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► **To cite this version:**

Monika Stern. Getting Our Voices Heard: Radio Broadcasting and Secrecy in Vanuatu. 2021. hal-03334887

**HAL Id: hal-03334887**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03334887v1>**

Preprint submitted on 5 Sep 2021

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# Getting Our Voices Heard: Radio Broadcasting and Secrecy in Vanuatu<sup>1</sup>

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[Pre-proof version for publication in Lonán Ó Briain and Min Yen Ong, *Sound Communities in the Asia Pacific*, New-York, London, Bloomsbury, pp. 15-31.]

## Introduction

When in May 2018 I returned to Mota Lava in the Banks Islands in the far north of the Vanuatu archipelago, after being away more than ten years, I was struck by something new: several groups who played music wanted to be recorded and told me of their dream of making an album. The local journalist Edgar Howard Woleg also asked me to record a few pieces of music there so he could include them in his radio programmes. All I could offer was to record a few of their songs on my little Zoom H4, not professionally, and then leave them the recording on an SD card from one of their phones so that they could exchange, distribute and broadcast them as they saw fit.

Vanuatu is a Melanesian archipelago made up of more than 80 islands, whose inhabitants, called ni-Vanuatu since independence, speak more than 130 vernacular languages, thus holding the world record for linguistic density. As well as these Austronesian languages, there are three official ones (French, English and the lingua franca pidgin English, locally called Bislama). These three languages stem from the joint Anglo-French colonial history, known as the Condominium of the New Hebrides from 1906 to 1980. Mirroring this linguistic diversity, traditional (*kastom*) forms of music are many and various according to the different islands, regions and even villages. Other music genres also exist: string band music, Christian religious music and pop, essentially reggae and hip-hop. For technical reasons, pop music is played mostly in towns but also widely listened to in rural areas.

Apart from the two islands on which Vanuatu's two towns (Port-Vila and Luganville) are to be found, the other islands are isolated, with poor transport services and, for most of them, no electricity grid. For all these reasons, it is not always easy for their inhabitants to be part of national and international news networks, nor to make their voices heard.

The national radio can sometimes be more or less picked up; FM radio stations, like television, do not reach most of the islands and mainly broadcast in the two urban centres. Since the opening up of the telecommunications market to competition in 2007, mobile phone services have developed considerably. The networks, and more recently 3G, have been

reaching all the archipelago's islands for several years. However, these new means are expensive and in some islands the network seldom works, in others it is only accessible at certain times and in certain places. Thus the role of radio is seen by the population as an essential public service, although the infrastructure does not always sufficiently meet this demand.

This then makes one wonder how the recording technologies and radio which enable music to be broadcast have been used. This chapter will not include digital technologies, as it is essentially devoted to music considered as "traditional" which is not greatly broadcast on the Web and seldom exchanged by individuals on their SD cards and, on the other, because I have already discussed the circulation of music by digital means in another publication (Stern 2014).

The official media broadcast music as diverse as traditional music from the archipelago's different islands and other musical genres. How are choices made in the media's treatment of repertoires? Are distinctions made, competition created? Is all music equally accessible to everyone? These questions are also connected to the understanding of the more general notions of culture and democracy commonly understood in what we call democratic states as the possibility for everyone to access all knowledge. Here we will not go into the debates on cultural democratization and democracy specific to notions of class in the West, but will retain the vocabulary used by Harrison (1995): "openness" and "freedom of access" to knowledge. For Melanesia is known for its secrets – in the form of secret societies, secret spirit voices, secret instruments and secret songs described in many classic anthropological works on the region.<sup>2</sup> A great deal of specific knowledge and practices are reserved for a kin group, whether hierarchical or residential, or a secret society, and only the initiated or people belonging to these groups have access to it. Moreover, publicly showing one's knowledge (in the form of public dances for example) brings prestige. Thus, as Harrison notes (1995: 12), in some cases: "(...) knowledge increases in value by being shared. In the other approach, (...) it decreases in value by being shared. There seem to be two contradictory models here for managing knowledge, and two incompatible theories of its value."

We shall be drawing on Harrison (1995) and Lindstrom's (1990) works which demonstrate that here it is not a question of a simple dichotomy (secrets/open knowledge), but of strategies and political stakes put in place in order to conceal or reveal secret knowledge (or some of its elements).

This knowledge which is both restricted and circulated through the large exchange systems has often been described in Melanesia since Malinowski. However, what appears to be a

regional particularity can be found in other forms, less explicit perhaps, in other parts of the world. Foucault therefore questions this opposition between the secret knowledge of certain cultures and the supposedly free circulation of knowledge in the West, "one of the great myths of European culture (...)":

“[t]o the monopolistic, secret knowledge of oriental tyranny, Europe opposed the universal communication of knowledge and the infinitely free exchange of discourse. This notion does not, in fact, stand up to close examination. Exchange and communication are positive forces at play within complex, but restrictive systems; it is probable that they cannot operate independently of these.” (Foucault 1971 : 17, 18).

