Eye of the Other Within

Artistic autoethnographic evocations of the experience of cross-cultural health work in Vanuatu.

Karen M. Scott-Hoy

B. A., Grad. Dip. Ed (education and training of adults), Grad. Dip. Rec.

Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences

University of South Australia

Submitted to meet the requirements for

Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract:

This thesis takes the form of an artistic evocative autoethnography. As a product and a process, 'a method and a text' (Reed-Danahay 1997:9), it endeavours to explore, describe and portray my attempt to work with the people of Vanuatu, a small island nation in the South Pacific, in a respectful and collaborative way, establishing a preventative eye care project. My goal in this study was to offer a contribution to the understanding of cross-cultural health work through a portrayal of what the experience of cross-cultural health work in Vanuatu was like and to explore the meanings and significance the experience had for me.

As I thought more about the experience of being a health worker in Vanuatu, pictures formed in my mind, not surprising as I often painted when I wanted to think. These paintings were interpretations of my experience of life, of my knowledge of the world. It occurred to me that ethnographies are interpretations too, 'not a just record of human experience' (Denzin 1997:284). Usually, ethnographers have 'language sit in for life' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:20) as they translate their visual observations into words, and have 'language doing the work of eyes' (Tyler 1986:137, cited in Ball & Smith 1992:6). Image-based research and visual representations have often been overlooked or marginalised by social researchers (Ball and Smith 1992; Fyfe & Law 1988; Harper 1994; Prosser 1998), but I felt that painting could be both a 'natural' and verisimilar method of portraying my experiences and interpretations, which could 'speak' to my audience.

As I created the paintings, people, epiphanic moments, ordinary events, conversations and stories came to mind. I wrote down these stories and with the paintings, they became 'an intimate conversation about the intricacies of feeling, relating and working' (Ellis 1995a:3).

I wrote stories of my Self alongside my subjects, the Other, and endeavoured to expose my Self to the same scrutiny. 'If one could do participant observation with others, why not with the self as subject' (Ellis 1995a:310)? It felt more honest for 'I could not without gross inconsistency apply to my subjects a model which is logically at odds with the one I apply to myself' (Heron 1981:22).

During this time of painting and writing, many friends and relatives would ask me to talk about my experience and the stories, and paintings. In turn they would give their interpretations, share their experiences and reactions, and so began another story woven around these stories and paintings, framing them, embracing the varied elements, giving them coherence and context. When choosing a frame for a picture it is important that it enhances enjoyment of the picture and does not detract from the picture it frames—that it forms a coherent, aesthetic whole. The story of a visit of two Australian friends, Brian and

Alice, to my home in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, at time when I was working on this thesis, I hope provides such a framework for my paintings and autoethnographic stories.

In this framing story we discuss issues of motivation in health work, share the pain of self-discovery and territoriality, power and vested interests. Together we examine issues of 'Going Native', of being authentic, and of Participant Action Research and the need for participation, patience, and persistence in health work. I discuss, with these friends, the physical and emotional risks a health worker faces, and the responsibility I felt to both obtain and use indigenous people's knowledge respectfully, whilst acknowledging that both the biomedical world and the ni-Vanuatu cultural world need to be constructively critiqued. Cultural differences in understandings of time and aetiology are discussed, as are issues of gender, age, education, employment, identity and the legacy of past colonial dominance as they impact on the wearing of sunglasses. As each of these issues is raised and explored it opens up a range of emotions, thoughts and evaluations, all of which are integral to understanding my experience of cross-cultural health work.

However, through my attempt to portray and understand this experience it has been transformed. My understandings of Self-Other have become less clear as I have reworked these in paint and words, in an attempt to better understand their relationship. I hope that this thesis will continue a 'critical conversation among qualitative researchers, erode fixed categories and provoke possibilities for qualitative research that is designed *against* Othering, *for* social justice, and pivoting identities of Self and Other *at* the hyphen' (Fine 1994:81).

In this thesis, I appear as Australian-woman-mother-wife-health worker-friend-artist-author-main character-subject-social scientist. I assume multiple identities and use multiple voices. This range of different and disparate voices can have a kind of 'meta' effect that shows life as it is for me, for 'as with all narrative accounts, mine is partial, historically situated, and mediated (Bruner 1986a; Clifford 1986)' (Ellis 1995a:4). The multiple and mixed voices and genres, whilst creating some jarring, recreate and depict the many voices I contend with in my life and cross-cultural work. Sometimes these are in harmony with each other, but more often than not these elements are to some extent in tension with each other, perhaps because as an autoethnographer I had struggled 'to find the ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life' (Reed-Danahay 1997:4).

Through the process of painting, writing and researching this thesis, I understand now that 'to be concerned analytically with experience, is to treat seriously what people are aware of and notice as part of their everyday world' (Ball and Smith 1992:55), and that experiences encompass 'more than the material objects of the seen world. They include abstract phenomena like music, mathematics, philosophy, physics, pain, emotions, and

memories' (Coulter 1979, 1989). I feel I know more about how I make choices, how the society of which I am a part, shapes and moulds the way I make sense of my life. My concept of myself as a tolerant, compassionate person has been challenged, as I tried to look at my Self as if through the Other's eyes. This re-visioning of the Self has allowed me, not only to see my Self but the Other, through a new lens created by this understanding.

However, I find like Ellis (1995a:336) that 'as I wrestle with the ambiguity, complexity and contradiction in lived experience, sometimes I now feel I know a great deal about living in relationships and writing narratives; other times I am sure I know almost nothing, even about the most basic process.' So as an autoethnographer, on a day-to-day basis I continue to struggle with the convicting Eye of the Other Within.

Table of Contents:

Glossary v

Declaration viii

Acknowledgements ix

Part One:

Prologue 1

Part Two:

Oil Painting: Form carries experience .....

Chapter One: Weaving Heart and Head in Representations:
A story of the art and form of storied knowledge 15

Oil Painting: What makes me .....

Chapter Two: What makes me:
A story of morality and motivation 43

Oil Painting: Waiting and Working .....

Chapter Three: Waiting and working:
A story of taking time: making time: unlearning and learning 76

Oil Painting: Risk and Responsibility .....

Chapter Four: Risk and Responsibility:
A story of engagement 119

Oil Painting: Spare Eyes .....

Chapter Five: No spare eyes at the store:
A story of changing the way we see 152

Oil Painting: Flas .....

Chapter Six: Making Flas:
A story of who's powerful and why 179

Oil Painting: What's eating you? .....

Chapter Seven: What's eating you?
A story of turning points 207

Part Three:

Epilogue 231

References: 237

Glossary

Anglophone refers to ni-Vanuatu educated in English-language schools.

Bislama is one of three official languages of Vanuatu. It is an English- based pidgin, but also contains many words of French, and vernacular, origins. To make it easier for English-speaking readers, in the stories I have Anglicised the Bislama. I hope this allows the reader to more easily enter the conversations, whilst at the same time maintaining a sense of cross-cultural context. Where Bislama words are used throughout the thesis, they are *italicised.* Definitions of frequently used words or phrases are included in the glossary.

Culture In this thesis I view 'culture not as behaviour itself, but the knowledge used to construct and understand behaviour' (Spradley and McCurdy 1987:2). It is understood to be 'a system of knowledge by which people design their own actions and interpret the behaviour of others' (Spradley and McCurdy 1987:3). As such I define culture in this thesis as 'the beliefs, values, actions, and material objects shared by a people. Culture includes such elements as language, beliefs about the universe and the nature of good and evil, ideals such as justice and freedom, and more mundane considerations such as what constitutes appropriate food, dress and manners' (Freund and McGuire 1995:4).

Dokta blong ae literally means doctor of eyes. It was the Bislama title given to my husband due to his optometric work. As I worked with him, dispensing spectacles and undertaking patient education, I was also called *dokta blong ae.* However, I was also the wife of the doctor of eyes, and frequently called *waef blong dokta blong ae.*

Flas is Bislama for 'flashy' or showing off. It is often referred to as making flas or *mekem flas.* It is a notion that had a great impact on the wearing of sunglasses, and hence the Preventative Eye Care Project. The importance of *mekem flas* is more fully explained and developed throughout the dissertation.

Fraet means fear in Bislama when used as a noun, but can also be used as an adjective meaning afraid, frightened or nervous. It was also translated for me as embarrassed, although as will be shown in the thesis embarrassment and fear of ridicule are linked which would account for this interpretation.

Francophone refers to a ni-Vanuatu who is educated in a French-language school.

Jif is the Bislama word for chief. The chief is the leader of the village. He mediates where there are disagreements and makes decisions for his village. In northern Vanuatu a ni-Vanuatu achieves this status by passing a series of ceremonial grades. In the southern region chiefs inherit their titles or elected.

Kastom is the Bislama term for traditional beliefs and ways. *Kastom* has also come to mean the resurgence of ni-Vanuatu power and control over their lives *kastom* as opposed

to colonial or European ways. 'The conceptualisation of 'custom' (or 'law') as both the quintessential embodiment of a people's way of life and as a domain contested through the imposition of colonial law was itself a product of colonial experience and European categorisation. (...) *Kastom* does not simply represent the customary practices of Malaita peoples, but represents a hypostatisation of customs *as a body*, the elevation of custom into an externalised political symbol' (Keesing 1994: 45) '*Kastom* can be a symbol of national or even pan-regional unity, as appeals to 'the Melanesian way'; or it can be a symbol of separatism and ethnic rivalry (Keesing 1994:52).'

Kilim means to hit a person or object in Bislama.

Lukim yu is a Bislama farewell equivalent to 'See you later.'

Misis is the title accorded a European woman in Bislama.

Nakamal is the central meeting place in the village. In many areas of Vanuatu it is a large building, but in the south it can be a cleared area under a large Banyan tree. Women and men of low social status may have restricted access to the *nakamal.* In our work, permission to enter the *nakamal* was offered by, or sought from, the chief prior to us entering the *nakamal.*

ni-Vanuatu is the term for a citizen of Vanuatu, especially someone of Melanesian descent. Although, I did not hear them call themselves ni-Vanuatu very often, but more commonly *man ples* / man of the place, or local person, or *man Vanuatu.*

Namba Wan, literally 'Number One!', is a Bislama expression used to show delight or approval.

NGO Non-Government Organisation

Pandanus is a palm-like plant. Its leaves are woven into very strong floor mats.

Pasta is the Bislama title given to the Pastor of the church. The Christian name of the person usually follows it.

Pikinini is the Bislama word for child.

Pterygium is a fleshy growth on the eye. In Bislama the spelling was given as *Terijium.*

Rabis tingting, literally 'rubbish thinking', is the Bislama equivalent of saying a 'silly idea'. The word *rabis* was also applied to *laet* / light, by our ni-Vanuatu health worker to explain ultra violet light, *rabis laet,* and in this sense it means no good / nasty.

Refractor Head is an instrument for measuring visual error in order to prescribe spectacles.

Storian means to chat, yarn or swap stories in Bislama.

Tabu 'Taboo' when used as an adjective means forbidden or prohibited by social custom, which involves a system or act of setting apart a person or thing as accursed or sacred. It can also be used as a noun meaning a restriction or prohibition.

Trak pronounced 'truck' means a car or utility in Bislama.

Vatu is the currency of Vanuatu. Approximate exchange rates are:

AUD$1 = 80 Vatu = US$0.60

Village According to the 1989 census the majority (78%) of villages in Vanuatu consist of less than 50 people. Nearly 80% of rural households lived in 'custom' or 'modified custom dwellings' which were dwellings predominately constructed of local materials (NPC 1991:40). There are two major urban regions, Port Vila and Santo. The majority of dwellings in urban areas were of a 'permanent' type, but a large percentage or urban dwellings were considered 'temporary', and were made from any available material.

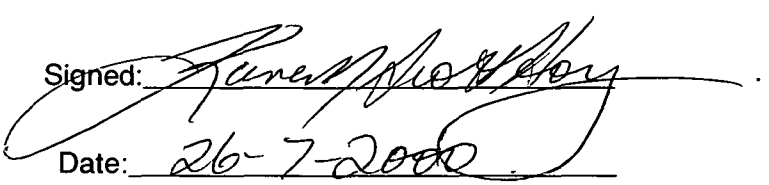
Waetman is the Bislama term for European (regardless of their gender).

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

Thesis/project Title: **Eye of the Other Within:** Artistic autoethnographicof cross-cultural health work experience in Vanuatu

Candidate's name: **Karen Mary Scott-Hoy**

I declare that this thesis/project is the result of my own research, that it does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material submitted for a degree or diploma in any University and that it does not contain any materials previously published, written or produced by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: 

Date: 26-7-2000

Acknowledgements

There are many friends, family and colleagues, to whom I am indebted for assistance and encouragement during the preparation of this thesis. I wish especially to thank the people of Vanuatu, who welcomed my family and me into their villages and homes. To those people who worked alongside us, embraced us with love, showered us with hospitality, and risked sharing their stories with me, I owe much. To those who challenged me, who dared to question, and confront, I say, 'thank you' for what I have learned as a result.

Closer to home, I must thank Heather Carter, who listened, suggested and listened again, keeping me going and believing I could do it in the right place at the right time.
To my two mentors, Peter Willis and Bob Smith, I extend my thanks for their critical evaluation and helpful comments on earlier drafts and for helping to build the keel for those big sails to evocatively carry others to the islands of Vanuatu and beyond.

I also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Early and the Polkinghorne families. They shared their homes, their lives and experiences of cross-cultural work, offering practical and moral support. Thanks also to Graham Jones for taking on the arduous task of proofreading, formatting and printing copy.

Finally, to my children, Lachlan, Alexander, Llewelyn and Vaughan, and my husband Stephen, thank you all for allowing me to tell your stories alongside mine. It's not been easy, and there were bumps in the road and now there are dents in the paintwork, but I am so glad we took the journey together.

A.M.D.G
James 2:14-17

Choice

Life in this world is for man to

Make his choice

Where to go

What to eat

What to do

What types of clothes to wear

Which people to be his friends

Then he can say he wasn't

Alone or left astray in this world

He has friends

He has food

He has a place to sleep

He has everything

Mildred Sope 1983

Part One

Prologue

This thesis takes the form of an artistic evocative autoethnography. The seven chapters each comprise an oil painting and an autoethnographic story within a framing story, creating a vicarious account, which is both evocative and instructional about cross-cultural health work in Vanuatu. As a means of understanding my experience as a cross-cultural health worker, it represents a product and process, 'a method and a text' (Reed-Danahay 1997:9). Through the paintings and text, I have endeavoured to portray and explore my attempt to work with the people of Vanuatu in a respectful and collaborative way on prevention of visual impairment. The result is a multi-layered, mixed media study that attempts to 'integrate private and social experience and tie autobiographical to sociological writing' (Ellis 1995a:3).

My goal in this thesis was to acquire, portray and describe knowledge, which could enhance cross-cultural interactions by giving people the opportunity to '*taste what something is like*' (Willis 1999:110) and to offer insights into the experience of cross-cultural health work. 'If one were to tap into, assess, and systematise all the insights that various people may have had over the years, our social science would likely be much richer as a consequence. However, as long as these insights remain fragmented, isolated, and fail to transcend life spans of particular individuals, there is little hope of developing a more extensive social science' (Dietz, Prus, Shaffir 1994:3). So it was in this hope of developing a more extensive social science, that I submit my experience to public and academic scrutiny.

This thesis offers an extensive account of my experience as a health worker in Vanuatu, which endeavours to depict my activities, thoughts, feelings, and relationships openly and honestly. The kind of knowledge I sought was not objective knowledge such as how much disease I encountered, but rather expressive and interpretative knowledge which sought to portray, describe and analyse the experience of cross-cultural health work. These two forms of knowledge are separate even though portrayal and interpretation inform each other because 'to be concerned analytically with experience is to treat seriously what people are aware of and notice as part of their everyday world' (Ball and Smith 1992:55).

'Expressive knowledge is generated by the knowing person adopting a receptive listening stance, allowing an element of the world to present itself for contemplation, then attempting to construct a text which accounts for that experience in its wholeness' (Willis 1999:93). Initially, I drew on phenomenological methodologies to endeavour to describe what cross-cultural health work was like for me. The crucial method is

meditative thought and reflection. Experiences encompass 'more than the material objects of the seen world, and include abstract phenomena like music, mathematics, philosophy, physics, pain, emotions, and memories' (Coulter 1979, 1989), so I needed a method that would enable me to grapple with and understand these phenomena. I employed 'experiential reflection' (Willis 1999), which wants to bring attention to the lived experience. I tried to recall moments and to think back to '*what the event was like as an experience*' (Willis 1999:105). This reflection focuses on two forms of overlapping subjectivity: the person having the experience and the so-called 'whatness' of the experience (cf. Willis 1998). It seeks to slow down and hold my gaze on the phenomenon of cross-cultural health work—my lived experience of it—seeking not to locate it in an abstract matrix by saying how its abstracted structure might be similar to others, but rather to illumine its specific quality as an experience (Willis 1998).

My task was then to elucidate some of the meanings emerging from the experience and its portrayal. This required a more interpretative approach as I sought to understand more about the ways in which the people and I undertook activities on an ongoing basis, and how they and I perceived and accounted for ourselves and others.

In order to examine these elements of my experience I turned to 'systematic sociological introspection' (Ellis 1991). Using this method I gathered interpretative materials 'useful for understanding the lived experience of emotions' (Ellis 1991:26). I felt this was important as it enabled me to have a better understanding of 'subjectivity, meaning human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience' (Ellis and Flaherty 1992:1). Added to the experiential reflection it provided an analytical end where I examined what I felt, and the foundations, and significance, of those feelings.

Both the portrayal—and the meaning of the experience for me—were then written into autoethnographic stories. These stories are not just literary devices but narratives drawn from real-life stories. I have tried to make them as life-like and believable as possible whilst retaining an analytic purpose. The goal of the stories is therefore 'not only to know, but to feel ethnographic 'truth' and thus to become more fully immersed—morally, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually (Bochner, Ellis and Tillman-Healy (forthcoming), Richardson 1994)' (Bochner and Ellis 1996:4).

Expressive description can generate a challenge 'to resolve contradictions that particularly a beginning practitioner might not have been aware of, between the expectations they may have about a form of practice and the actual reality of it as experienced' (Willis 1999:110). Further, 'because sense-making about the world serves to counter daily chaos, everyone is in a constant search to understand their own

experiences within a broader context rather than as isolated events' (Glassner & Hertz 1999:x). I hope that others may benefit from being able to compare and contrast their own experiences with mine. That they may obtain more knowledge about the cross-cultural health work and changing conceptions of both self and society, as through an autoethnographic lens I tell about cultures at the same time that I tell about lives.

Contextualising the Project: The Preventative Eye Care Project

Working as an optometric assistant and eye health educator in Vanuatu, I was fascinated by and concerned for the ni-Vanuatu people and the amount of visual impairment they suffered. The haunting vision of impaired eyes within my mind triggered the search for ways to prevent such visual impairment.

I wanted to gain insight into ni-Vanuatu pre-existing conceptions about eye disease and treatment as I had come to understand illness and health as cultural factors (Hellman 1984). Epidemiological data from the literature and our clinics indicated a high incidence of impaired vision related to exposure to ultra violet radiation and trauma (Newland et al 1992). Normal optometric practice would be to encourage the patient to reduce their exposure to UV light and environmental hazards through the wearing of sunglasses. However, of the patients visiting our clinics who had been seen by an ophthalmologist or optometrist previously, some had been told to wear sunglasses but had not followed this advice. I wanted to know why. Hence, it was this search for answers and solutions to the issues raised by the research that formed the context in which I was working in Vanuatu and the experience I chose to portray and analyse.

From Ethnography to Autoethnography

My first attempt to record the project revolved around finding an answer to, 'Why won't they wear sunglasses? I began by writing a traditional ethnography, but was left feeling that something was missing; that somehow I had misrepresented the experience and betrayed the people. The literature (Denzin 1997; Ellis 1995b; Punch 1994) said it's easy to feel during the writing stage, that you are betraying your subjects, 'selling somebody out' (Didion 1968, cited in Denzin 1997:287). I asked myself *if* I could live with that. I also began to ask '*why* did I feel like I was selling them out?'

I believe it was because the question was one sided, involving *my right* to have them comply with my advice, and that it really sought to maintain the superiority of Western theoretical knowledge, whilst arguing that it was for the sake of helping. It was unequal and not reflective of the relationships I had developed with the people in the field. I was not alone in this. 'Much qualitative research has reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonising discourse of the 'Other' (Fine 1994:70).

I began to ask myself, 'What am I *really* doing?' 'What have the ni-Vanuatu asked me to do?' And, 'How can I help?' The knowledge I now sought was not that which would *explain* how to make them comply with a Western preventative health behaviour, such as wearing sunglasses, but rather knowledge which could increase my *understanding* about how to work alongside the ni-Vanuatu and support them in improving their eye health.

As I believed 'dissemination should be built into the process of knowledge-creation' (Chaudhary: 1997:120), an integral part of the process of the research continually sought a suitable form which may be able to portray and describe my experience to the ni-Vanuatu. I felt this was important not only to fulfil my obligation to return the knowledge generated to the communities, but also to reinforce ni-Vanuatu identity, which emerged as a critical issue in the wearing of sunglasses, and the success or otherwise, of the preventative eye care project. As 'practitioners of ethnography have become increasingly aware of the politics of representation and of the power relations inherent in traditional ethnographic accounts (i.e., Behar and Gordon 1995; Fisher 1994; Moore 1994; Strathern 1987b)' (Reed-Danahay 1997:2) and that the 'eye of ethnography [often connects with] the I of imperialism' (Rosaldo 1989:41 cited in Fine 1994:74), I felt I needed to be careful and mindful that I did not subjugate the ni-Vanuatu to colonial rule by subjecting their stories and lives *solely* to Western theoretical scrutiny. Rather, I have striven to keep the unique ni-Vanuatu qualities foregrounded.

In writing traditional realist ethnography I seemed invisible, yet in absolute control. That was not how it appeared to be in the field, or how I felt it should be. I had concerns about questions of identity and selfhood, about voice and authenticity, and of cultural displacement. I had learned *from* the ni-Vanuatu not just *about* them. I was as much the taught as the teacher. That knowledge did not appear to be present in my first ethnography, because I was not present. I wanted to be there, alongside the people, for that's how I felt it was. I wanted to use a form of representation that would not violate my desire to be there alongside the people, as I had been in the field.

As I began to read about autoethnography, it seemed as if autoethnography could be more ''authentic' than straight ethnography' (Reed-Danahay 1997:3). Its blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing incorporates elements of one's own life experience when writing about others. It is a form of self-narrative that 'placed the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay 1997:9). Although this appeared to shift the focus of my study from the Other to the Self, I felt that here I had found a way I could be alongside the people, I could speak for myself, yet also allow them to speak for themselves, rather than me invisibly speaking for them. Using an autoethnographic

approach, I could look around and move my gaze from them, to me, and back. In this way I discovered that research is not only a process of discovering the Other but of discovering the Self for 'the notion of autoethnography foregrounds the multiple nature of selfhood and opens up new ways of writing about social life' (Reed-Danahay 1997:3). The boundaries between Self and Other became blurred as I made an effort to study myself as the Other and to see my Self working with/for/and despite the Other. As Fine (1994) says 'qualitative researchers are chronically and uncomfortably engaged in ethical decisions about how deeply to work with/for/despite those cast as Others, and how seamlessly to represent the hyphen. Our work will never 'arrive' but must always struggle 'between'' (p74). It appears to be one of the main characteristics of an autoethnographic perspective that 'the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser (Reed-Danahay 1997:3)'. I felt it was a familiar role—a role I was already playing in the field, for as Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1996) argue 'the medical anthropologist must tread lightly between the poles of cultural interpreter and cultural critic, defender of tradition and broker for change' (p44).

As I became interested in understanding my experience as a cross-cultural health worker I began to ask more questions. What did it feel like treading these poles, crossing these boundaries? How did I make decisions, accomplish tasks, and manage feelings? That involved a different kind of knowledge and agreat deal of self-reflection as, like other development professionals, I came to see 'that the problem is more 'us' than 'them'. It is with ourselves that we have to start' (Chambers 1997:32). My ethnographic gaze was turned in on my life, my cosmos, and my actions, then outward again. I found I was critically looking not just at the Vanuatu experience but at Australian life. I was looking not just at 'their' world but mine. I was also comparing my life in Vanuatu with my life in Australia. Changes were occurring not just in me 'there' but in me 'here' and these changes impacted on me as a person, a researcher and as a health practitioner. Geddes (1994a:3) explains, 'as we come to appreciate the many different ways in which human beings understand themselves and organise life, we will also gain a new perspective on our own understandings and forms of organisation. This in turn will help us to appreciate our own motivations and ambitions in involvement within Third World development programs'.

I began to ask 'if one could do participant observation with others, why not with the self as subject' (Ellis 1995a:310)? I tried to apply to myself the model I had applied to them for 'I cannot without gross inconsistency apply to my subjects a model which is logically at odds with the one I apply to myself' (Heron 1981:21). Through this process I realised that 'despite the fact that ethnography is one of the principle moral discourses of the contemporary period, ethnographers do not have an undisputed warrant to study

others; this right has been lost. Self-reflection is no longer an option, nor can it be presumed that objective accounts of another's situation can be easily given. Truth is always personal and subjective. An evocative and not a representational epistemology is sought' (Denzin 1997: 265-256).

Through the process of forming the thesis I came to view an ethnography as 'a means of experience and a method of empowerment for the reader. It is a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves. More deeply, the ethnographic tale is a utopian tale of self and social redemption—a tale that brings a moral compass back into the reader's (and the writer's) life' (Denzin 1997:284). It became important to me that this thesis was in a form that was accessible to my audience, that would carry the experience, 'not as vehicles carry goods but as a mother carries a baby when the baby is part of her own organism' (Dewey 1934:118 in Norris 1997:92-93).

Visual Representation

As I thought more about the experience of being a health worker in Vanuatu, pictures formed in my mind. I often painted when I wanted to think. I began to give serious thought to the possibility of painting a visual record of my research, painting ethnographically. I wondered how I would determine what to paint. Was it any different from knowing what to write? It seemed it was all a matter of choice, that in linking concepts and using intuitive flashes to arrive at conclusions, in recording significant moments and interactions, in observing, living and working in a field, all ethnographers make choices.

As I thought about the process I used in the creation of a painting it occurred to me that the process of research was similar[1]. It was necessary to move back and forth in the creation of a painting, just as it was necessary to move back and forth in focus and thought during the creation of knowledge in the field. During the research process I needed to be sensitive to the social tones, the moods and feelings that coloured the daily life, the world-view and cosmos that shaped the action and interaction. That same sensitivity was required in painting. I also needed to look at myself; to try and take off my 'coloured' glasses and see the difference personal and cultural lenses make to what we see. Eisner (1991, p1) says, 'If the visual arts teach one lesson, it's that seeing is central to making. Seeing rather than mere looking, requires an enlightened eye: this is as true and as important in understanding and improving education as in creating a painting'.

For some time I had stopped trying to paint things as they 'really were', and painted them as they 'really seemed' and made me feel, or as I thought would evoke a particular

response in my audience. My paintings were interpretations of my experience of life, of my knowledge of the world. Ethnographies are interpretations too for 'the ethnographer's tale is always allegorical, a symbolic tale, and a parable that is not just a record of human experience' (Denzin 1997:284). I accepted that all knowledge is socially constructed and the 'knower' always plays a central role in the creation of knowledge. So if I painted representations of my research wasn't I merely using a palette knife, not a pen, to represent that knowledge. I knew that just as in any ethnographic research and writing, my personality, historical roots, spiritual, moral and ethical beliefs, my physical body and senses would be present in my paintings—integral parts of my interaction with and interpretation of the world. Some ethnographers try to bracket out, or expect the audience to bracket out, these declared interests and biases. I couldn't bracket these out of my painting. Perhaps in this sense, painting would be more honest.

Through the medium of oil paintings I had been able to tap into deeply personal, emotional experience, using a consciousness that did not rely on words. Words 'miss the fullness and the uniqueness of our private worlds. Words fall short because language is essentially social. It is only through the collectivity of language that we can access experience, the experience of others as well as our own. And so the essentially unique and private qualities of inner experience will ultimately be beyond our linguistic reach' (Van Manen 1997:xiii).

The paintings were, however, not just a means of exploring my experience but were a means of publicly portraying that experience without being confined by the use of language and culture-specific words. 'Language cannot be a neutral means of communicating what exists in the world' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:20). Language use is so intricately bound to cultural identity, to people's understanding of and perceptions of the self and the other. Thus, concepts learned in one language may be extremely difficult to translate or comprehend in another language. By painting, I had attempted to capture the meaning without the constraints of the linguistic boundaries. The paintings, with appropriate interpretative commentary, could endeavour to speak to each sociolinguistic group. It seemed to my eyes as if my paintings had captured the tone, volume, and colour of the ni-Vanuatu voices; they spoke loudly, powerfully, and multidimensionally, with context and action.

'Even though most sociologists are sighted, even though much sociology depends upon observation, sociology has not derived from, nor has it reflected a visual record of the world' (Harper 1996:69) for image-based research and visual representations have often been overlooked or marginalised by social researchers (Ball and Smith 1992; Fyfe &

Law 1988; Harper 1994; Prosser 1998). Usually, ethnographers have 'language sit in for life' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:20) as they translate their visual observations into words, and have 'language doing the work of eyes' (Tyler 1986, p. 137, cited in Ball & Smith 1992:6). Initially, I felt that to translate these pictures into words was to rationalise, and lose some of the spontaneity and fluidity of the images[2] and painting appeared to be both a 'natural' and verisimilar method of portraying my ethnographic research. As I was seeking expressive-interpretative knowledge, the criterion for judgement was the ability of the portrayal to present the experience so that it evokes in others a similar feeling—verisimilitude (Denzin 1997; Garman & Piantanida 1996). I felt the paintings could do that.

Over the next few months, I created seven large oil paintings using palette knife and canvas boards. I began as a traditional thesis begins, with a defence of methodology.

The painting **Form carries experience** became a story of the art and form in coming to know about cross-cultural health work in Vanuatu. It expressed visually a weaving of heart and head in knowledge representations. A second painting followed. **Waiting and Working**, portrayed cross-cultural living and health work. Whilst examining the work I had begun in Vanuatu I painted **Spare Eyes** and **Flas,** two paintings that explore the need for new ways of seeing, understanding health practices and cultural differences.

This then drove me to think about the **Risk and Responsibility** involved not only in health work but also in being a researcher in a cross-cultural context. In telling a story of engagement, the painting evoked a sense of journeying and of being burdened with care for the Other, which in turn led me to examine issues of morality and motivation in a painting entitled **What makes me.** The centrality of a knowledge of Self, one's moral standards and the place of judgement are depicted as connected and carry implications for future cross-cultural workers. The difficulties and frustrations of balancing the demands of life and work are portrayed in the painting **What's eating you?**

Autoethnographic Stories

During the process of creating the paintings I began to recall people, events, stories, quotes from literature I had read. It was as if painting opened up the experience and brought back the events, linking them by common themes or words. I went back to my photographs and my field notes and imagined myself physically there. Who was with me? What did it feel like? What smells were there? What could I see? This spurred on the painting process but these thoughts also began to be stories, in their own right, having both descriptive and analytic merit. I would jot down these thoughts and return to them later, discussing them with my husband and family—recalling experiences.

These words did not come from my rational mind, but from the paintings. They were words and stories *of* me, not from me.

I was unsure if I should write these stories down. I asked myself if the *audience* would benefit from the stories or if was writing something I felt I had to do because of my cultural and educational background. Examining the stories I had recorded I observed that they did not directly point out the meaning of the paintings, but demonstrated meaning by 're-creating pattern in metaphorical shape and form' (Reason 1988:80, cited in Willis 1999:94). They gave important background information about ni-Vanuatu culture, enabling an audience to give meaning to what they saw in the painting. They were 'an intimate conversation about the intricacies of feeling, relating and working' (Ellis 1995a:3), and as such were important to the portrayal and analysis of the experience of cross-cultural health work.

The Framing Story

I now had seven paintings, and six short stories about cross-cultural work. My task was to somehow hang it all together so that it was engaging, evocative and instructive for an audience, whilst providing scholarly analysis so that it could achieve both expressive and academic goals. It was a struggle to blend such analysis into the narrative (Ellis 1995a).

I wanted a 'kind of analysis, different from distantly and abstractly interpreting what happened for readers, that would assist, rather than detract from, my desire to show lived experience as it happened' (Ellis 1995a:312). During this time of painting and writing, many friends, colleagues, and relatives would ask me to talk about my experience, the stories, and paintings. In turn they would give their interpretations, share their experiences and reactions, and so began another story woven around these stories and paintings, framing them, embracing the varied elements, giving them coherence and context. When choosing a frame for a picture it is important that it enhances enjoyment of the picture and does not detract from the picture it frames, but rather forms a coherent, aesthetic whole. I wondered, if I wrote these conversations and reflections on the experience, would they become the kind of analytical framework I was seeking? I created two composite characters Brian and Alice, who could engage in conversation with me in the text, in the same way my friends, colleagues, and relatives had done. Our conversations became the framing story—depicting a visit of these two Australian friends, to my home in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, at a time when I was working on this thesis. We discussed issues of motivation in health work, shared the pain of self-discovery and territoriality, power and vested interests. Together we examined issues of 'going native', of being authentic, of Participant Action Research,

and the need for participation, patience, and persistence in health work. I discussed, with these friends, the physical and emotional risks a health worker faces, and the responsibility I felt to both obtain and use indigenous people's knowledge respectfully, whilst acknowledging that both the biomedical world and the ni-Vanuatu cultural world need to be constructively critiqued. Cultural differences in understandings of time and aetiology were discussed, as were issues of gender, age, education, employment, identity and the legacy of past colonial dominance as they impact on the wearing of sunglasses. As each of these issues was raised and explored it opened up a range of emotions, thoughts and evaluations, all of which were integral to understanding my experience of cross-cultural health work. The framing story also became an important part of understanding cross-cultural work, the coming 'home'.

Writing the framing story I realised that the role of the autoethnographer as 'a boundary-crosser' (Reed-Danahay 1997:3) is not just adopted when working in the field, but even when relaxing at home. I could see that my work and life were so intricately bound up in who I am, what I do and how I do it, that even in friendly conversation I had become a 'cultural interpreter and cultural critic, defender of tradition and broker for change' (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1996:44). The experience of cross-cultural health work in Vanuatu, and the process of portraying and analysing that experience had redefined not only the way I now viewed the world, but who I was, and this didn't change when I came 'home'. I could see in the framing story how I now lived the uneasy life of *'belonging-but-not'* to both Western and ni-Vanuatu cultures and that I would have to continue to try and reconcile 'pivoting identities of Self and Other *at* the hyphen' (Fine 1994:81).

Voices

As author, main character, artist, health worker, subject, and social scientist, I assume multiple identities and use multiple voices. In the text I have tried to capture several voices simultaneously, just as in a room filled with conversation. Along with the characters'voices, you will hear my conversational voice, as I chat with them. Often you will hear my self-reflective voice commenting on my feelings and fears, whilst at other times you will hear my authorial voice containing considerable reading and reflection on a wide range of literature relating to elements of my research and experience. Sometimes these voices will combine as I answer questions and gauge reactions to my paintings and stories explaining a range of meanings embedded in them and my experience. You will sometimes hear the narrator's voice, setting the scene, describing the situation in which the action is taking place. You will also hear the voices of the ni-Vanuatu, whose words I have translated from *Bislama* into an Anglicised pidgin, so that

readers can understand the conversation yet remain aware of the linguistic differences encountered in the field. Finally there are the expressive voices of the paintings.

This range of different and disparate voices can have a kind of compounding effect. It seeks to show life as it is for me, for 'as with all narrative accounts, mine is partial, historically situated, and mediated (Bruner 1986a; Clifford 1986)' (Ellis 1995a:4). The multiple and mixed voices and genres, whilst creating some jarring, recreate and depict the many voices I contend with in my life and cross-cultural work. Sometimes these are in harmony with each other, but more often than not these elements are to some extent in tension with each other, perhaps because as an autoethnographer I struggled 'to find the ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life' (Reed-Danahay 1997:4).

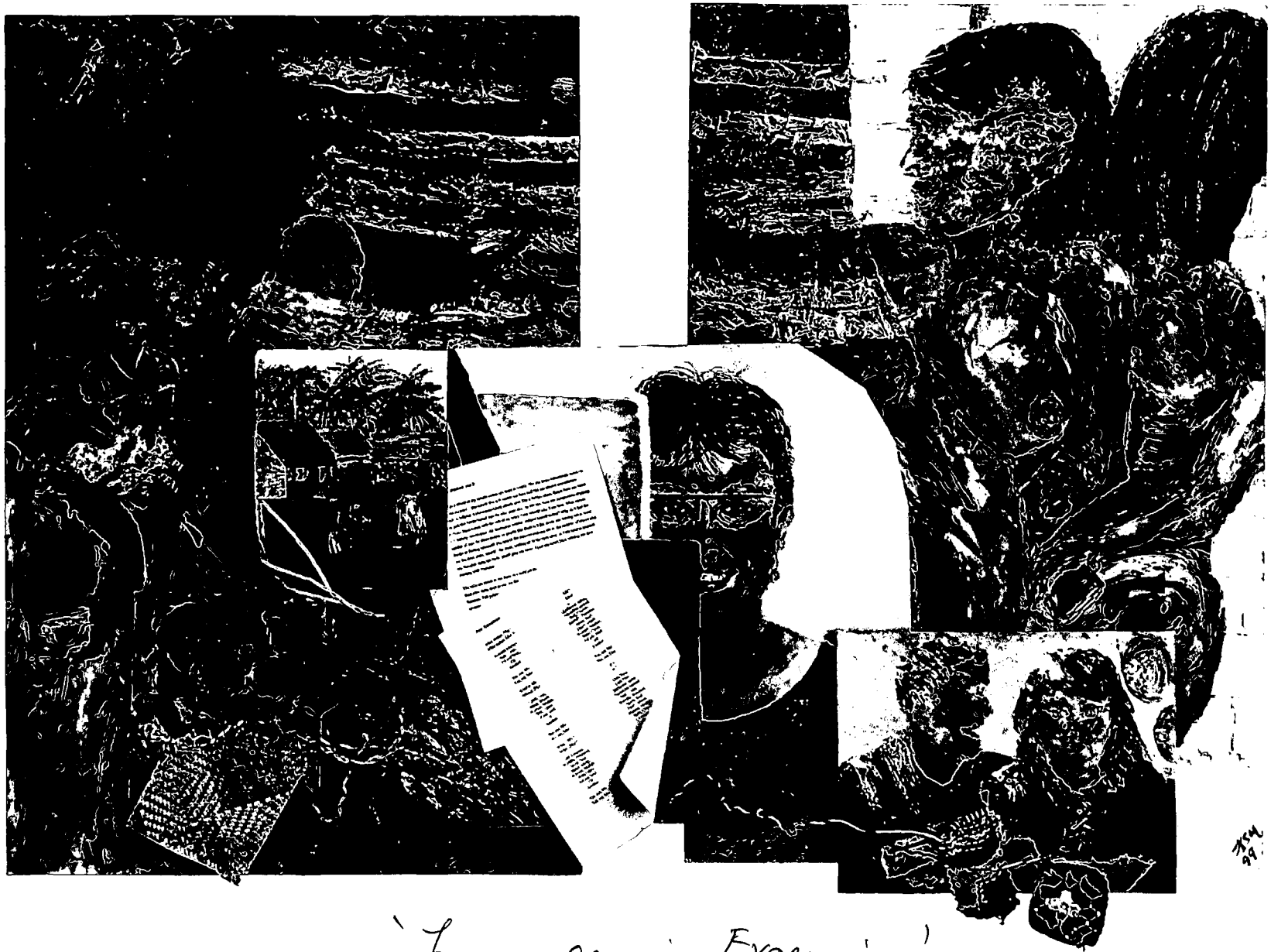
And so now I invite you to brew the coffee, slice the cake, then come and join my family and friends, Brian and Alice, as we *storian* about the experience of cross-cultural work, my research, our lives and our worlds, as 'actors and participants, not spectators, in the public dramas that define meaningful life' (Denzin 1997:280).

Notes

[1] Wolcott (1995) argues that the work of fieldwork is like that of the artist.

[2] Words also 'miss the fullness and the uniqueness of our private worlds. Words fall short because language is essentially social. It is only through the collectively of language that we can access experience, the experience of others as well as our own. And so the essentially unique and private qualities of inner experience will ultimately be beyond our linguistic reach' (Van Manen 1997:xiii).

Part Two



'Form carries Experience'

Chapter One

Weaving Heart and Head in Representations:
a story of the art and form of knowledge

As I set out the last plate of lemon-frosted orange cake on the polished wood table and adjusted the flowers in the vase, the ding-dong of the doorbell resonated through the room. Although I was expecting guests it still made me jump. I glanced into the kitchen to see that all was in order, checked my hair in the glass of the painting hanging on the wall, and walked to the door. Not too fast, lest I show too much anticipation, not too slow lest I appear unprepared. Through the gathered terrylene curtains I could see the shapes of my guests, relaxed and chatting outside. I opened the door and warmly greeted Alice with a hug.

"Hi, Karen. Good to see you again." She handed me a plate of homemade biscuits.

"Gee, thanks. You didn't need to do that..." I replied looking at the mouthwatering array, "but I'm glad you did."

"Brian, this is Karen," she said and stepped inside to allow Brian to reach forward and shake my hand.

"Hi, Brian. Nice to meet you," I responded, as I shook his hand and looked into his face with a welcoming smile. He was older than I imagined him to be, shorter, not at all as imposing and strong looking as Alice had made him sound. Alice had told me stories of how they met, what they had done to their home, and how they loved each other. I had drawn a picture of Brian in my mind. It was not an accurate one. I wondered what he had heard about me. Did my appearance surprise him too?

Brian followed Alice into the hallway.

I stepped aside and closed the door. As I did I thought, handshakes and hugs; greeting people is interesting isn't it? How did I choose which friends received a hug and which a handshake? Here, in Australia, when we shake hands, hardly a thought is given to the hand, unless it is too hard, and hurts, but we notice the face and eyes. Australians often don't shake hands when meeting but rather look into the face and smile or nod acknowledging the other. Handshakes are reserved for more businesslike greetings, and a woman who offers her hand, may be thought aggressive. I had noticed this when I returned from Vanuatu and offered my hand, out of habit, to everyone I met. In Vanuatu even if you met someone walking along a track in the bush you greeted him or her, "Good Morning," and shook hands. A handshake was a ritual and cultural greeting, but did not involve looking at the other. Some people used one hand and shook it firmly once. Some hardly held my hand, but rather cradled it gently in theirs, rocking it to and

fro like a child in a crib. Some held my hand in both of theirs, with hardly an up and down movement. It amazed me often that the size and gender of the person often had nothing to do with the type of handshake. It was an immensely personal 'signature.' A gift from one human to another, in a society where human touch is minimised and human connection regulated by kinship, and culture.

My entrance hall is dominated by what was a planter box in a bygone era. Now topped with a large highly polished slab of red gum, it holds an impressive display of 'dust collectors'. Many of my guests are intrigued by the collection. These guests were no exception. These objects are my memories. Each item marks a time, a person, or an event. As I look at, touch and smell each object I am transported back to the time and place I was given or had bought each object. Each of these items triggers my memory, so I recollect the 'little fragments that have no beginning and no end' (O'Brien 1991:39) and around which 'I tell and retell stories' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:420).

"That is a ceremonial mace."

I picked up the mace and handed it to Brian who had been admiring it from afar.

"Here touch it. I bought it from a Ngunese[1] lady in the Women's market house in Port Vila, on one of my visits. Her uncle carves them. I love the dark rose coloured wood."

"It's much heavier than it looks," Brian commented as he ran his fingers over the mace, exploring the intricate carving.

"Amazing isn't it. Can you imagine carving that from a branch with rough tools? The fretwork is so fine. And that?" I looked over at Alice who was admiring the fine weave of a basket hung on the wall nearby.

"That woven basket comes from Tanna Island. We were given that when we were guests at a circumcision ceremony, several years ago."

I smiled as I thought back to that day. The colour, the silence of the ceremony followed by the sound of the pigs as they were killed. They sounded like human babies as they cried out. And the sound of the skulls being broken when hit with the maces. It still made me shudder. There was an earthquake whilst we were at the ceremony. It was as if the mat we were sitting on was suddenly ripped out from under us throwing us off balance. It created a real uproar amongst the people.

I did a painting of that day. I called it 'and daughter.' It is hung just around the corner from the hall, on the way into the kitchen, so I pass it many times a day and smile and wonder what that little girl is doing.

"What did you do in Vanuatu?" asked Brian.

"Conducted primary eye clinics, eye health education, and researched, planned and commenced a preventative eye care project," I replied.

I was often asked by people, and had asked myself, "Why do you go to Vanuatu?" Or, "What do you do in Vanuatu?" But I don't recall ever being asked, "What is it *like* to do what you do in Vanuatu?" Yet, "what is the experience of cross-cultural health work like?" had come to be the most important question for me. Not because it could elicit empathy, or supportive action from the asker, but because in seeking to elucidate the meaning of the experience both the asker and the answerer may learn from the experience. I wanted others, ni-Vanuatu, cross-cultural workers and academic colleagues, to be able to share the passion, the frustrations, the joy and thrill of being part of this work in Vanuatu, to learn and be challenged by what I, and they, now knew about that experience.

We moved off into the 'green' room, so-called because of the pale apple-green walls and curtains that frame the outlook onto the green treetops, sandstone cliff face, and wide, open paddocks. My guests were seated comfortably chatting to each other so I went into the kitchen to put on the kettle. I had not seen Alice for a month or so. In that time I had begun to examine new ways of reconceptualising my experience as a cross-cultural health worker in Vanuatu, having become increasingly dissatisfied with the direction my writing and research were taking and the lack of connection of my academic work to the rest of my life. 'I needed to go back to why I was attracted to higher education in the first place, to my dreams and hopes of what I could do with a Ph.D., to a place I inhabited before my creativity and imagination were discouraged by my professional socialization' (Ellis 1997:135). Almost five years ago, I had set out to record my experience as an eye health worker in Vanuatu, so that I could show others what the experience was like, in order that they could learn from it. What I found however, was that instead of examining the experience as a whole, I was increasingly being led into studying aspects of a particular phenomenon within the experience, theorising about the phenomenon, applying 'Eurocentric logics of inquiry that reduce the knowable to the measurable or to evolutionary or linear variables' (Stanfield 1994:182), distancing myself from the health programme with which I was involved, alienating the people in the field, and moving further and further away from the experience that I had sought to portray and understand.

When I came to write up the research it was so far removed from my experience, and what I set out to do, I had become quite disillusioned. Although 'there are many different ways of being in this world, alternatives to traditional ways of thinking, and many levels of awareness about alternative 'spaces' that people may occupy, either permanently or temporarily, there are few clear or shared ways of identifying these, or of talking about

them' (Reason and Rowan 1981:114). It was going to be quite a journey to search for, explore, and practise them. But I knew I was not alone, as in recent years some authors (Tierney and Lincoln 1997; Polkinghorne 1997; Denzin 1997; Barone and Eisner 1997; Ellis and Bochner 1996) had called for scholars to help others see the world in new ways, by taking up their personal concerns and representing them in their own unique ways. Other authors had searched for expressive ways to capture 'the liveliness, the involvement and even the passion' (Reason 1988:79) of the experiences being evoked and reflected upon. They had tried to find a way of incorporating the 'passionate contribution' (Polyani 1962) of the person knowing what is known. In searching for a way that was uniquely me, was accessible to my audience of ni-Vanuatu, cross-cultural workers from all walks of life, and academics, I was attracted to arts-based methods[2] and began to explore my experience of cross-cultural health work through the medium of oil painting. I had asked Alice along to get her reactions to the paintings. As a community development worker and friend, she had been following my research for a number of years, albeit from a distance since she lived quite a way from me. Seven paintings were spread around the room, completing their drying process.

When I returned with the coffee I found Alice standing in front a painting.

"It's called '**Form carries experience,**'" I said.

"This is great!" she said enthusiastically.

"I'm so glad you like it," I replied, relief evident in my voice.

"It's about finding a form of portrayal or re-presentation that can convey my experience and understanding of it, to others. 'The selection of a form through which the world is to be represented not only influences what we can say, it also influences what we are likely to experience' (Eisner 1991:8). 'Form, as Eisner (1985) tells us, is usually thought of as a noun, 'the products made by both artists and scientists' (p27), but thinking of the word as a verb helps us to recognise that knowledge is made, or *formed.* Not just any form will do; the form must be integral to the work, and arise from it. Form carries the experience not as vehicles carry goods but as a mother carries a baby when the baby is part of her own organism (Dewey 1934:18). Form is not superimposed, or merely associated with a work it is *of* it' (Norris 1997:93)," I stressed.

"Mmm. I can see the pregnant forms of you as researcher, and the ni-Vanuatu woman," said Alice. "The other people depicted are weaving stories from your paintings back into their lives, in their worlds. Is that it?" asked Alice.

"Yes, but they are not just weaving *my* stories into *their* lives. I wrote the stories from my experience of their lives and what they told me of their lives. The threads are connections

that join us." I replied.

"The woman washing in the stream, the woman weaving a mat, the young boys with their bows and arrows, and the couple from your world, all weaving stories, and woven into stories," said Alice. She moved her hand from image to image as if reaching out to connect with each in turn.

"I liked the concept of working with threads, weaving, knitting with yarn. I saw weaving and knitting as forming, creating something. Then I saw these threads as the intimate connection of creator and created and it reminded me of Psalm 139 verse 13, 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb'."

"And so your form carried the experience as a mother carries her baby in the womb!" exclaimed Alice, placing her hands on her face.

I left her standing there seemingly mesmerised as I walked over and placed the tray of coffee on the table.

"Brian?" I looked over to where he was sitting.

"Oh, milk and two sugars please," he replied as he made his way over to the table.

"Alice?"

"I'll get hers," offered Brian.

He carried the coffees over to where Alice was standing.

"Here." He passed the coffee to her.

"Thanks," Alice replied, as for the first time she seemed to take in the people and room around her.

"Why the gap between the paintings?" Brian asked.

"The two worlds. You know, worlds apart," answered Alice, as she looked to me for confirmation of her interpretation.

"That's what I saw. Yet as researcher you'll see that I cross physically into both worlds and that the form straddles both worlds," I said.

"Why do you have two faces?" quizzed Brian.

"One looks inward, one looks outward. One explores my internal world, the other explores the world of the ni-Vanuatu. See the blurring that represents the outward movement of the gaze and also the connection with the people in the other world," I pointed out the sweeping semitransparent whitish 'gaze'.

Brian nodded and drank his coffee.

"The mirror. Is that you reflecting on yourself? It seems that you are somehow being

naked before yourself. That is your bathroom isn't it?" asked Alice.

"Yes. I wanted to contrast the stark, sterile, uniformly divided, interior white walls of our man made world, with the natural, intensely coloured, openness of their world. Being naked is also important: being stripped of all pretence, of all cultural trimmings. Yet still she retains something of them. See in her hand."

"What is in her hand?" asked Brian.

"You tell me?" I replied.

"Looks like a wallet," replied Brian.

"Looks like a glasses case," said Alice.

"Could be all, or any of those. I see it as a little black book. Could be a Bible. Could be any book of learning. It contains those things that even when stripped of all else, inform her judgements and interpretations of the world."

"Also, we can see things about her in the mirror that she can't see herself," commented Alice.

"The tears. Are they caused by what she discovers?" asked Alice.

"No. I think they are because she's torn apart from the other woman. See the hands are still holding each other," pointed out Brian.

"I think you're both right. Also I think tears come from being exposed and vulnerable. Sometimes tears come from it all just being too hard. From being alive."

A moment of silence followed.

"The half that's dressed," said Alice, "is dressed in ni-Vanuatu dress?"

"Yes, 'Island Dress'."

"So these paintings, they are part of your thesis on cross-cultural health work, Alice tells me," said Brian. "Is that unusual?"

"Yes. But recently there have been a number of scholars calling for research that blurs the boundaries between social science and humanities, acknowleging that there is a need to constantly be searching for better and alternative ways of exploring and representing their experience. Some (Ball and Smith 1992; Harper 1998 1994; Norris 1997) have suggested and called for ways of expanding the tools we use for representing knowledge, whilst others have explored poetry (Richardson 1994a) and 'messy' texts (Ellis and Bochner 1996; Denzin 1997; Tierney and Lincoln 1997), using written text in unconventional ways to evoke responses in their audience. Still others have called for expressive inquiry (Willis 1998, 1999; Crotty 1996) and arts-based research (Barone and Eisner 1997; Eisner 1991)," I paused.

"Yet, to date, most inquirers still employ words as their sole medium of representation. They may have expressed their 'belief in the usefulness of non-verbal artistic media' (Barone and Eisner 1997:73) but in the main they have developed ways of applying artistic qualities to words, and avoided the use of non-verbal artistic media."

"Why do you think that is?" asked Alice.

"Maybe because of academic, and publishing restrictions," I sipped my coffee. "For some the fear of reprisal or ridicule, as ethnographers *blurring genres* (Geertz 1973) struggle to be accepted as 'real' social scientists (Barone and Eisner 1997; Ellis 1997; Norris 1997:108). It is increasingly clear that 'which particular forms of representation become acceptable in the research community is as much a political matter as an epistemological one' (Eisner 1991;7-8)."

"Aren't you taking a bit of a risk then?" asked Brian.

"Yes, I suppose I am. But in an ever-changing world there is a need to continue to push the boundaries of ethnography in seeking to find forms of expression which endeavour to be more accountable to research participants, more honest, more engaging, and more likely to achieve the goal of empowering, understanding and improving lives. 'Visual art with its elements of aesthetics, economy of statement and individualised expression, conveys information and points of view in emphatic and convincing ways' (Sharf 1995:72). Also 'by adding new forms to our repertoire, we open more avenues to understanding, thus increasing the kinds of questions we can ask' (Norris 1997:97), I explained.

"I admit I find it a bit hard to accept paintings as research," said Brian. "They just don't seem scientific."

"I know to some 'the very concept of artistically based research is regarded as an oxymoron. To them research is a concept that is embedded in a scientific conception of method. The idea that something as personal and subjective as art can perform a research function does not fit comfortably into their traditional views of research method' (Barone and Eisner 1997:84)", I looked at Brian.

"Think about the way such art forms as literature, poetry, dance, film, and video have been used in our culture to 'help people see and understand important issues and events' (Eisner 1991:245). You accept them as ways of knowing about things, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I do," Brian said as I offered him a slice of cake.

"So if that's the case why did you choose paintings and not a novel or such?" he asked.

"I love to paint. I love the feel of the palette knife moving the thick, glossy paint across the canvas. I love the anticipation, the sense of creativity, and the feelings captured and

displayed. Even a painting of a tree, is not just a tree. It is how I felt about seeing that tree. It is how small I felt, how huge the tree. It is an interpretation of my experience of that tree."

"But how does your love of painting tie up with the research in Vanuatu?" Brian interrupted.

"I was coming to that. The series of paintings I have created are emotional, lived experiences of cross cultural health work, interpreted and depicted. They include images, which when depicted together perform 'an artistic function of reorganising experience so it is perceived freshly' (Grumet 1988:81). The images both evoke and clarify the experience. Also, being a researcher in Vanuatu is not dissimilar to being an artist. You need to be sensitive to the texture, features, tones, and perspectives of the social settings. You need to be intuitive, creative and reflective (Wolcott 1995). So my tool for generating knowledge using an expressive interpretative approach was not a surgeon's analytical scalpel but an artist's pen, palette, and painting knife (Willis 1999:93), and when it came to re-presenting that knowledge I continued to use the same senses, exploring my topic through picturing. This is not radically new, 'most human beings come to know the world as it is for them through a process of picturing' (Fyfe and Law 1988; Ball and Smith 1992; Barone and Eisner 1997; Van Manen 1997; Chaplin 1998), it just hasn't been used very much by social scientists," I explained.

"Yes. I can picture another cup of coffee," said Brian with a grin.

"I think I can arrange that!" I replied, as I made made way to the kitchen.

I was glad of the break in the conversation. I had been doing a lot of talking. Was it too much? They seemed genuinely interested not just politely interested. Vanuatu was so much part of my life. The health work, the thinking about it, the sharing and the experience had become part of me and moulded the person I was. I poured the dark-brown, glistening whole beans into the coffee grinder and wound the handle around.

Vanuatu coffee. We had purchased the beans from the factory on Tanna. The aroma of the freshly ground coffee filled the room. Tanna. What a frustrating visit that had been. Large distances travelled to find messages had not been given out so clinics were unable to be conducted. Yet, it was also a time to immerse ourselves in the culture to have wonderful experiences of *kastom* ceremonies, community celebrations, warm hospitality, spectacular volcanic eruptions, and dolphins at play.

The clunk of the kettle switch snapped me back into action as I poured the water onto the ground coffee and fitted the plunger into the top of the glass cylinder.

"Mmm. That smells great!" Alice exclaimed as I re-entered the green room.

We refilled our cups and settled down on the sofas again.

"Now where were we?" I asked.

"You were telling me why you used paintings," Brian said enthusiastically.

"Oh, yes. Usually, ethnographers have 'language sit in for life' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:20) as they translate their visual observations into words, and have 'language doing the work of eyes' (Tyler 1986:137 in Ball and Smith 1992:6). Image-based research and visual representations have been often overlooked or marginalised by social researchers (Fyfe and Law 1988; Ball and Smith 1992; Harper 1994; Prosser 1998). 'Even though most sociologists are sighted, even though much sociology depends upon observation, sociology has not derived from, nor has it reflected a visual record of the world.... For many of us this has been unsatisfactory. Sociology, we believed, ought to include a new kind of epistemology, based on knowledge represented in imagery rather than words' (Harper 1996:69)." I took a mouthful of coffee, then continued. "I felt that to translate the experience into words was to rationalise, and lose some of the spontaneity and fluidity of the images. Words 'miss the fullness and the uniqueness of our private worlds. Words fall short because language is essentially social. It is only through the collectivity of language that we can access experience, the experience of others as well as our own. And so the essentially unique and private qualities of inner experience will ultimately be beyond our linguistic reach' (Van Manen 1997:xiii). Through the medium of oil paintings I was able to tap into deeply personal, emotional experience, using a consciousness that did not rely on words. The results often surprised me, as I looked at the finished paintings."

"They surprised you! How could they surprise you when you created them?" asked Alice.

"I don't know. Images turned up on the canvas that I now recognise from things seen, experiences I thought I had forgotten. So the process of painting taught me things about the experience, about the culture I had begun to absorb, the people I had come to know, and about myself," I answered.

"Okay, I can accept that you might use paintings as a means of learning more about your private experience, but why use them to publically display that experience and not words?" asked Brian.

"Well, you see, the words I use would be from a *particular* language and language use is intricately bound to cultural identity, to people's understandings of, and perceptions of the self and the other. I understood and recognised 'its potential for *intersubjectivity*, or obtaining a shared understanding of the other; for *self reflectivity,* that is developing a sense of self, interpreting conversing with oneself, and *meaningful activity,* like anticipating, performing, interacting accomplishing or doing things.' (Prus 1994:11). If I had just told people these things through written language, in my case English, I would

have isolated, possibly alienated, a significant part of my audience, the non-English speaking, and the illiterate."

"Why alienated?" asked Alice.

" 'Language cannot be a neutral means of communicating what exists in the world' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:20). Concepts learned in one language may be extremely difficult to translate or comprehend in another language. Vanuatu has three official languages, English, French, and Bislama. Most of my research was conducted in Bislama, the language of inter-island communication, hence I was constantly struggling to translate what I had learned back into English, endeavouring to understand concepts and expressions that lost meaning in the translation. Through painting I could capture meaning without the constraints of the linguistic boundaries. The paintings could speak to each socio-linguistic group." I drank some coffee. "Further if I had settled for a thesis written in conventional format, it would have been laden with jargon which is largely inaccessible to people outside the discipline, let alone non-native speakers (Norris 1997; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991)! It would therefore not have reached the audiences I intended. I find it ironic when in 'a text that argues for greater accessibility, a chapter may be quite laden with dense and difficult language. Texts don't need to be 'dumbed down' for readers but not all texts need to be written for similar academic audiences, or even indeed solely for an academic audience. Hopefully more texts will be created for a broader range of readers' (Tierney and Lincoln 1997:xiv-xv) as is my thesis."

"But haven't you presumed paintings are read in the same way by everyone?" asked Brian. " 'Cos surely they won't be?", he added

"No, they won't and that's okay because rather than prompt a single closed, convergent 'reading', I sought to persuade my audience 'to contribute answers to the dilemmas posed within' (Barone and Eisner 1997:75) the paintings. So, the stories that people weave from their 'readings' of these paintings 'will long to be used, as well as analysed, to be revised and retold rather than settled and theorised' (Bochner and Ellis 1996b:4)."

"So are you saying anyone's understanding is valid? Won't some of them be wrong?" exclaimed Brian.

"Wrong? No, they won't be wrong. Maybe not what I had intended, but ..."

"So how do people know what you intended?" quizzed Brian.

"In order to understand the painting, the viewer enters a 'created' world through connection with images, persons or places depicted. In the 'created' world he/she endeavours to hear what the artist is saying through the images, deals with emotional responses evoked through interaction both within and without that 'created' world, enters a dialogue with the artist/other and then leaves that 'created' world to re-enter the 'real' world."

"But don't you need to write sometime?" pressed Brian.

"I have heard an argument (Van Manen 1997:124) that 'in an oral culture, in a society dominated by orality, phenomenology would be quite impossible. Not only because phenomenology is a certain mode of reflection done traditionally by scholars who write. But also because a certain form of consciousness is required, a consciousness that is created in the act of literacy; reading and writing'. The argument centres around the notion that writing fixes thought on paper, distances us from our immediate lived involvements, and 'objectifies' our thinking. 'Writing is the method. The writer produces the text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. Writing is a kind of self making or forming' (Van Manen 1997:126-127)."

"I take it you don't agree with that?" said Brian.

"Well, I have some doubts. I agree that we need to record experiences and that recording requires a consciousness but I'm not sure that it requires writing. I think painting may perform the same function. In my experience, recording feelings, events, places—life - in pictures or images and icons led to a transformed consciousness that distanced and allowed understanding of the phenonemenon, that was different from the lived experience of the phenomenon. I am not talking here about realistic pictures captured with the eye, but 'feeling' pictures and images. You see it goes back to what I said before. When I painted the final paintings, they sometimes surprised me. I was using a different consciousness when I was painting. Looking at the paintings rationally after they had been formed gave me greater insight of myself, and the experience. 'Vision, at least initially, depends upon the existence of qualities that can be seen. These qualities may be aspects of the world we inhabit or products of our imagination. To imagine is to generate images; to see is to experience qualities. Both the content of the world and the content of our imagination are dependent upon qualities. It is through the perception of qualities—not only those we can see, but those we experience through any of our senses—that our consciousness comes into being...But seeing qualities, interpreting their significance and appraising their value are only one side of the coin. The other pertains to that magical and mysterious feat through which the content of our consciousness is given public form' (Barone and Eisner 1997:1)."

"And for that you used paintings," said Brian.

"That may well account for *your* experience, and *your* voice, but what about the voices of the *Other*, aren't you silencing them?" asked Alice.

"No. They just don't use words to communicate. If I used their words, I'd have to translate for non-English speakers anyway, and some meaning is lost in translation. I think the people speak loudly and powerfully through their actions and interactions within the paintings. Their voices are also heard multi-dimensionally, having both

context and action evoked. The voices have tone, volume, and colour as they are depicted on the canvas. Without having to worry about words, you can really hear the voices. You concentrate and look deeply at what is meant, rather than what is actually said. And remember my voice is treated the same as theirs in the paintings," I pointed out.

"How did you know what to paint?" asked Brian struggling with another piece of cake. "Did you paint from your travel diary or photos?"

How did I know what to paint? How did I choose what to paint? I thought back to the way the bright cobalt blue oozed from the tube as my fingers pushed into the soft metal casing. How the smell of the oil paint reached into the depths of my mind and began to awaken the consciousness, the consciousness that was freed from the binding cords of rationality when I painted. How could I answer Brian's question?

"I learned much about myself, and about the people of Vanuatu, their culture, their perceptions of eye health, prevention and sunglasses. I kept field diaries and had taken many photographs, yet I used none of them in the creation of the paintings. I stilled my rational mind, and risked letting images bubble up from the thick stew of emotions buried inside me under rational self-control and social acceptability. 'Using contemplation and intuition 'the mind does not 'seize upon' the object to analyse and subdue it, but attempts to behold it, to allow its reality, its beauty and its texture to become more and more present' (Willis 1999:98)," I replied.

I waited, drank a little more of the coffee, then continued.

