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Article

# Who was Polynesian? Who was Melanesian? Hybridity and ethnogenesis in the South Vanuatu Outliers

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## Abstract

Archaeological constructions of past identities often rely more or less explicitly on contemporary notions of culture and community in ways that can sometimes oversimplify the past and present. The archaeology of European colonialism has shown the proliferation of 'hybrid' identities that emerged from relatively recent cross-cultural encounters (though this concept is not without its critics). We argue that this perspective can also inform interpretations of the deeper past, with specific reference to ongoing research in the Polynesian Outliers of Futuna and Aniwa, south Vanuatu. Polynesian Outliers represent precisely the kinds of cross-cultural spaces where hybrid identities likely emerged during the pre-European era. A theoretical approach

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drawing on archaeological approaches to hybridity and ethnogenetic theories applied to the south Vanuatu Outliers allows for a clearer understanding of the roles difference and familiarity played in identity formation in the past.

**Keywords**

Identity, hybridity, ethnogenesis, Oceania, Polynesian Outliers, Vanuatu

**Introduction**

One of the ongoing challenges facing archaeologists remains describing the movements and relationships of past peoples in ways that do not essentialise or oversimplify. Debates about migration, ‘admixture’, and past identities have recently re-emerged, particularly in relation to the ancient DNA ‘revolution’ (e.g. Matisoo-Smith, 2019; Piscitelli, 2019; Terrell, 2019). Oceania, the region of tropical and subtropical islands in the South Pacific, presents a particularly complex case when understanding the settlement of islands, sustained contacts over many millennia, and the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region, particularly in the western part of the Pacific (see Kirch, 2017 for a recent overview).

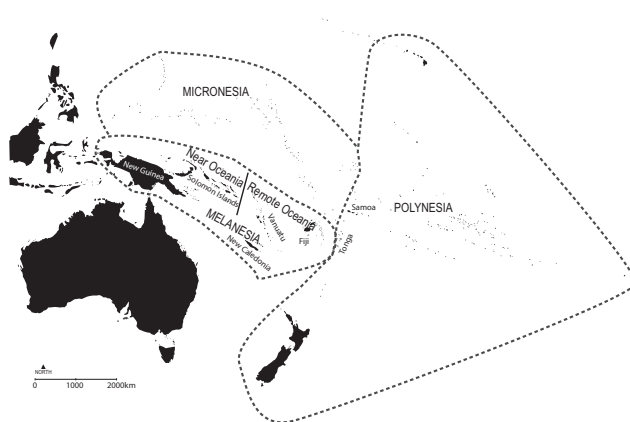
It has been widely recognised in scholarship on Oceania for several decades now that the divide between ‘Polynesia’ and ‘Melanesia’ proposed by French navigator Dumont D’Urville in the 1830s is untenable as representing historical or cultural difference. The divide is based on a racialised gaze across the Pacific that is inappropriate and indeed historically damaging to Pacific Islanders, as it ranked the ‘darker’ peoples of Melanesia below the ‘lighter’ ones in Polynesia (for critiques see, e.g. Burley, 2013: 436; Clark, 2003; Douglas, 2008; Guiart, 1982; Terrell et al., 2001; Thomas, 1989). This sense of racial hierarchy became so dominant that it even influenced the prominent early twentieth century scholar of the Pacific, Sir Peter Buck (also known as Te Rangi Hiroa) to posit a model of Polynesian migration that passed through Micronesia rather than Melanesia (Buck, 1938). Buck was himself New Zealand Maori, and had reflected the racial ideologies of his time onto his model for migration so as to avoid Polynesian affiliation with the ‘savages’ of Melanesia (Kirch, 2017: 20–23).

Archaeologists working in other regions will recognise the chilling echoes of racial migration stories that were once used in the service of European domination and white supremacy (e.g. Silberman, 1995). On the one hand, as archaeologists we should be very careful of the ways we frame our narratives when discussing the movements of people around the world precisely because they can be misinterpreted in racial terms (see also Terrell, 2018). On the other hand, there is real evidence for long-distance voyages of colonisation and migration as fundamental elements of Pacific history, both before and after European incursions into the region. This includes the forces that resulted in different trajectories for island groups on either side of the Polynesia/Melanesia divide, as Burley (2013) has argued for Fiji. Pacific Islanders themselves have described the centrality of the

sea, long canoe voyages, and contacts between islands in their own identities (e.g. Hau'ofa, 1993). Thus it would be equally wrong to dismiss out of hand any kind of explanations of culture change that rely on external contacts or migrations.

Living Pacific Islanders have also re-appropriated the term Melanesia in a post-independence context to promote a sense of regional cooperation and unity, as in the Melanesian Spearhead Group, which includes Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and the pro-independence Kanak of New Caledonia (Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat, 2018). Thus the term 'Melanesia', once emblematic as a signifier of racial division and oppression, has been re-purposed for the aims of economic, political, and cultural development in the twenty-first century. The terms Polynesia and Melanesia remain pervasive in contemporary scholarship, even if it is recognised that Melanesia especially should be used as a geographic heuristic, and not a reflection of cultural affiliation or history (e.g. Kirch, 2017: 4). Melanesia is unlikely to go anywhere, simultaneously loaded with colonial baggage and tied up with contemporary identities. What is to be done in such a situation?

Archaeologist Roger Green (1991a) argued on culture historical grounds that the term Melanesia could be 'disestablished' and Oceania essentially divided in two. 'Near Oceania' includes those islands in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands originally settled during the Pleistocene between 40,000+ to about 10,000 years ago. 'Remote Oceania' consists of islands settled beginning around 3000 years ago beyond the sea gap between Makira (San Cristobal) and Nendö (Santa Cruz) in the Solomon Islands, through to Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, and beyond (Figure 1). While not a focus here, Green argued for the disestablishment of the term Micronesia on the same grounds, including the region in Remote Oceania, although it was not settled by Lapita communities. Green (1991b) further proposed



**Figure 1.** Map of Oceania, showing Dumont D'Urville's boundaries of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia and Green's Near/Remote Oceania boundary as well as the locations of main island groups mentioned in the text.