He thus demonstrates that these forms of “secret-appropriation and non-interchangeability at work” exist in numerous contexts in European societies. We shall therefore follow Lindstrom who has suggested that Foucault's theories have "considerable relevance for making sense of systems of knowledge and power in Melanesia" (Lindstrom 1990: IX).

Radio which provides the technological means of cultural broadcasting is directly connected to these questions of secrecy and disclosure.

Looking at radio and recording technology, I will thus examine how the ni-Vanuatu use these technical means in their practices of listening to, broadcasting and producing music. Rather than analysing the media as transformative cultural elements (Bull 2005), we will follow the trend which studies how specific historical, social and cultural contexts deploy technologies (Miller and Horst 2012; Wall and Weber 2014, etc.).

We will begin with a historical panorama of the national radio and the role it played at the time of independence. The second part will consider the constraints in uses of *kastom* music. Afterwards I will describe the emergence of the music industry which favoured the development of music for entertainment and its link to radio broadcasting. A final part will then return to the attempts to restructure the national media, based again on local knowledge.

### **Radio, *kastom* and national identity**

In order to make my remarks easier to understand, let us first put the notion of *kastom* (in Bislama, the local lingua franca), which is at times too rapidly translated by “custom” in English, into context. In fact, in Vanuatu, *kastom* has a more complex meaning especially because of the political role it played in the history of gaining independence in 1980.

Jolly has explained the double meaning of *kastom* and its revival: on a national level it represents a means of distinguishing the ni-Vanuatu as a whole from the former European colonizers. On a local level, the particular practices of *kastom* (marriage, birth or rank-taking ceremonies, myths, dance and music) are claimed by distinct communities and sometimes passed down in the form of secret/restricted knowledge, to which explicit ownership rules are attached. This does not preclude the possibility of loaning or exchanging (Jolly 1992: 341-344, Stern 2013).

In her well-known article entitled “Radio and the Redefinition of Kastom in Vanuatu”, Lissant Bolton (1999) retraces the history of the national radio and the role it played at the time of pre-independence in 1970 to 80’s. She notably demonstrates how it contributed to the valorization and broadcasting of the archipelago’s different oral traditions (traditional stories and music). The history of radio in the New Hebrides began in the 60s. Its interactive programmes (personal messages, feedbacks, sending of recordings, etc.) were inward-looking, focusing on national issues:

“Rather than seeing the radio as a way of gaining access to the ‘world-out-there’, the ni-Vanuatu response was concerned mainly with programs that engaged with their own world, the knowledge and practice that arose out of the place itself, and with their own concerns.” (Bolton 1999: 346)

Contrary to the fears mentioned in many works at the beginning of radio in industrialized countries (Johnson 2017 [1998]: 172) that it would prevent people from talking to each other, in this island context it was quite the opposite: radio enabled the inhabitants of different islands to communicate among themselves. It was used (and still is to a certain extent) to send not only collective messages such as information on the circulation of copra boats (which also transport other goods and passengers), but also very diverse family and personal ones: information about a death or birth, a parcel to collect at the boat, a letter carried by someone to be collected at the airport, or to announce a forthcoming arrival on the island. In addition, as we shall see in this chapter, radio’s beginnings in Vanuatu represented an example of a highly participative tool. Bolton (1999: 345) writes: « Service messages have always been the most listened-to program. »

According to Bolton (1999: 347), when in the early 70s the journalists Godwin Ligo (ni-Vanuatu) and Paul Gardissat (French) launched their respective programmes broadcasting local music and oral histories, people reacted actively all over the archipelago. The journalists received a great deal of listener correspondence. Gardissat, it is said, could receive fifty or so

letters a day. He even set up a system of “travelling cassettes” by sending a Dictaphone and cassettes to people on remote islands to enable them to send in their recordings. Ligo concentrated on the competitiveness of his listeners’ reactions:

“The program generated a form of competitiveness. People would hear a story from another island, or another village on their island, or even from another clan in their own area, that was similar to one they also told themselves, and would write to the radio requesting that their version be broadcast. Sometimes, Ligo said, they would write to say that the version first broadcast had been stolen from them. Or they might write to say that they had the same story in their own island, but that it went further than the story that had been broadcast. (...)” (Bolton 1999: 346)

This bears witness to the way in which the inhabitants took advantage of the technical means radio offered in order to extend their possibilities for using the power and prestige surrounding their knowledge to broadcasting. Ligo also states that “This did not happen so frequently with songs, which were sung in local languages, and therefore not accessible to the majority of listeners”. For, in Vanuatu, knowledge circulates in different ways:

“[S]ome knowledge circulates secretly, narrowcast along lineal roads that snake through the forest, or in the private conversations between a knower and his heir. Other knowledge circulates publicly, broadcast from open clearings to surrounding audience.” (Lindstrom 1990 : 130)