"Even here consciousness is still active, but the act of thinking is different; 'it is an act of reception which holds the thinking mind back from closure and returns again and again to behold the object, allowing words and images to emerge from the contemplative engagement' (Willis 1999:98). In my art room the experience of being a health worker in Vanuatu, was transposed onto a canvas. Sometimes it was realistic visualisations of places, people, and events. Other times it was collages of superimposed images, faces, colours, and textures. All these appeared as I looked inside myself."

Brian looked confused.

I wanted to explain that 'introspection permits us to prompt and collect our own and other people's stories about the lived details of socially constructed experience. Still most methods available to sociologists focus on the rational order in the world. Surveys, questionnaires, and laboratory observations of emotional feelings tell us about the surface public self (Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1983). Even participant observation and phenomenological study are rational, cognitive searches for order (Douglas 1977:xiii). Without examining the lived experience of emotion in individuals and across collectives, we are forced to talk of spiritless, empty husks of people who have

programmed, patterned emotions, and whose feelings resemble the decision making-models of rational choice theorists. Introspection will allow us to study emotions as they are experienced without using models that have rationality built into them' (Ellis 1991a:45). But whilst important, that all sounded so authoritative, devoid of emotion, telling, not really showing how *I* made the decision about what to paint.

"Using 'emotional recall' (Ellis 1999:675) I continued to imagine myself back in the scenes emotionally and physically. I captured the experience and how it felt using the images, colours, and interactions depicted, to endeavour to evoke in the audience emotional responses. As I painted, moments came into my mind, and strong feelings accompanying them. Images of what I had experienced, of what I knew it to be like. These emotions and images were interwoven as I looked at the experience. I drew. I painted. I stood back from the palette and the easel and looked at the picture being formed on the canvas, then moved in and corrected the shape, the scene or the figure," I explained.

My research project was like that. Looking at one little aspect, I tended to miss seeing the bigger picture, and whilst looking at the bigger picture it was difficult to see the minute details and intricate aspects, I thought as I paused, and sipped my now lukewarm coffee before continuing.

"Back and forth I moved in the creation of the painting. Back and forth I moved in focus and thought during the creation of knowledge in the field. Sensitive to the social tones, the moods and feelings that coloured the daily life, the world-view and cosmos that shaped the action and interaction. Looking at myself. Taking off my 'coloured' glasses and seeing the difference personal and cultural lenses make to what we see. Back and forth, I gazed. Seeing what others missed. The ideas that become the content of artistic creations are 'fed by what is called perceptivity, and associated with perceptivity is the matter of providing a deep interpretation' (Barone and Eisner 1997:93) of those ideas," I added.

"Sounds very emotional," said Alice.

"It was, and it was hard work," I replied.

"Hard work! I can't imagine remembering and doing a hobby, being *hard* work," said Brian.

I smiled. "You know Brian, 'although the mind is a receptor, it is not inactive or passive. All kinds of knowing require work by the knower' (Willis 1999:98)."

I placed my cup on the coffee table near my chair.

"Listening to what you've said, does that mean that we are getting a lot of researcher *impressions* and not real, objective data?" asked Brian.

"Is there such a thing as 'real' or 'objective' data? All knowledge is socially constructed; a 'form of experience and therefore a reflection of mind as well as nature: knowledge is made, not simply discovered' (Barone and Eisner 1997:87) and the 'knower' always plays a central role in the creation of knowledge," I answered.

"So you're saying everything I know is really just an interpretation of something that I have chosen to believe, not 'real' or 'objective'?" asked Brian.

"Yes, but it depends what kind of knowledge you are seeking to construct. Mine wasn't so-called objective facts, the number of people needing eye treatments etc. I sought to portray, describe and understand the experience, a different kind of knowledge which combines objective and subjective elements. Hence, my personality, background, historical roots, spiritual, moral, ethical beliefs and judgements, my physical body and senses are all integral parts of my interaction with my world and influence the way I come to know it. And so my paintings 'represent—whether in some hidden way or openly—my baggage as an individual and social scientist' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:582).

"So if everything is influenced by me being there and my knowing about it, is anything out there 'real'?" asked Brian.

"Yes, but it must be 'interpreted cognitively, rather than as an objective reality waiting to be discovered' (Lowenberg 1993). You see there is an interdepence between thought and experience because 'reality is what exists in a person's mind about the somethings—not the somethings themselves' (Potter 1996:38). Interpretive inquiry seeks to identify, describe, and analyse subjective meanings and the social construction of meanings, those of the people studied, and the person studying them. My 'emphasis is very much on the ways in which people produce or formulate activity on an ongoing basis and, in so doing, how they take themselves and others into account' (Dietz, Prus, Shaffir 1994:4). As we talked about before, 'all researchers are to some degree connected to, a part of, the object of their research' (Davies 1999:3) so reflexivity is of central importance."

"What's reflexivity?" asked Brian.

"Well, as I understand it, 'reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self reference' (Davies 1999:4)," said Alice.

"Yes. When we talk about reflexivity in social research, it refers to the ways in which the products of the research are affected by the person and process of doing the research. It also entails a form of self-examination, from private diary keeping, to 'total reflexivity requiring full and uncompromising self-reference' (Davies 1999:7). Some scholars argue that 'in this fullest form, reflexivity, in spite of its unavoidable and essentially desirable presence in social research, becomes destructive of the process of doing such

research; because as researchers we are led 'to reflect on our own subjectivities, and then to reflect upon the reflection in an infinitude of self-reflexive iterations' (Gergen and Gergen 1991:77).' (Davies 1999:7). But I believe 'much can be learned from taking a self-reflexive stance toward my own reasons and motivations for doing what I do or have done and toward my understandings of their interactions with others' (Smith 1992:103), although I acknowledge we must be wary of becoming so 'self-absorbed that we lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other' (Rosaldo 1993:7)," I explained.

"Okay," said Brian, "I think I've got it. You are concerned about understanding how you and other people construct the world, interpret things that happen, rather than how we discover them, so that makes it okay to use your own impressions as data, because I as audience then understand more about how you construct your world and make sense of your experience. But how does that work when you are examining the world of the ni-Vanuatu?"

"I was in their world, seeking answers to questions I had about their lives. I looked at how they lived, acted, and created their worlds. At the same time I was questioning the process of gathering this knowledge, as well as the knowledge itself and how it impacted on me. All this was part of my experience of cross-cultural health work. So for me writing autoethnography entailed the incorporation of elements of my own life and experience when writing about others through ethnography. So my work differs from straight ethnography or autobiography. See over there."

Brian and Alice looked towards the painting *Flas*.

"That is an ethnographic painting. The focus there is on the Other and their construction of making *flas*. We can talk about that a bit later. There are two other important things to remember here; firstly, any study is only the researcher's 'impressions', or interpretation of the Other, which in my research project were the ni-Vanuatu. Secondly, I can only partly know their world, because I am not one of them. I can become engaged, involved in their world, but in doing that I am also changing that world by my presence. I influenced the data. Even undertaking participant observation my presence had to change the social interaction. But by 'knowing-in-action' (Reason and Rowan 1981), which encompasses as much of my experience as possible, I have a deeper understanding of aspects of the experience of protecting eyes, because I know about it in the context of my participation in ni-Vanuatu life, not as isolated dependent and independent variables of experimental science. My 'knowing' has involved not only a systematic learning process but also learning through risk-taking in living."

"I know that in my work, you just have to get out there with the people to know what's going on sometimes," said Alice.

"Yes, and sometimes it takes more than that. You have to develop closeness to people, so that you can 'don the shoes of another human being' (Eisner 1991:37). That's called empathy, it pertains to feeling or to emotion, and 'emotion interestingly, is often regarded as the enemy of cognition' (Eisner 1991:37)."

"Yes," said Brian, "you can't think with your heart."

"But can you really think without it? People talk about 'gut reactions'—how they just 'knew in their heart' what to do. Hillman (1981) outlines three philosphies of the heart. The first is the heart of the Lion. 'My heart is my humanity, my courage to live, my strength and fierce passion' (p5). The second is the heart of Harvey, the anatomical heart, a heart we can see and hold, and a divided heart. It is also understood to be the force that keeps me alive, but can attack me, causing death. 'We cannot have faith in the very organ that was once the source of faith. The heart has become my enemy, my killer, my death' (p15). Thirdly, there is the heart of Augustine. This is a personal heart. 'My heart is my love, my feelings, the locus of my soul and sense of person' (p6). 'Every move we make, phrase we utter, is a confession of our heart because it reveals our images' (p20). Each of these philosophies has impacted on Western thinking, still we are 'bereft in our culture of an adequate psychology and philosophy of the heart, and therefore also of the imagination. Our hearts cannot apprehend that they are imaginatively thinking hearts, because we have so long been told that the mind thinks and the heart feels, and that imagination leads us astray from both' (Hillman 1981:3). Hillman (1981) explores the work of Henry Corbin who 'thought of the heart as sovereign and noble, as joyous, as subtle as an animal, bold, courageous and encouraging, as delighting in intellectual forms and fierce in their defence, ever-extending equally in its compassion and in its visionary power, forming a beauty in the languague of images' (p2)."

"I like that definition," said Alice enthusiastically.

"Yes," I agreed, "so do I. It shows that the heart is important. It needs to be conveyed powerfully in the research findings. As Eisner (1991) says 'Why take the heart out of the situations we are trying to help readers understand" (p37)?

"But wouldn't that make it very subjective?" asked Brian. "Isn't objectivity important?"

"To take out the heart, to hide it, was to lie. It was not being objective. It involved making a subjective choice to ignore something that was a real part of the experience, so as to conform to the expectations of, and be acceptable to, some members of the academic audience," I said passionately. "My 'objectivity' as scientist was less important to my representation than providing my audience with some 'powerful propositional, tacit, intuitive, emotional, historial, poetic and empathetic experience'

(Denzin and Lincoln 1994:582) of the Other and me, as we engage in the Other's world and mine."

"That's really different from realist ethnography," said Alice, "where you write yourself out of the picture."

"Yes. There the researcher tries to be invisible in the writing of the story. Any effects they might have had on what people said and did, or what they might have learned through their reactions to the author, are secondary. They don't admit how much their own emotional experiences in the communities influenced what they saw and wrote (Ellis 1995b)," I suggested.

"I can see that it is important to include and describe the emotions involved, after all we often make decisions based on how we feel. I should imagine in a cross-cultural situation this is a battle a lot of the time, when you feel homesick, lonely, threatened by unknowns yet also elated, excited and stimulated by new experiences and challenges. Tell me how you examine emotional experience? Aren't you just too close? Won't other current emotions cloud your ability to see?" asked Alice.

"Yes, you can be 'too close' at the time. But jotting notes, keeping a diary can allow you to return to the experience later. Using 'emotional recall' (Ellis 1999) and 'systematic sociological introspection' (Ellis 1991a) you can get into and move around inside an experience, helping to reconstruct the scenes. Representing the experience 'after' can give the distance needed to get outside to analyse from a cultural perspective. You move from being emotionally inside the experience, to being outside as you analyse thoughts, feelings and actions as socially constructed. 'Both of these processes, moving in and moving out, are necessary to produce an effective autoethnography' (Ellis 1999:675)," I explained.

"But recording after the experience, you have to know things now that you didn't know at the time. That has to influence how you recall and feel about the event," argued Alice.

"It will," I agreed. "But Alice, 'that doesn't mean there's no value in trying to disentangle now from then, as long as you realise it's not a project you'll ever complete or 'get right'' " (Ellis 1999:675). As I had made notes in the field I could refer to them and help in working out what I knew then, and what I know now. I then found trying to look at the differences, and discovering what changed in me, was really helpful. Also, as a result of the experience, I had read widely on the topic, and what I read made me think about it differently. That added to the depth of the analysis, and helped enlighten or point to other aspects of the experience that I hadn't understood or dealt with. I wove this into the stories so that readers would 'trust that I had started with what I didn't know and discovered what I did know through the process of writing. I never pretended

to have it all worked out, nor to suggest that the finished product disclosed the bare truth' (Ellis 1997:130)."

"Aren't you embarrassed to bare your soul, so to speak? I know I would be," said Alice.

"Sure, there is a personal risk that comes from exposing yourself, your private self and that self interacting with others. Having your thoughts, your faults, your actions becoming public knowledge and open to others' scrutiny, is scary and I have weighed up that cost as much as anyone can. I guess I am a fairly open person anyway. I feel that everything I do will have to be accounted for on the day I meet my maker."

"But I get so angry when people criticise my work, I can't get my act together for days," said Alice.

"And that's when I pack my bags and find a business trip to go on," joked Brian.

We laughed.

"I get hurt and angry when people criticise me or my work, in my opinion unfairly, but I think I have the strength and support to get through it, to view it as a learning process as I have before. Or at least I hope I can. I think the benefits of honesty with self and others far outweigh any negatives. I know that may sound naïve, but I'd rather be naïve and trusting, than cynical and full of defensive barriers," I replied.

"So did you write anything?" asked Brian.

"Yes, but the writing was an extension of the process undertaken in painting. It was not the intention of my writing to directly point out the meaning of the paintings, but together with the paintings to represent the experience by 're-creating pattern in metaphorical shape and form' (Reason 1988:80). They also give important background information about the ni-Vanuatu culture to allow the audience to give meaning to what they see in the paintings."

"So your writing is really for the audience—to assist them in understanding the paintings," said Alice.

"Yes, as my paintings included images of worlds of which my audience would not have had previous experience, and so would not have ready connections, I needed to incorporate points of access to these worlds for the audience, my writing is one point of access. Also, through writing, I further explored those aspects of the experience I uncovered through painting, so the process of writing became another tool for reflexive knowledge, allowing me 'to see the 'other' as an extension of the writing-observing self' (Prattis 1985b in Denzin 1997: 212). In my writing 'the distance between the 'I' and the 'Other' and between the 'writing-I' and the 'experiencing-I' was reduced' (Richardson 1994a:11). I could look at myself differently, see myself as the Other and I

could look at myself in relation to the people. I could see a closeness, a kind of relationship that I didn't always feel."

"So you're saying that by writing, you actually became closer to the people," said Alice, "because I had read that in the writing stage researchers often move away from their subjects and that sometimes they and their subject suffer a sense of betrayal."

"That was how I felt when I began writing initially and those feelings contributed to me seeking another way to portray the experience. One that felt more equal, that was applying the same rules to me as to the people. By changing my voice from authoritative, outsider to connected storyteller, and picture maker, I also changed the way in which the voices of the people could be heard (Polkinghorne 1997:3). You see, they joined and interacted with me in these, as co-actors, with their own roles in the drama."

"But you didn't have records of what was actually spoken did you?" asked Brian.

"No. It goes back to what we were discussing before. Using my field notes, I had to recreate, re-enter the scenes. The result was not realist copies of actual words but rather storied accounts of events, involving as much of the experience I could recall. 'When people note something of their experience, whether to themselves or to others, they do so not by the mere recording of experience over time, but in storied form. In effect, stories are the closest we can come to experience as we, and others, tell of experience' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:415). The painting opened up the experience and brought back the events, linking them by common themes or words. I went back to my photographs and my field notes and imagined myself physically there. Who was with me? What did it feel like? What smells were there? What could I see?"

"Did you record things like that in your field notes? It must have been hard keeping field notes when you were working most of the time," sympathised Alice.

"Yes. Hurricane light does not help clear writing, apart from being exhausted at the end of each day, but I did jot down incidents, things people said or talked about. Also, as Lewis (1975), an anthropologist undertaking a study into health and illness in New Guinea found, 'the adequacy of my recording varied during my stay since my knowledge of the people and their language increased gradually, just as did their familiarity with me and their wish or readiness to tell me about things' (p97)," I paused recalling the faces of those who had shared with me. As the images flooded my mind I said, "I took lots of photographs".

"How did you use them?" asked Alice.

"They jogged the mind. Transported me back into a scene. As I looked at them again with my family they could also recall conversations, events or other interesting details about the day, the place, the people."

"Did you use tape recordings?" asked Brian.

"I only used tape recordings with close informants, people who worked regularly with me in the clinics. They didn't seem to be intimidated by the tape recorder. The other thing was, it wasn't always appropriate or possible to pull out a tape recorder and then record conversations taking place casually on the beach waiting for transport. I was often too embarrassed by the differences in our material possessions to do that in any case. It seemed to be like flaunting the differences when you were trying to focus on establishing closeness. I know the camera was also a sign of that difference, but I could give something to them they wanted from that: photographs! I seemed to have trouble keeping up with batteries too. Comes from a lifetime dependence on an electricity supply!"

I paused. "One night we had to raid four torches to get enough batteries to record an interview, and even then they only just had enough power in them."

"So in writing the stories, you began with the paintings, checked with the field notes, then what?" asked Brian, clearly relieved that I had finally written something down for people to read.

"I went back to the paintings. When I looked at the paintings, I did not just see the people depicted, but sensed the experience. I needed to share these stories with the viewers of the paintings, to further involve them in the paintings. I did not want them to be just spectators; I wanted them to feel experiences depicted in the painting as I did. Looking at the painting I heard the drums, smelt the fire, felt the humidity, the excitement, the disappointment, the fear, the relief. I wrote some more." I looked at Brian. "Yes, I know I said language was confining. But these words were not coming from my linguistic, rational mind they were coming from the paintings. They were words and stories *of* me, not from me. Rosaldo (1989), another anthropologist had a similar experience. His wife died, falling from a cliff, while they were in the field. Some time before, he had studied headhunters who said it was their grief that caused the rage to cut off people's heads. Through her death he came to understand their explanation. It was fifteen months after her death before he was able to begin writing anthropology, then one day he began to write. He says it was like a fog lifting and 'it seemed less as if I were doing the writing than that the words were writing themselves through me' (p11)," I explained.

"Oh," said Alice, "what an experience that must be. And what a powerful story it must make, written from that kind of experience."

"Yes. 'The story format is best suited to promoting 'epiphanic moments (Denzin 1989)' in its readers, and gets its power from its capacity to entice the reader into a powerful vicarious experience' (Barone and Eisner 1997:84). Writing the stories also takes the

writer back to these moments and forces them to face, again, the emotion of the moment, and to this time seek to understand it with the benefit of hindsight and distance. This was painful but proved therapeutic, Rosaldo (1993) found that. Admittedly, I found things were confronting, generated fear and self-doubt, but learning comes through 'doubt, self-examination and willingness to change, seeking self-correcting engagement with dynamic realities and making learning a way of life' (Chambers 1997:100)."

"Would the ni-Vanuatu relate to storytelling as we do?" asked Alice.

"Very much. Storytelling is an appropriate medium for both Western and ni-Vanuatu audiences. As an oral culture, *Kastom* stories have been part of ni-Vanuatu life, and *storian* had been a major part of my experience, research method and of health work in Vanuatu."

"It seems that storytelling has become really important to your research," said Brian.

I nodded. "I have come to see storytelling as 'an imperative human practice' (Tierney and Lincoln 1997:51)."

"Aren't *Kastom* stories different from what we understand a story to be?" asked Alice.

"Yes.With the coming of the *waetman*, the ni-Vanuatu entered a world of written text, as missionaries began to write down stories, chants, and songs. 'It appears that the model for textualisation was the missionary model, or the little more improved models of the social scientists and colonial administrators. Their texts stand and appear as final, objective and neutral entities. They have no history, no parentage, no people, but plenty of authority. The problem with all this is the erasure of orality from all the texts' (Manoa 1995:19), and the loss of the art of storytelling."

"That's what you've just been saying about research texts," said Brian. "They need more sense of attachment, reflexivity, and art form. Sounds like the move is back to what the people were doing before Westernisation."

"What do you mean by the art of storytelling?" asked Alice.

"The art of story telling lies in the writer's ability to create a virtual reality, allow the presence of ambiguity. The story teller lets 'contradictions and seemingly random events stand, willing to admit, after deep exploration, that no explanatory scheme or pattern was readily apparent and that understanding is never complete' (Ellis 1997:132). The art of storytelling involves making use of expressive, contextualised, and vernacular language in the telling of the story. It promotes empathy. It has the personal signature of the teller and presence of aesthetic form (Barone and Eisner 1997)," I explained.

"Aren't they also qualities of works of art?" asked Alice.

"Yes," I replied. "My stories endeavour to possess the characteristics of the paintings which co-exist with them. They are created one of the other, but like the chicken and the egg it is impossible to decide which came first."

"So what sort of stories did you write?" asked Alice.

"I wrote autoethnographic stories. Are you familiar with the term?" I asked.

"No. I guess it has something to do with the cultural study of people 'ethnography' and 'auto' the self, you alluded to that before, but how do the two go together?" asked Brian.

"Let me read you Carolyn Ellis' definition."

I walked over to the side table where some books and papers I had been using earlier in the day were neatly packed away.

"Ah! Here it is." I made my way back to the chair and sat down.

> " 'Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angled lens, focussing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (cf Deck 1990; Neumann 1996; Reed-Danahay 1997). As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in the first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In these texts concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories impacted by history, and social structure, which themselves are dialectally revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language' (Ellis 1999:673)."

"Sounds great, and I sense from what you've shared that it was the right methodology for you, as it appears autoethnography enabled you to work through the issues of voice, detachment, betrayal, and objectivity, that had deterred you from adopting a more traditional approach," said Alice.

I placed the paper on the glass coffee table and picked up the plate next to it.

"More cake?" I asked.

"No, thanks," said Brian.

"Are autoethnographic stories any different from any old story?" asked Brian.

"Yes, and no. Autoethnographic stories, are not just literary stories; they are real-life stories. They are lifelike, believable and have analytic purpose. They offer ways to improve lives and communicate with others different from us. They invite the reader into the story. 'The goal is not only to know, but to feel ethnographic 'truth' and thus to become more fully immersed—morally, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually' (Bochner and Ellis 1996b:4). In this sense, they possess the orality that many written stories have lost," I answered.

"Orality? I haven't heard of that," said Brian.

"Orality is speech, verbal communication, word-arts, songs, chants, jokes, stories. 'Orality is the order of our human lifeworld, closest to it for our survival, closest to it for our personal development, closest to it for maintaining the bonds that keep us human' (Manoa 1995:3). Orality is rhythm, inflection, cadence, and silence. 'Its social and verbal complement (which sometimes takes the form of compliments, additions, echoing, reinforcing sounds of approval or disgust, wonder) an interacting audience, a participatory audience' (Manoa,1995:3). When we read stories, we desire to "hear" the voices of the characters in our heads, we seek the closeness, the intimacy of the oral, but in many stories words have become distant, stiff, silent and visual through the way they are written. I tried to write stories that someone can read to others. Stories that others bring to life. This was important as the ni-Vanuatu are very good orators with a long tradition of oral storytelling."

"So not only do the people have voices as actors, in the story, but voices to interpret and give life to the story as it is read to others," said Alice.

"Yes, and 'working with our respondents to help them find their own voice implies a connectedness with them that we only rarely see now in text form. Such closeness implicates a fraternal or sororial relationship that may be uncomfortable, unfamiliar, awkward, or graceless. But paternalistic colonialism can no longer suffice. The sharing of work implies egalitarian ends. Such ends necessarily define who we are and how we approach those, whose voices become the subjects of our stories' (Tierney and Lincoln 1997:51)".

"But what about the paintings?" asked Brian.

"The stories are told in words and paintings. The orator tells stories using his or her own experience and interpretation of the paintings. So the audience and teller are able to enter the experience. It becomes an experience of an experience as the orator and audience interact with each other and the story. Such conversations between audience and orator form a practical and powerful method of analysing the social worlds depicted."

"I was going to ask you about analysis," said Alice. "Do you have to do an analysis?"

"Yes, and No."

Brian looked puzzled, and I continued.

"I have tried to avoid 'traditional, empiricist narrative methods which turn the story told into a story analysed, because in so doing they sacrifice meaning for analytic rigour. They privilege the analyst's listening ear. They only hear and read the story from within a set of predetermined structural categories. They do not hear the story as it was told' (Trinh 1989:141). In both the stories and in the paintings, you hear the voices of others telling their stories. You hear me telling my story. You then interact with those stories to gain understanding. In doing this you, as the audience, are undertaking a form of analysis. You pick out themes or events which capture your interest and prompt you to look for solutions to the problems or issues being presented. 'A text's meaning is best given in co-performances, when audience and readers-as-performers interact in and over the same text' (Denzin 1997:247)."

"But how can I do the analysis, when I don't know as much about Vanuatu as you do? asked Brian.

"You're right, you need to know certain things about me, the research project, the decisions I made and the country and culture. I've included in the stories background information about Vanuatu, and about issues uncovered, so that the text exhibits 'interpretive sufficiency' (Christians et al. 1993:120 cited in Denzin 1997:283); that is, it possesses that 'amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical consciousness to be formed by the reader' (Denzin 1997:283)," I explained.

"So do you do any analysis?" asked Brian.

"Of course, throughout the research process, I have analysed what I learned—as I collected data, asked new questions, linked ideas and concepts together. On that basis I have chosen certain stories to tell, pictures to paint and decided not to tell or paint others," I replied.

"The titles give my audience clues. More clues to central issues emerge as I reflect on situations, raise questions and endeavour to answer them, although these answers remain incomplete. In the paintings my analysis is evident in the images I have drawn together to evoke feelings and interaction from the audience. I try to maintain a 'delicate balance by striving to be socially conscientious while retaining the necessary ambiguity that is a hallmark of good art' (Barone and Eisner 1997:84). You can find meaning embedded in the texts and paintings as you examine them and compare and contrast them with your own experiences of the world," I suggested.

Brian shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Of course, sometimes I make it quite clear what I think are the main issues, and even point the reader to other authorities who have contributed to that debate or discourse."

"So how do we judge the research?" asked Brian. "How do I know if it's valid?"

"Well, firstly how do you define valid? Do you mean true or useful, because the criterion for 'validity' varies according to the kind of knowledge being represented. Expressive knowledge is judged on how effectively the representations, in my case the paintings and writing, present the experience so that it evokes in others a similar feeling."

"Yes, true, and I suppose useful," Brian replied.

"Then you have to be the judge of that, and 'at a personal level decide if a work is believable, is satisfying and appeals to your heart' (Sandelowski 1994)," I replied.

"I thought verisimilitude was an important criterion of traditional validity," suggested Alice. "You know it being believeable."

"What is versimilitude?" asked Brian.

"It descibes 'a text's relationship to reality' (Denzin 1997:10)," replied Alice.

Brian still looked confused.

"It is what prompts readers to decide whether the representations in a text are consistent with life. It describes 'a text's ability to provide a vicarious experience', (Denzin 1997:10), where you feel you know what something is like, just as well as if you've experienced it", explained Alice.

"I agree. But 'verisimilitude can always be challenged. Challenges to verisimilitude in qualitative research rest on the simple observation that a text is always a site of political struggle over the real and its meanings. Truth is political and verisimilitude is textual. The meaning of each of these terms is not in the text but rather brought to it by the reader'. (Denzin 1997:12). I think that is why it is also important to ask if it is satisfying, and does it appeal to the heart? Ellis (1999:674) suggests 'you might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own'. I think this is important as 'a good text exposes how race, class, and gender work their ways into the concrete lives of interacting individuals' (Denzin 1997:10)."

"Yes, but so do some novels and they are just a work of fiction; something someone has made up," said Alice.

"That's right! 'Artistic truths are often more true to life than scientific ones, providing us with visions of human nature more resonant with our own experiences than any psychological, sociological or other conventionally scientific rendering of it' (Sandelowski 1994:52). This can be an asset but it can also make it hard to judge as 'our

capacity to remain critical may not be as effective when findings are offered in a manner that fires our imagination or reinforces our most passionate convictions' (Thorne 1997:129)," I suggested.

"That's for sure," said Alice. "It seems we really have to work out from what the researcher tells us about the experience, the kinds of decisions that they made, and on what grounds they made them, whether they are an ethical person and telling us the 'truth' as they interpret it."

"What is important to remember is that 'human inquiry is a process of human experience and of human judgement. There are no procedures that will guarantee valid knowing or accuracy or truth. There are simply human beings in a certain place and time, working away more or less honestly, more or less systematically, more or less collaboratively, more or less self-awarely to seize the opportunities of their lives, solve the problems which beset them, and to understand the things that intrigue them. It is on the basis of this that they should be judged' (Reason 1988:23)."

"It seems it's a lot about researcher morality, motivations, whether they are ethical or not, and about interpretations, whether we as individuals and society accept them or not, and about resulting action, whether we can or do choose to act," said Alice.

"Yes. I explored those issues, morality and motivation in the painting, **What makes me?** over there."

"I think it's time to look at these paintings," said Brian as he stood up from the sofa and moved over to the window near where I had indicated. Alice joined him.

"Would you like some more coffee?" I asked.

"Actually, I need a toilet," said Brian.

"Sure, its down the hall, turn right then first left."

"I'd like some more coffee," said Alice. "Can I help you get it?"

"That'd be great. I'll put the kettle on. Would you mind picking up the cups? Do you remember whose is whose?"

"Come to think of it, I don't," said Alice.

"Never mind, we'll have fresh ones," I said as I made my way to the kitchen with Alice following.

Notes

[1]. A person from Nguna Island of the islands of Vanuatu near the Main island of Efate, which is the site of Port Vila.

[2]. Arts-Based methodologies are distinguished from other intrepretivist methodologies by the pronounced aesthetic quality of their purpose and products (Barone and Eisner 1997; Willis 1999).



"What Makes Me"

Chapter Two

What Makes Me:

a story of morality and motivation

Brian was clearly intrigued with the painting and kept twisting his head into positions to get a new perspective on it.

"Wow," he said as he stepped back from the painting. "That's a bit overpowering." He paused, then commented, "The two larger creatures...can I call them that, or are they people? They look like they are outside the encounter between you, Karen, and the woman, but the one at the top sure looks threatening."

"I don't see that," said Alice. "I see the eye looking into the head. Trying to work out what's going on inside. Although it looks like she's got her tangled up, she doesn't look threatening."

"Oh, come on, can't you see the noose, the claws, and that huge knife?" asked Brian waving his hand at the painting, and looking at Alice. Then he stopped and turned to me.

"What is the knife?"

"It's a bush knife," I replied, "a long machete. Most people in rural areas carry them as they go about their daily activities. They are used to clear paths of grasses or vegetation; cut down and open green coconuts when fluid is required for drinking; as well as usual cutting purposes. I suppose I see it as a double image, one of ni-Vanuatu everyday life and something that I did find very threatening at first. I wasn't used to seeing people walking around with huge knives swinging in their hands."

Brian and Alice picked up their freshly brewed coffees and cradled them in their hands.

"The red—it doesn't look strong like rope, yet I can see the noose now," Alice said looking at Brian. "So what is the red that is entangling them all?"

"What does it look like?" I asked.

"Like ribbon," said Alice

"Or..." I replied, motioning her to keep going.

"Red Tape," replied Alice.

Then they both exclaimed. "Red Tape! Bureaucracy!"

"The other creature has hold of some strings too," commented Brian. "And the string seems to link the hand to the stomach, to the heart, and head," he added as he moved closer to the painting for a better look, like a bird waiting to peck a worm from freshly tilled earth.

"It is tugging at the heart strings," I smiled, and twisted my fingers as if manipulating strings of a marionette.

Alice laughed.

"But why in the hand, stomach, and head?" asked Brian.

"Because, 'in using one's personality to enter the field situation, and in acting out a transient role, one has to face the personal and emotionally charged accusations that not infrequently accompany this style of work' (Punch 1994:94). These accusations, real and imagined, tied my stomach in knots and kept my mind preoccupied unravelling situations. Also, our actions are dictated by what we think, feel and believe is ethically and morally right," I replied. "These moral and ethical choices may bind my hands and keep me inactive until I break through their restrictive bonds. The knot in the stomach may be caused by the dilemma of not being able to choose between right and wrong. Or of wanting to do something you think is right but not being able to, or of knowing that you've done something that has proved wrong, or may prove to be wrong at some time."

I sipped my coffee whilst watching Brian over the rim of my cup.

"Is that an issue, doing wrong, I mean? Surely health programmes are good?" asked Brian.

"Now that's a loaded question! 'We frequently uncritically assume that health projects are more likely to achieve their basic aim of improving the health of the people in the community and also will have fewer downsides than any other form of development' (Hughes 1994b:207). However, the knowledge that 'no project for social change is likely to be realised in accordance with its design should make one anxious to imagine the non-designed consequences that are possible' (Berger 1974: 223). Hence the knot in the stomach!" I exclaimed.

"So what are these downsides? Did you find any?" Brian asked.

"Yes. Both in the field and in the portrayal."

"Give me an example," said Brian.

"Well, say in the field, I encourage a woman to wear sunglasses but her husband has forbidden her to wear them. If she follows my advice, unbeknownst to me, she could become a victim of domestic violence, which is very common in Vanuatu, or she could be ostracised by his family and village."

"His family and village?" asked Alice.

"Yes, when a woman marries, if she is not from the same village as her husband, she will leave her village, and go and live in his. So as you can see, following my advice and disobeying her husband would make things very difficult for her and be detrimental to her health and well-being."

"Well, what downsides are associated with this portrayal, with these paintings?" asked Brian.

"When I portray things that happened to me, others are involved in them, or they are caused by others, and they will have repercussions for others. For example, I may be thinking about what they have told me in the context of my research, but they may be telling me as a friend not researcher. If I use this story or information they may feel betrayed. Then again, maybe we were just sharing and experiencing something, and then I later realise that it has significance to the project and I need to share that story. I can endeavour to conceal the identity to protect the other people, but someone will be bound to work it out in a small community and it could have serious repercussions for those people. In some cases, I may not even remember who told me something. I just know it now. But they will. I would not have knowingly betrayed anyone's trust, but I fear that some may think I have. Or I may feel I have later, when I realise an oversight, or safeguard I could have taken but didn't, and that scares me. I read a story about a researcher—you've heard me speak of her before, Carolyn Ellis..."

Brian nodded.

"When you read her definition of autoethnography," commented Alice.

"...returning to the field several years after her study was published, she found some of the people felt betrayed by her, and were angry about what she had written. The very special relationships she had with the people were damaged, some of them irreparably (Ellis 1995b). I don't know how, or if, I could handle that."

"I can see that would be terrible," said Alice.

"I know whatever I portray, in word or pictures, will have consequences, and so I am not just 'interpreting, but changing the world' (Denzin 1997:287), and I feel that is an enormous responsibility," I said quietly.

"I imagine the ethical issues are huge," added Alice, "I mean there are some identities you just can't conceal. Your husband for instance; anybody who knows you and reads these stories, will be able to identify him. And what about your children, will they be hurt by what you portray and write?"

"I have done all I can to ensure that no one is harmed. In fact the children have been very keen to see what I have written about them and to add to it, or edit it!

"But as you have pointed out, the ethical considerations are huge, both in re-presenting and in collecting the data. There are issues of consent, deception, privacy, harm, identification, confidentiality, trust, and betrayal. As I was living and working with the researched, I found I was often in a state of conflict as to whether I should be 'reporting' that is, thinking through and rationalising, or 'living', acting and feeling the moment. I

had to constantly weigh the appropriateness of my actions. 'Both engagement and detachment can be dehumanising if carried to excess' (Berger 1974:215). I had to evaluate the 'appropriateness' of either attitude to specific human activities, and the appropriateness of any action depended upon which culture I was both perceived to be operating in by others, as well as the one I perceived myself operating in."

"See how the 'being', the white one has control of your heart—and mind. Is that being controlling your emotions then?" asked Alice.

"I don't see it so much as *controlling* as *vying* for control. The fire is in my belly, they can't stop that," I replied pointing to the picture. "Being in the field, feeling vulnerable and often out-of-control often meant finding the strength, or strategies to control my emotions. The strategies I chose, or had available to me, depended on the nature of my feeling, accessibility, and desirability of control mechanisms. 'For people who feel deeply, control mechanisms are much more important than they are for those whose feelings are less demanding and salient' (Ellis 1991a:40). Sometimes I see the white spirit as a control mechanism, something helpful. See..." I said as I walked over to the painting, "...its hands may well be gently untangling the knots in the string."

Alice joined me. "Mmm. I can see a gentleness."

"These creatures, you just called spirits, vying for control, tugging at heart strings, controlling the red tape, are they real or imagined?" asked Brian.

"Both." I replied. "Whether they have flesh, or not, they are real, yet they are imagined—perceived, perhaps, is a better word."

"I think they look like spirits. I see one as the spirit of bureaucracy checking you out, attempting to regulate your interaction with people in their country. The other I'm less sure about, but perhaps it's your Western traditions and culture calling you and, as you said, aiding you. It is almost childlike, so that's why I think of it as things you learned as a child influencing you now," said Alice.

"Wow. That's a lovely thought. Maybe that's why sometimes I see it as helpful and other times as interfering. Sometimes I wanted to be like the ni-Vanuatu and my background inhibited that. At others times, however, I needed reassurance from what I knew and understood."

"Inside your head. What is that?" asked Brian.

"The day of reckoning. Judgement day. It is knowing that some day I must give account for my actions," I explained.

"Is that threatening?" asked Brian.

"Sometimes it feels that way. Fieldwork is a 'demanding craft that involves coping with multiple negotiations and continually dealing with ethical dilemmas' (Punch 1994:85)," I answered.

"You had to go through an Ethics committee didn't you?" asked Alice.

"Committ*ees*! One here and one in Vanuatu. I had to obtain ethics clearance through both the university and the VNCC."

"Who's that?" asked Brian.

"Sorry! The Vanuatu National Cultural Council. I had to submit an application to the VNCC to undertake research into vision and I was granted a research permit in 1995. The real problem started though, when it came to addressing the issues of obtaining consent of people included in the research. Verbal explanation and consent was considered the most effective as many of the people attending the clinics had impaired vision and literacy rates are low. It was the policy of the VNCC for researchers not to approach subjects for research purposes until they have discussed the matter with the VNCC, or its delegate in this case, the Vanuatu Christian Council, the VCC. So I relied on the VCC to obtain initial consent," I explained.

"How were you sure they would adequately explain the research and that the consent you were given was informed?" asked Alice.

"Don't worry. I had nightmares about it—having vivid memories of "Chinese whispers" in my mind," I assured her.

"Is that where you whisper something to someone at one end of a row of people and they whisper to the next and so on? You wait and see what comes out the other end and it's usually hilarious!" Brian laughed as if he had just been part of such a line.

"Yes, it can be really funny how things get distorted and changed—unless you are relying on everyone to get the same message," I added.

"So what did you do?" asked Alice.

"I made up an illustrated pamphlet, in Bislama, with plenty of line drawings to illustrate and explain what the research was, what I was asking and what I intended to do with the information. These pamphlets went out to the VCC representatives who could read and write. They then spoke to the chiefs and the matter was raised at the community meetings and consent given. So you can see consent for the vision questionnaires and the participant observation data collection was obtained by a series of hierarchical discussions," I said.

"Of course, for indepth interviews I also spent time with the individual and obtained verbal consent." I added.

"This may seem like a stupid question, but why is consent so much of an issue? Journalists usually don't gain consent of the people they write about," suggested Brian.

"I can see your point, Brian. Interpretive research is 'an eminently practical and moral activity that shares much in common with, or is continuous with, other forms of inquiry, such as those practised by journalists, novelists, painters, poets and ordinary people in their day-to-day lives' (Smith 1992:100). However, I think there are several issues here. Firstly, 'research can never be neutral. It is always supporting or questioning social forces, both by its content and by its method. It has effects and side effects, and these benefit or harm people' (Reason and Rowan 1981:489). The kind of research I wanted to do was to empower and illuminate in a respectful way. It's important, in that kind of research, to recognise the need for people's consent, their ability to contribute to the process of the research and to determine the use of the knowledge generated.

Secondly, the social researcher and the journalist seek the knowledge for different reasons, which points to a difference in value systems. As I just mentioned, the knowledge I was pursuing was meant to directly benefit the people being studied in some way. A journalist wants to get information and tell it to his or her readers, the knowledge is for the readers' benefit and, as such, I would think that a journalist and I would see different boundaries, and have different ethical considerations about what is private and what is public, about what stories should and shouldn't be told," I paused.

"Thirdly, as social researchers are becoming more self-reflexive, so are the people they study. We now have to understand and now grapple with the realisation that 'the objects of our analysis are also analysing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics and their politics' (Rosaldo 1989:21). Perhaps that makes us more ethical. Perhaps it makes us think harder about if we can live with what we write. I know that was an important issue for me. Once something is out-there in the public domain with my name on it, I have to live with it! And although I think journalists too, are being held more accountable by their subjects, perhaps they have not yet had to learn to live with themselves!"

"So how do you deal with these ethical decisions?" asked Alice. "Codes of Ethics and having watch-dogs in the form of bodies which give ethics approval for research can obviously assist but they can't deal with day to day issues like you've described. Is it possible to make right ethical decisions in every situation? Sounds to me like it really comes back to personal morality and integrity."

"I agree with what you said about watch-dogs," I laughed. "Ethics Committees can give 'guidelines and alert researchers to the ethical dimensions of their work and this is beneficial particularly *prior* to entering the field. I am not arguing that the field-worker should abandon all ethical considerations once he or she has gotten in, but rather that

informed consent is unworkable in some sorts of observational research' (Punch 1994:90) and, it really does come down to personal ethics. You end up having to make the decisions in 'the same way you make them in everyday life' (Ellis 1995b:89)."

"This painting shows me that you've spent a lot of time reflecting on this issue," said Alice. "You wouldn't do that in everyday life, would you?"

"Yes, and No. You've just done that."

"What?"

"Reflected on the way you make choices in everyday life, and you decided that you don't think that deeply about it. But what if you were in a situation that was threatening or you thought was critical to your career, family or such?" I asked Alice.

"I guess I would think long and hard about it," she replied.

"That's how it was in the field. Sometimes you just made a decision and it was easy. Other times it was long and hard. It's just that in the field there seems to be a lot more of those long hard choices. But using cultural sensitivity, awareness of my own ethical values and how strongly I need to impose them, trusting in my own gut feelings about what is right in the immediate situation and whether there will be later repercussions (Lipson 1994:353), I made them. That is why reflecting on my own moral and ethical stance is particularly important as I am the instrument of my own research in the sense that I acknowledge my own instincts, intuitions and curiosities and allow them to guide my interpretations (Smith 1992:105)."

"And this painting is part of that process," concluded Alice.

"Yes."

"So this painting is portraying the process of self-reflection in the field and its effect on your interaction with the people?" asked Brian.

"Yes. It is about morality and motivation. The more self-aware I became, the greater the burden became to 'say no to the mindless destruction of human meanings' (Berger 1974:228) and to 'move ahead with the painstaking task of finding alternatives which will not only be morally acceptable, but will work' (Berger 1974:228)," I answered.

"If you are an unethical person you will lie, deceive and misrepresent your data the same as you do on your tax form. If you are an honest, ethical person, you will constantly question your motives. You will question the means not just look for the ends. You will have at heart the desire to do to others as you would have them do to you. That doesn't mean you will always make the right decision. You don't have the benefit of hindsight. And I know any wrong doing will still hurt like hell and I don't kid myself that knowing I did my best will make it feel any better, because it never has before," I recalled sadly.

"But isn't it hard to know what is ethical? There's no universal is there? I mean, I've just finished reading a book where the people who were portrayed as the bad guys actually thought they were morally right; killing for Allah," said Brian.

"Of course what is considered ethical and morally right in one culture may not be in another. That's what makes cross-cultural work so difficult!" I agreed.

"Kind of makes you wonder why people do it," said Brian thoughtfully.

"Because we have a responsibility to try to help others who want and need our help," I replied passionately.

The room was quiet as we took in the enormity of the task I was currently tackling and we would all be confronted with at sometime in our lives, as we told stories of others and ourselves.

"The flower, a hibiscus by the looks, typically tropical," said Alice. "Why is it over the hands?"

"In Vanuatu gifts are often decorated with flowers. The handshake is the common form of greeting, but at times, when people held your hand slightly longer than usual, or with both hands, you felt it was an intimate connection, a gift of friendship, of touching in a culture where body contact is highly regulated," I explained.

"I notice these creatures, as I'll call them, and the two people interacting, are all female," said Brian. "Is there a reason for that?"

"Sure. I am a woman, albeit a white woman with status, and it did impact on my ability to relate to ni-Vanuatu men especially as their society has very regulated conditions about interaction between the sexes. I was more able and comfortable working with women. Also, as it was the women who more often expressed *fraet* wearing sunglasses, I began to work closely with the women to understand their perceptions. It appears from what I have read, that 'in the past, medical anthropologists have not been overly concerned to differentiate between male and female world views, and the female view is seldom mentioned' (Hughes 1994b:252). But attention should always be paid to gender differences and there is a need 'to explore the nature of inequalities and injustices within a given society' (Ganguly-Scrase 1995:131)."

"So this woman in the picture—she was a friend not a patient?" asked Brian.

"Yes. A friend, a special friend."

I walked over to the side table and put down my cup. Lying to one side was the stack of papers on which were written the stories of the paintings. Thumbing through the pile I came to the story **'What makes me'** I lifted the copy out and straightened the pile once more.

"Would you like to hear the story now?" I called to Brian and Alice.

"Yes. I'm fascinated," replied Alice.

"I'm in," said Brian, "as long as I don't have to read it. I haven't brought my spectacles!"

A look of guilt spread across his face as if he were confessing to a pastor he hadn't been to church for months.

We laughed.

"You don't have to read it," I said.

"I'd like to," said Alice. "Would that be okay?"

"Okay? That'd be wonderful!" I exclaimed as I handed her the sheets.

We returned to the sofa and made ourselves comfortable as Alice began to read aloud.

*****

What makes me

The taste of salt in my mouth makes me want to vomit. The sun beats relentlessly down on the terrace roof. I kid myself that it is cooler out here and that the almost non-existent breeze is helping. Voluminous black clouds look like a freshly shorn fleece from the black sheep of the family tossed into the blue-grey sky. As the salt from the perspiration dripping from my head mixes with the salt of my tears, I ask myself why I am here. What makes me, a thirty-seven-year-old Australian woman, subject myself to this? Why do I feel the burden of care for these people so greatly that there is a fire in my gut driving me to work harder at finding answers? The search for answers exposes me to the scrutiny of others and my harshest critic, myself. The tears, welling up in my eyes sting, as I try hard to conceal my thoughts from my body. Don't give me away. I cast my mind back reliving my first meeting with Vanuatu, six years ago.

*****

The salty air blew in my face, as I stood on the deck of the Fairstar[1], anxious to step onto land after three days at sea. As the island of Ifira came into sight, I get my first glimpse of Vanuatu. Tall palms were blowing in the wind. The lush green overwhelmed the senses of one so accustomed to the browns and reds of a drier land.

A long, yellow boat carrying women and children, large, rectangular, blue, red and white striped carry bags, brown cardboard boxes, and a table strapped to the bow, scooted past dwarfed by the size of the huge ship. I could see a colourful array of stalls lining the route away from the wharf and lean over the rail for a closer look. Large blue tarpaulins speckled with shells, corals with red, pink and yellow dyes, and wooden carvings cover the dirty, black wharf. Women in brightly

coloured 'island dresses' sat cross-legged fingering their wares and then positioned them carefully on the tarpaulin to attract a Tourist's attention. Others hung an array of hand-painted T-shirts on a rack between child-size raffia 'grass' skirts and woven pandanas bra tops. The musty heat swept off the cliff, which rose high above the wharf, and replaced the cool sea air. So, this was Vanuatu.

It was October 1990 and my husband and our three young children joined me on the deck, as a group of dark skinned men in vivid white uniforms with red stripes and black, shiny shoes moved into formation. Their brass instruments sent flashes of light searing into the eyes of the crowd of onlookers gathered on deck. They began to play and march along the wharf. We caught their enthusiasm as the brilliance of the brass music swirled around the ship, but this was no ordinary Brass Band—their marching included hops, jumps, and twirls. We were captivated by their agility whilst playing and carrying heavy instruments. The incongruous mix of Western military marches and Pacific Island dance moves was fascinating. Watching them, I sensed that Vanuatu held many surprises for us.

A string band played island music as we left the ship and set out to explore the township of Port Vila. The small group of young men, dressed in bright red cotton shirts adorned with large hibiscus flower prints played tea-chest bass, ukulele, jangle stick, and sang. They nodded their thanks, as my son tossed a shiny gold coin into the basket placed on the ground by the group.

My children aged four, two and nine months, were the subject of much attention from the ni-Vanuatu women as we sought out interesting items displayed on the stalls. My son chose a coconut shell rattle with *Vanuatu* burnt into the short, thick wooden handle. I was fascinated with the size of the shells and asked many questions of the women. Most spoke good English and those that didn't, quickly had another come to their assistance.

Much of the day was spent like any tourists, shopping, eating, and visiting the waterfall recommended by the cruise director. Returning to the ship that evening, my husband and I examined the large tablecloth we purchased at the Duty Free Store. Pleased that we had been able to get one large enough to cover our dining table, we had splashed out and bought it as "we'll probably never come here again".

Stephen had recently left his past employer and we were embarking on establishing our own optometric practice. Knowing other people that ran their own businesses and never seemed to get holidays, we were keen to have a holiday before commencing the business. However, our practice proved different and instead of leaving us tied to a regular 'shop front', we have a mobile optometric practice visiting small country towns for a few hours each month.

The support of our patients has enabled the work in Vanuatu to be an extension of the optometric practice in Australia. Many of them see Stephen as a Fred Hollows[2], a pioneer of Third World eye care. Each year we programme time in Vanuatu to conduct eye clinics.

We swap the highly equipped and comfortably decorated Eye Bus for a pull along golf buggy adapted to hold modern optometric equipment and instead of cruising the smooth open roads of country South Australia, we travel the rugged tracks, and choppy waters of the islands of Vanuatu.

*****

The sound of the land rover rumbling into the drive transports me back to the present. The heavy car door crashes shut, then another higher pitched bang as the screen door to the house closes behind her. Through the louvered windows, I hear Margie's voice greet Meg, my aunt who has come with me on this trip. I met Margie and her family on that ship—they had spent years living in a village, learning and recording the languages. They were going to Australia to live whilst her husband undertook a Ph.D. in linguistics. Our two families met for the first time attending a church service on the ship and now we are back here, together in the country that has forever changed us all. Through our association with this family we were invited to conduct our first optometric clinics in Vanuatu in May 1994. Seems like an era ago not two short years.

Since then, her husband had finished his study and mine had begun. I wanted to share my knowledge, gained through experience, both failures and successes, through effort and prolonged engagement, in the hope that others might know what it is like. I also sought to challenge both prospective visiting health teams and the ni-Vanuatu who work with them to become more aware and engaged as they seek to improve people's health.

From the time I began to focus on prevention of eye discomfort and disease I've been caught up in a web of complex issues to which there often seems no real answers. I get so tired of seeing young people with an eye missing, with horrendously red and sore eyes that have large lumps growing on them, of people who come in with eyes streaming and red. It is very draining emotionally especially when you know it's only the tip of the iceberg.

It all seems so simple. Get them to wear sunglasses. A barrier would prevent so much damage to the eyes. So when I encountered a resistance to wearing sunglasses, I had to know why. Why wouldn't they wear sunglasses? I asked them about sunglasses. The women said it was because the men laughed at them. Some others said it was because they were *flas*. What the hell is that? Some said their husbands had forbidden them to wear them. Why would they do that? What is it about sunglass wearing that would threaten the husband? It is so frustrating to be asked for help and find you can't help because of some reason you can't understand.

I observe, reflect, analyse, plan and act, over and over. I call it SPAR 'Spirit of "participatory-where-possible" action research. It is like sparring. Making motions of attack and defence. Constantly balancing a desire to get-it-done and a need to wait and learn and defend. I really want to work with the people and from the meetings I've had, they seem to be supportive and keen, but always something goes astray. Like this trip. After months of planning and arranging group

discussions, a 'big storm', according to the papers, some argue it was a cyclone, comes through and the people don't make the meeting. Another time someone's father died and there was a time of mourning, so no one could talk with me whilst I was there.

Then there's the red tape! Ethics approval, research permits! As much as I remind myself it's designed to protect people's rights, I can't get away from the sadness I feel that our lives have become so legally regulated. The fear of failing and crossing a line preys on my mind. Yet, I know that in my heart I am a moral, ethical person and am accountable for my words and actions to a Higher Being than either the university or the Vanuatu National Cultural Council.

My eyes catch a glimpse of the children's clothes on the line. Yes, time has past since we first met. Our children have grown and we now have four sons. I still remember Margie's letter to us when the youngest was born. "Welcome to the club! You are now a member of the group that never gets invited to dinner because there's just too many of them!" Odd, I think four children in Australia seems so many, yet here, five, six, seven, eight! *Tumas Pikinnini tumas wok*—too many children, too much work; *Gudfala specing*—good spacing; read the family planning posters displayed in community houses, aid posts and women's clubs. In a country that is rapidly outgrowing its land, where families are struggling to make a living from subsistence agriculture from ever decreasing land sizes, family planning education is a big issue. Many women have commended me on the 'best' family, according to the promotion. Four children 2 years apart, and none born before I was 18! I wonder how my well-spaced family 10, 8, 6, and 4 years are surviving at home without me.

My thoughts are interrupted as Margie and Meg move into the lounge room to chat about the morning and the trip to the Market House in Vila. I picture the ni-Vanuatu women there. Many of their faces are so familiar to me now. "Remember when they all looked alike?" I ask myself. Yes, I do. Moreover, I remember when I looked the same as any other *waetman* to them. Now I know them and am know by them. I am *Misis,* the lady who talks about sunglasses, *Sista Karen, waef blong dokta blong ae,* Sister Karen, the wife of the eye doctor. Even after months away, I am greeted with delighted shrieks of *Eeeee Misis*! *Yu kam bakegan!* Oh! Misis you have returned!

I am not fond of these women. It is so much more than that. I am committed to them; bound to them with some kind of bond I am only just beginning to realise. I breathe deeply again, wanting to maintain the oneness with the women, and needing to in order to hold back the tears stinging my eyes and threatening to overflow again. My mind, my heart, my gut have become inexplicably joined to them through shared experiences, shared learning, and shared meanings I cannot begin to name. The fragrance of the frangipani near the terrace reminds me of the scented coconut oil many of them rub into their hair and on their skin. I breathe deeply as if to take in the closeness of them.

I look down at the vivid fushia-pink, yellow and blue pattern on my flowing island dress. Metres of cotton material gathered in layers falls around the chair and onto the tiles of the terrace. My tears cause the colours to blur and form a rainbow spanning across my body.

Why do I wear this? I wouldn't be seen dead in it at home! "Now that's not true. You wore it with pride, on the 'Christmas round the world' float," I tell myself. A smile breaks through the heaviness as I remember how I represented Vanuatu, in the Christmas pageant. The float was so colourful as it passed down the main street of Tanunda, the little Barossa Valley[3] town full of people waving and smiling. It was no surprise to the townspeople that I wore the dress, a treasured gift from a group of ni-Vanuatu women.

Many townspeople had supported our optometric work in Vanuatu through the donation of their old spectacles. Some had given monetary donations to assist in printing the educative materials used in preventative eye care project. Still others had taken on the task of cleaning, sorting, measuring and packing the spectacles for distribution in our clinics. What a lot of work that is, sorting through the endless pairs of used spectacles. Some in excellent condition cleaned and wrapped carefully in soft tissues. Others, you wonder what people expect you to do with them.

Scratched, broken, arms missing. I guess they think beggars can't be choosers. I choose. I throw out scratched lenses, broken frames, some frames that are too big or not useful. Sometimes that racks me with guilt. What would the people who donated them think if they knew I threw away their glasses? I salvage frames that can be reglazed with more useful lenses, but some glasses just cannot be used. They are discarded, almost secretly, a few at a time, so as not to cause offence to those that may have donated them. I feel a sense of responsibility to both the donors of the glasses and the recipients. It is an uneasy position in which to be.

After sorting the glasses, your hands smell. The glasses become oily from the breakdown of the vinyl cases they have been stored in for years and develop a putrid, musty, old, dank smell. Some are green from the reaction of the metal with the skin and sweat of the past wearer. You try not to think about it, where they might have been. Just wash, dry, measure and pack.

Margie interrupts my thoughts, "You Okay, she asks?" I want to scream "No! I'm bleeding to death stabbed in the gut by a callous, cold powermonger!"

I smile, "Hmmm, I just need some time out. Hot isn't it?" I say, moving to safer ground.

Margie senses the strain and moves off. I am grateful. I catch sight of her island dress sweeping through the door, the ribbons trailing out behind her.

"They really are pretty, aren't they?" I say to myself. "Cool too," my head replies.

Why do I wear it? The question returns, begging to be answered. To belong. To be accepted. Because some expatriate women I know here do. Because they're pretty.

I wonder what they feel when they see me in it. Tears well up again and the lump in my throat feels as big as a tennis ball. What if they think like her, that woman at the meeting? What if they think I'm using them? Manipulating, calculating using Island Dress to 'go native' and so be taken into their confidence. I was, wasn't I? I'm not like that, am I? Like what? The tears flow freely now.

What about Ambae[4]? Jack told my husband I looked like a real ni-Vanuatu woman! I was saying a lot by wearing the dress and identifying with the people. Showing respect for their culture. And the women. They told me they liked my dress. Maybe they just hoped I would give it to them! Who is manipulating whom? "*Misis*, next time you come you bring me a cardigan, it gets so cold here at night," asked one nurse at the end of the clinic...Stop! This is getting out of hand. I check my thoughts.

What about the gifts exchanged? Not manipulations, gifts. Gifts of food handed to us in villages. Gifts of shells given to us to treasure. Gifts of handwork, intricately woven mats, given so we would remember the giver and the relationship. During our second visit in 1995, we came with 10 soccer balls in our suitcases as gifts for the communities that were to feed and house us during the clinics. At other times, cotton tea towels with pictures of kangaroos and koalas have been gifts to the women who are so much to me. There is much giving, and receiving. Each gift a binding exchange, not just physically but symbolising a change in the relationship and a move towards the inner circle of friendship and kinship.

The rumble of thunder draws my attention away to the sky. If only it would rain. I wipe the tears and sweat away with the back of my hand. Large raindrops begin to fall. Margie calls out to me to get the clothes off the line. I quickly jump down the step onto the spongy grass, the large drops cooling as they splash on my shoulders and run down my back.

Hardly seems worth taking the clothes in. They still feel very damp, but then nothing feels dry in this weather. I quickly lower the line throwing the bamboo support down onto the grass. I take a dress from the line and fold it into the basket.

Several children skip up the road, calling out to each other and laughing. Their schoolbooks rest on their thick, black curls to protect the smiling black faces from the rain. The bright colours of their dress contrast with the darkness of the sky. I look back to the island dresses on the line. Funny how something introduced by white missionaries has been adopted by the people and become representative of the islands. I think of the dolls in island dress sold in the markets to tourists. I wonder if sunglasses will ever be adopted. Could they become an accepted part of ni-Vanuatu dress? I had hoped they could.

I needed to understand what the ni-Vanuatu women felt was a 'good' sunglass. I drew, coloured and cut-out a woman's face from the cardboard cover of my son's schoolbook. We were staying at a health centre in the islands and resources were scarce. However our children had brought

school materials with them to continue their lessons whilst in the islands, so I had a few items I could use. I cut out several different sizes and styles of sunglasses to 'fit' the cardboard face. By relieving the embarrassment of putting a real sunglass on their own face, I hoped the women would share with me what they liked, what they thought would be accepted. I coloured some with strong colours like their dresses, thinking that they would like those. How wrong was I! Small brown or black frames were favoured, something that would blend in and not be noticed, like something that was not there!

A loud clap of thunder startles me out of my thoughts. The rain is heavier. I grab the basket up from the ground and dash back to the terrace where a sheet of water is falling as the gutter overflows. I am soaked but do not worry as it is so refreshing. Margie comes out with a tray of glasses and a jug of fresh limejuice. "How did the meeting go?" she asks somewhat cautiously." I don't know how to answer that," I reply. I close my eyes and cast my mind back to the meeting that morning.

*****

It felt like an interrogation. I was the stranger in their territory. She had the upper hand. He sat behind a large old desk, his back to a window, looking down at his papers the whole time she is in the room. She sat opposite me. A large, imposing woman, forthright and head-strong. "Why wasn't I told? Why don't we know about this?" she demanded.

"You're bloody slack, that's why you didn't know," I hid my thoughts. I noted the pile of letters in the IN basket on the desk. Are they really slack or is it that they just avoid dealing with the letters containing jargon and complex English that comes across the desk?

No, it can't be—some of my letters were in Bislama. Maybe it's just that everything works on an around-to-it basis? I bit my tongue and smiled.

I stated carefully, trying not to accuse, that they had been informed through a number of sources and began to explain that I'm assisting in developing a preventative eye care project with a number of non-government organisations, as well as representatives from various government departments. The high number of cases of pterygium and trauma we see in our clinics, and the requests from the people in the villages for ways to relieve the pain and discomfort their eyes cause them, have motivated me to act. I struggled to keep the emotion from breaking my voice. I felt so pressured. So under judgement.

"Don't let it fall back in our laps," she barked. "Always we are left with the programmes," she said.

I thought that was the role of the department, but maybe I am wrong. In any case, I did not intend to leave the programme in anyone's lap. I was aware that she has continued. I looked up at her. She did not look at me but past me.

"You only want a PhD," she threw another dart at my heart. I reeled back in my seat, and didn't hear much of what followed. I was stunned by her words. Where did that come from? How would she know what does or doesn't motivate me? Haven't I just told her passionately why I started the research? Didn't she hear, or doesn't she believe me? Maybe she's jealous of the opportunities I have; after all it must be difficult being a woman in her position. What right does she have to pronounce such a judgement? Why does that accusation hurt? It is true, but it's the way she said it. As if I'm just another white representative of colonial repression using little black guinea pigs to prove my experiment!

I visited this country conducting eye clinics for two years before beginning the preventative eye care program. We pay all our expenses from our pockets. I started the research and health education project out of compassion for the people. The people who came to the clinics asked me for help with their sore or damaged eyes. I did not walk away from them. I took action as best I could. I wanted to scream: "I don't give a damn about a piece of paper. I do care about your people." I did not honour her accusation with an answer. I fought the tears. She would not win. She would not intimidate me.

"It's about time the NGOs pulled up their socks and did something."

I reeled again at her condemnation of NGOs. It seemed to me that they were doing most of the work and without most of the aid money! She muttered something else and swept out of the room. He and I stood as she left.

Once she'd gone he looked at me. I saw compassion in his eyes. He came around to my side of the desk. I wondered if he could see how wounded I felt.

"I have Vanuatu in my gut." I placed my hand on my stomach as I used a local expression.

"I know," he said. "You are doing good work."

We talked some more as we walked down the hall to the stairway. We shook hands, as is the custom. He held my hand longer than was usual. I sensed he was apologising for what happened in that room. I nodded, smiled, took my hand back, thanked him, and left.

*****

I sense someone watching me. I open my eyes and smile at Margie. "I'm not ready to talk about it yet." My heart is heavy, remembering, seeking answers. We drink the juice in silence. Its stringent sweetness cleanses my palate of the salt and bitterness, the taste of my sweat and tears.

*****

Alice finished reading and placed the papers on the table in front of us.

Her reading of the story had transported me into another world and it was hard to return to this one just because the words had finished flowing. My mind and body were still there asking the questions, listening to voices, feeling the heat, sharing the intimacy and pain.

It was the goal of my research to 'feature dialogue, self-disclosure and process rather than goals such as theory generation or direct applications for practice (Shotter 1992: Tyler 1986)' (Norris 1997:89). I hoped these paintings and stories would serve 'to broaden and deepen our understandings of ourselves and others' (Smith 1992:104).

Brian broke the silence.

"You know it surprises me that there are such strong feelings all mixed up in that story. I would have thought that conducting eye clinics in a tropical paradise would have been a pleasant experience."

"It was sometimes. But all the experience was coloured by the fact that 'in studying health and illness, the reality is that illness receives far more attention than does health' (Hughes 1995:55), and that is very emotionally draining," I replied.

"And it appears that what drives you to seek solutions to their pain and yours, is you seeing them suffering," observed Alice.

"Yes," I said sadly. "There is still a feeling of pain about it all."

"And it appears that health is full of self-interest and power games," said Brian.

"Mmm. Although 'it is often assumed that medical care for indigenous populations was a priority for health professionals working in the colonies, in fact greater attention was paid to maintaining the health of Europeans who were establishing business ventures, administering colonial rule or ministering to the souls of the local population. The health of the developing world is not therefore, and never was—if we are honest—merely either of academic or compassionate interest, but rather owes more to that most effective of motivators: self-interest' (Hughes 1994a:198-199)," I agreed.

"Do you think that is why the woman reacted to you in such a way?" asked Alice. "She felt you were just in it for what you could get out of it?"

"I'm sure that had a lot to do with it. I also think that she had a lot of anger and frustration, which had a lot to do with her struggle to be a woman in power in Vanuatu. Something I imagine requires extraordinary will-power and determination," I replied.

