Neotraditionalism-Examining the Role of Traditional Revival in Vanuatu

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Abstract

Contrary to the predictions made by classical modernization theory that ethnic traditions and religion would die out, they have proved to be surprisingly resilient throughout the world. In contemporary times various revitalization movements have been on the rise and from Africa to Asia scholars have been debating what seems to be a growing attention to tradition and culture. This thesis, based on empirical material from a minor field study in Vanuatu, will elaborate upon revivalist tendencies in a small island country. The purpose of the thesis is to examine expressions of revival of tradition, their causes and their possible implications for the country and its inhabitants. Modernization theory and the contesting paradigm of Alternative development create the foundation of the work while Globalization and the notion of Neotraditionalism are used as further theoretical points of reference. The thesis main findings are that tradition is used as a political strategy in Vanuatu and that a present neotraditional ideology offers both opportunities and pitfalls to the future development of the country. Based on the understanding gained from the field study, the message of this thesis lies in the importance of keeping an open mind when discussing development.

Key Words

Neotraditionalism • Revival • Vanuatu • Globalization • Indigenous Alternativ development • Sustainability
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Abbreviations

ADB - Asia Development Bank
AusAid - Australian Agency for International Development
DHF – Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation
FDI - Foreign Direct Investment
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GNH - Gross National Happiness
MAV - Media Association of Vanuatu
NZ - New Zealand
RSE - New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme
TMP - Traditional Money Banks Project
VDP - Vanuatu Daily Post
VIPA - Vanuatu Investment Promotion Authority
VKS - Vanuatu Cultural Center (Vanuatu Kaljoral Senter)
VP - Vanua’aku Pati
WB - World Bank

Glossary

Kava - Crop of Melanesia. Chewed, ground or pounded and mixed with water it is used as a relaxant drug due to its psychoactive chemicals
Nakamal - Traditionally a meeting place, nowadays it often refers to a place to drink kava
Port Vila - Capital of Vanuatu
Maori - Indigenous people of New Zealand

Name of islands: • Efate • Espiritu Santo • Malakula • Pentecost
1. Introduction and research problem

In the contemporary world, the notion that development is mainly an economic phenomenon has until recently been widespread and global capitalism has been seen as the main road towards development (Todaro & Smith 2009, p. 14). Long has tradition been equated with backwardness and primitivism and by classical modernization theory seen as a hindrance to progress. However, although modernization theory pictured a future where ethnic traditions and religion would die out, they have proved to be surprisingly resilient throughout the world (Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p.18). Various revitalization movements have lately been on the rise and various scholars have been debating the resurgence of chieftainship and customary law in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Von Benda-Beckman 2008). Rata (2000) and Pika (1994) are two scholars that have been discussing the term ‘neotraditionalism’ in order to describe contemporary revival of tradition, although they come to different conclusions of the consequences of such expressions. While Rata (2000) argues that the revivalism she sees among Maori in New Zealand brings with it negative downsides, Pika (1994) has been emphasizing revival as a constructive force among indigenous people in northern Russia.

In Vanuatu, a small island country in Melanesia, there have also been various attempts to strengthen traditional structures. Geographically isolated from other markets, Vanuatu is GDP-wise one of the poorest countries in the world. However, in recent times the country has gone through an economic boom, mainly fueled by increased tourism, aid inflows and property development, and is now one of the fastest growing economies in the Pacific (ADB 2009). In the same time as the country is increasingly being exposed to globalizing forces, voices have been raised about the need to preserve and revive certain aspects of tradition in order to create a more holistic approach for the country. This thesis originates from a project report I read in 2010 about a partly UNESCO founded initiative to revitalize what was denominated the indigenous “traditional economy” of Vanuatu. The Traditional Money Banks Project (TMP) (Huffman 2005) was directed by
the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS), and evolved around portrayed traditional wealth; mats, tusks, food items, kava\(^1\), shells, and the most valuable animals in Melanesia, pigs, which were seen as invaluable cultural, social and economic capital in the country (Huffman 2005, p.27). The report produced a macro-oriented criticism against what could be designated as the mainstream way of development and called for strengthening of traditional, indigenous systems and the preservation of cultural values. To teach custom, establish and strengthen chief structures and make sure that production and use of traditional wealth was done in a proper customary way was seen as an urgent need in order to maintain culture and assure the survival of cultural safety nets present in society. In this way, the report argued, the country could protect itself and its inhabitants from the vagaries of an uncertain world economy (Huffman 2005, p 11).

The *Traditional Money Banks Project* manifested the view of the importance of a perceived traditional way of life and saw the revival of certain aspects of tradition as a solution to contemporary problems. By classical modernization theory, tradition is to be cast behind as it is seen as a static element for development. Contrary to this view, Pika (1994) has instead argued that the enhancement of tradition could offer a viable approach to development. In the view of Rata (2000) any revival should be interpreted as a contemporary phenomenon and not a continuation of a previous society, and while the intentions of its proponents might be altruistic, revival can in fact contribute to increased cleavages and oppression. The TMB project report awoke the interest to further investigate expressions of contemporary revivalism and their possible consequences in a Vanuatu context. Therefore, a minor field study was carried out in order to explore possible tendencies of traditional revival and their possible significance for the future development of the country.

\(^1\) A Pacific drug made out of the root of *Piper methysticum*, a relaxant which is argued to relieve stress and anxiety.
1.1 Purpose of the study

With this background in mind, the purpose of this study is to analyze possible expressions of revival in contemporary Vanuatu as well as discuss how such traditional resurgence may affect the development in the country.

1.2 Research questions

The purpose of this field study leads to the following research questions:

- Through people’s perceptions, what tendencies can be identified in terms of traditional revival in Vanuatu and how can we understand these expressions?
- What implications might such expressions have; is revival a constructive contribution to the development of the country or a negative force?

1.3 Relevance of the study

In present times we have seen various examples of a rising attention to traditions in several parts of the world and there are different views on how we can interpret such manifestations and their possible consequences for development. It is deemed relevant to shed more light over this issue by discussing the matter through a new context, namely Vanuatu, with the hope that this thesis will provide additional insights that will be valuable for future development work.
1.4 Disposition

The first chapter has presented an introduction to the research problem and the following research questions that this thesis aims to investigate. In chapter two the methodological work of this study is presented. Following this, chapter three will introduce the theoretical points of departure for this thesis. Chapter four will familiarize the reader to Vanuatu through a presentation of the country and its contemporary economic, political and social setting. In chapter five the result and analysis of the work will be presented, followed by a final debate in chapter six and recommendations for future studies in chapter seven.
2. Methodological design

This chapter gives a description of how the work of this thesis has been carried out and the methodological grounds behind it.

This study has a qualitative nature and is based on the ethnographic approach that can be found in Aspers book “Ethnographic Methods2”. Since the thesis is grounded upon people’s perceptions of their own reality it was of importance to go to the field in order to conduct such study. In order to make this kind of investigation, Aspers states that it is of high significance to interact socially with the subjects of the work and by practically gaining more knowledge through interviews and participatory observations that give an insight to the everyday-life of the informants. In an ethnographic study, the informants might be aware of the ethnographer’s presence as a scientist, which might affect their behavior. Therefore, participatory observations could offer a solution where the ethnographer has the possibility to observe the behavior of the subjects in a more natural context and thus increase the validity of the material collected (Schensul et. al 1999, p. 237). The researchers own personal experience of situations and interactions are also seen as an important part of the empirical material (Aspers 2007, p. 110). By the use of these various ethnographic techniques more knowledge was acquired.

Interviews were conducted with both local individuals and groups in urban and rural areas as well as from different age, gender and status categories. Altering between different types and subjects of interviews can contribute to the scope and validity of the information received (Mikkelsen 2005, p. 89, p.180). Semi-structured interviews, as described by Mikkelsen, were chosen which allowed for more flexibility and a more dialogue-based construction. In these types of interviews the questions are open-ended and focus groups or key informants are often the main interviewees (ibid). Further, a thematic interview guide was used to provide more focus in order to acquire the

2Original text: Etnografiska Metoder
preferred information and to present topics that were discussed during the focus
groups. Field notes were used to document the information given as well as course of
events. These field notes then became the foundation for the interpretations and
analyses of the material. According to Aspers, it is of high importance that the researcher
transcribes the material as soon as possible when an interview is performed without
being recorded (Aspers 2007, p. 152). This recommendation has been followed in this
work.

According to Mikkelsen, researchers always carry pre-understandings that must be
taken under consideration during interaction with participants. It is of importance to be
clear on ones preconceptions and what is taken for granted since the knowledge that the
researcher is carrying with her will affect the interpretation of phenomena (Mikkelsen
2005, p.34). To be aware of one’s preunderstandings is not always an easy task. Since
our “common sense” and the way we react intellectually and emotionally feels natural to
us it is sometimes difficult to detect the assumptions made. However, to be aware of the
fact that we all carry with us suppositions is an important step in order to gain insights
(and new pre-understandings) from new experiences. Mikkelsen further argues that it is
important to understand the reality of the subjects of the study and ”understanding
people understand their own reality is by Schütz (as cited by Mikkelsen, p. 41-43)
described as “first order constructions”. Subsequently the researcher creates “second
order constructions” based on the information she receives through her study. The first
order constructions are thus the raw material, which is then coded by the
understandings and reflections of the researcher. The second order constructions are
not empirical in themselves, but rather connected to the empiricism (ibid p. 41-43).
Hence this study is based on first order constructions, that have been interpreted and
analyzed through conceptual frameworks, which then create the second order
constructions. According to Aspers, analysis is constantly present throughout a
researchers work and runs parallel to the fieldwork (Aspers, 2007 p. 157). The margin
method\(^3\) as described by Aspers has been used in the work of this thesis to codify the material through a scheme where different categories are marked with colors in order to facilitate the interpretation of the information received (ibid, p. 172). The result of the fieldwork has been analyzed in its whole and it is the sum of interviews, literature and experiences that create the foundation for the second order constructions and conclusions.

2.1 Interviews in the field

This thesis is based on empirical material consisting out of 22 individual interviews, 3 group interviews and 2 focus groups conducted between the 22\(^{nd}\) of November 2010 and the 2\(^{nd}\) of February 2011 in urban and rural Vanuatu. The total number of interviews adds up to 46 participating individuals living in and outside the capital Port Vila on the island of Efate and people living on the islands of Espiritu Santo and Malakula. All interviewees have been asked for consent in participating in the study and I always made clear what my purpose was. All interviews started with me introducing myself as a Swedish student collecting material for my thesis, and that the interviewees did not have to answer questions they deemed they did not want to or could answer. All individual interviews took from thirty minutes to two hours. The focus group sessions took around one hour. The length of the interviews depended on several factors, such as time available and discussions started.

My main entrance into the field has been the Alliance Française in Vanuatu that assisted me with useful information and valuable contacts and helped me arrange interviews with people they deemed could give me new insights. I have also conducted interviews with people that I found through what Aspers has described as the “snowball method” (Aspers 2007, p. 91) where the researcher receives new contacts through informants in the field. A risk with this method is that the informants are within the same network, which could limit the understanding of the issue. This was taken under consideration

\(^3\) Original: Marginalmetoden
and in order to increase the knowledge-base, interviews were also held spontaneously in villages or town areas outside of the known informants’ networks. The age spans range from 18 to ~100 years old. The interviews have been conducted with people from urban and rural areas and can also be divided between different social groups and gender categories. The socio-economic and social status of the informants involved in the study ranges from subsistence farmers, urban students, formal workers, organizations and leaders, both chiefs and politicians.

In the interviews, there is an intentional focus on age rather than for example gender categories since it was deemed interesting to see if the perception of tradition among young people and older generations differed. This idea was based on a thought that young adults have been growing up in the nation Vanuatu while the older generations have been experiencing the rule of the New Hebrides. It has also been a focus on urban “versus” rural areas, since what could be described as modernization processes have not been as widespread in the rural regions. This division was further based on a preunderstanding that what could be interpreted as “tribalism” and “tradition” would be stronger in rural areas, an idea that I later had to reconsider.

2.1.1 Rural areas

Interviews with people from rural areas have foremost been conducted on the islands of Espiritu Santo and Malakula where certain remoteness exists and where urbanization and modernization processes have not been as extensive as on Efate. The dialogues have been taking place in small villages outside the main centers of the islands, more precisely the villages of Nambahuk, Vimalla and Monieshiill on Espiritu Santo and Uripiv, Mae and Lakatoro area on the island of Malakula. A vast majority of the interviewees were subsistence farmers that received some extra income from e.g. small-scale tourism activities, and/or selling some of their produce when money deemed needed. The focus on this group is mostly on their status as rural inhabitants.
2.1.2 Urban areas

The urban interviews have mainly taken place in the capital Port Vila on Efate and in the second largest city of Luganville on Espiritu Santo. Most people interviewed had formal employment and/or were studying. As with the rural interviewees it is possible to make further distinctions between for example social strata. While this distinction is of relevance and views of the different categories will be presented, the urbanity of the interviewees will be in focus.