In some situations, as in land disputes for example, continues Lindstrom, secret knowledge can be divulged in order to testify to the legitimacy of one's claim to this property. Certain secret songs, containing genealogies and geographical names, can also be revealed in this context. Thus technical devices exist in the creating or performing of songs and dances in order to protect/hide their secret content. For example, some songs were often in a specific vernacular language (François/Stern, 2013), difficult to understand even for the speakers in question and not easy to pass on. In other cases, as for instance the *Newēt* dances of the Torres Islands, the songs are performed by a soloist placed in the middle of the other singers and musicians who cover his song with a vocal and instrumental ostinato:

“While stamping the board, the musicians sing a hocket “*O ho, Ohé o – O ho, Ohéo*”... Once this setting is created, the soloist can finally begin to sing the *newēt* song proper. Its melody and rhythm seem independent from the main rhythm, and is [*sic*] largely drowned out by the latter. This is in fact deliberate: most *newēt* poems are secret (*toq* “sacred”), and must remain inaudible to the non-initiated crowd – for fear that the song, which belongs to the singer and his family, be stolen from him. In the Lo-Toga language, the verb *gupe* “hide” designates the way in which the choristers, with their loud panting (“O ho, Ohé-o”), conceal the voice of the soloist.” (François/Stern 2013: 123)

Thus, in a language incomprehensible to the uninitiated, some songs, although secret, can be broadcast on the radio without divulging their secret aspects. As we have already stated, *kastom* music more generally, in the form of particular dances, musical instruments or songs known to be part of reserved/restricted repertoires could belong to a family, an island, a village community or a hierarchical group and require payment in traditional money (Stern 2013, Leach/Stern forthcoming). These special repertoires, even on a very local scale, regularly give rise to property claims when performed publicly. At times the inhabitants of neighbouring communities still accuse each other in ceremonial or festival contexts of stealing a particular song, dance, instrument or element of a dance or even a whole genre, like water or bamboo band music.

This competitiveness and these “arguments” on the radio, described by Ligo, are nothing more than an extension of the usual strategies established in order to control the circulation of knowledge.

As for radio, although it was reported that programmes on *kastom* were those that made people react most, at the time other forms of music were also being broadcast: string band music, pop music from other Pacific islands, Anglophone and Francophone light music, pop, rock, etc.

We could therefore describe these early days of radio as a sort of “cultural democracy”, in the classic sense of being open to all cultural forms, opinions, criticism and discussions, through the possibility of active individual participation in culture, underlined by Zask (2016):

“This participation is the democratic ideal par excellence: a society which does not make available to its members the resources necessary for their fulfillment as distinctive individuals and as fully participative members can be neither just nor democratic.” (Zask 2016 : 44)

Radio broadcasting created a space where everyone<sup>3</sup> (whatever their status in society), could express themselves, share their knowledge, discuss things, criticize and reply to criticisms about this knowledge, the way of presenting it and the legitimacy of owning and broadcasting it. Let us remember what Foucault's words about the "(...) ambiguous interplay of secrecy and disclosure" (Foucault 1971 : 18). We are in exactly this situation where through self-controlled disclosure and restriction of information, radio broadcasting has enabled individuals themselves to make their voices heard.

### ***Kastom*: between broadcasting and secrecy**

The first known recording of the archipelago's music were those of Layard in 1914, then a few recordings made in the following years by various researchers and travellers. Most of these early sound documents long remained in the obscurity of archives, scattered all over the world, even if some copies were later sent back to the archives of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (*Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta*: VKS) and the digitalization of archives is now making an increasing number of these documents accessible online<sup>4</sup>. In parallel to the radio programmes which began to broadcast traditional oral cultures, another project has played an important, perennial part in the future of this local knowledge and its valorization and dissemination in the archipelago: *The Vanuatu Oral Traditions Project*. In order to solve the problems of the New Hebrides Cultural Centre (founded in the late 1950s by the two colonial governments), which had difficulty attracting local inhabitants, in 1976 the ethnomusicologist Peter Crowe and the linguist Jean-Michel Charpentier launched a project for recording oral traditions financed by UNESCO and the South Pacific Commission. Their aim was to train the local inhabitants in recording and archiving techniques, in an attempt to involve them in the production of the material conserved at the Centre. In particular, the ethnomusicologist Peter Crowe trained the ni-Vanuatu living in rural areas and involved in *kastom* practices on a daily basis to make recordings which were then broadcast on radio programmes (Crowe 1981, 1997). Crowe notably describes how in 1977, during a very rare ceremony on Maewo Island, two of his disciples made recordings which were broadcast on the radio. This training project in making recordings was at the root of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's specificity, which thus developed a local fieldworkers' programme (Bolton 2006). With a view to involving ni-Vanuatu inhabitants in the preservation and valorization of their traditions, researchers like Crowe and Charpentier, then Tryon, Huffman and Bolton, developed this project by training a network of fieldworkers in most of the archipelago's islands<sup>5</sup>. When Gardissat decided to stop his radio programmes, various employees of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (and some fieldworkers)



produced their own which they gave the radio to broadcast. These programmes took a great deal of their material from the Centre's sound archives, containing recordings made by local fieldworkers and foreign researchers. A lasting link was thus established between radio programmes on *kastom* and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