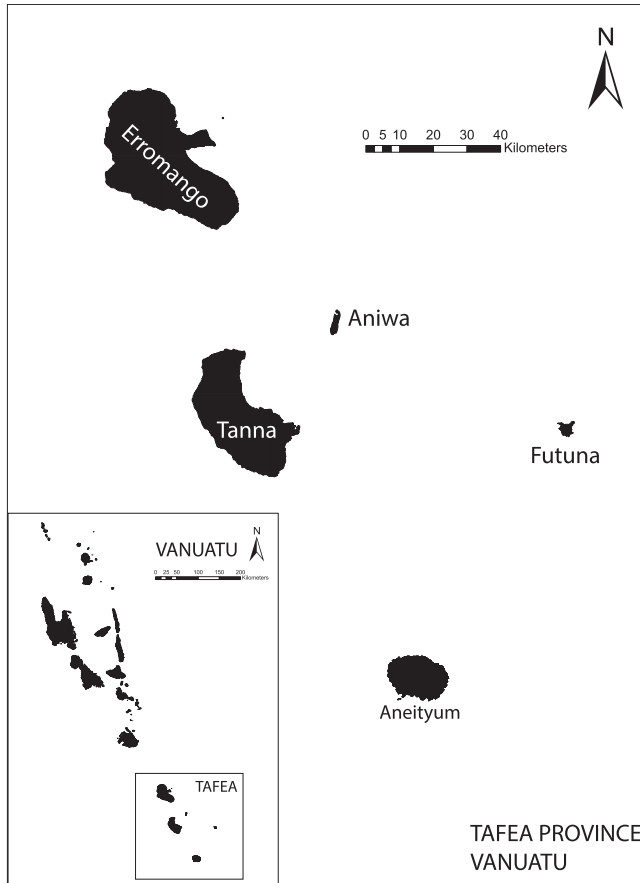
a ‘triple-I’ model for Lapita interaction in Near Oceania, standing for intrusion, innovation, and integration. Lapita could arguably be understood in terms of both changes introduced by a new cultural complex (intrusion), those developed in the course of a voyaging people moving through new territory (innovation), and those developed through exchanges with the extant population of Near Oceania (interaction).

Remote Oceania would further encompass the islands of Polynesia, with west Polynesia settled during the Lapita period, and other islands much later. Kirch and Green (1987, 2001) have argued that unlike Melanesia, Polynesia in fact holds together reasonably well as an evolutionary phyletic unit. That is, the islands of Polynesia arguably contain people who can be demonstrated to have a shared common biological, linguistic, and cultural ancestry. Nonetheless, Addison and Matisoo-Smith (2010) have suggested a ‘triple-I’ model also be applied to Polynesian origins. To further complicate the picture, some islands that are linguistically and culturally ‘Polynesian’ in fact lie outside of the great triangle stretching from Hawai’i to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Aotearoa (New Zealand), along with the ‘homeland’ area of Tonga and Samoa. The islands outside of the triangle, which are found both in Melanesia and Micronesia, are referred to as ‘Polynesian Outliers’ (see Feinberg and Scaglione, 2012; Kirch, 1984), and it is two such islands in the south of Vanuatu, Aniwa and Futuna, with which we are concerned here (Figure 2). While the term ‘Melanesian Outlier’ doesn’t exist, we find it interesting that a slight meander along the western border of ‘Polynesia’ studiously avoids Fiji. A minor redrawing of the boundary might encompass that very interesting archipelago within Polynesia, which could indeed be considered an outlier of sorts, given its somewhat unique trajectory in Oceanic prehistory (Burley, 2013).

To attempt to resolve the thorny contradictions and potentially acrimonious debates about the use of labels like Melanesian and Polynesian, and how they might relate to cultural dynamics in the deeper past, we turn to the archaeological scholarship on hybridity to understand the spaces where the Polynesia-Melanesia divide was breached, redefined, and in some cases, subverted. While notions of hybridity and hybrid identities are commonly used for understanding modern European colonial contexts, they are rarely used for the deeper past and non-Western contexts (see case studies in Card, 2013). The concept of a ‘hybrid’ or ‘creolised’ past for Pacific Islanders has been proposed before (Spriggs, 1997: 12–13), on the basis that language, material culture, and cultural belief are not necessarily correlated. Here we build on that proposition to explore the ways that patterns of non-correlation developed through time in conversation with more recent theoretical approaches to hybridity.

### **An argument for hybridity**

Silliman (2015) proposed a ‘requiem’ for hybridity because of the vague and general way the term has been used in archaeology. Silliman suggested that most archaeological uses of the term ‘hybrid’ were conceptualised in terms of



**Figure 2.** Map of south Vanuatu's TAFEA province.

'Frankensteins', 'mules', 'purees', and 'melanges' that conflated any number of types of evidence for cultural encounters relatively uncritically. Such a formulation offers relatively weak explanatory power for human behaviour, and likely obscures a variety of motivations, interactions, and historical processes. If hybridity is treated as a label, or 'thing', it is basically ahistorical. Anything that looks 'mixed' can be called 'hybrid', and as a result, hybridity can describe everything while explaining nothing. Further, there is no evidence that scholars can demonstrate a point at which hybridity ends, or what is specifically not hybrid, and thus how hybridity differs from other kinds of culture change. Hybridity, like cultural essentialism, carries a colonial baggage in archaeological interpretation, where indigenous and subaltern people 'get' to be hybrid, but the dominant European male does not.