2.1.3 Young adults

Men and women in the age group ~ 16-30 years, thus representing individuals growing up in the new nation of Vanuatu, will in this thesis constitute ‘young adults’. Most formal interviews with this category were held in the center and periphery of the capital Port Vila, thus representing an urban setting. There has thus been an urban bias in this category. In an attempt to compensate for this bias I will use the information given from participatory observations of the urban youths that I got to know when I stayed with local rural families. They all knew that I was collecting material for my thesis and the informal contact with them provided me valuable insights. The young adults that I met and interviewed also came from different socio-economic backgrounds that further could be examined. However, I have chosen to mostly focus on their status as young since I was interested in younger generations’ viewpoints on tradition. Nevertheless, when the young adults’ discussions and perceptions have been diverging, a closer look at the material has been taken in order to distinguish if their background could reflect this difference.
2.1.4 Older generations

People in the age category of ~ 40-100 years will in this thesis represent older generations. This means that they were young adults during colonial times, which could be of interest when discussing perceptions of change and societal transformation. The interviewees have been from different economical settings and status groups. Chiefs are included in this group, as well as most politicians and other persons that for different reasons could be seen as holding power in society.

2.1.5 Organizations

In addition to interviews with Ni-Vanuatu\(^4\) of different social classes and backgrounds, a handful of interviews have been held with development organizations and workers operating in the country. These include representatives from Peace Corps, the World Bank, Australian Aid, Asian Development Bank, fieldworkers and anthropologists. These interviews were conducted in order to receive more information about how different (foreign) agents are working in Vanuatu and how they view the changes that the country is going through, all in order to get a broader view of the processes operating in society.

2.2 Anonymity and other sources of information

Out of respect for the anonymity of the interviewees no names of the participants will be published. Vanuatu is a small country with few inhabitants and to publish names would make it very easy to know exactly who the quoted person is. This thesis will thus only cite the interviewees with date and location.

Beside my interviews, I talked a lot with friends and people that I met during my fieldwork. Many discussions have taken place at kava bars and I also received information by reading the daily newspaper\(^5\). I further had the privilege to live with two

\(^4\) Ni-Vanuatu is a term to describe the indigenous inhabitants of Vanuatu since Independence (Bolton 1998).
\(^5\) Most often the Vanuatu Daily Post
different Ni-Vanuatu families during my time in Vanuatu, on the island of Espiritu Santo and on the island of Uripiv offshore of Malakula, and I appreciate them opening up their homes and lives to me. Although not formal interviews these dialogues and insights to everyday life have been very valuable, both personally and for my thesis work, by creating a greater understanding about people's perceptions of their own reality. According to Aspers, the informal life is also a part of an ethnographic study (Aspers 2007, p.115) and interpersonal methods require that the researcher interact with the informants (ibid, p.30). Therefore, this information is also deemed valid and will be used in the work of the thesis.

2.3 Validity and reliability of the ethnographic method

In qualitative based studies, validity concerns how what is measured correlates to the “reality or the “truth” and if the scientist is measuring what she was supposed to measure. Reliability concerns the way repeated observations under identical conditions would give the same result (Mikkelsen 2005 p. 195). Ethnographic methods, however, diverge from conventional standards of validity and reliability since the researchers themselves are the instrument of data collection and since the study cannot be repeated in its exact form due to the natural changes that humans go through over time. According to Mikkelsen (2005) there are further no straightforward way to test the reliability and validity of the information collected when using semi-structured interviews. However, there are ways of enhancing the quality and credibility of the qualitative analysis. By continuously working through the material of field notes and doing cross-validation of the findings it is possible to increase the validity of the information received. The use of a variety of sources, by Mikkelsen (2005) defined as triangulation, has been applied in order to verify and substantiate the assessments made.
2.4 Field study dilemmas

Although the ethnographic methods described by Aspers are deemed a valid way of conducting this work, there are certain limitations to be aware of. When conducting the interviews, I set out to interview as many men as women in order to receive equal contribution from both sexes. However, this turned out to be more difficult in practice. Often when I came to a village and asked if someone would be interested in helping me I was presented to men. I sometimes had to ask specifically for women if I wanted female input, and often there were men present at those times, perhaps limiting the information given. Because of relative difficulties receiving female participation there has been a slight male-bias. However, I made female friends during my fieldwork and received information from them through the private conversations we had which will be used in the work of this thesis.

Further, English is my second language and even though it is one of the national languages in Vanuatu, it is not the first language for e.g. Ni-Vanuatu from a francophone background. Many areas also have other indigenous languages as their mother tongue. Although Bislama is similar to English and it sometimes was possible for me to understand and take part in a conversation I often deemed it necessary to bring an interpreter. Even though she did an excellent job, the need for a translator might have affected the interview and the information received. Vanuatu is also a very diverse country with many cultures and islands. It was not, for understandable reasons, possible to visit all of them and thus the study is limited to three of the islands. Further, the traditional systems are often argued to be strongest in the Northern part of Vanuatu, especially in Pentecost and a trip to this island was planned since it was deemed interesting for the work. However, a cyclone ruined this plan and there was no time for a visit. Perhaps this could have provided additional important material. In an effort to compensate and avoid the risk of losing important material I arranged interviews with people from Pentecost living in Port Vila.

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*6 See e.g. Huffman 2005
7 The tropical cyclone Vania struck Vanuatu on January 13, 2011*
In retrospect there are of course things that could have been done differently. What struck me in the supplementary work of this thesis was that I did not include naturalised\textsuperscript{8} Ni-Vanuatu in the job for this thesis, probably directed by my preunderstanding of the country and what being a Ni-Vanuatu citizen means. Vanuatu is further a quite difficult country to comprehend. Not only does this small nation possess twice as many cultures and languages as the entire Europe (Huffman 2005), it also consists out of approximately 65 islands that are spread out in the Pacific Ocean. To complicate things further the country has dual legal systems and dual political systems as a legacy from colonialism, and it is not always easy to understand how these systems overlap and interact. I came to the field guided by my thoughts on how I perceived society would be and function, only to realize that the reality is far more complex and that many of my preconceptions had to be thrown away. With the knowledge I have today I would probably have been able to go deeper into the field and thus received a more comprehensive understanding about the issue. Additionally and highly important, the outcome and information interpreted as significant is based on the view of the interviewer. This is taken under consideration throughout the work. This thesis is further based on human perceptions and does not claim to offer exact truths, but rather aims at opening up for discussion and debate. Hence, the approach is exploratory rather than confirmatory.

\textsuperscript{8} According to the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu (1980, Chapter 3, Act 12) a national of a foreign state or a stateless person can apply to become a citizen of Vanuatu if he or she has lived in the country continuously for over 10 years.
3. Theoretical frameworks

In order to investigate the research questions I have taken a number of theoretical points of reference. Firstly, an introduction to (1) modernization theory will be presented, which has influenced, and to a certain extent continue to influence, the debate about societal transformation and how poor countries should escape underdevelopment. Secondly the concept of (2) alternative development will be introduced which is questioning many of the assumptions made by modernization theory and proposes another way of looking at progress. The development of the alternative field will be outlined and one of the paradigms core documents, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundations centerpiece “Another Development”, presented. A presentation of (3) globalization is deemed relevant, relating to greater transnational and supraterриториal relations between people in a rapidly interconnected world and its counter reactions. Fourthly and last, the concept of (4) neotraditionalism as an ideology of revival will be further introduced.

3.1 Modernization and Social Change

Modernization is a phenomenon that is difficult to conceptualize since in can encompass a large scope of ideas. In this thesis it will be used as a category for a wide scope of processes taking place and to designate economical and socio-cultural transformations. “Modernization is a type of social change which is both transformational in its impacts and progressive in its effects. It is also generally viewed as extensive in scope, as a “multifaceted process” which not only touches at one time or another virtually every institution of society, but does so in a manner such as transformations of one institutional sphere tend to produce complementary transformations in others” (Tipps 1973, p. 202).

Modernization theory originated in the era of Enlightenment in the 18th century. With technological advancements the belief that humanity could control nature was growing
and the emergence of science started to challenge the intellectual monopoly upheld by the church and provided people with new insights. Antoine de Condorcet was one of the earliest modernists to link cultural change with economic development and argued for the inevitability of changes in people’s moral values as a result of economic development and technical progress (Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p. 16).

Marx notion of modernism has been one of the most influential. His version criticized the harsh exploitation that was characterizing the early industrial society and saw the revolution of the proletariat as a way towards greater equality. Marx was not against modernization, as he saw technological innovations and its consequences as the base for human progress, but he had differing views on the best pathway towards it than for example Adam Smith. While Smith argued for capitalism as the road to prosperity Marx saw communism as the way towards greater justice. Although they did not share the same view of the goals, they both saw modernization and the changes it brought as having pervasive implications for culture and politics (Inglehart & Welzel 2005, p.16-17).

Tönnies later divided the traditional society from the modern and developed a dualistic conception of modernization. The traditional society was by Tönnies seen as being bound by traditional community ties, Gemeinschaft, while the modern society tended to have a highly individualizing and differentiating unity, Gesellschaft (Brohman 1996, p. 20). According to Durkheim industrialization and the changes it brought transformed society from uniformity and simplicity to rationality and variation. Modernization was also by Durkheim seen as bringing with it further division of labor (Roberts & Hite 2000, p. 37).

Influenced by Durkheim, Talcott Parson put forward the idea that societies change in distinctive patterns, moving from a traditional stage to a modern. He was inspired by biological evolution and attached these ideas on his view on modernization, where social adaptations either encouraged or inhibited further evolution. A modern society was by
Parson characterized by industrial capitalism, bureaucratic organizations, universalistic legal system and liberal democracy (Roberts & Hite 2000, p. 83). Modernization was seen as evolving in the West in the 18th century with the development of democracy and industrialization. Ancient Greece and Ancient Israel were perceived as seedbeds for rationalism that then spread to other parts of the world by colonization or other forms of interaction. Activism and individualism were seen as modern values and liberal ideas such as freedom of the individual and personal autonomy as contributing to the fall of authoritarian regimes (Varma 1980 p. 35).

Modernization theory thus provided a dualistic view on the world, where the modern and the traditional were opposite poles. After the Second World War, a version of modernization theory that sought internal causes for underdevelopment became popular. Third World countries were seen as carrying with them endogenous barriers that hindered them to advance. Economic growth was the goal of development and GDP its measurement. There was a hope that such path would bring qualitative social changes and it included a linear theory of history and development (Jahanbegloo 2004, p. 7). According to Tipps, modernization theorists were influenced by developmentalism when studying the social change of non-western nations, contributing to the idea that a Western developmental path would function as a model for the development of the South (Tipps 1973, p. 204). Smith (1985) further debates the role of developmentalism in the era after the Cold War and is referring to this quote by Almond:

“What had happened in Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries was now, more or less, about to happen in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The progress promised by the enlightenment- the spread of knowledge, the development of technology, the attainment of higher standards of material welfare, the emergence of lawful, humane, and liberal polities, and the perfection of the human spirit- now beckoned the Third World newly freed from colonialism and exploitation, and straining against its own parochialism” (Gabriel Almond as cited by Smith 1985 p. 537).
This notion of modernization has been debated and contested as its linear ideology implies universal patterns to follow. Although the concept in this original form is not as relevant today, modernization theory is still influencing development thinking. In the contemporary world the debate has been narrowed down and often revolves around foremost economic globalization and neoliberalism. To Güell “it appears that the concept of globalization has in many ways replaced that of modernization” (Güell 2003, p. 214) and just as critics arose towards modernization theory, reactions are now directed towards globalization forces.

3.2 The Rise of the Alternative Development paradigm

The paradigm of Alternative Development arose as a response to previous modernization theories and the idea that economic growth would alone lead the way to prosperity. It sprung out of the dependency theories in the late 60’s and the social movements of that time which created a seedbed for the rise of the civil society as a collective actor (Friedmann 1992, p.1). The alternative development thinking introduced new ways of looking at societal problems, focusing on social and community development and “human flourishing”, as described by Margaret Jane Radin, centering on the rights of humans to live up to their capacity (ibid p. 11). Alternative development thus sought to unite the endeavors of development and emancipation.

According to Friedmann, an alternative form of development that is empowering the poor must begin locally, to later be extended to a higher level (Friedmann 1992, p. 7). As Pieterse argues; “in alternative development the role of the state is to act as an enabler, a facilitator of people’s self-development” (Pieterse 2010 p. 94). The focus of alternative development is on rectifying existing social, economic and political power imbalances caused by the mainstream ideology. This alternative approach is thus “centered on people rather than profits” (Friedmann 1992, p. 9).
3.2.1 Another Development

“Another Development is people-centred, geared to the satisfaction of basic human needs – both material and, in its broadest sense, political; it is self-reliant, endogenous, ecologically sound and based on democratic, political, social and economic transformations, which alone will make possible the attainment of the other goals. Another Development also encompasses the search for societies overcoming discrimination of any kind – whether social, sexual, ethnic or economic. It is a participatory process“ (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 1975).