However, in 1994, the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (VBTC) was created, with two national stations (Radio Vanuatu and Nambawan FM 98) and began to adopt a more commercial policy:

“(…) FM98, a music station modeled on commercial FM popular music stations in western countries, was founded, broadcasting to Port Vila and to Luganville. Both stations increasingly assume a hearing rather than listening model in radio, a development that is far from welcome in the islands, as rural Ni-Vanuatu depend on the radio as the source of all kinds of information.” (Bolton 1999: 354)

Fees were due for all content broadcast (on both National and FM98 radios) thus reducing broadcasting opportunities for many organizations and associations, including the VKS. The broadcasting of local programmes decreased dramatically, replaced by numerous replays of foreign films, series, news, music, programmes etc. (Bolton 2010 : 8). Today however the VKS is once again producing cultural programmes broadcast on Vanuatu's radio and television, as well as by a private Telsat channel owned by an expatriate living in Vanuatu. The legitimacy of the VKS, a government body, as the guarantor of respect for the broadcasting of traditional repertoires is widely recognized by the ni-Vanuatu. Therefore the other institutions perhaps feel they have less right to venture into this field. As Moses Cakau, a television programme producer born in the capital yet with an utterly Western education, told me, broadcasting *kastom* repertoires is not always easy:

“Another problem, is the secret aspect of *kastom* music. Many people from elsewhere like this music, tourists adore it, but for us ... the definition is different, so to go and record music like that. The VKS does it, but we are aware that these are *kastom* practices (...). You know, the reactions of our ancestors' spirits might be feared if we broadcast it. People might not sufficiently respect this music (...). There are ways of paying<sup>6</sup> for these *kastom* songs. Also, because if we play these *kastom* songs on the air, the value of these songs decreases, (...) if you listen to them at a certain time, in an appropriate situation you will feel a power (...) but

if you listen to them on the air, some young people might lack respect, because they would be more exposed to mockery” (Interview with Moses Cakau, 29 May 2018).

Melanesians often mention the precautions needed in the different uses of this singular repertoire and in this can be seen a desire to protect it against the risk of disrespect and inappropriate uses:

“Within Papua New Guinea, concerns had been raised from around 1996 onwards that certain aspects of local cultures, particularly traditional songs, music and dances, were increasingly used without authorisation and outside traditional contexts – seen by many Papua New Guineans to be unacceptable. A former Chief Ombudsman of Papua New Guinea is reported as saying: ‘In many ways, our traditional music and dances are unique. They must be recognised and accepted as such, encouraged and promoted, and above all must be protected... I must admit that introducing traditional music and dances into modern music using modern instruments can become mockery’.” (Kalinoe 2004 :41)

For the spiritual nature and the connections of this music with its places of origin and kinship, make it at the same time sacred, intimate and precious. The bulk of Vanuatu's musical repertoires is closely linked to the ancestors. The songs and dances are not considered to be compositions by living individuals, but to be brought to humans by spirits, in dreams. Moreover, some songs containing geographical and historical knowledge capable of bearing witness to land ownership are strictly secret (Ammann 2012 : 44 ; Lindstrom 1990 : 109, 110). They may also possess magic powers. Therefore, those who possess knowledge constantly waver between secrecy and disclosure. For this knowledge giving them a certain power: “[a] person is empowered by his public revelation of knowledge” (Lindstrom 1990 : 113). Deep knowledge of local rules is necessary to know if and how these pieces of music can be broadcast. Some elements are strictly secret, 'taboo' and dangerous while others, on the contrary, are public and need to be revealed in order to confirm one's prestige. Thus Peter Crowe (1981: 171, 172) explains that, among secret knowledge, some parts of the repertoires can be heard by all and this public listening brings prestige to those who possess the right to perform them:

“Secret knowledge is repeated and transmitted during the *Qat Baruqu* rites. The material performed and recorded from the final and 10<sup>th</sup> night was, however, largely public and suitable for broadcast. Indeed, it is customary for women and children and non-initiated men

to listen at this time outside the *ghamali* ‘men’s house’ and to be spectators for the dances and audience for the music.”

I have often encountered this kind of caution regarding the broadcasting of *kastom* music and dance in Vanuatu. I experienced it with my colleague Alexandre François (François, Stern, 2013) when our CD “Music of Vanuatu. Celebrations and Mysteries” was released: the necessary steps and discussions with the VKS and the communities concerned took several years. While some repertoires, particularly those for children or forms recreated recently like water or bamboo band music, pose no major problems (except when they become commercial<sup>7</sup>). For others, conflictual ownership, spiritual aspects and presupposed origins may occasionally make their production/broadcasting difficult, even when non-commercial. At the same time, this spirituality gives *kastom* music a kind of “aura” that could be compared to that evoked by Benjamin for ‘authentic’ art work<sup>8</sup> or Adorno for the live performance of ‘serious’ music<sup>9</sup> at the beginning of recording industry. For some or in certain conditions, the ni-Vanuatu’s spirituality also makes performance outside its context or media broadcasting (as for Moses) inappropriate. For all these reasons, although, as we have seen, it was broadcast in the early days of radio in Vanuatu and today essentially by the staff of the Cultural Centre, up until now *kastom* music has not been part of the recording industry.