"But it really upset you having your motives questioned, didn't it?" asked Alice gently.

"It did. I was caught totally off guard. I had never had that experience before. I learnt a lot. And I have come to understand more about morality, power, politics, motivation, and action. I love this quote by Peter Berger (1974)."

I stood and walked over to the side table and the stack of papers. I noticed my hands were shaking ever so slightly. Just hearing that story again had triggered the cells of my body

into remembering the emotion of the moment and they responded automatically to the stimuli.

"Oh, where is it?" I rummaged through the papers. "Ah, here it is."

I was conscious of Brian and Alice watching me intently as I walked back to my chair by the sofa.

> "Berger (1974) says, 'Political morality does not demand visions or certainties, only that we act as best we can. The best political morality is informed by the heavy knowledge of its past. Its fruits are humility and compassion. Our time is full of visions of the future, loudly and arrogantly proclaimed. Moral self-righteousness is evenly distributed throughout the political spectrum. They all tell us so confidently where it's at today and where, if only they have their way, it will be tomorrow. Yet in fact, they know so very little these self-confident prophets of doom and salvation. It is necessary to act quietly and disbelievingly, out of that compassion which is the only credible motive for any actions to change the world. History is a stream of blood, behind us, carrying us. Our age scoops up the blood in plastic bags and stores it, out of sight for electronic retrieval. There is an obligation to remember, not in the memory cells of computers but in the heaviness of the heart' (p232)."

"That is so true. I love that bit about computer cells, the unreal world of cyberspace, and the contrast with heaviness of heart. The cost is so much greater," reflected Alice.

"You really were, no *are*, involved with these people aren't you?" said Brian.

I nodded.

"Doesn't that compromise you as a researcher or conflict with your role of researcher?" questioned Brian.

"No. 'A researcher's ability to participate fully, to become emotionally as well as intellectually involved in another culture, provides a wealth of data that could never be acquired by any other means, which of course is the argument for entering the field in the first place' (Turnbull 1990:51). Some authors see that the blurring of roles resulting from close rapport means that 'the researcher may become a spokesperson for the group, losing his or her objectivity or may 'go native' and become a member of the group and forego the academic role' (Fontana and Frey 1994:367). But as we talked about before, 'such terms as objectivity, neutrality and impartiality, once endowed with great institutional authority, are arguably neither more nor less valid than those of more engaged, yet equally perceptive, knowledgeable social actors' (Rosaldo,1989: 21)," I replied.

"But I have often read that 'Going Native' is not a good thing for a researcher," said Alice.

"That's not a term that's used a lot anymore. Today few researchers talk of 'Going Native'. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) editors of the Handbook of Qualitative Research say its disappearance as a category of concern among sociologists and anthropologists is 'like the silences between lovers, it is all the more significant for its absence' (1994:581)."

"Why?" asked Brian.

"Well, they argue that 'Going Native' is 'a category that speaks volumes to both our distorted senses of scientific objectivity and our colonial past. We struggle to find ways to make our texts meaningful beyond the artificial structures of conventional objectivity. We come to terms with our own 'critical subjectivities'. All the while we have also admitted our guilt and complicity in the colonising aspects of our work, pointedly subsumed by the term 'native'. Even using the term is offensive'. They go on to say that 'today we are trying to live ever closer to the lives about which we write and try to show not that we can live those lives but that we have lived close enough to them to begin to understand how their worlds have been constructed' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:581-582).

"You lived so close to them you wore their island dresses," observed Brian.

"That I did. But actually it was not an easy decision to make. During our initial visits, I struggled with the issue of what to wear to gain 'acceptance' (Goffman 1968). There is a strong dress code in Vanuatu. Most ni-Vanuatu women wear Island dress or Mother Hubbard dresses, as they are sometimes called."

"Mother Hubbard dresses!" exclaimed Alice.

"These are free flowing dresses all of a similar style, made in brightly coloured cotton fabrics and decorated around the neckline, bodice and sleeve edge with lace and ribbons. They are cool and sensible for the climate. Mother Hubbard dresses were designed and introduced by the missionaries in the late 19th century. Many ni-Vanuatu women, in both rural and urban areas still commonly wear them. I was unsure if I should wear Island Dress or not. I thought it might be seen as an attempt to 'Go Native' and be ridiculed (Powdermaker 1966). However, our first clinics were in association with people working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and many of these expatriate women wore island dress, so I did too. It was then that I discovered that 'clothing and other forms of bodily adornment become the language through which cultural identity is expressed' (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1996:62) and what is socially significant to the society's members is shown (Ball and Smith 1992:31)". By wearing island dress I expressed my association with the people. One ni-Vanuatu man in a village commented to my husband that I was a *real* ni-Vanuatu woman, wearing island dress," I told them.

"I'd never have thought that dress could do so much," said Brian.

"You have, you know," said Alice. "Remember when I wanted you to wear that shirt the other day and you said the guys at the golf club would give you heaps if you did?"

"Yes."

"Well, you knew that they would 'read' you a different way and treat you differently because of what you were wearing," said Alice.

"That's right," I agreed. "You see 'establishing identity in everyday life entails, in part, the construction and repair of borderlines that define who we are versus who we are not' (Freitas, Kaiser, Hall, Kim and Hammidi 1997:323), so as I was 'exploring the tensions in personal and social identity construction, particular attention had to be paid to the pivotal role of dress and appearance' (Michelman 1997:362)."

"How did they feel about you wearing island dress?" asked Alice.

"Many women complimented me on the island dress, by wearing the dress I was told I was saying a lot. Just what to each group of people, I found out when shopping in urban Port Vila. The Chinese man serving asked if I was a missionary, as the only Europeans who wore island dress were associated with the church! After several visits, over a number of years, I found I was comfortable wearing island dress in rural villages and on Sundays for local church, and a more Western style of dress with ni-Vanuatu hand paintings, in the urban areas."

"Was it just dress or were other things you wore also important? asked Brian.

"As I wear glasses that change to dark in the sun, I was conscious that these could be a barrier. Sort of saying 'Why can't *you* do like me?' Or if sunglasses were offensive, I was concerned that I might unwittingly cause offence too, so I left my changing-tint glasses home and wore glasses that were recognised as prescription spectacles. I also changed frames, from gold rimmed, to plastic frames, which blended in with my face.

Also, I was all too conscious of all the material wealth I had compared with them. I did not want to 'flash' it around so I didn't wear my other rings, just my wedding ring, as many of them did. In later visits, I realised I was only kidding myself. They knew the wealth I must have access to, just because I kept flying over to Vanuatu. There was no hiding the difference, but I felt 'flashing it' would be a barrier to communication; maybe more for me than them.

I mean, my family and I were living in their villages accepting their hospitality, joining in their church services, play time, meal times, not just the clinics. I was not just in the village as health worker, and researcher, but as a mother, a *dokta's* wife, woman, and friend. They watched me in all these roles, while I was supposed to be watching them! The people I studied studied me, even in moments when I did not seek to study them."

"What do you mean they watched you?" asked Brian.

"Let me tell you a story to illustrate," I suggested.

"Stephen and I were staying at the hospital on Tongoa Island, which was on the crest of a steep cliff, looking out over the sea. You could see other small islands of the Shepherds' group in the distance. I had woken early and drawn the water from the well to wash some clothes. It was a beautiful, still morning. No one seemed to be around. I lathered up the clothes in the blue plastic tub then squeezed them out, rinsed them in the clean water and put them back in the tub. I carried them to the line strung between two posts in front of our room. Whilst pegging out my washing on the line, I admired the view from the cliff, thought about the day ahead, and my children back in Port Vila. I was nearly finished, just a couple of pairs of underpants still to hang but when I thrust my hand inside the peg bag, I found to my dismay I had run out of pegs. I looked along the line to see what I could double up, and had a look around on the ground to see what I could use to secure the last remaining items. Suddenly, out of the bush beside the line emerged two young, smiling children holding a handful of clothes pegs! I had been totally unaware of their presence but they had obviously observed me for quite some time and had easily worked out that I would run out of pegs... even before I had!"

Brian and Alice laughed.

"Frightened the life out of me, I might add, even though I was really grateful for the pegs," I added, joining in their laughter.

"It does go deeper than that though. We are not just 'observers observed; we are interpreters interpreted. To figure out what the devil they think they are up to, requires us to try and figure out what they think we are up to—our motivation, purposes, and (sometimes) the moral message we bring with us. This is an Other side to reflexivity, one crucial to understanding dialogics of encounters in field research and one which researchers have only begun to explore' (Rodman 1991:432). So as researchers, we are 'as much the question as the questioner' (Parker 1985:65)," I pointed out.

"It's like that creature looking inside your head. Trying to figure out what you are up to," said Alice pointing to the painting.

"I imagine it would have been difficult at times working out what you were up to! You certainly had blurred roles!" commented Brian.

"Yes, and rather than detracting from my academic role it added to it. Indeed, I see the danger in remaining detached and aloof as far greater than that of foregoing an academic role when becoming engaged. Researchers have been criticised by Third World scholars and laymen for failing to be 'fully human and to use our full human potential when we make the attempt to understand others, treating them as though they were indeed not full human beings themselves but as things that could be satisfactorily examined and explained through artifice of reason alone. This is perhaps the worst form of intellectual arrogance' (Turnbull 1990:51). And also 'I cannot without gross inconsistency apply to

my subjects a model which is logically at odds with the one I apply to myself. I must see them in principle also as self-directing and intelligent agents' (Heron 1981:22)."

"What does that mean?" asked Brian.

"It means being authentic. It means being ethical. Being consistent. If I can think about the way things are done—what they mean—so can they. Engagement with people from another culture challenged me to question my beliefs about the world, people and myself. Learning from others provoked learning about myself, and the search for the 'essence of personhood' or authentic existence to discover what makes me? 'A person responds to the world in either of two modes: anxiety or care. Anxiety is a response to inauthentic existence, in that a person is afraid of no definable object, 'no-thing', of the possibility of not being. Care reflects one's concern to relate to the world and to accept oneself for who one is' (Homan 1991:94-95)."

I paused. "A vocation that involves an authentic existence, and morally acceptable actions, must be enlightened from within. It must stem from 'an expression of love for self and of loving others as I have loved myself. Erickson (1968) called this the virtue of care. I prefer to call it love' (Homan 1991:101)."

I was conscious of the passion entering my voice, and tried to still the rising tension and pitch.

"That must leave you open to being exploited. I remember in the story you ask who is manipulating whom, when a woman asked you to bring her a cardigan next trip," said Alice.

"It does. And once again it involves ethical and moral decisions as to what to do in each situation. I have just finished reading about a fellow (Crick 1992) who was undertaking a study on tourism in Sri Lanka. He formed a close relationship with an informant, who was a street hawker, named Ali. 'It would have been easy to become embroiled in Ali's financial predicament. But, apart from occasionally bailing him out not constituting a long-term solution to his problems, he was determined not to set any precedents which might lead to Ali or anyone else continually asking him for money (p183)'. However, when Ali announced that his young wife was ill requiring admission to the hospital and that the sums of money involved in hospital care were quite beyond Ali's reach, but not a large amount to him, he had to make a judgement about their entire relationship. 'Was his wife really ill? Did one really have to give money to staff in a hospital to ensure good care? Was giving Ali money here simply the only thing to do given their respective circumstances? Can an anthropologist create relationships and then refuse the ensuing involvement (Dumont 1978:91)? Or was involving himself in this way with Ali's troubles a way of assuaging the guilt he felt over the exploitative role playing that he was up to (Gans 1968:56-60)? Or was this an archetypal instance of a tourist being taken for a ride?'

(Crick 1992:184). I could really relate to his experience, and the choices he was facing," I explained.

"I imagine as a health worker it may even be worse," said Alice.

"Certainly the obligations seemed magnified as it involved seeing others in pain and suffering. Also, it was not only an issue of human compassion but of doing my job well. My vocation involves alleviating such suffering, so the role of researcher, in my case, is always linked to that of healer in health education and work," I agreed.

"From the story I understand you, and your husband, Stephen, is it, became involved in conducting eye clinics in Vanuatu." said Brian, "But I am unclear how it is you came to be doing research."

"Well, as you said, Stephen and I have been conducting eye clinics in Vanuatu for nearly seven years now. There was so much eye damage and discomfort, and yet the ni-Vanuatu did not accept our advice to wear sunglasses, so I started out doing research into why they wouldn't wear sunglasses. The research sought to examine the issues related to ni-Vanuatu wearing sunglasses, to reflect on and analyse the impact of these issues on an eye health intervention programme based on the wearing of sunglasses. The aim of the research was to produce knowledge and action that was directly useful to the people in their quest for eye health, and to enable them to take control of their health behaviours at a deeper level, through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge."

"That sounds like a big task," Brian remarked. "How did you go about developing that programme?"

"To begin with I adopted a Participatory Action Research approach," I replied.

"What's that?" asked Brian.

"You've heard me talk about PAR," said Alice.

"I don't recall that," said Brian, somewhat guiltily.

"PAR is 'a way of learning how to explain a particular social world by working with the people who live in it to construct, test, and improve theories about it so they can better control it. It can be seen primarily as a learning strategy for empowering participants and only secondarily as producing 'research' in the conventional sense' (Elden and Levin 1991:131)," explained Alice.

Brian looked to me.

"I agree, and I rather like Fals Borda and Rahman's definition."

I went over to the side table once more, and began to look through the papers.

"Damn."

Brian and Alice laughed as the pile of papers went sprawling across the floor.

"Looks like your office at work, Alice," teased Brian as he got up to come and help pick up the papers.

"Ah! I found it. Don't worry about those, Brian, I'll probably just do it again."

He and I picked up a few papers and we returned to our seats.

"They say: 'PAR while emphasising a rigourous search for knowledge, is an open-ended process of life and work—or *vivencia*—a progressive evolution toward an overall, structural transformation of society and culture, a process that requires ever renewed commitment, an ethical stand, self critique and persistence at all levels. In short it is a philosophy of life as much as a method' (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991:29)."

"I can see why you like that," said Alice, "it comes out in your story and painting."

"That definition is interesting in the light of what we've been talking about, you know, ethics and morality. I also find the bit about persistence intriguing," remarked Brian. "It seems the kind of research you've undertaken involves a lot of time, and as you've already explained engagement with the people."

"For sure. 'Researchers who work in qualitative participatory action projects require stamina and patience to deal with the competing demands for immediate action versus meaningful participation, and as the process evolves, demands on personal time and energy are unpredictable and exceed those originally anticipated. Also, the emerging design inherent in action-oriented research demands that the research process be reflexive. This requires commitment and energy that is difficult to sustain over the life of the project, particularly in the face of competing personal and professional responsibilities' (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1997:302-303)."

"I remember you speaking about that before. You weren't able to fully implement PAR though were you?" asked Alice.

"No. Participant Action Research emphasises the role of participation and self-direction in development, is radically egalitarian (Reason 1994) in approach and in an ideal world, would always be initiated by the group the research is meant to benefit. To a certain extent the people initiated the research, because they kept coming to the clinics and asking for a solution to their eye problems. They wanted answers. Finding those answers had to confront the importance of their personal knowledge and choice in health development decisions. I believed the people had a capacity for self-awareness and for autonomous, self-directed action within their world, and that they may develop the power to change their world. However, I faced the dilemma of knowing that without the initiative of someone like me, from a privileged and educated group, who has some skill in eye health and adult education, commitment in time and emotion, and finances for travel, health promotion and sunglass stock purchasing, this project would, most likely, not occur (Reason 1994:334)." I explained. "So, as much as I wished to employ PAR in this

research project, it was not possible, and I adopted an "action-oriented, participatory-where-possible "approach."

"Why didn't PAR work?" Alice asked.

"I think there were a number of factors. From the start, I was supposed to have a ni-Vanuatu counterpart as a condition of gaining research approval from the Vanuatu National Cultural Council. However, the VNCC was unable to arrange this with the Health Department. This resulted in a less than ideal situation, for I was working as an optical assistant, and trying to establish a group to assist at the same time. Whilst being associated with the clinics had some advantages, it would have been good to have had some support in collecting and analysing data separately from the clinics, and having someone who as an insider already knew the language and culture."

"That would certainly help," commented Brian.

"Also, it is not easy establishing mutual relationships, especially when the people have been victims of a dominating colonial structure."

"Why does that influence relationships?" asked Brian. "Isn't it nearly twenty years since Vanuatu became independent?"

"Yes, but as we say, old habits die hard! Many expatriates, and so-called expert visitors, still ignore, discard, or overlook traditional values. That makes people wary of becoming involved. It can also have so damaged their image of self and of others, that it keeps people implicitly subordinate in research processes in which outside researchers are involved.

Dwight Conquergood, an ethnographer, was working at a Hmong refugee camp. He established a knowledge barter system, so that 'each culture could benefit from the other approaching health care issues within a both/and embrace instead of an either/or separation of categories; this was particularly important because the refugees were accustomed to having expatriates undermine, even outrightly assault, their traditions' (Conquergood 1988:182)."

"But as the painting shows, you did succeed in establishing mutually beneficial relationships," said Alice.

"Sometimes, yes—people in the villages made 'structural allowances' (Turnbull 1990) for my participation in village life. By assigning me a social role and title, *wife blong dokta blong ae*, because they saw me in the clinical role with Stephen, I was accorded, not only access to communities, and was *expected* not just allowed, to participate. When you take on an established social role, usually there is a particular set of rules, a front, already established for it. Whether you acquire the role primarily because you desire to perform the given task or because of a desire to maintain the corresponding front, you find that you

have to do both (Goffman 1971:37). This meant that I started to perform functions for them. Helping with their eyes, speaking at their women's meetings, attending church services with them, and exchanging gifts and services," I said.

"In the story you talk about those gift exchanges and the closeness you have with some of the women," added Brian. "I'd like to hear more about that."

"Yes. Gift giving is an interesting one. You come to know that, in Vanuatu, 'the connection between material flow and social relations is reciprocal. A specific social relation may constrain a given movement of goods, but a specific transaction—'by the same token'—suggests a particular social relation. If friends make gifts, gifts make friends and the material flow underwrites or initiates social relations' (Sahlins 1972:186).

We were often showered with gifts, which we were both unable, and not expected, to reciprocate. However, in other situations, where we had extended contact and relations we felt obliged to reciprocate. It was as if we moved closer into the kinship circle and the gift giving obligations changed."

"So you weren't 'buying' their co-operation by giving gifts, you know, like the colonialists did?" asked Brian.

"Good Heavens, No! " I exclaimed. "The gift giving was something *they* instigated and we sort of fell into as we learned more about it."

"You were telling us about how you formed relationships with the people," said Alice quietly.

"Oh yes. They became co-researchers and key informants did emerge from patients, fieldworkers, and friends assisting us in the clinics and the villages where we stayed. These people played a crucial role in developing the preventative eye care programme and in teaching me about their world and lives. I owe them an enormous amount."

Speaking about them brought back the familiar feeling of closeness, the attachment, mixed with a sense of longing to return, and fear that I may not ever see them again.

"What did you do when you were out of the country? Having to return to Australia, didn't that upset the PAR process too?" asked Alice

"Well, after periods of intense data collection in Vanuatu, which varied in length from year to year, there were periods of reflection and planning in Australia.

From Australia, I would communicate via fax and letter with some ni-Vanuatu informants and co-researchers, and upon my return to Vanuatu we would initiate action based on the findings, and begin collection of new data. This systematic process of act-observe-analyse- evaluate-retheorise-plan-act provided continuous interplay between what was found out, analytic reflection on findings and the design of the next action.

I think though, that I was prone to see what needed to be done and maybe rush into it. Partly because I was under pressure to get things done whilst I was there and partly because I had seen that enthusiastic supporters of the project often only had small windows of opportunity to be involved. I needed to work with them as much as possible, before they were prevented from helping."

"What do you mean by that. In what ways were people prevented from helping?" Alice asked.

"Throughout the project, many people expressed the desire to participate but the pressures of their everyday life, political changes[5] and work commitments meant that their participation was usually spasmodic. For instance, one co-researcher's relative died, so he had to participate in a time of mourning, withdrawing from activities for several weeks. As I was only there for two weeks, I was unable to work with him, in the field, that year. But that didn't mean the people involved were not committed to or interested in the project; many made great efforts to be involved as much as their obligations and understandings of the project would allow."

I looked away from Alice, not wanting her to see the frustration and sorrow in my eyes. I felt that I had failed somehow, even though I understood why the programme had not worked, and it hurt. I took a deep breath and continued to voice my rationalisations hoping it would convince them and me.

"Also, as the research and the primary eye clinics, which were the vehicles for data collection, were self-funded, I was not able to return to the same group of people every time. We had to 'share' our optometric trips amongst the islands trying to reach as much of the population as time and our finances allowed. Participation for many groups was limited to a particular cycle of the research. Naturally, it raised concerns for the people involved in the research. I hoped that people would receive some benefit from participating in a cycle of the research, because the process of research brings about change and not just the product of the research."

"So did they?" asked Brian.

"Did they what?"

"Get any benefits?"

"I think so," I replied. "The people who participated in the extended interviews said, 'It is good to talk about things, because it makes us think, and that is good'. Other people involved in group discussions, re-iterated those sentiments. 'It is good to talk about things and to learn much about eye health'. The value placed upon talking and discussion in ni-Vanuatu culture is high and is an important part in their process of bringing about social changes."

"Didn't working with a new group of people each time make it hard to become an 'insider' to develop trust and rapport?" Alice asked.

"Yes, and no. For the first few years we had the same field worker joining us. So we 'knew' each other. My language and understanding also increased so I was more confident in entering new situations. Initially, as an 'outsider' I had much to learn. A new language and new world-view, but as I learnt their language, and shared their experiences, I gained an overview of their life experience, providing a background for understanding their perceptions of need. I became an adopted 'insider' by virtue of this knowledge, my association with the Vanuatu Christian Council who helped arrange our itineraries, and our reputation which had preceded us on some occasions as we had treated a relative or friend at a clinic in Port Vila or on another island."

"You mentioned the Vanuatu Christian Council earlier. What is their role?" asked Brian.

"The Vanuatu Christian Council is a multi-denominational body representing the many churches in Vanuatu. It plays an active role in political life and has its powers defined in the constitution of the country. Our reasons for working with them were threefold.

Firstly, they are well organised and able to reach large groups of people through church affiliation, which is very strong in Vanuatu.

Secondly, we had contact with them through a mutual friend. Of course, knowing someone in the country made planning and arrangements via facsimile easier and more efficient. We had tried to gain entry to Vanuatu via the Health Department but were unsuccessful in obtaining responses.

Thirdly, our religious affiliation meant that we felt comfortable with and acceptable to these people. As we spoke about earlier, they assisted in the site selection, gaining consent, arranging the clinics and were often 'our hosts' in the respective villages. Our integrity and trustworthiness were, therefore, implied through association with this group (Goffman 1968:64). Our association with the VCC has continued although its role has altered as other organisations have contributed as well.

Each visit has differed—with Women's Affairs, Vanuatu Society for Disabled People, the Department of Health, and Rotary all assuming organisational roles at times during the research."

"How did someone who was taking this seemingly participatory approach end up being interrogated as you felt you were?" asked Alice.

"That I felt I had a mandate given by others, including her people to be there, was not apparent to her. She was part of a department that had been approached several times to be involved in the project and from whom I had received no response. I had continued on with the project without their involvement. I continued to invite them to meetings and one

day a member of their staff attended. She arranged this meeting for me as she was excited by what we were proposing. I thought I would be meeting with people who wanted to learn about and be positively involved in the project! It was then I found out that 'PAR is not exclusively research oriented, nor adult education, nor socio-political action. It encompasses all these aspects together as three stages, or emphases, which are not necessarily consecutive' (Fals Borda and Rahman1991:3)". In this situation I was thrown unexpectedly into socio-political action and was caught off guard. As I read somewhere 'sociologists are involved—whether they like it or not—in the policy making process' (Schur 1979:486)."

"Speaking of policy, I found the comments on family planning interesting. I wonder if they had the same trouble changing behaviour as you seem to have encountered?" asked Brian.

"That is an interesting point. 'Traditionally family planning was commonly practised, the usual method being abstention. Generally, while the children were breastfeeding or until they could walk, husbands and wives abstained from sex. This had the effect of spacing births well, and two or three years were considered a good interval between births. Some herbal medicines were also used for fertility regulation. The concept of family planning was therefore well accepted in traditional ni-Vanuatu society' (UNICEF 1991:51). However, in most communities now the traditional methods have fallen into disuse and modern methods of family planning are not yet widely used. This has meant many families are faced with too many children. At the current growth rate, the present population of about 170,000 is estimated to reach around 239,00 by the year 2010. A study of key informant perceptions of family planning education in Vanuatu (Hardy, Dahl, Rory 1995:45) found that 'family planning education in Vanuatu needed to be improved to enhance the new national awareness of increasing population pressures'. Key informants suggested: more training for family planning workers; increased community participation, involvement of men and youth; and better education materials as the main factors needing attention. Posters and booklets are the preferred communication aids currently in use.

Also, until recently, Vanuatu's leadership had maintained a pronatal stance based on the belief that land was still readily available for everyone. But 'recent discussions held at several regional and international fora, focussing on high population growths of the countries of the Pacific and the implications for future development, have emphasised the need to formulate a population policy' (Asian Development Bank 1997:251-252)."

"So it appears that family planning, because of its roots in traditional values is acceptable to the community, but issues of knowledge of and access to modern methods is hampering its effect on the population," summarised Brian.

"And will continue to do so in rural areas," I added.

"What a pity traditional methods have been abandoned," said Alice.

"And wouldn't it be interesting to know why they were," I added.

"You're really big on the why's of things aren't you?" said Brian.

"Well, you see I think that people are self-interpreting beings who have reasons for their actions and who are constantly attempting to make sense of their own expressions and of the expressions of others. So it is natural to ask *why*. 'What inquirers are concerned with is no different from what most people are concerned with—understanding' (Smith 1992:102)."

"Yes, I guess that's true," conceded Brian.

"You know you've been asking a lot of why and how questions too, since looking at the painting and hearing the story," I added.

"Yes. I've been trying to make sense of it. Some of it I understand because I've had similar experiences. But some is way outside of my experience," said Brian.

"It's good it's had that effect on you. That's what has led some academics to acknowledge 'a potential for optional readings which gives readers a license to take part in an experience that can reveal to them not only how it was for me (the author), but also how it could be or once was for them' (Ellis 1993:726). These revelations occur when an audience, like you have done, 're-creates the inquirer's new vision of certain phenomena, and finds that new meanings have been constructed, and old values and outlooks challenged, even negated' (Barone and Eisner 1997:78); this in turn may influence their future behaviour and practice," I explained.

"Now you see why research is a moral activity," said Alice, turning to Brian. "Because 'moral decisions become paramount as both the researcher and audience seek to answer questions about the kind of people they are or have become, the kind of society they are or will become if they accept one interpretation over another' (Smith 1992:104)."

"Yes, exactly!" I enthused. "And 'these personal and anecdotal accounts form an oral culture of moral and practical warnings; they are not widely written of, according to John Van Maanen (personal communication 1993), largely because we have failed to develop a 'genre or narrative convention within our standard works' that would shape a taken-for-granted imperative that field-workers own up to the manner in which they solved such issues during their research' (Punch 1994:85)."

"Is that what you are doing—exploring a new genre to record these moral and practical warnings?" asked Brian.

"Yes I guess it is. I have an unusual audience too. I feel obligated to return the research to the ni-Vanuatu first and foremost. I want them to be able to use the knowledge they gain

to consider the way they interact with researchers, with visiting health teams, and with each other. Secondly, I want the research to be useful. To be accessible to cross-cultural field workers, no matter what areas they work in, so that they can compare, reflect and learn more about what it's like to undertake cross-cultural work, in order to improve practice. Thirdly, it is an academic exploration of new ways of re-presenting knowledge. 'Although there is continuing experimentation in data collection and analysis by qualitative researchers, in the main, less experimentation has been undertaken in the format for reporting results' (Polkinghorne 1997:18). The conventional format may allow the 'community of scholars' to judge 'validity' of the knowledge claim, but it is not designed to holistically communicate the knowledge claim itself. Researchers, such as myself, whose interests 'focus on the usefulness of knowledge claims, don't find conventional formats a useful means for displaying the significance of the knowledge for practice' (Polkinghorne 1997:4). Art forms, on the other hand, allow me to 'provide vicarious, situated learning experiences' (Norris 1997:88) for my audiences, 'inviting their involvement in a dynamic interpretive evolution' (Norris 1997:88) of my representations."

"Mmm. I can see that," said Alice. "I don't think I've gotten this much out of a conventional report before."

"Is there any more coffee?" asked Brian.

"I'm sure that can be arranged," I said, as I stood and picked up the cups. "I won't be long." As I left, Brian stood up and walked over to the window.

"You should see this view," he called to Alice. Alice got up and went over and stood by Brian at the window.

Notes

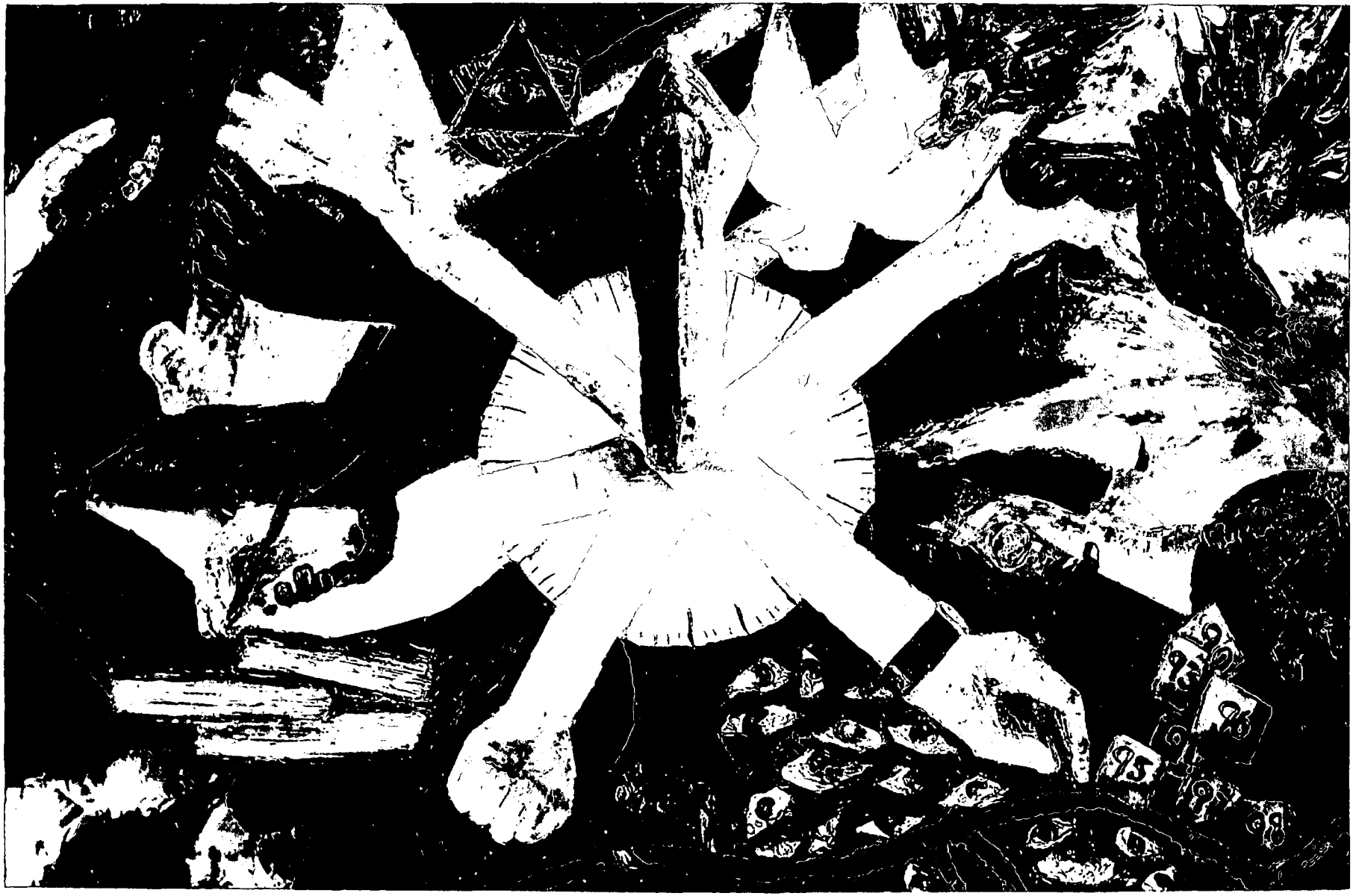
[1]. A passenger cruise ship that travelled regularly between Australia and the south-west Pacific Islands.

[2]. In the 1970s Professor Fred Hollows AC (1929-1993) pioneered the treatment of trachoma and other eye diseases prevalent among Australian Aboriginals, halving curable blindness amongst Aborigines. He helped establish the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern and was instrumental in the establishment of Aboriginal Medical Services throughout Australia. In 1995, The Fred Hollows Foundation launched an indigenous eye program in far north Queensland and the Torres Strait providing eye surgery, equipment, and training. Systems and procedures were set up to ensure that these communities continue to gain access to the optometry services and ophthalmic treatment that most Australians take for granted. Fred Hollows was an extraordinary man. He worked as a consultant to the World Health Organisation and visited many third world countries. He believed that everyone, everywhere, should have access to the best that modern medical knowledge can provide. Cataract blindness is a huge problem in many developing countries, but it can be cured with a relatively simple operation. Cataract surgery, using intraocular lenses, was always dismissed as being too expensive and too difficult to perform in the developing world. The Fred Hollows Foundation is a community based non-government organisation (NGO) launched by Fred Hollows in 1992. It initially began working to give the people of Nepal, Eritrea, and Vietnam the skills, technology and equipment to produce the intraocular lenses used in cataract surgery in their own countries, ensuring a ready and affordable supply for their blindness-prevention programs. Later, by exporting the lenses, the laboratories become self-sustaining and spread the benefits of the program by making the lenses affordable for many more poor and disadvantaged people in other countries. Equally as important as the building of manufacturing plants is the training and equipping of local surgeons to conduct high-volume posterior-chamber intraocular lens cataract surgery. The success of The Foundation's surgical training programs has seen requests from many more countries for assistance and the Foundation is now training doctors and providing them with the equipment required for modern cataract surgery in 19 countries across 3 continents. (Source: Fred Hollows Foundation website 12.9.99)

[3]. The Barossa Valley is a wine-growing region of South Australia, settled by German immigrants who left Germany to escape religious persecution in 1838.

[4]. This is an island in the North of Vanuatu

[5]. In Vanuatu, when the government changes from Francophone to Anglophone, all public servants, also change. Continuity in dealing with people in government departments was often hampered by political uncertainty and hence job uncertainty.



"Waiting and Working"

Chapter Three

Waiting and Working:

A story of taking time: making time: unlearning and relearning

"Wow. The colour is amazing," Alice remarked as she looked into the painting '**Waiting and Working'.**

"Mmm. The colours are amazing." Although I stood beside her, I was seeing not the painting, but re-entering the experience, as I was transported toVanuatu. "That's what I see being a health worker in a foreign country. Overwhelming colours. Vibrant, primary colours inviting others to join them in a celebration of the senses depicted on rich canvases of life," I paused as I looked back to the painting.

"Browns: bodies brown, glistening, glowing, living browns. Earthy browns, and volcanic browns. Greens: vegetation, viridian hues, vivid limes, dense sap greens, of money. Colours which smell." I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply.

"Reds: blood, inflammation, irritation, anger, bureaucracy, flowers resplendent, love, of life, of responsibility, of risk and danger. Whites: pure purity, righteous love, reflection, sterility, dead coral, squeaky sand, eyeballs, European skin. Yellows: sun, fire, gold, refining, burning, of happiness, flora and fish. Blues: oceans, lagoons, rivers, and sky, of distance and depth. Violets: ultra-violet rays, spirits, of passing, liminal: not red or blue."

I stepped back from the painting trying to distance myself physically from something to which I was so intimately connected and often overpowered by. I knew now what Renner (1964:36) meant when he spoke of the 'emotional accent of colour' and of a 'sensual-moral' character present in colour theories.

Brian, too, stepped back.

"What's this painting called? I remember you said the title would help me make sense of it, and I need that help!" he remarked with a smile.

"Waiting and Working," I replied.

"Waiting and Working," Brian repeated. "Waiting is about time," he mumbled to himself.

We stood and looked.

"Ah!" Brian exclaimed, "A clock. I can see a clock." He turned to Alice hopeful that she would confirm his interpretation.

She smiled and pointed to the white disc in the centre of the painting "There?" she asked.

"Yes, and the arms are the hands of the clock," he continued, then stopped and frowned.

"What's that got to do with your role as health worker?"

"Being a health worker in a foreign country strikes me as being timeless clock watching. As you pointed out there is the clock but without numbers. The stark white with black divisions shows precise, calculated cost-effective time is imposed in a place where time has not needed to be measured. Words exist for yesterday, today, tomorrow, before yesterday, after tomorrow, last/next week, last/next month, last/next year, long time finished. It's time to get up when the sun rises. It's time to eat when hungry. It's time to sleep when tired, dark, or too hot. It's time to drink kava at dusk. It's time to go to church when the gong is hit. It's time to plant, and it's time to harvest. It's time for the eye clinic, when the doctor arrives. Everything happens in 'Vanuatu time'."

" 'Vanuatu time' what's that?" asked Brian.

"Vanuatu is a country where time is rarely measured. Certainly not divided into sixty seconds, sixty minutes. Local people knowingly speak of 'Vanuatu time', as something relaxed, extended and socially derived. Time to get up. Time to go to gardens, time to eat. It is a place where it's good to get a 'round tuit'," I smiled as I replied to his question.

"What?" asked Brian.

"You know, I'll get 'around-to-it'!" I explained with a grin.

Alice laughed as Brian, knowing he had been caught out, slapped his forehead.

"Sounds great to be like that," said Brian.

"It is when you are *there,* but if you are *here* trying to arrange a trip, to get responses, there is no point marking something URGENT!"

I tried to cover the strain evident in my voice.

"Oh," said Brian.

"Look away from the clock. See my fist clenched, thinking of the bloody clock," I said.

"Looks like frustration, and anger, perhaps at a loss of time," said Brian as he continued to study the painting. He looked at me and said, "the red background really frames it in anger."

"I see it as more a fist that has been clenched but now opening, relaxing, perhaps as it settles into a new time pattern," said Alice, "see the fingers are not so tight as they first appear."

I moved closer to take another look.

"I can see that now. I hadn't noticed before. You know, 'phenomena such as time, space, spirituality and human relationships with nature are culture bound' (Stanfield 1994:184). What you sensed might be the signs of me entering their world. That's why it was easier

there than here to accept their time frame," I remarked with some surprise, as Alice's revelation sunk in.

"What does that mean?" asked Brian.

"Just that in the Western world, time is linear and is viewed as 'a commodity, something to be used up for a profit' (Stanfield 1994:184), so for us, time can be 'wasted'. 'Western people have a very distinctive understanding of time based on centuries of wage labour and a belief that life requires non-specific goal oriented achievement. For them, life is first and foremost about work; 'socialising' is done in one's 'spare time'. In non-Western cultures, when status attainment and maintenance are based on social interaction, people will spend much more time in 'socialising' than in 'being productive'. Time is not 'spent'; it forms a less than conscious backdrop to the activities of community members' (Geddes 1995:120-121). Time in the Western world, is also viewed as a 'horizontal sequence of events, such as the life cycle and the ageing process' (Stanfield 1994:184), whereas time in Vanuatu is more like a web. Dead ancestors are part of the present, are part of the future. Time is woven into the relationships of life, its events and their meaning or significance. Most older people don't know how old they are, or their birthday, it's not important, but they can tell you long and complex family trees and stories of events," I replied.

"I can see that not being able to record your patient's age may make it hard for giving glasses, but what do those other differences in time perception make to health work?" asked Alice.

"Time perceptions have an immense impact on cross-cultural health work. Vanuatu relies heavily on visiting teams for eye health programmes. The people wait for teams to come in order to receive treatment. Most visiting eye teams have a curative focus, which ensures positive results in a short time for the teams, the funding body and some patients. It is easy to measure how many, the outcomes of the treatment, and so justify spending. But in the planning stages, the visiting team waits, pressured for time, and annoyed that repeated requests for information appear to go unheeded, as teams need to ensure there is adequate work for them to undertake in the time allowed. Even in the field these differences cause frustration. Everything happens so slowly. With lots of waiting."

"Wasting time," interjected Brian.

"To Westerners. I had an email from an eye doctor inquiring about the eye health work in Vanuatu. He expressed his concern about his usefulness based on recent experience in another Third World country. Out of the five weeks on mission his team managed to operate only on 12 days. Let me read it to you."

I walked over to where the notes were sprawled. Next to them was the plastic box containing my record cards, I opened the lid of the box, and flicked through the pink

cards. "Ah! Here it is." I turned to Brian and Alice who had made their way over to the sofa once more.

"He says of their time '*we felt as if it was wasted.* It's not that we haven't done a good job. *But we could have done lot more, or we needn't have been there more than 2 weeks at all.* It was a great experience for me and now I am qualified to set up an ophthalmological service anywhere in the world starting from scratch. I feel that, unless I can set up an eye camp *quickly* and then perform *as many operations as patients available*, at this time it is not *worth* for me to go and have holidays in the sun'.

"I can see what you mean. He mentions counting, speed and value for time spent," said Alice, "as justifications for it being worth his time."

"Yes. You sense his frustration, don't you?"

Alice and Brian nodded.

"However curative work can bring immense personal satisfaction to the workers. It's a fantastic feeling to give someone back their sight." I placed the card back in the box, closed the lid, and returned to my seat.

"That's all about curative work but weren't you involved mainly in preventative work?" asked Brian.

"Both. Giving out corrective spectacles is more curative, and although that's what I was involved in, my focus was on patient education and eye damage prevention. Unfortunately, preventative care is not so emotive, easy to quantify, and hence justify economically. In aid projects, empowering people through a preventative and educational focus has not been emphasised. Time appears to be the enemy of preventative and educational programmes. There is such a lot of waiting. Programmes involve input of money over extended periods, with measurable outcomes difficult. In the rapidly changing Western world, funding bodies and visiting teams could change several times while a project is running."

"I can see huge problems with that," said Brian. "Recently I have enough trouble trying to work out who is my current bank manager—Branches closing, and downsizing."

"What about time needed to get to know about the people?" asked Alice, "I imagine from what you told us, that is a problem."

"Mmm. Time, needed to develop cultural sensitivity, language skills, and insider knowledge required to focus on preventative and educational aspects of health, is not available to visiting teams which are usually short-term, and hospital, not community, based," I agreed.

"Sounds like there is a lot of waiting involved for everyone. The difference is, that for ni-Vanuatu the act of waiting doesn't seem to cause the same personal stress and financial repercussions as it does for *waetman,*" observed Alice.

"No, but it does affect their health through limiting their choices. And when the visiting team does come, the cost to the patient or their family, of getting them to the team, can be huge. I find it ironic, that in a country where time is rarely measured, time, a Western, highly calculated, precise and economically derived concept, dictates health options and quality of life," I reflected sadly.

"It makes you think how so many of our Western so-called 'advances' have been about eliminating waiting," said Brian.

"Yes. Microwaves, no waiting for dinner to cook," said Alice.

"Frozen Dinners, no waiting to prepare either," said Brian.

"You hate those," said Alice.

"I did say *so-called* advances," countered Brian.

"You're right! We don't like *wasting precious time* waiting. Yet, I learned a lot through waiting experiences. Some things are worth waiting for. Sounds corny, but it's so true. Like waiting for trust to develop. Waiting for appropriate times to share and record. Waiting for people to offer information; it's hard not to ask, to push forward with your own questions, to wait. Just wait, *storian,* listen, and learn. I learned to wait for the word to be passed around, wait for the people to come from their gardens and wait without feeling the need to 'make up for lost time', because waiting is no longer 'lost time', it is valuable 'being' time. Then you learn to wait for people to ask for your advice, listen to their questions, and accept, without judgement, their right to say 'No'," I said. "You learn to wait and see if your help is needed or wanted. Wait until it is asked for. Wait for stillness. Wait for prompting from within. Wait for the flash of inspiration that makes the experience clearer and somehow seems to tie it all together."

"Seems that you do a lot of waiting. Do they?" asked Alice.

"Yes," I replied. "They wait; without impatience, for the glasses I promised to post, and I did, but they never arrived."

I paused recalling the face of the man as he strolled up to me, shook my hand and asked with such anticipation in his voice if I had brought his glasses. I was so taken a back. Almost ashamed that I didn't remember him. I blinked hard to clear the image from my mind and I looked back to Brian and Alice.

"So when I came the next year they came to get them," I continued.

"Can you imagine anyone willingly waiting a year for their glasses?" asked Brian.

"My last pair I got at a store offering spectacles in an hour. They took four, and I wasn't happy."

"Yes, I learned from that experience how much Brian *hates* being kept waiting," laughed Alice.

Brian shrugged. "I bet you don't like waiting either do you?" he asked me.

I raised my eyebrows.

"You do that a lot," said Brian.

"What?"

"Raise your eyebrows to show you agree," he replied.

"Habit. Ni-Vanuatu show agreement with, or acknowledgement of another, by raising and lowering the eyebrows. It's a 'body technique' (Mauss 1973). Mauss showed that common bodily activities such as walking, require an organic function, but they are also 'socially learned and culturally variable across societies' (Turner 1992:15). 'Each culture, each person within it, uses the entire sensory repertoire to convey messages; manual gesticulations, facial expressions, bodily postures, rapid heavy or light breathing, tears, at the individual level; stylised gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronised movements such as marching, the moves and plays of games, sports and rituals at the cultural level' (Turner 1982:9). Also, as 'non verbal communication plays several essential parts in social interaction, such as communicating attitudes to others, supporting speech by elaborating on utterances, and providing feedback from listeners' (Argyle 1982:65), using non-verbal techniques was an important part of being recognised as an 'insider'."

"It showed you had spent *time* with them, eh?" exclaimed Brian.

"That it did," I agreed. "Enough time, to pick up some of their habits!"

"I just love all the hands," said Alice, watching hers as she folded them in her lap.

"They are connected to time perceptions too. What you discover in being a Health Educator in a foreign country is that you need a thousand hands. Hands to heal, hands to hold, hands to reach out, hands to ward off, hands to give, hands to take, hands to juggle daily living tasks, hands to record, hands to greet, hands to farewell, hands to invite, hands to express, and hands to pray. The hands became the hands of the clock. Reaching out beyond time, as being taught by a hand outside of time," I said.

"But the hands of another colour, interacting, helping, you know, 'I'll give you a hand', it means so much here, depicted like this," said Alice.

"Yes. It's important to see what the hands are doing. They are coming together," I said as I brought my hands together in front of the painting, comparing them with the image before us.

"It's not two white hands and nearby two black. It's a black and a white hand together, interacting. So when I gaze at being a Health Educator in a foreign country, I see contrasted similarities. Black and white juxtaposed," I explained.

"It's the contrast between black and white, something we're not used to seeing here," said Brian.

He paused and drank his coffee. "Makes you think about the issues of reconciliation with our land's Aboriginal people."

"Mmm. We went to an island once and one of the children was scared of seeing a *waetman* for the first time. I remember the fear on the child's face at seeing the colour of my skin. Can you imagine what it feels like to have the wrong colour skin? Skin that inflicts terror on another? I couldn't change the colour of my skin. I couldn't take away her terror. She would not let me. She hid screaming under her blanket in the safety of her room in that iron hut. No one prepared me for that."

"Nothing could," said Alice softly.

We sat in silence for a moment.

"No, nothing," I continued. "Even though I remember the shock I got when I went to Ernabella station to work for a few weeks, twenty or so years ago[1]. I was totally unprepared for 'feeling white' then, and even what I learned through that experience didn't help."

I stood up and went over to the dining table and returned with the biscuits, which I offered to Brian and Alice, before placing them on the coffee table.

"Then there are the other contrasts portrayed in this painting," I said as I waved my hand towards the right hand, lower corner. "One seeks reasons, the other seeks meaning. One seeks cures, the other knows better. One is principal, the other has principles. Seeking solutions to eye health problems, one out of physical pain, the other out of emotional pain."

"See, there it is again. You recognised that motive in the last story," said Brian to Alice.

Alice nodded.

"And I imagine we'll hear it again and again," said Alice.

Only then was I was beginning to realise just how much the people's pain had impacted on me, how many times I had repeated it without being conscious of it.

"Karen."

I turned to Alice, suddenly aware that I had been distracted from our conversation.

"Sorry," I replied.

"You mentioned just a minute ago that one seeks reasons, one seeks meaning, and a couple of other conflicting ways, yet I sense here not conflict, but working together," said Alice.

"They were contrasts more than conflicts. Although the energy required to resolve, or rather appreciate them, was similar."

"But that's my point, you do seem to have appreciated the differences," said Alice.

Did I? I thought to myself. Sometimes I did. Sometimes I wrestled with them. Sometimes I wished them away. Sometimes I wanted to change them. I recalled something I had read from Freund and McGuire (1995) 'While the social arrangements that influence our health may seem remote and object like, they are human products and as such can be humanly changed. Some needed changes are in cultural values and stubbornly resistant social structures; while human products they change more slowly. Nevertheless, becoming aware of the social arrangements that shape our lives is a first step in making effective efforts to change those forces' (p316).

"Yes, I guess you're right," I said as I looked up at Alice.

"I certainly became aware of the differences and appreciated the impact they had on my practice as a health worker. But it was not a matter of just changing their thinking. I had to challenge and sometimes change my way of thinking. It was not so easy as it sounds. But through that struggle I came to appreciate that being a health worker in a foreign country involved mutuality—not seeking to eliminate competing issues or ways of being and doing, or striving to find the lowest common denominator, or 'blend' upon which to build. It was not settling for grey, as black and white cultures compete, but is striving for the rainbow," I pointed at the painting. "It's colouring the world through a developing relationship, which acknowledges the benefits of the self and other, and finds the promise of restoration of body and spirit: true health."

A bird screeched in the tree outside the window breaking the silence that had engulfed the room.

"Look at those disgusting eyes," said Brian, as he walked over to the painting and bent down to get a closer look, "there are so *many* eyes."

I recalled what it was like painting them. I had started painting eyes quickly like I was possessed, as if I just had to get it over with. My heart raced with my hand across the canvas. "How many eyes? Are there too many?" I asked myself. "Always too many! There shouldn't be this many!" I cried out in reply. But the eyes kept coming, leaping onto the canvas. I rubbed my eyes and looked over to Brian.

"I wanted to show, Brian, that being a health worker in a foreign country presents itself as a struggle to free yourself from seeing bodiless eyes," I said. "How do you recognise someone? What clues do you look for in an encounter to see if you know this person?"

"I look at them," he replied. "The colour of their hair, their eyes, sound of their voice."

"In a cross cultural context those clues we read, gestures, facial characteristics, body shape, speech, and dress are changed. All hair is curly. All hair is black. All skin is brown. All eyes are brown. You look for the teeth, because they are different. Are there any missing? Look at their nose, is it wide or narrow? Are they fat or thin? Are they tall or short? Still, it's easy to see them as all the same. Combine that with a heavy workload and see if you remember the first patient when you're treating the one hundred and twenty-fifth in the day? It is easier not to see them at all, just see the pterygium, the scarred cornea, and the arcus senilis[2] . Yet I must see the person, I must hear their story. I must help *them,* not just their visual organs, to function," I explained.

"That's my beef at work. People are not just numbers, they *are* people," said Alice.

"Are the brown squares with numbers, the patient numbers?" asked Brian.

"Yes. They had a system where each patient received a number on a cardboard square when they came to the hospital clinics. It was different in the rural clinics where people of rank came in first. But in the painting, the numbers I used on the cards also correspond to the years that we visited."

"There's the red tape again," remarked Brian.

I nodded. "Always the red tape."

"I hadn't noticed the black hand with the red tape over its finger," said Alice. "It looks as if it's beckoning someone over. But the tape lies over that finger."

"We receive many requests to come each year. But each year the red tape comes between us. In the past few visits, every time there has been a new director of health. There's always work permit exemptions, customs clearances, difficulties in organising programmes, dates and so on."

"The hand writing, is that you recording field notes?" asked Alice.

"Yes. As I reach out my hand and mind beyond the curative. It is a pen in my hand recording. Then another takes that hand away from the books and shows it the real way to learn and record. With the ears. With the body. With the soul."

"Does that mean you stopped writing?" asked Alice.

"No, but it means the writing, became secondary. When I was first there I was always worried I wouldn't get everything down. I worried that my field notes would be 'insufficient to capture field experience adequately' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:422). It was the fear that somehow experience would be lost that drove me to try to record, tape

or photograph all of experience. What I failed to acknowledge was that 'all field texts are constructed representations of experience' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:422) and are only ever partial. Although I made most of my field notes during, or as soon as possible, after the events, I rewrote them, or added to them later at home when more time could be given to recording the fullness of the experience, and I had the opportunity for 'continuous reflective analysis' (Edwards and Talbot 1994:84). They were kept in the form of a reflective diary, which 'can be taxing but a rewarding experience as it demands and develops a high degree of self -exposure' (Edwards and Talbot 1994:58). Edwards and Talbot (1994), whose book is called The Hard Pressed Researcher..."

"Oh, I like that title," interjected Alice.

"Yes, great isn't it. It's a research handbook for the caring professions. They argue that a reflective diary is both 'a data source and a structure which supports reflection on practice' (Edwards and Talbot 1994: 59) as the researcher draws on the reflective diary when writing up the research project. However, Richardson (1994b) suggests that writing up field notes is an opportunity to 'expand your writing vocabulary, habits of thought, and attentiveness to your senses, and as a bulwark against the censorious voice of science. Where better to develop your sense of self, your voice, than in the process of doing your research' (p525)? And that was what I did in writing the stories that accompany the paintings."

"I hadn't thought much about that before," commented Alice.

"You said something about photographs," said Brian. "Did the people mind you taking photographs?"

"I always asked permission first, and most people didn't mind. If they did of course, I didn't take the photograph. Some said they'd like a copy given to them. But all the time I needed to be aware that 'because the camera intrudes and reveals, it must be used with the wants, needs, and cultural perspectives of the subjects at the forefront of one's consciousness... There is no formula that works in all situations, but the issue should be framed morally' (Harper 1994:406)."

"How do the photographs help you in your research?" asked Brian. "It doesn't appear that you've copied any of them in the paintings."

"Like the field notes they are triggers, prompts which help the process of recall. 'Our memories of places are largely structured through photographic images and the mainly verbal text we weave around images when they are on show to others' (Urry 1990:140). Also 'each photograph marks a special memory in our time, a memory around which we construct stories' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994; 420)," I explained.

"The eye in the triangle, with the circle around it, is an eye looking through a camera lens?" asked Brian.

"Could be," I said. "I like that interpretation."

"It's not what you had in mind when you painted it though" said Brian, sounding disappointed.

"No. But that doesn't make it any less valid," I replied, hoping to encourage him to continue seeking new solutions to the problems posed within the paintings.

"So what was your idea?" asked Alice.

"The all-seeing eye of God, with the equilateral triangle of the Trinity surrounding it. Painted over the promise of the rainbow, it was assurance and comfort to know God was watching over us."

"And it's next to the praying hands," reflected Alice.

I moved towards the painting and placed my hands near those depicted. It felt like an act of reverence. I turned back to face Brian and Alice.

"The praying hands, the joining of the hands were signs of involvement, interaction, and engagement. Involvement with the people was not just a way of gaining information, but gaining trust and respect, which in turn enabled the true dialogue and partnership which I sought, not only for information purposes but because of our shared humanity. 'There seems to be no better way than associating fully with them, meeting with them in the villages, joining them in their daily chores and sharing with them their lifestyles' (Eyoh 1986:23 cited in Conquergood 1988:181). We ate with the people, worshipped with them on Sundays, our children played with their children, and we were invited to ceremonies and funerals. We lived, as a family, in the villages, for the days or weeks we were conducting the eye clinics on their islands; that was unusual for visiting health teams. It is more common for visiting teams to operate from the familiar environment of the Hospital and the people to have to travel to them for treatment."

"Is that because it's more economical for them to do it that way?" asked Brian.

"Actually you'd be surprised to hear that when a survey assessed the value of their visits it was found that expert visitors are not always 'cost effective' (Lee and Walt 1992). 'Apart from the transitory nature of their visits, delegates often exhibit a lack of cultural sensitivity and presume that the 'blanket panacea' they have devised for application in one region of the developing world, will be just as suitable in another. On a very practical level, visiting experts are such busy people that their limited time does not allow them to visit small rural health centres where the real work of Primary Health Care is conducted' (Hughes 1994b:232)."

"They don't learn much about the people that way," said Brian.

"You learn wherever you are, if you're open to learning. But it is an uneven relationship because the people are coming to your territory; the hospital. Often it's threatening for

patients. Health workers can miss important information because they don't understand the world of their patients. But just as the patient feels threatened going to the hospital the practitioner can be threatened moving into the patient's territory. Miller and Crabtree (1994), two clinical researchers, point out that there needs to be what they call 'a community of discourse at the wall' (p349). These walls are not just hospital walls but psychological and cultural barriers erected to keep distance between the practitioner and patient. If the practitioner is prepared to become engaged with the clinical experience, the questions it raises, and practice humility, it can be a life changing experience. As they say 'this is a dangerous, but exciting, conversation, because it promises that no-one can stay the same' (Miller and Crabtree 1994:349)."

"So really, it's about doing what it takes to enter a partnership with the patient, in order to work together on improving their health, "said Alice.

"Yes. I pictured being a health worker in a foreign country as taking the hand of another in partnership, where "the art of partnership involves recognition of my own limitations. I have something to contribute, but I don't have everything. Partnership also involves recognition of the other and the contribution that person can make. But most importantly, 'partnership has to find a way by which both can make their contribution without the one dominating or the other being relegated to the sidelines' (Ringma 1998:3/6)."

"You say that, yet somehow, I can't work out if those handshakes are handshakes or arm wrestles. They just don't have a comfortable feel about them. And the hands holding the money, who's giving and who's taking?" asked Brian.

"I don't know," I replied.

Brian looked concerned, as if it was unfair I couldn't give him an answer.

I remembered that feeling. It was so unjust—so unfair. I did not want to see it, but I had to face it. It was there. To grasp the social import of the preventative eye care programme, I had to place it in the political and economic context at the specific point in time (Hughes 1994a, b). Was it a handshake or an arm wrestle? Was it for good or bad? I didn't want to see the bad. It was too confronting, and this time *I* was powerless. How did that feel? What was uncovered when I focused on being a Health Educator in a foreign country was *kastom*-ary corruption. The giver takes, the taker gives. Who gives and who takes, is not known.

"What I think those hands show is that health is political, it's not outside politics. To understand health requires a critical-interpretive approach which 'seeks to go beyond a culturally sensitive presentation to reveal the contingency of power and knowledge in the creation of and relationship to the culturally constructed individual body' (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1996:68). It's not what you need, it's who you're related to, where you rank and what gender you were born," I said.

"You know with all those arms, it seems like an octopus," said Brian.

Alice agreed.

"Have you ever seen one?" I asked.

"On a dinner plate," teased Brian.

"That's not *quite* what I meant!" I laughed.

"I remember the first time I saw an octopus lying on the ocean floor just below where I was snorkelling in crystal clear waters. I was just floating, looking into azure blue water. My heart beat rapidly, as I saw it. I didn't know if I was in danger, but I didn't want to leave. It was fascinating. Its camouflaged body so different from the vivid blue, yellow, and red fish darting around. Did you know that used figuratively Octopus means organised and usually harmful ramified power or influence?" I asked.

"No," said Alice.

"Only in James Bond," said Brian, "you remember 'Octopussy' Alice?"

Alice looked blankly back at Brian and shrugged.

"Well, as I thought about it, being a Health Educator in a foreign country looked to me like an ocular octopus on an ocean bed. Perhaps health work could be seen as this organised, ramified power and influence."

"And as we talked about before, health programmes don't always mean good!" Brian added.

"Exactly. So I looked at the similarities between the octopus and me. The octopus is capable of changing its colour and its skin texture, to be perfectly concealed in its environment. The cross-cultural health educator works hard, to change, to adapt, and to be acceptable in their work environment. Not causing alarm, but one with the social world in which they seek to act. If sensing an attack, the octopus draws water into its mantle cavity and expels it with great force, thus jet-propelling it away from the threat. Like the octopus the cross-cultural health educator when threatened can be jet-propelled into another world, away from that which threatens it. This leaves behind a black cloud, which although conceals its exit, causes confusion, in some cases sensory paralysis for those left behind. Entering and leaving the field are important and sensitive tasks for the cross-cultural health educator; tasks which are often overlooked or under-rated by visiting teams and their funding bodies. I wondered whom I'd confused—whom I'd hurt in my coming and going, and was scared."

"Another recurrent theme," added Brian smiling.

"Yes," I replied. A recurrent theme, or a repeating nightmare, I wasn't sure which.

"You've painted ears in the pictures, but they don't appear to be listening to voices. I can't see any mouths except the one filled with books and that's not near the ears!" said Brian.

"It's all connected. The ni-Vanuatu invite me to put down the pen, stop reading the books and listen to life's voices. So being a Health Educator in a foreign country sounds to me like deep, resonating, colourful voices reverberating from lofty mountain tops, across lush valleys, echoing out into the world. Listen. Hear new words, new meanings. Hear the stories, as lives are told. Hear the voices, the words unsaid. Hear the colours, rich, tonal qualities unfamiliar yet alluring. Listen." I waited and looked into the painting. "The mountains are calling, the sea is speaking, the sun is singing out. I am not accustomed to hearing these voices. I must learn to listen. I must be still to hear the quietness. Then I will learn. Then I will facilitate learning. Then I will be."

"Gee, I've never thought of sounds as colour before," said Brian.

"I remember a lovely scene in the movie *The mirror has two faces*," said Alice. "Rose, an English literature professor and Jeff, the mathematics professor, on I think their first date, are at a chamber music concert. She is feeling, experiencing the music, when he pulls out a gadget that translates the music into coloured lights, by measuring something, could be wavelengths, I forget. Anyway he gets a thrill out of watching the colours change, I don't think he even hears the music," said Alice. "That's sort of similar to your experience, Karen, isn't it?"

"Well, it does illustrate really well that there are different ways of experiencing the same thing," I agreed. "Remember when we were talking about how knowledge is really an interpretation of a thing, rather than the thing itself. How different do you think knowledge about music would have been for those two?" I asked.

"Vastly. And different again for the musicians playing I suppose," replied Alice.

"You remember we talked before of all the different roles I had in the field. Well, being a Health Educator in a foreign country seems to be like hearing a symphony when they're playing local string band music."

"String Band Music?" asked Brian.

"Ni-Vanuatu singers, ukulele players, backed by jangle stick, tambourine and tea chest bass. They write and perform songs about island life."

"How can that be a symphony?" asked Alice.

"It is melodic, leisurely rhythmic, island music which in me, builds to a symphony. The ear hears the melody, the mind hears the lyrics, the body feels the rhythm, and the spirit hears the symphony. Suddenly the simple tune is polyphonic. Symphonic enhancement results from engaging the experience of the string band music, with the experiences of the

life they sing about, and the life you know and experience. The complexity of the symphonic style of music, although appreciated by the novice listener, demands understanding of the structural elements underpinning the music. Not only the musical elements, but also the historical events, the composer's emotional involvement, the person or occasion for whom or which, it is written. The music inspires, and the music motivates the search for meaning."

"So the background information is part of the symphony. Like your stories are part of the paintings," said Alice, "and motivate the search for meaning."

Alice looked at the painting, whilst Brian snuck another biscuit from the plate.

"I think I'd like to read the story that goes with this one now," said Alice as she turned to face me.

"Sure. I'll get it for you." I walked across to the table where the papers had been restacked after their tumble earlier in the afternoon.

"Here, Alice." I passed the white sheets to her. "Would you like some more coffee, while you read?"

Alice nodded.

"I'll go and put it on."

Brian moved closer to Alice, and was peering over her arm at the story as I left the room.

*****

Waiting and Working

I looked out the window of the car at the scene below us. The crystal blue waters of the bay spread out between the islands. Tourists were stirring as the sun beamed into their huts perched above the water line and the peninsula where local children were making their way out to school by foot and local buses. The peak of the hill afforded us spectacular views across adjoining hills to the bay. Even here in the city, lush tropical vegetation still encroached onto every vacant allotment. Large hibiscus in various shades of red, pink, yellow, and white, competed with the fragrant frangipani for our attention, against a green backdrop of coconut, banana, and mango trees. A smoky haze still drifted across the hills from wood fires lit to prepare food for the day.