The concept of “Another Development” was coined by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) and first described in the report “What Now?” from 1975. This report is still the foundations major policy document, and in its core it argues against the dominance of a mainstream ‘development model’ which it considers to be largely based on Western and North American historical experience (DHF 2009, p. 6). The existing world order, the report argues, has failed to meet the needs of the vast majority of people and has only benefited a small portion of a privileged minority. Whether it comes to food, health, education or habitat it is not the scarcity of resources that explains the poverty found in the developing world; rather it is the distribution that is fostering inequalities (DHF 1975, p. 26).

The concept of Another Development criticizes the free-market dogma as a universal blueprint for development and argues that “one-size-fits-all” approaches will not meet the needs of the people in the developing world. Instead, a pluralistic approach with a variety of solutions must be found; “The plurality of roads to development answers to the specificity of cultural or natural situations; no universal formula exists” (DHF 1975, p. 7). Thus, according to this belief, another form of development is required that focuses on the strengthening of the South’s capacity for self-reliant development. The concept is further need-oriented and argues for a radical modification of existing world trends and redistribution of resources on national as well as international levels (ibid). Although
this report was written in the late 70’s, the foundation claims its value to be as relevant today as it was in 1975 as social and political structures still favors the developed countries (DHF 2009, p. 32). In 2009 the foundation published a second report, “What’s Next?” reflecting the ideas of the core document while exploring new challenges of the contemporary world (ibid, p. 1). Its central ideas evolve around the need for pluralistic frameworks that recognize diversity and alternative forms of development thinking, thus continuing the work against a universal blueprint of development. In order to reach a better, sustainable future, various solutions and ideas must be examined and there is according to the report a dire need to reform the way we think about development, progress and the society at whole. In the current debate regarding development, global inequalities and environmental issues are still framed and limited by old assumptions that we seldom criticize or even realize. According to the report the contemporary growth-obsessed development path based on fossil fuel will “unavoidably lead to disaster “ (DHF 2009, p.7) and need to be replaced by other sets of values and ways. Civil society has a large responsibility in leading the world towards a more sustainable future. Even if governments, media, business and other actors also play a crucial role there will be no major changes without action from organized citizens moving the other actors (ibid p. 12).

3.3 Globalization and its counteractions

Globalization should by Scholte be defined as the spread of transplanetary or supranational connections between people. According to his definition, globalization should not be equated with older concepts and terms such as liberalization or universalization. Westernization and internationalization are other concepts that often are associated with globalization, and even if Scholte acknowledges that they have some common characteristics he asserts that globalization is not equivalent to these terms. Scholte emphasizes that even if the most enthusiastic promoters of globalization come from Western Europe and North America the term should not be interpreted as westernization. Globalization could, in theory, take on many different forms that are
considered non-western, such as for example Buddhist globalization. He also stresses that globalization is not essentially imperialistic; it produces emancipatory social movements as well as exploitative global processes (Scholte 2002).

Although globalization has the capacity to be a positive force, many scholars have highlighted its negative consequences. Stiglitz defines globalization as the “closer integration of the countries and people of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and to a lesser extent people across borders” (Stiglitz 2002, p. 9). The way globalization has been managed has, Stiglitz argues, in many cases contributed to misery rather than prosperity, especially for developing countries. He asserts that globalization in itself is neither good nor bad and could be a positive force; however, structural faults makes its track record negative. The rapid pace of globalization has not allowed countries time for cultural adaptation and has brought with it environmental degradation and unequal distributions of its fruits. Developing countries are not experiencing the promised economic benefits that globalization was supposed to bring and the gap between the poor and the rich is instead growing wider (ibid p. 5).

The non-inclusiveness of foremost economic globalization on national and international levels has provoked protests in developing countries as well as in the West. The dissenting voices found in the anti-globalization movement are highly diverse and encompasses many groups: “from students protesting athletic apparel produced in sweatshops to peasants resisting multinationals’ control of their land and seeds; from indigenous groups defending their forest habitat to religious leaders seeking debt relief for developing countries; from labor unions concerned about the impact of free trade to feminists opposed to trafficking in young women” (Boli and Lechner 2004, p. 407). Thus, a wide range of problems is now ascribed to globalization and the various groups that are pursuing their own agenda with specific goals are united behind a “single anti-globalization banner” (Boli and Lechner 2004, p. 407)
3.4 Neotraditionalism

Different scholars have used the notion of Neotraditionalism in order to describe the ideology of traditionalist revival. It has been seen as both a positive force related to the survival of indigenous practices and way of life (e.g. Pika 1999) and as a creation which leads to increased inequalities and new oppressions and power inequalities (e.g. Rata 2000).

Rata (2000) has applied the concept in order to analyze Maori tribalism in New Zealand. In her view a crucial aspect of the ideology of neotraditionalism is the re-creation of the traditional ideology as contesting the modern that does not confine with indigenous social reality. Three different aspects of the invented dichotomy are defined by the author: (1) Romanticisation of a traditional past, which is seen as an ideal way of life and opposed to the modernized fragmentation of social relations (2) The resistance by indigenous communities to this materialized modernity is seen as having a higher moral value, and (3), Indigenous knowledge and culture is seen as belonging to the perceived rightful owners, i.e. members of the tribal society. This unity is often described in ethnic terms, sometimes touching biological undertones where ethnicity alone offers a rightful membership into the culture (Rata 2000, p. 46-50). According to Rata, this creation of identity is a strategy that must be judged not by the criteria of its authenticity but rather be seen in relation to its connection to political interests involved in this creation. She argues that traditional societies “://never functioned as set pieces in a timeless ‘natural’ order with disturbances coming only from outside” (Rata 2000, p. 48). In her analysis she argues that the ideology of neotraditionalism can create a legitimizing framework for what she describes as neotribal capitalism, where modern tribes are organizing capital accumulation. This is according to Rata leading to the recreation of contemporary class-relationships in pre-colonial terms. Neotraditionalism has thus “://shaped the form of the global universalizing force of late capitalism into a local version of capitalism through the dialectical interaction of the global and the local, and secondly, it reified the exploitative
class relations of neotribal capitalism in the form of nonexploitative communal relations of production” (Rata 2000, p. 43).

Contrary to the malign tendencies of revival that Rata (2000) has presented, Pika (1999) has in his studies of indigenous peoples of Northern Russia argued that neotraditionalism is a positive strategy to overcome the failed state policy of modernism. Distinctive features of socioeconomic development and inadequate polices have worsened the situation for indigenous people and structural disadvantages arise when people are leaving their traditional lifestyles. Changes that have not contributed to the welfare of the people constitute the ground for traditional revival. Neotraditionalism in the view of Pika (1999) incorporates the use of traditional social and economic practices, kinship-based decision-making, cultural premises of indigenous rights and native self-government. The prefix neo in this context suggest that the re-emergence of traditions is not to be equated with moving back in time. Instead it should be seen as a strategy which could be argued is pluralistic: “/ the new ‘traditionalism’ does not mean a return to the past. It is a forward looking development, though one which attends to the specific nature of northern regions and its people” (ibid p. 23). Instead of being malign Pika argues that neotraditionalism is a way forward for indigenous communities to evolve and flourish. Through a continuation of kinship-based decision-making, revival of cultural distinctiveness and traditional activities such as fishing and hunting, the indigenous communities can maintain their culture and traditions while ensuring economic survival. Instead of fostering another economic basis of life the traditional, sustainable, lifestyle should be encouraged and supported for the benefit of local people (Pika 1999).

According to Friedman, culture should be seen as a phenomenon and cultural processes understood as embedded in life space and social experiences that in themselves should be subject to analysis. Revival should be seen as a political ideology that combines “cultural identity with a culturally defined resistance towards “civilization” (Friedman 1994, p. 44). Friedman argues that tradition, primitivism, modernism and
postmodernism are all constituent poles of the modern, and neither before nor after the world we inhabit. Instead, these poles have always been represented in society but with different strength depending on the cycles of hegemony. In his view we can see a fragmentation of identity in the contemporary world. This crisis is based on weakening national identities and the emergence of other types of identities, based on primordial loyalties, ethnicity, local community, language and other cultural forms. The identity fragmentation is by Friedman the consequences of a beginning shift in hegemonic world system. The West is in hegemonic decline and new global powers such as China and India are possible rising hegemonic centers. The retreat to the past and cultural expressions is described as a logical product of a decline of the modernist pole of Western identity and celebration of ritual and the past is upheld as liberation from the prison of modernity itself (Friedman 2006, p. xiii). The decline of Western hegemony and following emphasis on cultural identity is not something that has occurred suddenly during the last decade; it should, according to Friedman, be seen as a gradual process from the mid-70's and onwards. Modernism has been a future orientation and the dominant theme during the last and present century but the decline of western hegemony forms the basis of retraction into roots and identity politics. The past represents stability in an unstable world and is (at least theoretically) not changing although restored to suit specific needs (Friedman 2006, p. xiii).

From these given exposés over neotraditionalism we can see that there are different ways of interpreting the phenomena and its possible consequences. Later on we will continue the debate about revival in a Vanuatu context, but first a short introduction to the country is deemed needed.
4. Vanuatu – brief background information

The contemporary situation in Vanuatu and present socioeconomic and political conditions cannot be properly understood without explaining a bit about the country and its history. Thus, a short background to the country and certain key notions will be presented.

4.1 An (almost) interconnected world

Vanuatu is a politically independent republic consisting out of around 65 inhabited islands located in Melanesia approximately 1700 kilometers north-east of Brisbane in Australia with a population of 235,000 inhabitants (ADB 2009). Despite its small size it is one of the world’s most linguistically and culturally rich countries and possesses twice as many cultures and languages as the entire Europe (Huffman 2005, p. 30). In addition to Bislama, the pidgin lingua franca, the official languages are English and French. Local languages are symbols of identity but not promoted in formal education. Christianity in various forms is the main religion together with various traditional beliefs (Baldauf & Kaplan 2006, p. 154-167).

Located in the Pacific Ocean, without bordering other countries and physically far from the global markets, the country’s interaction with other nations has been limited. However, with increased tourism the country has recently been increasingly exposed to globalizing forces. Vanuatu is GDP-wise one of the poorest countries in the world but has

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9 In this thesis, I will use the definition of culture as proposed by Lindstrom and White (1994, p. 3): “Culture is a system of more-or-less shared, more-or-less conscious, knowledge and understanding by which people organize how they live together”.

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over the last nine years become one of the fastest growing economies in the Pacific. An economic boom started in 2003 and the country has experienced an average annual growth of 6%, mainly driven by increased tourism, aid inflows and property development (ADB 2009, p. 7). The government has intentions of sustaining this growth, which has outperformed most other developing Pacific countries. A believed step towards this goal includes making the country more business-friendly for private sector development and the country recently opened up for competition in the airline industry and the telecommunications sector (ibid). The government is further emphasizing its own role in creating a facilitating environment for domestic and international investors (Bowman et.al 2009, p. 3). Foreign investments are attracted by a liberal tax regime and sound macroeconomic management, which has meant a rapid increase in GDP. However, the economic growth is almost exclusively found in the urban areas, mainly in the capital Port Vila, and has not made much impact on the lives of the majority of Ni-Vanuatu that live in rural areas far from the emerging urban centers (ADB 2009, p. vii). The employment rate is low, the micro business sector overcrowded and most Ni-Vanuatu have few opportunities to participate in the formal economy. As a result of this, the economic inequality between the urban and the rural population is growing (AusAid 2008, p. ix).

4.2 The Legacy of Colonialism

Vanuatu has a long history of foreign rule. The country became known to the Europeans in the 17th century when the Spanish explorer de Quiros anchored at one of the islands, which he named Espiritu Santo. Other European explorers, mainly from France and England, later followed De Quiros and in 1774 Captain James Cook gave the islands the name *The New Hebrides*, which would remain until the country gained independence in 1980. Whalers and traders that exploited the archipelago for sandalwood and other resources then followed the explorers. The labor trade started in New Caledonia 1857 and later extended to Fiji and Queensland. This trade was known as blackbirding and it is estimated that around 40,000 to 61,000 Ni-Vanuatu left to work in Australia during
this time (Forsyth 2009, p. 1). Other early arrivals were Christian missionaries, starting with the Presbyterians and the later arrival of Catholics and Anglicans determined to convert the natives. Traditional practices such as dancing and pig killings were by the missionaries seen as the darkness of heathenism and something that needed to be abolished. The followers of traditional beliefs often reacted with opposition against the church and missionaries were sometimes victims of cannibalism (Forsyth 2009, p. 11).