As a remedy, Silliman suggests that hybridity be understood in terms of practice, and explicitly informed by any number of potential theoretical frameworks,

including actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), entanglement theory (Hodder, 2012), and assemblage theory (De Landa, 2006; Law Pezzarossi, 2014). Responding to critiques of hybridity from Silliman (2013) and others, Liebmann (2015) has defined the term more specifically, not to refer generically to cultural mixing, but rather to describe instances where material signals of cultural difference are reassembled as a means of negotiating power relationships (see also Bhabha, 1993). Here we apply some of the recent archaeological discussions of hybridity to the pre-European history of Polynesian Outliers, focusing on our research in the south of Vanuatu. Where Silliman, Liebmann, and others (e.g. Harrison, 2002; Loren, 2015) are primarily interested in indigenous responses to European colonialism, we ask whether this kind of framework could be usefully applied to pre-European contexts in the Pacific, and how it might help us re-examine some of the assumptions about the Melanesia-Polynesia divide.

In one sense, this exercise responds to some of the critiques of hybridity as reflecting Eurocentric concerns about 'pure' or 'authentic' indigenous cultures (e.g. Loren, 2015: 302). Here, we take some of the concepts of hybridity, drawing on previous critiques, into the pre-contact era. The problem shifts beyond simply asserting that all past societies were 'mixed', to begin to try to explain the dynamics of how difference may have been experienced. The Polynesian Outliers represent a useful case study in this way not simply because there were no such things as 'pure' Melanesians, Micronesians, or Polynesians. This instance of cultural encounter is interesting because while the linguistic, biological, and cultural differences were somewhat marked, the people encountering each other were related through shared ancestry. In other words, the experience of cultural encounter was in this case partly about negotiating difference, but also about recognising familiarity and shared cultural practices as maritime peoples of the Pacific.

With this in mind, some of the recent archaeological work on ethnogenesis (e.g. Hu, 2013; Voss, 2008) is potentially informative for understanding the ways that cultural belonging is defined, practiced, and experienced. This can relate to the notion that communities or groups of people could choose to behave in ways that confound imposed categories, especially colonial categories. Studies of continuity and change (Silliman, 2009), indigenous persistence (Panich, 2013), and autonomy (Panich and Schneider, 2014a) are also relevant here, particularly as these concepts are rooted in the kinds of material patterns that archaeologists are so good at tracing over the long term. This is not to say that hybridity always emerged from conscious or intentional choices; it also might result from some combination of entrenched habit and the generally chaotic, non-directed ways in which cultures evolve, what Liebmann (2015: 323), following Bakhtin (1981), terms 'organic hybridity'.

Ethnogenesis (e.g. Voss, 2008) can help us to better conceptualise specific historical processes for identity construction in Polynesian Outliers. We follow Hu (2013), who provides a heuristic tool for identifying processes of ethnogenesis along two axes: Primordial-Instrumental and Isolationist-Interactionist. The first axis divides theories of ethnogenesis driven by narratives of common ancestry, cultural practice,

and so on (fabricated or not) from those that see ethnogenesis as emerging from the leveraging of such narratives for economic or political gain. The second divides theories that say ethnogenesis occurs where groups become bounded for cultural, linguistic, or political reasons, versus theories that say ethnogenesis emerges from cross-cultural contacts. In fact, Hu (2013: 392) demonstrates that all four combinations of processes can occur, and have been documented archaeologically. For the Polynesian Outliers, we would suggest that these four elements of processes of ethnogenesis could possibly explain the development of hybrid identities.

To re-claim a space for hybridity in archaeological discourse, we point to the specific case of the Melanesia-Polynesia divide with reference to concepts of purification and the proliferation of hybrids created through the work of categorisation. The work of purification was inherent to European colonial projects in the Pacific, as colonial agents sought to define, categorise, and control people, resources, and territory across the region (see Flexner, 2017). Hence, Dumont D'Urville's division was created in the environment of encyclopaedic knowledge production from the late 1700s through the 1800s. If European colonisers could 'know' that on one side of the line there were backwards and dangerous savages who were inferior to their lighter-skinned neighbours (who were in turn inferior to Europeans), they simultaneously had the necessary information and justification to colonise the region. European attitude to actual settlement varied, from large-scale demographic invasion by the British in the 'temperate' islands of New Zealand, to protectorates and small-scale rule as in the somewhat absentee 'Condominium' government of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu).

As we know now, these racial categorisations were misjudged, and masked the historical dynamism and complexity of Oceanic history. Yet the categories have proven remarkably persistent and difficult to erase or redefine. Even within archaeology that moves away from racialised divisions, the anthropological cultural distinction between 'Polynesian chiefdoms' and 'Melanesian big men' remains influential and problematic for the discipline if used uncritically (Sand, 2002). Defining a 'hybrid' identity for Polynesian Outliers requires two steps: first, a distancing from and rejection of the racial logic originally underpinning this division; and second, a clear formulation of the historical processes and cultural practices that underpin this identity.

## **Pacific interactions and the formation of Polynesian Outliers**

The presence of islands with populations featuring Polynesian languages and cultural traits outside of the geographical boundaries of 'Polynesia' has long been an object of fascination for Western scholars. Early debates about the formation of Polynesian Outlier societies focused on origins: did these populations represent the remnants of an original Polynesian settlement that was then overwritten by later Melanesian populations, or a 'backwash' settlement of Polynesians later in prehistory? Current consensus places the weight of evidence on voyaging from Polynesia, specifically west Polynesia, into the neighbouring regions (Carson, 2012; Kirch,



1984). However, linguistic evidence connecting the Outliers to east Polynesia suggests there may be a more complex picture (Wilson, 2018).