As we approached the intersection the traffic increased. Driving here was quite an art. Not only did you need to have eyes on the road to avoid the gaping holes where cyclonic rains had long since washed away the bitumen, but you needed to watch the sides of the road, often the only smooth place to drive, as it was where the vast number of pedestrians walked. In brightly coloured clothing, some with multicoloured umbrellas for protection from the sun, they made their way down

the hill to work in the main commercial area, like a vivid, wriggling caterpillar. Local buses, which mainly consisted of mini vans, would suddenly stop to pick up or set down passengers. Although there were designated bus stops, they stopped anywhere people hailed them or asked to be set down. Other road users had to be wary of not only the buses stopping in front of them, but also cars travelling in the opposite direction swerving around the buses on their side of the road. A young boy and his mother had been hit yesterday. He had been killed, on the day he was seventeen. The newspaper report urged road users to slow down, pointing out that it was only a small town, and it really didn't take all that long to get from one side to another. But it seemed when people adopted a Western mode of transport; they also adopted a Western time frame.

The noise of car engines, people chatting, and radios playing, heralded the start of the working day. Having become part of the snaking traffic through the main street, we slowed to a pace where pedestrians were getting where they wanted to go faster than we were. Already the day was getting hot and the cooling breezes on top of the hill were lacking down by the coast. We passed the women's market house[3] already bustling with people. How things had changed since I had been coming here. I remember when the women had just a cleared area of mud and dirt for their market. They would spread their blue tarpaulins out and set up their stalls in the open, crouched under large multicoloured golf umbrellas to shield them from the rain, or beating sun. Now they were shielded from the elements by a large sweeping roof. This modern building was based on a traditional ni-Vanuatu design, concrete pylons taking the place of the wooden pillars of old. Electric lighting enabled trading late into the night and early morning.

Rows of wooden tables, filled with fresh produce and handcrafts recently off-loaded from rusted utilities parked in the car park, patterned the concrete floor. Many of the women had slept there, on the floor, wrapped in a cotton sheet, so they could have the best position to sell their goods in the market. Others had travelled since early morning from their villages. Seated on the concrete steps facing the road, were women with hundreds of small bags of roasted peanuts, still in their shells, piled high on mats in front of them. Small cardboard signs read 20 vatu.

Outside the market, still on the dirt, the other women, the ones belonging to a different co-operative and kinship group, were hanging out bright lavalavas[4], sarongs and T-shirts also in the hope of catching a tourist's eye. Some were erecting their tarpaulins over the galvanised pipe framework that made their workshop for the day. Inside this makeshift workshop, they would sew using their hand driven singer machines, make shell necklaces using shells they had collected or bought from other women whose islands have a more plentiful supply of the right size shells or coral pieces, or create child size grass skirts from coloured raffia.

I wiped the perspiration from my eyes as we turned into the road that led to the hospital, and went through the list of things I had to bring.

"Oh, blast!"

"What have you forgotten?" Stephen asked, not taking his eyes of the road.

"The candle."

"What do you need a candle for?" he asked surprised.

"I need to heat the frames to adjust them. Yesterday I only had matches and I burnt my fingers several times, not to mention the fact that the fan constantly blew the match out so I had to tum the fan off and suffer the heat. At least with a candle inside a glass jar I can hold the frame over the heat and shape it more easily. You know sometimes it is easier in the villages," I said.

"Why, because there's always a fire burning?"

"Yes. I've sort of mastered the art of holding a burning stick between my knees and blowing on it to increase the heat and shape the frame!"

"The ultimate blow heater, eh?"

We both laughed.

Already the car park at the hospital was filled with people, buses, and taxis. We found a car park near the far building where the eye clinic was held. The sun burned down on my shoulders as I bent over the boot of the car and lifted out the boxes needed for the day.

"Good Morning *Misis*, Good Morning *Dokta*."

I turned to see a patient from yesterday walking along the path to the dispensary.

"Good morning," we replied in unison. I never tired of the musical quality that was part of their greetings. The longer vowel sounds added a tonal quality to the greeting that enticed the ear, and warmed the heart. I had learned to speak Bislama, and had tried to produce the same tones. My patients asked how I learned to speak Bislama so well. I guess I have a gift for languages and a desire in my heart to be able to commune with them. I pick up accents quickly, my ear is tuned, unlike poor Stephen who as hard as he tries, speaks the Bislama words but sounds very Australian. This makes him feel awkward and embarrassed and so makes his attempts sound worse, but we both had learnt how important it was to learn the language for ease of communication, to show respect for and earn the respect of our patients.

We had patient history sheets in Bislama printed, which we learnt off by heart. The trouble with this was that it made you sound fluent in the language and patients would respond with answers, which were too fast and used vocabulary with which I was not familiar. I would repeat the section I understood slowly and often the patient would then pick up and repeat the additional information slower. I could then clarify meanings using gestures, or diagrams, or look for someone else to assist in translation as there were usually many people crowding around and making suggestions as to what the patient meant.

In order to increase my vocabulary and ability to speak, I would use phrases I had heard my patients use in similar situations. To assist us in learning and improving our language skills we had listened to tapes I purchased, but found the lack of 'physical body' in the tapes made it difficult to learn to communicate. Gestures and facial expressions missing on the tapes were an important part of learning not just words, but to use the language and communicate. I think I hold a reasonable conversation now. Yet a friend tells me I sound Francophone. Pretty good, eh? An Aussie from the bush speaks Bislama and sounds French! Well, I do remember the time when I had to translate for our ni-Vanuatu fieldworker and another ni-Vanuatu health worker who accompanied us. One was educated in French, the other in English. Generally they could communicate in Bislama but the names of a few things had been learned only in the colonial language in which they had been educated. Only I could translate from French to English and vice versa.

Using the language did expose you to the risk of being ridiculed, because of mistakes. I had prepared an illustrated pamphlet explaining my research to be distributed in villages we were visiting, prior to our arrival. It was sent to Vanuatu and distributed through the Vanuatu Christian Council who were assisting us in the planning of our clinics and in obtaining access to villages. I had checked the pamphlet several times and was alarmed to hear it made quite an impact on one friend who rolled on the floor with laughter as he read that the eye doctor would examine your arse and help you see better! It was the difference between typing 'ae' and 'as'! Thank goodness the ni-Vanuatu have a great sense of humour! The slip continued to haunt me as one of our drivers teased me every time I put up a sign about the eye clinics—"That should be an 's' ", he would say pointing to the 'e'. I would feign mild shock and he would slap his legs and laugh loudly at his joke.

I have learnt to crack jokes, and to take the hefty slap on the back that follows in praise of a good joke. It's enough to require chiropractic treatment for a month, and the better the joke the harder the slap. Being able to tell a joke meant that I was able to think quickly enough in a foreign language, and that I was enough of an insider to know what was funny! Maybe that was why I enjoyed joking with the patients, it made me feel one of them, a feeling I so earnestly desired, and yet knew I would never really know. I was reminded of that when our fieldworker told a joke the other night. I understood the literal meaning but that just wasn't funny. Three times he repeated it, so I could enjoy the joke as he and his girlfriend had. He even tried to explain the background to it, but still I didn't see the funny side. Finally I laughed heartily, with them, to save face, and save him repeating it yet again ad infinitum! To understand words was one thing; to understand the innuendo surrounding their use was yet another!

I passed two of the boxes to Stephen, closed the boot of the car, locked it and picked up another box before we made our way over to the room. There were several aqua blue, wooden pews, already filled with patients, outside the entrance to the clinic. I smiled and greeted the people as I

passed. The nurse, dressed in her white coat, came to the door and called for people to come and get a number. They were handed a small cardboard square each with a black number on it. This would dictate how long they had to wait.

I handed the glossy, illustrated, patient education brochures to several people near the door and placed the others on the end of the pew next to the numbers. It was only 8am and already these people had been waiting several hours. The brochures contained information in Bislama about the four main eye problems that we had encountered in Vanuatu. I used Bislama spelling to give names to these conditions. A photograph of the condition was accompanied by an explanation in Bislama of the symptoms, the bio-medical treatment, and the prevention of these conditions. The pamphlet also showcased, using photographs of daily activities, the need for sunglasses to be worn. They were a means of preventing eye damage by blocking ultra-violet light and other small particles such as dust and wood chips from entering the eye. Many times the pamphlets had provided a source of discussion whilst people were waiting at the clinics. It also allowed people to undertake an active role in their eye health and many used it in self-diagnosis as they came to the clinic saying "Me got wan *terijium*[5], the same as him here," pointing to the photograph in the pamphlet.

As I walked in through the glass doors, the nurses from the child health clinic were packing their bags ready for a day in outer clinics. "Good morning, *Misis*," they interrupted their laughing and chatting to greet me. "Good morning. You have a good day," I responded as they picked up their square white plastic cases and made their way out to the truck where the driver was waiting.

The perspiration ran down my back with a tickling sensation. An ever so slight breath of air followed it and I felt the relief as it cooled ever so slightly. The yellow walls of the hospital were covered with posters of smiling, healthy, chubby, European babies.

Only the language of the words printed underneath in black felt pen betrayed the incongruous world I was working in. I wondered what my babies, back in Australia, were up to today. I looked at the cardboard posters again. What did the ni-Vanuatu mothers see in these pictures, the same as me? It seemed a pity to me that they had no photos of ni-Vanuatu babies to promote their own well being.

Images of the newborn baby we had seen last week flooded into my mind. In a galvanised room, on the crushed coral floor, sat the grandmother nursing the newborn babe. The mother was asleep behind the roughly cut hessian curtain. As we looked in, the proud grandmother held the baby, swaddled in a cotton wrap, for us to see. Because the doctor had been present in the village the baby boy had been named 'Stephen' after him. This was not the first time he had been so honoured. There was another baby boy on another island called 'Stephenson' in honour of the

doctor. What a shame there were no girls born, though I doubt they would have called it Karen, it sounds too much like the Bislama word for 'garden', a joke I often made.

Finding the boxes of glasses from yesterday I began to sort and tidy them ready for the day ahead. In the adjoining hallway and room, Stephen had prepared his trolley and instruments. The eye chart was straightened and wiped clean of the fingerprints left by yesterday's assistant. I wandered into the larger room, normally occupied by the physiotherapist. Here the nurse and several field-workers were busy taking down patient histories. I watched as the field-workers we had trained at a recent workshop, moved to the visual acuity testing area and explained the test to the patient. This was their opportunity to put into practice the skills they had recently acquired but would need to continue to use in our absence. We hoped it would mean they could dispense spectacles in uncomplicated situations and recognise surgical cases for referral[6]. It was a slow process and the queue was growing, but no one seemed to mind, except Stephen and me. We had been trained not to keep people waiting. I reminded myself that waiting was not an issue here as it was at home. They did not resent waiting. The clock did not run life here, nor was the day carefully measured into sixty-minute slots. Things happened in 'Vanuatu time'.

"Blokem one eye," was the command from the field-worker, as the patient held the palm of his hand over his eye.

"No pushing the eye," the field-worker said noticing the patient had too much pressure on his palm.

Walking slowly down to the eye chart, counting the steps, the fieldworker turned and called back, "You say E goes which way. Make a sign with your hand. E goes this way," indicating right with her fingers," E goes this way" pointing down, "E goes this way" pointing left," E goes on top", pointing up with her hand.

I smiled as I watched the patient standing behind the tape on the floor. The process of testing began as the patient indicated the direction of the E with his hand[7].

The morning was filled with patients standing in lines waiting to be seen. Some for reading glasses, some for surgery and some for whom the verdict was "Eye blong you, buggered up—sorry we no can fix,"[8] the saddest outcome for them and us.

In our clinics, I endeavoured to talk to the patients and share their stories, to give them the time to choose their frames, to make decisions regarding surgical referrals. I didn't want to treat just their eyes, I wanted to understand their lives, and so better meet their visual needs.

There was questionable benefit giving an illiterate man reading glasses, but it took time to find out if he was illiterate, could read numbers, or whether he did other close work that would require spectacles. Maybe he carved intricate objects and would benefit from a pair of glasses set especially for working at that distance.

Over time I had come to know how and what questions to ask. I felt so under pressure with the heat and the number of patients crowded into the room, yet wanted to appear to each patient that I had all the time in the world to spend with them. I consciously slowed my movements. I slid my feet across the room, rather than marched. To not be hurried was to be more ni-Vanuatu, to not be so Western. I wanted so much to be partners with the people, yet I struggled to shake off the pressures of time.

An orderly arrived from the kitchen on the other side of the compound, with morning tea on a tray. "It's all right *Misis*, you drink now," the women encouraged me. I measured out a teaspoon of coffee, added the milk, and poured the water into the cup. I took a sip. It was too hot, too hot to drink. I was rather glad as I could hardly bring myself to stop and drink with ease whilst they were sitting waiting, yet again. I did not want to keep them waiting. Somehow that seemed to be saying, 'My needs are more important than yours.' Yet I sensed that because I didn't stop and drink, they thought I was another slightly crazy, always busy, white woman.

I was always weighing up what they thought, what was expected, what would cause offence, what wouldn't. I was conscious of the observed observing the observer. Always feelings and actions were under control, until I felt safe. Now that I had worked here for a number of years, I had more 'safe' moments than in earlier visits. I could 'read' the people better and was happier about what they may 'read' in me. The differences were not as extreme as they were in the beginning and there was a comfortable sense of familiarity in many situations. The boundaries between insider and outsider were blurred, as it appeared we lost our sense of suspicion of each other. I sensed more of a true I-Thou partnership, where they, as insider, and I, as outsider, were treated with equal dignity and respect and found that we needed each other to complete the task of identifying issues, clarifying strategies for change and taking action towards new eye health behaviours.

I had lost some of the 'knight-in-shining-armour' rescuing enthusiasm I had in earlier days and had learned to listen without seeking to give all the answers, even when that may have been expected of me as the visiting health 'professional'. Still, I wished I could stop more often and sit and talk longer. I have done a lot of talking with people and a lot of listening to people but it was usually after everything was finished; after I had completed my obligations to the clinics, and to my family. Talking would always be secondary to acting, even when I desired it to be otherwise. Acting was the reason we were there—to perform the task of primary eye care. As Westerners, action was primary, 'being' was secondary, yet to the ni-Vanuatu it seemed that 'being' was primary and action arose from the 'being'. At first, I tried to take notes and write everything down as I heard it, in fear of missing something. I soon realised I was missing more by writing when I should have been listening, feeling, watching, and 'being'. I put away my notebooks.

A patient handed me her money. As I leant over the table and wrote the payment on the patient sheet, I scribbled a star in the corner designed to attract my attention later that night when I would

be reviewing the patient notes, and recording and checking the day's takings. Dot points were there to remind me of the person, the conversation, and the significance I attached to this meeting. Conversations in the clinics, on the beach, playing with village children whilst waiting for the boat to come after a clinic, or in the boat on the way through the reef, or in the shade of a tree during siesta time, were experienced first and recalled and written later. The field notes made later were richer, as I had the time to include details which were missed in the rush to record the actual words. In writing at the end of each day, I would record my overall impression of the day, specific events significant at that time, and I would try to jot down a timetable of my movements. It was all an attempt to keep alive the pictures in my mind, the feelings generated by the experience so that I could live it again to enjoy it once more or learn from it as I worked through the pain.

My next patient was a young girl of seven years. She had a scar on her right eye. I fitted her with sunglasses.

"Please, can I make a photo of you?" I asked the young girl. She gave me a full, warm smile and raised her eyebrows in consent. I looked to her mother for her consent also.

"I want to be able to show others how smart she looks, and how she is protecting her eyes," I explained. Parents often commented that they wanted their children to look smart, although it was *flas* for parents, particularly mothers, to do the same. The mother seemed pleased that I had selected her daughter to photograph and agreed. I carried a small camera with me everywhere.

People would usually consent to having their photograph taken, although I shudder as I think of some on the photographs I have taken and how they must have intruded into people's lives. The camera, however, has not only been of benefit to me; many people have been thrilled to receive photographs of themselves, family, or friends. Once, we were invited to attend a kastom ceremony, with specific requests to bring the camera. I was encouraged to take many photographs and to send copies to the people. It was a unique opportunity. Unfortunately, I did not check the amount of film I had and was able to take only five shots. At the time I was so cross with myself. I felt so stupid. The next day, we were invited to another ceremony in a neighbouring village. Armed with a new film and a spare I found that here the chief would not allow any photographs. How this added to my frustration with my mistake! I felt I had missed capturing the experience. How wrong I was. I remember it so vividly. I pressed the button and captured the image of my young patient; her story was yet to be told.

As I looked at the long line of patients, one face caught my eye. It was a young woman holding her baby daughter. Not unusual in normal circumstances, but just five days ago she had been blind in both eyes. She had been led into the clinic room by two relatives, whilst her husband carried the six month old daughter she had never seen. She was seated in the chair as the surgeon examined her and I assisted in trying to ascertain when she had lost her sight. She was a candidate for

surgery but was reluctant to have it done. I had spent time talking with her and encouraging her to talk about it with her family. I knew her brother was at Bible College and before she left the clinic encouraged her to seek prayer before deciding against the operation. I did not know what her decision had been before this moment but I, too, had offered a prayer for her that night. I smiled at her and she returned the smile. I caught my breath. She saw my smile! My heart beat rapidly and the warmth of its extra exertion flooded around my body. I held the table edge to steady myself.

"It's like a miracle," whispered the field worker by my side, as his face broke into a huge smile.

"Yes. It is," I agreed.

I wished for a miracle too. In the clinic situation all too often success or failure were measured in the numbers of patients examined, the number of cases referred, the number of patients treated. A curative focus was immensely gratifying personally and for those who funded the work. To be able to say we examined over 1,000 patients in two weeks, dispensed spectacles to 750, referred 70 for sight restoring surgery, seemed to give merit to the work, to prove its worth.

My preventative work was far more difficult to quantify and justify. I have no idea how many people I have spoken with. Taxi drivers, shop assistants, women in the markets, people at church, students, all have heard me talk about preventing eye disease.

I can say that I have distributed so many thousand pamphlets, and posters, but what does that tell you? People could all ignore the talk. Dismiss it. They may not see or read the pamphlets and posters. Visiting teams had been coming here for years before me, telling the people to wear sunglasses. What made me think I would achieve what they had been unable to achieve? Was I any different to them? I wanted to be part of the solution to the eye problems here, but sometimes it was so hard to battle on without the rewards. Maybe that's part of the problem. I am divided within. I want to help but I also want some credit, some reward. I want to empower others, but find it hard to relinquish control for fear it will fail. I want to produce good, but pressured for time and finance, I sometimes went about it in inappropriate, Western, ways.

"Ready for lunch," Stephen stuck his head around the corner.

"Yes," I replied eagerly.

The sister swept through the room.

"11.30am. Lunch. You come back in afternoon," she instructed the patients waiting as she ushered them out the door and locked it firmly behind.

"Karen, you eating in lunch room?" she asked.

"No, thank you. I want to go down to the women's market house today."

"Okay. I see you half past one," she said as she locked the glass door behind us[9].

We drove in silence to the women's market house. Stephen parked the car and went across the road to get some cool drinks. I made my way to the tables where I hoped I would meet my friend. As I approached the group of tables in the front corner, I could see her standing behind her table. I caught her eye.

"Karen," she made her way past the other women and around in front of the tables.

I extended my hand to her in a traditional greeting. She took it in her large, dark hands and shook it as she pulled me to her, greeting me with a double kiss and a warm smile. She picked up a necklace of tiny, fine shells from those displayed on the table in front of her and placed it around my neck. Her friends also recognised me, came over, and also greeted me with vigorous handshakes.

"*Misis*, I was just saying you said you'd be back in September," said one of the women with a smile.

I took out a small, wrapped gift from my pocket and handed it to my friend.

"For you. From Australia," I said as I kissed her warmly once again. It was a silver teaspoon with a bunch of grapes and the word 'Barossa' depicted on the handle.

She put it to one side as she ushered me to the steps where we could sit and talk for a while. I heard how her sister's daughter was about to be married and the preparations for the feast, how their ladies choir was training for a mission to Australia and the dedication of the church. I told of my children and how they sent their greetings. We sat and shared our lives, as the women around us sold their goods to the tourists. Black meets white, and white meets black, but on very different terms, or were they?

Stephen arrived with the drinks and some fruit for lunch. Someone brought a stool for him to sit on.

"*Dokta*, you make a clinic here?" asked one of the women.

He looked at me. I took the schedule out of my basket and looked over it. Already it was full from early in the morning 'til quite late at night, as we held clinics in churches after we had finished at the hospital to cater for those that had to work and couldn't come to the hospital.

"Saturday morning?"

He raised his eyebrows in agreement.

"You go ask the woman in charge here, if it Okay to make clinic Saturday morning," I said to the woman.

She moved off to the other side of the market place and returned a short time later to say it was approved. This met with the approval of the women as they, too, could not get to the hospital for vision checks as they couldn't leave their stalls unattended for too long.

When the clinics came to them, they were always popular. The women cordoned off an area in the car park with seats or tables and we worked out of the boot of the car, the eye chart hung from a tree or pillar.

An increase in the traffic on the road signalled the end of siesta and time to make our way back to the hospital for the afternoon. Stephen and I stood and shook hands with all the women, moving slowly from table to table.

"*Lukim* you on Saturday morning," I called.

"Yes, *Misis*," they chorused.

"Goodbye, *Dokta.*"

"*Lukim* you," he replied.

As we made our way to the car a woman pushed a bunch of small, ripe bananas into my hand. I thanked her as she surreptitiously slipped back to her stall.

As we made our way back up the hill, I fingered the necklace around my neck.

"My reward," I thought, and a miracle too, the miracle of friendship.

"Hello," said Stephen in a singsong voice. "Calling Karen!"

I laughed. I had been a million miles away.

"I was just thinking, that is what makes us different."

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Different from other visiting teams. We have come to know the people, really know them. We have travelled to many parts of this country that even expatriates who've been here for years have not seen, and experienced hospitality and life in rural areas. We go where the people are, and where they want us to be. Sort of makes a difference," I paused.

"You know you even walk differently when you're here?" I remarked.

"I do?" Stephen questioned.

"Yeah, you do," I said having noticed how he developed the slow, easy lope. It was quite an art to wear thongs[10] and not have the short flip flop sound associated with quick footwork required to keep them on.

"Well, you dress differently," he teased looking at my island dress. "I never see you in a dress at home. Well, hardly ever."

"Exactly. We've tried to find a way to be acceptable, compatible with the people. I show respect for their culture by not wearing shorts, mini-skirts, or trousers. I know that the thighs are offensive. Especially mine," I laughed.

"I don't think so," he replied squeezing my leg.

"Keep your eyes on the road," I countered as I smacked his hand.

"Anyway, as I was saying, we become different here."

"Your point being?" he asked.

"Because of these experiences and because of our deep involvement and the intimacy we share with the people, we have a real partnership, one that may work and change attitudes towards eye protection. Ours and theirs."

"It'll work, if they want it to work," he retorted.

"Who's they? The government departments? The people?"

"I guess it has to be both," he replied.

"But who wants the change? Seems to me it's the people coming to us for help."

"Yes, but the health official approached the service club for funding for the preventative eye care project," he countered.

"Yes, but did he do it because he believed in it as a health project or because it would advance him?"

"So you're saying it all comes down to who's powerful and why?" Stephen threw me a sideways glance.

"Maybe. It's like that guy that came to the clinic and was turned away. He was unhappy about it and went to the health minister who insisted he get his operation. The lady you called in was refused because she didn't know or wasn't related to a politician, and she will go on with no vision in one eye and very poor vision in the other, living in a village and looking after all those children. How many was it?"

"Seven last count, I think. Yeah, I see what you mean," he said as he applied the brakes at the intersection.

"I think the change will come from the people and the traditional power holders, the chiefs," I continued.

"Mmm. We have an appointment with the council of chiefs don't we?"

"Yes. On Thursday afternoon," I replied, "at the chiefs' *nakamal.*"

We turned into the hospital car park and parked the car. The line of people had returned.

"Back to work," Stephen said as he unbuckled his seatbelt and climbed out.

"Are we ever not at work?" I asked throwing him a sideways glance and moved off to greet the patients waiting patiently in the shade of the tree.

*****

I returned to my guests just as they finished reading the story.

Alice stood and walked quietly over and placed it on the side table beside the other one.

"Coffee's ready," I called.

The smell of the freshly-made coffee wafted through the room.

It was so inviting, so conducive to sitting and sharing. Was that something I had learned through experience or through watching years of *Nescafé* advertising with its slogan, 'It gets you together'. The woman did finally marry the man, but it took years of coffee drinking to get there!

"Great!"

Brian and Alice picked up their cups.

"Biscuit?" I offered.

"Thanks," said Alice as she and Brian made their selection.

I looked out the window.

"The sun's out. Would you like to sit outside for a bit?"

"Sure," said Brian. "Wouldn't you Alice?"

"Yes, if it's not too cold."

The wind was a bit fresh but the warmth of the sun was enough to make it comfortable outside. We settled on the patio area overlooking the grove of Silver Birch trees. Their tiny iridescent green leaves had unfurled at the first hint of spring sunshine. The tulips in the terraced bed nearby were turning their heads to the sun for warmth.

"Need my sunglasses," said Brian shielding his eyes from the glare, as he fumbled in his jacket for them.

Alice laughed.

"Glad to see you've learnt to protect your eyes," she said teasing him.

"I'm glad it's not a big problem for me to wear them here," said Brian as he slid them on his face. "What do you think, *Misis?*"

I cringed. The way he said *Misis* made me feel uneasy again.

"I think the glasses look great and fit well, and I think I'd rather you didn't call me that," I admonished.

"Sorry," said Brian. "In the stories that seems to be your title," he muttered as if to excuse himself.

I sensed my words had been too harsh reflecting an inner tension and one I had not intended to unleash on my guest.

"No. It's me who should be sorry. It's just that, in the stories, I am the *Misis*. I am *waef blong dokta blong ael* the wife of the eye doctor, *Misis*, Karen. But here, just as there initially, being called *Misis* gave me a feeling of dis-ease. The intensity of the feeling surprised me, as one night I snapped back at an expatriate who persisted in calling me *Misis*. "Don't call me, that! I've had enough of that rubbish." I think I picked up on his using the term to mimic them and put them down. It was also that I felt so uncomfortable with the label. The stereotype of the white *Misis* label absorbed through movie portrayal of slaves and *Misis*, and now applied to me, was too confronting. It made me ask, was I, too, left over from a colonial past? Was I aloof, detached, demeaning? What did that label say about me as a person, or about how I was viewed by the Other?"

"What a lot of questions from the use of one title!" said Brian.

"How did you resolve it?" asked Alice.

Brian leaned over to Alice, "I don't think she has."

I threw him a glance that told him I'd overheard, and I knew he was right.

"I guess over time I've come to accept the title with a little less dis-ease. I understand that people in Vanuatu have titles and use them in everyday interaction. *Pasta, Misis, Jif, and Dokta.* It is a sign of status. A mark of respect—always used. My own aversion to the title says a lot about me, my background, and about my feelings of social justice and Christian beliefs. As I entered the field, I discovered that research is not only a process of discovering the Other but of discovering oneself," I replied.

"Speaking of *Self* and *Other*, I was interested in your comments about the differences between you as a health worker and as a tourist," said Alice.

"There seems to be a definite 'role of visitor' to which one is expected to conform. Rather 'greater accommodation to local ways is expected of those who stay for longer periods, and this may include mastering the language' (Argyle 1982:63). After prolonged engagement with these people I had formed a relationship with them that was based on mutual respect and understanding certain things were expected of me. I was careful about the way I dressed, the mannerisms I used, and the language I used. Tourists were *not* expected to wear local clothes, or engage in exotic greetings. Women often 'inappropriately dressed' in shorts or revealing clothing, were loud and gregarious and

would speak to the people, often who spoke English well, as if they were small children or deaf!"

"So you were expected to and tried to conform, whereas tourists generally didn't," Alice said to summarise.

"Yes. And I know, because I was once on that cruise ship as a tourist, that they do ask tourists, particularly the women, to be sensitive to cultural norms and not wear shorts or revealing clothing. But many obviously choose to ignore that," I said with an edge to my voice.

"I get the feeling you did not see tourists as particularly pleasant," said Alice.

"No. Don't get me wrong," I replied. "Tourism is an important industry in Vanuatu. In 1995, the value of tourism earnings was twice the level of all merchandise exports including copra, cocoa, cattle, etc. (ADB 1997:213)."

"But," said Brian teasingly, "I sense a 'but' coming."

I smiled. "But, there has been a big impact on the local people as they become involved in the cash economy and the tourist industry through choice or default. Unfortunately, 'it is very difficult in the absence of alternatives to see that developing countries have much choice but to develop their attractiveness as objects for the tourist gaze' (Urry 1990:65)."

"What's wrong with tourism?" asked Brian. "What sort of impact does it have?"

"That depends on a number of factors (Urry 1990). Firstly, the number of tourists which visit a place in relationship to the size of the host population. As the tourist population visiting Port Vila, in particular, is largely associated with cruise ship visits, the number of tourists to hosts varies dramatically on a day to day basis, hence some days tourists are everywhere and seem to far outweigh the number of local people.

Secondly, the object of the gaze. Tourist activities involving observation of physical objects are less intrusive than those involving observation of private lives of host groups. In Vila, tourists tend to visit set places. Some villages have established *kastom* feasts and dances that are staged for tourists in places away from their daily living areas. Others charge admission to and conduct tours of the waterfall of which they are the *kastom* owners.

Thirdly, the manner in which the tourism industry is organised which includes factors such as ownership, whether public or private, locally owned or involving overseas interests. Many of the facilities that result from tourism such as airports, golfcourses, and hotels, are of little benefit to the mass of the indigenous population. Also important are wages paid to locally recruited employees, as much of the wealth generated is highly unequally distributed. Employment generated is 'relatively low-skilled and may well reproduce the servile character of the previous colonial regime' (Urry 1990:60).

Fourthly, the economic and social differences between the visitors and the majority of the hosts are usually enormous. As I became more of an 'insider' my awareness of these differences increased and often led to me not wishing to be associated with 'tourists'. I felt somehow ashamed of their ignorance and the manner in which they treated their hosts. I realise that in many ways I was like them in the beginning and maybe it is this knowledge that somehow evokes the shame.

Fifthly, the degree to which the mass of visitors demand particular standards of accommodation and service, that they should be enclosed in an environmental bubble to provide protection from many of the features of the host society. Large resorts cater for tourists where different cultural rules apply to dress, for example wearing swimsuits, shorts etc.; social relations, men and women interacting and even the environment. Did you know they bring in soft sand to cover the naturally sharp coral beaches?

And finally, there is the extent to which tourists 'can be identified and blamed for supposedly undesirable economic and social developments. Some local objections to tourism are in fact objections to 'modernity' or to modern society itself; to mobility and change, to new kinds of personal relationships, to reduced role of family and tradition, and to different cultural configurations' (Urry 1990:59). Coupled with this is the effect of development on local customs, family life, and the 'trinketisation' of local crafts and kastoms."

"I understand what you are saying, but some of those things can be good if managed," insisted Brian.

"And some *are*," I added.

"But what strikes me most is the power the tourist has as an agent of change," remarked Alice.

"Yes. In the literature, (Tilley 1997; Urry 1990; Argyle 1982; Pearce 1982) tourism and tourists are viewed as 'agents of cultural change, with the dress of women, the use of alcohol and the mixing of sexes being particularly sensitive areas of potential influence' (Pearce 1982:207). It is the tourists who have 'the power in the social situation and the hosts, confronted with a new group of people for social comparison, re-align their view of the world' (Pearce 1982:217). I, although also seeking to be an agent of cultural change, was in contrast, struggling to understand my host's view of the world, in order to bring about changes in their health from within their culture, and without confrontation or imposition of my worldview."

Was this because I still needed them? Or was it because I was truly committed to a relationship with them? If I was no longer able to provide their eye care, would they want to continue the relationship? I remembered reading what Crick (1992) wrote about 'intellectual tourists'. 'As tourists move on failing to keep promises about sending gifts or

writing, so many anthropologists let relationships fade once back in the writing environment and with a different audience. So let us finally not forget the fact that though academics, we are not in a totally different universe to tourists, sightseers, and spectacle hunters: etymologically, the terms 'theory' and 'theorist' derive from the Greek for sightseer and spectacle (Abbeele 1980:13). We are in other words, intellectual tourists. If these suggested similarities seem unpalatable, others writing in reflexive mode have found other identities to compare us to—conmen, double agents, shamans, trickers, among others (Schechner 1982:81; Boon 1982: x, 6)' (Crick 1992:189).

"Karen, you mentioned about language before marking a difference between tourists and other guests," said Alice. "I got the sense that language use and learning were really important parts of the process of entering the field. I thought English was one of the official languages of Vanuatu. Why did you need to learn another?"

"Vanuatu has three official languages: English, French, and Bislama. People are educated in either French or English, and in higher years of secondary school they sometimes learn both. But most people have only done a few years of primary education. Bislama is the language of inter-island communication. In the early visits I spoke mainly English. This meant I either spoke only to those who knew English, or used a translator. This frustrated me. It felt as though I was always on the outside looking over the fence, listening to someone else's conversation. Eavesdropping. It made me feel awkward and 'naughty.' I knew that if I spoke the language myself I might pick up on inuendos or inflections that might help me understand my patients better. Also I was never sure if the translator was telling me everything or leaving out parts that he/she thought I wouldn't like. I knew enough Bislama to know this was happening on occasions. It seemed to be especially if people started to talk about their eye problems being caused by sorcery or spirits that the nurse/translators would disregard that and not tell me. As you can imagine that could have significant implications for the data I was collecting. So I came to see that by using an interpreter you become 'vulnerable to an added layer of meaning, bias and interpretations that may lead to disastrous misunderstandings' (Freeman 1983 cited in Fontana and Frey 1994:366)."

"Did speaking the language make a difference to the way you were accepted?" asked Alice.

"I think so. What was interesting is that it didn't matter at first that my vocab. was somewhat limiting. It was more that I tried to use the language, that people appreciated," I replied. "Although fluency is necessary in language communication there is evidence that 'confidence in the use of the language regardless of ability is just as important (Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1966)' (Argyle 1982:64)."

"But you also say in the story that a good ear for languages helps. What do you mean by that?" asked Brian.

"Well, if you really listen to people you can hear differences in speech tones, language use, and so on. I know it's easier for some people than others to imitate, but you can 'indicate positive or negative attitudes to another by shifting towards a more similar or less similar speech style (Giles and Powesland 1975)' (Argyle 1982:64). 'Visitors to another culture should be aware of the impression they are creating by the speech style which they use' (Argyle 1982: 64)," I replied.

"Creating impressions was something you had to work hard at wasn't it?" commented Alice. "I remember having to read Goffman talking about that."

"Yes. Goffman (1971) argued that we interpret stimuli which make up 'personal front'. These he calls appearance and manner. 'Appearance refers to stimuli, which serve to tell us of the person's social status' (Goffman 1971:34) and 'manner refers to stimuli which warn us of the interaction role the person will expect to play in the oncoming situation' (Goffman 1971:35). He goes on to say that we expect coherence between setting, appearance, and manner. As I was an outsider, I was not adept at reading the stimuli in this setting and was fearful that either I inadvertently cause offence by not performing my role as expected or by reading stimuli from an Australian perspective not a ni-Vanuatu one. This might discredit me as a person who could be trusted and could undermine the research and health work. See, people effectively project a definition of the situation when we enter the presence of others, so we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When this happens, the interaction itself may come to a confused or embarrassed halt. 'In stressing the fact that the initial definition of the situation projected by an individual tends to provide a plan for the co-operative activity that follows—we must not overlook the crucial fact that any projected definition of the situation also has a distinctive moral character' (Goffman 1971:23-24)."

"It's back again," said Brian.

"What?" Alice and I both asked turning our heads quickly towards Brian.

"Morality," he said.

We smiled and drank our coffee.

"It must be hard not knowing what is expected. I can understand why you were on edge a lot to start with. But even later, when you didn't understand the joke. You had to make a decision about what to do then, to save face for you," said Alice.

"Yes, so they wouldn't think I was stupid! No really, I don't think they would have thought that, those people knew me. They would have just gone on explaining it to me endlessly!"

"Why didn't you get the joke?" asked Brian.

"Jokes usually involve double meanings, comments on social characteristics or rules. I could not understand the joke even though I understood the words, because I had not assimilated the cognitive frame that accompanies language. 'Each person thinks and acts in terms of understanding learned from the community in which he or she lives. We get the frame that enables us to think, to interconnect the ideas and experiences to which we are exposed from our society, in early childhood. We don't only pick up the frame of our language in childhood, we also receive a cognitive frame' (Geddes 1994b:9). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher, would argue that it is not possible for me to understand fully, as I belong to another world. 'The full meaning of language is never translatable into another. We may speak several languages but one of them always remains the one in which we live. In order to completely assimilate a language, it would be necessary to make the world which it expresses one's own and one never does belong to two worlds at once' (Merleau-Ponty 1989:187)."

"But you tried to enter their world," said Alice.

"Tried. I wasn't there long enough to leave my world behind though. I was moving between the two."

"Mmm. What about when you talk about knowing what *kind* of questions to ask, is that a cultural consideration or a practical one?" asked Alice.

"Both. It's knowing what questions to ask and how, or if to ask them. As far as 'what' questions go, spectacles contain lenses of different powers that provide certain magnifications for certain distances. A pair of reading spectacles if used working at a bench would give blurry vision. As I was dispensing the spectacles I had to find out the patient's expectations of the spectacles, the use they intended to put them to, and teach them how to care for the spectacles. All this involved learning more about their lives, activities and resources."

"And the 'how' questions?" asked Alice.

"Morse, a qualitative health researcher, suggests adopting a 'stance of active inquiry', actively asking informants questions about the data and seeking answers. 'The investigator must act like a sponge, absorbing and drawing in information, maintaining a spirit of inquisitiveness, rather than a judgmental or evaluative manner' (1994:28). I agree that the spirit of inquisitiveness is important and the non-judgmental or evaluative manner. As Brian said before, I'm big on the *why*'s of things. But in Vanuatu questioning

is not the usual way to find out something. To ask too many questions is to alienate people. They may feel unable to answer the questions. 'Questions might ruin a well-planned trip by informing others, including spirits of the trip. 'Why' questions are met most of the time with puzzled uncomprehending or worried looks. Replies to direct questions were short and unhelpful. Often people spend time trying to divine the reason you want the information and create answers to suit' (Phinnemore 1989:2-3). More is learnt through listening, *storian* or waiting for people to offer information in the course of leisurely discussion, as is the custom. 'Typically when a local villager is investigating something he does a lot of observing, waiting and listening. When a man returns to the village after a long time, his friends do not 'question' him, they feed and accommodate him and wait for him to tell his story' (Phinnemore 1989:3). As a researcher, this means one runs the risk of not learning about some issues that you may wish to clarify, but it creates the opportunity for learning much more about what the participants think is important to them at that time. It also means that time factors enter the equation again. The urge to get it down and get on with it versus wait and 'socialise' and learn," I explained.

"So could you ask *any* questions?" asked Alice.

"Yes. It wasn't as bad as it sounds. But it did require immense self-control to start with. Some techniques appeared to work in questioning. What worked well, was a long preamble and short questions, where the longer the statement, the softer and less impertinent the question at the end seems. These usually involved 'giving away' my reasons for wanting to know sufficiently so that the respondent could respond 'naïvely' with their own uncoached reaction and with an 'answer' as full or as incomplete as they desired (Phinnemore 1989:12). This involved use of dangling sentence fragments where the respondent completes the sentence, or alternative questions, where the respondents generally agree or disagree with one or other alternative and give their reasons."

"Gee. I never imagined what you'd need to know before working in another culture. Our company sends people overseas all the time and I don't think they get told any of this," said Brian. "I know they get papers on health issues, but nothing like you've discussed."

"I didn't learn it all in one visit, and I didn't do it right every time, or all the time. But I have come to understand that unless we are both aware of the diversity in social, cultural and intellectual lives of people and take it into account, 'development practice no matter how well intentioned, may well do more harm than good' (Geddes 1994a:1). That's why I felt it was so important to show my experiences to others."

"I can see why it's important to share the experience," said Alice thoughfully. "You've learned so much about yourself as well as them, and I have learned a lot from sharing it with you."

"Yes, and what I've told you, so far, is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. I also discovered that I was part of the problem."

"What do you mean by that?" Brian sounded astounded.

"Well, you see, the more I found out, the more I saw that visiting health professionals, of which I was one, operated from a world-view that was very different from that of our patients. Goddard (1998:61) in his examination of the social construction of madness in a highland Papua New guinea society is 'critical of the notions of 'trans-cultural' or 'cross-cultural' psychiatry, which imply the adequacy of the operational modifications to a distinctly Western medical science in response to a non-Western cultural context'. Likewise, I couldn't just modify the operational optometrical side, to work with the people, I had to examine my own world-view, start with myself. I was not alone. Other 'development professionals are coming to see that the problem is more 'us' than 'them'...and it is with ourselves that we have to start' (Chambers 1997:32). So I was faced with questions like, what was it that made me act? What kept me going to Vanuatu, kept me looking for the answers? Who was I to evaluate someone else's practice and invariably the beliefs attached to that practice? Who was I, how did I fit in the web of life? How would I feel faced with the same choices as my patients?" I said quietly.

"So you tried to solve their eye problems by looking at yourself. Sounds a bit far fetched to me." Brian shrugged.

"Not really. See, I was asking questions from a biomedical perspective, they were hearing the questions differently, from a *kastom* perspective."

"Meaning?" Brian asked.

"Okay, for argument's sake, let's say a biomedical model of medicine and Western thinking about bodies involves five principles (Nettleton 1995:3). The first, Cartesian body-mind dualism, assumes the mind and body can be treated separately and have no significant interaction, so biomedicine tends to treat bodies as 'objects' ignoring the social 'subjects'," I said as I marked each assumption using the fingers on my hand.

"The second assumption is that the body can be repaired like a machine. The third follows on from the second and assumes the right 'tools' can fix the 'machine', hence the benefits of technological intervention can be overrated. The fourth, because biomedicine focuses on biological explanations of disease, and often neglects social and psychological factors, the assumptions of biomedicine are reductionist. The fifth, known as the doctrine of specific aetiology, assumes that every disease is caused by a specific identifiable agent." I folded my fingers again, relaxing after having made a point.

"I agree with most of that," said Brian and looked to Alice for confirmation.

"Me too." Alice agreed.

"So why did believing that, cause you to ask the wrong question?" he asked.

"And how did you know it was the wrong question?*Who* said it was wrong?" added Alice.

"How did I know it was wrong? The looks on people's faces. Their responses. Who said it was wrong? I guess I did, eventually. I changed the question, redesigned the study, reframed my health work," I replied.

"Can you do that in research?" Brian asked.

"Sure!" I exclaimed. "In the early stages, the question is as broad as possible as 'narrowness distracts the researcher from seeing the whole picture' (Morse 1994a:226). You often don't know what the important questions are until you have been in the field for a while and begin to understand what is going on, if you ever do."

"What do you mean by *that*?" asked Brian.

"Well, as Rosaldo (1989) says..."

"The guy whose wife died?"

"Yes. 'Ethnographers begin research with a set of questions, revise them throughout the course of inquiry, and in the end emerge with different questions than they started with' (Rosaldo 1989:7)"

"So how were your questions different?" asked Brian.

"You see I had adopted many of the biomedical assumptions in our eye clinics. Although I had long questioned the body-mind dualism, I found it difficult to accept explanations of sorcery or spirits as causes of visual impairment. I reduced causes to biological explanations of disease. I sought to improve eye health by reducing friction in the body machine, that is, by blocking ultra-violet light and other irritants from entering the eye. I saw that the technology offered a simple 'fix' through good quality CR39, UV400 lenses, or pterygium or cataract surgery. I had a lot of difficulty understanding why people would refuse to consider a sight-restoring operation just because it meant leaving their village for a while. I didn't understand their attachment to the land and their ancestral spirits. Remember the woman in the story who was blind. She believed that her blindness was a result of swimming in different waters from her home island. This action had resulted in spirits causing her blindness. Biomedically, this is dismissed as unscientific, irrational or naïve."

I paused and drank my coffee. "But it's even more complex. As the cause of the eye disease is not often perceived by ni-Vanuatu as biological, but spiritual, the consequences of seeking either treatment or prevention may result in further disease or death, due to angering the spirits. Although the wearing of sunglasses was a 'simple' means of preventing eye damage and discomfort, the very high personal cost of ni-Vanuatu wearing

sunglasses, was not understood or considered by me. By neglecting the social and material aspects of eye disease and prevention, my biomedical knowledge failed to be effective as ni-Vanuatu patients who had been given sunglasses and advised to wear them had not. The patient's failure to wear sunglasses was perceived as a fault in the individual, not as a fault in the method or in my knowledge as practitioner. By under-rating or overlooking the individual's perceived aetiology and subjective meanings of health and illness, I dismissed the notion that the consequences of wearing sunglasses could be worse than the disease or eye damage. Initially, I did not know that being perceived by others as *flas* when wearing sunglasses, could lead to ridicule, social isolation and even sorcery leading to sickness or death." I admitted.

"You mentioned that before, but people don't really believe that. Do they? " Brian asked.

"Careful. As a society we dismiss the spiritual realm all too easily, yet more and more people are seeking answers to their spirituality in formalised religions, in 'New Age' teaching, and holistic healing avenues. How many people in your office have crystals to energise, design their homes to have the right ying/yang and so on?" I paused.

"And I believe in a spiritual realm, albeit one that has been formalised and accepted by our society; it's called Christianity and church!"

I wanted to go on, but waited in case I seemed too aggressive.

Brian sensed I was not finished and he too waited.

"You see Brian, 'unless researchers discard their usual dislike of religious topics and realise that many people of colour (especially aboriginal populations) cannot be understood fully unless the central place of spirituality in their lives is given serious consideration' (Stanfield 1994: 185) and 'unless we learn to deal with the concept of Spirit we are going to continue misunderstanding and misrepresenting the phenomena of religious belief and practice that we analyse to death in other cultures, as though the mystical concept of Spirit was irrelevant to such analysis' (Turnbull 1990:70). At some time we are going to have to face 'the reality of Spirit and spiritual phenomena, for they are real, every bit as real as those fantasies academics are want to call theories, and possibly more so' (Turnbull 1990:74)."

"Okay, point taken." Brian conceded. He looked over at the painting, which I had rested against the glass doors inside so we could see it from the patio.

"Are those suggestions of spirits in the paintings?" said Brian. "Those purple things look like spirits."

"Yes. When we ran the poster competition in the secondary schools, the students quite often depicted the ultra-violet light as evil spirit beings. It combined their perception of the cause of eye damage with my perception. It also alluded to the battle I felt within

myself, the conflicting compassion I felt, swirling around with the anger and a frustration at their reluctance, or was it inability, to do anything about their pain and suffering. See the white dove. It's the symbol of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to show the spiritual battle, and raise questions like what happens when good versus evil? Healing versus harm? Why does God allow suffering? Was spiritual warfare involved in survival, the battle to have wholeness and health?"

I was speaking to them, but reliving the questions that surfaced as I had painted.

A moment of stillness followed as we sipped our coffee deep in thought.

"You must have felt some frustration then, that what you were offering the ni-Vanuatu patients, in biomedicine, was not acceptable to them?" said Alice.

"Yes. Conflicts and frustrations arise when health workers with a professional commitment to the tenets of Western science, conduct health programmes that depend on people with equally strong beliefs in spirits and shamans, accepting and co-operating with 'the new scientific epistemology which has been presented to them as a 'superior' form of knowledge' (Conquergood 1988:196)."

"So what can you do?" asked Brian.

"Make choices," I replied. "I, like other Third World developers, was faced with two very different directions in which to proceed (Geddes 1994a:3). I could have planned the programme which related to Westernised versions of community organisation and understandings requiring people to behave as I behave, think as I think, and relate to their environments as I did. Or I could develop a programme, which took account of the unfamiliar, of those forms of organisation and understanding which informed their daily life and which was very foreign to me. You see, I had to acknowledge that 'the embeddedness of health within social and spiritual contexts, in addition to physical and psychological contexts is a feature which health developers have often ignored and which results in a lack of enthusiasm for the services offered' (Hughes 1994b:252)."

"Is that why you've painted the black hand blocking the sunglasses being offered by the white hand?" said Brian.

"Yes. A barrier. But, the open hand could so easily become an embrace as the fingers curl around the sunglasses and accept them," I suggested.

"Yes. I see that. Because the people came to you, must mean that they are open to Western systems," said Alice.

"Although the ni-Vanuatu are adopting some Western practices, it has often come at a price. Many now question Western practices and there is a return to claiming *kastom* or traditional ways. To adopt practices or not, is a choice that they must make not one that should be imposed by visiting 'experts'. Indeed, the resistance to the Western practice of

wearing sunglasses shows that people did make that choice. I just wanted to understand *why* they were making the choice to reject sunglasses and found there was a complex web of cultural issues I had not understood, or considered, that resulted in people rejecting sunglasses. As I began to listen to their stories, I also began to critically examine my own assumptions about health and healing, illness and prevention which impacted on the way I practised and the development of the preventative eye care project."

"So what you are saying is, that in finding an answer to their eye problems you had to look at your own practice and the impact it was having on them." Alice tried to summarise it.

"Yes. But I wasn't just looking at my practice. I was looking at the whole experience and the impact it was having on them and *me.* As you observed before, I learnt a lot about myself through studying them."

"So how did that change your approach?" asked Alice.

"I began to genuinely listen to their questions, and not assume I had all the answers or even knew which questions were important. Certainly I wanted an answer to the question, 'how can their eye health be improved'? But that was a different question to 'why won't they wear sunglasses', which was the original question and *assumed fault* on their behalf. The inadequacies of what biomedicine had to offer, and my ignorance, were very clear. I was guilty of 'biomedical arrogance' and had dismissed the fears and perceptions of our patients. To continue to do so would not only have been arrogant, but ineffective.

To become effective I needed to be willing to learn. And 'learning is then through doubt, self-examination and willingness to change, seeking self-correcting engagement with dynamic realities and making learning a way of life. In a phrase, this is epistemological awareness, awareness of how we learn, how that affects what we think we know, and how we perceive and distort the realities of others' (Chambers 1997:100)," I explained.

"But no-one knowingly distorts the realities of another. Do they?" Alice queried.

"We'd like to think not. But what about vested interests? The people who fund research?

Do they publish all their findings? What about ignorance like mine? Did they ask the right questions of the right people in the right contexts?"

"So how do you know that what you did, did not harm anyone?" Alice asked gently so as not to cause offence.

"I don't," I admitted. "I know that I recognised the need for people's consent, their ability to contribute to the process of the research and to determine the use of the knowledge generated. I was aware there could be unforeseen consequences of introducing an artefact into a culture and health programmes undertaken with the best of intentions have resulted in the exploitation of people and a host of unexpected and possibly unwanted outcomes. Although sunglasses have been available in Vanuatu for some time, and I was not

introducing the artefact, I was for the first time advocating the majority of the population wear sunglasses as a therapeutic device, not as bodily adornment, and as such advocating a new use for the sunglasses. I did know what effect that would have."

"Scary," said Brian.

"Yes, scary," I agreed.

"But not scary enough to deter you," Alice responded. "You must have found some encouragement or else you would have given up."

"Yes. Spradley and McCurdy (1987:385) argue that culture change originates from two sources—innovation, and borrowing. Innovation is 'the invention of qualitatively new forms' whereas borrowing involves the 'adaptation of something new from another group'. Sunglasses fit into the second category. They go on to suggest that regardless of whether something is an innovation or borrowed 'it must pass through a process of social acceptance before it can become part of a culture' (p385). This involves becoming known to the members of society, being accepted as valid and fitting into a system of cultural knowledge revised to accept it. They suggest that to facilitate the process of social acceptance the following factors are important. Winning the support of a person in authority; the appeal to prestige, in societies where prestige is important; the time at which the change is introduced; the extent to which the item meets a felt need within the society and the provision of some continuity with traditional customs."

"Is that why you and Stephen went to see the council of chiefs? To meet some of those criteria?" asked Brian.

"Yes. I hoped to begin the process of gaining social acceptance of sunglass wearing through discussing with the chiefs the bio-medical causes, the people's reservations, and means of prevention of the eye problems their people faced could result in increased understanding amongst the people. Chiefs have the ability to intervene in village disputes or when people were being ostracised for the wearing of sunglasses. In such a way they could assist in changing the perception of sunglass wearing. Chiefs often decreed the style of clothing and hair decoration that was allowed in the village. If they encouraged the wearing of sunglasses, chiefs would be acting in their traditional role of providing and caring for their people and village," I said enthusiastically.

"Wow, that is so different from here," said Alice. "I can't imagine anyone telling me what to wear."

"I can," said Brian." Don't wear that shirt, Brian, I hate it! Brian! Those pants don't match that shirt, you can't go out like that!" he said in a voice that mimicked Alice.

Alice squirmed.

"Getting cold?" I asked to ease her discomfort, which I guessed was caused more by Brian's remarks than the weather.

"Yes, a bit. Let's move back inside," she replied. Brian and I will bring the cups and food inside."

"Thanks," I replied and moved the chairs away from the table

Brian moved cautiously towards Alice and put his arms around her as she began to pick up the cups. At first she shrugged off his embrace, but softened as he leant over and whispered in her ear.

Notes

[1]. Ernabella is a Pitjatjantjara community in the far north of South Australia.

[2]. The arcus senilis is a white ring which is visible over the iris on the cornea.

[3]. The women's market house is a large building where women are able to sell fresh produce, artefacts and handcrafts and food. It is run by a group of women who are from the group who were the *kastom* owners of the land. Permits are granted for other women from other island groups to attend the markets on particular days. The market house operates Tuesday to Saturday with the biggest markets being on Wednesday and Saturday.

[4]. A lavalava is a cloth worn around the waist

[5]. Bislama for 'I have a pterygium.'

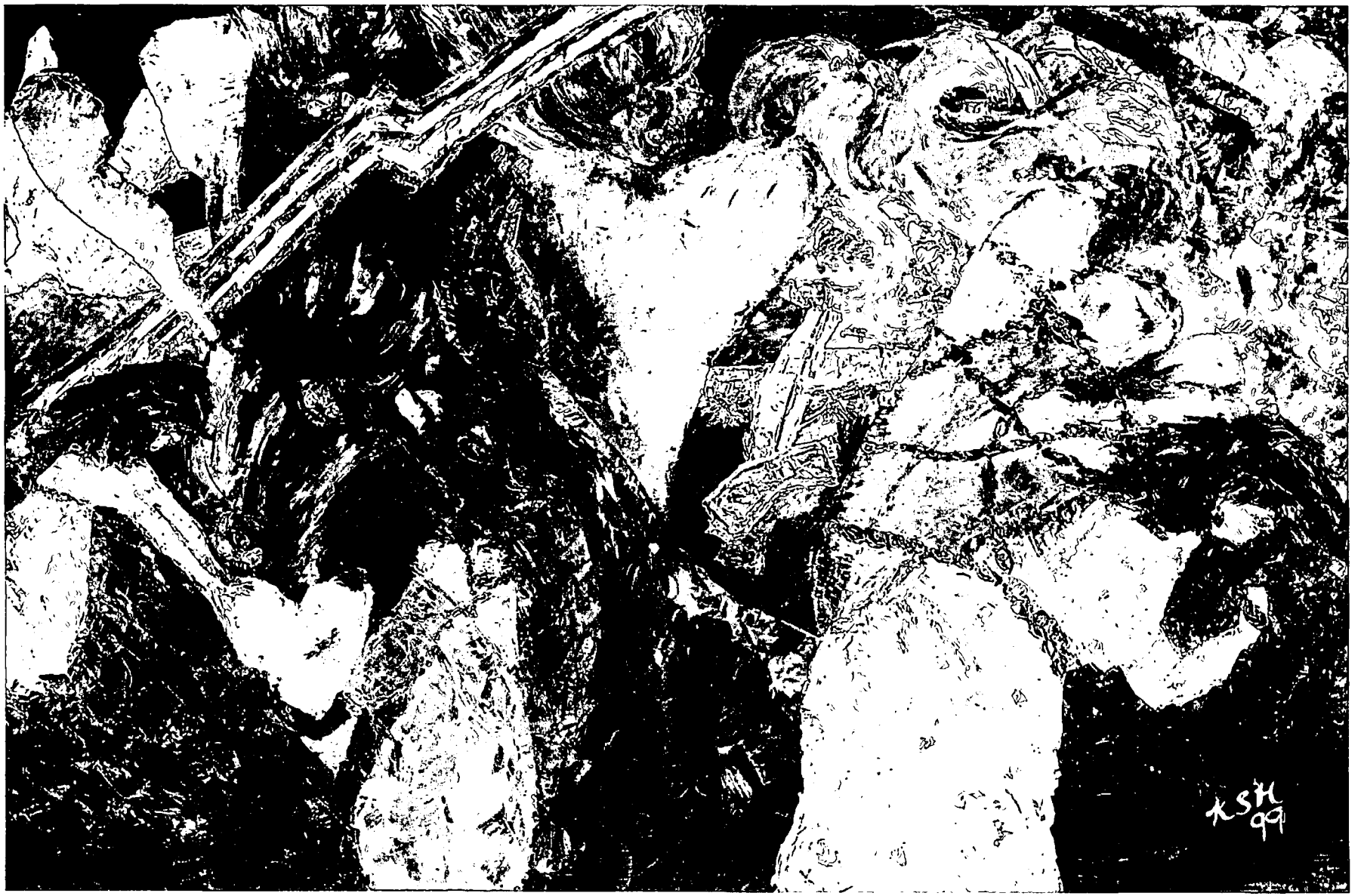
[6]. A need which was identified by Newland et al (1992)

[7]. Instead of using the common letter eye chart we used what is known as the illiterate E chart, as the difference in pronunciation of letters between French and English schooling often caused confusion. Also as many older people were not fluent in reading letters it enable more rapid assessment of their visual ability not their reading ability.

[8]. The use of the word *buggered* is not impolite in Bislama but simply means not working, or broken.

[9]. In Vanuatu most shops and services close from 11.30 am until 1.30pm for lunch/siesta.

[10]. Thongs are a rubber or plastic sandal of sole and straps. Also known as flip-flops.



'Risk and Responsibility'

Chapter Four

Risk and Responsibility:

A story of engagement

As I washed the last cup and placed it on the drainer, Alice met me in the kitchen.

She looked around and spied the cotton tea towel hanging on the oven door, picked it up and began to dry the cups.

"You took on a huge responsibility," she said as she looked out the bay window and into the garden.

"What do you mean?"

"In wanting to establish the preventative eye care project," she said. "I never could have imagined what was involved in it, and in the writing about it. I found that painting so moving. When I think of the programmes we run through the centre, it makes me wonder," her voice trailed off as she entered her private thoughts.

"Such responsibility," I heard her say as I removed the plug and wiped down the sink area.

I looked at Alice.

"I became very aware of the responsibility! It was a big part of the experience. There's a painting called **'Risk and Responsibility'.**"

"The one with all the hearts?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I like that one. Come and go through it with me," she said as she spread the tea towel out to dry, took my arm and led me back to the green room.

"Where's Brian?" I asked.

"Outside. He's got a phone call," Alice replied.

We stood in front of the painting.

"There's so much in that. Where do I start?" Alice turned to look at me, her eyes drawing me closer.

"Look into the heart of the painting, right in the centre," I encouraged.

"The heart in a hand," murmured Alice. "Placing your heart in another's hand. Giving over responsibility to another. Is that it?" asked Alice her voice becoming louder.

I nodded. "Placing your life in the hands of another."

"What about the other hearts? Are they all lives?" she asked.

"What do you think?" I replied.

Alice stood and looked.

"I can see that the one split by the lightning is, perhaps, showing the fragility of life, as is the one with the knife in it. But the others, they seem to be about something else," Alice remarked.

"Look at them one at a time, taking particular notice of what is in the background. Remember too, that the title is **Risk and Responsibility**," I suggested.

"There are the spirit creatures again," said Alice. "And the white dove. More spiritual battles."

Alice paused.

I watched her expression change as her eyes were drawn back to the painting.

"The lightning splitting the heart. Then all the little split ones falling underneath the purple spirit. Seems to say to me, that as you reduce the moral responsibility, the risk also reduces, but then you are left with nothing, no heart."

I was amazed at what Alice had seen in the painting, and found it so moving to be able to share this with her. I continued to look at her and encouraged her to go on. Not wanting to spoil or intrude into her moment.

"Then there is the woman covering her eyes with the heart, and you, I guess it is, reaching out to take it from her. I see that as you helping her with her burden of impaired vision."

Alice and I looked back at the painting. My heart was racing.

"The threatening purple spirit, the one with the teeth, swooping down, shows that there is a risk involved in sharing her burden," continued Alice.

I nodded.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed. "She has a heart strapped to her back. I guess that is the burden of her daily responsibilities," said Alice.

I looked at her with a smile to encourage her to continue, willing her to continue.

"On the other side it seems that you are weighed down with the different responsibilities you have. I guess coming from the multiple roles we discussed before." Alice paused. "Then there's the heart stabbed with the bush knife," she said as she pointed to the top right hand corner. "Always an image of betrayal to me, being stabbed in the heart, because to get close enough to stab someone in the heart they had to have trusted you, let you come close," she remarked as she turned to look at me.

The door swung open and Brian came in, tucking his mobile phone into his pocket.

"Back again. Sorry about that. What are you up to?" He strode across to Alice.

Alice and I stepped apart: the moment disturbed like the surface of a pond when a stone is thrown in.

"This painting is called **Risk and Responsibility**," said Alice.

Brian stood back and looked.

"The plane falling out of the sky is intriguing," said Brian, "and the little red boat in the huge waves. Do I detect a story about those?"

I raised my eyebrows.

"Did you want to read the story now?" I asked.

"Yes. That' s a good idea," agreed Alice and Brian.

"How about you read it this time?" suggested Brian.

"Okay," I replied as I walked over to the papers and picked up the story.

"I think I'll put the painting over here so you can look into it while I read," I said as I positioned it on a chair near the coffee table and sofa.

*****

Risk and Responsibility

The first rays of the morning sun paint the sky in autumn hues. It is May 10, 1999. I gratefully accept the cup of coffee my husband has brought into our room as I reach out beyond the warm covers and turn on the radio. My youngest son is snuggled in the bed with me telling me about his 'snake' dream the night before. It is a typical morning in our house. I turn up the volume as the news broadcast commences and we listen to the headlines of the day. "Three Australians have survived, by swimming six hours to shore, after their plane crashed off the coast of Port Vila, Vanuatu on Saturday night." My gut leaps then kicks me hard. I look at my husband in horror as the reader continues, "Seven other people and the pilot are missing feared dead."

I can't believe it. I had just spent the previous week writing stories of our flights in Vanuatu, of the risks we had been exposed to and the responsibilities I had felt for my children's and our safety. I wrote the story to provide important background information about the experience of being a health worker in Vanuatu and the decisions faced in practical matters of health work. I had relived my fears and frustrations, my anxieties and concerns. I had analysed and speculated about what could have happened, what might happen if—that had been hard enough but now it had all come true. Even the tiniest details. I had written about missing, stolen life jackets and I hear that the

survivors—five of them—could only find two life jackets for the five of them. Eight people got out before the plane sank, but three were swept away by the huge seas. I wonder if their life jackets were under their seats.

Reports are now coming in saying the plane may have been overweight, that passengers were not weighed with hand luggage. Just as likely the luggage of a relative was not recorded so that it could be flown free of charge, or the scales were not accurate. We had been part of each of these scenarios. I feel like a prophet of doom, as if I was somehow responsible. What do I do with these feelings that haunt me? It could have been us: but it wasn't. I feel deep sadness and relief. Do we have angels that watch over us? Do we have just enough time on this earth to do the things God has prepared for us to do? How do we know when that work is finished?

I do not know who was killed. I can picture the pilots who have flown us from island to island. The blonde French man, the greying Australian, and I wonder if it was one of them. I hear again the voice of one pilot, "If it was up to them to run this bloody airline, we'd all be dead," and now they were. I can see the faces of the men, the mothers, and the children who have flown with us between islands. I grieve for these unknown people. Tears of relief, tears of bitterness and anguish at what might have been.

On 8 May 1998, one year before those people, I made the same flight from Santo to Port Vila. Yesterday, we had talked about when we would be returning to Vanuatu, but for many reasons we just can't set the date this year, and now this. The very things I feared were shown not to be exaggerated but very real risks. On every trip you balance the risks and responsibilities. Responsibilities of continuing what you have begun; of not betraying trust; of returning when you said you would; of continuing to strive to understand and work towards improved eye health. Maybe the problem this year is that we cannot balance the risk and responsibility. The risk seems too great.