In the 19th century the country was subject to both French and British settlements, primarily involved in the plantation industry that they established mainly on the southern and central islands. The pressure from French and British settlers and missionaries resulted 1906 in the Condominium; a joint rule between Great Britain and France. This divided the diverse population further into Anglophones and Francophones and the rivalry between France and Britain led to separate police forces, medical services, juridical systems and school systems. Vanuatu is the only country that has experienced such unique colonial arrangement between Great Britain and France for an extended period of time (Forsyth 2009, p. 2). It is also one of the last countries in the pre-colonial world to be colonized by a European power since the condominium was not established until 1906 (Baldauf & Kaplan 2006, p. 154). Miles (1998) presents the remarks made by the British representative at the time concerning the Condominium:

“We meet today to make history. We are, today, starting a remarkable and absolutely new experiment in the joint yet separate administration by two great Powers on one area. . . . Henceforward Frenchmen and Englishmen will live intermingled, each enjoying the benefit of the laws of his own nation and . . . both joining together to rule the natives of these islands” (O’Connell as cited by Miles 1998, p. 33).

Discontent with the two ruling powers among the indigenous population was however bubbling underneath the surface. Several parties were created, often paired up with Francophones on one side and Anglophones on the other. The call for independence was sparked by disputes over land alienation that had been starting before the
Condominium. Land became the catalyst for the national movement that would lead the country towards independence in 1980 (Forsyth 2009). The English-speaking, church-based Vanua’aku Pati (VP) was the leading party in the independence movement and Walter Lini, the leader of the party, became the founding father of the new nation “Vanuatu” (Forsyth 2009).

4.3 Customary ownership of land and the recent land boom

Landownership was as we have seen one of the main triggers for the independence movement in Vanuatu. With independence, land was returned to traditional owners and customary landholding entrenched in the constitution that states that: “all land in the Republic of Vanuatu belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendents” (Constitution of Vanuatu, Article 73). According to the constitution land can’t be alienated permanently and no freehold exists. It is however possible to lease the land for a long period of time, up to 75 years (Bowman et.al 2009, p. 47). Customary ownership of land is still the dominant form of tenure in contemporary Vanuatu. Indigenous systems of ownership of land and land use in Vanuatu are complex and often considered to be clan or community based. The right to land depends upon memory culture, inheritance practices, oral histories and multifaceted social categories (Bowman et.al 2009 p. 11.). In most parts of the country the land rights are patrilineal although there exists matrilineal landholding societies in for example northern Pentecost. However, even in matrilineal societies the women does not necessarily have the control over the management and use of land (ibid). Matters have further become gradually more complicated by intermarriage, adoptions, movement of people and cultural changes (Farran 2002, p. 216).

Although most land in Vanuatu is under customary ownership the country is currently going through a land boom. There is a growing demand from investors for access to customary land and the real-estate sector has become a new magnet for investment (AusAid 2008, p. 21). Especially New Zealand and Australia are marketing Vanuatu as a
destination that is ideal for retirement and holiday. Already, 90 % of the coastal land on the main island of Efate is alienated and similar trends are found on other islands such as Espiritu Santo and Epi (ibid). The World Bank states that the recent land boom is depending on the ability to use land as an economic resource (Bowman et.al 2009). However, contemporary land registration is complicated since the land registry is not computerized and multiple claims of ownership are often laid on the same plot of land. While the intention with individual titling of land was to facilitate private investment and resolve conflicts regarding land, the initiative has been opposed from various directions since it is argued that it will create tension between people and only benefit the already wealthy (Simo 2006).

4.4 The Political and Legal System(s)

The political system in Vanuatu has been characterized by instability and is described as fragmentary and unstable (AusAid 2007, p. ix). Fierce infighting and coalitions make the system fragile. Political competition is often based on patronage which fuels corruption and politics is deeply influenced by cultural norms. Politicians are under constant pressure to provide material benefits to their voters since the traditional system is built upon reciprocity between leaders and communities (ibid, p. 25). In contemporary Vanuatu two legal systems can be seen as operating simultaneously; the formal legal system derived from the colonial powers and the customary system that is based on traditional rules and customary dispute resolutions. Only a minority of the disputes is dealt with in the Supreme Court. Most conflicts are either handled by Island Courts10 or informally by chiefs (Bowman et.al 2009, p. 64). The traditional law does not make a distinction between civil and criminal matters and compensation or punishment and its aim is argued to be restoration of peace and harmony in the society. However, the ways the two legal systems operate are not clear-cut and formal law and customary law often overlap and interact with each other (Forsyth 2009, p. xvii).

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10 Island Courts could be seen as operating on a community level with person(s) of status acting as judge(s)
4.5 Kastom

*Kastom*, a term deriving from the lingua franca Bislama, is an important notion in Vanuatu and could in easy terms be understood as describing everything that Ni-Vanuatu perceive as belonging to themselves. *Kastom* is similar to the word *custom* in English and could be understood to denote practices perceived as deriving from a pre-colonial past. This past and its knowledge and practice are very diverse, considering the number of languages and sub-cultures in the country (Bolton 2003). An exact definition of the term is thus difficult to identify since its meaning varies with time and space. Bolton has provided the following description of the expression: “*Kastom is the word that people in Vanuatu use to characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place*” (Bolton 2003, p. xiii).

In Vanuatu there has been a focus on *kastom* that dates back to colonial times. Throughout the independence movement there was a particular use of the notion by indigenous protagonists that were involved in pro-independence politics (Rousseau 2004, p. 27). Perceived traditional markers of *kastom*, such grade-taking to receive chiefly titles and traditional clothing, were used by what has been denominated as *kastom*-movements. Nagriamel was one of those, founded by Jimmy Stevens in the 1960’s. Stevens explicitly opposed European ways of living and made a point of manifesting *kastom* in practice. He took many ranks and also exchanged pigs and practiced polygamy in order to create ties with other groups (Bolton 2003, p. 15). *Kastom* as an identity marker was also used by the English-speaking, church-based Vanua’aku Pati (VP) which in 1971 claimed their main aim to be promotion, revival, and encouragement of New Hebridean culture (Rousseau 2004). The Vanua’aku Pati was concerned with creating an identity for islanders that would distinguish them from the colonial powers and give the country a sense of unity. Various accounts from this period argue that VP’s promotion of national awareness used *kastom* as a tool in order to create a distinctive non-European identity, “thus creating a national version of *kastom* that moved away from its “actual” meaning” (Rousseau 2004, p. 29).
By looking at history we can thus see that *kastom* and tradition has been politicized by various groups, and that perceived traditional items and expressions have been used as identity markers; both for nationalistic purposes, in order to reach independence from a colonial power, and as a unifying force for various groups with different agendas. Later on we will continue the debate about contemporary views on *kastom* but first a short introduction to certain key concepts in Vanuatu will be introduced in order to explain more about the country and its social and political setting.

### 4.6 Chiefs

In contemporary Vanuatu, chiefs are often described as traditional leaders with the right to speak for *kastom*. Throughout the archipelago there was, and is, a concern with rank and status, even if the forms vary depending on the local culture. Even if there historically has been various forms of traditional leadership in Vanuatu, the term “chief” and its meaning today (leaders often by heritage with power and authority over a community) is by many scholars seen as construction, introduced by the colonial process (Forsyth 2009, p. 80). Nevertheless, at present chiefs are often perceived as the main authorities at a local level and responsible for law and order, especially on the outer islands where the state has little influence. Most chiefs are men even if there are female chiefs\(^\text{11}\) and female leadership in matriarchal societies\(^\text{12}\) (Bowman et al 2009, p. 21).

### 4.7 The Malvatumauri and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS)

The Vanuatu Council of Chiefs, the Malvatumauri, was introduced in 1983 as advisory body to the government after independence. With its foundation, chiefs were defined as representatives of the indigenous and able to give advice to the parliament regarding

\(^{11}\) See e.g. Hilda Lini

\(^{12}\) See e.g. the island Epi
kastom matters. Bolton (1998) states that with the creation of the Malvatumauri the chiefs embodied (perceived) pre-colonial knowledge and practices. The Malvatumauri comprises chiefs from every region in Vanuatu that are elected every fourth year. Meetings are held two times a year and the council has produced a policy on kastom with 40 articles covering various aspects of life and issues such as land, sorcery and ceremonies (Bolton 2003). This Custom Policy of the Malvatumauri is a documented attempt to revive and strengthen local customs and practices and to encourage customary laws that are deemed applicable to the entire nation. It is covering a variety of issues such as language preservation, rules regarding land issues, inheritance, adultery and other aspects of human life. The role of the Malvatumauri has so far been to give recommendations and advise to the government regarding all matters concerning kastom (Forsyth 2009).

While the Malvatumauri has been seen as representing kastom on a national and political stage the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) has been described as the promoter of kastom on a local, often rural, level (Bolton 2003, p. 44). VKS is a statutory body under the laws of Vanuatu that was founded in the 1960’s. The organization had, and has, as its primary function to “support, encourage and make provision for the preservation, protection and development of various aspects of the cultural heritage of Vanuatu” (VKS 2007). The organization receives funding both from the government and various bodies such as UNESCO to realize its projects (ibid). In 1985, a few years after independence, the VKS imposed moratorium over all research done by expatriates’ within the social science field. Instead there was an increased focus on locally developed research and basic training for fieldworkers through workshops were different ways of maintaining and developing kastom was debated in a time of economic and social change (Bolton 2003). The moratorium was abolished in 1994 but the center continues to encourage local participation. The system of permanent fieldworkers that work voluntarily to document, maintain and develop kastom in their respective community is growing every year (VKS 2007)

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13 Published 1983 as the fundamentals of kastom and culture in the republic of Vanuatu, see Lindstrom and White (1999) for further articles and sections.
5. Result and Analysis

This chapter includes the combination of the results and the analysis of the fieldwork, based upon the theoretical points of departure chosen for this study. Quotes from the interviews will be used in order to present the views of the informants. The result and analysis will be constructed under two headlines with subchapters. These headlines are:

- Neotraditionalism: the revival of tradition and the discourse of identity in Vanuatu.
- Towards a Museum, New Middle Age, or a Sustainable Future? - Implications of a neotraditional ideology and resurgence to tradition.

5.1 Neotraditionalism: the revival of tradition and the discourse of identity in Vanuatu

This chapter aims at answering the first research question of this thesis. It will therefore first concentrate on identifying revivalist tendencies in contemporary Vanuatu, to then continue with a discussion about how we can understand present expressions of revival.

5.1.1 Tendencies of revival in contemporary Vanuatu

In the view of Lindstrom and White (1994), culture and tradition are increasingly invoked in national politics and governmental plans in the Pacific and leaders from various Pacific nations have to a growing extent been calling to attention the importance of customs in order to raise feelings of national identity and belongingness (Lindstrom & White 1994, p. xvii). According to Kolig, culture and politics are often inseparable in the contemporary world. Culture is not only a tool for collective self-awareness but it also functions as an activist ingredient that is driving social discourse (Kolig 2006, p. 37).
In Vanuatu there was an observable focus on tradition in the public discourse among the local politicians and officials, exemplified in a quote from the Prime Minister Sato Kilman:

“As the Prime Minister I would like to see that any new changes of government, it must be the one that recognises our cultural heritage and based on our tradition and values” (Vanuatu Daily Post 2011). Contemporary politicians are also involved in taking chiefly ranks\textsuperscript{14}, which could be argued a step to consolidate their status as traditional as well as modern leaders.

5.1.2 Strengthening of Chiefs

In present times there have further been various calls for strengthening of chiefly structures in the country. In the contemporary discourse about tradition and \textit{kastom}, it was often argued that the chiefly system was the old, domestic form of governance, which had been discouraged by the missionaries. To strengthen this form of rule was seen as a step towards greater self-reliance and preservation of culture. One example includes the Malvatumauri Customary Land workshop held by the National Council of Chiefs in Port Vila in 2011. This workshop was aiming at providing the government with chiefly insights on land issues and its main message was to “\textit{strengthen custom governance through tribes and clans and intends to clarify chiefly titles in all areas of the country}” as well as “\textit{remove the power of the Lands Minister to sign leases where there are ownership disputes}” (Makin 2011, p. 1).

\textsuperscript{14} I had the opportunity to observe when the Prime Minister took one of the highest chiefly ranks one can receive in Malakula, “Melteklivtuvanu” by killing a pig with a curved tusk (28/1/2011). This pig was moreover fed by the family that I stayed with at Uripiv and I got a closer look at his valuable circled tusks before he was used in this ceremony.
The workshop presented 19 recommendations for the government, which included the transcription of custom rules and law as well as the restoration of custom authorities and a call for reinstating them to their “rightful position” (ibid). The traditional system, perceived as deriving from pre-colonial times, was seen as a functioning, legitimate form of governance. A quote from Chief Selwyn Garu (the CEO of the National Council of Chiefs) expresses this view: “The chief had authority and responsibilities towards his people. It worked. The system worked” (Makin 2011, p. 1).