One of the limitations in the debate about Outlier origins and historical dynamics is a lack of archaeological evidence in many of the islands in question, and there remains a pressing need for further survey and excavations to provide nuance to our understanding of the historical dynamics of the Outliers. There have been several major studies of Polynesian Outliers, including Davidson's (1971) work in Nukuoro, Kirch and Rosendahl's (1973) work in Anuta, Kirch and Yen's (1982) work in Tikopia, Carson's (2002) work in West Uvea, and Leach and Davidson's (2008) work in Taumako. Other smaller-scale studies have been carried out that offer some understanding of settlement, chronology, and material culture (for a recent synthesis see Carson, 2012; Zinger et al., forthcoming).

What is clear from these studies is that the historical dynamics of Polynesian Outlier settlement were highly variable. Outliers were likely formed on islands that were uninhabited at the time of Polynesian settlement, as was proposed for Anuta (Kirch and Rosendahl, 1973), and islands that had extant populations, as was likely the case for the south Vanuatu islands. Quite often, though not always, they are located on small islands close to larger, more populous neighbours, as is the case for Aniwa and Futuna (Flexner et al., 2018). In a number of cases Outliers are on islands or atolls which are remote in the extreme, such as Kapingamarangi (Leach and Ward, 1981). The clearest archaeological signature for Polynesian settlement of an Outlier comes from Tikopia, where the 'Tuakamali' phase, dating from ca. 1200CE, is marked by the disappearance of pottery combined with the appearance of diagnostic Polynesian-style trapezoidal cross-section adzes and fishing lures (Kirch and Swift, 2017; Kirch and Yen, 1982: 331–334). In Taumako, Leach and Davidson (2008: 297–299; 305) defined a 'Namu' period from ca. 1000CE, interpreting bioarchaeological evidence as indicating 'considerable mixture of characteristics from both Polynesian and non-Polynesian areas', and identifying at least three stone adzes that could be sourced to Tutuila, American Samoa. Yet in both cases, the authors also stress that contacts with neighbouring islands, particularly between Taumako and Santa Cruz, were also equally significant throughout these phases.

In the southern group of Outliers, covering what is today Vanuatu and New Caledonia, the arrival of Polynesians is not so clear from the archaeological record. In West Uvea, in the Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia, the Polynesian language and cultural traits appear to have transferred with little in the way of genetic change (Carson, 2002; Serjeantson, 1984). In Vanuatu, it has been suggested that certain ornaments associated with chiefly burials, for example in Retoka (Spriggs, 1997: 212) and Aneityum (p.218), showed 'Polynesian' influences. Carson (2012: 39–40) later argued that distinctive shell ornaments from Mele and Ifira Islands may reflect Polynesian identity. In the south of Vanuatu, Shutler and Shutler (1967: 98) described the archaeology of West Futuna as 'indistinguishable' from that of the neighbouring islands, eschewing any clear 'marker' for Polynesian arrival (see discussion below). Davidson (1992) similarly found no distinctively Polynesian

material in Nukuoro, arguing instead for general continuities in material culture and settlement patterns adapted to life on atolls. Considering the diversity of archaeological trajectories across the Outliers, we might consider the possibility of many cultural processes operating at various scales (Zinger et al., forthcoming), including the emergence of hybrid identities.

## Melanesian Christians: Hybridity in the colonial New Hebrides

To explore some of the processes that might have resulted in hybrid identities in Futuna and Aniwa, we can turn to evidence from the colonial period. Interactions with Christian missionaries in southern Vanuatu show the ways that indigenous islanders accommodated, resisted, frustrated, and integrated the beliefs and practices of outsiders (Douglas, 1989; Flexner, 2016), as also happened in many contexts inside and outside of Oceania (e.g. Ash et al., 2010; Äikäs and Salmi, 2013; Crossland, 2006; Middleton, 2008; Panich and Schneider, 2014b). People in Vanuatu (called the New Hebrides during the colonial period from 1774 to 1980) adapted colonial material culture, practices, beliefs, and language somewhat independently, while also maintaining distinctive local identities.

At present, the overwhelming majority of indigenous Ni-Vanuatu identify closely with two historically nested systems of belief and practice. *Kastom* is the umbrella term for a variety of traditional cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, chiefly systems of governance, cuisine, and so on. Simultaneously, contemporary worship is overwhelmingly Christian, with 86% of people in Vanuatu identifying with a Church of some description at the last national census (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009). However, people in Vanuatu do not see *kastom* and Christianity as conflicting in the present. Rather, Christianity has been enveloped into the broader universe of *kastom*, reflecting an active process of resistance, adaptation, and re-evaluation of different beliefs and practices, from the missionary period beginning in the 1840s until after independence in 1980 (Flexner, 2016).

In Ni-Vanuatu perspectives, the archaeological heritage of early Christian encounters is incorporated within the pantheon of *kastom* sites (Flexner and Spriggs, 2015). Colonial churches, mission houses, and related infrastructure exist within the same landscapes as ancestral *kastom* places and they are perceived in similar ways, not as *waet man* ('white people' or European) heritage but significant because of their relevance to indigenous church elders. The history of conversion is interpreted through local stories that emphasize the actions of indigenous chiefs and communities. In an example of this from Aniwa, a colonial-era, prefabricated kitset Presbyterian Church that had been assembled in 1894 blew down in 1959 during Tropical Cyclone Amanda. Some of the timbers, roofing iron, and in one case a door from the building were then taken and integrated into the domestic architecture of prominent church members and elders (Figure 3). An 'introduced' sacred architecture was integrated into the everyday indigenous household sphere.