### **The recording industry and radio broadcasting**

The impact of the first years of national radio was not however without echoes in local musical creation. Parallel to the broadcasting of *kastom* during the 1960s and 70s, the radio recorded and broadcast another style of music, string band music, and thus launched a national music industry. It was Gardissat, the French journalist, who in the 70s created the archipelago’s first recording studio, Vanuata Productions, and up until 1988 made some 150 albums on cassettes, mostly by string band groups.

String band music is a musical genre played by mostly male groups, sung in falsetto, in responsorial form and accompanied by acoustic string instruments – guitars, ukuleles and a string bush bass – and some percussion like bamboos and/or congas, bongos, etc. Initially inspired by country music and American light music, spread by American soldiers based in the archipelago during the second world war, and pan-Pacific pop strongly influenced by Polynesian music, Vanuatu string band music strictly speaking was created under the influence of the owners of the first tourist hotels and developed in the 70s around the capital Port Vila (Ammann 2013). For Ammann, string band music was the first real music for

entertainment, as traditional and Christian music had spiritual functions (Ammann 2013). It was also the first local music recorded and sold on cassettes in the town's shops. However, according to Bolton, a French producer of one of the first radio programmes recorded in the New Hebrides around 1960 is said to have approached local employees of Vila Town Council, who formed a string band broadcast during the programme. This programme which tended to play mostly ni-Vanuatu productions (*kastom* music and stories and string band music) is said to have left a strong mark on the memory of the local population (Bolton 1999 : 339).

As the recording studios were almost exclusively based in Port Vila, it was mostly groups from the islands nearest the capital which made recordings and became known on a national level. However, string band music rapidly spread to all the archipelago's islands. In an informal conversation with Ralph Regenvanu, the former director of the Cultural Centre and currently a minister, he suggested to me that while *kastom* music was a form which reflected the local identities of particular islands and villages, string band music, because it was present on all the islands and used Bislama amongst other languages, might represent national music. Nonetheless the community aspect is usually kept, for the groups are often made up of musicians from the same islands, interpreting their original songs in the lingua franca, Bislama, and sometimes re-using their community's traditional (*kastom*) songs.

The commercialization of string band music marked the 80s when tape recorder technology developed and spread all over the archipelago. While radio could no longer always be picked up, some people in the islands could afford the luxury of listening to music on battery-powered tape recorders. As with radio, people usually listened to cassettes in groups. Like elsewhere in the world (Manuel 1993: 3), cassettes also gave rise to a parallel distribution circuit, whether through certain shops which copied albums and sold them with no scruples or through exchanges between private individuals (Stern 2014).

At the time, the archipelago was not concerned by copyright laws. A Copyright Act was written in 2002, but it remained unpublished for more than ten years. It was only in 2011, in preparation for joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), that the act was ratified and that the country became part of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)<sup>10</sup>.

After Vanuata Productions, the growing number of recording studios enabled the development of a music industry with local string bands and imported musical styles (reggae, foreign pop music, remixes, etc.) released first on cassettes, then on CDs. Because of its links with the spiritual world and its secret, identity aspects (links to a place and a group of people), *kastom* music is generally seen as unsuitable for commercial recordings.<sup>11</sup>

With the development of these studios, radio no longer needed to continue doing a large amount of recordings itself, especially as the studios left them copies of their creations. For being broadcast on the radio was the only means of getting known. Even copies of music albums imported from abroad for commercialization were left at the radio station for publicity purposes. Thus, the first recording studios had contracts with the national radio so that neither the radio nor the studio would have anything to pay and both of them would reap advantages: for the radio, material to broadcast and for the studios publicity (interview with Ambong Thompson, former programming director at Radio Vanuatu and currently in charge of the audiovisual section of the VKS, 29 May 2018).

As everywhere else (Malm and Wallis 1984: 241), recording industries and broadcasting are closely linked. The former provide the latter with material and the latter publicize it so boosting sales. However in Vanuatu, not only does broadcasting in the media not generate royalties, but moreover, bearing in mind the limited size of the market, the sale of albums does not bring in much either. On the other hand, having an album and getting it broadcast on the media, brings renown and prestige, as was the case when in the early days of radio *kastom* oral traditions were broadcast.