*****

As I stepped off the large chipped, red metal scales holding my handbag, my husband stepped on, with his hand luggage.

"O *dokta*, you heavy too much," I teased. My husband looked at the large black needle hovering above the scratched black numbers[1]. The man checking us in gave a hearty laugh, his dark face broke into a sparkling white grin and the whites of his eyes grew bigger. Another man stood just behind him peering at each ticket as he slowly thumbed through each page of the tickets with a huge, roughened, black thumb, looking at the codes printed in fading red carbon. Carefully he removed the top sheet of each ticket, looking at each of the travellers once more. I tried to keep the children together in a group, but with the unusual mix of excitement at travelling and boredom

with waiting in hot humid conditions, they were very active. When confined they released that energy by poking or niggling another who then responded with another poke or niggle, and so it escalated as we struggled for control to maintain the appearance of a civilised, caring family. At last, six purple laminated cards were handed to us. They were becoming well worn. They don't read to anywhere. I hoped they have given us the right ones. It was September 1995, and we were heading out from Port Vila to an island about 30 minutes away by plane to conduct primary eye clinics. We planned to visit villages, in conjunction with the nurse practitioner, for the next five days.

My husband settled to read on a seat alongside several other large ni-Vanuatu men. He knew it would be a long wait. The children and I moved to the glass doors to watch the action on the tarmac. Somehow, the large black strip of bitumen just didn't seem to fit the scene. The hazy mountains in the distance, palms swaying and the blue sky, an answer to my prayer the night before for good travel weather, were in total contrast with this black, tarry intrusion of another culture, another place. The Twin-engine otter was loaded on the tarmac. Men in white overalls pushed heavy carts of luggage across the tarmac. Through the glass doors, smeared with sweaty handprints, we watched as our luggage was put aboard. There was not much by Australian standards but here we were conspicuous by the amount of luggage we carried. There was a large grey sports style bag containing three plastic crates packed with spectacles each washed, checked, measured, numbered and packed in its individual plastic bag. Next a canvas bag, which contained the collapsed golf buggy. Assembled, this became an optometric stand holding a refractor head. My husband and I had painstakingly designed it to increase the comfort of patients and make it easier for him as a practitioner. On our previous visit, he tested patients' eyes using trial lenses. I could still picture the fear and discomfort of patients as he placed the heavy, black frame on their face and then awkwardly inserted each new lens until the right combination was found. The frame looked like something out of a science fiction movie to me, but to them I could not even imagine what they thought! Silver bits sticking out, white numbers blazoned on black rims, heavy and uncomfortable as it rests on the bridge of a nose for which it was far too small. As their bodies hunched over, and their voices shrank to a whisper, it was clear having something on their face was not only foreign, but to be constantly touched by a stranger seemed to me to engage a struggle to control the flight or fight response[2]. For the optometrist, too, it was a difficult experience, slow and tiresome, frustrating as lenses could not be found quickly, and expensive lenses were lost, or left behind in the move to the next village.

"Mum, look!" My son pointed at another trolley being pulled out to the plane.

Where does it all go? The plane seemed so small. I saw another of our bags loaded. Good! It's the small black case carrying the refractor head and optometric tools.

There should be one more. Ah! There it is. A small green case containing a few clothes, first aid kit, and gifts for the villages. I had heard so many stories of luggage not being loaded that relief flooded in as I saw it all being put on board.

Turning back to the terminal room, bustling now with people waiting, children crying and tugging at the large dresses on their mothers, I looked around for my children. I could see three, but where is the fourth? White children are generally not hard to find amongst the sea of black faces, but I just couldn't see him. Wasn't he here just a moment ago? I should have been more careful. Moving quickly to the others I tried to keep the anxiety out of my voice. "Have you seen Llew?"

"No," came the overwhelming reply.

"Check the toilets please, I'll go up stairs." I began to move through the crowd to the stairs.

"He'll be around," said my husband looking up from his book.

As I move, too fast for Vanuatu, across the room and up the stairs, I wondered why it was that I couldn't just sit and read a book and assume all will be okay. Why is it that the mother hen worries about the chicks and the rooster just crows in the morning?

As the corridor opened into a deck surrounded by Cyclone wire fence, I was relieved to see a little, fair-haired boy with his fingers twined through the Cyclone wire.

"Llew," I called, the relief singing out in my voice. He turned his head to me and smiled with those big blue eyes.

"Look, Mum, planes."

"I was worried about you. I didn't know where you were."

He looked at me as if I had lost my marbles, as if I should have known he would be watching planes at an airport. Maybe I should have. Being a mother changes everything. The desire to protect and nurture sometimes takes over from all rationality. I looked at my watch. It was nearly scheduled departure time. The speaker system here was unreliable. You needed to be down stairs to hear the call or see the movement towards the plane.

"Come on we must go down now to get on the plane."

He took my hand as we moved down the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs people had gathered close to the doors and we couldn't move off the bottom step. A smaller ni-Vanuatu man opened the doors from the outside and announced the flight in such a strong accent I didn't recognise the words he used even though they were in English. I looked at the colours of the boarding passes being collected and saw that it must be our flight.

"Excuse me," I eased my way past several large women, who smiled and touched Llew's straight blonde hair as he passed by them. There was a strange odour of perspiration, scented coconut oil, and aviation fuel. My eyes searched the room for the others. They were on their way over.

"I see you found him," Stephen said smiling as he gave me a hug that said, "I told you so."

He handed six passes to the man and we moved away from the building to the plane on the tarmac. The strong wind whipped my hair across my face. As I pulled it back from the corner of my mouth where it had lodged itself, I ducked to pass under the wing. We climbed the few suspended stairs, which bounced as you crept inside. Two seats on one side, a row of singles on the other. Stephen and the boys made their way to the front of the plane, where from their seats they could see inside the cockpit. The plane moved around on the ground enough for me, and I hate confined spaces. Please let me have a window seat. I began to concentrate on my breathing to calm myself. It was so hot inside I could feel my dress seal itself to my clammy skin. The pilot was an older Australian, and the co-pilot a ni-Vanuatu. Once we were all seated the co-pilot explained the safety regulations.

"Put on your seat belt, life jacket should be under the seat, sick bags and safety card in the pocket in front of you."

"Mum."

I looked at Llew seated next to me.

"Yes, Llew."

He was bent down to the floor.

"There's no life jacket under my seat," he said looking up at my face.

The pilot heard the comment and turned to him, "I don't think we'll be needing it today." He smiled and I was grateful for the reassurance.

As the plane began to move down the runway, I caught my breath and closed my eyes. The sound of the propeller just outside the window was deafening and the whole plane seemed to shudder. I felt the plane rise into the air, then it seemed to fall just as quickly, lurch side ways and then settle. "Oh, I hate this," I thought.

"Look out there," Stephen pointed to a small island. It was a dark brown dot surrounded by a splash of tan ringed with the most amazing aquamarine colours. The beauty of the ocean and reef took away the fear.

As we came in for our first landing the warning beeper on the engine sounded on and off. I could see a light in the cockpit flashing. I looked to see if anyone else was fussed. How did the pilot look? The plane bounced, banked left, then right and then suddenly there was a bump and the sound of land beneath the tyres.

"Have we crashed?" Llew asked as he looked anxiously at me.

"No, sweetheart. This is our first stop," I said as I looked around to see if there was anything I could point out to reassure him. The only indication that this was the airport was a small concrete

slab and a man seated by a metal box suspended from a wooden pole. A number of cardboard cartons were on the slab next to him. He held an umbrella over his head for protection from the misty rain. A few people with rusty utilities were waiting by the clearing.

"Look, there's the airport man," I said not too convincingly.

My observation was confirmed as he dropped open the door and looked in. He moved to the back and tossed several carry bags on the ground. Two men and one woman made their way off the plane. The pilot was busy calculating something on a clipboard. Each time the plane lands the pilot has to calculate the weight of the fuel, passengers, baggage, and freight. I hoped his maths was good.

Three large ni-Vanuatu men dressed in long pants and short sleeved shirts climbed in and sat in the empty seats. They appeared to be business or government workers. Two more men climbed in and looked around, but there were no spare seats. They climbed out of the plane and went over to the airport manager. A group of women waited under the wing of the plane. They had bundles of brightly coloured pandanas mats and several red, blue and white striped carry bags by their feet. They looked in the windows and then across to where the men were talking. Several of them were becoming agitated, their voices louder, their hands waving about, and their heads shaking. I looked down at the children and talked about our big adventure, and I tried to keep their interest during the long wait.

The airport manager climbed in with another large man and looked around. He looked particularly at us, and the other man pointed at the children and spoke loudly to him in the local language. Stephen looked over to me, his eyes showing amused interest in what was going on. "Looks like we're over full," he said.

"Mmm," I replied. I was reasonably sure it was more than that and that somehow we we're the problem.

The airport manager approached the pilot and called to the co-pilot. They all studied the clipboard one more time. They quickly glanced at us, and then back at the clipboard. We were obviously a source of concern. The Australian pilot turned to us and asked if the children would mind sharing a seat. Wanting to relieve the situation, I got up and suggested that the two smaller children sit with their older brother. Llew and Vaughan were strapped into one seat together, Alex, their brother, in the other. Three children on two seats. Stephen moved back to sit by me leaving a spare seat. Still this did not seem to appease anyone. The argument became more heated. It appeared they wanted the children on our laps so as to fit two more. I looked at how my knees pushed into the seat in front of me and could not conceive of how I would fit a child on my lap. Stephen barely got by with his legs in the isle. I searched Stephen's face for reassurance, but saw only increasing frustration. "We've paid top dollar for these seats," he reminded me. "We have a lot of baggage

that they don't know about. I'm not putting us at risk." We sat. I did not move again, just waited, and hoped.

The pilot looked back at us. He appeared calm. He'd obviously fought this battle before. I hoped he'd won. The pilot tumed back to the airport manager standing below him on the ground. He shook his head and said, "No." The airport manager did not accept this answer and continued to point at the clipboard. He shook his head and walked determinedly around the front of the plane to the co-pilot. His voice lowered as he hung onto the side of the plane and began to speak in Bislama to the co-pilot. I felt like I was privy to a secret society's conspiracy as they used signs known only to them to discuss us. After a while the co-pilot turned to the pilot. I could not hear their conversation, but saw the anger growing in the pilot. He turned to the passengers standing in the isle of the plane and waved his arm motioning them to leave. Still they did not move. They wanted to be on this plane; there was a wedding to go to. The pilot became more angry and forceful and ordered the people off the plane.

He looked apologetically at us, as he could not avoid seeing us as he turned to the cockpit again.

"If it was up to them to run this bloody airline, we'd all be dead," he voiced his frustration to no-one in particular, but to everyone who'd listen.

Although I felt awkward and embarrassed at having been the cause of this, I was relieved. We had heard stories of this haggling and planes overloaded having to abort take-off, reduce weight, and try again. But it didn't prepare me for this experience and the sense of powerlessness.

As we took off over the ocean and the land slipped further and further away, I turned to Stephen and asked, "What do you think would have been the outcome if the ni-Vanuatu pilot was in control?"

"What do you mean?" he replied

"Well, what if his relatives were wanting to fly. Do you think he would have been able to say no to them?" I asked.

"You mean because they're his relatives and he has obligations to them?"

"Yes, exactly. If he puts his ni-Vanuatu obligations above the obligations he has to adhere to the airlines rules, who knows what may happen," I replied.

"Yeah, but what can you do? There won't be expatriate pilots here forever. Besides, shouldn't they have control themselves? That's what you keep telling me," he said seriously.

I couldn't keep the questions from coming but didn't trouble him any more with them.

Was it only right for them to have power when they don't put other's lives, my life, at risk? Can 'inside' ideologies and customs control 'outside' technologies? I think back to my time at Ernabella Mission. How many people did Aborigines get into one car to go to the corroboree at Amata?

Certainly not one per seat belt! And what about the radio report from India where fifteen people were killed when the truck, in which they were travelling to collect cheques and have children immunised, overturned. I spent the short flight lost in my thoughts.

*****

"Look, the *trak*," Stephen points to the familiar orange utility parked next to the airstrip.

"They must have got the message"[3], he added, relief evident in his voice.

"Well, that's a turn up for the cards," I replied smiling.

As they opened the stairs of the plane it began to rain heavily. The large drops stung our faces as we hurried across the grassy field and we all got very wet in spite of attempts at sheltering under the large mango tree. Our luggage was retrieved from the plane and piled into the *trak*. A large blue plastic tarpaulin was spread across the bags to keep off the rain, although I think it served to keep the water on our already waterlogged bags.

A small group of people was waiting for us at the airport. They had accompanied a mother and her young son. He was about 10 years old. His head bandaged with a dark green and blue cloth, hung towards the ground. He appeared acutely embarrassed by the attention.

His mother explained to our driver that he had been shooting pigeons for food with a slingshot when the rubber strip broke and ricocheted into his eye. As we unwrapped the cloth from his head his eye was revealed, severely swollen and shut. Stephen carefully raised the swollen lids with his fingers. It was very red and difficult to see anything. He turned to me.

"He really needs some drops to get the swelling down."

"Maybe they'll have some at the Health Centre. We can ask when we get there and send a message back to her," I offered helpfully. To do nothing was unethical; to not be able to do anything was demoralising. I shared his frustration at not being able to intervene immediately, of being placed in the uncomfortable position of being known as a 'healer' and not being able to perform that role. I knew well the burning desire to help and share the burden these people bore in battling the elements, trying to maintain their visual health. When you took on the role and work of *dokta blong ae* you took on a burden of responsibility and care, which at times like this weighed heavy on your heart.

As it was already early afternoon the driver was keen to move us along. It seemed that the nurse practitioner had set up a programme for us and advised the villages accordingly. The children and Stephen climbed into the tray of the *trak* along with the luggage. There was a roughly sawn plank propped up on two metal drums to provide seating. I was shown to the passenger seat. Waving goodbye to the crowd who had gathered to get a glimpse at the doctor and his family, we set off along the track to the first village. The track was worn and slippery from the rain. The *trak* lurched

from side to side and I was having trouble not hitting the armrest on the door each time. Two of the children, in order to give their backsides a rest from the bumping, were standing immediately behind the cab window holding onto the rail. I leaned out and called to Stephen, "Hope you've got a grip on them."

"Don't worry about them," he said, "you're more likely to lose me over the edge!"

The road seemed to get worse and the vegetation encroached so that the boys had to watch that a branch didn't slap them as we passed.

"Is it much farther?" I asked not wanting to seem impatient.

"E no far. End o' road," replied the driver with a smile.

Catching his insinuation I asked, "What does that mean?"

"Last village has road. Afta road finished. Sipose you wanna go long nother village you walk," he replied.

"So does the doctor only go to the aid post here?" I asked incredulously, knowing it was still a long way to the southern tip of the island.

"No. *Dokta* he go walkin with barrow and pack. Sometimes he take two or tree days to go south."

"You wouldn't want to get sick too often," I observed.

The driver just smiled.

A bit further on he swung hard into a clearing and spread out before us were groups of thatched houses. You could smell the salty air and soon we saw the beach. We had gathered a train of screeching, laughing children. Their high pitched voices calling out as they ran alongside and behind the *trak*, jumping up and down and pointing at the white children. The *trak* stopped next to a shed made from corrugated iron. A small white board had a roughly painted Red Cross on it. A young woman in a clean island dress came to greet us. I stepped out and shook her hand. Stephen climbed out rubbing various parts of his shaken body. I introduced the *dokta blong ae* and they shook hands. The driver was busy unloading the bags. The children had jumped out and headed to the beach with the village children still jumping and laughing behind them.

In one area inside the aid post was a concrete floor, bare iron walls and a crude bed. A rusty bedside cabinet covered with a cloth, and with neatly labelled bottles on it, stood alongside. There were a few faded posters on the walls depicting a good diet, and some about AIDS. It was very hot and humid inside with only one small window near the bed. In another area, there was a table standing on a crushed coral floor. It was made from roughly sawn timber and Masonite, the layers separating and chipping off at the edges. I spread out the spectacle boxes on the table, which rocked and bowed under the weight. Stephen set up his equipment outside under the shade of the

large banyan tree and the sound of the pupu shell echoed through the village[4]. People began to emerge and congregate in the shade outside the Aid Post.

As I watched over the children, kept an eye on the spectacle boxes on the table from the door and listened to the questioning process, I sensed what was coming next.

"Listen, do you have to get answers to all those questions? Couldn't we just take a sample?" Stephen asked. "It's going to take forever at this rate and I want to be able to see everybody that wants to be seen. We owe them that much."

"They'll be out in a minute or two," I replied.

They weren't. It was taking too long. We had printed patient history sheets. We hoped to use the information collected to get a better picture of the eye health of the ni-Vanuatu.

However, the questionnaires were too big and cumbersome. The people did not understand the questions or the reasons for so many. Many could read the questions but could not write. The nurse aid did a good job trying to get the answers for us. She was very patient and recorded a lot of detail. It was a very slow process. Each question seemed to initiate a long discussion between the recorder and patient as they tried to work out what it was the white woman wanted to know and why she would want to know it.

As it was an aid post, people came from other villages to see us. More and more people kept arriving, waiting to be seen by the doctor. I grabbed some blank cards from my bag and handed them to Stephen.

"Go for it," I said.

He took the cards and smiled as he beckoned to an elderly gentleman to come over.

Soon, people all anxious to watch the doctor checking eyes, surrounded him.

The first elderly man came over to me carrying the card from the doctor.

"You sit down here, please," I smiled as I indicated a chair next to the table and took the card with his prescription written on it. Then began the search, through the seemingly endless pairs of glasses, for numbers on the glasses that matched the ones on the card. Finding several that nearly matched I placed them on the upturned lid of the boxes.

"You try this one, please." I took the glasses from their plastic bag and placed them carefully on the man's face. I handed him the Bislama songbook.

His face broke into a huge smile. Yellowed teeth appeared as he read through the words, his cracked lips moving silently. He looked up at me. The grey stubble on his black face shining in the light from the door. "*Numba wan,*" was the soft reply.

Having seen his pleasure, many people came over to the table and looked over the spectacles, moving from box to box. I was anxious that they didn't mix them up but didn't want to appear rude in asking them not to touch.

"*Misis*, dis one, 100 vatu?" asked a lady holding up a pair marked +1.00.

I explained that they were the prescription numbers not price numbers and that each person had a special number for their eyes, which was why I couldn't give them the glasses without the *dokta blong ae* checking them first.

A long line of patients was forming—waiting to have their glasses distributed. After having selected their spectacles, they would take out money that was carefully tied into a handkerchief or piece of cloth. Even the notes were folded several times, until there was just a small inconspicuous square inside the cloth. Some came and selected the glasses then returned a short time later with the money. Others asked for it to be put on an account. When I queried this they said, "You just write down my name and the amount and I will pay the aid post later." I was unsure about this but was too busy to seek an explanation of what was the best way to handle this.

It was very hot and humid and we all needed a drink. I asked one of the women if we could have some drinking water. She dropped her head and beckoned for me to come.

"*Misis*, we no got wata. I bring some coconuts," she whispered almost apologetically. She moved off and called a young boy who scurried off down the track after a few short words with her. Her words, "we no got wata" rang in my head. How could people live without water? Why did they not have any water? Moments later he reappeared with six green coconuts. Taking his bush knife he made two holes in the top and handed them to us to drink. I do not like coconut milk. It is so sweet. My thirst had to be quenched; I needed fluids in the heat. I took the coconut, thanked him, and held the shell to my lips drinking quickly so as not to taste the fluid. "No got wata" still echoed in my head.

The line of patients was reducing. The driver retumed and was keen to head off to the Health Centre. The village meeting area was dotted with people sitting talking, many holding small plastic bags in their hands. Some were passing their new glasses from one person to another as each tried a new pair. We loaded our bags into the *trak* and said our goodbyes. It seemed like we shook hands with every person in the village as we climbed in. A woman handed me a bunch of small bananas.

"Thank you," I said gratefully. As I began to eat the bananas I tried not to think of the dirt on my hands, from the flight, sorting through spectacles, touching people's hair and faces and shaking endless hands. With or without the germs, these bananas tasted good.

The *trak* began to settle into its rhythm of rocking and swaying as the driver dodged the deep ruts in the road. Having seen the reluctance of ni-Vanuatu to answer direct questions, I began to

comment on the village life, making leading statements and waiting for the driver to finish them off or comment further.

"They don't have water supply at the village," I said casually.

"Yeah, they do...", he replied.

"That's not what I heard." I thought. "Better rephrase that". While I am thinking, he finished his sentence.

"...but it's no good in the dry."

"Dry?" Didn't it just rain today? Didn't I get wet at the airport? My thoughts were flying.

"They no have good rain, tree years now. Village no got money so no got big tank. Village no got same rain as nother side long island."

"Oh, so they only can save small amounts of rain water. They didn't get that rain this afternoon?" I asked.

"Meybe. A little, but rain he no big one too much."

On the way back down the track I continued to talk with the driver. When I approached the subject of the coming elections he was quite animated[5]. He thought most people on this island wanted a change of government. There was one village which was the exception as the French school was there and had had a lot of money put into it by the current Francophone government. The discussion continued for some time until he brought it to a conclusion with, "Sipose we no get differen government, I tink we shud just graaeeek!" he drew his hand in a sweeping motion across his throat. Well, what does one say in reply to that?

We drove for a while in silence. Suddenly the *trak* swerved violently and I hit my head. I looked to the back to see they were all right. The children were shouting and pointing at something by the side of the road. The driver put his head out of the truck and looked back to where they were pointing.

"O'he dead finis," he said.

"What?" I asked, alarmed by the use of the word dead!

"Chicken," was the reply. Obviously this chicken didn't make it across the road:

Some children came running to the edge of the road making a cacophony of sound. The driver slowed and called out to them. There was much to and fro of conversation at the end of which he put his head back in the *trak* and turned to me, "I must pay 500vt for killing dead chicken. I tell pikanninis to tell owna," he explained, after seeing the quizzical look on my face.

"Oh." I am amazed that they would know who owned which chicken. Don't they all look alike; scrawny, long-legged, speckled brown? Besides the chicken wasn't penned. It ran onto the road. It

seemed to me, the owner of the chicken was irresponsible for not keeping the chicken off the road, not the driver for hitting it!

A smile crossed my face as I imagined what it would be like if drivers in Australia had to pay compensation for anything they hit and the responsibility was not the responsibility of the owner of the livestock. Maybe the road toll would come down and speed limits wouldn't be necessary. No, I think the level of dishonesty would probably increase. People would work harder to conceal their accidents, shift the blame, frame others. With the larger population identities are more easily concealed, changed, or assumed. The value placed on objects is not the same. Groups don't share similar understandings and practices. It seems that here everyone is known by their family ties, village and island group. They share mutual understandings, practices, and obligations to the group. Their identity is assigned and supported by the group. Does this make them less free than we are? We can be more individual and have more than one "self" but with this individual freedom comes the responsibility of each 'self' and when the chips are down, I am I, largely alone and accountable. Here, others step in and share the responsibility. In the village many people came and paid for the glasses of another. They would just step out from somewhere and pass the money discretely to either the patient or me. There is no external government support but an intricate social web of support based on kinship. Doesn't sharing the burden of responsibility also bring a kind of freedom?

My reverie is interrupted as the driver calls out to a young boy. He laughed and ran ahead to open the roughly made, barbed wire and stick gate. There are old coconut trees growing in almost straight lines as far as I can see in each direction. Every now and then, one that had fainted, as if tired of standing against the wind, broke the sentinel-like rows; had pulled up its shallow roots and lay across the ground. A group of men and women were seated on one of these fallen trees, surrounded by a large pile of brown coconuts. As I watched, one man took the large bushknife and swiftly opened the coconut. The driver noticed my concentration and, as if anticipating my question, said, "Cutting copra."

The children enjoyed the ride immensely and began to sing as they rocked around in the back. As we passed through an old colonial plantation there were many gates and they took it in turns to jump down and tackle them. The opening and closing of the gates had slowed us considerably and the shadows of the afternoon were growing. The driver increased his speed, anxious to get back before dark. Unfortunately, this also coincided with deterioration in the road. The *trak* lurched even further to the side and the driver's elbows seemed to flap about like a startled bird as he hung onto the steering wheel. I reached down and dug my fingers into the vinyl seat in an effort to steady my body.

A violent lurch sent sharp, stabbing pains down my neck and into my shoulders. I dared not look behind in case I sustained greater injury to my neck, but hoped that all the children were seated

and safe, if one could be safe driving this way. The singing had stopped, I guessed because they needed all their energy to hang on. Should I ask him to slow down? If I did would he think I was being disrespectful? Perhaps I was just feeling scared and getting it all out of perspective. Another violent lurch and the *trak* groaned. Even it was complaining about the treatment. What about my children, I would not put them at risk like this at home. Just when I had decided I would ask the driver to slow a little, we came to the base of a hill.

Heavy rains had long since cut a deep trench down the side of the hill where the road used to be, or as the driver was trying to convince me, still was! He told me how some years ago some white engineers came and talked to the people about making the better road. Better road? Surely this was not it? Some country had given the money to make a road to provide access to the hospital for the other villages. They came with big machines and made a good road. The people told them it would be no good in the rain, but they said, "Yes, it would be okay." The road did not survive the first cyclone season. The heavy rains badly damaged the new road. Sections of it washed away leaving deep gullies. Then, with no repairs, the road had continued to provide a bed for water to run from the hill. Gradually the road had washed and worn away. Now there were just two narrow, winding tracks which had been built up to allow the wheels to pass if driven slowly and with precision! The driver looked anxious as he engaged the four-wheel drive lever.

"Gear box, he no good too much, numba two gear he buggered up."

Stephen leaned his head in the window from the back.

"How you gonna get up that?" he asked. "You want us to get out?"

"We try, first time," came the reply.

The wheels spun as if objecting to the challenge, then slowly we moved up the steep incline. From my window I had a spectacular view of the ocean, tinged with pink as the sun sank slowly below the horizon. In the distance you could make out the other small islands, one with a large volcano, its vent covered in cloud. The waves crashed onto the rocks outside the reef then rippled into the shore, past the sticks holding the fishing nets. Out the driver's window I could see only the cut away red cliff and encroaching tropical vegetation threatening to lash the *trak* as it passed. As the engine groaned again the driver eased the clutch and the *trak* levelled out.

"Yee hah! You rippa!" a cheer went up from the back.

The driver smiled.

It was nearly dark when the *trak* made its way across the thick grass and stopped out the front of the building. A small kerosene lamp was burning on the table inside. There were long shadows around the room. Having heard the sound of the *trak* the nurse practitioner, Jimmy and his wife, made their way up the hill from the health centre below to greet us. We had spent a few days on this island the previous year and were fulfilling a promise to return.

We unloaded our luggage and farewelled the driver. Whilst Stephen and Jimmy talked about the plans for the week, I set about boiling some water on the gas burner in the kitchen so we could all have a wash before tea. Tea. I realised it was hours since we had eaten and how hungry I was. We had missed lunch due to the flight and apart from some bananas we had not eaten since the hurried breakfast in Vila that morning. I began to rummage through our bag looking for a shoebox which contained several packets of instant soup; with the loaf of local bread the nurse practitioner had brought, this would be tea.

"I have big worry bout de *helt centa,*" I heard Jimmy say to Stephen with heaviness in his voice as he discussed the struggle to keep the health centre going.

"I tink that now we got no money maybe da *helt centa* no go on. We still got plenty babies born long hospital here. More and more patients evry year, but no more help or money. It get more an more harder. The dispensary, it be okay. I orda long time ahead, but just now dey no got vaccine for newborn babies. Central Stores supplies all finissed. Dis means me mas go find de babies time de vaccine comes. Make plenti work cause sometime de babies come from far away."

Stephen listened in silence as he explained how he has asked the Health Department for some equipment and spare parts to fix the hospital truck, donated years ago by Save the Children Fund, but he hadn't received them.

"You know there is a truck the same as this on the island I visited last year," interrupted Stephen. "It has already had some parts removed from it and is up on blocks. Surely you could get the parts from there shipped down that would not cost much! We are going to that island next week maybe I could get them taken out and put on the ship for you."

I sighed quietly. So now we were responsible for finding truck parts as well as fixing eyes. Well, it wouldn't be the first time. It was not that I minded. Once I knew about something, I felt a moral responsibility to act on it as best I could. I thought back to how I had returned to Australia after a previous visit to an island health centre and had purchased hospital sheeting and curtain material. I had seen the efforts that the nurses had put into the health centre and shared their frustration at what they wanted to do but couldn't because of limited resources. I had taken on the responsibility of sharing their frustration with others. That had enabled their plans to come to fruition and brought satisfaction and pleasure to them, their patients, and me.

"De main office must sign de papers. Maybe me ask," Jimmy replied with some reservation. Previous experience had taught him that there were never simple solutions where bureaucracy was involved. He sent two drums to Vila to get diesel for the generator but only one came back, so fuel for the generator was very low. While the drums were away there was no fuel, so he performed surgery at night by hurricane light. Surgery by hurricane light! I struggled to record my field notes at night, the flickering light was so bad. All the while he talked with Stephen I did not get

the impression that he was complaining, just that he wished for something better for his people. The patience and endurance he had shown humbled me.

There was a cry from outside and Alexander came in holding his arm. He had been swinging from a tree when the vine had broken. His arm was bleeding and obviously sore. Stephen and Jimmy came to see what had happened.

"Come long *helt centa,*" said Jimmy, "I clean cut. I tink he alright."

I drew Stephen aside.

"Do you think you should take our medical kit in case he needs stitches?" I asked.

"No.Things here are clean. They are very careful. I trust him."

"I guess it might offend if we brought out our kit of pre-packaged, sterile medical supplies, but I was thinking they can ill afford to use precious supplies when we already have our own," I suggested somewhat hesitantly.

"It'll be alright," said Stephen as the three went off together.

I ushered the other children into the bath. They were washed, dressed in long-sleeved, light cotton clothing and coated in insect repellent, when Stephen and Alexander returned. The arm did not require stitching and appeared not to be broken, but Alexander would have to have antibiotic cream on it everyday to prevent infection. We knew, only too well, the pain associated with tropical sores. It was part of the nightly routine to inspect every part of the children's bodies, and treat every scratch or nick no matter how small. We knew from painful experience that a scratch could grow to a large pus-filled sore in a few days. Lachlan's knee still bore the scar.

There was a rap at the door. Jimmy's wife and small child had arrived carrying a large, amber coloured glass bowl full of boiled yam and thin soup. I thanked them profusely and they slipped quietly away into the night, just as they had come. The soups and bread were delicious in the cool of the evening.

The children were tucked into their beds under the mosquito nets. Prayers were said and the hurricane light placed in the passage turned down low.

"Good night. Don't let the bed bugs bite!" It was not just a well-worn saying here. It too was a prayer. Lachlan knew all about it, as on a previous visit to an island he had woken up covered in bites. Something had feasted on him inside his mosquito net. The bites turned into infected sores that seemed to take forever to heal. Yes, don't let the bed bugs bite was a prayer.

I boiled the kettle one more time; some went into the sink to wash the dishes from tea.

As I washed and Stephen wiped we reviewed the day. "You know I haven't been that scared since that awful boat trip," I shuddered as I remembered crossing seven miles of shark-infested, treacherous seas in an old plywood boat. It was grossly over loaded, seven adult men on the roof,

our family of six, our field-worker, the aid post worker, two extra children, the boat driver, and his assistant. Once again a wedding at a village on the mainland had been the reason everyone wanted to share the transport. As the waves broke over the boat, the nurse sitting next to me buried her face in her hands.

"Too many on the boat," she cried. Tears had filled my eyes as I looked around helplessly to see if there were any lifejackets, or something to bail with. Nothing.

"Yeah, I know what you mean, " said Stephen, also reliving the moment.

"When the engine started to fail, and the guy had to keep pumping the fuel through by hand, and I realised there was nothing on board to help us bail the water coming in," he paused, "I spent the rest of the trip deciding which of the children I would save, because I knew I would not be able to save them all."

"Really?" I asked. "You've never told me that before. I don't think I could make that decision."

"I hope I never have to," he replied.

We had nearly finished the dishes.

"Why don't you go have first shower, I'll fill the bucket for you," he offered.

He poured the rest of the boiled water into the plastic bucket, went to the bathroom and filled the galvanised bucket. I could hear the squeaking as he heaved the rope through the pulley and tied it off on the wall. The full bucket swung as it dripped slowly into the bath below.

"Ah, nothing like a warm shower and bring relief to tired, bruised muscles," I thought as I pulled off my clothes and climbed into the bath. Standing under the galvanised bucket with its leaking shower rose, I turned the little brass tap attached to the suspended bucket and huge droplets began to splash down. I hoped the rope and hitch were strong, as the bucket was heavy. I could see the headlines, "Wife of eye doctor killed as bucket shower falls on head." Well that's one way to kick the bucket! I laughed aloud.

A short time later as I lay under my mosquito net, I wondered about that headline. How accurate would the information be? Who would appear to be at fault? No one? The people maintaining the property? My husband for putting the water in the bucket, or me for standing under it? There were so many ways to report the same experience. The repercussions of the choices made by the reporter and the reader could be great. I thought about the field notes I had written up earlier. Had I made the 'right' choices? What if I had 'picked up fag ends', as Stephen calls it? Would what I had written be anywhere near accurate? What would be the repercussions of what I had written? I tossed and turned on the thin mattress, trying to get comfortable, to shake the thoughts from my mind. But the risk and responsibility weighed heavily on my mind, and I carried them into my dreams.

******

"Wow," said Brian. "Now that makes you think about the logistics of getting somewhere, staying fit and well and able to do the job you went for. I really got a sense of excitement and fear, all mixed up."

"Yes, it was often like that, and in understanding the experiences there is a need to understand those emotions and how they influenced what I came to know, and how I behaved. In the stories you find the real nature of emotions recorded and see that 'people tend to feel different emotions simultaneously' (Ellis 1991a:37). Sociologists now generally recognise that 'emotional processes are crucial components of social experience' (Ellis and Flaherty 1992:2) and that 'the notion of an objectively known world that is somehow experienced independent of our interior life seems far-fetched' (Barone and Eisner 1997:88). Ellis (1991a, 1991b) argues that the use of one's own emotional experience is a legitimate object of sociological research to be described, examined and theorised. In this perspective, 'focus on researchers and their feelings during research situations in the field is of particular interest' (Ronai 1992:103)."

"That does makes you think about how we know something and then what we do with the knowledge we have, and how we feel obliged to act, or not, upon it," said Alice.

"Yes. With knowledge comes responsibility. Of course as a health worker, I always felt a responsibility to use my Western biomedical and educational knowledge I had brought with me to the field, to assist in relieving their visual distress. But, as a researcher, I also came to feel a responsibility to represent the knowledge I acquired from them and the experience truthfully. To use that knowledge for the betterment of the people and not to their detriment. I felt accountable to the people. I felt I had to re-present what I had learned in a way that was appropriate for them, that would answer why it mattered, and to whom. I had to show how the research could help them have better lives," I said the passion breaking into my voice."

"I never thought of research actually showing people that they could have better lives," said Alice, "I always thought it was to just find out something."

"Well, it usually does result in that, but 'developing country social scientists recognise there is a vital role that qualitative research can play in development efforts. It is to put people and culture back into health and development theory and practice. They often have to find ways to work across deep-seated traditional divisions between research and practice and among academic disciplines' (Muecke 1997:363). Also, you find that there is

a shift from seeing value in social science research for the sake the knowledge it generates, towards valuing it for how it can be used to alleviate problems that are felt by communities. You see research for knowledge's sake represents only one possible goal. Barone and Eisner, two arts-based researchers, 'view 'personal accounts' (Lancy 1993) generated within narrative forms of inquiry as useful and important texts for improving practice' (1997: 82). They argue the purpose of these accounts is to 'entice the reader to reconceptualise the experience of the phenomena through intimate disclosures' (Barone and Eisner 1997:82) from the lives of the individual actors. Other social scientists are also turning to narrative modes that emphasise 'goals of human solidarity, community, sense making, coping, and improving life conditions' (Bochner 1994 in Ellis 1997:115). Viewed this way 'good sociology should help make people's lives better' (Ellis 1997:135)," I insisted.

"So is it improving the lives of your subjects, your audience, or you?" asked Alice.

"All of the above," I replied. "Because 'the phenomenological world is not pure being, but sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears' (Merleau-Ponty 1989:xx). So knowing 'what it is like' to do cross-cultural health work from my experience, may help my audience, which of course includes my subjects, be better prepared for their engagement with others and the risks it brings."

"Remind me again who your audience is," interrupted Brian.

"Sure. The people of Vanuatu, cross-cultural workers, and academics," I replied.

"But I imagine it could appeal to anyone, not just those groups", said Alice

"So what you're talking about is raising awareness?" said Brian.

"Yes, but it's more than that. It involves increasing knowledge, raising questions and challenging ideas. And it seems that cross-cultural health workers face these issues as much as their patients. Conquergood (1988:199) realised as he critiqued his work in the Ban vanai refugee camp that he should have been more assiduous in attempts to reach the expatriate personnel who were most ethnocentric in their dealings with the Hmong. In matters of communication and intercultural sensitivity, relief workers 'are not trained. Within the agency bureaucracy they are not rewarded for involving themselves with individuals. In fact field-workers are often warned against 'getting involved' ' (1986:305). Perhaps knowledge gained through interaction with the represented experiences, and subsequent self-examination can 'resolve contradictions that particularly a beginning practitioner might not have been aware of, between the expectations they may have about a form of practice and the actual reality of it as experienced' (Willis 1999:110). I also hope that the ni-Vanuatu audience will learn to think critically about their interactions with the Other, and seek true dialogue and partnership. The ideal is for the two cultures to

enter into a 'productive and mutually invigorating dialogue, with neither side dominating or winning out, but both replenishing one another' (Conquergood 1988:202)[6]."

"Is that a responsibility you feel?" asked Alice.

"Yes, it is. 'In seeking to do better, criticism is easy. To be constructive is harder. Taking responsibility and accepting risk by actually doing something is hardest of all. But much of the best learning is through self-critical commitment to action, to engagement with the world, to learning by doing' (Chambers 1997:100). I endeavoured to portray the depth of this engagement in the paintings but I am very aware that with such engagement comes responsibility and risk. Risk of being physically and emotionally hurt. I think that comes out in the paintings."

"Yes," said Alice "I can see it in the broken hearts, the use of knives and threatening images hovering around you."

"I find it hard to understand how just doing health work can leave you so vulnerable," said Brian.

"It wasn't just the health work. It was the intense desire to understand, to share, and to become part of their world that leaves you vulnerable. And those qualities are necessary to really enter the field."

"So it was the research more than the health work," said Brian.

"Not really. It is widely recognised that primary health care, and hence primary eye care, cannot be seen in isolation from the social and political context in which the people live (Hughes 1994a, 1994b). The professional and personal experience of undertaking primary eye care in Vanuatu has provided me with essential sensitivity to the phenomena researched which enables good interpretation which Geertz (1973) argues involves 'getting to the heart' of that which is interpreted. For me that implied 'getting to the heart' of both what it is like to be ni-Vanuatu and to wear sunglasses, and what it is like to be a cross-cultural health worker. But remember before, I explained that 'all interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others. Even when knowledgeable, sensitive, fluent in the language and able to move easily in an alien cultural world, good ethnographers still have their limits, and their analyses always are incomplete' (Rosaldo 1989:8). This is why it is important for the audience to also be given as background and 'experience of the experience' in order to form a 'critical consciousness' (Denzin 1997) and make decisions about the ethnographer's work. John Van Maanen (1995) characterises three 'moments' in ethnography. Field-work, the first moment, represents the process of collecting information about culture. Textwork, the second moment, involves the construction of some representation, usually textual, of the culture studied. Headwork is the third moment and it is the reading and reception of the text or representation. You see ethnography can

appeal to my varied audience because of its ability to "illumine the human condition in a way which lays open both human strength and frailty in an intellectually accessible manner (Perry 1995:6)."

"Well I certainly got a sense of that," said Brian. "I was also taken by the issue you raised about developers ignoring the local knowledge. Fancy building a road and having it wash away. That's really money down the drain!"

"Yes," I replied, "and unfortunately it wasn't the only example we saw in Vanuatu. So when I explored it further I found that the literature has many examples of development projects that have failed to take seriously indigenous people's knowledge and is equally full of examples of projects that have failed because they failed to do so. Berger (1974) explains that 'those in power may have a genuine desire to allow subjects of policy to participate in the decisions that have to be made, through whatever modalities of political participation. This desire may well extend to what I have called 'cognitive respect'—a recognition that no outsider, including the outsider who possesses power, is in a position to 'know better' when it comes to the finalities of other people's lives. Nevertheless, the exercise of power means to make choices—and inevitably, these choices will supersede the wishes and definitions of reality of others whose power is less' (Berger 1974:224). In this instance it appeared that the choice to go ahead with the road's construction, disregarding the ni-Vanuatu warnings, had resulted in thousands of dollars being washed down the hill in a very short space of time. As Harrison (1988) writes, 'for anyone remotely connected with Third World countries, bureaucracies need not necessarily be related to efficiency, and money, far from being emancipatory from ascriptive bonds, may equally serve to reinforce them' (p35)."

"So how is this problem overcome?" asked Alice.

"I don't know if it can ever be, as long as we have cross-cultural workers, external funding and direction, there will be conflicts, some having to choose between the lesser or greater of two evils. Conquergood (1988), describes the interaction and perception of Western officials and workers with the Hmong refugees and suggests 'that so much focus on the 'dirtiness' and 'difficulty' of the Hmong is actually an expression of Western expatriates' uneasiness when confronted with Difference, the Other. A Western aid official's encounter with the Hmong is a confrontation with radical difference—in cosmology, worldview, ethos, texture of everyday life' (1988:195-196). See, the Western expatriates were choosing one interpretation over another based on their worldview. If they were engaged long enough and were prepared to subject their own world view to the same scrutiny as they subject their subjects then, maybe, better decisions and outcomes would result."

"This appears to involve the issue of time again," said Alice. "It takes time to become engaged."

"Yes, but it also takes a change of heart. It involves taking risks, and accepting responsibility. You see, in attempting to alleviate the problems of eye health I was faced with choices about when to be engaged and when to step back. As I think I mentioned before, 'both engagement and detachment can be dehumanising if carried to excess. The enragé fanatic is no less repulsive figure than the theoretician to whom human anguish is nothing but an occasion for intellectual exercises. Reason imposes moral obligations no less than compassion, and to be fully human surely requires reflection as well as action. It is foolish, therefore, to absolutise either engagement or detachment. Rather, one ought to ask the appropriateness of either attitude to specific human activities' (Berger 1974:215)."

"Seems we're back to talking about moral and ethical decisions again," commented Brian.

"We are. 'Qualitative researchers are chronically and uncomfortably engaged in ethical decisions about how deeply to work / with / for / despite those cast as Others, and how seamlessly to represent the hyphen. Our work will never 'arrive' but must always struggle 'between' ' (Fine 1994:75)," I explained.

"So this is a new challenge for social science?" asked Brian.

"Yes. Denzin (1997) wrote a book titled Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century. He suggests that ethnography has passed through five moments and is at the crossroad of the sixth."

"What are the moments?" asked Brian.

"The first was the traditional, about 1900 to World War II. The second the modernist, from World War II to the mid-1970s. The third he calls the blurred genres (1979-1986). The fourth is the crisis of representation, about 1986 to the present, and the fifth moment is now and the sixth is the future (Denzin 1997)."

"So it sounds like social science methods are constantly changing in response to the changes in the world," said Brian.

"Not so much changes in the world, but in us, as people. Culture is dynamic and our ways of inquiring into and writing about cultures need to be dynamic too. In order to fully investigate experience researchers need research methods that 'mirror life as the authors move between fluctuating levels of absorption and detachment, managing multiple selves and roles, even when their own experience is the object of investigation' (Ellis and Flaherty 1992:6)," I explained. "This involves experimentation in genre, voice, narrative and interpretative style," I concluded.

"So what will be ethnography in the sixth moment?" asked Brian.

I stood, walked over to the side table, picked up a book lying next to the now jumbled papers and thumbed through it. I turned back to Brian and Alice and began, "Denzin (1997) says, 'An ethnographic epistemology that goes beyond vision and mimesis is required (see Tyler 1986:130). This will be an evocative epistemology that performs, rather than represents, the world (Tyler 1986:136; see also Bochner and Ellis 1996). Interpretative ethnographic writing in the twenty-first century will move closer to a sacred and critically informed discourse about the moral, human universe (Clough 1992, 1994)' (Denzin 1997: xviii)."

"You know that's what we've been doing?" said Alice.

"What?" said Brian and I together in stereo.

"We've been performing the world," said Alice. "We've acted out scenes from our lives. And we've interacted with each other and the paintings according to our interpretations and experiences both of the paintings and our lives."

"I guess we have," I said, as Brian nodded his agreement.

I placed the book back on the side table and walked back to my chair.

"It seems to me that this story has a lot to say about change too," said Alice. "There is the change that the engineers brought in putting in the road, the changes in eye health that you wished to bring about, the change in government the driver wants, and the changes in the hospital system that the nurse practitioner fears."

"I guess that has a lot to do with risk and responsibility. We usually feel at risk when put in unfamiliar or changed circumstances, and if we are the ones placing others in those unfamiliar circumstances then we must accept responsibility for our actions. Berger (1974) argues that 'there can be no social change without costs. The questions to be asked with intense seriousness are just what the particular costs are, who is being asked to pay them, and whether the putative gains make these costs acceptable. There can be no social change without disturbances in the order of meaning. Again it is necessary to ask the same questions concerning the relation of costs and hoped for gains' (p223)."

"Those questions are sometimes difficult to answer. How can we make those choices?" asked Alice.

"Hughes (1994b) a medical anthropologist, ponders similar questions and concludes, 'I do not wish to suggest that as development appears to be a health hazard, communities should revert to their previous lifestyles. However, I wish to stress the need for informed participation in the development process. Disempowerment, as a result of ignorance, cannot be afforded' (p243)."

"So once again we are back to spending time getting to know people, understand situations and encouraging participation and partnerships," said Alice.

"And accepting the risk and responsibility that that demands!" I added.

"I was interested in how you became involved in sourcing car parts," said Brian.

"Why didn't the department know the parts were there? Why didn't they use their resources better?"

"An Asian Development Bank report (1997:250) said that 'the quality of health services from Government health centres and hospitals is seriously affected by a variety of short comings including: poor management that resulted in frequent shortages of essential supplies; low maintenance of equipment and facilities; inefficient use of human and other resources and a weak system of collection and analysis of information necessary for monitoring and for good management', which serves to explain why they may not have known about the parts."

"So what is the difference between the aid post where you first visited and the health centre where you stayed?" asked Brian.

"Vanuatu has a four-tiered system comprising 162 aid posts at the village level, 70 dispensaries, about 20 health centres and 5 district hospitals. The staff at a village aid post is given a six-week government training course to enable them to provide treatments for minor ailments, promote family planning, provide health education and detect and refer serious complaints to dispensaries, the first level of government provided health care. Aid post workers are not paid regular salaries; they are effectively community volunteers working from community-built facilities. 'A health centre is usually run by a nurse practitioner, with one or two nurses as assistants, has 10 to 12 beds and provides inbirth services for mothers. It serves a population from 3,000 to 8,000 persons. A health centre supplements the services provided by the dispensaries in the area it serves, as well as providing beds for inpatients' (ADB 1997:245)," I explained.

"So that nurse practitioner would have been looking after aid posts, dispensaries and his health centre?" asked Alice.

"Yes."

"I noticed that when you were working at the aid post the nurse assisted with the questionnaires. I was wondering how that related to what we talked about earlier with the direct questioning not being part of their culture?" said Alice.

"The questionnaire was really a result of being a requirement of the institutional ethics approval process. It did help me learn to ask the questions in Bislama so it acted as a guide for me, but it was quickly apparent that people were generally unable to write their own responses and that 'oral communication strategies were often more valuable for understanding the nature of people, within oral-based cultures, than are methodologies dependent upon written responses' (Stanfield 1994:184). Also, as I had drafted the

questionnaire based on Western direct questioning techniques, it would have taken most of the day to answer, as the recorders read the question, added their own preamble to make it more culturally acceptable, then discussed it with the patient. It was tiresome and difficult for the patients."

"So what did you do? Did you rework the questionnaire or just ignore it and use blank cards as you did in the story?" asked Alice.

"I reworked the questionnaire. Cut down the number of questions and used many of the techniques we discussed earlier. I couldn't go and get formal institutional ethics approval as I was in the islands at the time. So I had to make the ethical decision to embrace a more culturally appropriate means of inquiry. I felt okay about it though, because ultimately its concern for the subject/patient was more ethical than the original, and resulted in the collection of richer data about eye health practices."

"I was interested in the way they went about putting things on an account. That seems very capitalist, not something you would expect in the islands," commented Brian.

"I agree, and as I mentioned in the story I wasn't sure what to do about their requests. However, as I found out later, it appeared that putting things on an account was common practice and was linked to the sharing and redistribution of goods. The amount of time taken to repay was similarly calculated as under rules of reciprocity and gift exchange. But unfortunately it also means that 'many businesses have a very short life because relatives either 'borrow' or 'buy on credit' from the business, assuming that they will never have to settle their debt because they are entitled to a redistribution of the goods or of the income. To argue that this is illegitimate because their relative is operating a business is seldom effective, since they do not accept what Western people take for granted, that business activities are separate from social responsibilities. If development programmes are planned on the assumption that those involved will accept the logic of the separation of business from social life, they will very often be subjected to various forms of 'corrupt' practice. Stock will disappear, capital will be dissipated and those in responsible positions will be subjected to a wide range of pressures to conform to community redistributive expectations' (Geddes 1994c:97). This became an issue later in the preventative eyecare project when we needed to maintain a continual supply of sunglasses. The money was needed to be re-invested to purchase more sunglasses to ensure sustainability of the project."

"You were charging for the spectacles weren't you? Was payment for those a problem too?" asked Alice.

"Not as much. Most of the glasses dispensed were donated to the project, and we made a charge for spectacles on the advice of the ni-Vanuatu who assisted with the clinics. They felt it gave people more dignity to pay for things than to take a handout. When problems

arrived with payment we adopted the practice of putting it on an account. They owed the aid post, the church, or whatever the money. In this instance, the nurse kept a record of payments and collected the money."

"But how did she get the money to you?" asked Brian.

"She didn't. We advised the island co-ordinator, they collected the monies and forwarded them to a selected community project. See, on each island we donated the monies collected back to community projects. On islands where there was little or no cash we adopted a barter system and people exchanged goods of equivalent value of the spectacles. These included live chickens, yams, shells, mats, and handcrafts. We took the items back to Vila and sold them and donated the money to community projects."

"Hey, I like that," said Brian barely controlling his laughter. "Imagine telling people you work for peanuts!"

Alice and I laughed as we watched tears trickle down his face.

"Or trying to calculate the fringe benefits tax[7] on a grass skirt!" blurted out Brian between laughs. "Or..."

"Okay Brian, we get the point," said Alice patting him on the back. Brian breathed deeply and wiped his eyes but his stifled laughter continued.

"You know it makes you think about what different perceptions of 'Self' we have from them. I mean if you took something from my shop, I would think you were stealing from *me*. I wouldn't see it being yours to take anyway," said Alice.

"Yeah, and if I ran over your chicken I'd be damned if I'd pay you compensation," said Brian. "You should have kept it off the road."

"What about paying for a relative's glasses?" I asked.

"They should do that. They have their own income. Whether they get glasses, or spend the money on something else, is their business not mine." He stopped himself. "You know that does sound selfish. I guess we are a very self orientated society."

"We are. 'The Western individual knows himself by reference to a private, unrevealed centre, which has no direct relationship to roles in society and is not finally dependent on a network of social relationships' (Geddes 1994c:82). As you said it's *their* business not *yours*. You have a clear sense of boundaries, responsibilities, and individual rights, such as privacy. 'What has been created in Western industrialised societies is an independent individual who has no strong allegiance to any social group and can be directed into any range of activities, and places without feeling any strong sense of social dislocation' (Geddes 1994c:80). But 'for Pacific Islanders, much of what determines a person's behaviour, feelings and self-perception, is environmental, consisting in the physical and

social relationships that nurture a growing child and form the context in which the adult acts' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:7)."

"I think that their way has lots of advantages," said Alice. "I see similar relationships amongst some traditional ethnic families. They have a real sense of community, which supports its members."

"I have a family I deal with at work, and I'd call it more control than support. It seems the young daughter can make very few decisions for herself, and the son was given a set of photographs of girls his parents had decided were acceptable. And from these he had to choose which girl he would court and marry. I don't call that support. That's control," said Brian sternly.

"A matter of interpretation," I smiled.

"A matter of morals," said Brian. "*My* right to make decisions which determine *my* life."

"Still a matter of interpretation," I countered. "Most 'non-Western communities do not share these Western concerns about coercive power of the state, community or family. The community has responsibility for the behavior of its members and individuals are subjected to community discipline when they behave unacceptably' (Geddes 1994c:96). 'People are not private persons with a right to independent action. They are first and foremost, members of the community, who are answerable to others for their actions' (Geddes 1994c:96). But it is an interesting issue; self and community. In a recent study on community, Adelman and Frey (1997) wrote 'all too often in the course of everyday life—at work, school, and even in our homes—opportunities for enhancing the quality of community life elude us' (p108). They acknowledge that 'longing for community is particularly poignant in 'the post-modern era' (1997:1) and that 'we are beset with no sense of place (Meyrowitz 1985), a saturated self (Gergen 1991), and an inability to conceive of the public good (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985, 1991). The forces of urbanisation, industrialisation, and technology, especially the mass media, are said to make it virtually impossible for people to connect meaningfully with others. In such a world, community bespeaks what we have lost and are trying to regain' (Adelman and Frey 1997:1)."

"Sounds like we can learn from each other. I see now why you asked in the story, 'doesn't sharing the burden of responsibility also bring a kind of freedom'?" said Alice.

"The people seemed willing to share what they had with you too," continued Alice. "You seemed to receive gifts of food in this story and I remember in the other stories you talked about gifts received as well."

"I must admit that initially I felt uncomfortable receiving gifts from people who to me seemed to have so little. But I came to see that hospitality is valued in their society. 'Food offered in a generalised way, notably as hospitality, is good relations, and where coming

to sociable terms with visitors is desirable, hospitality is an ordinary way of doing it' (Sahlins 1972:216). To not accept would be to reject not just the food, but the relationship."

"Is it then significant that you were given food?" asked Alice.

"I think so. 'Generosity is distinctly associated with food dealing' (Sahlins 1972:217). 'The character of goods exchanged seems to have an independent effect on the character of the exchange. Staple foodstuffs cannot always be handled just like anything else. Socially they are not quite like anything else. Food is life-giving, urgent, ordinarily symbolic of hearth and home, if not of mother. By comparison with other stuff, food is more readily, or more necessarily, shared. Direct and equivalent returns for food are unseemly in most social settings; they impugn the motives both of the giver and of the recipient' (Sahlins 1972:215)."

Brian was looking at his watch.

"Do you have to go?" I asked.

"No. It's just all this talk of food is making me hungry!" he replied.

"Well, let me assure you, my generosity does extend to feeding you," I replied. "What time is it?"

"Quarter to five," he replied.

"Heavens! The children will be in from after-school sports soon. Listen, do you guys want to go for a drive, explore the valley for a while and then come back for tea about five-thirty or six o'clock? You're more than welcome."

Alice looked at Brian, who nodded.

"That'd be great. Can we pick up some wine for dinner? Which would you prefer—red or white?" asked Alice.

"Red, would be great. You could try the winery just down the road."

Alice looked around for her handbag. Brian was standing by another painting.

"I want to talk about that one when we get back." He waved his hand towards the painting depicting a large jar of eyeballs, on a shop counter.

"Okay, if you're sure you have a strong stomach. That one's called **Spare Eyes,** and it doesn't make for pleasant post dinner conversation," I warned.

Brian laughed. "I've got a strong stomach!" he exclaimed.

We walked to the front door past the ornaments.

"I feel like they are becoming part of my experience now," said Brian. "We'll have to go to Vanuatu one day," he remarked to Alice.

"Come on," said Alice. "Karen's got a hungry hoard home soon. Travelling Tanunda will have to do for today."

I closed the door and on my way to the kitchen passed the painting "and daughter." I looked at them and thought, "I wonder what you're doing today?"

Notes

[1]. For internal flights all passengers are weighed holding their hand luggage, prior to being issued a boarding pass. The weight of passengers, baggage, and fuel is then calculated before take off at each destination.

[2]. Vanuatu is a non-contact culture. "Bodily contact is widely practised in some cultures, but allowed only under very restricted conditions in others. In non-contact cultures, bodily contact is confined to the family, apart from greeting and parting, and various professional actions, like those of doctors and tailors. Bodily contact outside these settings is taboo, and a source of considerable anxiety (Argyle 1982:66)." Although Argyle found that contact was permitted in professional actions, they still largely appeared to be a source of anxiety, especially for females, when the doctor was male.

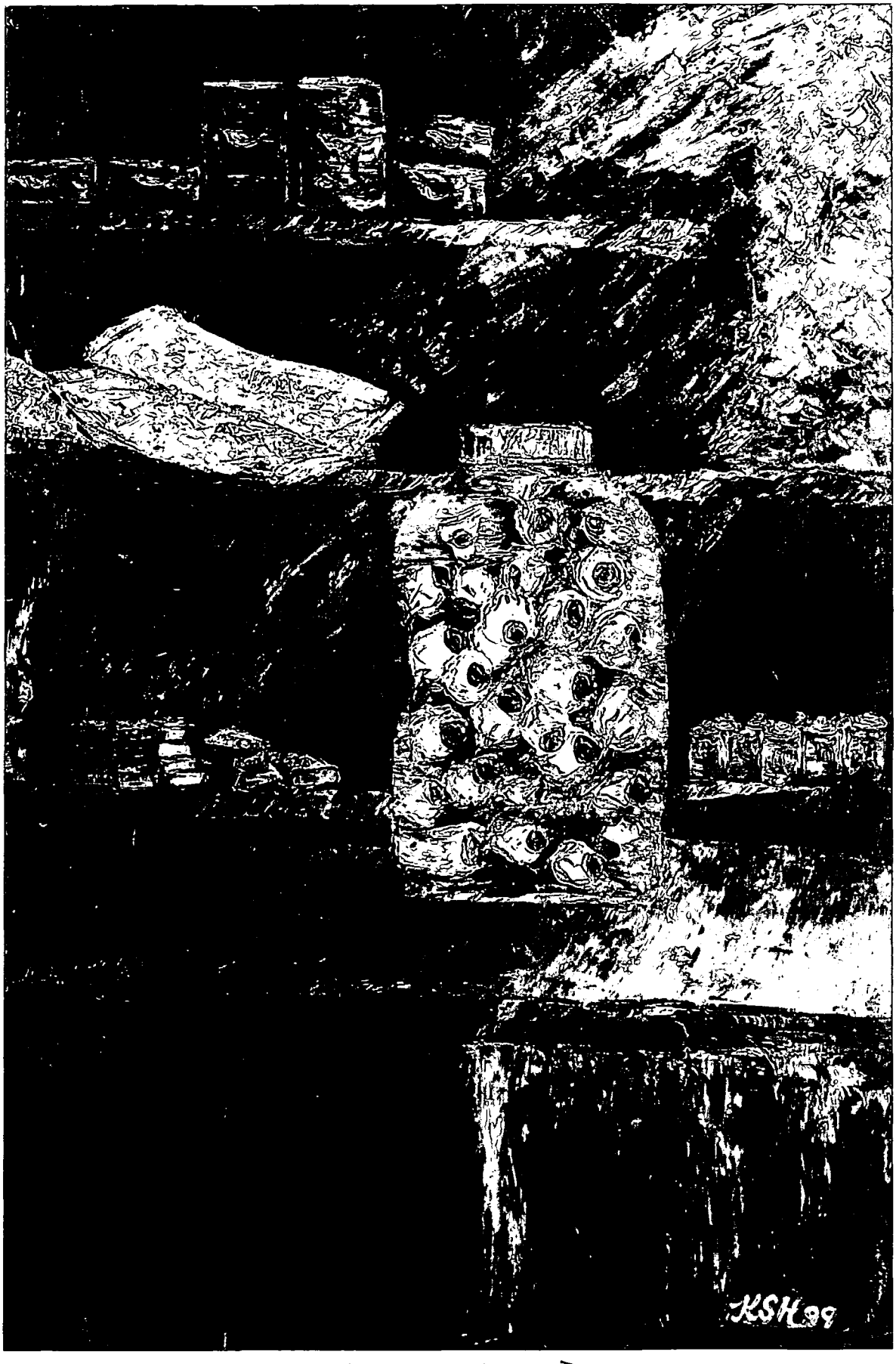
[3]. One of the major problems encountered in Vanuatu was communication. Getting messages out to islands and not knowing if they were received was a constant source of frustration.

[4]. A large conch shell with a hole in the end when blown produces a sound similar to the foghorn on a ship. It is blown to signal a community meeting. Other villages we visited which did not have a shell used old Oxy-acetylene tanks hung from large poles. They were then hit to produce a clanging sound like a bell. This was known as *kilim gong,* hitting the gong.

[5]. 'Vanuatu politics is a complicated affair, an interplay of local issues and personalities, emanating in part from centuries-old traditions and recent historical events' (Van Trease 1995:xiii). At the time of our visit Vanuatu was facing an important election in November 1995. In the first decade after independence Vanuatu had a period of political stability. 'However, in the 1990s the earlier favourable development eroded in two ways. Firstly, the political arm of Government has become increasingly involved in the day-to-day operation both of the central Government and the public sector entities. In Government, the system of ministerial cabinets (political appointments which are often unqualified) has become sizeable and inefficient. This undermines the professional delivery of public services and the performance of public entities. In the public entities, both staff and board appointments (often professional unqualified) have become increasingly determined by narrow political considerations. Secondly, during 1996, the political system itself became increasingly unstable and the year saw three different Governments and one major realignment. The rapidity of political change resulted in both discontinuity and lack of good governance; information accumulated under one government would be unavailable to the next, thus leaving civil servants unaware of earlier policy initiatives. Many boards were dissolved in early 1996 not to be re-appointed by year-end. Given the adverse political developments in the 1990s and the system where political support is rewarded through the granting of positions in the public sector appears entrenched, reforms will be difficult. Nevertheless, the major conclusion of this report is that political reform is the single most important requirement for Vanuatu to achieve improved social and economic performance' (ADB 1997:iii).

[6]. See also Scott-Hoy (1997).

[7] Fringe Benefits Tax was introduced in Australia in 1986. Any benefits provided to an employee which would otherwise be considered income to the employee, such as school fees and motor vehicles will assessed to the employer as Fringe Benefits Tax. The current rate is 48.5¢ in the dollar.



'Spare Eyes'

Chapter Five

No spare eyes at the store:

A story of changing the way we see

The steak sizzled as it dropped on to the hot wok and the aroma of oriental herbs and spices wafted through the house. As I turned over the strips with the spatula, the doorbell rang.

"I'll get it," Alexander called from the other room. A few moments later he returned to the kitchen with Brian and Alice.

"I see you've met Alex," I said as I tossed the vegetables in the wok. "Tea's nearly ready."

I turned to Alex, "Would you go and tell your brothers that tea's ready please?"

He nodded and left the kitchen.

"He's a big lad," commented Brian.

"And getting bigger," I added.

I enjoyed being with my sons. If we lived in Vanuatu he would already have left home to attend secondary school, and would be entering a world that was far removed from the one I knew in the village. I thought of the young boys we saw at the circumcision ceremonies, and how different their relationship with their mothers must be. I wondered how our culture had lost the 'rite of passage' which signalled the change of our young boys into men. Was that why so many teenagers had something to prove? Or why 'so many men in our society struggle with living life as a man' (Biddulph 1995:6)? 'If we look at older cultures we see immense and focussed efforts going into the raising of boys—rituals, teachings and processes which have only feeble equivalents in our culture' (Biddulph 1995:14). The education system in Vanuatu also meant that the young men often spent time in a liminal phase, not belonging to the *waetman's* world, nor the ni-Vanuatu.

"Where do you want me to put the wine?" asked Alice.

"Oh. There's an bottle opener in the second drawer down, if you could open it and then put it on the table, that'd be great," I replied.

The next few minutes were filled with organised chaos as the four boys bounded in noisily and made their way to their respective places at the meal table. I showed Brian and Alice to their seats and began to serve the meal.

"Where's Stephen?" Alice asked me as I placed the last plate of food on the table, and took my seat.

"In the Eye Bus. He'll be home around eight oclock, I guess."

We sang grace together and the children began to hurriedly devour their meal.

*****

The children were settled into their homework or preparing for bed. I packed the last of the dishes into the dishwasher and switched on the kettle. Brian and Alice were seated in the green room. I walked to the edge of the adjoining room and called "Coffee?"