So is this hybridity? Certainly from the perspectives of Christian missionaries there was some anxiety about what was acceptable and what was not regarding



**Figure 3.** Door from the historical mission church integrated into a 'traditional' Aniwan house (above); detail of the original lock (below).

indigenous practices (Keane, 2007). Missionaries were disturbed by the possibility that apparently sincere converts could 'backslide' towards the indigenous beliefs and traditions they classed as 'heathenism'. Particularly concerning was the question of idolatry, the idea that people worshipped the Bible and Church as objects, rather than the spiritual Christian symbolism they embodied. Ironically, when the missionaries were insistent about purity of religious belief, or overreached in outlawing certain traditional items and practices, people abandoned the new faith almost immediately (Bonnemaïson, 1994: 226). In short, Ni-Vanuatu were only happy being Christian while they could also maintain a sense of local identity and *kastom*. Thus the habit during and since the missionary period of the mid-1800s has been to eschew the 'pure' categories of Christian or native, rather

choosing a synthesis of the two as a means of negotiating colonialist relationships (Flexner, 2016: 159–168).

## Deeper past hybridities in south Vanuatu: Hints from ethnohistory and archaeology

South Vanuatu's TAFEA Province is named by the first letters of its five islands: Tanna, Aniwa, Futuna, Erromango, and Aneityum (see Figure 2). The islands have variable geological history and environments. Tanna (550 km<sup>2</sup>) is an active volcanic island, while Erromango (855 km<sup>2</sup>) and Aneityum (159 km<sup>2</sup>) are significantly older, dormant volcanic islands. These three are much larger than Aniwa (8 km<sup>2</sup>), a tiny coral atoll located close to Tanna, and Futuna (11 km<sup>2</sup>), an uplifted limestone *makatea*-type island (Carney and Macfarlane, 1971; Colley and Ash, 1971; Neef and McCullough, 2001). The area of TAFEA was settled 3000 years ago, and while we only have direct evidence at this point for Lapita pottery on Erromango (Bedford, 2006: 32–39) and Aneityum (Bedford et al., 2016), we can assume that all of the islands, which are intervisible, were known to Lapita people if not permanently inhabited during that time. Following the Lapita period, Vanuatu underwent a period of regionalisation, as the northern, central, and southern islands began to differentiate themselves culturally and linguistically (Bedford, 2006; Bedford and Spriggs, 2008; Tryon, 1996). In the southern islands, the near neighbours took slightly different paths, with Aneityum and Erromango developing more hierarchical paramount chiefdoms, while Tanna saw a historical process of splintering and intense competition (Spriggs, 1986; Spriggs and Wickler, 1989).

### Ethnohistory

While we focus on complex processes of identity formation for Futuna and Aniwa, it must be recognised that these two islands were part of a localised exchange network with neighbouring islands. Tanna was particularly influential in the development of the chiefly systems of Futuna and Aniwa. On Futuna, for example, despite the Polynesian language, the chiefly system uses the names for the two moieties of Tanna: Namruke (Futuna)/Numrukuen (Tanna) and Kaviameta (Futuna)/Koyometa (Tanna). This division structures chiefly interactions and rivalries, as the 'clever' Namruke compete with the 'aggressive' Kaviameta for influence over island districts (Keller and Kuautonga, 2007: 61–64; for Tanna see Bonnemaïson, 1994: 148–153; Guiart, 1956: 24–27, 90–94). This form of chiefly competition in circumscribed, but not isolated, environments keeps Tannese and Futunese societies relatively egalitarian (Spriggs, 1986: 16–18). Geographically much closer to Tanna, Aniwa may have served as something of a satellite for the Tannese chiefdoms (Flexner et al., 2018: 250).

At the same time, there is extensive evidence for Polynesian influence on Tanna in the rituals and language surrounding *kava*, a socially and ritually significant intoxicating drink made from the *Piper methysticum* plant (Lynch, 1996). *Kava*

itself may have been introduced to southern Vanuatu from Polynesia, despite northern or central Vanuatu being the most likely place of initial domestication (Lebot and Lévesque, 1989; Lynch, 1996: 30). On Tanna, kava was and is drunk in open, cathedral-like clearings fringed by massive banyan trees called *imwarim* in the south of the island (Brunton, 1989). On Futuna and Aniwa this is also true, but the spaces are called *marae*, using the more widespread Polynesian term for places of ritual significance. Linguistically, it is notable that two of the main Tannese deities have Polynesian names, both of which trace their roots to Proto-Polynesian language. *Mwatiktiki* is the demigod Maui ('Maui tiki tiki', Proto-Polynesian reconstruction Maau; Kirch and Green, 2001: 243). *Tangalua* is the sea snake god (Tangaroa, Proto-Polynesian reconstruction Taangaloo; Kirch and Green, 2001: 245). Some of the more nuanced linguistic debate is beyond the scope of this paper, but what is clear is a deep entanglement between south Vanuatu's 'Melanesian' *kastom* and 'Polynesian' ritual and linguistic introductions.

Within south Vanuatu, social connections were reinforced with material exchanges between the islands. Often these exchanges reflect the environmental variability of the region. For example, Aniwa lacks volcanic stone, but has rich marine resources because of its lagoon and fringing reef, and thus trades for oven stones with neighbouring Tanna and Erromango (Flexner et al., 2018: 250). South Tanna chiefs exchanged grass skirts, yams, and pigs for pandanus mats, taro, and red ochre from Aneityum (Flexner et al., 2016: 34). Presumably a similar trade took place with Futuna as well, which along with Aneityum is linked in local traditions of *Mwatiktiki* (Lindstrom, 2004). Futuna myths of *Mahjijiki* (Futunese for Maui) make explicit reference to a Tongan connection, said to be the source of *Mahjijiki*'s wives and the place to which he eventually returned (Keller and Kuautonga, 2007: 146–165). While not 'material' per se, bridal exchanges between the south Vanuatu islands remain common today, and presumably this pattern of female exogamy has a deeper history.