This relationship between the local music industry and broadcasting on the media has not always been rosy. For, at the same time as payment was introduced for airtime thus reducing the number of VKS programmes broadcast other forms of local music came up against the same problem. Musicians or producers wanting to be broadcast had to pay:

"(...) it must be remembered that only two or three years ago, when a group wanted its clip to be on TV, it had to pay, as if it were an advertising space, that's it, so that, that has changed, precisely thanks to, to the pressure group in fact musicians, this has changed, so clips are broadcast without paying rights, let's say, but on the other hand, there is no remuneration" (Interview with Georges Cumbo, director of local branch of Alliance Française 8 November 2012).

Since then it has become relatively easy today to be broadcast on the radio when you have made a single or an album: for political and cultural discourses valorize the broadcasting of local musicians and this lack of payment (on both sides) enables a fairly easy exchange between the musicians who offer their recordings and the radio which plays them. However if the majority of this music is broadcast when an album is released, not very many continue to be played repetitively for any longer than a few days.

Nonetheless, the official media do not have a monopoly on broadcasting. As Wallis and Malm have also mentioned for other small countries (Malm and Wallis 1984: 255, 256), music can become better known by being played in buses and taxis and at concerts and festivals where during a group's performance, announcements are made and the album can be sold directly on the festival stands. Moreover, today with digital technology, broadcasts on channels like YouTube, Vimeo, Daily Motion or Face Book are also very widespread.

Even if studios and recordings are on the increase, there are hardly any musicians making a living from their musical activities in Vanuatu (apart from a few individuals playing in the capital's bars and restaurants). Despite this, in town as in rural areas (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), all groups dream of having an album. One of my musician friends in the capital told me how after years of effort, approaches, fund-raising and work, once the album had been released, they completely messed up advertising and marketing it. Finally the CDs were distributed to friends and family. He realized that in fact they had just wanted to fulfill this old collective dream of making an album, even if it was not sold. Having an album is a way of speaking out, a possibility to express oneself and to be heard. For musicians, it legitimizes their status in a sense. As in the early days of radio having one's story or song on the air helped to assert one's existence or proclaim one's island belonging, nowadays having an album means being heard outside one's own island or marginal condition and gaining prestige (Stern 2017). However, despite this prestige and flourishing local music production, the radio and television programmes broadcast today play mostly foreign music (Hayward 2009 : 63, 2012: 65). The few programmes still broadcasting *kastom* music are prepared beforehand by the VKS, which may also agree to broadcast recordings made by inhabitants in the islands. But these are rare cases and the interactive programmes in which inhabitants of the remotest islands could send their own recordings directly to the station are no longer possible. The only way to be heard therefore is to make an album or take part in a programme made by local journalists of the official media.

### **New cultural policies: *kastom* back on the air**

According to Ambong Thomson<sup>12</sup>, listeners' demand for *kastom* programmes is enormous and the feedback after their broadcast always very positive. Some programmes are even re-run on public demand. However the VKS does not have sufficient staff able to devote themselves exclusively to the production of such programmes. For his part, Moses Cakau underlines the necessity for the VBTC to work in closer collaboration with the VKS, but he mentions too the lack of staff competent for such topics on national radio and television, who are also restricted

by marketing considerations. In 2007, the first private radio station, FM 107, was created, though according to A. Thompson, the FM stations do not sufficiently valorize *kastom* music. M. Cakau stresses the fact that the national stations, Radio Vanuatu and Paradise FM 98 (which since 2009 has replaced Nambawan FM98) have a particular responsibility, more so than the private radio stations, to broadcast local music. Indeed, for the new management in place since 2017:

"(...) the focus is on man Vanuatu, the focus is on promoting the development of Vanuatu culture. So you're going to see that every day you can hear at least an hour of local music (...). Radio Vanuatu and Paradise FM are Vanuatu stations, they're run by the government and intended for "people from Vanuatu", so we want to broadcast stories about people from Vanuatu, the music of Vanuatu people, so the OC (Organization Committee) has given more advice about this point" (Interview with Moses Cakau, 29 May 2018).

Indeed, the VBTC has been the subject of various development and restructuration operations, not only on a national scale but also with Pacific regional aid.

The VBTC, linked to national politicians, has always had problems and been involved in scandals: unpaid salaries, frequent dismissals of directors and staff, misappropriation of funds, etc. After the golden age of the beginnings of national radio, for a long time radio could not be picked up in the islands far from the capital. To solve these problems, important reforms were implemented with considerable international aid including the Australian public agency AUSAID which organized an aid programme (*Vois blong Yumi*) from 2007 to 2013 and PACMAS (Pacific Media Assistance Scheme) in the context of ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) International Development from 2008 to 2019. The staff has also been largely renewed. A new General Manager has been chosen in the person of Francis Herman who has considerable experience in the region's media (Fiji and Australia in particular). Broadcasting policies have been aligned with broader ones on a Pacific scale:

“For Herman, the power of the media rests in its ability to ‘look beyond today’s news and look at tomorrow’s news. This quality is essential to address key issues in the Pacific such as poverty, climate change and gender inequality. (...) The media can and should play a very pivotal role in development.” (Anderson 2015)

The importance of radio on the most remote islands was particularly underlined following Cyclone Pam (classed 5 on the Richter scale) which devastated the archipelago in 2015 and

helped to make people aware of the importance of a public service which could have brought radio coverage to all the islands. The valorization of local broadcasts is thus part of a broader context of regional media policies with common objectives.