"Yes, please," they replied.

As I entered the room with the coffee Brian remarked, "that painting is so bizarre. Eyeballs for sale amongst food items!"

"It's quite different from your other paintings," said Alice as she stood and came to pour out the coffee for her and Brian.

"I wanted to portray the slogan a student developed as part of a poster competition we conducted in secondary schools. 'Look after your eyes. You have two eyes no more. You can't buy spare eyes at the store'[1]. It was the slogan chosen for the preventative eye care programme. I thought it would be effective if I turned it around and portrayed a jar of eyes in a store as 'when an actual message is inconsistent with what is expected, active thought is triggered' (Parrott 1995:13)". I sipped my coffee then continued, "I also wanted to show that 'belief in a single, correct way of seeing, corresponding to a single and likewise correct way of representing, is of course untenable, since the disembodied eye/I simply does not exist' (Cavallaro and Warwick 1998:21)."

I walked over to the side table and picked up the story to accompany this painting. Juggling coffee in one hand and papers in the other I rejoined Brian and Alice.

"I thought it was to so repulse people that they'd value their eyes," said Brian squeamishly moving in his seat.

"Perhaps reading the story will help you understand," I said as I handed the story to Alice.

A squeal from the far room required maternal intervention.

"I'll be back in a tick," I said as I made my way quickly out of the room and the distant cry became more urgent.

"Do you want to read the story or shall I?" I heard Brian ask as I left the room.

It was followed by the shuffle of papers, as my guests settled to read once more.

*****

No spare eyes at the store

As my eyes adjusted to the dim light I could make out rough wooden shelves. One shelf was sparsely stocked with tinned fish, tinned beef, white rice, tea, and sugar. The shelf below had a few batteries, checked cotton tea towels, a note pad and envelopes, pens and a few torches. I recalled my conversation with the health nurse yesterday. She was worried about the people's health. She felt it was deteriorating as their local diet changed from freshly grown 'island food' to 'store food.' As more people turned their attention to making money through cutting copra and other Western cash crops, they had less time and land for their gardens which had previously supplied a balanced diet of 'island food.' So 'store food' was our equivalent of take away. White rice and tinned mackerel! Hardly a McDonalds Big Mac Burger, but the shift in diet seemed to be having the same effect; an increase in Western diseases.

"Good Morning, *Misis*," the man offered behind the counter.

"Good Morning. Me wantem one tin fish please. Hem how much?" I replied in Bislama.

Slowly he turned and took down the tin of fish from the shelf, turned it around, then turned it back, and put it down as he reached for another. He took down the smaller size and looked at it in a similar way.

"*Misis*, you wantem big one or small one?"

"Big one, please," I replied.

He picked up the tin and again turned it to one side then the other. Then he took down another tin and went through the same procedure. A young boy was leaning on the ledge of the small window, watching the white *Misis* in the shop. The man walked over to him and spoke to him in the local language[2]. The boy ran off calling out excitedly.

As I looked around the dimly lit store, my eyes settled on the batteries as a shaft of light highlighted their silver domes. I marvelled at the uses I had learned for them here. They were not just a power source. When depleted they became toys. I smiled as I recalled watching a group of people playing pentanque, having substituted batteries for the usual chrome balls, they tossed the batteries onto the ground and endeavoured to hit the kitty. My smile changed to a frown as I also recalled how easily batteries fitted into the eye socket. "Time me small, papa blong me threw battery. It kilim eye blong me", explained the teenage boy who now had vision only in one eye. He was not the only patient we had seen who had been a victim of batteries.

"You wait, *Misis,*" the shop assistant smiled as he turned back to me. I nodded and continued to gaze around the small store. I thought of the speed with which we purchased items at home. Hop out the car, whiz in, anytime of the day or night, grab the items required, toss them in a trolley,

proceed to the checkout, have the items scanned, pack them, swipe the card for payment and you're out of there. Having to choose between endless brands, sizes and packaging, trying to locate an item in amongst the multitude of grocery and other items on display, or the occasional inability of the scanner to read a barcode, were the only things which slowed the process.

"*Misis...*"

I looked up at him.

"...You wife of *dokta blong ae?*" he asked. As I raised my eyebrows to indicate I was, I guessed what was coming next.

He put his hand to his eyes and rubbed them.

"You tell me. Time I go in sun, my eyes run and run all time. I no see well." He paused, and I raised my eyebrows to show I understood.

"Also, me got dis white something. Hem growing on eye," he leaned over the counter and pulled down his bottom eyelid.

I had already noticed the large, reddish pterygium growing on his left eye, but now it was being offered to my attention across the counter! I leaned forward to take as closer look. It was not necessary for diagnosis, more because I knew he wanted me to 'really' see it.

"Mmm. Name of it; pterygium. It feeds on the *rabis laet*[3] in the sun. You must put a sunglass, it blocks *rabis laet* and stops it growing big one. Also, sunglass blocks wind and dust. They make it sore."

He looked down as I spoke. Funny how you get accustomed to people not making eye contact during conversations, I thought as I continued. "Suppose you no put the sunglass, time you walk about in sun, it grows big one, then your eyes will not see well."

He looked up and said, "My friend went long hospital and doctor cut it off."

I cringed at the thought of having anything near my eye. Even applying mascara on rare occasions was an effort for me.

"Yes, doctors can cut off pterygium, but after, it very sore. Sometimes, track of knife leaves a scar and plenty times it grows back again." I try to make it sound like an experience no one would want to go through.

"I think it better to block sickness, before it grows big," I said reciting the words I had said so many times before.

I was surprised to still hear the passion and enthusiasm in my voice as I was getting very tired after having worked in clinics for nearly ten days straight. My days began early, with us rising about 5.30am. Two young girls brought fresh local bread to the door about fifteen minutes later. The kettle boiled, tea was made, and the bread eaten. As we washed the dishes in the bright blue plastic bowl

outside the house, the children could be seen making their way to the school swinging their aluminium pails full of rice or yam for lunch. Many have walked an hour or more to reach school by 7.30am. The *trak* would collect us about the same time as school started to take us up the track to the health centre or village. We would retum about dusk and head to the beach for a swim. On the way home we'd stop at the store, which was open for an hour or so each morning and each night for supplies of fish and rice. Returning to the house, we'd light the hurricane lamps, fetch water from the tank, and boil the water for baths.

From the galvanised "bathroom" I could watch the last rays of the sun sink below the horizon as I stood in the aluminium bowl, scooped up cups of warm water from the bucket on the coral floor, and poured it over my tired body. A fresh dress for the night and it was time to serve up the meal of rice and tinned fish, fresh *pamplimus*[4] sliced for dessert. After tea the children fell into bed, and Stephen and I would settle on the veranda outside for a short time to discuss the day, sort through papers, record takings and prepare for tomorrow. By the flickering light of the hurricane lamp I would write copious notes of the day's work, of what I had leamed and what I still needed to know. Whilst a strain visually, it helped to ease the mind, still it, before attempting to sleep.

"Some people tell me, sunglass makes eyes no good," he said slowly. "One friend tell me after he puts sunglass he no can see good."

"Sunglass protects eyes. It no spoil eyes. I think maybe he puts sunglass and walk about in sun, after takes off sunglass, and sun feels too strong. Eyes cry like before. He think sunglass spoils his eyes. Its all same as walking about at night. Suppose one *trak* comes. Lights from *trak* make eyes sore. Before when eyes in dark, they not sore. When light comes they sore. Man forgets eyes stop sore before he wore sunglass. Sunglass no spoil eyes. Sun spoils eyes." I hoped he could understand what I was getting at.

He leant on the wooden counter and looked across the room into the darkness, then he turned his head towards the light coming in from the window. As the bright light entered his eyes he screwed them up tightly and ran his hand over his furrowed brow. He was checking out my explanation by moving his eyes from dark to light.

"You got sunglass?" he asked.

"Yes. Come to the clinic, then the doctor can check your eyes too."

The young boy retumed and spoke to the man.

"Big tin fish, 300 vatu," he said.

I took out my purse and paid him. He dropped each of the gold coins individually into the till, and handed the tin to me.

"Thank you, *Misis*."

"Thank you," I replied. "See you at clinic."

*****

The clinic was held in a large thatched building, the *nakamal* or community house, built in a central position in the village. Some pigs wandered across the grass in front of the building. A dog yelped as it received a hefty kick from its owner for trying to come inside with him. It backed off yelping only to have a stone thrown at it for making too much noise. The people laughed at its cries. I cringed, and I thought of my beautiful, well fed and cared for dogs. I wondered about all the money that was spent by the RSPCA and prevention of animal cruelty in my country[5]. Should people instinctively know better, or was it just another example of a different culture and different order of things? If it was, then should people's cultural backgrounds be considered in animal cruelty cases? Indeed, could their acts be considered cruel?

I made my way through the people and inside. It was cool and dark as I spread out the spectacles in their numbered boxes ready for dispensing. The men were dressed in shorts and cotton shirts or T-shirts, some bearing logos or slogans from my world not theirs. The clothes were often sweat-stained and faded, many in disrepair. They stood or sat in the shade of the trees, talking to each other or just watching. The health nurse sat on a roughly sawn log seat, taking patient histories. The old men were ushered to the front of the group, so they would be the first seen by the doctor.

In another group, seated under the galvanised awning to one side of the *nakamal*, were the women. They wore Island Dresses, but not the bright, clean ones I had seen in Vila. These were faded and well worn, the ribbons tatty or missing and I was conscious how fresh and bright my Island Dress was in comparison.

The men came in and sat along the wall on the wooden benches. The women stayed outside initially, but gradually came in after some of the men had moved out. A six-year-old boy sat with his father on the wooden bench waiting for his turn to see the doctor. He had not been able to see out of his left eye since an older boy had thrown a green mango at him, hitting him in the eye. One of the first patients was a man who described himself as "seventy something." This was not uncommon, as many did not know their year of birth. His right eye was badly scarred. He had been travelling in an open truck when an insect had flown into his eye and caused swelling and later infection. Now he had very little vision in that eye. "You must put sunglass to protect other eye," I advised. He smiled and said he really just wanted reading glasses today. As I found him a pair and fitted them I wondered what was it about sunglasses no one liked. I wished I knew.

"*Misis*, my eyes sore time I walk about in hot sun," said the man seated next to the table.

"You got sunglasses?" I asked in reply, already having guessed the answer.

"No got, *Misis*. Me no like putting sunglass," he answered in a whisper.

"I think many people here no like them," I stated hoping he would continue and perhaps tell me why.

"Yes, you right, *Misis*."

I waited. He said nothing more.

"I think eyes of many people here would stay better if they put sunglasses time they work in sun," I continued my crusade.

He looked away.

"Maybe you take these and try outside," I said, hoping a demonstration might convince him. Maybe they were just frightened of the sunglasses dark lenses. Many patients talked about having 'dark eyes' when they meant their vision was bad. Perhaps they thought the sunglasses would make their eyes stay dark. If a few people would try sunglasses, would it alleviate the fear?

"Okay, *Misis*. Thank you." He took the sunglasses and went to the door.

I sensed it was more to be polite to the white lady than because he really wanted to try them. He did not put them on. I watched as he raised them level with his face and peered through the darkened lenses, then took them away and screwed up his eyes.

He repeated this action several times before another younger man approached him. He passed the sunglasses to the younger man who tried them on straight away. The younger man stepped outside and walked around. A sort time later he came back inside and spoke to my patient. The two of them made their way through the crowd of people and purchased the sunglasses. As they left the *nakamal*, the younger man was confidently wearing the sunglasses. My patient was walking slowly behind. Why was it the younger man could wear the sunglasses but not the older? Was his status something that prevented him from wearing them? Surely the younger man should have conformed too, after all they both lived in the same community. I made a note on his sheet of what I had just seen.

I turned to assist my next patient. She was a large, jovial woman, with thick, curly greying hair. I took the sheet from her. Right eye. Balance: Little or no vision. I looked down at her sheet where we had asked her to *storian*, that is, tell about her eyes.

'Long time ago, my husband hit me in the head with a piece of wood," I read.

I tried not to recoil at the thought. I knew domestic violence was a problem here, but I did not realise how widespread and how often I would encounter its victims.

"Oh sorry," I said using the traditional expression of regret, "your husband spoiled your eye."

"It long time finished," she answered. "He's dead now."

I didn't know whether to say I was sorry to hear that or I was glad. We chatted about her family as I found her a suitable pair of spectacles. I received her payment, shook her hand, and took the next sheet.

It was getting late in the morning and inspite of the number of patients I had already seen the line did not seem to be decreasing. I greeted the next patient, another elderly woman. Left eye: Balance: Little or no vision. I looked at her face. She had a thick white scar across the left eye.

"Your eye is no good," I said to open the conversation.

The woman raised her eyebrows and smiled. "One pikaninni stuck me with knife. Long time finished."

I had seen many small children running around with knives in their hands. It seemed it was part of growing up. Learning to carry a small knife at first then later the larger, heavier bush knife. I asked how it happened and she told me how she was caring for the small child whilst her mother was at work in the gardens. Whilst they were seated on the ground, the playful child had accidentally cut her eye with the knife. It had swollen up and been very sore. It wept for several days. When it did not get any better washing with traditional leaf medicine, she had walked the many miles to the health centre. The nurse had given her some tablets, but had told her the eye was no good. It was too late to save the vision.

I expressed my sympathy and fitted her with some glasses that enabled her to read with the other eye.

"Oh. Misis. *Numba One!*" she exclaimed.

I smiled as the warmth of gratitude spread throughout my body, overcoming the pain in my back and legs from standing too long in one position on a hard concrete floor. She was so thrilled at being able to read her Bible again, and she continued to thank me over and over. As she took my hand and held it tightly, she turned and said with her deep, soulful voice, "God bless you, *Misis.*"

And at that moment I felt I was.

I watched as she walked hunched over on spindly legs across the room. Although frail looking, she seemed to have a great deal of strength in her body. How different old age was here. Not for these people years of leisure and retirement. She would probably still help cutting copra, weaving mats with strong fingers, preparing food, cooking and selling *laplap*[6] in the small, local market. Life was hard, but at least you were never redundant, or packed off into a strange home to await your fate. You lived, worked, and died in your village among your people. Even those who moved to urban areas usually stayed within their village groups, under the watchful eye of village 'urban' chiefs.

"*Misis.*" I turned to see a young man of about twenty, waving a sheet at me. His right eye was shut and the eyelid sunken.

"Misis. *Dokta* said you tell me where I get glass eye," his voice was full of expectation.

I looked at his sheet. Following an injury to his eye during a fight, surgeons in Vila had removed his eye. He had not been fitted with a conformer or glass eye. I did not know if it was too late to do

anything. I gave him the name of the field worker who had been in contact with a glass eye manufacturer in Brisbane. Maybe they could get a conformer sent and get the surgeon to fit it. I told him that he would have to go to Brisbane in Australia and stay for four to five days while the eye was made. It would cost him about 60,000 vatu for the eye. Deep down I knew this would all be impossible for him but went through the motions anyway. There was nothing else I could offer. To lose an eye here was to look deformed for life.

I thought back to the young boy we had seen earlier that week. He had been born without an eye and his other eye had little vision. It was thought his mother had broken a *tabu* during pregnancy. She had eaten a *tabu* food and that action had resulted in damage to the child.

The morning wore on and the line of patients was seemingly endless, as were the stories they told. I was getting a picture of a group of people for whom eye damage was an accepted part of life. Many people had bad pterygia—thick, white growths which grew across the white of the eye and encroached on the dark brown iris, looking like a lump of meaty fat that had been smeared on the eye. Seeing so many of them made me want to do something about it. Did they feel the same way and just not know what to do about it? Had they tried and failed? That they were coming to us for help seemed to indicate they did want to do something, just not wear sunglasses.

Meanwhile, I walked over to where Stephen was talking to a patient seated on his refracting trolley. She had a large pterygium growing on her left eye.

"What do you think caused this?" he asked.

The young girl looked down shyly at the floor and spoke softly, so softly we could not hear her clearly. One of the field workers came in and assisted. The patient was more at ease talking to her.

"She says *masing* caused the pterygium," she said.

"*Masing*?" we asked in unison.

"It's a *kastom* potion, a love magic boys use to make girls fall in love with dem. She say a boy put some on his lips, den blew it inside her eye, when she was at night-club sometime ago," the field worker explained. "Afta da *terijium* grow."

Stephen wrote '*masing*' on the sheet under cause of eye problems and completed the examination.

I resisted the urge to ask if she did fall in love with the boy. As I retumed to the dispensing area, I wondered if that's what Shakespeare wrote about in Midsummer's Night Dream?

The girl came through to the dispensing area where I was fitting a patient with reading spectacles. She sat on the seat alongside my current patient, a woman in her forties, sheet in hand. I knew what the sheet would say. "Sunglasses."

How was I to justify her wearing sunglasses as a means of preventing eye damage, if she thought *masing* caused the damage? She was hardly going to wear sunglasses in a night-club so that the

masing couldn't enter her eyes. I believed that ultra violet light caused the growth of the pterygium. She believed something else. It was easy in a clinic situation to begin to see bodiless eyes, to forget that the eyes were part of a feeling person; a person who had a culture and a history very different from your own. If you mechanically went through the process of dispensing, prescribing, fixing, removing, and replacing, it was so much easier to cope with the experience. You could distance yourself from the histories, from the pain and suffering from the loss. You didn't have to face issues like this. You had read the manual; you fixed the problems accordingly. The manual didn't deal with what to do when the machine answered back, refused treatment, or threw the spanner back at you!

As I had done many times before, I would explain what I thought and let her decide. I would do it in a way that respected her beliefs and did not imply that mine were right and hers wrong. After all, there was still some debate over the cause of pterygium even amongst Western scientists. I sat next to her and began to *storian.*

She began to describe her symptoms and discomfort. I listened.

"It gets sore?" I asked gently.

"Yes, *Misis*, in wind," she turned her face towards me, but her eyes were down cast. "Sometimes, it cries and cries."

I stood up and went to the table. I need not debate the cause, impose one view over another. The wearing of sunglasses would relieve her physical symptoms of discomfort. I picked up the sunglasses and returned to sit next to her.

I passed the sunglasses to her. "Suppose you wear these when you walk about in wind and sun, they help stop the eyes crying or getting red and sore."

She fingered the sunglasses nervously.

I excused myself to go on to the next patient whilst she continued to sit, and finger the sunglasses.

"*Misis*," she called, as I was sorting through the boxes. I turned and went over to her.

"I'll try this. It's how much?"

"500 vatu," I replied.

She took out a small, orange and purple woven pandanas purse and lifted out a wrinkled note folded into quarters. I waited as she unwrapped each corner and straightened the note before she handed it to me.

"Thank you, *Misis*," she said as she shook my hand.

I fitted my current patient with spectacles, took her money, farewelled her, and turned to the next patient. I shook her hand, and took her sheet it was becoming almost automatic now. I tried to remind myself each was an individual. Each needed special attention. I battled to keep my mind alert and caring. It wanted to shut down, go on to autopilot and rest.

"You got a white something growing in your eye," I explained to the young mother, as her child nudged at her full bosom.

"You must put a sunglass, to stop it growing," I encouraged. "If it grows big one, too much, it will spoil your eye and you won't see good anymore."

She hung her head and spoke ever so softly. I had to squat down so my ear was near her face, to hear her.

"*Misis*, me gat *fraet* putting sunglass. All men they laugh, laugh at me." She looked up at me. I felt her pain. Trapped. Damned if she did, damned if she didn't. Laugh and laugh at her. Many women had told me they would not wear sunglasses because the men laughed at them. I recalled how I had seen adults laugh at children when they had suddenly begun to cry because of fear or hurt. The adult laughter had made the child return to the mother for comfort but she, too, was often laughing at the child. The child learned to stay within safe zones for fear of being ridiculed. Still, as a mother with children of her own, this woman too, was being held in a 'safe zone' by the threat of laughter.

"It's a big problem in Vanuatu. Plenty people have white somethings growing but no people want to put on sunglasses," I surmised to myself as much as her.

I smiled to reassure her that I did not think less of her because of her decision to reject my advice. I knew it was easy for me to say these things. I just didn't understand why it was so hard for them to do it; but I knew it was. I shook her hand as she left the hall; her child still snuggled against her and another hanging around her skirts.

I was reminded of what another young mother, a teacher, I had met last year in another village, had explained to me, "When I was a student in New Zealand, I wore sunglasses all the time. I don't do it here though. It's a different culture."

Sunglasses were a product of a different culture. Was it the sunglasses themselves? Was it the act of wearing the sunglasses? What was it about sunglasses that made them unacceptable to ni-Vanuatu?

The nurse assisting us came over a short time later.

"Willy, what is it about sunglasses the people do not like?" I asked.

"Ah, *Misis*, some people tink you *flas* time you put sunglass," he said, as if it explained everything.

Flas, I thought. I must find out more about *flas*, but how? Maybe I should try using the word and see what people said about it.

"Do you feel *flas* wearing sunglasses?" I asked knowing that he had been wearing a pair of sunglasses we had given him.

"That *rabis tingting*," he said.

"Rabis tingting it may be but it seems everyone believes it!" I thought.

"Sunglass make me look all same James Bond," he said.

I managed not to laugh. He looked nothing like the James Bond, I knew. Debonair, white-skinned and very English! But I had heard that said before. So was it the sunglasses that were a symbol of Western prestige associated with film stars, or was it the act of wearing them that changed the person's identity?

"Some people put sunglass to hide their eyes. Time they walkabout they look anywhere, at anyone and people no can see what or who they looking at," Willy demonstrated and then continued on "...and some people think you put sunglass time you drunk, or time you drink too much Kava. Too much partying," he smiled wickedly.

I wondered if that was why he had so gratefully accepted the sunglasses.

"Oh," I said thoughtfully. "So that was it! Sunglasses were used to change identity and conceal misdemeanours."

I wondered if that meant they were associated with disrespectful behaviour. Maybe that was why the husband had forbidden his wife to wear the sunglasses the eye surgeon had given her. What if, on my advice, she wore the sunglasses against her husband's wishes? She could be the next victim of domestic violence! I had not thought of that before.

As I continued to dispense reading glasses to the patients, I began to think about how we could, and whether we should, encourage more people to wear sunglasses. Was there a way to stop sunglasses being associated with disreputable behaviour? Was there a style of sunglasses that wasn't *flas*? What if there was a sunglass style that was associated with health? Maybe if they knew more about their eyes and the causes of the problems. But what if they had different ideas about the causes? Many had said that eye problems were caused by spirits, sorcery, breaking *tabus*, eating food from *tabu* places, food prepared by menstruating women. Sunglasses would not block these causes. I was beginning to see things differently as I looked at the problem of improving eye health from a new, ni-Vanuatu perspective. They were not the only ones who were visually impaired. The biomedical view of the world had clouded my vision. As my Western eyes were being opened, I saw new ways of understanding the factors that caused visual impairment. I could not turn a blind eye to them anymore.

Just then, an elderly man came for an examination. He had central cataracts, so had difficulties reading. No corrective lenses seemed to help him. Stephen brought him over to the table where I was dispensing. I was a long way behind and many people were sitting around the tables, papers in hand waiting for their turn. Stephen placed a pair of sunglasses on his face in the hope that they would allow the pupil to open further and improve his vision. There was a hush in the room as people watched the doctor and the old man. Stephen handed him the Bislama hymnbook.

"*Yumi sing blong presem...*" As he read the words, he looked up slowly from the book at Stephen. A wide smile was on his face. He took Stephen's hand and shook it vigourously.

"Thankyou, *dokta*. Thankyou, *dokta*," he repeated over and over, still shaking Stephen's hand.

The noise in the room increased as people gathered around the old man, who could read.

He was so excited.

Willy said they thought this was 'magic'.

I asked Willy if he would explain to them, in Bislama, why it was important to wear sunglasses. As he began to speak, many people gathered to hear what he was saying. The noise that had echoed through the building subsided and there was a hush as he addressed them. Following his speech, many people came to see and try the sunglasses.

These sunglasses, like the spectacles, had been donated to the project. There were many different styles and sizes. Men came first to try the sunglasses; among them was the man from the store. He found a pair he liked and paid for them. I demonstrated the correct way to wear the sunglasses so that maximum protection was gained from the lenses. They watched as I put the sunglasses straight on my face, so that they were close to my eyes.

"You look. No gap here," I said as I pointed to my cheeks and the sunglasses.

"...and here." Indicating my forehead and the sunglasses.

"Also, handles of the sunglasses must go straight here," I moved my hair to show how the temple fitted behind the ear, keeping the sunglasses secure and straight.

People then began to sit them on their faces and try more pairs in an effort to get them to sit straight. Once satisfied they came and asked me for my opinion.

Some people were lucky enough to find ones that fitted correctly, many were not. Fitting the sunglasses correctly was a problem. The temples were too short and the bridges often too narrow causing the glasses to sit at odd angles offering little protection. I made notes about the width of those that fitted correctly and began to check temple lengths. We would have to be selective with the sunglasses in order to get pairs that were suitable for their skeletal structure.

Some men came with their wives and bought sunglasses for both themselves and their wives. The women were reluctant to try on the sunglasses, preferring their husbands to choose for them. It was all done, very discretely, without drawing attention to themselves.

The sunglasses were purchased but most of them remained sealed in their plastic packets, taking up space in the bottom of the women's baskets. Clearly, convincing them of the value of sunglasses themselves was one thing, but to get them to wear them was going to be yet another.

The young teenagers of the village came and tried on the sunglasses, and were happy to wear the sunglasses perched at the end of their noses just for effect. They laughed and joked with each other. Slapping each other on the back and jumping around.

Was that making *flas*? I wondered what the older people thought. No one seemed to take much notice of their noise, but then no one seemed to take much notice of the children either. Largely they played with the older children and it was only if they got too loud or unruly they were hissed at and would run off. Babies were carried and cuddled, but it seemed once they were three or four, the children largely looked after each other. Children seemed to get what they wanted by throwing tantrums. Many a mother had handed over the spectacles she had just purchased when the child screamed at her. Children's desires seemed to be indulged by adults and older children. I knew, then, why so many patients had reported that "the *pikininis* had broken their glasses." If the *pikininis* wanted something, they generally got it, and if the *pikininis* broke the glasses, that was just the way things were. Still, I felt sad that it may mean that people would be unable to read for a long time as it was hard to replace the glasses, financially and geographically.

As I watched the children playing soccer on the grass outside, I wondered how many would grow up with good eyesight. There were so many damaged eyes. So many people suffering with red, running and sore eyes. Prevention had to be the answer, because you couldn't buy spare eyes at the store.

******

During the reading of the story I had rejoined Brian and Alice in the green room.

"Everything okay?" Alice asked as she looked up from reading the story over Brian's shoulder.

"Yes, thanks," I replied.

"Tell me," said Brian. "Why was wearing sunglasses so important? I understand about relieving glare and blocking UV. Is the damage worse over there? I would have thought they were better adapted having brown eyes and that."

"In hot, tropical and 'developing' countries, eye diseases will differ from that of other countries in four particular ways (Sandford-Smith 1986:1). Firstly, the number of blind or partially blind is high, and secondly, most of the blindness is either preventable or treatable. Thirdly, the pattern of tropical diseases varies from area to area, and fourthly, the medical resources are usually inadequate. Pterygium, cataract, and trauma were the major

causes of visual impairment in Vanuatu[7], and these are all either treatable or preventable. Vanuatu does not have a resident ophthalmologist and only one resident optometrist in Port Vila who caters largely for the expatriate population. As you heard before, it relies on visiting surgical teams sponsored by foreign aid. The Government of Vanuatu has expressed the desire to meet the need for primary eye care services (Vanuatu Second National Development Plan 1987) but unfortunately resources for development of the health workforce have been limited. Vanuatu's medical resources therefore continue to be inadequate to meet the demands placed upon it."

"Yes. I remember what you said about that doctor operating by hurricane light!" exclaimed Alice.

"What's a pterygium?" asked Brian.

"It looks like a lump of fat stuck to the eyeball. Short term exposure to UV radiation can damage the conjunctiva, while long-term exposure, as these people experience in their daily lives, can cause it to thicken, forming a fleshy growth known as a pterygium." I said.

"That sounds very uncomfortable," said Alice rubbing her eye at the thought of something growing on it.

"It can be. Especially in windy and dusty conditions, the eyes get red and sore. Pterygiums usually grow slowly, growing until it starts to cover part of the cornea when it can interfere with vision and become unsightly. The only treatment is surgical removal. It is a case where prevention is definitely better than cure." I explained.

"Why is it so common in Vanuatu?" asked Brian.

"It appears the condition is more common in people living close to the equator and is probably aggravated by sand and salt. It appears a major problem is the reflected light as it hits the eye from underneath where there is no protective brow (Nilsson 1996). In Vanuatu, where people spend a significant amount of time on the water, or on beaches consisting of highly reflective white coral, reflected light is a significant factor in UV damage. We found epidemiological data collected in our clinics showed a high incidence of impaired vision related to exposure to ultra violet radiation. So faced with these patient histories, normal optometric practice would be to encourage the patient to reduce their exposure to UV light through the wearing of sunglasses or a hat."

"So sunglasses or a hat can help prevent the formation of pterygium through blocking out the ultra violet light. So why not a hat if they wouldn't wear sunglasses?" asked Brian.

"A number of reasons. Firstly a good-fitting pair of sunglasses provide better UV protection as they screen out light reflected from surfaces below the eye, as well as light from above. Secondly, sunglasses also provide a barrier between the eye and the general environment reducing the risk of trauma."

"What aspects of their lives make them more susceptible to trauma?" asked Alice.

"Insects, dust, wind and other airborne particles, as well as dense foliage both overhead and alongside paths pose a constant risk to the eyes of ni-Vanuatu because of their lifestyle and climate. Patients had been hit in the eye with mangoes, papaw sap, other nuts and plant matter. Sometimes this was through walking or working in the dense vegetation, sometimes through playing around as children and sometimes through silliness or anger when objects were thrown. Some patients presented with injuries which occurred whilst employed. There are no work safety codes there. Welding with no eye protection. Working without eye protection had resulted in some patients with cement in eyes. In others chips of concrete, wood, petrol, and metal had injured eyes. One patient reported getting chemicals sprayed in his eyes whilst working on a plantation in Santo island. In the islands, communities often build their own housing from bush materials. They also build ocean-going canoes by hollowing out tree trunks. I watched one day as a group of men took turns in working on the project with curved adzes as the master canoe builder guided them. A group of men sitting close by watched this process. Wood chips were being blown onto the people by the sea breezes. They regularly rubbed their eyes as the chips caused irritation. No one wore eye protection. In the tropics, irritations and scratches quickly become infected and can cause permanent vision loss. Also in rural areas public transport includes riding in the tray of utilities. Boards are placed in the open tray to provide seating. Driving through the bush you can easily be hit in the eye by insects or dense bush encroaching into the rugged tracks."

"I remember that from your last story," said Brian.

"Knowing about their lifestyle is really important in understanding how the damage occurs and how to prevent it, isn't it?" asked Alice.

"Yes, I found it was. 'Societies do not literally make or produce bodies, but they can influence, shape and misshape them...our material environment, such as the urban landscape, the work place, or our foods, are influenced by our culture, social structure and relationships. And these in turn influence our bodies' (Freund, and McGuire 1995:4). As you've heard, there were factors within ni-Vanautu society that were contibuting to the high number of cases of visual impairment. I wanted to discover what they were and work towards change to bring about improvements in their eye health."

"That sounds like we're back to research that improves lives again," said Brian.

"Yes, and we're back to ethical and moral choices," I added.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, we are. See 'early in the century, 'twas noble to write of the Other for the purposes of creating what was considered knowledge. Perhaps it still is. But now, much qualtitative research is undertaken for what may be an even more terrifying aim—to help them' (Fine

1994:79). So questions about helping become important, such as, how I help without disempowering? How do I speak for the Other? Should I speak for the Other? And these questions are 'entangled with the ethics of knowing, writing, and acting' (Fine 1994:81) which in turn mean moral and ethical choices for the researcher/ practitioner."

"But all you were doing was trying to raise their consciousness about sun damage, and the need to wear sunglasses," said Brian, "How unethical can that be?"

"Well, firstly, I think that 'all worlds of consciousness are, in principle, equal, and therefore no one is capable of 'raising' anyone else's consciousness. This is a theoretical as well as a moral position. But there are also pragmatic reasons for this position: policies that ignore the indigenous definitions of a situation are prone to fail' (Berger 1974:182). And Geddes (1994) agrees, 'if we choose not to understand the communities within which programmes are to be implemented then we inevitably set out to make them over in our own image and the consequences for both programmes and people are likely to be most unfortunate' (p3)," I replied.

Brian cringed at the mention of moral positions yet again.

"I remember us going into that before," said Alice. "When you talked about the difference between your understanding of biomedicine and their perceptions of causes, and how all medical systems are socio-cultural and that Western medicine is 'not simply a natural phenomenon but an artefact of human society, founded in a cultural framework of values, premises and problematics' (Hahn and Kleinman 1983:306). I felt it was good to hear in the story about the patients, how they shared their stories with you and how you worked through those issues in practice."

"Yes, as Lock and Scheper-Hughes, two medical anthropologists, wrote 'the work of the medical anthropologist rarely stops at an ethnographic description of medical theories and practice but extends willy-nilly into the world of decision making and action. One of the biggest challenges for medical anthropology is to come to terms with biomedicine, to acknowledge its efficacy when appropriate while retaining a constructively critical stance. At the same time it is necessary to be critical, at times, of the cultural values and tradition of the societies under study. The medical anthropologist must tread lightly between the poles of cultural interpreter and cultural critic, defender of tradition and broker for change' (1996:44)."

"I could see you switching between those poles in the stories and paintings," said Alice, "as you tried to work out what to do about the traumatised eyes and bad vision."

"Yes, there was such a high incidence of trauma related visual impairment in data collected through our clinics[8], and I knew that wearing of sunglasses in daily tasks, could help reduce some incidence of trauma related visual impairment," I explained as I took a mouthful of coffee, "if not all."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Brian.

"Domestic violence is also a large problem in Vanuatu. It was not unusual to have women with vision impairment as a result of being hit. Children also had lost vision due to being hit by batteries, stones or other objects thrown by parents."

"That sounds awful," gasped Alice. "Did you really see a lot of it?"

"Yes, unfortunately we did. The problem is currently being addressed by women's groups and government through education campaigns being conducted in the schools, counselling and poster promotion through health clinics and aid posts."

My body cowered and I felt a familiar shiver down my spine as I remembered the horror I felt at some of the injuries and the stories that accompanied them.

"I recall in the story you realise that your advice might result in domestic violence and that shocked you," said Alice.

I nodded.

"The role Willy played in the story is interesting," said Brian. "He seemed to also act as cultural interpreter and broker for change."

"Willy was keen to assist us and as we had established a relationship with him, he trusted us and was willing to perform the role of cultural interpreter for me. There were times though, when even Willy was reluctant to answer questions, and again I had to be careful how I asked, when I asked and choose if I should ask him things.

"But he was keen to address his people about sunglasses when you asked him to," Alice prompted.

"Willy was respected in the community and was a good orator, a trait that is highly valued in Vanuatu. It was an opportunity to display that trait. Community meetings often involve long addresses to the people. It is an important part of the educative and decision making processes within communities. It is not surprising, therefore, that Willy was willing to make the speech and that the speech had an immediate impact on the people there. Also Willy was *man ples,* a man of the place, one of them,[9] which gave what he said clout. Jolly (1992) and Rodman (1992) two anthropologists, point out how difficult it is to separate place and ni-Vanuatu identity. 'Place, like voice and time, is a politicised social and cultural construct' (Rodman 1992:640)."

"I liked the way Willy tells you about sunglasses, how they change him into James Bond," said Brian with a laugh.

"You'd be surprised the number of times when people tried on sunglasses, that they were told by others they looked like a film star. Sometimes they were French film stars, more often James Bond! Sunglasses are associated with Western cinematic identities. To wear

them associates you with Western culture and so dissociates you from ni-Vanuatu culture," I explained.

I took another sip of the coffee.

"So are you saying that sunglasses appear to be a symbol of something?"

"Yes. In his work with Ndembu, Victor Turner suggested that, in their society, indigenous sacred symbols were 'associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behaviour' (Turner 1967:20). Although not indigenous, I think that sunglasses had become a major new symbol, with something of the carrying power of old ones. I just wasn't exactly sure what they were a symbol of," I said as I drank some more. "But also the act of wearing sunglasses could be thought symbolic. George Herbert Mead..."

"Now I've heard of him," interrupted Brian.

Alice glared at him.

"Great," I replied. "From his viewpoint 'reality is symbolic (or intersubjectively accomplished) experience. Realities are created and transmitted in the course of human interaction through the development of shared symbols' (Prus 1994:13), hence a gesture such as wearing sunglasses, becomes 'shared' or attains the status of a significant symbol when it becomes 'language' and can be understood by others and the self to have the same meaning. I felt that this was happening as most people 'read' the act of wearing sunglasses as making *'flas'*, and thought that sunglass wearing had something to do with changing or concealing identity."

"So the inferred behaviour here was that sunglass wearers are people who pretend to be something they are not?" asked Alice.

"Ni-Vanuatu sunglass wearers. Remember the teacher in the story who wore sunglasses when she was living in another country, but didn't in Vanuatu, because it was a different culture?" I reminded her.

"So it's not the object itself but the meaning attributed to it by the people," said Brian.

"Yes. That's what I'm getting at. People act towards things on the basis of the meaning the things have for them, and that meaning is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. Further, meanings are 'handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he/she encounters' (Spradley and McCurdy 1987:24)."

The look on Brian's face indicated he recognised that theme, but this time did not verbalise it.

"It could also be that sunglass wearing is associated with lack of respect for traditional authority," I suggested.

"How did sunglass wearing get linked to lack of respect?" asked Alice.

"I suspect because sunglasses are often worn by young people who have left the villages, gone to school in urbanised areas, and lived according to different cultural norms. When they return to the village, often with anger and frustration, they can be seen as 'rebels' until they conform again to village authority and customs. But it could also be that wearing sunglasses indicates the person has something to hide. As Willy said people who drink too much kava develop red eyes."

"What's kava?" asked Alice intrigued.

"It's a traditional drink made from the roots of the *Piper methysticum* shrub. There are many customary rules surrounding its growth, preparation and drinking. Usually it's only men who prepare and drink it but that varies from island to island. It tastes awful, kind of muddy and pungent. It makes your lips go numb, like after a trip to the dentist, and your body feels heavy, sort of sedated. It makes the eyes sensitive to light and can cause double vision," I said almost cringing as I remembered drinking it on several occasions as part of accepting our hosts' hospitality. The very thought of it made me gulp the coffee to bring a more pleasant taste to mind.

"And remember that sunglasses also conceal 'wandering eyes'," I said looking at Brian cheekily. "A woman told me that she always thought the men wore sunglasses so they could perve on other women without their wives knowing."

"Hadn't thought of that," said Brian clearly amused by the thought.

"Just as well," Alice teased as she reached over and dug Brian in the ribs.

"At the end of the story, you raise some of the problems with getting and keeping sunglasses," said Alice. "I found them fascinating!"

"I don't know about that," I said shaking my head. "The practical considerations sometimes seemed insurmountable."

"They were complex," Alice said. "Fitting, choosing styles, and getting access to a pair."

"And then keeping them," I urged. "Patients attending our clinics often had their spectacles and sunglasses broken by children. Replacement is difficult both in terms of access and finance," I said, catching the crumbs that dropped from the biscuit I was trying to eat politely whilst continuing the conversation. "Don't talk with your mouth full," a voice from my childhood reverberated in my head.

"So why don't they keep them away from the children?" asked Alice.

"I thought that too initially. But child rearing is quite different over there. Children are left a lot to themselves or in the care of other older children, who keep the children from harming themselves. Largely they learn boundaries from experience. I had not really had the opportunity to learn as much about child rearing as I would have liked. However, as my

young family travelled with me, some differences in my child raising experiences were contrasted with those of the carers of my children in the villages and with the parent and child interactions I witnessed and heard about."

"I was surprised that the ni-Vanuatu had such complex explanations for the diseases," said Alice. "The woman who had eaten from a *tabu* place and had a deformed baby for instance."

"Yes. The process by which people seek health is an active one. 'Both preventative care and the treatment of problems involve numerous decisions about the body and its needs' (Freund and McGuire 1995:189). 'Many people in the developing world very often do not differentiate precisely between magic, religion, and science' (Hughes 1994a:193). "In his study of the Gnau in the highlands of New Guinea, Lewis (1975) found that 'rules on correct behaviour, proper food, the dangers in objects, animals and trees, represent an ordering or a collection of precepts which one should follow to achieve the ideal, normal life' (Lewis 1975:199). If a person breaks these rules, it is expected that they will face severe repercussions, usually through spiritual intervention and an inability to achieve this ideal, normal state. 'The danger in breaking a *tabu* is inherent and automatic', writes Lewis (1975:197). I found a really interesting list of *tabu* foods for preganant women and their effects if eaten, in the Vanuatu National Nutrition survey report (1983)," I added.

"Oh, can I see it?" asked Alice.

Once again, I stood and made my way to the side table and the sprawled papers.

"You'll wear out a track in the carpet soon," teased Brian.

"You shouldn't ask so many questions," I retorted impishly as I rummaged through the pile of papers.

"Ah, here it is." I made made way back to my seat this time purposely taking another route around the table, so as not to wear the track.

Brian watched and laughed.

I handed the paper to Alice.

"Seafood, certain types of fish, shellfish, turtle, and octopus causes abnormalities in the baby, still birth or miscarriage, and sickness in the mother after birth. Chicken, egg, meat, and pig cause difficult childbirth, sickness in the baby after birth and sickness in the mother before birth. Flying fox and certain types of taro, yam, and banana cause difficult childbirth and sickness in mother before birth. Tinned fish causes stillbirth or miscarriage. Mango, watermelon, and pineapple cause sickness in the baby before birth. Coconut water, young coconut and navara cause sickness in the mother after birth," Alice read.

"What's navara?" asked Brian.

"A shooting coconut. They eat the pith," I explained.

"Wow, that list is so amazing. Their lives are so regulated and complex, yet we've been encouraged to see them as having simple, not complex ways of living," remarked Alice thoughtfully.

"There are cans of tinned fish in that painting," observed Brian.

"Mackeral," I replied. "You'll notice the rice, matches and batteries too. That seems to be a lot of what stores sell. Stores are usually only open early in the morning, maybe at lunch and for a few hours in the evening. The need for stores has arisen since people want to buy staples like tinned fish and rice, as they either use all their land for cash cropping or spend all their time in working for cash. 'While purportedly for the benefit of people, to facilitate their movement into the consumer economy, cash crops often have a flow-on effect causing malnutrition. This occurs when inappropriate amounts of time and/or land are devoted to the cultivation of crops for the world economy and insufficient time and land are devoted to subsistence farming' (Hughes 1994b:214)."

"Hence the comment in the story about tinned fish being 'fast food'," said Brian.

"Yes. Even when it comes to what people eat, 'modernisation in much of the world today presents itself as a process of Westernisation. As such, it is a process not only of social change but of cultural imposition' (Harrison 1988:110)."

"That's what you were trying to avoid in the health arena, wasn't it? Imposing a Western agenda?" asked Alice.

"Mmm. As I pointed out before 'it is necessary to work with communities, learning their models of health and change, and alerting them where appropriate, to the issues which their education has ill-fitted them to comprehend. If this is done skilfully and sensitively, it will enable them, both men and women, to have the power to make the best choices' (Hughes 1995:54). Many populations are 'facing choices that an earlier generation could not imagine' (Hughes 1995:54) and with which traditional or *kastom* ways may be ill prepared to deal. The ni-Vanuatu are being exposed to higher radiation levels than ever before due to a hole and thinning in the ozone layer, it is a challenge to them to find new, culturally acceptable, ways to protect their eyes. It is the task of the health researcher and the sensitive practitioner, working together 'to ensure that a narrow interpretation of medical practice is not imposed upon developing countries which have recently emerged from years of colonialism' (Hughes 1994a:191). Atu Emberson-Bain (1994) puts it rather succinctly, 'As Pacific Islanders we need to come up with our own vision of development: to ask ourselves whether our development direction should continue to be determined by foreign institutions and ideologies which promote economic ethics that have little relevance to, and in some respects directly contradict, our own heritage of development knowledge and practices' (p.x)."

"What does it mean 'economic ethics that contradict their heritage'?" asked Brian.

"Remember we spoke about sharing of property before. There are obligations of giving small property to relatives if requested. The problem of replacement of sunglasses is also involved in issues of ownership of small property," I added. "You can't say these sunglasses are mine I paid for them. That would be a Western economic ethic. The ni-Vanuatu one would be to give them to your relative as they had need and you could provide."

"You mean if my brother wants my sunglasses I would have to give them to him?" asked Brian incredulously.

"Not so much *have* to give them to him but feel *obliged* to give them to him. And not just brothers, but cousins, uncles and your extended family. Exchange of property and "gifts" 'is a direct expression of the manner in which sub-groups within segmentary societies of an archaic type are constantly embroiled with and feel themselves in debt to each other' (Mauss 1970:30)," I explained.

"Goddard (1998:63), in a study on the social construction of madness in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, also found 'communalism remains an overwhelming ethos, manifest in fierce descent group loyalty and a rigorous adherence to obligations to share resources and reciprocate gifts and assistance. Those who default on such obligations suffer at least a withdrawal of cooperation from their fellows, and more likely censure and punishment, sometimes direct, sometimes subtle'. It also helps to explain some of what we Westerners see as 'corruption' in government (See Geddes 1994b)."

"How's that?" asked Brian somewhat astounded by that statement.

"Well," I began. "Your social obligations do not vanish when you assume a powerful position in government. Also you were probably only elected into government, or educated enough to get a job in government, through the support and generousity of family. Once you have the power and wealth, you need to maintain and increase it while you can. One day you will need to repay others, or at least be generous to family to maintain that loyalty. You see, *outwardly* people adopt the ways of Western administrators but *inwardly* they are still very ni-Vanuatu. 'People learned to live on two levels. There developed an 'official' politically sanctioned level of community organisation and interaction and, in most communities, an unofficial, formally unrecognised set of interactions and understandings which provided the rationale for daily life in villages and countryside. As Western influence had diminished in the Third World countries, those previously 'informal', outlawed or unrecognised forms of organisation and understanding have re-emerged as important within communities' (Geddes 1994a:2)"

"Before you said this family wheeling and dealing was connected to problems of replacement. Are you saying if they break or give away their sunglasses they couldn't buy replacement sunglasses at local stores?" Brian asked.

"No. They may be able to get some *flas* styles, round eyes, you know 'John Lennon' glasses, at the Chinese stores in the urban areas but generally not in rural areas. I also found that the sunglasses made for Europeans do not fit ni-Vanuatu, as the skeletal structure is markedly different. The sunglass temples do reach behind the ears, and tip forward. That is the position perched at the end of the nose that has comes to be associated with making *flas*. We had to have sunglasses specially made to get the temple length and correct fit giving the best protection," I remarked.

"We keep hearing about this *flas,"* said Alice. "There seems to me to be more to it than we have heard so far. What is it?"

The front door opened, and was followed by the sound of pounding feet.

"Daddy!"

We looked out of the green room to see Vaughan leap into the arms of Stephen.

With Vaughan wrapped around him, he made his way towards us.

"Hi, guys," he said as he entered the room, and made his way over to kiss me.

Brian stood and Stephen shook his hand.

Stephen, with Vaughan now on his back, made his way awkwardly over to Alice to greet her too.

"We've been admiring your wife's work here," said Brian.

"It's fascinating," added Alice. "We've been reading the stories as we go. You have really had some experiences."

"That's for sure," Stephen agreed as he lifted Vaughan from his back and placed him on the floor.

"Come and I'll get your meal," I said. "Will you excuse us a minute?"

We started out the room, when I suddenly remembered Brian wanted to know about *flas.*

"Hang on a minute," I said as I walked to the side table and found the papers. "Here, this is the story about *flas*, and that's the painting there. The one with two heads."

Brian came over, collected the papers and went to stand in front of the painting. He looked back at Alice who was still seated finishing her coffee.

"Is it alright if I move it over there, so we can see it while reading," he asked.

"Sure. Just watch the edges where the paint is thick it may still be a bit tacky," I replied. "Keep it on the newspaper."

Brian gingerly lifted the painting. Alice grabbed the newspaper and positioned it near the sofa, then Brian gently placed the painting on it so it leant back against the coffee table.

Stephen and I made our way out to the kitchen with Vaughan, leaving them chatting quietly as they gestured at the painting.

Notes

[1]. John Tabi Guru, Ranwadi High School, Central Pentecost Island, Vanuatu

[2]. Although Vanuatu has three official languages, English, French and Bislama, it also has many other languages spoken by small groups on the different islands throughout the Archipelago.

[3]. *Rabis laet* in Bislama translates to rubbish light and was the way the students choose to explain ultra violet rays to people in their posters. They used the expression *rabis*/rubbish is everyday conversation to express things that are bad, or undesirable. I heard the weather forecaster one day explain that the rubbish weather would be around another two or three days, referring to the rain and high winds of the tropical low, slightly less intense than a cyclone, battering the islands.

[4]. *Pamplimus* is a large, sweet grapefruit with a pink interior.

[5]. RSPCA Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

[6]. *Laplap* is grated yam, manioc, cooking banana or breadfruit mixed with coconut milk and sometimes with meat or fish added also surrounded by island cabbage, all of which is wrapped in large leaves and cooked on hot stones. It has a rubbery texture when cooked.

[7]. The incidence of pterygium was widespread and affected young and old people alike. In many cases pterygia had grown to a size where vision was significantly impaired and surgical removal was urgently required. The incidence of cataract was also high amongst those attending our clinics and a survey conducted by Newland et al (1992) also found that the most common cause of impaired vision was cataract. A change in the lens of the eye from transparent to opaque is known as cataract. The light is thus prevented from reaching the back of the eye and vision is reduced accordingly. The changes in the lens can also cause a myopic shift and a person suffering from cataracts can experience difficulty in seeing objects in the distance. It is a relatively simple operation, to remove the lens and replace it with an artificial lens, known as an Intra Ocular Lens implant. In many cases this will restore the sight to the person previously rendered blind or severely impaired by the cataract. In recent years research into the causes of cataract has increased. There is now a great deal of epidemiological literature which indicates that the prevalence of cataracts is related to exposure to sunlight and that the incidence is related to exposure to ultra-violet light by persons living at different latitudes (Pitts, D in Cronly-Dillon 1986:202). Other researchers (Dolan in Nilsson 1996) argue that the link between sunlight and cataracts may not be so sound and that there may well be many other factors of significance. Hence, although the issue of the relationship between sunlight and cataracts is far from settled, given the high rate of cataract in Vanuatu and the extended hours spent outside in sunlight and on the water, where reflected light compounds the exposure of the eyes to UV light, until conclusive evidence to the contrary , it seems prudent to advocate UV protection for the eyes. Further, in Vanuatu, anterior uveitis, macular degeneration and glaucoma were also attributable causes of impaired vision, (Newland et al 1992) and research has indicated that there maybe links between each of these conditions and exposure to UV light (Cronly-Dillon et al 1986: Miller et al 1987).

[8]. Newland et al (1992) found that 11% of monocular blindness in Vanuatu was due to trauma.

[9]. The powerful condensation of person and place in the concept of *man ples*, was "not only crucial in reclaiming the land as inalienably attached to the people of the place, but proclaiming the people as necessarily in control of the place (Jolly 1992: 342)".



'Flas'

Chapter Six

Making Flas:

a story of who's powerful and why

As I dashed back into the adjacent room to retrieve a school notice, sign it, and place it in Vaughan's school bag for the next day, I saw Brian and Alice, snuggled up on the sofa, as they silently read the story together. Every now and then they would look up at the painting and point to something. Then it was eyes back on the paper again.

*****

Making flas

"So, you can't put on sunglasses to protect your eyes, even if you understand about eye protection," I stated, somewhat taken aback by this realisation.

"Yes. It's not what you think that counts. It's what everyone else thinks," she replied.

From a distance, we probably looked an odd couple, sitting on the rocky shore, lined with broken coral and black volcanic rock, cooling our feet in the clear blue water that washed in and out. I had taken the opportunity between clinics to come down to the shore with Mary, our assistant this trip, to *storian*. Mary was about my age, was able to speak English well, and had a family of similar size and composition. We shared our hopes for our sons, for our worlds, for ourselves. I hoped that we had built enough of a relationship over the past few years that my questioning would not cause any offence. Her world was one in which conformity to known ways meant social support and comfort. To be different, to think differently or question, meant social ostracism and ridicule. People who engaged in perceived serious wrong doing were set apart and negated. Was making *flas* such wrong doing? I wondered.

"*Flas*, Mary. What is it? People say they don't want to wear sunglasses because they are *flas*."

"Mmm. People don't like others calling them *flas*," Mary agreed.

"So, it is others labelling them *flas*, like calling someone a bad name, that deters them," I concluded, yet still trying to understand this strange notion that I continually heard used in different ways.

"Mmm. Sometimes." Mary looked away across the bay. "Making *flas* is saying, 'Look at me'," she continued.

I could sense she was thinking aloud. Maybe she was having as much trouble understanding just what *flas* was, as I was having. Or more likely, she had never really thought about it. Just dismissed it as *rabis tingting*, as had so many others I had spoken to.

"In a way you shouldn't be looked at?" I queried.

"Yes. It's like wearing a pretty dress. It makes people 'look' at you."

Was there anything wrong with that, I thought. In fact, wasn't that why you bought a pretty dress in the first place? People spent a great deal of time dressing and decorating themselves with makeup and jewellery so that they would be looked at. Now you're thinking like a Westerner, I reminded myself. This was Vanuatu. Ni-Vanuatu society had strict rules on relationships. There were people with whom you could be familiar, and people with whom you could not. There were people you could touch and people you could not. There were people who should look at you and people who should not. There were rules on dress. 'Island dresses', full flowing, bright cotton garments were worn most days by the Presbyterians. Other denominations wore Western clothing, calf length skirts, and loose tops, during the week, and 'Island dress' on Sunday. Some groups permitted the wearing of Western dress in gardens and 'Island dress' in the village. Some had rules forbidding twisting the hair into bundles, as was the fashion amongst some young girls in Vila. Most forbade the wearing of shorts or trousers by women. I was conscious that Mary was still speaking. I had been lost in my thoughts.

"...Wearing jewellery, high heels, short skirts." Mary was listing items perceived as *flas*. "Those tight pants, you know, bike pants I think they are called."

All Western clothing I noted, but was determined that my musing would not distract me from what Mary was saying. I checked my thoughts and kept with hers.

"People think you are a prostitute," she said.

"Sunglasses do the same?" I said somewhat disbelievingly.

"Some people think so. You pretend to be something to make others look at you."

"But it's not just sexual is it?" I asked. "I mean it's not just about prostitution? Women are more regulated in what they can or can't do, but men can be *flas* too can't they?"

Mary quieted me.

"I don't want the men to hear us talking," she said in a hushed voice.

I hadn't noticed the group of men sitting in the shade of the tree a few metres away. Their dark skin made them hard to see in the shadows cast by the encroaching vegetation. They must have arrived after we had come to the beach.

"You have to understand that in Vanuatu we have two cultures. *Waetman*'s and *Kastom*. If you go to school, then get work in office or shop, it's okay to wear *Waetman*'s clothes. It's not *flas*. But

suppose you go to school, but don't or can't finish or you get no work, and come back to village, and you still wear sunglasses or big shoes. People think you're *flas,* showing off your things to say you're better than them." Mary stopped unsure if she should go on.

I waited. Making *flas* is about trying to be a waetman, not ni-Vanuatu? Trying to appear something you're not? Inside my head, I tried to summarise what she had told me. Was it then about national identity? Maybe it was about trying to keep a 'pure' ni-Vanuatu culture. I remember reading about that in Mary Douglas' book *Purity and Danger.* Vanuatu had only been an Independent nation a relatively short time, and now there was resurgence of *Kastom*, as the people tried to reclaim their culture, as well as the power to govern their land. Could *flas* be part of this movement towards *Kastom*?

"*Flas* is showing off, to say you're better than them," I repeated her sentence aloud.

"Mmm." Mary looked at me as if she was trying to work out what was going on in my head.

I could see lots of conflict surrounding *flas.* Haves with have-nots, ni-Vanuatu with *waetman*, young people with traditional authority. The outcomes of these conflicts determined whether you conformed to the role assigned by society or not. If you didn't and were labelled *flas* you suffered the consequences: being slandered, isolated, or ridiculed to reduce your social standing or even to get rid of you completely through sorcery related death!

"Mary, do people think you are *flas?"* I asked cautiously, wondering how she dealt with these sanctions.

"Yes. When I go back to the village people say, 'Oh, Mary. You make *flas long* Vila'."

"But when you go back to the village you don't dress the same as you do in Vila do you?" I asked.

"I do what is expected," she replied.

I knew that Mary had suffered because she was different. Many women did when they married outside their villages. They would live for years; sometimes their whole married lives as outsiders. It used to be like that in our small country town[1]. Unless you were born there, you did not belong. Now it was said, jokingly, that after twenty-five years you belonged. Of course, it helped to have the right surname, one that was German in origin.

In the ten years or so we lived there, things had changed dramatically. New people were moving into the community. It could no longer remain the closed community it had been for so many years. The unique language 'Barossa Deutsch' was being lost. The traditional festivals were changing in nature, becoming more cosmopolitan, relating to new public appeal rather than long held German traditions. The German Oompah music, once so popular, was waning, replaced by a new style of brass band music, which in turn was trying to survive in a world of techno-music. The church, which had been the centre of both spiritual and social life, was competing with outside

influences as it tried to sustain its decreasing numbers. Yes, the change had brought freedom in thinking, but it had come at a price. Similar changes would occur here as outsiders came in greater numbers, and again there would be costs. Maybe this was why labelling *flas* was needed, to limit change. To control the cost of change to the community.

"Was there *flas* behaviour before *waetman* came?" I asked.

Mary laughed, "Oh, Karen, I'm not that old!"

Mary's laugh was so musical and she laughed with her whole body. It was contagious. As I joined her laughter, I felt how good it was to laugh, to experience the release of tension that flooded out with the laughter. I realised that in my efforts to find out as much as I could in the time I had, I often missed the experience of simple things such as laughter. My questions were usually so serious and urgent to me.

"So how did you learn about *flas*? Did your parents teach you about *flas*? Did they say to you when you were small, 'Mary don't be *flas*'?" I asked somewhat breathlessly as I was still recovering from the laughter.

"No. My parents did not teach me about *flas*. I think that maybe my friends taught me. When I was in the village if I put a flower in my hair they would say, 'Oh Mary, you *flas'* and they laugh and laugh at me," she answered.

Laugh and laugh at her. Many women had told me they would not wear sunglasses because the men laughed at them. Here it was again. Laughter used to control behaviour. I had thought *flas* was to do with pretending to be a *waetman* when you're not. Her story just blew that theory out of the water. Wearing flowers in the hair was hardly a *waetman*'s introduction or was it? Maybe it came with the Polynesian missionaries who accompanied the Europeans. Maybe it was always a Melanesian practice. In any case, I felt that I was being drawn back to the theory that *flas* involved drawing attention to yourself, others reacting to feeling put down by the *flas* person, of the *flas* person feeling shamed because of their actions and then choosing to conform to the order of the others. How was that different from 'peer pressure' experienced in our society? I didn't know yet, but I just felt it was. I was looking at a jumbled jigsaw puzzle scattered on the floor inside my brain. Which pieces went where? How could I get a full picture? Pick up each piece and try it for fit? But what if some pieces didn't even belong to this puzzle?

"Is that why people say they have *fraet* of putting on a sunglass? *Fraet* of what others think of them? *Fraet* of being thought *flas*?" I asked, trying to put another piece of the puzzle into place. Could it be that people not only avoid *flas* behaviours but also develop a fear of being thought *flas*?

"They say they have *fraet* because other people think that they are making themselves proud," Mary said, looking at the water rippling beneath her feet. "People think they think they are being better than them."

"And that is not good because then people think you are putting them down?" I added.

"Yes," she paused. "And some are jealous, they make up stories, rumours about people. If others believe them then they will not talk to the person, or work with them on chief's day. They can't do anything for the village. The person becomes sad and feels alone. Sometimes the person can be frightened because the spirits can find them. Maybe the spirits will do something bad to them."

I had a picture in my mind now. Wearing sunglasses leads to rumour and criticism, leads to social ostracism, leads to exposure to sorcery, and leads to sickness or death! No wonder people resisted wearing sunglasses. I sat wondering how I would feel if someone told me to do something that would bring me into disrepute, cut me off from my friends and family. I had endeavoured to tackle the problem of a lack of eye protection through community education and the distribution of illustrated brochures. They contained information and photographs of common eye complaints in Vanuatu, details of ultra-violet light and information about eye protection. I used these brochures to explain problems to each patient, and I encouraged them to carry the brochure with them so they could teach others about eye problems. I hoped that if they were brave enough to wear the sunglasses they had purchased, and they were challenged by someone calling them *flas,* that they would use the pamphlet to justify their actions to others. I had not realised how difficult this action might be for individuals. I knew that I had to try and break the sequence. Somehow intervene before the rumour lead to ostracism. I had arranged a meeting with the chiefs. In a village situation one of the roles of the chief was to act as a magistrate ruling on disputes. If chiefs understood the preventative role of sunglasses, maybe they would intervene in these situations. Perhaps they could even dictate that the wearing of sunglasses was required for certain activities. Certainly some chiefs dictated dress rules, acceptable behaviour and even the chosen denomination of the church in the village. Of course, if this was to happen then sunglasses needed to be far more readily available. I was working on that.

Social ostracism didn't seem to always be a factor though. What about the old lady at the clinic yesterday? As I handed her the sunglasses she trembled, stooped low, and held her breath. The men around her were all encouraging her and explaining why she should wear sunglasses, showing her the pictures in the pamphlet. Some of them were wearing their recently purchased sunglasses. The conversation around her went on for a long time, yet all the while she just sat and stared out of the *nakamaal* at the ground outside. There was no jeering, no ridicule, no laughing, only encouragement and persuasion. Surely she couldn't be frightened of being thought proud?

"Mary, I understand that being thought proud would stop people wearing sunglasses, but I don't see that can be when people in the village are encouraging, and the patient still shows fright. It can't be the rumours and being thought proud then." I picked up a small stone and tossed it into the sea watching the splash rise up into the air and the ripples move out until the wave came and dispersed them. That was what trying to find out about *flas* was like. Dropping little questions, or

fragments of knowledge, into conversations and watching the reactions, until some other force changed them all.

"Maybe the woman was frightened of drawing attention to herself," said Mary quietly.

"Whose attention?"

"Maybe the spirits. A lot of people still believe in spirits. Many people think that accidents are the spirits punishing or teaching them things. Some people think that spirits cause sickness," she said with an edge to her voice.

At first, I had a hard time accepting spirits as a cause of illness. Having been raised in a biomedical environment I looked always for a biological cause. It was one day as I sat with a group of women in church that I realised I was being hypocritical. If I believed in the Holy Spirit as a healer, teacher, giver of life, why could I not accept that there were other spirits, which caused illness? The Bible spoke of demons and illnesses, was this something I could just explain away with biomedical jargon?

My explanations of a hole in the ozone layer, which I explained as a blanket around the earth with a hole that let in ultra violet light, something that did damage to your eyes but which you couldn't see, sounded just as far fetched; probably even more so. In the poster competition some students had drawn ultra violet light as spirits soaring down from the sun to damage the eyes. This was more believable to them than all the simplified astrophysics that I had tried to explain from my limited knowledge.

"Yes, I have had some tell me that," I said, "but how does that fit with this woman?"

Mary thought a while then answered quietly, "If she thought that the eye problem was caused by a spirit, she may think that by trying to stop the sickness she would anger the spirits, and maybe they would do something worse."

"Ah. That would also explain why people often don't want to go to the hospital for surgery too," I surmised.

"Yes. But maybe they just scared too. They don't know what will happen to them," she paused, "and some people don't like to leave their land. They think maybe they will never see it again."

"I have been reading about a group of Australian Aborigines. They are taught not to leave the camp area by adults telling them about 'debil-debils'[2] who live at the edge of the camp. The children are scared of them and so they won't go away from the camp."

"Same here," said Mary.

My thoughts were racing now. So if people were taught at a young age that to step outside of physical boundaries meant the spirits would get you, did it also mean that if you stepped outside the social boundaries, the spirits would get you? Maybe these social boundaries were so well

internalised by the woman she could not step outside of them, even with the support of those around her. Breaking her internalised boundaries would cause her spiritual attacks, or personal shame, or both. Another piece of the puzzle seemed to fit. Branding people *flas*, and ostracising them, was not only a way to maintain a national identity, but it was a spiritual battle too, aimed at keeping an order, an order which was constantly being threatened by outside forces. Now the battle was with Western forces, which had stolen away their land, their people, their *kastom* and left nothing sacred.