In Vanuatu, kastom often seen as something that had been lost but also possible to revive and revitalize into its previous forms: “In many areas of Vanuatu, kastom is alive and well; in many areas it is under threat from new fundamentalist missionary sects, or potential logging activities; and in others it is only ‘sleeping’, waiting to reawaken and fly like the sacred hawk that inspires high-ranking men” (Bonnemaison 1996, p. 96).

5.1.3 Turaga- kastom movement of today

Turaga, a kastom-based movement currently active in contemporary Vanuatu, is another example of revivalist tendencies in the country. This indigenous movement has its roots in the 50’s and has been expressing the perceived need to revive Melanesian customs in Vanuatu. The movement thus initiated its own traditional banking and educational system in order to support the traditional forms of exchange and to teach Melanesian indigenous knowledge. The movement further established its own institute in 1997. The main aim of the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology is to "preserve, teach and promote Melanesian indigenous values" (Lini 2000, p. 7). The institute was founded on the grounds that the indigenous educational system is the most appropriate for Vanuatu because it “safeguards respect, human values, leadership qualities and economic empowerment for self reliance” (Lini 2000, p. 7). The movement also has its own alphabet, Avoiuli15, intended to create and indigenous alternative to the Western script.

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15 Avoiuli is based on sand drawings, and could be written in one single stroke. It is further possible to read the script in both directions.
5.1.4 The Malvatumauri and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre as strong promoters of kastom

The strongest driving force behind what could be described as a neotraditional ideology seemed to be the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Malvatumauri. Interviewees from these bodies all argued for the importance of reviving and maintaining certain traditional aspects of life and saw the encouragement of traditional lifestyle as a way to be self-sufficient, maintain cultural values and promote national identity. According to Lindstrom and White (1994) the VKS has been the country’s strongest advocate of kastom and the interviewees for this thesis all saw preserving and revitalizing various traditional aspects of life as essential for a future sustainable development of the country. During an informal lunch with a foreign anthropologist it was stated, “everyone knows that ...without the cultural center there would be no kastom” (Port Vila 17/1/11).

One of the most common initiatives by the VKS and its field workers has been “the reconstruction and revival of certain rituals from living memory into performance and contemporary life” (Regenvanu 2009, p. 4). Other initiatives of revival regard organization of festivals, where the participants learn about traditional cultural expressions such as songs, practices and rituals (Regenvanu 2009). Additional attempts includes the by the VKS encouragement of the traditional economy, manifested in the earlier mentioned Traditional Money Banks in Vanuatu Project (Huffman 2005). According to Van Tease, “the use of custom currencies has been gaining greater prominence” (Van Tease 2010, p. 6) and the government also supported this revival by denominating the years of 2007 and 2008 as the year of the traditional economy (ibid). There have also been attempts to introduce this currency as a payment for school fees and medical treatment in an effort to provide governmental services for people that are

\[\text{16} \quad \text{While this implies that the kastom discourse owns a lot to the work of the VKS and that culture in Vanuatu (as anywhere in the world) could be seen as a construction, I agree with Rousseau (2004) that it doesn’t serve much point to discuss the “(in)authenticity of kastom or its relationship to a “real” body of tradition” (Rousseau 2004, p. 20). What is of interest though is the way the discourse is used and understood by people at different levels of society.}\]
not earning cash income. However, since what is perceived as traditional wealth varies among the islands this initiative has (so far) been restricted to food, that is valuable for all cultures, and which also could be used by students and teachers. A current problem is however, according to one representative from the cultural center, that many families today are not producing enough traditional currency to pay for the fees in this way. Thus, to encourage people to produce more traditional wealth was seen as an important step in order to support this form of exchange (Port Vila 4/1/11).
5.1.5 Incorporating traditional knowledge in the school system

Various efforts have further recently been made by the VKS to reform the school system in order to incorporate traditional elements such as gardening, traditional craft skills and traditional resource management (Regenvanu 2002). The contemporary “modern” or “western” educational system was not only seen as ill fitting, but also a cause of contemporary problems. By giving youths a bureaucratic education, it was argued that the present system encouraged urban drift and provided the students with skills that they only could use in the “modern economy” and the scarce office jobs in urban areas (Port Vila 4/1/11). As stated by Regenvanu: “the formal education system is perhaps the single biggest contributing factor to the erosion of our tradition-based culture today” (Regenvanu 2002, p. 1). UNESCO (2011) has recently supported a pilot project driven by the VKS in order to redesign the science curriculum and integrate indigenous knowledge. As stated by the organization: “By presenting indigenous and scientific knowledge systems side-by-side, it is hoped that the youth of Vanuatu will feel pride in their indigenous cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2011, p. 1).

At an organizational and political level there is thus arguable that a neotraditionalism in its core sense, meaning revival of indigenous practices and cultures, is present in the country. Tradition and kastom has been part of official policies, and cultural politics has been accounted for when it comes to social, economic and political development. The next subchapter will continue the discussion of revivalist tendencies in the country and how kastom and tradition is perceived at other levels of society.

5.1.6 Views on tradition and kastom among other strata of the population

Lindstrom and White (1994) have further argued that people of today are increasingly aware and self-conscious about their way of life and that there is a growing debate about tradition and culture at a local level among ordinary people in Pacific nations. This appears to be the case also in Vanuatu where kastom had a lot of public support. However, there is also a need to contrast the debate and acknowledge that there are
different ways of describing the meaning of *kastom* and thus the importance the notion has for people. As argued by Schröder, tradition as an ideology is an “idea that is out there to be filled with meaning; and it means different things to different constituencies” (Schröder 2003, p. 450). From the material collected for this thesis it seems like the strongest proponents for revival of tradition were found among the educated, urban strata. There also seemed to be a certain discrepancy between how rural, elderly people described *kastom* and the feelings young, urban informants attached to the notion.

5.1.7 Kastom in rural areas

Keesing (1996) has argued that there exists a realm of lived cultural continuity as a part of the everyday life in the Pacific, beyond the field of represented and rhetoricized tradition. In the case of Vanuatu, most rural inhabitants practice subsistence living and thus what could be described as a traditional lifestyle. While this is indeed their lived reality, the importance of *denominating* these practices as *kastom* did not seem to be of very high importance among rural inhabitants. The debate about *kastom* did not seem to stir strong emotions and discussions held about the notion often referred to concrete traditional items, such as weaving baskets, certain ceremonies relating to circumcisions and weddings and the role of community chiefs. By several elders, *kastom* seemed to relate to old rules that now have changed. In a discussion with elderly men it was stated:

“Before there were more kastom rules, a man could not smoke the same cigarette as his brother and they could not sit next to each other. But many of these rules are now gone. Children tend to lose kastom. The youths have a new style and women wear trousers and drink kava, that was tabu before” (Nambahuk 25/12/10).

An elderly man in another village further said: “*kastom is not so important now, before it was*” (Moniechhill, 27/12/10). Although it was expressed that *kastom* was being lost, as traditional societal rules were changing, these old men did not seem too upset about it.
They were, however, worried about the climate changes that made it impossible to grow Chinese cabbage due to increased temperatures. These changes in the environment they ascribed to the increased logging of local and foreign companies. Despite of these climate alterations, the village life was seen as providing everything they needed in terms of food and land was bountiful. An elderly man said with a laugh: “There is enough food for the people living there, even if you don’t work so much. You can relax. If you overwork you are just wasting food!” (Nambahuk 25/12/10). By another man it was however argued that life was easier before when people did not have as many needs for consumer goods. Especially the children, he said with a sigh, are not satisfied with local food; “they want to eat rice instead of taro now” (Moniecshill 27/12/10).

Rural young seemed moderately interested in discussing kastom, and many of them instead saw the urban, “modern” lifestyle as appealing. Young people were seen drawn to town in order study, do sports, take part in activities and “see nice girls”. As stated by a young man: Once they go, they don’t want to come back. They say that life in the islands is boring (Port Vila 10/12/10).

During my time at one of the outer islands I further had the opportunity to speak with a fieldworker from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre who was based there to raise awareness about kastom, especially regarding kastom clothes. She was very keen on learning the inhabitants about their cultural heritage, and I was told that the revival of kastom was a heavy work since “a lot of people, both young and old, don’t have a high knowledge about it” (Uripiv 27/1/11).
5.1.8 Kastom as a strong identity marker among urban young

Interestingly, and quite contrary to my own preconception about the issue, it seemed like the strongest emphasis on the importance of tradition and *kastom* was found among young urban dwellers that did not fully engage in what could be described as a traditional lifestyle themselves. These informants were formal workers and/or university students that had grown up in an urban area and the way they talked about the relevance of *kastom* in their lives could be argued located at a more abstract level than how the notion was discussed in rural areas. In the view of the young urban informants, *kastom* seemed to be a strong marker of identity rather than relating to time-honored practices. Instead of describing certain traditional rules and items *kastom* was portrayed as a form of salvation and a guiding principle for the continuation of a rightful society: “*Kastom is our identity, who we are. It is connected to respect. We learn social rules through kastom from older generations. Hopefully it can continue like this, peaceful, if we maintain kastom*” (Port Vila 6/12/10).

*Kastom* was further perceived as something fragile that needed to be protected and enhanced against rapid changes in order to maintain social stability: “*kastom is getting lost faster than ever before*” argues one of the participants in a focus group with urban young and another informant fills in that “*we are crying helplessly to hold on to our kastom. Nobody knows the roadmap*” (Port Vila 7/12/10).

There was also an expressed desire among the majority of the urban youth to learn more about *kastom*. A young man expressed anger towards his father for not teaching him about traditions when he was young. When he grew up, he felt that other children knew about *kastom* and that he had missed out on something. He wished to have learned but argued that the decision was not up to him: “*It is related to how you were brought up*” (Port Vila 10/12/10). The urban young further took pride in eating local food instead of using imported goods. In their sense, older generations were not as dedicated to traditional life nor as keen to support the local market. As one young man puts it: “*Old
people want everything from town, they want to eat rice instead of local food\textsuperscript{17}, they don’t believe. I trust the traditional system (Port Vila 6/12/10).

In the same way as it could be argued that eating local food was perceived as a better choice among urban youth, drinking kava was frequently described as a preferred, traditional alternative to alcohol as a way of socializing with others. Words which came up during the discussions were that kava is related to making friends, stress relief, feeling the atmosphere while alcohol was seen as causing problems such as fights (Port Vila 6/12/10). It was also clearly stated by a young girl that: “young people today prefer kava rather than alcohol” (Port Vila 6/12/10). Thus it could be argued that the urban youths took pride in using traditional domestic goods and a stand against foreign food imports and commodities. The life at outer, less modernized, islands was further often upheld (at least theoretically) as an ideal among the urban youths and portrayed in almost purely positive terms. “Laef long aelan” (island life) was described as the “easy life” and “free life” without worries about food and bills. From these examples it is possible to argue that a certain romanticization of what is perceived as the traditional is present among the urban youths. Although alcohol is in many ways a stronger drug than kava\textsuperscript{18}, the social and medical risks with the domestic drug were often downplayed and the problems of island life overlooked. Modernization was to a large extent perceived as a malign force that was eroding traditional social stability and forcing people in to foreign structures where the community is no longer the base of society. Without traditional social ties and perceived traditional moral, such as respect, the country was seen as heading towards an uncertain future: “Modernization is changing a lot, it is changing social relations. Village community used to be a unit, now people are spread among the country and live separately. Some things can be done about this but you cannot stop it. It will increase and then it will be a war” (Port Vila 7/12/10).

\textsuperscript{17} Local food was described as food that was homegrown and not imported, often taro and yam.
\textsuperscript{18} Kava drinking is generally perceived as a calm, group event that doesn’t bring the hazardous consequences of alcohol. However, according to recent studies, it now appears that kava has its own set of social and medical problems. Observable in the field was that poor people often spend much money on this rather expensive drug and I have been leading friends home from the kava bar several times after a night of kava-drinking.
From the information given by the urban youths it could be argued that *kastom* was connected to loosely defined ideals about human relations and ethics that, rightly or wrongly, are associated with precedent times. The revival and strengthening of *kastom* thus meant the revival of perceived traditional moral such as respect, harmony and peace instead of the revival of for example concrete traditional activities. *Kastom* could thus be seen as vague, (but potentially powerful), ideas about how an ideal society should look like. The view that the urban youth presented of *kastom* does in many ways reassemble the way the VKS and the Malvatumauri have been driving the discourse as a way to be self-sufficient and take pride in one’s culture.
5.1.9 Roots of neotraditionalism in Vanuatu

There are different explanations on why revival of tradition and neotraditionalism arise. In assessing the roots of revival in Vanuatu it is of importance to frame the identified revivalist tendencies within the contemporary world and the wider aspects of globalization processes. The country has until recently has been rather peripheral to global forces due to its limited inclusion into the world economy and its physical isolation in the Pacific (both from each other and neighboring countries). Recent forces have introduced the country to a globalizing neoliberal capitalist economic system and the government has been dedicated to follow neoliberal market policies. This, coupled with an absence of functioning regulatory systems and enforcements, has according to Trau (2012) led to increasing social inequalities between expatriates and Ni-Vanuatu. This disproportion of wealth was clearly observable in the field, where foreign investors were building large mansions next to local shacks.