Entitled *Vois Blong Yumi* (“Our voices”), one of the goals of this new project was to give a voice to those who could not make themselves heard like women, the young or inhabitants of the most remote islands. As stated in one of the reports on the project, it was about “Building the nation by linking its past to its future and connecting people to knowledge and to each other” (VBY Review 2012: 7). In this way, its initiators wanted to introduce educational aspects by valorizing both local knowledge and development. Following government policies aimed at reducing the lack of local knowledge among urban youth, television programmes such as “Art Kalja” (Art Culture) tried to encourage the young to turn to traditional knowledge in order to help them be creative.

Moses Cakau emphasizes the importance of local music broadcasts: “even if it is true that many international stars (including African ones) are very well-known in Vanuatu, and this is inevitable particularly because of easy access to YouTube and the Internet”, but he continues: “our position is that of also playing Vanuatu music so that though the young listen to all this foreign music, they also “ have to be rooted”. (Interview with Moses Cakau, 29 May 2018)

In addition, broadcasts like talk back shows and programmes produced in rural areas were created to generate an interactive spirit. Again in this context, a series of programmes was started to train journalists in the archipelago’s six provinces in order to make *Vois Blong Provins* heard, a weekly half-hour programme including provincial news, interviews and public comments (VBY Review 2012: 19). What is important in this action is that production be in the hands of local people, (journalists from the provinces) who know (or are close to those who know) what can and cannot be divulged. This, in a way, has certain similarities with Peter Crowe's idea in the 1970s when he trained fieldworkers. Perhaps a link between these local journalists and fieldworkers (Edgar Woleg, a Banks Islands journalist is the brother of a VKS fieldworker for example<sup>13</sup>), could improve this project even more.

For Edgar Woleg, a local journalist of Torba Province, the northernmost in the archipelago, his province had long been forgotten. The people there had no access to news as even today the national radio can only be picked up very badly during the day and a bit better at night:

“(…) despite this, for me it is important to be able to transmit government news. Thus, even if our islands are far away, this service enables news to reach Vila where government departments, NGOs and the representatives of other countries are and perhaps draw their



attention to our problems so they come to help us here.” (Interview with Edgar Howard Woleg, 18 May 2018)

With these words, Edgar makes the point that, in an island context, being able to make oneself heard in the national media in a sense makes it possible to be part of the nation and provides the opportunity to seek development aid. Unlike in the 1970s to 80s, the broadcasters, here island journalists, and the local people interviewed are not necessarily the same as the listeners, who tend to be town dwellers. In order to make his province (Torba) voice better heard and to stand out, Edgar uses a form of identification in the content he broadcasts:

“When I interview people (...), I only play music with the unique sound of Torba (...) when the music is over, I move on to an interview (...). Throughout the 30 minute programme I only use music from the island talked about, I never use music from elsewhere, not just elsewhere outside Vanuatu but even elsewhere outside Torba, like Santo, Vila, Efate.” (Interview with Edgar Howard Woleg, 18 May 2018).

The radio and tv programmes Edgar produces bring the voices of his province back on the air. In his determination to only broadcast music from Torba, Edgar is again giving a strong identity to the cultural forms of expression of certain regions in the archipelago. However when there are *kastom* forms among this local music, these are repertoires which are partly accessible, with no notion of secrecy, interpreted by legitimate people (the music’s owners). The interplay between what must be kept secret and what can be disclosed, in order to gain recognition and prestige, is thus once again on the air.

### **Conclusion**

Using examples of broadcasting oral knowledge, particularly *kastom* music, on Vanuatu radio, I have endeavoured to show how the inhabitants constantly reconsider and manipulate what can be shared and what must remain unshared. For nothing is fixed and our words have here confirmed Harrison and Lindstrom's theories on the strategies used by the population to manipulate knowledge:

"(...) it tries to maintain a delicate balance between restricting it and circulating it. (...) The 'management' of knowledge seems therefore to consist in a sort of balancing act, in an attempt

to function with some combination of two equally credible, but contradictory, models of the value of knowledge at the same time." (Harrison 1995 : 13, 14)