Mary stood up, "You coming, Karen?"

"Yes, I guess it's time." I stood and joined her and together we made our way up the beach.

The *trak* would be waiting to take us to the airport for the flight back to Vila.

*****

I leant my head against the window of the plane looking out at the island underneath us. The dense, green canopy of tropical vegetation was broken every now and then by a cleared, brown area full of darker, little squares. Villages. Groups of about 50 people lived on their own ground, by the homes of their ancestral spirits. Each village, with its own language, traditions, and customs, was often quite different from neighbouring villages.

As I gazed outward my attention turned inward to the questions flashing in my brain. How was this group of islands going to form a national identity? Did they really have any concept of nationhood, this group of villages dotted around a Y-shaped group of islands? Certainly, plane trips like this one were increasing interaction between islanders. People moved around, as a result of their work, to find work, visit relocated relatives, and to go to schools. I thought back to the people with whom we had stayed. They had met whilst both being posted for employment on another island. They had married 'for love' rather than as an arranged marriage, as was still common. Would increasing intermarriage, like theirs, help to join these unique island groups into one Vanuatu? These people had lived under colonial rule of two powers, Britain and France, which duplicated services. Two health services, two education systems, two of everything! Even now, nearly twenty years after Independence, there was division based on the language in which you were educated and acculturated. "Could francophone ni-Vanuatu have the same sense of nationality as anglophone ni-Vanuatu?" I wondered.

I looked down at the gift Mary had given me, a fan woven from a coconut leaf. She had tried to teach me how to weave a similar fan. I smiled as I recalled the way mine had resembled a bat with wings outstretched not the symmetrical U shape of Mary's. Yet I was still proud of that fan. Mary had demonstrated and encouraged, and I had succeeded, well almost, in producing a ni-Vanuatu

fan! Mary was more than our assistant, was more than an informant. We had shared food, work, play, confidences, and laughter. We had shared ourselves. Mary had told me that she had high hopes for her sons. She wanted them to get a good education and go on to get good jobs. Yet she hoped they would always think of themselves as belonging to their father's village. How could they do that in this changing world? I too hoped my sons would go on to get a good education and good jobs, but I knew that if they did, it would probably mean a fragmented family. No longer did children grow up in, work and settle in the same community. I would be lucky if they stayed in the same State.

The engines began to roar and I realised we were making our descent into Port Vila. I had a meeting with a group of people from non-government and govemment organisations, all of whom were interested in hearing about the preventative eyecare project. It was going to be a busy day. I had given more thought to ways of overcoming the stigma associated with sunglasses. We had stimulated discussion about eye problems through the illustrated brochures. We had enlisted the support of people in authority, through the chiefs, elders, pastors, and health workers. What needed to happen was for the sunglass itself to be associated with health not *flas* or *waetman*'s fashion. On previous visits I had collected data about sunglass styles, sizes and colours, and had selected a sunglass style which I hoped would become known as the 'health sunglass', as distinct from the sunglasses worn for making *flas*.

We made our way across the tarmac to the small room where we collected our baggage and went out to the car park. It was good to see the familiar face of our friend, Bob, waiting for us. As I climbed into the car I couldn't get a tune out of my head. Stephen looked at me.

"What are you humming?"

"Was I humming?" I asked, not conscious that I had given voice to the tune haunting me. I stopped and thought "what was it?—'If everybody's somebody, then no-one's anybody'," I half spoke half sang the words.

"What?"

"If everybody's somebody, then no-one's anybody," I sang with more gusto. That was it! Being a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera fan from way back, this snippet of libretto from *The Gondoliers* appeared to hold the key to *flas*.

"If everybody wears sunglasses, then nobody will be *flas*, because nobody will be different," I declared. W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan used comic opera as a medium for commenting on society in Victorian England, yet the words from their satire written more than 100 years before, rang so true in my head.

"If everybody's somebody, then no one's anybody," I continued to sing.

"Someone used that idea in Fiji," Bob interjected.

"Tell me more," I said quickly, my voice failing to conceal the excitement I felt.

"It was called a book flood[3]. As I recall students with books were ostracised for having something others didn't have, so they 'flooded' the schools with books. Every student had access to books and no one was left out. I think I have an article about it somewhere in my office. I'll check it out for you." he said.

"Gee, that's great. We could have a flood of sunglasses!"

"And how do you propose to do that?" Stephen asked, ever practical.

"I don't know just yet. Maybe someone will have an idea at the meeting today," I said refusing to let his practical concerns dampen my enthusiasm.

Stephen smiled. "You amaze me."

"Why?" I asked, wondering how could he still be amazed after fifteen years of marriage.

"You just don't give up do you?"

There were times when I questioned our being here. The good, or worse still the bad, we were doing. But whilst I knew the people wanted our help I could not walk away. I did know they wanted us, I saw it in their eyes. "*Misis*, we no can do this. You must tell others for us," the women insisted. They could not talk about *flas* from inside. I could from outside. I accepted their challenge. I told others about it. I spoke to groups, to leaders, to politicians. I thought back to the many talks I had given and the challenge I had in turn issued to them: "Me one person, no more. Me no go talk with 170,000 man Vanuatu. Me no got money to go round every island. Every man must tell out the message to others. Sunglass, they no *flas*. Sunglass, they protect eyes. Sunglass, they make good health for eyes. You, me, together, we tell out to everyone, then world be full up with healthy eyes." Questions, then a speech in reply would follow. A show of thanks in applause and then a prayer, thanking God for the gift of sight, for the things they had learned from the talk, for the *Misis* who had come to teach and work with them.

"No," I said determinedly. "I couldn't give up."

******

Alice and Brian were chatting quietly as Stephen and I returned to the room and sat in the chairs positioned either side of the sofa. Alice looked over to me, a smile on her face.

"Are the children in bed?"

"Two down, two to go," I replied. "The bigger ones will be a while yet. How did you get on with the story and painting?"

"This would look better the other way up," Brian said almost turning a somersault to look at it the other way up.

"That's because you want to look at it from the dominant male perspective. But I wanted you to look at the female perspective," I grinned. "In Vanuatu gender differences are very pronounced. As one man explained to me, 'In Vanuatu, the man is on top and the woman is down'. The image of the man dominates the picture here as ni-Vanuatu men do in real life[4]. But it is the woman's voice I wanted the audience to hear, as it appears the *flas* label has more impact on a woman's behaviour than a man's, keeping her under control. Many women spoke of *fraet* when contemplating wearing sunglasses. Men would ridicule them they said. As women participate to a great extent in the work of subsistence farming, their eyes are exposed to the dangers I described to you before, but they are often unable to take preventative action," I concluded compassion evident in my voice.

"Why do they submit to that sort of control?" asked Alice. "Especially if it is bad for their health?"

"Firstly, it depends on what you think is healthy. Then on your class and/or gender as 'ideas of body and its health or illness are influenced by both one's cultural and social position. People act as they do, not only because of their beliefs about health, but also because of the structural aspects, such as how power is distributed and relationships are organised' (Freund and McGuire 1995:4). Then, as Ngwele (1981:12) a ni-Vanuatu author explains, 'in Vanuatu, the most important reason for which custom is obeyed is that we know we have to live in the same community, and we need help and security from one another' (cited in Larcom 1990:178)."

"See, I told you all this community stuff was not necessarily good," retorted Brian. "Telling people what to do, what to wear."

"Yes, but listen to what they get in return. Help and security," countered Alice.

"And gossip, and rumours about them," insisted Brian.

"That's an important point," Stephen added. "It's not what *the person* thinks about sunglasses, it's what *others* think."

The four of us sat quietly looking at the painting. The sound of the television in the back room could just be heard. The light from the chandelier twinkling in the centre of the room made it difficult for me to see the painting clearly as it reflected off the thick, glossy paint. I moved my chair around to get a clearer view.

"What's the arrow pointing at?" asked Brian. "Both the man and the woman have one of them."

"What's the arrow doing?" I asked him in return.

"The arrow is coming from the people and pointing to the person," he replied.

"And what does that do?" I asked.

"It makes you follow it."

"So..."

"So your attention is drawn to the person."

I waited.

"Ah, now I have it! They are saying 'Look at me!' Which is what *flas* actions are saying."

"That's it," I replied.

"That's why they are turning away from her, the woman wearing the sunglasses in the painting," observed Alice. They don't approve and are withdrawing their support."

"The men are doing the same thing, except for one fellow," pointed out Brian. "And he looks like he wants to go for it!"

We laughed at Brian's expression.

"You seem to have unravelled that aspect of the painting," I exclaimed. "I wanted to show how social life, although essential to human existence, is precarious. 'We are not 'genetically coded' for behaviour but we seem to inherit a general need for social approval' (Spradley and McCurdy 1987:113), and most people desire, and actively seek, the approval of others. Gossip, ostracism, rumour, and ridicule are therefore formidable sanctions against non-conforming behaviour (Seymour 1995), but 'gossip does not occur in a vacuum, it is almost always 'plugged in' to the unit of social process—the social drama' (Turner 1982:68)."

"Yes, you mentioned in the story that the women were frightened of the men laughing at them if they wore sunglasses," Alice added. "The fear of the ridiculing by the men really prevents them from wearing the sunglasses."

I nodded.

"And that *fraet* controls behaviour, teaches boundaries and encompasses elements of shame. It appears it is learned in childhood. A child wandering too far from a carer becomes distressed. They are laughed at and ridiculed until they return to the carer. Their shame is evident in the stooped posture, in the burying of themselves in the carer in an attempt to hide from the laughter. They learn to conform rather than suffer the pain of being ridiculed."

"Which is why the woman hangs her head in shame when all her friends turn away," suggested Alice.

"But why shame?" asked Brian. "That's such a strong word."

"It's interesting you should ask that. Like Alice, I see the reaction as shame," I agreed. "As she hangs her head, the 'highly negative and painful state of shame results in the disruption of ongoing behaviour, confusion in thought, and an inability to speak. The physical action accompanying the shame includes a shrinking of the body, as though to

disappear from the eye of the self or the other' (Lewis 1992:75). And to answer you, Brian, I think it is shame rather than embarrassment—because it *is* such a strong reaction."

"But a strong reaction to whom?" asked Brian. "Just the women turning away?"

"Shame 'is not produced by any specific situation, but rather by the individual's interpretations of a situation' (Lewis 1992:75)," I began.

"You mean the people turning away don't make her feel the shame, she feels it because of something inside her?" queried Alice.

"Yes and No," I continued. "Of course, as we have discussed, in Vanuatu there is a we-self more than a Western I-self, and the we-self 'is a symbiotic self in which the ego ideal also centres around proper behaviour in a diverse hierarchical organisation of relationships' (Lewis 1992:201). But 'even a we-self still has some separate identity. Things happen to an I-self without happening to the other incorporated into the we-self. Although the we-self dominates, the I-self exists at some level, can fail, and thus can be shamed' (Lewis 1992:202). This shame 'occurs when standards are violated, when fault is attributed to self and when self rather than action is focussed upon' (Lewis 1992:198). You see an individual feels shame when they feel they have broken an internalised rule and blame themselves. It is an internal attribution, the 'eye of the other within us' (Lewis 1992:139). And as the most important standards to a ni-Vanuatu are the standards of the group; 'violations of group, rather than individual standards, are most likely to produce a shame feeling' (Lewis 1992:203)."

"And wearing sunglasses, making *flas*, puffing yourself up, violates the group's social standards," concluded Alice.

"It is as if the shame helps keep control," said Stephen.

"It does," I agreed. "Did you know that 'shame is used in both India and Japan as one of the paramount means of instituting controls in child rearing. Shaming the child leads to increased interdependency between child and parent, since it focusses attention on the failure of the reciprocal relationship. Any culture that uses shaming and humiliation in childrearing is likely to register high in shame' (Lewis 1992:202, 205)."

"And you explained before, people laugh and ridicule children to control them. I guess that is shaming them," commented Alice. "And then they become dependent on each other."

"Yes, and so 'shame has adaptive significance, because shame helps fixate on behaviour and focus on self as well as actions, it serves to define who we are and who we wish to be' (Lewis 1992:174)," I suggested.

"Why doesn't the man react the same?" asked Brian.

"Because men have different status and different social roles to perform," I replied. "Although some men will feel the same reluctance to wear sunglasses as they don't want to be seen as *flas*."

"What! This talk about *social dramas* and *roles* to perform makes it sound like a night at the theatre!" Brian exclaimed.

"Well, quite a few social scientists have looked at social life as performance," Alice responded. "And before Karen mentioned what Denzin (1997) called the sixth moment in ethnography; performing the world!" Alice threw her arms apart in a dramatic gesture, Bringing a quizzical look from Brian.

"Besides, you remember your Shakespeare from school," she exclaimed as she began to recite, "All the world's a stage,

> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> One man in his time plays many parts...[5]"

"Okay. Okay," said Brian. "I get the idea. I never really got into Shakespeare." He shook his head and leant back into the sofa as if trying to hide in case Alice went on.

"I love Shakespeare," I exclaimed.

"I can't understand it," said Stephen, "although some of the modern films haven't been too bad."

"Too bad! Some of them have been great!" exclaimed Alice.

"How did we get onto this?" moaned Brian.

"We were talking about life as performance," said Alice, giving him a look that told him not to complain, as he brought up the subject.

"That's right. We already mentioned Goffman (1971). You were familiar with his work Alice, but it is the work of Victor Turner (1982) that reveals something about reactions to *flas* that I found interesting. He says 'social dramas have four phases, breach of a norm, crisis, where sides are taken and factions formed, redress in the form of personal advice, arbitration, or public ritual, and either reintegration or recognition of a schism' (Turner 1982: 69)," I commented. "Does that help Brian?"

Brian nodded thoughtfully as he adjusted his position on the sofa, and placed a cushion at his back.

"Okay, I can see that making *flas* is the breach of the norm," he said as he looked to Alice and me for confirmation before continuing. "The laughing, gossip and rumours bring about a crisis, where people in the village take sides and won't work with them, as the story told us." We nodded urging him to go on. "The person then changes behaviour and after making amends, through some apology ritual, is reintegrated."

Stephen leant forward in his chair. "That's all very well but how do people know what the rules are? The social norms as you called them?" he asked.

"Traditionally, everyone grew up with and knew the system. It was learned at home," I replied. "Although 'major disciplining took place in the *nakamal*, gossip, suspicion, and poison were mechanisms used to police, discipline, and control. If someone was getting to be too much of an upstart, the problem would most likely never get to the *nakamal*; the elders would see to it that outrageous behaviour would be curbed very fast. The person concerned might not be killed outright, but he could become sick. Either he lived and learned or was eliminated' (Molisa 1995:432)."

"Good grief!" exclaimed Alice. "That seems a bit over the top."

Brian and Stephen joined in with a chorus of surprise and disgust at what they saw as injustice.

"Hold on a minute," I cried as I tried to calm them. "Try and see it from their perspective. 'Any activity which threatens the status of people, or which challenges present forms of social organisation, will trigger social activity aimed at reassessing statuses and restoring and reinforcing organisational forms' (Geddes 1994b:64). It is for the common good, an attempt to protect the individuals of the group. Geddes (1994c) talking about the Bakongo in Africa explains that 'if individuals promoted themselves at the expense of their fellows, if they insulted their elders, if they displayed arrogance and a disregard for the social whole, then it was almost certain that they were in league with evil forces, a threat to the well-being of their fellows' (p18), and I suspect it is similar in Vanuatu."

"But what about the people growing up outside the system in Vila for instance, won't the rules be different for them? Which rules do they conform to?" Stephen insisted.

"Remember Mary said that when she went back to the village she did what was expected. She knew the rules of both cultures. I think the problem arises when a person is caught between the two, without a true identity and the corresponding set of norms. I read somewhere (Spradley and McCurdy 1987), that, 'human survival depends on cultural conformity which requires that every individual become a specialist, be committed to a few values and acquire knowledge and skills of a single society' (p8). The authors then went on to pose the question as to whether 'we can survive in a world where our neighbours and even our children have different cultures' (p9). That is an issue facing people like Mary, as she either struggles to make the two cultures into one, or chooses between the two. Either way if what Spradley says is true, that makes survival difficult," I declared.

"It sounds to me like this is a pretty critical time in the lives of the people and the nation," remarked Alice. "They are facing issues their ancestors would never have had to face..." her voice trailed off as a rattle at the door surprised her.

The cat was rubbing its body, leisurely on the double glass doors. Having attracted our attention it began to meow, pleading to be let in. Stephen stood up and let it in. It rubbed against his leg in grateful thanks, then sprawled out on the rug in front of the sofa, obscuring the bottom few inches of the painting from view.

"I can see who wants to be the centre of attention," laughed Alice.

The cat raised its head barely off the floor, cocked it to one side, and looked at her through its half open eyes, as if to say "and don't I deserve to be."

We continued to look past the now comfortable, fully reclined cat at the painting.

"Is that the Vanuatu flag in the background?" Brian asked.

"Yes," I replied pensively as I recalled the attachment *I* felt to *their* flag.

"I wish I knew why people chose certain colours and symbols for their flags," said Alice.

"One thing about all the controversy concerning changing our flag is it does make you think about how you want to be represented or seen by the rest of the world," she added.

"For sure, the flag is one of the symbols of the nation," agreed Stephen.

"Well, I think I can actually help out here," I replied. "I found out about their flag. In Vanuatu 'great stress was laid on the eternal attachment of people to their land and their resistance to colonialism. The green in the flag is seen to represent the land and agriculture, the red the blood, which unites the people and the black their skin colour. The yellow in the flag represents Christianity which brought the light to the people of the place' (Jolly 1992:342-343)."

"But why do they have the yellow Y-shape though?" asked Brian.

"To represent the geographical layout of the islands. Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago," I replied.

"So having the flag in the background links *flas* to being true ni-Vanuatu?" inquired Alice. "I mean in the story you describe *flas* as a means of maintaining national identity."

"Yes, certainly *flas* and being perceived as ni-Vanuatu, or not, are closely related, but 'to understand the present in any community we need to know its past' (Geddes 1994a:9). So it was important that my audience try to understand the struggle these people had been through to become an Independent nation. I wanted to portray a sense of war. When colonial rule was imposed it was 'clothed in the symbols of sovereignty' (Keesing 1994:48) of which the flag was one. I've portrayed *flas* as a weapon in the armoury used in the battle for ni-Vanuatu identity, fought under the national flag, because "if one wants

to challenge colonial assertions of sovereignty, one must do it in the language of flags (Keesing 1994:54-55)".

"That seems a little extreme," suggested Brian. "Likening it to war I mean."

"There is no doubt in my mind that wearing sunglasses brings the wearer into conflict with others," said Stephen.

"And conflict 'seems to bring fundamental aspects of society normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily discourse into frightening prominence. People have to take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints, often against their own personal preferences. Choice is overborne by duty' (Turner 1974:35). To me that is very similar to war," I insisted.

"So *flas* is this weapon. But you still haven't really told us what *flas* is, just what it does," said Alice. "I get the idea from the story that *flas* is a breach of the norms we were talking about earlier. *Flas* involves putting people down, and drawing attention to one's I-self in a society where the self is generally perceived as we-self, and that this is done through behaviour *mekem flas* / being flashy or through association with certain *flas* items."

"Of which sunglasses is one," added Brian.

"Yes," I agreed. "Although many ni-Vanuatu will tell you it is *rabis tingting* many still hold it to be true and will not be associated with *flas* behaviour or items. Today *flas* seems to be related to a reaction against Western individualism, anti-colonialism and a struggle to revive and maintain ni-Vanuatu traditions or *kastom* in the face of increasing Westernisation."

"The two cultures Mary was talking about in the story," commented Alice.

"The tricky thing with *flas,* however, is *flas* is not the same to all groups," I went on. "You know parents visiting our clinics often said that they wished their children to look 'smart'. They did not use the word *flas* even though they were making choices for objects that had been rejected by other groups as *flas*."

"How can that be if people act towards things on the basis of the meaning they have for them and they have learned those meanings in the same culture?" asked Alice.

"It is possible for 'signs which mean one thing to one group to mean something else to another group, the same category being designated but differently characterised' (Goffman 1968:63). Let me give you an example," I said. "I read that 'during the eighteen hundreds in California, the absence of a pigtail (queue) on a Chinese man signified for occidentals a degree of acculturation, but to fellow-Chinese a question would be raised as to respectability. Specifically, whether or not the individual had served a term in prison where cutting off the queue was obligatory; loss of queue was for a time, then very strongly resisted' (A Mcleod 1947:204 cited in Goffman 1968:63)."

"That sounds similar to what we were talking about this afternoon—people appearing to be something else by wearing sunglasses," said Brian.

"And people reading others by their appearance," suggested Alice.

"Yes. Students for instance chose to be *flas*. They adopted the behaviour and some dress patterns of popular Western/European music figures or film stars. They were showing a degree of acculturation. Whilst they were at school their *flas* behaviour was tolerated, if not encouraged. Being a student seemed to be a liminal phase, in a 'time and space betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another' (Turner 1982:113). It was the time when they were not ni-Vanuatu in one sense, but not fully *waetman* either; they were 'betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life' (Turner 1974:53). I have a piece written by a young man, Abel G Tapisuwe of Pentecost Island, that demonstrates this," I said. "Let me grab it for you, it's in my room. I won't be a minute," I called as I opened the door, and headed up the hall to collect the book.

I returned a few minutes later with a small green soft covered book in my hand.

The men were discussing the weekend's football draw. Alice looked over to me as I turned to the index and ran my finger down the list.

"Have you got it?" she asked.

"Mmm," I replied as I opened it to the correct page. I glanced over the story as I waited for the men to finish talking. Brian and Stephen went quiet and nodded for me to read it.

"It's called '*Between two worlds.*'

> The young people of today are tossed around between two societies—traditional society and civilised society. They do not know on which side to settle permanently. They fit into neither of them. Their ways are different. They think and talk differently. They have different tastes. They mimic both societies but in vain. Why should this be so?
>
> Let us look back to the days when they were at school. There they were told, "If you want to be a good citizen do not smoke or drink alcohol. Behave well."
>
> When they returned home in the holidays, they were told not to leave their customs behind. "Don't follow the white man's ways," was the advice frequently given.
>
> Yet when they leave school they find themselves in the white man's world without being able to cope with its problems and temptations. They get decent jobs and earn immense salaries. But the money is wasted. They do not know how to budget. They spend their money on incredible entertainment such as watching sexy films, consuming quantities of liquor and smoking a large number of cigarettes. The social behaviour changes. Youngsters unfortunately

> want to experiment with things to get experience. After doing so, they cannot stop. Discrimination gets harder and harder.
>
> The situation is aggravated when they return home. They have grown so sophisticated that their own people cannot recognise them. These strangers cannot be their own children. The village people tend to look down on them and think they are of mean intelligence. They know nothing of traditional village life. Is it their fault? Of course not.
>
> They were educated in the so-called civilised schools and nobody ever taught them to value their cultural inheritance or learn from their elders back home.
>
> To live successfully in Vanuatu today, the ni-Vanuatu needs two kinds of knowledge. He needs to know what it is to be a ni-Vanuatu, to value his cultural inheritance and to take a pride in it. If however, he goes to towns to work, he needs to know how to survive in the whiteman's world. He needs to know how to handle money wisely and to resist the temptations of shoddy entertainment, smoking and alcoholic drink. (1983:86-87)

"Wow, that really sums up a lot of what you've been saying," commented Alice.

"Did you get the sense that there was a choice not just between two courses of action, but between two moralities?" asked Stephen.

"Yes," Alice eagerly agreed.

"That would fit," said Brian, with a hint of resignation in his voice. "We've spent most of the day coming back to that point!"

Alice and I laughed as Brian threw up his hands in mock horror then continued, "Okay, so would someone explain to me how this relates to wearing sunglasses and protecting your eyes?"

"Sure. Earlier we discussed how sunglasses were a symbol of *waetman's* culture. Well, the 'magic' of symbols is visually transferred and 'wearers acquire the symbolic energy of the items worn, which visually become part of them—via visual mimesis, they become what they wear' (Ball and Smith 1992:35)."

"So that's why you painted the woman's face in stripes! She's ni-Vanuatu becoming Western through sunglass wearing," observed Brian excited by his discovery.

"But because you've used stripes, you've depicted her as both," pointed out Alice.

"People can maintain more than one identity simultaneously," I assured her. "Because 'behavioural attributes such as residence, language, dress, participation in exchanges, are not only significant markers but are also determinants of identity' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:9). Ni-Vanuatu living and working as *waetman* can adopt Western dress and

sunglass wearing without being thought *flas*, or not being ni-Vanuatu. It appears that it is understood that they must engage in these behaviours in order to fulfil their role in the *waetman's* world. It is only if you are perceived to be ni-Vanuatu 'pretending' to be *waetman* that *flas* becomes an issue," I reiterated.

"Or if you openly break the social norms which show you don't want to be ni-Vanuatu," added Stephen.

"Yes, that too," I agreed

"So if you go all the way, living and working as a *waetman,* you will not be labelled *flas* for wearing sunglasses. But, if you are living and working as ni-Vanuatu and you wear sunglasses, you probably would be, and the stigma of being labelled *flas* will serve to pull you back into line," Alice reflected. "I remember Goffman (1968) saying that 'stigma constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity' (Goffman 1968:13). Is that what's going on here?"

"Yes. Through the discrepancy in identities the person is reduced in the minds of others from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Their social identity is spoiled and it has 'the effect of cutting them off from society and from themselves so that they stand a discredited person facing an unaccepting world' (Goffman 1968:31)."

"What about the students? They were 'between' worlds. How is their identity determined?" asked Alice.

"Their identity in this liminal time is more fluid and open. People can play around, explore new forms of symbolic action (Turner 1982). What is interesting is this liminal phase may invert but does not usually subvert the status quo, but 'reversal underlines to the members of a community that chaos is the alternative to cosmos, so they'd better stick to cosmos, ie the traditional order of culture, though they can, for a brief while, have a whale of a good time being chaotic' (Turner 1982:41)."

"Don't you think people expect them to move out of this phase sometime?" Stephen asked. "Because I think most people we spoke with had an expectation that their children will make the transition to the *waetman's* world, do well in employment, bring pride, and income to the family.[6]"

"I agree. Mary had those hopes for her sons, didn't she," noted Alice.

"She wanted them to take their place in the new *waetman's* world, but still retain their ni-Vanuatu identity," I agreed.

"But you were worried that it may be difficult for them to do that in the changing world," suggested Brian.

"Yes, for several reasons," I paused. "Firstly, they are going to have to reconcile both identities. 'In the second half of the twentieth century, Western people have assumed that

other communities can easily be altered to become like themselves. It is widely believed that Western forms of behaviour and social organisation are rapidly displacing the forms of non-Western communities' (Geddes 1994a:11). Further, it has been assumed that 'the emanicipations of Western people are needed by all people, wherever they might live. Development schemes, have assumed that the isolated, independent, competitively opposed individual is the ideal and that all communities either wish to, or should, move towards this ideal' (Geddes 1994c:90). This 'belief that social forms can be adjusted to better fit the needs of individuals is endorsed by the understanding of Western people. We 'know' from experience that each individual is a separate being, whose primary focus in life is on the self' (Geddes 1994c:80). These current beliefs in the fragility of culture and ethnic identity are misplaced. 'It is naïve to believe that, because of this overwhelming dominance of Western influences, in order to facilitate the transition from 'traditional' to 'modern' life, all that is necessary is an appropriate education system and appropriately tailored forms of development' (Geddes 1994b:11-12). People will hold onto their cognitive frames, but will be faced with moral choices to pursue a career at the cost of social relations, or fulfil social obligations at the expense of a career. For the two often seem to be exclusionary and conflicting. They will have to struggle with issues to redefine who they are and what they can or can't be. Some will succeed in doing this, others will fail. So 'far from enhancing quality of life, programmes incorporating assumptions of Western templates may be socially and psychologically threatening to the non-western people who are subjected to them. Such programmes may challenge people's understanding of themselves, asserting the superiority of foreign forms of status achievement and maintenance. The effects may be destructive rather than constructive, despite the best intentions of those responsible for planning and implementing them' (Geddes 1994c:65).

Secondly, employment is not easy to find in Vanuatu. If they become university educated, they may seek employment in countries other than Vanuatu, which enable them to use the knowledge they have acquired. If they don't want to leave their homeland you may find, and we have met in the villages, some very highly qualified subsistence farmers! And finally there are those students who don't finish school because the money runs out, or they don't pass or get accepted into the next level. The student can feel they've lost face, let the family down. If they return to the village and a subsistence way of life, there is much they don't know as they have been away at school for so long."

"That young man's story sure told about that," Brian interjected.

"Yes. He certainly told how 'the modern school system has distanced them from the way of life of their parents, and the children have not had the opportunity to acquire the values and skills for survival in the traditional village situation from their parents' (ADB 1997:224)," I agreed.

"So what happens to them?" asked Alice. "The young man said they are thought of as stupid, and put down."

"The student then has a choice to make—be ostracised, or be accepted. To be accepted they must reverse their life's course, learn, and submit again to traditional ways," I suggested.

"So in actual fact, the student's return to the village reinforces the traditional norms," suggested Brian.

"To some extent. But also the student's return challenges those norms for a time."

"What happens if they don't go home to the village?" asked Alice.

"If they stay in Vila, work opportunities are limited. The young people become bored, frustrated and angry. Unfortunately, the crime rate appears to be increasing as a result. As the people largely live in their island groups even within the urban areas, there are town chiefs who endeavour to deal with problems but these students having boarded at secondary schools have often been living outside this traditional system of authority," I explained.

Alice jumped as the cat leapt onto the sofa, the bell around its neck ringing loudly.

It proceeded to sprawl itself across her lap purring loudly.

"Push him off if you don't want him there."

I laughed as I watched him manipulate his environment to give him maximum comfort.

"He gets heavy after a while," I commented.

Alice smiled and stroked the cat. "He's fine."

Stephen stood and stretched and moved towards the painting.

Brian also took the opportunity to stand.

"Oh, look! I see the other hands wrestling the flags now," said Brian. "Fighting for control. Then the ni-Vanuatu hand reaches out and takes both of them away. British and French aren't they? I seem to remember reading about the New Hebrides, Vanuatu as it is now, being ruled jointly by a condominium. It caused a great deal of duplication of services from what I gather. Two lots of schools. Two lots of hospitals."

"Yes, there is still a legacy of that today, although in upper secondary school, if students progress that far and can afford to pay the fees, they learn both French and English, not just one European language," Stephen explained.

I raised my eyebrows in agreement.

"And that's not its only legacy," I commented. "The 'colonial expansion of states in the Pacific imposed new administrative definitions on native peoples and in turn provoked shifts in self-perception' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:11) and 'made cultural identity

problematic both in thought and action' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:13). As a result people reconstructed their identities, and 'a world in which identity was formed by face-to-face social relations was transformed into one where it was defined by a status and role influenced, if not determined, by ethnicity' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:14-15)."

"You mean they had to choose between being anglophone or francophone," asked Stephen, "and that 'choice was reflected in church affiliation, language of education, employment opportunities in the cash economy, and in determining individual party affiliation since national politics began in the 1970s' (Van Trease 1995:3)."

"Yes, except they really didn't choose *individually* to be anglophone or francophone, but 'found themselves in one camp or another as a result of historical events and geographical circumstances beyond their control' (Van Trease 1995:57)," I replied.

"And Karen, I remember you saying before, we get a cognitive frame from our language," added Alice.

"That's right! The language we use influences how we name things, and how we interpret them. So new divisions emerged amongst people, even those who lived on the same island, as different villages had different colonial affiliations."

"But they eventually chose to be neither, rather to be ni-Vanuatu, didn't they?" said Brian as he sat down again next to Alice.

The cat, which had gradually eased its way over into the warm space he had vacated stretched, and began kneading Alice's lap. A stray claw caused Alice to flinch and lift the paw away from her leg.

"What's the curly thing?" asked Alice.

"Here?" asked Stephen, pointing to the white strip separating the woman from the others.

Alice nodded.

"A curled pig's tusk. It is a sign of prosperity. They are valued as a means of traditional wealth. They feature on their flag, on their aeroplanes and even on their beer!" exclaimed Stephen.

Brian looked up approvingly.

"Tusker beer," said Stephen, reliving the relief he had felt as he drank 'a tusker' after a hot day's work testing eyes.

"You know it takes 14 years for a pig to grow a double circle tusk!" I added.

"The poor pig," said Alice. "Must be hard eating!"

"They are well catered for," assured Stephen. "The best kept animals in Vanuatu."

I nodded in agreement.

"You've depicted the tusk separating the people wearing the sunglasses from the other people," observed Alice. "Why is that?"

"The man and the woman wearing the sunglasses are making *flas,* standing outside of traditional ni-Vanuatu values. Their behaviour cuts them off from those still surrounded by or embracing the traditional values," I answered.

"*Kastom,"* said Stephen thoughtfully. "That's become a new cultural identity, hasn't it? One *they've* chosen, not one imposed," he said looking at Brian, and confirming Brian's prior conclusion.

"I mean people now call themselves ni-Vanuatu, meaning Vanuatu born, as a cultural identity," he concluded.

"Yes," I added. "Although, some authors have suggested that this relatively recent preoccupation with *kastom* in Melanesia, particularly new nations such as Vanuatu, also was itself a product of colonial experience and European categorisation, suggesting the influence of Western notions of culture and society (Linnekin and Poyer 1990: Keesing 1994)."

"How's that?" asked Brian.

"Well, take the word *kastom* for example. It is a Bislama word, a pidgin developed in the colonial period as a means of communication between colonialists and ni-Vanuatu, which became the language of intercultural communication between the various ni-Vanuatu groups. It means customs or traditions. There are terms and phrases in the vernacular languages of Vanuatu, but even when people speak in the vernacular languages they tend to use the word *kastom* (cf White 1991 in Jolly 1992). So they've used this word *kastom* as a means of uniting themselves. Also, since Independence in 1980, politicians in Vanuatu have vigorously promoted *kastom* as a means of 'constituting national consciousness' (Tilley 1997:76) of becoming a nation, a Western concept. And it has gone wider than that as people began to speak about *kastom* and 'the Melanesian Way', as the region sought to be recognised and to compete in the global economy and political scene. Still, at the same time *kastom* can also mean 'localised knowledge of a particular kind' (Jolly 1992:343). Hence, '*kastom* can be a symbol of national or even pan-regional unity; or it can be a symbol of separatism and ethnic rivalry' (Keesing 1994:52)."

"You would have heard people speak about '*ol man kastom'* meaning people with knowledge of traditional medicine and magic," I said looking across at Stephen.

"Yes," he replied. I could tell from his eyes he was picturing the people we had met."

"Well, in that context it refers to traditional and spiritual knowledge and practice. So *kastom* is known to be powerful."

"Now that is confusing," said Brian. "Is there a common link between these usages which appear to be conflicting? National pride, and ethnic rivalry."

"Yes. Margaret Jolly (1992), an anthropologist who has worked in Vanuatu, thinks there is, and it has to do with 'a more fluid and relational sense of identity. Authenticity is probably more associated with the sense of *kastom* as indigenous way of life, in opposition to the European way of doing things' (p344)."

"But didn't you just say that in asserting their *kastom* they are actually being more Western," commented Brian. "Now you say they use *kastom* to oppose Westerners."

"That's right. Sort of fighting fire with fire. For in espousing *kastom,* the ni-Vanuatu are 'asserting their right, their capability, and their willingness to reject aspects of Western culture and to retain crucial features of indigenous lifeways and world view' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:15). '*Kastom* is predicated on a sense of rupture and revival, and is associated not just with a moral criticism of European ways, but with more trenchant opposition towards foreigners in general, and white in particular' (Jolly 1992:330)," I explained.

"There it is again. This time *kastom* is associated with moral criticism. We just can't get away from these issues of morality, can we?" sighed Brian.

Alice just shook her head and looked at Brian.

He laughed, and sat back suitably chastised.

Alice leant forward to look at the wrestling flags.

"I can see now why you spoke of *flas* as a weapon in the *kastom* armoury. They are fighting against the Western influence, aren't they," remarked Alice.

"For sure." Whatever else may be said about Third World nationalisms, they also stimulate a respect for indigenous tradition, a bias against the mindless transplantation of Western institutions and a desire to find innovative solutions to societal problems' (Berger 1974:221)," I remarked.

"So, I guess that's why they wouldn't wear sunglasses," said Brian, "because they are imported from the *waetman.* What did you just say 'a mindless transplantation of a Western institution'?"

"Not so *mindless* in this case, believe me. There was a lot of thought and collaborative research in this preventative programme," I countered.

The sound of the television in the back room filtered through to us, as the conversation lulled.

"Would education help overcome this association of sunglasses with *waetman,* and perhaps help them see sunglasses as being more allied with health than Westerners?"

asked Alice. "Because I would have thought that if people understood why people wore sunglasses perhaps they would not be discredited," she added.

"We hoped so. Didn't we?" I said, as I looked across at Stephen.

"Certainly I found that patient education was poor and even if they had seen an optometrist or ophthalmologist before, people were unaware of the reasons for wearing sunglasses. Whether this was the fault of the practitioners, the patient, or breakdown in communication generally, I can't be sure—but I guess it was all three to some extent," I commented.

"What I don't understand, is why wearing sunglasses would attract the attention of the spirits," Brian said.

"It is difficult for us to understand," I replied "and even though I see myself as a spiritually aware person, I struggle with this. For them, the spiritual world is so much more real."

"More threatening," interjected Stephen.

"Yes. We don't dwell on evil spirits too much. And even talk of Satan and hell is passé in many Christian churches. Our spiritual world is much more loving," I supposed.

Brian looked uneasy and shifted his position on the sofa.

"Well Brian, I'll try and answer your question as to why spirits intervene in sunglass wearing, but I'm still unsure about it. I think it might be because it changes your identity," I paused. "And some of the spirits are your ancestors, who determine your identity," I suggested.

"So you're sort of saying to the spirits, 'I don't respect you. I divorce myself from you', by wearing sunglasses?" queried Brian.

"Perhaps," I said thoughtfully. "Afterall, 'Aboriginal communities are interconnected with one another in emotional and spiritual bonds which ensure that no individual can consider himself or herself an independent isolated entity living only for himself or herself to the exclusion of his or her fellow community members' (Geddes 1994c:78)."

"Also you are drawing attention to yourself in a way you shouldn't, so the spirits might have to intervene and pull you back into line," Alice added.

"So might the people," retorted Brian. "With poison, and rumours..."

"...Sorcerers, and witchcraft," added Stephen.

"Yes, 'basic elements of social organisation, such as statuses and roles, and norms and sanctions, help provide enough predictability and patterning that we can get on with the business of day-to-day living' (Schur 1979:5). Disrupt or upend them and..."

"You muck up daily life," announced Brian.

"But I think we need to be careful of explaining away sorcery, and spirits as 'metaphors for social relations' (Mullings 1984:164 cited in Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1996:61). Western researchers have endeavoured to develop a new epistemology of the emotional, social and political sources of illness and healing, but you'll notice that the spiritual will be explained away as one of these, when I think it deserves to stand in its own right," I paused. "I think as Westerners, we are very cautious or even anxious to avoid the spiritual as a category. Our life experience has not provided us with the means to imagine or understand spiritual phenomena. Also, I think 'in strange social surroundings people unconsciously look for things that appear familiar as a means of grappling with the situation. That has the advantage of making the strange seem similar, of making us feel at home in strange surroundings. It has, however, the disadvantage of masking differences, of interpreting the Other as though it was very similar to what we already know' (Geddes 1994a:1)."

"Are you saying that tends to stop people from seeing the spiritual?" asked Alice.

"Not so much that, although of course it may, but rather that they are quick to explain it away, or discount it, rather than seeking to grasp it, experience it and learn of it," I suggested.

"So, what you're saying is that researchers..."

"...and cross-cultural workers," I added.

"...need to view the political, social, emotional, and *the spiritual* as integral parts of a whole person, linked to a physical environment. They need to adopt a holistic approach," Alice observed.

"Yes, then they will see that many people cannot be understood fully 'unless the central place of spirituality in their lives is given serious consideration' (Stanfield 1994:184) and that may mean they need to develop a whole new epistemology," I replied.

The door rattled again.

"Mum." Lachlan stood at the door. Alex was just behind him.

"Has the programme finished?"

"Yes. We're going to bed now," he replied.

"Okay. I'll come and say good night."

I stood up and excused myself as I walked past Brian and Alice.

Would anyone like more coffee? " I asked.

"I'll have another," said Brian.

"Do you have decaf?" asked Alice. "If I have another now I won't be able to sleep."

"I'll put the kettle on," said Stephen following me to the door.

Notes

[1]. The European settlers came to the Barossa Valley in 1838, to escape religious persecution in their homeland, Prussia, which included the provinces of Brandenburg, Posen and Silesia. They were Lutherans who opposed the reform of the church by Friedrich Wilhelm III, into a state church with himself as titular head and with changed church dogma to suit his personal importance.

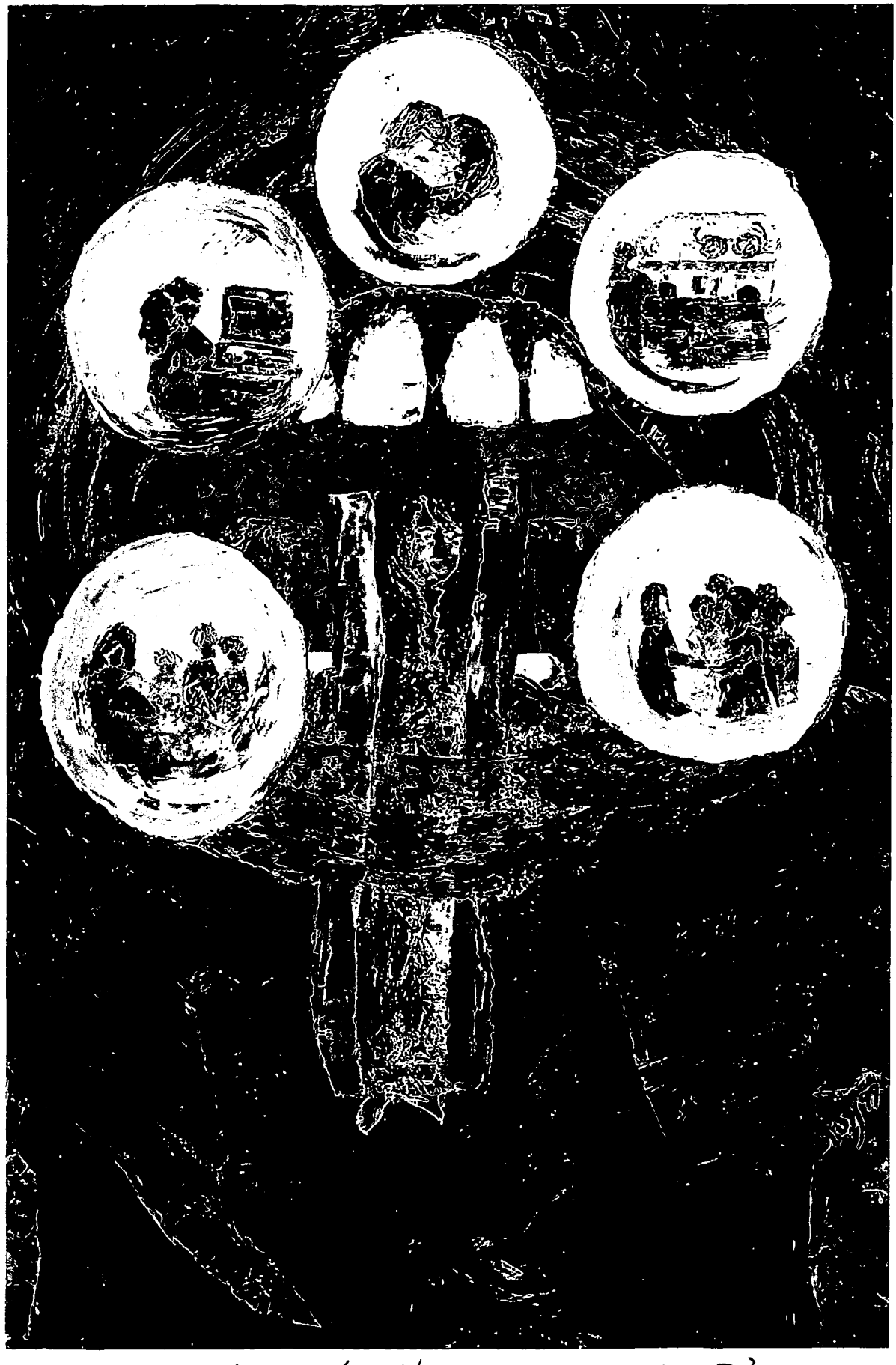
[2]. 'debils-debils' literally, devils-devils or evil spirits. See Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal child-rearing in North Central Arnhem land, Annette Hamilton, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Pp 54-57

[3]. Warwick Elley and Francis Mangubhai conducted the Book Flood Project, in Fiji 1980-1981.

[4]. 'The social role and position of women in traditional ni-Vanuatu society is sub-ordinate to that of men. Traditionally her role is to be supportive of her husband and assist him in his endeavours to improve his social position. While women play a highly significant role in household production, rights over the resources used and the products of the work generally rest with men. Women's rites and rituals are considered inferior to those of men. The very significant role of women in both national and subsistence production and family care is usually overlooked in development planning. Women bear the major part of the burden of family care and support. The pressures on women are becoming worse with the social and economic changes taking place in Vanuatu.' (UNICEF 1991:51-57)

[5]. 'As You Like It' Act II scene VII

[6]. Goddard (1998) found similar expectations in highland Papua New Guinea. 'Of those who leave in search of formal education, wealth or prestige, some return successful and share their fortune visibly through favours such as nepotism in employment opportunities, generous contributions to bridewealth, loans of cash, provision of motor vehicles, beer parties or more formally in the use of their acquired skills for the benefit of the community.' (p76)



'What's eating you?'

Chapter Seven

What's eating you?

a story of turning points

"Here you go," called Stephen as he stepped into the room and placed the coffee on the sofa table. I followed him in with the milk and sugar.

"That's the decaf," he said indicating the one on the left. "I'll be back in a tick."

Alice picked up her coffee and made her way over to the painting **'What's eating you?'**

Brian added the milk and sugar to his coffee and wandered around the room stopping occasionally to take a closer look at objects that interested him.

Stephen returned shortly after with a plate of biscuits, which he placed on the table.

"Brian, can I interest you in a port?" he asked.

"Yeah. That sounds great," Brian replied as he made his way across the room to the mirror-backed bar where Stephen was standing.

"What about you, Alice?" Stephen called as he poured the rich coloured port from the crystal decanter.

"No, I don't think I will, thanks all the same," she replied.

"Karen?"

"Yes, please. Just a small one."

Stephen laughed. "Is that an Australian small or ni-Vanuatu *smol?*

"Australian!" I called back.

"What's all that about?" Brian asked.

"Well, you see, in Vanuatu if you get invited to eat, you'll be told just a *smol kakae*, literally meaning a humble, small meal. But, when you arrive everything is laid on, a feast!" Stephen explained.

"Why's that?"

"Something to do with keeping yourself down. Not making a big deal. Not flashing around what you're doing. Karen gave me a paper to read about a guy working and living in the Kalahari. He decided to thank the people by buying the biggest, fattest ox for Christmas. They all kept telling him it was worthless. He got himself into a real state worrying about what he had done, that he would offend them, that there wouldn't be enough meat, although he couldn't see how that could be. But everyone kept telling him how *small* this ox was. Anyway he eventually asked someone after Christmas had past,

and it all worked out, why they gave him such a hard time about the ox. They explained it was their way. They liked to fool people about that. When they came back from a hunt they would sit quietly and wait for someone to ask about the hunt. When asked they would reply that they were no good at hunting, that they saw just a tiny little one. When that happens they know the hunter has killed something big!"

Brian shook his head in disbelief.

Stephen continued. "This was done because if someone boasts about what they have killed, they come to think of themselves as a big man, and think of others as their servants or inferiors. The people won't allow this. They refuse to associate with one who boasts, for someday their pride will make them kill somebody. So they always speak of their kill as worthless. This way they cool their heart and make them gentle (Lee 1987:33)."

"That sounds like *flas*," Brian noted. "Fear of being put down by someone means you label them *flas* first!"

"...Or you do it to keep them in line," suggested Stephen as he handed Brian his port.

"Thanks," said Brian, and he made his way over to where Alice and I were standing.

"What's up you two?" Brian asked.

Alice turned and smiled at him. Reaching out she took his arm and pulled him closer.

"What do you see in this?" she asked.

Brian looked at the painting and turned his head to the side, then took a few steps back. He looked away from the painting and at me curiously as if trying to work out what sort of person would paint something like that.

"It's called '**What's eating you?**'," I said as I took my port from Stephen. The deep red-brown liquid glistened in the light and clung to the sides of the small cut-crystal glass, as a good port should. I swirled it around the rim and smelled the luscious fruit bouquet.

"Well?" Alice asked, tugging at Brian's arm once more.

"A green monster eating someone. Jealousy? Or is jealousy only a green-eyed monster? It doesn't really have the feel of a threatening monster, I mean the teeth aren't jagged and pointed. It's not drooling saliva, frothing at the mouth or anything. In fact it looks like eating the person in the sandwich is just a perfectly normal action," Brian commented.

"I see what you mean," said Alice. "But just the size and colour of it, I find revolting." Alice shivered. "And that it doesn't see what its feeding on—after all its features, as you said, are more human than monster. Doesn't that imply it should recognise those similarities?"

"Maybe it just hasn't looked," I suggested.

"Maybe it chose not to see it," added Stephen.

"Either way it doesn't seem fair," concluded Brian, and he kept looking intensely at it. "You know I've felt like that... at work," he said with a sigh. "No matter how many tasks I take on to save us, no matter what we cut back, or prune, there always seems to be someone waiting to feed off us. To gobble up the little guy's business."

He turned and stepped away from the painting, taking a large mouthful of port.

Alice followed him. Touched his shoulder and then placed her arms around his waist. Brian dropped his eyes to hers and smiled, his posture softening.

As I sipped the port, and felt its warming rush, Brian's reaction and remark stayed in my mind. "I've felt like that." This painting, although dealing with *my* experience, had stirred up in Brian similar feelings evoked by *his* very different experience. I was reminded of something I had read recently: 'We need to see the knowledge we're seeking in ethnography as the kind that helps readers use other people's sorrows and triumphs as a way to reflect on or re-contextualise their own, enhancing their capacity to cope with life's contingencies' (Ellis and Bochner 1996:28). Certainly, I viewed the knowledge portrayed in the paintings and their companion stories in this way. I hoped they would help the audience by raising questions in their minds about how they live life, how they cope with experiences, how they can change and improve their lives and those of others. However, Brian's reaction to the painting told me it made him feel uncomfortable, as he relived the anger and frustration associated with business takeovers and the 'dog-eat-dog' approaches to commerce with which he had to deal. Was that 'helping'? I was unsure how to deal with this. Should I apologise for causing this discomfort? Or was that desirable—a part of motivating people to act? 'Perhaps signs of (an audience's) discomforts would be 'evidence of my study's success' (Krieger 1984:283) at bringing the audience into the emotional complexity of my experience' (Ellis 1995a:313). Because, just as 'reader response is an integral part of narrative texts that strive to open up rather than close down conversation (Bochner and Waugh, in press)' (Ellis 1995a:319), so audience response was an integral part of my paintings. They had certainly opened up conversation as they 'called up our own experiences, making them available for examination', so that 'in our interpretations we could learn about own own lives, 'experience things that no longer exist' and 'understand things that are totally unfamiliar' (Iser 1978:19)' (Ellis 1995a:319)."

The sound of Alice speaking brought me back.

Brian, and she, had returned to a position where, once again, they could view the painting.

"I see Karen as the meat in the sandwich. It's a great image, and I agree, I've felt like that. The last board meeting is the perfect example!"

As Alice opened her mouth to launch into a tirade about the board meeting, Brian looked at her. Alice did not go on.

"What intrigues me is the look on her face," said Stephen.

"Yes," agreed Alice." The eyes are upturned almost looking heavenward. The face is serene. With the long robe, bare feet and arms outstretched. It reminds me of the way Christ is sometimes depicted."

"Really?" I gasped.

"You didn't mean it like that?" asked Alice.

"Not consciously. Although, I did feel a sense of martyrdom at the time. Like I was the one who was making all the sacrifices for the cause, but that was more feeling sorry for myself, not being Christlike!"

"But," insisted Alice, "you haven't captured that in your expression—it is almost smiling, and either not aware of the threat of the huge mouth behind it, or choosing to ignore it because you have a job to do, well several, from what you've depicted."

"Yes, I get a sense that she is so focussed on the task of juggling those balls, that she keeps doing it even in the face of danger," said Stephen.

Brian began to laugh loudly. "In the *green* face of danger, or in the *mouth* of danger more like it."

Nobody else seemed to find his revelation funny, and there was a confounded silence, except for his now stifled laughter. I felt his laughter was a release valve, triggered under pressure. It made me feel awkward.

"The balls are moving aren't they?" asked Alice. "I mean the smeared circle gives you a sense of them rotating, being juggled, as you said Stephen."

"Yes. I depicted me juggling my responsibilities, which are all important parts of who I am, not just what I do."

I smiled and looked across at Stephen. It was something we had often discussed.

"I see you depicted there," said Brian as he pointed to one of the balls. "Health worker with the ni-Vanuatu women on the right, and mother with your children in the one on the lower left," said Brian.

"Researcher, writer at the computer," said Alice, pointing to the respective balls.

"And as business woman with the EyeBus, then with me, as wife," said Stephen. Although you can see she just couldn't picture me without the moustache!"

"Ah! That's what's different," said Alice looking at Stephen, "you've shaved it off!"

"After about twenty years," I added.

"Don't you like the new look?" asked Brian.

"I'm just so used to the old," I replied. "He's had the moustache nearly all our married life. I just don't picture him with out it." I hesitated. "But it grows on you."

"But not on him," laughed Brian pointing to his top lip.

"Oh, Brian. That's too much at this hour," sighed Alice, as she playfully leant over and gagged his mouth with her hand. Brian pulled her hand away and kissed it with a twinkle in his eye, as if to say, "I'll be good now."

"The EyeBus, that's the name of your mobile optometric practice?" Brian asked Stephen.

"Yes. I visit country towns that are too small to have a resident optometrist, on a monthly basis. The rear of the truck is fitted out with a reception and frame display and fitting area. The forward section has a fully equipped optometric consulting area."

"You remember in the first story we heard how they swapped the tarred roads of South Australia for the rugged dirt tracks and choppy seas of Vanuatu," Alice reminded him.

Brian looked puzzled, then smiled. "Ah, yes. I do now. That was the one with the strings and tape and creatures." He sipped his port.

"Although you said they're balls that you are juggling, they also look like bubbles about to burst," observed Alice "because they seem to have a transparent glistening quality."

"I think they look more like crystal balls. Sort of glimpses into the past, present and future life of Karen," said Stephen.

"Yes, Vaughan is depicted as a babe in arms, and you two at the top look like young lovers," said Alice.

"We are," said Stephen placing his arms around me and pulling me close as he planted a kiss on my cheek. I looked up into his face and smiled.

"Why don't we sit down?" said Stephen.

"Yes, let's," agreed Alice, "and Karen you could read us this story."

"Okay, the final story," I said as I picked up the papers, adjusted the cushion at my back, and waited for the others to give me the sign to begin.

*****

What's eating you?

"What's eating you?" Stephen asked as he placed his arms tenderly on my shoulders.

"I feel like the meat in a sandwich," I replied in a tone, which indicated I was truly sorry for myself.

"Hope you've got sauce with it," he replied, with a smile, trying to jolly me out of the mood.

I swung around to face him, eyes flashing with anger and hurt.

"Just like you to say that. It's easy for you. You just go off to work, in your Eye Bus, doing one task at a time, having time to yourself in the evenings. I'm left here trying to write my thesis, juggle the kids going to basketball practices, music lessons, tenpin bowling competitions, gymnastics, confirmation classes, doing homework, mediating the arguments, overseeing the office work, fixing broken spectacles, keeping up with the housework, shopping, cooking meals, sorting out the stuff getting to Vanuatu," I paused as I struggled to keep control of my emotions, "and still try to be a loving wife."

My voice trailed off as the tears began to flow out of the guilt I felt for venting my frustrations on an undeserving other. It seemed that I could often muster the energy to be polite to strangers and guests, but the family got the brunt of my frustrations and pent up anger.

'Charity begins at home.' It didn't always in this house and that in turn contributed to guilt and anger that I directed inwards myself, and then outwards to those I loved. In the busy-ness of life it was easy to lose sight of priorities, to neglect the importance of stillness, to overlook the perfume of the roses, to forget to just be. Why was it that women in our society assumed so much? Seeking to juggle motherhood, career advances, body image—after all we still want to resemble supermodels—and community involvement. Was it that we selfishly wanted it all? Perhaps it was something subtler; something that was infiltrating our home as it had our society. Living in a world of juxtaposed images, news, sports, movies, sitcoms, medical dramas, commercial advertising, beamed in through television, radio and 'the net', we 'saw' some people have it all in their virtual worlds. Was my life what it should be? How could I tell? I wondered if these virtual people became our measuring sticks. With less extended family interaction, and decreasing contact and support from neighbours in communities, were these virtual people becoming our neighbours? TV characters that we not only identified with, but also knew better than any real person? Especially on days like today I felt so alone. So tired of the effort involved in living. I wanted to enter an unreal world to escape the pressures of mine a moment. I realised I resented the demands that were being made of me by my world, my family and myself. I was calling for a 'Time Out'. Stop the game and re-assess the game plan. Listen to the coach's voice. Look around for team-mates.

Stephen tightened his grip on my shoulders as my head fell back against his chest.

"I'll get you a cup of coffee," he said gently.

As I watched him leave the room, I realised just how much my life-course had been changed by marrying into optometry. Certainly, it had been my choice to show an active interest in his work. To enter a partnership that not only encompassed a romantic partnership but a business one too. Back then, I never imagined that the partnership would take us around the world, as I shared what I had learned with the people of Vanuatu at international gatherings. I had presented papers at conferences with passion and pride at being partners with these people in their efforts to improve their eye health and understanding about cross-cultural health work. I saw myself as a conduit for their voices, a means of carrying their voices and stories out into the world in the hope of bringing about change, in both their world and others. For over six years I had worked in partnership with the people of Vanuatu, in clinics, in schools, in workplaces. I had listened, suggested, acted, and learned with them. Yet, still I questioned whether we were true partners. This was especially so on days like today, when I felt so alone, so pulled in all directions, so sandwiched between worlds.

I turned to look out of the window of my room. A car came to the edge of our drive, braked, slowly turned around and went back up the road. I live at the turning point. Here the long, black snake of carefully planned, evenly surfaced, clearly marked, smooth road ends. Singles, couples, families in vehicles with unmarked paintwork, glossy, black tread, glistening windows, stop and decide to go on or turn back. Some take time. Consulting maps, pointing in different directions, looking hopefully for something familiar to identify, to reassure, and to encourage.

Others feel the road end, swing around, throwing up clouds of dust, which screens their eyes from that which they will never see or experience. Still others slow, move a few metres into the uncharted, dirt road which falls away in the distance, leaving a backdrop of richly coloured sandstone cliffs, fashioned over time by the flow of the river, and framed by majestic gums. Where the road will lead cannot be seen. The surface changes. Becoming rougher, gouged out, distorted, overcome by the run-off from the 'real' road. They stop and turn back.

Every now and then a car will come undaunted by the change in surface, by the unknown, unseen. They move onto the dirt, dust billows out behind. This time blocking out where they have been. Enveloping them in where they are going. They slow, and move on. As they reach the sharp bend, built up with loose gravel, dirt, and the thick grasses escaping from the river's edge, they find the road and the river flow in the same direction. The cliffs offer shelter from the beating Western sun. Native waterbirds look up uneasily from the task of feeding, to examine the intruders in their world. A boy plays with his dog, tossing a wet and gnarled gum branch into the murky water of the river. The delighted dog, leaps into the water to retrieve it, ferrets around in the thick reeds at the edge as it tries to find a way up out of the water. An elderly couple walk hand in hand along the edge of the road. They stop as the car approaches. He steps to one side placing his arm around the shoulders of his wife as he protects her from the dust of the road. A kookaburra laughs raucously overhead in the tall gum and a flock of corellas takes flight filling not only the brilliant azure blue

sky with their presence, but shattering the peace with their shrieking. Those who turn back never experience what lies beyond. But they don't get chips in their paintwork, dents in their bodywork, or clouded windows either.

"Life is full of turning points. Points of time where we choose to go on or turn back." My fingers moved automatically across the keys of my ergonomic keyboard. Deep in thought I had not heard Stephen return.

"My, my, we are philosophical." He had been reading over my shoulder the words radiating from the computer screen. He placed the coffee on the desk next to me.

"Don't you ever feel like turning around and going back?" I asked, as I picked up the hot coffee and took a sip from my favourite china mug.

"Sure, I do." He sat on the edge of the bed across from my desk.

Visions of all the things I'd do differently, if only I could, flashed in my mind.

"I guess it's a good thing we can't go back in time, " I mumbled as I cradled the warm mug in my hands. "You know, I've spent most of the day sending faxes back and forth, trying to find out about the Preventative Eye Care program. Nobody rang back. It's so frustrating. Until I hear from them I can't go on. I need their input. I'm hanging here in limbo. Marking time. Going no where. I feel like I'm not worth anything."

"Why would you think that?" he asked taken aback by my logic.

"Well, these people know us. We have been there many times. We have shown our commitment, our integrity. They wanted me to draw up the proposal. They chased me for it in the beginning. Now I need their help I can't even get an answer. They must not value me at all."

Stephen waited sensing that there was more to come.

"And then I discover that the people I thought were having a hand in supporting me are really just manipulating, using me. They saw me coming and gobbled me up." I paused and was grateful for the coffee as an excuse to swallow hard, before going on.

"I guess I can't blame them. It's my fault. I should have seen that we really are imposing something from our culture that they just don't want. I've wasted years of precious time and money. Risked our lives, all for nothing." The tears began to flow again.

Stephen moved over to my chair by the computer and drew my head gently against him.

"You know that's not true. And you know you're not the only one who has this trouble. It isn't personal. Remember the surgical eye team had the same trouble. They even rang you to see why it was that Vanuatu was the only country they deal with which does not answer telephone calls and faxes. Remember?" he was looking directly at me, as I nodded my head.

"Maybe it isn't personal. Maybe it's racist! Maybe they just don't want to talk to white people," I spluttered back.

"So how do you account for them not getting back to their own people? The research co-ordinator never got a reply from the department when he applied for a person to assist you in the research, remember? And if you think back there's plenty of examples we've come across. It's not just race related."

I knew he was right, but it didn't change the way I felt.

*****

The phone rang and the receptionist answered it.

"Hello, Eye Bus, mobile optometrist. How may I help you?" She reached out and began looking through the patient record cards on the desk. I picked up the bundle of mail alongside and was soon busy sorting through it. There was a blue envelope with a stamp depicting a large pink hibiscus and bearing the word VANUATU at the top. My heart leapt. The postmark showed it had taken ten days to arrive. Living in the islands, sending letters was not easy. Purchasing pens and paper could be difficult to start with. Then one had to have the cash to purchase stamps and face the difficulty of getting it posted. That made letters like this very special. I put the other mail to one side, carefully slit open the envelope, and removed the thin blue sheets. As I carried them across the room to my chair I read:

> *"Dear Stephen, Karen and boys, Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> *Hello from Vanuatu. Concerning my family, everybody is well..."*

It was from one of the eye health workers we had trained in a recent workshop and who had assisted in our clinics. How wonderful it was to hear from her!

> *"We are still working together with the aid post nurse. People came to the dispensary to have their eyes checked and bought some glasses from us. I have also been working with the sister from the hospital in the next village. She had helped me to make some more work checking people's eyes."*

What a difference a day makes. Here was the encouragement I had been lacking yesterday—well, been lacking for months. As I read about her efforts to use her new skills, I was encouraged by her ingenuity. Tapping into the existing health areas could be difficult to achieve because of all the government red tape. I knew that only too well. She had tapped into her social networks and made a niche for herself. She was always keen to learn more and it thrilled me to hear that she was able to put it into action that would not only bring benefits to her, but to her community.

"I arranged with some people from uptop to check their eyes "

I smiled as I read the words. Originally from 'uptop', from the mountains, but having married, she now lived in her husband's coastal village. I remembered how she told me that the coastal people thought the people from 'uptop' were not as smart as them, the equivalent of "hillbillies" I guess. How wrong she was proving them to be. I read on.

"... and when I got to their villages, nobody waited."