In the view of Rata (2003), any retraction to the traditional should be seen as a broader worldwide phenomenon in reaction to the recent crisis of global capitalism. The contraction of the global economic expansion from the 60’s and onwards triggered a loss of faith in modernity and the traditional thus represents a form of safety in an unsecure world. Harsh capitalism and the “destabilizing processes and psychological uncertainties that characterize globalization” (Rata 2001, p. 169) have led people to escape into archaic forms and “neotraditionalism offers the hope that political equality exists in a revived communality” (Rata 2003, p. 56). With increased impoverishment and disempowerment, Rata (2003) has argued that many Maori sought refuge to revivalism.
In a Vanuatu context, there seemed to be a joint feeling among urban dwellers (foremost young adults) that the traditional lifestyle offered a security net when the modernizing policies of the state were not able to provide for the people:

“The government is helping business people to buy land and they never give support to the people if they for example have sold their land and have nothing or if they are unemployed. There is no safety net” (Port Vila 6/12/10).

Pika (1999) argues that preservation of tradition should be seen as a form of salvation from the non-inclusiveness of modernizing state policies. Where local people have not been consulted by reorganizations, “planned sociocultural changes brought feelings of resentment and helplessness” (Pika 1999, p. xxxix). Neoraditionalism therefore constitutes a way for addressing social problems and protect minority interests that might be in conflict with for example industrial development (ibid). In Vanuatu, it was often argued by the educated strata of the population that the current economic restructuring by the government was bringing malign changes to the society, foremost by the increased land leases, that brought outside capital and power and carried with it increased cleavages and conflicts. While the recent land boom has contributed to a large growth in GDP, it has been fueled by the increasing tourism activity and mainly contributed to the building of luxurious hotels and infrastructure surrounding these complexes. The majority of the local people have thus not benefited from this development that to a high extent is found in the urban centers. Even in the capital, most people are not taking part in the advantages that capitalism brings and are still living under basic conditions. Poverty was seen as an increasing problem in urban areas, were one is depending on the cash economy in order to survive. As argued by a young urban dweller:

“People in Vanuatu are poor in terms of money, but they have land and food. People in Port Vila are poor because they don’t have land, nor food or money” (Port Vila 10/12/10).
According to Schröder (2003), the approaches people have to tradition should be seen as reassembling their position in the social space. The contemporary revivalist tendencies in Vanuatu seemed to be stronger in urban areas; arguably since the negative impact of globalization forces have been more pervasive there. Young urban adults, who according to this thesis were the strongest adherents of what could be described as a neotraditional ideology, could be argued having a vulnerable position in society. With their modern education and lifestyle, they are not taking part in the village life and thus have to compete for the scarce urban jobs available. In the same time, they do not have an easy access to the global world outside of Vanuatu. By older generations, it was often argued that urban young were rootless: “Youths are culturally neutral, they are floating. They know a little bit about their culture but not everything” (12(12/10). Thus, in the search for roots and belongingness in an uncertain world, the appeal of a shared culture and a, perceived peaceful, past is perhaps more appealing.

Davidson and Henley (2007) have also discussed the role of an international discourse on indigenous rights as a trigger for revivalist movements where global communications have linked thoughts and struggles with each other. Although Vanuatu is in many ways isolated the country is still affected by global currents and ideals of our time and is thus also influenced by events in the world today.
5.1.10 Short summary of the chapter

The aim of this chapter has been to identify contemporary tendencies of revival and discuss its potential causes. It has showed examples of contemporary revivalist tendencies in Vanuatu and the present focus on kastom in the public and political discourse, which could be seen as forming a neotraditional ideology in the country. The contemporary resurgence to tradition could be understood as a response to contemporary globalization processes that have failed to deliver continued progress as well as a worldwide loss of faith in the capacity of modernity to deliver continued progress. Revival should thus be seen as relating both to the actors involved in this creation as well as the structural conditions surrounding them. While it seems like the discourse is mainly driven by the VKS and the Malvatumauri, Friedman (1994) has argued all cultural creations are motivated but can only function if they reflect people's perception:

"The particular combination of elements that are integrated in a cargo cult, a Kastom movement, a religious sect or a nationalist or ethnic revolt can only function if they resonate with the experiences of the subjects that participate in them" (Friedman 1994, p. 13).

The question is then how we can interpret the possible implications of neotraditionalism. This will be further examined in the following chapter.
5.2. Towards a Museum, New Middle Age, or a Sustainable Future?

- Implications of a neotraditional ideology

This chapter aims at discussing the second research question about possible implications of revival and consequences of what seems to be a growing attention to culture and tradition. Is neotraditionalism a troublesome reactionary force or a constructive contribution to the development of the country? Is it contributing to a museification of culture, does it produce a negative form of development or is it perhaps a road towards greater justice? This chapter will try to elaborate upon this issue and is divided into three parts: 1). Creating a living Museum? 2). Towards a New Middle Age? and finally 3). Moving forward by looking back?

5.2.1 Creating a living Museum?

There has by some scholars been advocated that preservation of culture and tradition could impose a risk of driving a development that is locking people in to a time sealed condition. Tilley argues that this is one way of describing the revival of tradition, where the inhabitants become part of a “Pan-Pacific human zoo” (Tilley 1999, p. 254) and the relationship between the dominant and the dominated is reproduced in the post-colonial context. While the increasing amount of tourists might expect luxuries such as showers and electricity, “the rest of the island population should retain their traditional ways and not be seduced by such amenities” (Tilley 1999, p. 250). A museification approach to culture brings with it a static view of tradition where Ni-Vanuatu are seen as “noble savages” that should be protected from the evils of modernization and market capitalism. Tabani has argued that the series ‘People of Paradise”, made by the naturalist and documentary maker Attenboroug in the 50’s, helped towards “identifying the ‘natives’ of Melanesia and their cultures with their paradise-like environment: a pure world, inhabited by indigenous peoples uncontaminated by the ills of civilization” (Tabani 2010, p. 313) Series that could be argued exotifying Ni-Vanuatu have also been produced in a more contemporary context with ”Meet the natives” (2007) and “An idiot
abroad” (2011) where the indigenous population is portrayed as living an “ethnic life” wearing traditional clothes in their everyday life, producing a misleading picture of the contemporary Vanuatu.

Tabani (2010) has further debated that there exists a form of ‘neo-ritualizations’ of traditional elements in Vanuatu such as folk festivals and rituals and that kastom has been exploited commercially by the tourism industry. Tourism is the largest, growing industry in Vanuatu and employs a majority of the formal and informal working force, both in rural and urban areas. Arguably, a revivalist ideology could be seen as reflected in the tourism industry that to a large extent is built on cultural tourism, i.e. showcasing of traditions and rituals. Almost every hotel and resort is offering traditional dances and tourists can visit “kastom villages” where Ni-Vanuatu dress up in traditional ways with bare breasted women and men in penis wrappers performing dances and ceremonies for an increasing number of visitors. As the official Vanuatu tourism homepage states “To capture the complete Vanuatu experience, you MUST try a cultural or community tour” (Vanuatu Tourism Office 2009). Vermeylen (2008) is dreading that an exaggerated focus on tradition and cultural tourism is leading to exotification of people: “I would go as far as to claim that there is a danger that indigenous peoples will become occupants of an indigenous theme park, fulfilling the dream by those who are longing to an idealised past but as a result deny agency to indigenous peoples who: // want to be both traditional and modern: //” (Vermeylen 2008, p. 2).

The by global media and for tourism purposes driven promotion of kastom in Vanuatu has according to Tabani (2010) led to an increased monetarization in the villages which has been a factor for division and inequality at a local level. Information given from people interviewed for this thesis showed the double nature of showcasing traditions and rituals for tourists. On the one hand it was seen as a positive contribution to the local cash-economy and an incitement for the revival of cultural traditions and practices. On the other hand it was perceived as having the force to instead erode culture and kastom and changing its value by increased commercialization of culture. A rural VKS
fieldworker was emphasizing the contribution to revival that tourism has and stated that tourist come to Vanuatu to see *kastom* and therefore it is important to keep these traditions vivid (Uripiv 27/1/11). On the contrary, a group of middle-aged men in the capital city argued that cultural tourism was a deteriorating force that changed the very essence of *kastom*: “*White people can come and visit the village and they kill a pig. They give a kastom title to a foreigner which will not know the name or the meaning of the title, and who will not perform the responsibilities connected to the title. The tourists pay for this. Instead of traditional value there is a commercial value*” (Port Vila 5/1/11).

Cultural tourism is a vital part of the tourism industry in Vanuatu and could indeed be argued spreading and encouraging a museification approach to culture. This together with revivalist tendencies from various directions could perhaps be contributing to the creation of a “living museum”. However, from the material collected from this thesis I would agree with Tilley (1999) that there is a fundamental difference between putting on a show for tourists and for the performers to be full-time representatives for a time-sealed image. Showcasing tradition could also mean self-reflection and creation of a picture of oneself that you want others to see. According to Tilley this image “*is self-consciously not of Western modernity, but of a vibrant culture independent of it*” (Tilley 1999, p. 257). While it can be argued that the global tourism industry has a large part in sustaining a rather deceptive image of the indigenous population of Vanuatu there further seemed to be an interest in keeping this image by Ni-Vanuatu themselves that made a living out of this industry. When visiting a so-called *kastom village* I was told that “*kastom hasn’t changed at all*” (Mae 27/1/11) and that performing traditional dances and such for tourists was strengthening *kastom*. The performers in the *kastom villages* visited for this thesis did not live these lives in reality; rather they put on a show for tourists. Bolton has further argued that revival often is directed towards certain aspects of life that are deemed vulnerable rather than an entire way of life (Bolton 2003, p. 148).

Singh (2003) is however expressing a warning that tourism will be the guiding force of revival, where only items and practices that are potentially attractive to visitors will be
sustained, thus creating a “fake culture”. In this trap, the increased modernization and transformation of local culture will in eventually lead to neutralization and with this the reduction of a distinctive identity “and, thereby, its special attractiveness” (Singh et.al 2003, p. 61). Perhaps this is a potential future danger for Vanuatu. So far the country has been rather isolated and by showing “the kinds of expectations anticipated and generated by brochures and guidebooks: unaltered and ancient customs” (Tilley 1999, p. 252) people have been able to reap some of the fruits of capitalism. This “opportunity” might not last forever. However, in the view of Tilley, revivalism, “authentic” or not, promotes self reflectivity: Through constructing this past, people are better able to talk about themselves to themselves and through this secure a place in the global future (Tilley 1999, p. 259).

5.2.2 Towards a New Middle Age?

According to Rata (2003) contemporary revival is mistakenly often framed as a ‘natural’ occurrence where revivalism is seen as a restoration of a more humane, traditional society and the return to (perceived) pre-colonial forms. In her view, the contemporary neotraditionalism has however not been leading towards a more equitable future as claimed by its proponents. Instead, the turbulence and rapid change due to a contraction of global economy has opened up a space for emerging elites who used post-colonial theory as a self-serving ideology.

Rata (2005) argues that neotraditionalism has helped to legitimize neotribal capitalism, characterized by absence of private ownership of the means of production where the tribe rather than the individual is the owner of resources. Contrary to the argued goal of social justice, this has led to enhancement of class relations which by the neotraditionalist ideology are reified as communal social relations, neglecting the internal inequalities of a tribal society (Rata 2000, p. 33). The inequality of political and social relations of traditional societies then works in conjunction with the exploitative economic relations inbuilt in capitalism. The strong collective pressure of tribalism,
leading to a declining individualism and the desire for roots, is by Rata possibly creating a "New Middle Age", characterized by oppressive social and economic structures (Rata 2003, p. 1).

In a Vanuatu context it is possible to argue that the present revivalist tendencies are upholding the communal and the village structure as an ideal. Many informants dismissed private ownership on the base that it did not suit the local culture and traditional resources such as land were seen as belonging to the tribe or the village:

_We are against registration of land because in kastom the land is part of the clan, the family and the tribe and it is not an individual commodity. Ones you register land you take the land away from a traditional system to a legal system and the power is taken away from the family. If you keep the land in kastom it is still a part of us but ones it is registered it is a property of someone else_ (Port Vila 4/1/11). Rata (2003) is however dismissing claims that communal relations can coexist alongside with the class relations of a capitalistic society and argues, “the cultural strength of revivalism, with its characteristic communal relations, is unable to resist the imposition of capitalist class relations” (Rata 2003, p. 4).