## Archaeology

Archaeological evidence that transcends the Polynesia/Melanesia divide in the islands of south Vanuatu lies largely across two fields: first, evidence for *shared practices* that cross linguistic boundaries; second, direct evidence for the *material exchanges* that linked islands via maritime exchange networks. The combination of these phenomena we argue resulted in the creation or ethnogenesis of hybrid identities. When Polynesians arrived in south Vanuatu, they were entering and amplifying extant local interaction spheres that connected these islands to each other through kinship, political alliance, and material necessity. We also can't assume that these voyages all came from one side of the boundary in question. It is equally possible that 'Melanesian' voyagers from south Vanuatu were traveling west through Fiji and beyond into 'Polynesia' as part of these interactions.

Our archaeological research in Futuna and Aniwa is ongoing, but we are beginning to piece together a general picture of the historical settlement patterns on the small

islands. Excavations in Futuna and Aniwa have recovered archaeological sequences stretching back roughly 2600 years. Pottery from these islands is thus far only represented in a few small, plain sherds from Futuna. There is currently no ceramic evidence from Aniwa. What is present on both islands is extensive deposits of organically rich soil with shell midden, oven stones, and some ground stone tools. In Aniwa, the earliest deposits are recovered from an open site on a raised reef terrace. Closer to the coast and in rockshelters along the lagoon, evidence for occupation is limited to the last 1000 years. In Futuna, the earliest dates come from rockshelter sites, but evidence for sporadic coastal occupation dates to 1000BP or less.

Also present on Futuna is a massive stone-walled agricultural field system, which is irrigated on the southern, windward side of the island (Flexner et al., 2018: 251). This system dates to the last 1000 years. However, we would argue that agricultural intensification involving investment in the field system does not necessarily reflect a signature of ‘Polynesian’ arrival, as a similar system also emerged on Aneityum around the same time (Spriggs, 1981). Investment in terraced agriculture in Futuna could have emerged around the time of the arrival of Polynesian speakers, but like the chiefly system (described above), the agricultural field system is a synthesis that emerges during a period of interaction between the island’s previous inhabitants and newcomers.

Despite their linguistic differences, patterns of subsistence and foodways are remarkably similar across Vanuatu’s five southern islands. There is a broad reliance on the starchy staples yams and taro as the basis for subsistence, while protein is primarily derived from marine fish and shellfish. Shellfish remains and fish bones have been extensive in our excavations of sites throughout southern Vanuatu. Pig remains are rarer but have been identified on Aniwa and Futuna as they have been in Tanna (e.g. Flexner et al., 2016: 43) and on Erromango from Lapita times (Bedford, 2006: 227). Pigs were an integral part of feasting practices throughout much of the Pacific, and south Vanuatu was no exception. The *neri* feast on Tanna is a classic example of chiefly pig exchanges for the purpose of solidifying alliances and familial connections between different districts. Similar feasts would have taken place throughout the region, and are not a unique ‘Polynesian’ or ‘Melanesian’ trait. Turtle, eaten by chiefs during certain rituals, is also represented by archaeological specimens on all islands in south Vanuatu. Notably, the rich marine resources on Aniwa were a key feature of the island’s exchange network with neighbouring Tanna especially (Flexner et al., 2018: 250).

Throughout southern Vanuatu, cooking is generally done over open fires or in earth ovens (*rua’kinea* on Futuna and Aniwa, Capell, 1958: 30; *nekwinimin* on Tanna, Nehrbass, 2012: 88). Evidence for earth ovens, which preserve archaeologically as small, discrete concentrations of ash, charcoal, and stones, is extensive on sites across Aniwa, Futuna, and Tanna. Excavated earth ovens from Tanna and Aniwa date to within the last 1000 years (Flexner et al., 2018: 255), though much older examples are known from elsewhere in south Vanuatu (e.g. Bedford, 2006: 34).

In addition to subsistence and cooking, there is a common pattern of use of caves and rockshelters for inhumation of the dead across the region of south Vanuatu during the last 1000 years (Valentin et al., 2011: 57–60). Perhaps related to these practices were views of the ancestral spirits believed to inhabit these islands after death, called *'ata* or *a'tua* in Futuna/Aniwa (Capell, 1958: 35–39); *ierehma*, *yarmis*, or *yermis* in Tanna (Bonnemaison, 1994: 178–179); and *natemas* in Aneityum (Douglas, 1989: 16–17) and Erromango (Humphreys, 1926: 165–167). There are some commonalities in beliefs about spirits throughout southern Vanuatu, for example anxiety that they cause illness or trouble, and can be propitiated with offerings of food. However, there was also some variability from island to island in terms of beliefs about the role of human intervention in the behaviour of these spirits (Douglas, 1989).

Turning to exchange, several artefact classes point to the movement of objects between islands: volcanic stone artefacts, throwing clubs, and greenstone and shell pendants. Volcanic stone was traded throughout southern Vanuatu, both as tools such as adzes and as oven stones. As noted above, Aniwa completely lacks local volcanic stone. Futuna does feature some volcanic outcrops (Neef and McCullough, 2001: 807) but likely also exchanged with neighbouring islands for these kinds of objects. Despite the fact that some Oceanic peoples used limestone for oven stones (Di Piazza, 1998), volcanic stone is still seen as superior and regularly traded for by Aniwan people with known contemporary examples coming from Aneityum, Erromango, Tanna, and Futuna.