So it wasn't just us. It happened to insiders as well. We had often travelled long distances and arrived at villages to find the people had not waited and had gone to their gardens, or had not received the message. Sometimes we would wait for the message to be sent out to the gardens that we had arrived and slowly people would make their way back down to the village and the clinic would begin. Often this waiting time became special, enabling us to *storian*, to discuss life with the people. Other times we would just move on to the next village with a mixture of disappointment, anger, and resignation churning inside. I turned back to the letter again.

"I'd like to learn a bit more to help my own people."

I knew the deep longing she was expressing. I had felt it many times. As a youth worker, I had longed to understand more about the complexities of teenage life and ways to help to prevent tragedies. I had read and listened to understand more about the life of the aged, whilst working in Aged Care in local government. I had studied and worked to improve my teaching skills so I could better facilitate learning as a women's group leader. I was seeking to understand more about parenting to help my children grow and develop. Yes, I knew the longing she had to help her own people.

I wanted to be able to help her, and the others we knew, to fulfil their desire to learn more and assume tasks within their communities. But we had limited time each visit for training, as the demands for direct service were so great. Believing that the future development of their primary eye health services lay in their own hands, not in that of visiting teams, we set aside time for training but found that even this time was diminished. People could not attend because of social obligations such as funerals, feasts, and weddings, or inclement weather, which prevented travel or required clean-up time, or a myriad of other reasons. For people to learn more we needed a co-ordinated effort from the bureaucracies, that more often than not, seemed to either run away from the challenge of, or place stumbling blocks in the path of, those training their own people.

This letter was a reminder that the people at grass roots levels really felt the desire that many, though not all, of the bureaucracy seemed to have lost. Here was one woman, already with many responsibilities to her family and village, with scarce resources, prepared to go out and make a difference in the lives of her people. I was sure that many of the bureaucrats had also felt this passion once. Why was it that now they had the power to bring about change, they appeared to

have lost this passion? Did absolute power really corrupt absolutely? Or was it that they were now part of a system belonging to a different culture, one so different that it alienated them from their people's needs, or buried their passions deep in a mire of political intrigue and protocol?

I looked back at the pale blue handwriting.

"Remember I brought back lots of reading glasses and a few distance glasses and also a few sunglasses."

Yes. I remember. We had caught a bus out to the house where she was staying after our last clinic. By the flickering light of the hurricane lantern, the remaining spectacles and sunglasses had been transferred from our plastic boxes into cardboard boxes, which were taped and tied closed ready for the journey to her island. We had carefully packed the brochures, and rolled the posters so that she could distribute them at clinics. Then we had walked along the wet, muddy potholed street and around the corner to a small restaurant. We had shared a meal of fish and chips together as a special treat. Saying goodbye was always an emotional time. Even now, remembering parting from her brought a large lump to my throat and burning in my eyes. Not knowing when you would see each other again; it was not something you forgot.

"The sunglasses are all gone. I could see that people now like the sunglasses. Stephen, I want more sunglasses. If you send some, send plenty of sunglasses. I'm looking forward to hearing from you again. God bless you all,

Much love..."

My vision blurred as I read the closing words of the letter. I wiped eyes and read again.

"I could see that people now like the sunglasses"..."send plenty of sunglasses." "People now like the sunglasses!"

My heart was beating as fast as if I had just read that I had won the lottery.

"People now like the sunglasses!"

I wanted to run outside and shout it aloud so that it reverberated from the hilltop.

"People now like the sunglasses!"

It didn't just mean that people liked tinted glasses. It meant all our hard work seemed to be paying off. It meant there was hope that the number of eye injuries, sun-related disease, and discomfort could be reduced. It meant following our hearts and not turning back had led to something that was good.

*****

As we lay snuggled under our warm feather quilt, in the deep comfort of an electrically heated water-bed, I thought of our friends in Vanuatu, in their homes woven from cane and coconut leaves, lying on a thin foam mattress, on top of a woven pandanas mat. Now that the evenings were cooler, they may have a cotton blanket to cover them. Worlds apart.

"Stephen?"

"Mmm," was the sleepy reply.

"What have you got that I can send to Vanuatu, any simple primary eye care books?"

"Might have. Can't think just now." He pulled the quilt up higher.

I knew that reading wasn't the *kastom* way of learning in Vanuatu. To learn by example was preferable, but I couldn't be there. The books may help. I lay there wondering how I could get books and sunglasses over there. It was so expensive to mail heavy items.

Shipping was risky. Things seemed to get lost or stolen if there was no one to collect them when they were off loaded. Airfreight, the most reliable method, was way outside my budget.

I tossed and turned unable to fall asleep. Finally I snuck out, pulled on my dressing gown, padded into the dining room, and began to write. It was a letter of encouragement as much to me as her.

My eyes were heavy now, my mind more peaceful. The letter was finished. I folded the crisp, white paper and slid it in the envelope, and addressed it.

As I climbed back into bed, I heard a car coming down the road. As the tyres crunched onto the gravel road the car slowed, the sound of the engine dropping in pitch. I waited, hearing the soft ticking of the engine, then the sound of the tyres as it turned around and went back up the street. I closed my eyes.

"Lord, maybe I don't know what lies ahead, and maybe I won't always have a safe, smooth road to travel, but may some of those bumps in the road serve to jolt me out of my normality, cause that rush of adrenaline, so that I am more alert and able to see, in a new way, the things around me. Thanks for the people who travel with me, for the encouragement and sharing. Thank you, I didn't turn back."

Juggling life's responsibilities, dreaming of possibilities and risking being gobbled up by jealousy, greed, and self-interest, is part of that road travelled by a cross-cultural, eye health educator. It was a journey, I was glad, at least for today, I had chosen to take.

*****

A long silence followed the story, as silence follows a large meal. Satisfied, the body rests, enjoying the sensation, retasting the delights, digesting the content, and feeding the soul.

Alice looked across to where I was sitting. I thought I saw a tear in her eye, or maybe it was just the one in my own, blurring my vision.

Alice sighed.

As I looked up I was conscious of someone watching me.

My eyes met Stephen's.

I looked away.

It was awkward reading about our relationship with him there. I wondered what he felt.

"Well, at least you had something to smile about in the end," said Brian. "They started to wear sunglasses."

I looked over to Brian.

"Yes. On that particular island. It was an island, though, that had more easily embraced and incorporated Western ideas in the past," I suggested. "And although I felt a great deal of satisfaction in hearing they had begun to wear sunglasses, I knew there was still a long way to go. On some islands, the issues associated with wearing sunglasses, which appear to be addressed on that particular island, were just being raised with communities for the first time. This is only a first glimpse of success, from the side of the first mountain!"

"Not the top of the first mountain?" asked Alice.

"I don't think so. This person is working with villages on just one side of the island, the other side is separated by a huge volcano!" I drank my coffee. "Actually, it is the fact that the worker still wishes to work on the project that encourages me most."

"It would be so encouraging to know the work goes on there, while you are here," agreed Alice.

"Yes, but it is more than that. It means that some of the people have seen the need to protect their eyes and to continue to work towards that goal. In Vanuatu, 'life is about fulfilling one's obligations and proving oneself a reliable member of the community. Goal-oriented behaviour has a specific end which, when achieved, leads to a sense of satisfaction. Material goals are set by the recognised needs of the community in which the individual is placed, not by a generalised feeling in the individual that life requires goal-oriented achievement. So when the goals have been achieved the person can stop; can rest until another socially recognised need requires further action. People involved in development planning in the Third World find this one of the most frustrating features of involvement with many non-Western people. Once their recognised needs and wants have

been satisfied they stop work. They do not continue to apply themselves to productive work when they see no need for the product' (Geddes 1994c:101)."

"So you're saying that once the sunglasses were sold to the health worker's community, they could stop work, feeling satisifed they fulfilled their role?" asked Alice.

"Yes. But this eye-health worker went beyond the goal of distributing the sunglasses, to sharing the knowledge with others, encouraging them to take it to their community, and creating a demand for eye protection. So the eye-health worker helped them see a need, and what's more, wants to learn more to meet that need. If that hadn't happened the whole thing could have just died."

"Is that why at the beginning of the story you were so frustrated and concerned that their lack of response meant you had wasted your time?" asked Brian.

"Yes, to some extent. But I also was questioning whether I was doing the right thing too. As Berger (1972:221) points out 'all material development is, in the end, futile unless it serves to enhance the meanings by which human beings live'. Which is why it is so important to be careful about riding roughshod over traditional values and institutions."

"You were still questioning that!" exclaimed Brian. "I would have thought you resolved that long ago."

"No. It is an issue that constantly preys on my mind. I am not one of them. I don't 'know it all'. I valued and applied their culture. I endeavoured to recognise essential or core values of the people. I took account of cultural and ethnic elements such as art, music, drama, sports, beliefs, myths, story-telling and other expressions related to human sentiment and imagination[1], but maybe I had missed something, misinterpreted something, or misunderstood..."

"...And I remember you questioning whether we should be going at all," added Stephen.

"Yes. There was a stage when I felt that we were *imposing* behaviour, based on a foreign model, onto these people. Did they need our advice? Or want it? Just as there were requests for help, there was plenty of evidence to suggest they wanted *waetman* to clear out and stay out. I began to question everything again. Ultimately, my work is about people with their own ideas of progress, living in a socio-economic environment which they cannot fully control, who have their own cultures, their own charters for living (Harrison 1988) and me, a person from a different culture, with a different charter, coming to a point where we can work together to bring their ideas to fruition. This involves the people taking from their culture and mine, elements that they thought would improve their quality of life. These thoughts were echoed by Ravuvu (1995), a scholar from the Institute of Pacific studies, in an address at the Regional Conference for Pacific Youth in the Cook Islands. 'Like other developing countries, our Pacific nations cannot do without modern political, social and scientific methods and techniques if we are to fulfil our primary duty

of providing better living standards to our generally underprivileged people. But as people do not live by bread alone, the duty to assimilate techniques by which nature is mastered is inseparable from the right of our people to make themselves the masters of their own cultures and destinies. The task is not simply to imitate a foreign model, but enable our traditional values and philosophies of life to strengthen their humanist functions and reveal their universal importance. This is healthy development' (Ravuvu 1995:97)."

"So you decided what you were doing *was* healthy development?" asked Brian.

"Sometimes."

"What does that mean?" Brian exclaimed.

"That I still feel uneasy at times. That what I was doing was 'good' but ..."

"Always the but," nodded Brian.

"But... I can't quite put my finger on it. Perhaps it was a question of how I went about things at times. Perhaps it was a matter of timing. Perhaps it is just the value of hindsight: me wishing I had known things when I couldn't possibly have known them but knowing it would have made a difference...." My voice trailed off.

Stephen came over and sat next to me on the arm of the chair.

"We can't know everything. All our knowledge is imperfect," he reassured. "And I'm sure we have, and will, make a difference. My last trip was so great!"

"You went by yourself last time, didn't you?" asked Alice.

"Yes. Karen was coming, but in the end we felt it was important for her to keep writing, and finish the thesis."

"That must have been a hard decision," commented Alice.

"It was. Once again I was choosing between recording and action. Between me and my world and going to theirs. I felt like I *was* using them, because I couldn't find the time to go to *them* because I was doing *my* work."

"... But also this trip was going to involve travel to islands that were only accessible by boat, and sea travel is not your forte," Stephen reminded me.

"Yes, and in the end it was better I hadn't planned on going because the yacht broke down before he left, and he ended up going in small boats, and turning up to villages at dark, finding they were not expecting him because the message hadn't got through. A woman in that situation would have made arrangements difficult."

"For sure," Stephen agreed. "It was much easier for them with just two guys. A great trip though—I distributed plenty of glasses."

"Yes, but the pamphlets and posters for the preventative eyecare project, that were freighted over three months before, were stuck on the wharf!"

"That's true," said Stephen. "I was really disappointed about that!"

"Not just you," I added. "I spent hours packaging and arranging them to be sent."

"It was out of our control," Stephen assured me.

That knowledge was of little comfort to me.

"So why did you portray yourself as the meat in the sandwich?" Alice asked."You weren't caught between biomedical and traditional modes of healing were you? They were."

"My mind was. I was aware of the dilemma. I had read articles about health in the Pacific, and indigenous programmes. I felt under pressure to examine my beliefs as I explained before. Biomedical input on one side, *kastom* beliefs on the other. But there were also other times when I felt like I was being pressured from both sides."

"Like when?" asked Brian.

"Like when I was asked to provide something, which I arranged. Then the people, who agreed to do it, for whatever legimate reasons, didn't. And the people came back to me. I went back to the people, and so on. I'm the go between. I know that's not unusual, but when you are separated by an ocean, you can't just get in there and fix it yourself. The pressure is on!"

"I still don't see why you painted something eating you," said Brian.

"About that time, one year into the planned three year project, I was being pushed by the group supporting the project to finish it. They wanted to move onto another project, and couldn't get funding for other projects until they spent the money from this one. Suddenly the hand that was feeding the project, was gobbling it up!"

"Gosh," said Alice. "You had carefully planned the project to run over three years to allow for gradual acceptance of sunglasses, and suddenly they want it over with! I'd have been livid."

"I felt betrayed. Alone. I knew the ni-Vanuatu needed time, yet was getting pushed and shoved by these other people. I felt like the meat in the sandwich, I can tell you. Spend the money! I couldn't get the tape of the song to spend it on, in health promotion, which was budgeted for. I couldn't get feedback as to numbers of sunglasses in stock over there, to spend it on more stock." I could feel the tension building inside me again. I felt like a pressure cooker, and knew if I continued my valve would blow. I took a deep breath and looked at Stephen, with eyes that pleaded with him to change the subject.

He picked up my cue. "Another port Brian?" he asked as he moved over to pour himself another.

"No, thanks. We'll have to be going soon."

"So you never got the tape of the sunglass song?" asked Alice.

"No, unfortunately."

"What song was that?" Brian asked.

"String Bands were given summaries of the research findings, information about sunglasses and eye damage in Vanuatu, and were asked to transform them into songs, which were then performed and broadcast on Radio Vanuatu as part of 1998 Independence Day Celebrations, which includes String Bands performing as part of a competition. Each band had to perform three songs, one of which was to be about sunglasses. The preventative eye care project put up the money for second prize in the competition and in return was to receive a tape of the winning band performing the song so that we could use it for health promotion on the radio."

"I've heard radio is really popular in the islands," said Alice.

"Not just popular. Radio is an important means of inter-island communication, broadcasting regular message services and news bulletins, as well music for entertainment," Stephen explained as he returned to his chair.

"But you didn't get the tape," commented Brian.

"No. There was a mix up, and we didn't. But I hope that when the group puts together their next cassette 'album', the sunglass song will be on it. That way people will still get the message. It will just happen in 'Vanuatu time'."

"I can see now why you painted the clock of arms in **'Waiting and Working'**," said Alice quietly. "The pressure of time and budgets does impact so much on preventative projects."

"And on the people working in them," I added. "I'm so tired of battling on at times. I feel like I'm the only one in the world who cares, and at times I wonder if even *I* care enough. Then at other times, something like the letter happens, and you get a new burst of energy that seems unlimited, spurring you on."

Stephen looked over at me, checking to see I was okay. I smiled to reassure him, but my eyes betrayed my true feelings and how fragile I was talking about and reliving the hurt and frustration associated with the project.

"That was pretty clear in the stories. They are packed with emotion, showing how complex emotions are, and how they influenced your day-to-day functioning and decision making," said Alice.

"I hope that's good."

"I think it is really helpful," remarked Alice. "It somehow seems to be 'demystifying and remystifying social processes involved in work and relationships' (Ellis 1995a:336)."

"Oh." I paused. "I guess it does. But I hope that helps people understand what cross-cultural health work is like. I didn't set out to just write about me..."

"It's all about you," said Brian, indicating the paintings in the room.

"Well, it has to be because 'we are part of all we see and what we see is a part of us' (Barone and Eisner 1997:88), and because we experience the world through our bodies. I couldn't write about cross-cultural experience as if I didn't experience it in a body! The other interesting thing about portraying such experience is that Merleau-Ponty (1989:150) says that the 'the body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather a work of art'. So perhaps this arts-based form of portrayal is more appropriate here."

"And..." Brian said enthusiastically. "...I remember you saying, when we were talking about the medical side of things, that Western medicine seems to treat bodies like machines to be fixed but the ni-Vanuatu didn't. Sounds like what that Perleau-Monty character was saying..."

"Merleau-Ponty," corrected Alice.

"Whoever," said Brian.

"You know that's a good thought Brian," I agreed. "When we stop seeing the body as a machine, and start to view it more holistically, we become more aware of the impact of things such as emotions, spirituality, and relationships on our bodies and in our lives. I guess that's why I felt those things were critical to understanding the experiences I had doing cross-cultural health work."

"Yes, your works of art not only portray your body, but help us see what you see in the world you experienced," said Alice.

"Yes, but in sharing here, you helped me see what you see. It's a dialogue," I assured.

"The paintings and stories certainly inspired our dialogue and created possibilities for us to share our thoughts, and be challenged to change the way we do things when dealing with others," added Alice.

"I feel like I've been in their world, the ni-Vanuatu that is. Yet oddly, I feel like I understand more about my own too," observed Brian.

"Mmm. One of the strengths of arts-based methodology is that 'it liberates people from blind authority and the dogmas and doctrines of institutions that close the questions and cease inquiry, and gives everyone the opportunity to function as a creator of his or her own understanding' (Barone and Eisner 1997:87). So, can you see now that it's about more than me?" I asked Brian. "That it's also about how people make choices, how they are part of a society which shapes and moulds the way they make sense of their lives. It tries to show that the experiences of cross-cultural health work depicted encompass 'more than the material objects of the seen world. They include abstract phenomena like music, mathematics, philosophy, physics, pain, emotions, and memories' (Coulter 1979, 1989). But it also shows that 'visual experience encompasses what is seen, and is socially

recognised, classified, and organised as seen, irrespective of philosophical questions of independent existence', and that 'to be concerned analytically with experience, is to treat seriously what people are aware of and notice as part of their everyday world' (Ball and Smith 1992:55)."

Brian nodded as he finished his coffee and biscuit.

"I think it also demonstrates that before people get involved in Third World development, they should do their homework and realise that they are not just dealing with programmes but people, whose lives might well be seriously and adversely affected by well-intentioned programmes unless those responsible for them have indeed planned the programme for the community (Geddes 1994a:7)," noted Alice.

"Yes, that came out a lot in our discussion—the focus on people not programmes, people not numbers, people not bodiless eyes," responded Brian.

"And the difficulty of making moral and ethical decisions as to how to carry out these things. Let alone trying to work out what is 'good' for people!" I added.

"Do you think you'll ever resolve that one?" asked Brian.

"I hope so. I need to feel that I have done 'good', in order to feel that my life is somehow worthwhile. But it's just so hard to know what is 'good'. I mean what I thought was 'good' at the beginning of the project is different to what I now see as 'good'. And each time I learn more about both the ni-Vanuatu and myself the boundaries of what defines 'good' shift."

"Perhaps they will always do that," said Alice. "Think about the issues arising now about the 'Stolen Generations'[2]."

"Yes."

"I'm pretty sure most of the agencies involved in taking those Aboriginal children really thought they were doing it for the 'good' of the children," Alice continued.

"But it's certainly not seen as 'good' now is it?" Brian concluded. "And I'm not so sure about their motives. Didn't they just want to assimilate a dying race?"

"But perhaps they thought that was 'good'," said Alice.

"Exactly. 'Good' is a morally defined word!" I insisted. "What I think is 'good', another may not."

"That's why I think that the stories and paintings, while foregrounding the personal—your experience, also address the complex and contradictory nature of theory and research—the bigger picture. They make me think about things I take for granted, consider my stance on issues, and they move me to feel compassion for others," Alice offered.

"What will the ni-Vanuatu think of them?" wondered Brian.

"Well, actually, I had the opportunity to show them to a ni-Vanuatu gentleman visiting last week," I replied.

"What did he say?" Brian and Alice chorused.

"He began to tell stories from the paintings! Pointing at bits he started to tell me about things," I answered.

"Did he understand it all?" asked Brian.

"I didn't ask. Remember, direct questioning is not the way—you *storian.*"

"Wait and let him tell you, right?" said Brian.

"Yes. It was sort of awkward because I wanted so much to see what he thought but had to hang back. I did an introductory talk about each painting, then waited."

"I remember he didn't know what juggling was," commented Stephen.

"Yes, that's right! He saw them as sort of speech balloons. So even though I used something that he didn't have experience of, he took the image and found meaning in it by applying it to what he did know through experience."

"How would he know about speech balloons?" asked Brian.

"Comics are very popular in Vanuatu, both books and in posters," Stephen answered.

"I really want to take the paintings and stories over to the people. Probably next year. But like all things, it'll happen in 'Vanuatu time'," I laughed.

The others laughed too.

"Goodness, look at Australian time," said Brian.

"Is it that late?" queried Alice. "We'd better get going."

Alice looked around for her handbag. She noticed the cups.

"Oh, do you want a hand with those?" she asked.

"No, you get going—it's been a long day," I replied.

"I'll give her a hand with those," assured Stephen.

We stood and walked to the front hall.

"Thanks so much for coming," I said as I hugged Alice.

"We've had a great day," Alice replied. "I just love the paintings and stories. I'm so glad you found a way to share your experience. I learnt a lot."

"So did I, " said Brian. "Thanks for your hospitality too," he replied shaking Stephen's hand. "What do they say in Vanuatu? Lookim yu?"

"Yes. Lookim yu. See you," Stephen and I replied as we stood arm in arm at the door.

"In 'Vanuatu time'!" laughed Alice, as she and Brian made their way down the path to their car.

I closed the door and slipped the latch across.

Stephen caught me up in his arms.

"*Hallo, Misis! Olsem wanem i gud*?"

"*I gud*," I replied smiling as I turned to go and pick up the cups in the green room.

"Leave them 'til the morning," Stephen said as he turned out the light in the hall.

"Okay, but I just want to check something," I insisted as I pulled away towards the green room. "I'll be in, in a minute."

Stephen smiled as he walked into the bedroom.

The light in the green room was eerie. I looked across at the paintings. The attachment I felt to them was strange. It was as if part of me now existed outside of myself. Yet it was a part of me that was gone, changed by the experience of having painted and written it. Already I was a new person. More self aware, yet elusive; stronger, yet more vulnerable; wiser yet still naïve. I shifted **'what's eating you?'** back against the wall, as if tucking in a child for the night. I turned off the light and closed the door.

Laurel Richardson's words came to me: 'Free at last? Free to break every convention? Free not to write? Not to speak? Free to dance, hum, fingerpaint the sociological?' (Richardson: 1995:192) Was I that free? I started out that way, but still felt I had to write to fulfill a responsibility to my audience. Was it like giving birth to a child, then feeling the responsibility to nuture, and teach it, before setting it free to run on its own? Was it a desire to protect it from corruption, from coming to harm, or doing harm? Was it a desire to reproduce yourself in some way, to leave a legacy to a better world?

Walking softly, I entered my eldest son's room. He was taller than me now, yet he was still my baby. How clearly I remembered his birth and the anticipation of his growing, of hearing my first child call *me* 'Mummy.' I picked up his sports jumper tossed off on the floor, and hung it up on the chair near his desk, which was covered with books and computer stuff. How different his world was from the one I grew up in. As I looked at his desk my eyes were drawn to the photo hanging above it. A mountain towered over a dusty playing field, fringed by wind blown palms. A group of ni-Vanuatu boys were playing soccer and amongst them was one fair-skinned, blond-haired boy, Lachlan. On a shelf near the photo were two pig's tusks, and a wooden tamtam.

I left his room and entered Alex's room. As I did so I knocked the wooden outrigger canoe hanging on his wall. I leant over and kissed him on his forehead. I picked up the cat from his bed and carried it out.

Llew and Vaughan's room was its usual shambles of teddies, school bags and clothes. They were growing so fast, their small room barely accommodated the two of them any

more. At the end of their beds on the wall hung the carved geckos. How Vaughan loved the noise the geckos in Vanuatu made.

Every night we still sang the ni-Vanuatu prayer together before they went to bed:

Papa blong mifala	Father God
Yu luk long mifala	Watch over me
Yu stap klosap bae mifala	Stay close to me
Go go I brok delaet.	Until daylight breaks.

Each of them had their own memories and experiences of Vanuatu. I wondered how those experiences would shape the people they'd become. I knew they weren't all good experiences. As I looked at Vaughan I recalled how he didn't want to go to Vanuatu again because he remembered how all the people had pinched his cheeks and touched his hair. He hated that invasion of his personal space. I was remiss in not sensing that, in not protecting him more. I pulled the covers over him, and tucked them around his small form. His blond hair fell across the pillow. I picked up teddy and tucked it into bed next to him.

Form carries the experience 'as a mother carries a baby' (Dewey 1934:18), I recalled. And how does a mother carry her children? Not just physically in the womb but within her heart. The child, no matter how big or small is part of her own organism, always, even though now separate and grown, and having a life of its own.

My paintings so laboriously brought into the world, so carefully nurtured and protected, were about to leave me too. They'll be put on display, and interpreted, misinterpreted and reinterpreted. They'll have a life of their own, one determined not just by me their creator, but by those who view them. With the stories, they'll be presented to the world without me physically there. Yet I *will* go with them just as the people, and experience, of Vanuatu are with my family and me. People will look into them as Brian, Alice, Stephen, and I had today, and the eye of my Self, will become for them, the eye of the other within.

Notes

[1]. Fals Borda and Rahman (1991:8) emphasise the importance of these elements in developing and conducting PAR projects.

[2]. The 'Stolen Generations' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities from 1910-1970. A national inquiry to be conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was established in August 1995. Hearings were held in every capital city and many regional centres between December 1995 and October 1996. The inquiry resulted in a 689-page report, *Bringing them home*. The inquiry looked at four main issues:

The first was to examine the past and continuing effects of separation of individuals, families and communities.

The second was to identify what should be done in response.

The third was to find justifcation for, and nature of, any compensation for those affected by separation.

The last looked at current laws, policies, and practices affecting the placement and care of indigenous children.

'The inquiry found that the forcible removal of indigenous children was a gross violation of their human rights.' (www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/j8_1_2..html p9)

Further it was noted that, 'The notion that children were removed for their own good is particularly offensive to indigenous peoples given the state of the institutions to which many children were sent.' (www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/j8_1_2..html p5)

And, 'the inquiry found that the main reason for removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was not concern for a child's well-being. The majority of the children were removed because they were indigenous'.
(www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/j8_1_2..html p6)

For further information on this report: http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/

Part Three

Epilogue

Representation can be viewed as relationship. When doing research the whole process involves relationships. Representation is the message portraying a relationship with the researched, exploring relationships with those with whom we live, and establishing a relationship with the audience (Gergen & Gergen 2000). Until now this thesis has largely attempted to represent through description, portrayal, and evocation, relationships with the ni-Vanuatu, and those with whom I lived whilst undertaking cross-cultural health work. I feel it is important that I now endeavour to explore the newly established relationship with you, the audience.

As an audience of strangers you were invited into my home, have been privy to intimate conversations and parts of myself that I would not normally have on public display. You have witnessed discussions about motivation in health work, 'Going Native', of being authentic, and of PAR and the need for participation, patience, and persistence in health work. You have 'seen' the physical and emotional risks a health worker faces. I have explained to my friends, and you, cultural differences in understandings of time and aetiology. You have heard me raise and discuss issues of gender, age, education, employment, identity and the legacy of past colonial dominance as they impact on the wearing of sunglasses. You have watched me struggle to constructively critique both the biomedical world and the ni-Vanuatu cultural world, while I dealt with the responsibility I felt to both obtain and use indigenous people's knowledge respectfully. As I shared with my friends, I also shared with you, the pain of self-discovery and territoriality, power and vested interests. You were able to observe a range of emotions, thoughts, relationships, and actions integral to understanding my experience of cross-cultural health work and its portrayal. Having now 'met' me, we can no longer be strangers, but move into a relationship of author and reader.

It is a relationship, which is unequally defined and risky, for you know much more about me than I know of you. I have endeavoured to guide you, but you retain the power over my construction and definition within this text, as readers 'construct authors of texts' (Ellis 1995a:320). This power not dissimilar to that which I exercised in constructing the Other in my original traditional, realist ethnography. I know now why I did not like writing in such a way.

In this thesis, I have tried to be honest with you, the reader, and create a text which is realistic and concrete with regard to character, setting, atmosphere, and dialogue (Denzin

1997). I hope that in viewing the paintings, and reading the text, you were able to identify with the characters and feel with them, although of course, different audience members will identify with, and feel for, different characters.

Perhaps you, whilst vicariously in the room, formed an image of them and me, and became 'like artists who connect the two-dimensional dots on the page, and, in experiencing the work, create a three-dimensional image with [your] gaze and response' (Giancola 1992:7 cited in Ellis 1995a:320). Now there are two artists, two image makers, bound in relationship by the text. However, it is in that relationship that conflict may arise. For this thesis does not have 'absolute meaning but is dependent on political, cultural and ideological contexts (Barthes 1967), on the location and time in which it is written and read (Derrida 1978, 1981), and on the experiences and interpretations of readers (Fish 1980: Polkinghorne 1988; Tompkins 1980)' (Ellis 1995a:319).

The kind of person you think I am may influence what credence you give to the conclusions I draw and the meaning you make of my experience as it is portrayed. That is why I chose to add to the framing story a prologue and this epilogue. These two additional opportunities to address you, the audience, enable me to remind you, my audience, that there will be multiple interpretations, and meanings.

As an audience, you may have formed an opinion of my actions and me, as you endeavoured to work out what kind of person I am and may challenge my assumptions or define me in a particular way from reading a particular story or viewing a particular painting. Yet I may have been transformed by the writing of that story, the creation of that painting and no longer be the person you think I am, because the self writing the story is changed by the process of writing the story (Richardson in Flemons et al 2000). I am now older, and hopefully 'wiser' than I was when I commenced this study. However, I find like Ellis (1995a:336) that 'as I wrestle with the ambiguity, complexity and contradiction in lived experience, sometimes I now feel I know a great deal about living in relationships and writing narratives; other times I am sure I know almost nothing, even about the most basic process.'

As an artistic evocative autoethnography, this thesis sought to provide a vehicle 'for readers to discover moral truths about themselves' (Denzin 1997:284) and 'for talking to each other, often across the borders of discipline and identity locations' (Burdell & Swadener 1999:26). Audiences are influenced by past experiences, gender differences, cultural practices, moral and ethical understandings, power and structural influences, for 'if we are all self-interpreting beings—finding an answer to the question 'What shall I make of this?' in part constitutes the kind of persons we become' (Schwandt 1999:460). An audience of self-reflexive readers—'readers who seek honest but reflexive works that draw

them into the many structures of verisimilitude that shape the story in question' (Denzin 1997:283)—will be aware of this and use such knowledge to begin a conversation perhaps with him/herself, perhaps with the author or others. 'The very act of construing meaning is risky, situated, disturbing and relational' (Schwandt 1999:463). Therefore it is important to now address your response, as it is 'an integral part of narrative texts, that strive to open up rather than close down conversation' (Bochner and Waugh cited in Ellis 1995a:319).

'Understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding. To be in dialogue requires that we listen to the Other and simultaneously risk confusion and uncertainty both about ourselves and about the other person we seek to understand. It is only in an engagement of this kind, in a genuine conversation, that understanding is possible' (Schwandt 1999:458). Such conversations constitute 'an unrehearsed practical-moral adventure with no way of predicting how it will turn out or what will turn up' (Schwandt 1999:461). This implies taking a risk that I have been, or will be, misunderstood, or that insights of members of the audience may show me that I can be wrong. It also implies that audience members may discover the same. Whereas, at the beginning of this study it was visions of physically damaged, red and sore eyes within my mind that provoked investigation, it has now become the soul searching eye of the audience within that I now struggle with on a day-to-day basis for 'both readers and writers are coproducers of the text that is being written and read' (Denzin 1997:246).

Understood as such a product, the paintings and text endeavoured to evoke 'perspective taking, compassion, and critique of prevailing 'common sense' assumptions and to problematise categories of difference (Burdell & Swadener 1999:25). Hence a number of important questions arise. 'Did my story engender a conversational response toward the text as you read? (Richardson cited in Ellis 1995a:319)? Did my story elicit a response, which led you to think more deeply about issues raised? Did it create in you a desire to be informed? What do you now understand about cross-cultural work, about others and about yourself as a result of your response to this thesis? Has this made you uncomfortable?

If it has, I feel the urge to apologise, for I wouldn't want guests in my home to feel uncomfortable. However, as an autoethnographer, I did want to motivate my audience to feel, question and act and perhaps that requires discomfort. 'Perhaps signs of readers' discomforts would be evidence of my study's success (Krieger 1984:283) at bringing readers into the emotional complexity of my experience' (Ellis 1995a:313).

So as Karen-the-person, I apologise for that discomfort, but as Karen-the-autoethnographer, I hope it will provoke deep thought and discussion. Once again I am

conscious of the multiple identities I adopt no longer just within my portrayal and analysis of this study, but in my everyday life.

Reading through this thesis, I am conscious that although I have striven to make it accessible to ni-Vanuatu, because it is being submitted for examination as an academic work, this latter audience has been foregrounded. To some extent this makes me, as *sista*-Karen-the-cross-cultural health worker feel uncomfortable and sad, for in so doing I have, in this representation, once again had to choose which identity, which relationship to privilege, on which 'side' of the hyphen to be. It does not indicate, however, that I consider the relationship with the academic audience of more importance than the relationship with the ni-Vanuatu audience.

Karen-the-academic suggests that there are barriers to writing for multiple audiences and that 'no text can do everything at once' (Denzin 1997:287). *Sista*-Karen-the-cross-cultural worker suggests it becomes just another example of Western imperialism asserting itself. Perhaps the answer will come when we move out of 'the grip of the text' (Schwandt 1999:454) and the divide between oral and textual/written cultures is more easily bridged, or navigated, through audience interaction and performance. That is something I am currently investigating as a means of representing my experience in a more equitable manner[1], but that will be another story.

So how can I best end this autoethnography? Ellis (in Flemons et al, 2000) suggests that I 'push for complex understandings and yet allow for ongoing conversations'. Hence, it is my hope that you find this thesis 'exhibits 'interpretive sufficiency'; that it possesses that amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical consciousness to be formed' (Christians et al. cited in Denzin 1997:283) and that it does indeed invite such ongoing conversations about cross-cultural health work and artistic autoethnographic representations.

My goal in this study was to acquire knowledge, which could enhance cross-cultural interactions by giving people the opportunity to *'taste what something is like'* (Willis 1999:110) and to offer insight into the experience of cross-cultural health work. I have told my story, sought to challenge my assumptions about it, and reworked it many times using a variety of media, yet I still have more questions at the end of this study than I had at the beginning. At the outset I sought to find out why the ni-Vanuatu would not comply with my advice. Now I wonder why I can't comply with other's advice. Why do I feel caught between these two worlds? Why when I watch a TV show that seeks to privilege one cultural interpretation over another do I feel so angry? Why have I become wiser about the Other's world yet feel more judgmental toward my own as I 'see through the crap'? How can I live in this liminal space? Can I remain a boundary-crosser? Does it really matter?

Perhaps it is not for me to 'finish' this thesis and so end our conversation. Perhaps that is something you, the audience must do, although as you will now know, from observing me through this thesis, it is hard for me not to have the last word.

Notes

[1] The ni-Vanuatu are very good orators. Watching a ni-Vanuatu gentleman telling stories from my paintings one night, I could see that as the orator retold the story, adding their own experience and interpretation of the painting, a process began that had a life, a passion of its own and provided an experience of an experience as the orator and audience interacted with each other, the story and the painting. So it appears that told through words and paintings, these stories 'will long to be used, as well as analysed, to be revised, and retold rather than settled and theorised' (Bochner and Ellis 1996:4). It seemed quite natural then, for me to begin retelling my stories through performance in and around my paintings. I added to them poems as poetry readings have been popular in Vanuatu especially amongst women's groups and poetry is a literary form, embraced by ni-Vanuatu writers, since the early 1970s, as a means of mobilising public sentiment (Subramani 1985). As such they became performance texts that 'exist in what Conquergood (1992) calls 'the borderlands' (p.80), the spaces where rhetoric, performance, ethnography, and cultural studies come together' (Conquergood 1992, p80 cited in Denzin 1997:91). They offered me another opportunity to further explore the 'created' world and my experience as researcher and health worker. They provided another point of access for my audience to enter the world created firstly through the painting and then re-created through the performance.

At the AERA Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group First Annual Conference February 2000, New Mexico, I performed *What Makes Me* with Mary Preisinger, a dancer. This performance incorporated visual arts, storytelling, poetry, and dance. I received the following email from a member of the audience, a professor of theatre.

'Your performance of *What Makes Me* at the Albuquerque Arts-Based Educational Research Conference in Albuquerque was nothing less than emotionally engaging and powerful. As I shared with you afterwards, the aesthetic of the performance—its elegance, its passion, its perfection of images, text, and movement—was so overwhelmingly moving that it evoked within me such strong response. My tears were genuine, and my comments about its power didn't do justice to the beautiful experience you gave me. The world you created was something I rarely find at live theatre performance. Words cannot express how deeply I felt shook to the core of my soul over the power (I can't think of any other word to describe it) of *What Makes Me.* All I can do is to say how appreciative I was of the event, how privileged I felt at being there to witness such power.'

Denzin (1997) writes 'ethnography has crossed that liminal space that separates the scholarly text from its performance. The text is now given back to those to whom it has always belonged—the reader, the Other, who finds in these texts parts of themselves and parts of others just like them' (p123). The audience response at this early attempt gives me hope that as I create such performances I will find a means of better addressing my multiple audience and bridging the divide between oral and textural/written cultures.

References

Adelman, M.B. & Frey, L.R. 1997, *The Fragile Community: Living Together with AIDS,* New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.

Agar, M. 1980, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography,* London, Academic Press.

Agar, M. 1986, *Speaking of Ethnography,* London, Sage.

Argyle, M. 1982, 'Inter-cultural communication', in *Cultures in Contact: Studies in Cross-Cultural Interaction* ed. S. Bochner, Oxford, Pergamon, pp 61-79.

Asian Development Bank 1997, *Vanuatu: Economic Performance, Policy and Reform Issues,* Manila, Asian Development Bank Pacific Studies Series.

Austin, D. 1996, 'Kaleidoscope', in *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing,* eds C. Ellis and A. P.Bochner, Walnut Creek, Alta Mira Press, pp 206-230.

Ball, M.S. & Smith, G.W. 1992, *Analysing Visual Data,* Qualitative Research Methods, Series 24, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Barone, T. & Eisner, E. 1997, 'Arts-Based Educational Research', in *Complementary Methods For Research In Education,* ed. R.M. Jager, 2nd Ed, Washington DC, AMERA.

Berger, P. 1973, *The Homeless Mind,* Middlesex, Penguin.

Berger, P. 1974, *Pyramids of Sacrifice,* New York, Basic Books.

Biddulph, S. 1995, *Manhood,* Sydney, Finch Publishing.

Bochner, A.P.& Ellis, C. 1996, 'Taking Ethnography into the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* vol. 25 no.1, pp 3-5.

Bochner, S. ed. 1982, *Cultures in Contact: Studies in Cross-cultural Interaction,* Oxford, Pergamon.

Boeren, A. 1992, 'Getting Involved: Communication for Participatory Development', *Community Development Journal,* 27 (3).

Burdell, P. & Swadener, B. 1999, 'Critical Personal Narrative and Autoethnography in Education: Reflections on a Genre', *Educational Researcher,* 28 (6), pp 21-26.

Carpenter, E. 1975, 'The Tribal Terror of Self-awareness', in *Principles of Visual Anthropology,* ed. P.Hockings, The Hague, Mouton and Co.

Cavallaro, D. & Warwick, A. 1998, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body,* Oxford, Berg.

Chambers, R. 1983, *Rural Development: putting the last first,* New York, Wiley and Sons.

Chambers, R. 1992, 'Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory", *Institute of Development Studies Discussion Paper* 311.

Chambers, R. 1997, *Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last,* London, Intermediate Technology Publications.

Chaplin, E. 1998, 'Making meanings in art worlds: a sociological account of the career of John Constable and his oeuvre, with special reference to 'The Cornfield' (homage to Howard Becker)', ed. J. Prosser, *Image Based Research,* London, Falmer Press, pp284-306.

Chan, Selina Ching 1998, 'Politicizing tradition: the identity of indigenous inhabitants in Hong Kong", *Ethnology,* vol. 37, no. 1, Pittsburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh, pp 39-54.

Chaudhary, A. 1997 'Towards an epistemology of participatory research", in *Participatory Action Research: International Contexts and Consequences,* ed. R. McTaggart, New York, State University of NewYork Press.

Cheek, J., Shoebridge, J., Willis, E., Zadoroznyj, M. eds 1996, *Society and Health: Social theory for health workers,* Melbourne, Longman.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. 1994, 'Personal experience methods", in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 413-427.

Conquergood, D 1988, 'Health theatre in a Hmong refugee camp: performance, communication and culture", in TDR: *Journal of Performance Studies,* vol.32, pp 174-208.

Corcega, T.F. 1992, 'Participatory research: getting the community involved in health development', *International Nursing Review,* vol. 39, no. 6, pp 185-188.

Coulter, J. 1979, *The social construction of mind: Studies in ethnomethodology and linguistic philosophy,* London, Macmillan.

Coulter, J. 1989, *Mind in Action,* Cambridge, UK, Polity.

Crick, M. 1992, 'Ali and Me: an essay in street-corner anthropology', in *Anthropology and Autobiography,* eds J.Okely and H. Callaway, London; New York, Routledge, pp 175-192.

Cronly-Dillon, J. et al. 1986, *Hazards of Light, Myth and Realities; Eye and Skin,* Oxford, Pergamon.

Crotty, M. 1996, 'Doing Phenomenology', in *Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education,* eds P.Willis and B. Neville, Melbourne, David Lovell Publishing, pp 272-282.

Csordas, T.J. 1994, *Embodiment and Experience: the Existential Ground of Culture and Self,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Davies, C.A. 1999, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others,* London, Routledge.

Denzin, N. 1997, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century,* Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Denzin, N. 1999, 'Performing Montana', in *Qualitative Sociology as Everyday Life,* eds B. Glassner and R. Hertz, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 147-158.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. eds 1994, *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Dewey, J. 1934, *Art as Experience,* New York, Capricorn.

Dietz, M.L., Prus, R., & Shaffir, W. eds 1994, *Doing Everyday Life: Ethnography as Human Lived Experience,* Ontario, Copp, Clark Longman Ltd.

Douglas, M. 1970, *Natural Symbols,* London, Barrie and Rockliff/Cresset Press.

Douglas, M. 1978, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Douglas, M ed. 1982, *Essays in the Sociology of Perception,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Edwards, A. & Talbot, R. 1994, *The Hard-pressed researcher: A research handbook for caring professions*, Essex, Longman.

Eisner, E. 1985, 'Aesthetic modes of knowing', in *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education: 84. Learning and teaching the ways of knowing. Part II*, ed. E. Eisner, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp 23-36.

Eisner, E. 1991, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*, New York, MacMillan Publishing Co.

Elden, M & Levin, M. 1991, 'Cogenerative Learning', in *Participatory Action Research*, ed. W. F. Whyte, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Ellis, C. 1991a, 'Sociological introspection and emotional experience", *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 14, pp 23-50.

Ellis, C. 1991b, 'Emotional sociology', *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 12, Greenwich JAI press, p123-145.

Ellis, C. 1993, 'There are survivors: telling a story of sudden death', *Sociological Quarterly*, vol 34, pp 711-730.

Ellis, C. 1995a, *Final Negotiations: A story of love, loss and chronic illness*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

Ellis, C. 1995b, 'Emotional and Ethical Quagmires in returning to the field', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 24, no. 1, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp 68-98.

Ellis, C. 1997, 'Evocative Autoethnography: writing emotionally about our lives.' in *Representation and the text: Reframing the narrative voice* eds W.Tierney, and Y. Lincoln, Albany, SUNY, pp 115-139.

Ellis, C. 1999, 'Keynote Addresses From the First Annual Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference: Heartful Autoethnography", *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 9, no. 5, Sept 1999, Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp 669-683.

Ellis, C. & Bochner, A.P. eds 1996 *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*, Walnut Creek, Alta Mira Press.

Ellis, C. & Flaherty, M. eds 1992, *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Emerson- Bain, A. ed. 1994, *Sustainable Development or Malignant Growth*, Suva, Marama Publications.

Englund, H. 1996, 'Witchcraft, Modernity and the Person: The morality of accumulation in Central Malawi', *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 16, no. 3, London, Sage, pp 257-279.

Fals-Borda, O. & Mohammad Anisur Rahman 1991, *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with Participatory Action Research*, London, ITP.

Fay, B. 1987, *Critical Social Science Liberation and its Limits*, New York, Cornell Uni. Press.

Feuerstein, M.T. 1986, *Partner in Evaluation: Evaluating Development and Community Programmes with Participants*, London, Macmillan.

Finau, S.A. 1995, 'Pacific women: Development for Better Health', *Pacific Health Dialog*, vol. 2, no.1, March 1995, Auckland, PBMOTP (Uni. Hawaii) & Fiji school of Medicine, pp 98-104.

Fine, M. 1994 'Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp 70-82.

Flemons, D. et al. 2000, 'Stories that Conform/Stories that Transform', notes from discussion panel presented at the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction Couch/Stone Symposium, Florida January 2000.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. 1994, 'Interviewing: The Art of Science', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp 361-376.

Freire, P. 1982, 'Creating alternative research methods: learning to do it', in *The Action Research Reader,* 3rd Edition, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 269-274.

Freitas, A., Kaiser, S., Chandler, J., Hall, C., Kim, J., Hammidi, T. 1997, 'Appearance Management as Border Construction: Least Favourite Clothing, Group Distancing and Identity...Not!', *Sociological Inquiry,*vol. 67, no.3 Austin, University of Texas Press, pp 323-335.

Freund, P. & McGuire, M. eds 1995, *Health Illness and the Social Body:A critical sociology,* New Jersey, Prentice Hall.

Fyfe, G. & Law, J. 1988, *Picturing Power: Visual Depiction and Social Relations,* London, Routledge.

Ganguly-Scrase, R.1995, 'Engendering marginality: women, work and femininity in West Bengal, India', in *Anthropology: Voices from the Margins,* eds J.Perry and J. Hughes, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 129-148.

Garman, N. & Piantanida, M. 1996, 'Criteria of quality for judging qualitative research', in *Qualitative Research Practice in Adult Education,* eds P.Willis and B. Neville, Melbourne, David Lovell Publishing.

Geddes, B. 1994a, 'Introduction' in *Anthropology and Third World Development,* eds B. Geddes, J. Hughes, and J. Remenyi, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 1-8.

Geddes, B. 1994b, 'Ethnicity and history: Zaire and Europeans.' *Anthropology and Third World Development,* eds B. Geddes, J. Hughes, and J. Remenyi, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 9-63.

Geddes, B. 1994c, 'Social Templates, Status and the individual: Australian Aboriginal and Western communities', in *Anthropology and Third World Development,* eds B. Geddes, J. Hughes, and J. Remenyi, Geelong, Deakin Uni.Press, pp 64 -127.

Geddes, B. 1995, 'Economy, environment, ideology and marginalisation,' in *Anthropology: Voices from the Margins* eds J. Perry and J.Hughes, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 61-128.

Geddes, B., Hughes, J. Remenyi, J. eds 1994, *Anthropology and Third World Development,* Geelong, Deakin University Press.

Geertz, C. 1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* New York, Basic Books.

Geertz, C. 1979, 'From the Native's point of view: on the nature of anthropological understanding,' in *Interpretive Social Science: a reader,* Rabinow, P. and Sullivan, W. M. eds Berkeley, University of California Press, pp 225-241.

Gergen, K.J.& Gergen, M.M. 1991, 'Toward reflexive methodologies', in *Research and Reflexivity,* ed. F.Steier, London, Sage.

Gergen, K.J. & Gergen, M.M. 2000, 'Representation as relationship', Keynote address The Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction *Couch / Stone Symposium*, St. Pete Beach, Florida, January 2000.

Giles, H. & Powesland, P. 1975, *Speech style and Social Evaluation,* London, Academic Press.

Glassner, B. & Hertz, R. eds 1999, *Qualitative Sociology as Everyday Life,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Goddard, M. 1998, 'What makes Hari run?', The social construction of madness in a highland Papua New Guinea society, *Critique of Anthropology,* vol.18, no.1, London, Sage, pp 61-81.

Goffman, E. 1968, *Stigma,* London, Pelican.

Goffman, E. 1971, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* London, Pelican.

Graham, H. & Jones, J. 1992, 'Community Development and Research', *Community Development Journal,* vol.27, no.3, pp 235-241.

Grillo, R. and Rew, A ed. 1985, *Social Anthropology and Development Policy,* Cambridge, Tavistock.

Grumet, M.R. 1988, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching,* Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press.

Grundy, S. 1982, 'Three modes of action research', in *The Action Research Reader,* 3rd Edition, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 353-364.

Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. 1994, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 105-117.

Hahn, R. & Kleinman, A. 1983, 'Biomedical practice and anthropological theory: framework and directions', *Annual review of Anthropology,* Palo Alto, California, pp 305-333.

Hamilton, A. 1981, *Nature and Nurture, Aboriginal Child-rearing in North Central Arnhem Land,* Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

Hammersley, M. 1990, *Reading Ethnographic Research,* Essex, Longman.

Hardy, R., Dahl, R., & J. J. Rory 1995 'Key Informant perceptions of Family Planning Education in Vanuatu', in *Pacific Health Dialog,* vol. 2, no.1, PBMOTP (University of Hawaii) and Fiji School of Medicine, Auckland, pp 45-50.

Harper, D. 1994, 'On the Authority of Image: Visual Methods at the Crossroads', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 403-412.

Harper, D. 1996, 'Seeing Sociology', *The American Sociologist,* vol.37, no.3, pp 69-78.

Harper, D. 1998, 'An Argument for Visual Sociology', in *Image Based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers,* ed. J. Prosser, London, Falmer Press, pp 24-41.

Harrison, D. 1988, *The Sociology of Modernization and Development,* London, Routledge.

Hellman, C. 1984, *Culture, Health and Illness,* Bristol, Wright.

Heron, J. 1981, 'Philosophical basis for a new paradigm', in *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research,* eds P.Reason and J.Rowan, Avon, Wiley and Sons, pp19-35.

Heron, J. 1988, 'Validity in Co-Operative Inquiry', in *Human Inquiry in Action* ed. P. Reason, London, Sage, pp 40-59.

Hettne, B. 1995, *Development Theory and The Three Worlds,* Essex, Longman Scientific and Technical, 2nd Ed

Hillman, J. 1981, *The thought of the heart,* Texas, Spring Publications.

Homan, K.B. 1991, 'Vocation as the quest for authentic existence', in *Adult learning in vocational education,* eds D.Little, J. McAllister, and R. Priebe, Geelong, Deakin University Press.

House, W.J. 1995, 'Integrating population factors in development planning', in *Pacific Health Dialog,* vol.2, no.1, March 1995, PBMOTP (University of Hawaii) and Fiji School of Medicine, Auckland, pp 6-16.

Hughes, J. 1994a, 'Medical Anthropology and international health', in *Anthropology and Third World Development,* eds B.Geddes, J. Hughes, & J. Remenyi, Geelong, Deacon University Press, pp 189-206.

Hughes, J. 1994b, 'WHO is working for international Health', in *Anthropology and Third World Development,* eds B.Geddes, J. Hughes, & J. Remenyi, Geelong, Deacon University Press, pp 207-252.

Hughes, J. 1995, 'After the Gold Rush: A medical anthropological study in Papua New Guinea', in *Anthropology Voices from the Margins,* eds J. Perry and J. Hughes, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 35-60.

Jolly, M. 1991, 'The Politics of Difference: Feminism, colonialism and decolonisation in Vanuatu', in *Intersexions: Gender/ class/ culture/ ethnicity,* eds G. Bottomley, M. deLepervaudre, and J. Martin, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, pp 52-74.

Jolly, M. 1992, 'Custom and the way of the Land: Past and Present in Vanuatu and Fiji', in *The politics of tradition in the South Pacific,* eds M. Jolly and N.Thomas, Oceania Special Issue 62 (4), pp 324-334.

Jolly, M. 1994, 'Hierarchy and Encompassment: Rank, Gender and Place in Vanuatu and Fiji', in *History and Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1-4, Malaysia, Harwood Academic Publishers, pp 133-167.

Jorgensen, D. 1989, *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies,* London, Sage.

Keesing, R. 1994, 'Colonial and Counter-Colonial Discourse in Melanesia', *Critique of Anthropology,* vol.14, no.1, London, Sage, pp 41-58.

Kilbourn, B. 1999, 'Fictional theses', *Educational Researcher,* December 1999, pp 27-32.

Kincheloe, J.L.& McLaren, P. L. 1994, 'Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N.Denzin and Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 138-157.

Krueger, R.A. 1994, *Focus Groups: A practical Guide for Applied Research,* 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Larcom, J. 1990, 'Custom by Decree: Legitimation Crisis in Vanuatu', in *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific,* eds J.Linnekin and L. Poyer, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, pp 175-190.

Lee, R. Borshay 1987, 'Eating Christmas in the Kalahari', in *Conformity and conflict: Readings in cultural anthropology,* eds J.P. Spradley and D.W.McCurdy, Boston, Little Brown, pp 26-34.

Lee, K. & Walt, G. 1992, 'What role for WHO in the 1990's?', *Health and Policy Planning,* vol.7, no.4, pp 387-390.

Lewis, G. 1975, *Knowledge of Illness in a Sepik Society: A study of the Gnau, New Guinea,* New Jersey, Athelstone Press.

Lewis, M. 1992, *Shame: the exposed Self,* New York, Free Press.

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. 1985, *Naturalistic Inquiry,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Linnekin, J. & Poyer, L. eds 1990, *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific,* Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press.

Lipson, J. 1994, 'Ethical issues in ethnography', in *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods,* ed. J.M. Morse, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 333-355.

Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, N. 1996, 'A Critical-Interpretive Approach in Medical Anthropology: Rituals and Routines of Discipline and Dissent', in *Handbook of Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and Method* eds C.F.Sargent & T.M.Johnson, Revised Edition, Westport, Greenwood, pp 41-70.

Lowenberg, J. 1993, 'Interpretive research methodology: broadening the dialogue', *Advances in Nursing Science,*vol.16, no.2, pp 57-69.

Lupton, D. 1994, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, disease and the body in Western Societies,* London, Sage.

MacCormack, C. & Strathern, M. eds 1980, *Nature, Culture and Gender,*Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press.

MacDonald, M. ed. 1994, *Gender Planning in Development Agencies: Meeting the Challenge,* Oxford, Oxfam.

MacDonald-Milne, B. & Thomas, P. eds 1981, *Yumi Stanap,* Suva, USP.

Maclure, R. & Bassey, M. 1991, *Participatory Action Research in Togo: An inquiry into Maize Storage System,* in *Participatory Action Research* ed. W.F.Whyte, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 190-209.

Manoa, P. 1995, 'From orality to literacy and to orality again: A story of story,' *Directions: Journal of Educational Studies*, Fiji, USP Institute of Education, Special Edition, November, pp 3-22.

Mauss, M. 1970, *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies,* London, Routledge and Keegan Paul.

Mauss, M. 1973, 'Techniques of the Body', *Economy and Society,* vol.2, no.1, pp 70-88.

Martin, J. 1994, *Action Research, Evaluation and Health Care: widening our perspectives on nursing research,* Armidale, UNE Press.

McIntyre, J. 1995, *Achieving Social Rights,* Melbourne, Community Quarterly.

McMurray, A. 1991, 'Advocacy for Community Self-Empowerment', *International Nursing Review,* vol.36, no.1, pp 19-21.

McTaggart, R. & Garbutcheon-Singh, M, 1988, 'A fourth Generation of action research: notes on the Deakin Seminar', in *The Action Research Reader,* Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp 409-428.

McTaggart, R. ed. 1997, *Participatory Action Research: International Contexts and Consequences,* New York, State University of New York Press.

Meloy, J. M. 1994, *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation: Understanding by doing,* New Jersey, LEA.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1989, *Phenomenology of Perception,* translated by Colin Smith, London, Routledge.

Michelman, S. 1997, 'Changing Old Habits: Dress of Women Religious and Its Relationship to Personal and Social Identity', *Sociological Inquiry,* vol. 76, no. 3, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp 350-363.

Miller, D. ed. 1987, *Clinical Light Damage to the Eye,* NewYork, Springer-Verlag.

Miller, W. 1997, 'Review of Representation in Ethnography by John Van Maanen', *Qualitative Health Research,* vol. 7, no. 2, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 309-313.

Miller, K. & Hunt, S. eds 1997, 'Cultures, Identities and Dress: A renewed sociological Interest', *Sociological Inquiry,* vol. 67, no. 3, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp 320-322.

Miller, W.L. & Crabtree, B.F. 1994, 'Clinical Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N.Denzin and Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 340-352.

Molisa, G. Mera 1990, *Who will carry the Bag?,* Port Vila, National Council of Women.

Molisa, G. Mera 1991, *Black Stone,* Suva, Mana Publications.

Molisa, G. Mera 1994, *Local Global: Indigenous arts, Communications, Networking,* Port Vila, Blackstone Publications.

Molisa, G. Mera 1995, 'A Crisis of Leadership', in *Melanesian Politics: stael blong Vanuatu,* ed. H.Van Trease, Suva: Macmillian Brown Centre for Pacific Studies: University of Canterbury, Christchurch, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, pp 427-434.

Morse, J. 1994a, 'Designing Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin and Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 220-235.

Morse J. ed 1994b, *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Morse, J. ed 1997, *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Muecke, M. 1997, 'Policy as Forethought in Qualitative Research: A Paradigm from Developing Country Social Scientists', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp 357-380.

Nettleton, S. 1995, *The Sociology of Health and Illness,* Cambridge, Mass., Polity Press.

Newland, H.S., Harris, M. F., Walland, M., McKnight, D., Galbraith, J.E.K., Iwasaki, W. & Momomura, K. 1992, 'Epidemiology of Blindness and Visual Impairment in Vanuatu', W.H.O. 70, 3, pp 369-372.

Nilsson, A. 1996, *Ultra-Violet Reflections: Life Under a Thinning Ozone Layer,* Chichester, John Wiley and Sons.

Norris, J. 1997, 'Meaning through Form: Alternative Modes of Knowledge Representation', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, Sage pp 87-115.

O'Brien, T. 1991, *The things they carried,* Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.

Palmer, C. 1998, 'From Theory to Practice: Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life', in *Journal of Material Culture,* Vol. 3, 2, London, Sage pp 175-199.

Parker, R. 1995, 'From Symbolism to Interpretation: Reflections on the work of Clifford Geertz', *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly,* 10 pp 62-67.

Parrott, R. 1995, 'Motivation to Attend to Health Messages: Presentation of Content and Linguistic Considerations', in *Designing Health Messages: Approaches from Communication Theory and Public Health Practice,* eds E. Maibach & R Parrott, Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp 7-23.

Pearce, P. 1982, 'Tourists and their hosts: some social and psychological effects of inter-cultural contact', in *Cultures in Contact: studies in cross-cultural interaction,* ed. Bochner, S., Oxford, Pergamon, pp 199-221.

Perry, J. 1995, 'Introduction', in *Anthropology Voices from the Margins,* eds J. Perry and J. Hughes, Geelong, Deakin University Press, pp1-6.

Perry, J., & Hughes, J. eds 1995, *Anthropology Voices from the Margins,* Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Phinnemore, T. 1989, 'Questions: you might get a lot less than you asked for', *Notes on Translation,* vol. 3, no. 4, USA, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Pitts, D. 1986, 'A Position Paper on Ultraviolet Radiation', in *Hazards of Light,* Cronly Dillon et al., Great Britain, Pergamon.

Polanyi, M. 1962, *Personal Knowledge,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Polkinghorne, D. 1997, 'Reporting Qualitative Research As Practice', in *Representation and the text: Reframing the narrative voice,* eds W.Tierney and Y. Lincoln, Albany, SUNY, pp 3-21.

Potter, J. 1996, *An Analysis of Thinking and Research about Qualitative Methods,* New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Powdermaker, H. 1966, *Stranger and Friend: the Way of an Anthropologist,* London, Secker and Warburg.

Prosser, J. ed. 1998, *Image-Based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers,* London, Falmer Press.

Prus, R. 1994, 'Approaching the Study of Human Group Life: Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Inquiry', in *Doing Everyday Life: Ethnography as Human Lived Experience,* eds M. Dietz, R. Prus, and W. Shaffir, Ontario, Copp Clark Longman Ltd., pp 10-29.

Punch, M. 1994, 'Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 83-98.

Rambo Ronai, C. 1992, 'The Reflexive Self through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer/ Researcher', in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, eds C. Ellis & M. Flaherty, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 102-124.

Ravuvu, A. 1995, 'Cultural heritage and healthy development', in *Pacific Health Dialog,* vol. 2, no. 1, March 1995, PBMOTP (University Of Hawaii) and Fiji School of Medicine, Auckland, pp 90-97.

Reason, P. ed 1988, *Human Inquiry in Action: Developments in New Paradigm Research* London, Sage.

Reason, P. 1994, 'Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 324-339.

Reason, P. & Rowan, J. eds 1981, *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research,* Avon, Wiley and Sons.

Reed-Danahay, D. 1997, *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social,* Oxford, Berg.

Renner, P. 1964, *Colour Order and Harmony,* London, Studio Vista.

Republic of Vanuatu 1982, *First National Development Plan, 1982-1986,* Port Vila, National Planning and Statistical Office.

Republic of Vanuatu 1983, *National Nutrition Survey Report*, Port Vila, Department of Health.

Republic of Vanuatu 1984, *The Mid-Term Review of Vanuatu's First National Development Plan,* Port Vila, National Planning and Statistical Office.

Republic of Vanuatu 1987, *Second National Development Plan, 1987-1991,* Port Vila, National Planning and Statistical Office.

Republic of Vanuatu 1989 *National Population Census,* Port Vila, National Planning and Statistical Office.

Republic of Vanuatu 1991 *Report on the Smallholder Agricultural Survey 1990,* Port Vila, Department of Agriculture, Vanuatu.

Rice, E. 1974, *John Frum, He come,* New York, Doubleday.

Richardson, L. 1992, 'The consequences of poetic representation: writing the Other, rewriting the Self', in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience,* eds C. Ellis & M. Flaherty, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 125-137.

Richardson, L. 1994a, 'Nine poems: marriage and the family', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol.23, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 3-14.

Richardson, L. 1994b, 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 516-529.

Richardson, L. 1995, 'Writing stories: co-authoring 'the Sea Monster' a writing-story', *Qualitative Inquiry,* vol. 1, no. 2, pp 189-203.

Ringma, C. 1998, *Cry Freedom: with Voices from the Third World,* Sutherland, NSW, Albatross Books.

Rodman, M.C. 1992, 'Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality', *American Anthropologist,* 94, pp 640-654.

Rodman, W, L. 1991, 'When Questions are Answers: The message of Anthropology, according to the people of Ambae', *American Anthropologist,* vol. 93, no. 2, June 1991, pp 421-433.

Rosaldo, R. 1993 [1989] *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis,* London, Routledge.

Roseberry, W. 1982, 'Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology", *Social Research,* vol. 49, no. 4, Winter 1982, pp 1013-1028.

Sahlins, M. 1972, *Stoneage Economics,* London, Taverstock.

Sandelowski, M. 1994, 'The proof is in the pottery: Toward a poetic for qualitative inquiry', in *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods,* ed. J.Morse, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 46-63.

Sandelowski, M. 1997, 'Programmatic Qualitative Research or Appreciating the Importance of Gas Station Pumps', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 211-226.

Sandford-Smith, J. 1986, *Eye Diseases in Hot Climates,* Bristol, Wright.

Schatzman, L., & Strauss, A. 1973, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology,* New Jersey, Prentice-Hall

Schur, E. 1979, *Interpreting Deviance: A Sociological Introduction,* USA: Harper and Row.

Schwab, L. 1990, *Eye Care in Developing Nations,* 2nd edition, New York, Oxford University Press.

Schwandt, T. A. 1999, 'On Understanding Understanding', *Qualitative Inquiry,* vol. 5, no. 4, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 451-464.

Scott-Hoy, K. 1997, 'Dialogue not monologue: preventative eye care and research in Vanuatu', *Pacific Health Dialog.* vol. 4, no. 2, PBMOTP (University of Hawaii) and Fiji Medical School, Auckland, pp 138-145.

Seniloli, K. 1995, 'Perspectives on Pacific women and children', in *Pacific Health Dialog,* Vol. 2 no. 1: March 1995, PBMOTP (University of Hawaii) and Fiji Medical School, