993). The TAPOL, Indonesia Human
Rights base in London, UK reported that more than 100.000 West Papuan demanded the political
rights that been killed and disappeared. The Catholic and Protestant Churches base in West
Papua estimated that more than 400.000 have been killed and disappeared since 1963.

In the 1999, after a year era of reform in Indonesia, West Papuan used that opportunity to tell
the government of Indonesia under President Habibie about their political right called ‘Act of No
Choice in 1999’ must review. On 26 February 1999, the Team Hundreds of Papua met the
President Habibie and talk him that West Papua want to separate from the Unitarian Republic of
Indonesia and that statement was strongly by the Second Papua Congress on May 2000 in
Jayapura, West Papua.

On 3 July 2003, the Indonesian newspaper ‘Sinar Harapan’ published the results of a survey
conducted by the International Foundation For Election Systems (IFES) in association with an
International research Institute, the Tyler Nelson Survey (TNS). Survey results suggest that more
than 75% of Melanesian West Papuans want to be independence from the Unitary Republic of
Indonesia. Another survey by the West Papua National Student Union in 2001, conducted at the
request of the International Commission of Jurists in Australia, showed that more than 95% of
Melanesian West Papuans want independence from Indonesia.

Majority indigenous Papua have been demanding their political rights has been fraudulent by
Indonesian government since “Act of No Choice” In 1999, and that condition wrong explained by
the government observer and said that the problem in West Papua are social problem, and it will
solving by Special Autonomy put out by Indonesian government regulation no.21/2001. Special
Autonomy never implemented. The current conditions now are partition provinace and regencies
without decision making by Papua Assembly Council/MPR, said Drs. Agus Alua, M.Th as a head of
the MRP was guest speaker on peace protests at Jayapura, West Papua on March 6th 2007. When
the Papua People’s Assembly Council/ MRP second Birthday on 30 of October 2007, Mr. Alua said
that MRP is NOT function at all.

The West Papua National Authority have been continued lobbying Indonesian Government by
Section V Indonesian Intelligent Body/ BIN it was part of offered the rights solution to solving the
core of the problem of West Papua. Few time since 2004 West Papua offered Indonesian
Government but we know now that it is deadlock.
The only way to solving the deadlock, West Papua and Indonesian must take immediately to the international roundtable. For that reason the Maraki Vanuatu Council of Chiefs and the Port Vila Town Council of Chiefs of The Republic of Vanuatu have been sponsor this issues by passed the Unity Day Port Vila Declaration, 29 November 2007

UNITY DAY PORT VILA VANUATU DECLARATION, 29 NOVEMBER 2007

1. The Maraki Vanuatu Council of Chiefs, and the Port Vila Town Council of Chiefs, and the gathered assembly, resolve that the Vanuatu Government and the Parliamentary Opposition group:

   (1) Sponsor West Papua onto the United Nations Decolonisation List in 2008

   (2) Facilitate a United Nations monitored self-determination referendum for West Papua

   (3) Request, through its Department of Foreign Affairs, that the Republic of Indonesia, including the military, intelligence and the police, to cease immediately The intimidation and terrorization West Papua leaders, civilians, and students. This includes terrorisation resulting from the meeting in Vanuatu in November 2007

   (4) Facilitate the establishment of a peace-keeping force in West Papua as early as possible leading up to and beyond the referendum

   (5) Urge the Indonesian and Papua New Guinea governments to guarantee safe return of this delegation and future delegations to and from Vanuatu

   (6) Provides representative/s to accompany delegation back to Jayapura

   (7) List West Papua as a full participant of the Melanesian Spearhead Group

   (8) List West Papua as an observer at the Pacific Island Forum and Africa Caribbean Group

2. The Maraki Vanuatu Council of Chiefs, and the Port Vila Town Council of Chiefs, and the gathered assembly, resolve that the Vanuatu Government and the Parliamentary Opposition Group:

   (1) Establishes a safe haven in Vanuatu for genuine West Papuan refugees in accord with customary adoption practices

   (2) Provides a place for the development and concretisation of West Papuan self-determination policies and strategies

3. The Maraki Vanuatu Council of Chiefs, and the Port Vila Town Council of Chiefs, and the gathered assembly, resolve that:
12) Major events leading to the emergence of the Vete Indigenous Historical Association
2005 – 2010

1968-1984. New Hebrides 83 archipelagos was divided into four Administrative districts

1981. January 12 the late Chief Tarisaliu places the land claim to the Rural Lands of Efate.

1982. During late Lini’s government, certain areas of Port Vila were declared as public land without compensating customary land owners because Port Vila was under dispute and the custom owners have yet to be identified.

1984. Abel David sponsored Chief Fandanumata to Australia to find more about the South Sea Islanders in Queensland.

1985-1994. The 83 archipelagos were divided into eleven local government councils.

1985. Establishment on Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs. There were 22 traditional chiefs in their own rights from the islands of Vanuatu. It was established for Chiefs to deal with customary land disputes. This Act was revised in 2006 and expanded chiefs roles and authority on Peace process and more roles.

1992. Land compensation made to some villages of the south Efate and one village of Tongoa during the Korman’s government.

1992-1994. MP Abel David held 3 different positions within the Department of Finance. He was the head of the internal audit, senior internal audit advisor and Cashier supervisor.

1993. 9 July. Land claim by Chief Tarisaliu- Note that the original claim was made in 12th January 1981 to Rural Lands.


1998. Sorovanga School was established.

2001. Customary Land Tribunal Act No.7 of 2001 was established in 2001 to deal with customary land disputed several years after the independence.


2004. 8th October land Claim by Chief Masoeripu Matarulapa Maseirango Balangalualima


2005. 19 April- Land claim by Family Toea Matavulap

2005. 25 April - Abel David signed the first customary land claim of Port Vila /Efate and send it to the Chairman of Ifira Land Tribunal.
2005. 19-22 July- First Congress of the Pacific Black Birding reunion and establishment of the eleven resolutions. The first meeting organized by the Vanuatu Vete Indigenous and Historical Association and Malvatumauri National council of Chiefs-MNCC held at the Chiefs Nakamal and was resolved that: [see appendix 9].

2005. Abel David was the Second Political Adviser to the Ministry of Finance.

**Port Vila customary land issues**

2006. 26 May - Abel David advised and arranged the members to place the Namele leaf at the work site next to the Port Vila Market house.

2006. 29 May - Abel David ordered the Vete young members to cut the fence wire at the work site near the Port Vila Market house.

2006. 31 May - Abel David received the Magistrate Court Order. The Court Order that David Abel and his boys stay 50 meters away from the work site. Abel David took no notice of the Order instead he orders Clay David and Philip Thompson to remove the remaining fence surrounding the work site.

2006. 21 June- was the first court hearing of Vete Association at the Magistrate Court in Port Vila.


2007. 29 November - Unity Day Port Vila, Vanuatu declaration MVCC and port vila town council and the gathered assembly resolve that the Vanuatu government the parliamentary opotion group 1) sponsor West Papua onto the United Nations Declaration list in 2008. [see 11 resolution of West Papua]

2007. November- organized 3 days conference for West Papua and signed the eleven resolutions

2008. 1st of January - was the launching of the Shepherd Alliance Party. Abel David held the position as the party president.


2008. September - Abel David contested the general election and secure a seat

2009. 5th November - the Port Vila municipal election the Vete Alliance secured one seat/candidate in the council.

2009. 16th November- was the launching of the new party “Vete Alliance”.

2010. July- Vanuatu Australia Connetion limited. In July 2010 sixty members travel to Australia to celebrate and officiated the establishment of VAC.