Adzes from south Vanuatu do not fall easily into simple Melanesian/Polynesian dichotomies, despite some earlier assumptions that such a distinction might exist (see discussion in Cleghorn, 1984: 404–406). Ethnographic and archaeological examples of basalt adzes from both Futuna and Aniwa are almost exclusively the lenticular or oval cross-sectioned 'Melanesian' form. We have found trapezoidal or rectangular cross-sectioned 'Polynesian' forms in south Vanuatu, indicating some affinity across the Polynesia/Melanesia boundary though (analysis of the chemical composition of these artefacts is forthcoming). On Aniwa, all volcanic stone must be imported from other islands, probably from the neighbouring 'Melanesian' islands of Tanna, Erromango, or Aneityum, but possibly further afield.

In addition to adzes, volcanic stone throwing clubs, called *kawas* on Tanna, were made and used throughout south Vanuatu. These consisted of a smooth, polished cylinder of volcanic stone, roughly 30–50 cm long and about 3–5 cm in diameter. Many examples are known from museum collections (e.g., Flexner, 2016: 148, 154). The Shutlers were gifted an example during their 1960s fieldwork on Tanna (Shutler et al., 2002: 193). We recovered a fragment of a basalt throwing club from excavations in Aniwa. Throwing clubs were also made from coral limestone, derived from reef terraces that had stone that could be broken off in small columnar fragments. An example of such a 'quarry' was shown to us in Aniwa in 2016 (Figure 4). These types of weapons were a shared part of the warrior's assemblage in south Vanuatu, though the basalt example from Aniwa must have been brought from elsewhere.



**Figure 4.** Coral throwing club ‘quarry’, Aniwa Island.

Shell and stone pendants are significant exchange items in south Vanuatu, known from ethnographic and archaeological collections (Haddow et al., 2018). Most of the archaeological examples date to the last 400 years or less, and are distinctive from the much older Lapita and post-Lapita valuables found at sites such as Ponamla on Erromango Island (Bedford, 2006: 204–209; Haddow et al., 2018: 108–109). A specific type of pearl shell pendant commonly found in ethnographic collections, which is carved to represent various animals, including fish, lizards, flying foxes, and antlion larvae, is usually attributed to south Vanuatu (e.g. Flexner, 2016: 146). Most commonly, this type of pendant is sourced to Futuna, and we have excavated at least one archaeological example. It is possible that this pendant form originated in Futuna and then spread to neighbouring islands. Carson (2012: 39–40) posits that distinctive pendant forms may have been a marker of identity elsewhere in Vanuatu and more widely among the Polynesian Outliers.

For long-distance exchanges to the west, greenstone pendants reflect connection between south Vanuatu and New Caledonia (Aubert de la Rüe, 1938; Dubois, 1996). Ethnographic examples are known from Tanna, Aneityum, Aniwa, and Futuna. While archaeological examples have not yet been found, these artefacts



have been curated for generations and many examples almost certainly predate missionary arrival in the mid-1800s. While the ‘*Ouénite*’ or jadeite examples must come from sources in New Caledonia, examples of similar form made of local shell and stone exist and were also treated as sacred valuables (Aubert de la Rüe, 1938). Connections to New Caledonia, particularly from Aneityum, are further reinforced by oral traditions of the ‘Xetriwaan’ dynasty in the Loyalty Islands (Spriggs, 1997: 219–220). Further, the presence of a Polynesian Outlier (Uvea) in the Loyalty Islands (Carson, 2002) indicates the complex overlap of voyaging, settlement, language, and identity extending west from south Vanuatu across the highly variable southern Melanesian interaction sphere (see Sand, 1998).

Recent genetic research in Vanuatu has suggested that there was a large-scale genetic population turnover in the islands, but that aside from the Polynesian Outliers the languages of the islands did not change dramatically during their 3000-year history of human occupation (Lipson et al., 2018; Posth et al., 2018). Ancient DNA samples from Tanna and Futuna were particularly strongly linked to genetic haplogroups associated with Near Oceania (Posth et al., 2018: 734–735). We would suggest this kind of evidence be taken as tentative at the moment, as the sample sizes are remarkably small (two individuals from Tanna and four from Futuna were subjected to ancient DNA analysis). With the exception of one of the Tanna samples (TAN-001), the individuals date to before 1000 BP, potentially suggesting that Polynesian influence post-dates this period.

The two lines of archaeological evidence, shared practices and material exchanges, transcend the marked linguistic distinctions between Futuna and Aniwa and the neighbouring islands. These dynamics fall along Hu’s (2013) primordialist and interactionist spheres. The shared practices relate to a common Oceanic ancestry and deep history of habits and adaptations to the environment. At the same time, the complex evidence for material exchanges suggests ethnogenesis in south Vanuatu took place in an environment of inter-island contacts and interactions.

## **Ethnogenesis in the south Vanuatu Outliers**

Ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence points to processes of ethnogenesis that led to the complex identities of south Vanuatu’s Outliers. All four processes outlined by Hu (2013) are present: primordialism, instrumentalism, isolation, and interaction. There are specific ways in which Outlier identities were ‘hybrid’, as they were built simultaneously on primordial narratives, used instrumentally, and based on both geographic isolation and periodic interactions over long and short distances. The presence of languages from the Polynesian family in Futuna and Aniwa indicates some kind of external migration, but we have been unable to identify a clear archaeological ‘phase’ that necessarily demonstrates that arrival. Rather, patterns of everyday life largely continued despite the Polynesian incursion, whatever form that took.