The competitiveness which developed around the radio broadcasts of the times bears witness to the way in which the population appropriated this technology in order to continue to use the interplay between these two models. Revealing part or all of a piece of knowledge, making it known that one possesses a more complete version or proclaiming exclusive ownership of it, all this shows the importance accorded to this knowledge and to the manner in which it is preserved and disseminated. Free radio broadcasting enabled everyone to become part of this dual system, directly on the air and therefore on a national scale. The classic borders between listeners and receivers thus in a way became less distinct and radio then belonged democratically (in the sense that everyone could make their voice heard) to all Vanuatu's inhabitants. However, this participative aspect of radio *kastom* programmes has gradually disappeared. On the one hand, for several years a media marketing policy has impeded the broadcasting of local knowledge. On the other, the creation of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's network of fieldworkers and its legitimization to spread *kastom* knowledge has in a sense institutionalized this broadcasting. As formerly for the fieldworkers trained to enable the inhabitants themselves to become involved in the Cultural Centre's actions, today in the effort to train local journalists living in their villages and in direct communication with the population the remotest provinces have been given a voice. These journalists have been trained to connect local knowledge with current development problems, by following the more general policies of the Pacific region. What is happening here amounts to an institutionalization of the broadcast word. A second layer of decision-making power in the form of institutions is establishing itself alongside the power stakes "traditionally" in the hands of "customary" representatives.

Whether it be in a direct system (individuals-radio) or through these new intermediaries, strategies concerning knowledge are not peculiar to Melanesia alone, even if particularly explicit cases are characteristic of this region. Foucault's work also reveals these models in European societies despite the democratic circulation of knowledge they claim:

“(…) none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. More exactly, not all areas of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some are forbidden territory (differentiated and differentiating) while others are virtually open to the winds and stand, without any prior restrictions, open to all » (Foucault 1971 : 17).

However, the fact of limiting one of the means available, inevitably causes other means to emerge at some time or another. Thus, if in Vanuatu today this institutionalization has in a sense reduced individual control of *kastom* knowledge circulation and listeners' interactivity present in the first radio programmes<sup>14</sup>, the population is appropriating other technological means (Facebook and its forums for example) in order to discuss this knowledge (sometimes in a very lively fashion), the way it circulates and the legitimacy and manner of broadcasting it<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was translated into English by Deborah Pope to whom I extend sincere thanks. I also thank the ARC (Australian Research Council) Grant: "Music, Mobile Phones and Community Justice in Melanesia" led by Denis Crowdy from Macquarie University (Sydney) and CREDO (Centre for Research and Documentation on Oceania) which financed several of my final fieldwork trips which resulted in this chapter, as well as other works. I also thank Ambong Thompson, Moses Cakau and Edgar Howard Woleg for the time they devoted to answering my questions.

<sup>2</sup> For texts which look more specifically at the secret aspects of music, see for example Gourlay 1975, McLean 1990, Kalinoe 2004 : 47-49, Ammann 2012, François and Stern 2013, etc.

<sup>3</sup> However, there was a big problem with the picking up of radio waves, which was not always the same throughout the archipelago.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the archives of the Pitt Rivers Museum (<https://pittrivers-sound.blogspot.com/2013/03/field-recordings-from-vanuatu-collected.html>) or the Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (CREM) (<https://archives.crem-cnrs.fr/search/?q=Vanuatu>).

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<sup>5</sup> Fieldworkers are volunteers who live in their village of origin and come once a year to take part in workshops at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in Port-Vila. During the year, their aim is to do awareness-raising, preservation and transmission work among their community, concerning practices on the theme chosen at the VKS workshop. A hundred or so men and women living on different islands in the archipelago are part of the Vanuatu's fieldworkers' network.

<sup>6</sup> This is not payment in the commercial sense, but a "traditional" form connected to ceremonial exchanges which use such moneys as shells, mats or exchanges of food or pigs.

<sup>7</sup> For issues concerning conflicting notions of music value due of commoditization and international copyrights imposition, see Leach and Stern, Oxford Handbook, forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, ([1936] 1969)

<sup>9</sup> Borrowing from Benjamin's idea which deplores the disappearance of the "aura" in art when it can be reproduced in several copies, Adorno considers that music which is not performed in live but reproduced by mechanical devices, is not "authentic" and loses its "aura" and "spirituality" (2009 - 2006 for first edition), he also criticizes in his several works music as commodity and distinguishes "light" and "serious" music. (Adorno 1938).

<sup>10</sup> For more information on copyright laws in Vanuatu see for example Forsyth (2013) and Forsyth and Haggart (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Even if in tourism contexts, live performances of *kastom* dances are given.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ambong Thompson 29 May 2018.

<sup>13</sup> According to fieldwork feedback, it would seem that among the programmes of the *Vois blong Torba* project, the ones from the Banks Islands made by Edgar Howard Woleg were those which met with the most success. The fact that Edgar has considerable experience of working on *kastom* through his collaboration with his brother, a VKS fieldworker, as well as with foreign researchers is probably not without these results.

<sup>14</sup> Even if feedback on these programmes is still present as Ambong Thompson shows.

<sup>15</sup> Here I am thinking of a discussion after the Melanesian Festival of Arts in Honiara in 2018, where the performances presented by the Vanuatu delegation gave rise to a great deal of online discussion (Facebook) about the proper manner to present *kastom*, authenticity /inauthenticity of presentation and legitimation of this presentations.