As we have seen there have also been various attempts to strengthen chief structures and chiefly representation in various levels of governance in Vanuatu. In the view of Rata (2005, b), the contemporary revival of tradition gives these leaders a new position that cannot be compared to the traditional rule, thus their resurgence could not be seen as the restoration of previous organization. With the ongoing globalizing process that Vanuatu is experiencing it is arguable that the meaning and value of traditional resources is changing. With an increasing capitalist society land, water, art and other traditional resources are no longer only valuable for a subsistence lifestyle and for their cultural and spiritual significance: they also have a commercial value. According to Rata this means that tribes become owners of capitalisable property and thus economic corporations. The role of the leaders of such society is therefore changing as they are put in a structure that is fundamentally different from a traditional leadership position.
Through this process Rata argues that these leaders thus will become ruling capitalist elite (ibid).

In Vanuatu it was sometimes argued by older chiefs that the younger generations of today were taking chiefly ranks without fulfilling their duties to the community and that the process (and perhaps also incentives) of becoming a chief was changing. Ceremonies and steps that before took years were today done in a rapid pace. Instead of the lengthy procedures in the past, where other members of the community watched the behavior of a person and then decided that this particular individual was of “good material”, the young now approached the elders themselves and stated that they wanted to become chiefs or take the next step. According to one elderly chief, the young were able to pass through all the stages rapidly because they now had the (economical) resources to do it. He argued that these chiefs were abusing their name (i.e. their higher chiefly status) and not fulfilling the responsibilities connected to this quickly acquired rank (Port Vila 19/1/11). It was also argued that money instead of traditional resources was a growing mean of payment when foremost urban chiefs took a rank, often since traditional resources were difficult to obtain (Port Vila 20/1/11). The changes in chiefly ranks thus seem to have a connection with the increased monetarization in the country. According to the theory proposed by Rata, the hasty procedures by contemporary chiefs could be interpreted as a way for young people to use their resources to increase their power, thus showing signs of becoming a neotraditional capitalistic elite.

In a Vanuatu context, there are other tendencies that could be interpreted as signs of what Rata (2003) would describe as neotribal capitalism. According to Tabani, the iconic Nagol land diving ceremony19 on the island of Pentecost “is legally recognized as ‘work’

19 Nagol land diving ceremony is an initiation rite from Pentecost and can be seen as one of the first commercialization of culture in Vanuatu. Starting with the arrival of the photojournalist Kal Muller in the 1970s (in search of societies that were scarcely touched by “civilization”) the documentation of the tradition inspired Bong, a traditional chief of the village Bunlap, to set up “traditional activities” in his village for tourists (Tabani 2010 refers to Gourguechon, 1974 and Jolly, 1994). Although Bunlap was a pagan village and the Nagol considered a heathen practice, its success in gaining profits inspired the Christian villages in the south. Finally the church came to recognize traditional practices beneficial value
and the ‘tribal’ group is authorized to claim the exclusive rights on a collective production, as long as it can prove the reality of the cultural identity shared by the group managing its own creations” (Tabani 2010 p. 315). The tribe is thus the owner of the resources that has gone from being a cultural expression to a capitalisable property. This tribal ownership has according to Jolly (1994) been a root of conflict due to unequal distribution of the profits since people realized that some men got a higher amount than others and that women got less. In the view of Lindstrom and White (1994) the proprietary rights to own or control kastom expressions are now preformed in a new sphere: “No North Pentecost “chiefs” in the past would have presumed to control the export of a South Pentecost ritual” (Lindstrom and White p. 141).

The community ways of sharing the resources was further not always appreciated by the local community. During an informal conversation with a group of rural women that were part of the quite recently started New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme20, certain resentment was expressed over the fact that a part of the profit they earned was distributed to the village and the chief. One woman stated that the following year she intended to keep the money for her own family since she was the one doing the work (Uripiv 25/1/11).

The right to occupy an area is further often determined by the chiefs and land is almost without exception owned by men since Vanuatu is a highly patriarchal society:

“Even in parts of Vanuatu where inheritance is matrilineal, decision making about the land, including the transfer of rights to land, is generally a male domain” (ADB 2009, p. 52).

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20 The New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is a policy founded in 2007 that facilitates the entry of seasonal overseas workers within in the viticulture and horticulture industry in NZ.
Strengthening chiefly structures and tribal ownership of resources could therefore present a risk of locking women out from economic participation. According to studies made by Forsyth (2009) chiefs are often taking the man’s part at the expense of the woman in a dispute. A female friend also told me about examples where women have been running away from their abusive husband or an arranged marriage and the family have demanded that the chief send them back. Interviewed women for this thesis further argued that chiefs often were ill-equipped to handle issues such as women abuse, incest and sexual violence. There have also been cases where chiefs and pastors have fined women for not wearing an island dress\(^21\), claiming that *kastom* is under threat due to women’s choice of wearing pants or board shorts (ABC 2005).

In Vanuatu, the National Council of Chiefs further declared in 2005 that money should no longer be used when paying the bride price\(^22\) but the traditional forms of payment such as pigs, yams and mats were to be maintained (UN 2007). According to informants for this thesis, this step allowed for the continuous production of these items as well as maintenance of a cultural tradition. However, matters become complicated by the fact that the traditional gifts are also a form of payment. According to an interviewed chief it was stated that: “If you pay your wife with a full circle tusk\(^23\) she does not go back, no matter what” (Port Vila 28/1/11). In the view of Rata (2003), despite the tendencies by a revivalist ideology to romanticize communal relations and the family structure as the realm for human connectedness, “these forms of social organisation have long been sites for exploitative relations, particularly involving the exploitation of women and children” (Rata 2003, p. 231). In Vanuatu it could be argued that the traditional society does carry with it internal inequalities and that individual rights sometimes are in conflict with group norms. Traditional power structures are often disadvantaging women, and in

\(^{21}\) A colorful national costume and everyday-wear for women, covering shoulders and thighs, also known as Mother Hubbard dress, in itself subject to change where fashion shows regularly show the newest styles. See e.g. Rousseau (2004) for further analysis.

\(^{22}\) Equal to approximately 80,000 vatu (USD 1000).

\(^{23}\) A full circle tusk could be seen as the highest amount of traditional currency in many cultures in Vanuatu and is thus extremely valuable. See Bonnemaison (1996) for a further explanation.
those cases where the rule of chiefs could be argued oppressive their position might be difficult to alter since chiefly positions to a certain extent are inherited. *Kastom* in this sense could be maintaining patriarchal power structures and a social order that sometimes work at the expense of individual and women’s rights.

### 5.2.2.1 Neotraditionalism and Democracy

In the view of Rata (2003) neotraditionalism further has direct consequences for liberal democracy. Within the neotraditional ideology, Rata states that tribes are often depicted as communal and non-exploitative structures and the tribal leaders are seen to be performing in the best interests of the people. By focusing on a communal-self instead of individual-self the tribal system is inherently against the democratic system since the autonomous individual is one of the essential principles of democracy (Rata 2004, p. 74). Group rights cannot be equated with individual rights, an assumption commonplace within neotraditionalism (Rata 2003, p. 50). Kolig and Mückler are further arguing that “//dangers are emerging in societies where democratic values are often interpreted by indigenous groups as foreign influences which should be replaced by traditional modes of representation” (Kolig & Mückler 2002, p.194).

The view that Westminster democracy is a foreign structure in Vanuatu was discussed at several occasions. Mainly among the educated strata it was described as inherited from colonization and not suitable for the country. During an informal conversation at a local kava bar a group of middle-aged men argued that: “*Melanesian democracy is not the same as European, we have a more clan-based system and chiefs are powerful. Democracy is really something that exists in Vila and Luganville, on the islands, the chiefs take decisions*” (Port Vila 12/12/10). In order to end the governmental turbulence that has troubled the country for many years it was further stated that another structure had to be found: “*The present democratic system is a foreign structure and it is not built on the same accountability and transparency as the village structure*” (Port Vila 17/1/11). These ideas have also been supported by the Prime Minister:
“As the prime minister I believe it is important for us to fully review our constitution and the Parliamentary Westminster’s System of Government to see whether it is still suitable for us” (Vanuatu Daily Post 2011)

According to Henderson (2003) there have been calls for a greater role of traditional authority in the Pacific in order to remove the ‘burden’ of independence constitutions. Babadzan (2006) is together with Rata (2003) critical to this renaissance and argues that indigenous leaders are proposing radical differences between the West and other societies and framing the realm of custom as completely different to the western world. Rata (2003) has further argued that the democratic citizen, who is equal for the law, has the possibilities to challenge the negative aspects that arise from capitalism, such as forming working unions in order to protect the worker. The replacement of the democratic citizen with a tribal framework, coupled with capitalism, could according to the author enhance antagonistic and unequal power relations where people have few opportunities to protest (or even be aware of their mistreatment).

Rata (2003) further debates that within the revivalist movement, claims to resources and other rights are often framed in cultural terms and neotraditionalism runs the risk of creating essentialist ethnic boundaries. Even though there might be a small risk of such politics in a country as Vanuatu that possesses so many cultures, there have been examples where claims have been made based on ethnic identification, especially regarding to “non-indigenous” citizens or naturalized Ni-Vanuatu. There has for example been a call from the MAV (Media Association of Vanuatu), including the president of the organization, to reserve media ownership to “indigenous citizens” only” (Patterson 2010, p. 1). Invocations of local traditions and culture into the political discourse has further led to upheavals and coups d’état in other Pacific countries such as Fiji and the Salomon islands where culture has been turned into a political symbol (Babadzan 2006)
5.2.3 Moving forward by looking back?

Contrary to the view of Rata (2000) various scholars have however argued that revival of tradition and neotraditionalism could serve as guidance for a forward-looking approach to development. Revival could function as a constructive activism that could be used as a tool to rectify structural injustices (Pika 1999, p. xxii). Pika understands neotraditionalism as the foundation, support, and revival of cultural distinctiveness, indigenous land use, economic management and time honored ways of livelihood (ibid). While Rata (2000) argues that traditional revival has been used as a top-down strategy for tribal elites to maintain power and control, it could be argued that Pika (1999) instead sees neotraditionalism as a policy on how to enhance the agency of indigenous peoples through localized power. Emphasis on traditional practices could be used as a foreground for addressing social problems and traditional use of land should, according to the author, be acknowledged as the most rational form of economic activity. While increased globalization might bring new jobs, Pika (1999) argues that these opportunities often are scarce and require technical skills that local people do not possess. Instead for being empowered, people then end up as unskilled labor in low-paying jobs which leads to lumpenization and increased gap between rich and poor, and thus often between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

In the case of Vanuatu, most people are still self-sufficient and to a high extent depending on a subsistence lifestyle in order to meet their daily needs. Contemporary changes and a growing introduction to the global economy seems, as argued, to be altering the way land is looked upon as it increasingly is seen as monetary resource. A lot of people will potentially be affected by these changes since their mixed cash-subsistence occupations are directly connected to land use. Land is still undervalued in Vanuatu (AusAid 2007) and it was often argued among ordinary inhabitants that it was easy to be seduced by the quick gain that one could receive by selling land. I also saw and heard about conflicts that arose when people sold land that they according to others were not entitled to. Once the money ran out (which in Vanuatu goes quite fast
considering the high costs of an urban lifestyle) people ended up with small opportunities to sustain themselves. As one of my female friends from the capital told me: “My cousins sold their land, now they have nothing. No house, no food, where are they going to sleep? No education, no work. They have to sell their bodies in town” (Port Vila 3/12/10).

This quote seems to describe what many, mainly urban, inhabitants were afraid of. Without land, uneducated and cash-poor people have few possibilities to manage in the urban society, with poverty and increased grievances as consequences.

5.2.3.1 Kastom as a strategy to draw attention to contemporary problems

While the VKS has been one of the strongest driving forces of the revivalist ideology, it seems like the emphasis laid on kastom is a strategy in order to draw attention to the problems that may arise for people if they leave a subsistence lifestyle. As described earlier, one of the main focus areas of the VKS has been the revival of what has been denominated as the “traditional economy”. To use this epithet could be argued a strategic construction, exemplified in this quote from one of the movement’s strongest proponents and former director of the VKS, Ralph Regenvanu:

“Vanuatu, along with our two immediate neighbours, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, is among the last places in the world where the “subsistence economy” – which I prefer to call the “traditional economy” – still outweighs the cash economy in terms of providing livelihoods for the population” (Regenvanu 2009, p. 30)

Although there have been cases where tradition has been used in order to justify oppression in Vanuatu and we have seen examples of what could be interpreted as neotribal capitalism, the interviewees from the VKS all argued against the commercialization of traditional sources:

“The land is traditionally for usage and not ownership. When you start to look at land as a commodity it is dangerous. To lose the land is not the way; people are not realizing the consequences (Port Vila 4/1/11).
It was further stated that the present land rush needed to be stopped since it was destroying the environment and thus people’s main asset in order to sustain themselves: “There is a reason to keep the bush. The wildlife is untouched, you can find medicine there, material to your house, spirituality...It is not useless just because it is not built on” (Port Vila 4/1-2011).