On the primordial-instrumentalist axis, myths of common ancestral connections on Futuna faced east to Tonga, particularly in the sagas of the culture hero

*Mahjijiki* who took wives from over the seas (Keller and Kuaautonga, 2007: 146–165). Similar stories link not only Aniwa but also Tanna to these Polynesian supernatural beings. But family histories and lineages on Futuna and Aniwa would also have faced south and west towards Tanna, Aneityum and beyond to New Caledonia. Mythic hero narratives and the quotidian realities of connection through kinship cross and render culturally and historically meaningless the modern boundary drawn between Polynesia and Melanesia as it was local understandings of both near- and long-term connections that mattered when reckoning ancestry. Ancestral narratives might have been manipulated by self-aggrandising ‘chiefs’ (Earle and Spriggs, 2015). Being able to point to connections to powerful lineages on nearby islands and mythical beings further across the ocean would provide a valuable source of propaganda within the competitive political environments of south Vanuatu chiefdoms. There has been some suggestion that Polynesian incursions resulted in the establishment of powerful chiefly dynasties elsewhere in Vanuatu (see discussion in Luders, 2001). However, the picture from Aniwa and Futuna is complicated as the political systems there draw on the egalitarian structure of neighbouring Tanna (see above discussion of regional ethnohistory).

Archaeologically, the common practices of fishing and shellfishing, seasonal camping and the use of coastal resources, shifting cultivation, cooking in earth ovens, and burying the dead in rockshelters provide a common baseline for the islands of south Vanuatu in the last millennium or more (Flexner et al., 2018). These similarities would have been material evidence of the common adaptations to island life shared by south Vanuatu’s ‘Polynesian’ and ‘Melanesian’ populations when they first came into contact. Over time, this sense of shared environmental management techniques, ingredients, and cuisine may have balanced apparent linguistic differences against a sense of familiarity, resulting in an evolving regional identity in south Vanuatu.

On the isolation-interaction axis, while we recognise that there was significant interaction between the islands of south Vanuatu and beyond, there were also environmental variations that might have impacted the intensity and frequency of such interactions. For example, Futuna sits on the other side of a deep-water trench from the other islands in TAFEA (Neef and McCullough, 2001: 806). High seas or bad weather thus may have cut Futuna off from trade networks more often. There is also a seasonal pattern where the southeastern current in this part of the Pacific can become especially strong, pushing vessels off course. People on Aniwa suggest this is not only an environmental danger, but a social one, as the passengers of unfamiliar or unexpected canoes were often attacked upon reaching another island. Thus there might have been periods when islands became somewhat more isolated and specific island identities were strengthened.

However, there is extensive evidence for voyaging, contact, and exchange, particularly the marriage exchanges that resulted in kinship networks connecting the islands of south Vanuatu and beyond. The archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence suggests that interaction was probably more significant than isolation as a

source of ethnogenesis in the region. As people moved back and forth, intermarried, and traded, what were probably initial markers of apparent linguistic, physiological, or cultural difference became less relevant within an extensive interaction sphere. Even as people on Futuna and Aniwa retained their 'Polynesian' languages, their practices, material culture, chiefly competitions, and kinship were increasingly simply another part of the local scene.

## **Conclusions**

When we talk about Polynesian Outliers, we have to make clear that these islands did not exist as isolates in relation to neighbouring islands. They are often on smaller, remote, or marginal islands, as was the case in south Vanuatu, as well as Tikopia (Kirch and Yen, 1982) and Taumako (Leach and Davidson, 2008) in the Solomon Islands, and Kapingamarangi (Leach and Ward, 1981) and Nukuoro (Davidson, 1971) in Micronesia. But, Outliers also had sustained contact with their neighbours. In other words, Outliers were part of local as well as more extensive networks. The Outliers were not simply home to Polynesians who lived outside of the triangle. Nor were the inhabitants of the regions in which Outliers are located 'Melanesian' or 'Micronesian' in some monolithic way. As the south Vanuatu examples show, islanders who settled Futuna and Aniwa would maintain a distinct linguistic difference from their neighbours, while also adapting local forms of governance, creating relationships through marriages and other alliances, and participating in local exchange networks, resulting in a complex form of ethnogenesis as described above.

Beyond Polynesia and Melanesia, this type of approach offers the opportunity to re-imagine contemporary assumptions about cultural boundaries in the past, allowing for the complex ways that people negotiate difference in situations of cultural contact and entanglement. Archaeologists concerned with hybridity have pointed to the ways that people intentionally reassemble cultural objects and symbols, often with political ends in mind, particularly in situations of marked struggle such as European colonialism (Harrison, 2002; Liebmann, 2015; Loren, 2015). This was true in the deeper past as well. The south Vanuatu Outliers offer an example of identity construction in what Gosden (2004: 41–81) calls 'colonialism in a shared cultural milieu'. Power differentials in south Vanuatu may have been more horizontal, with apparent differences less marked and balanced against shared habits and practices. The expression of Outlier identities, marked by linguistic difference but deeply entangled in local networks, was definitely a result of the kinds of active political struggle and social emergence that have been identified in more recent past hybridities. Hybridity in this way can move beyond the 'history/prehistory divide' (Lightfoot, 1995), historicizing the ways that people connected and evolved in a period spanning 1000 years or more in a remote corner of the South Pacific, with potential applicability resonating well outside of this region and time period.

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**Dr Stuart Bedford** is an archaeologist who completed his doctorate, focusing on the archaeology of Vanuatu, at the Australian National University (ANU) in 2000. Since 2005 he has been a Research Fellow at the ANU and has continued with his research in Vanuatu. This has involved undertaking archaeological research on most of the islands of the archipelago and has included the excavation of many sites dating from the period of initial colonisation (Lapita) at 3000 BP and subsequent millennia right through to the period of European contact.

**Frederique Valentin** is a researcher at CNRS in France, specialising in bio-archaeology and funerary archaeology. She works in various archipelagoes of Oceania including New Caledonia and Vanuatu. Her research, conducted in collaboration with other researchers in the field and in the lab, deals with mortuary behavior, dietary reconstructions, and first settlement of islands based on genetic and morphological data.