Thus, the *kastom* discourse that the VKS is advancing could perhaps be what Pika (1999) would describe as a mean to resolve structural problems caused by a mainstream approach to development. As Bolton (2003) has argued about the traditional practice of weaving mats: “by defining these things as *kastom*, we drew attention both to their importance and to their potential loss” (Bolton 1994, p. 154).

Instead of being seen as backward, Pika (1999) argues that the neotraditional economy presents an opportunity to combine traditional land use and age-old occupations that are able to support local people without moving away from market relations. According to AusAid (2008), there has been almost a complete vacuum of data on the subsistence economy in Vanuatu until 2006. The rural production has been able to sustain the rapid population growth that the country has been going through the last decades, but its importance has long been underestimated in economic statistics (ibid). According to the concept of Another Development as proposed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (1975) there is a need to highlight a development approach that is self-reliant and ecologically sound. To acknowledge the significance of the subsistence (or ‘traditional’) economy and its role in providing people with their basic needs could be a step towards a more sustainable development.
5.2.3.2 Pluralistic forms of looking at government

Although Rata (2003) has depicted the tribe as a non-democratic institution and it was argued in Vanuatu that the present democratic system was foreign to the country, the same should not be stated for accountable government. Chiefly appeals to tradition and culture should not be used to protect authoritarian rule but there might be a need for further research on the various ways that diverse cultures have for achieving political accountability. While Rata (2003) has argued for the malign consequences of a lack of faith in democracy, Henderson (2003) stresses the need to look further than this concept and argues that “there needs to be recognition that there are other ways beyond the Westminster route towards achieving accountable government – which is the essence of democracy” (Henderson 2003, p. 240). The key point in his view is that a political system requires leaders that are responsible for their actions. Democratic governance cannot be imposed from the outside and as Henderson states, “The only form of democracy that will flourish in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific islands will be home grown. Attempts to force a country to be ‘democratic’ make a nonsense of the term” (Henderson 2003, p. 239).

5.2.3.3 Criticism of the mainstream measurement of progress in Vanuatu

“There is a dire need to reshape thinking on development, progress and society at the core” (DHF 2009, p. 6)

In Vanuatu there has further been a rising critique against GDP-based indicators of progress. By this regular measurement, the country is one of the poorest in the world and thus seen as a less developed nation. What this way of measuring progress is missing though, is the way the subsistence economy has been able to provide welfare for the people without contributing to an increase in GDP. The VKS has recently been initiating a project in order to develop alternative measurements of progress for the country. After Bhutan, Vanuatu is now the second country in the world where well-being indicators are being developed (Makin 2011). Tanguay is the project manager of the project and argues, “The almost universal use of GDP-based indicators to measure
progress has helped justify policies based on rapid material progress at the expense of more holistic criterion” (Tanquay 2010, p. 2). Instead of solely focusing on economic growth, this program aims to include non-cash values into development thinking and incorporate factors such as access to customary land, culture, community vitality and family relationships (ibid). In 2006, the UK based New Economics Foundation declared Vanuatu to be the happiest planet on earth, based on the Happy Planet Index; a measurement that considers indicators such as ecological footprint, life expectancy and life satisfaction. The pluralistic view of alternative development approaches comes to mind. According to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation:

“The dominance of neoliberal thinking in the economical sphere has greatly contributed to crisis both when it comes to nature and justice and also constrained the space for alternative ideas and creative thinking about other options” (DHF 2009, p. 6-7).

Indexes of wellbeing of course have their shortcomings, but so does GDP. Islands like Vanuatu have to respect their ecological limits; there is no space to be reckless with the few resources available. Thus, by encouraging the domestic market through promotion of tradition, the country could perhaps prevent the injustices and problems that may increase if the country become be too dependent on other far-away markets.

5.2.4 Short summary of the chapter

The aim of this chapter has been to discuss the second research question about possible implications of revival and whether revivalism is a constructive contribution to the development of the country or a negative force. It has showed different angles of revival and possible consequences of what could be interpreted as a growing attention to tradition and culture. As we have seen, revivalism could be argued to offer both solutions and pitfalls to the future development of the country. On the one hand, the kastom discourse has been used in order to justify the maintenance of a patriarchal structure at the expense of women’s rights, and a focus on ethnicity have led to attempts
to exclude “non-indigenous” people from media ownership. On the other hand, a neotraditional ideology may also been a positive driving force in that sense that it can draw attention to a very important issue in the country and the world today, namely self-sufficiency. It also has the power to unite people, of importance in a nation with so many cultures, and instill pride and a sense of belongingness. While there is a danger that the tourism industry is driving a revival built around showcasing tradition, tourism activities do in many ways offer an easier cash-income than other (limited) activities on the island such as selling copra24. Tourism is further not as sensitive for market fluctuations. Vanuatu and its inhabitants are in many ways in the periphery and there are small opportunities for people to engage in the global economy. Thus, it could be argued that showcasing tradition is one of few gains that people at rather isolated islands see that they can get out from an increased globalization.

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24 Copra is the dried meat of the coconut and an important agricultural produce in Vanuatu.
Revival of tradition is a very complex issue and as we have seen there are different ways of describing the outcome of revivalist tendencies. It is of course a daunting task to try to predict which way Vanuatu is going, perhaps even impossible. What this thesis has been aiming at though, is presenting various routes and debate possible scenarios of a growing attention to tradition and culture.

In the view of conventional modernization theory there is only one way of dealing with “underdevelopment”: increased globalization and market. However, a small island country like Vanuatu actually has very little to trade with to the world outside. A complete inclusion in the world economy thus may be difficult, and proposing such development might raise unrealistic expectations. Contrary to classical modernization theory, Pika (1999) is arguing that the market economy is not the only viable alternative; on the contrary it can cause further underdevelopment. In contemporary Vanuatu there is a lack of opportunities for people to live a cash-based life and what modernizing economic forces have brought so far have not contributed to improving the quality of the lives of local people. In this sense, encouraging people to hold on to or engage in subsistence activities, through the discourse of tradition and kastom, might be a viable solution in order to ensure food security and self-reliance. By invoking kastom as a positive activism and revival as a strategy it seems like the VKS have been able to draw local, national and international attention to the importance of self-reliance in the country. By encouraging the domestic market, and the use of domestic products, the country will be more self-reliant and thus its development more sustainable. Thus, kastom has been used as a vehicle for empowerment, and political demands seem to be framed within the language of kastom and tradition. However, to choose this strategy might also carry with it inherent problems and restrictions. While the grievances that people are experiencing are indeed real, the question is if tradition should be seen as the remedy to contemporary problems and injustices. There might be a danger in framing
grievances in traditional and ethnic terms. One should not deny the dividing force that lies within this powerful ideology, and neither disregard the internal inequalities that do exist in “traditional” societal structures. As stated by Tania Li (2010) “The fixing of indigeneity in legal and administrative regimes, even in those cases where the process was designed to ensure stability and protect populations, produces unintended consequences that are not progressive” (Tania Li 2010, as cited by Rata 2011, p. 24). There is a fear that the revivalist movement will produce a stereotype of both the west and of indigenous people, instead of rising above superficial differences. At the moment, though, it seems like the ethnic divisions that have caused upheavals in The Salomon’s and Fiji are not present in Vanuatu. However, the further inclusion to the world economy will undoubtedly bring increased changes to Vanuatu society, and the question is if the promoted traditional organizations will be strong enough to resist the dividing force of capitalism, or if we increasingly will find the double oppressive structures that Rata (2003) argues is a result from the mix between capitalism and tribal organization.

6.1 Concluding remarks

Throughout this paper I have tried to elaborate upon tendencies of traditional revival and their causes and implications in contemporary Vanuatu (a fairly daunting task considering the complexity involved in the topic). My thoughts on the subject harbor many more questions and it is a mixed picture that emerges from this study. While the problems that, mainly urban, inhabitants are facing are real and it is possible to understand their grievances, I can’t overlook the fact that framing political problems within a cultural revivalist framework has it pitfalls.

It seems like we are standing in front of a reformation of the contemporary world order today, and the processes and challenges that Vanuatu is standing in front of are not unique to the country. There is a growing attention worldwide to the fact that economic growth alone won’t solve the problems of the contemporary world. Unless we do something about the structural injustices that are the underlying causes of inequality,
we will continue to see reactions in form of revivalism or other “anti-globalization” movements. The question is also what a possible dawning new world order might entail. According to Sternberg (1993), there is an ongoing contemporary transformation of capitalism and the scholar present eight different possibilities for the future “new age”. The arguments put forward by Rata (2003) about an emerging New Middle Age finds support in the 8th age of capitalism as proposed by Sternberg (1993) where the scholar sees “a rising fundamentalist rejection against the technocracy and consumerism of the new information age, in defence of territorial or ethnic identities rooted in pre-enlightenment religious or communitarian traditions and values” (Sternberg 1993, as cited by Rata 2003, p. 46). However, the scholar has also proposed another outlook for a future world order in his 7th age, characterized by social movements trying to humanize the new capitalism and promote a form of “social economy”. This age presents a focus on minority rights, economical security, ecological sensitivity and basic human needs (Amin 1994, p. 2).

Perhaps neotraditionalism can offer a route towards a more equal world order.
In the view of Pika (1999) neotraditionalism as positive activism is not merely a way for indigenous people to ensure greater equality. Instead, survival itself makes neotraditionalism a sustainable solution also for the rest of the world: “the vegetable garden belt that has encircled Moscow in recent years is also a form of neotraditionalism” (Pika 1999, p. xxiv). With increased climate changes, environmental destruction and a looming food crisis, maybe we should all pay more attention to the importance of subsistence living and acknowledge that there are far more important questions for development than solely an increase in GDP. As stated by Pika:

“We must not consider the extraction of oil and coal or the creations of mechanisms for this extraction more “progressive” than the cultivation of wheat from the earth, the pasturing of reindeer on the tundra, the catching of fish or the harvesting of game” (Pika 1999, p.20).
According to Gray, the neotraditional ideology could be seen as a functioning strategy in the contemporary world:

“The very concept of ‘traditional’ as a desirable ideal might be seen as a new model of development offered as an alternative both to the Western neoliberal model as well as to the Soviet socialist model. In that sense it is a potentially powerful and useful paradigm for indigenous peoples, and constitutes a feasible strategy for working within the international system” (Gray 2003, p. 152).

What the future holds for Vanuatu and the world remains to be seen.
7. Recommendations for future studies

There are a number of knowledge gaps to fill in this work and some entry points for continued elaboration have been identified. For anyone fascinated in the subject, it would be very interesting to read a more extensive analysis about traditional revival in Vanuatu that this thesis, for obvious reasons, have not been able to provide. The work could also be extended to include other countries. Other areas of interest could be the Turaga kastom-movement of Pentecost, of which I haven’t been able to find much literature. An evaluation of the Gross National Happiness-project in Vanuatu as well as an exploration of the growing field of alternative indicators of development is another recommendation.
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8.3 Movie

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8.4 Picture

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9. Appendix 1: List of interviews

Urban areas
Focus group 1: 6/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, 6 participants, 2 women and 4 men, students and formal workers, Age 20-27
Focus group 2: 7/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, 5 male participants, students and formal workers, Age 25-33.

Individual interviews
3/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, NGO worker, Woman
10/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, Student, Man, Age 25
9/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, Research officer at VIPA
12/12/10, Port Vila, Efate, Talk at the Galaxy Nakamal, 3 middle-aged men.
12/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, Chief, Man
15/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, Journalist, Man
17/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, Minister, Man
17/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, coordinator from the Gross National Happiness Project, Man
17/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, anthropologist, Man
19/1/11 Efate, Port Vila, Chief, Man
28/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, Chief, Man
2/2/11 Efate, Port Vila, informant from the National Council of Women, Woman

Rural areas
Individual interviews
25/12/10, Espiritu Santo, Nambahuk, 2 men, Elderly
26/1/11, Malakula, Mae, Woman, Middle age
27/12/10 Espiritu Santo, Moniecshill, 1 man and 1 woman, Elderly
27/1/11, Malakula, Uripiv, fieldworker, Woman, Middle age
Group interviews
25/12/10, Espiritu Santo, Nambahuk, 3 women, Age: 20-30
27/12/10 Espiritu Santo, Vimalla, 5 men, Age: 30-40
25/1/11 Malakula, Tjivetj, 2 chiefs and 1 pastor, Men, Middle age

Organizations
4/12/11 Efate, Port Vila, informant from the VKS, Man
9/12/10, Efate, Port Vila, informant from Peace Corps, Woman
4/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, informant from the VKS, Man
10/1/11, Efate, Port Vila, informant from The World Bank, Woman
12/1/11 Efate, Port Vila, informant from AusAid, Woman
15/1/11 Efate, Port Vila, informant from the Asian Development Bank, Woman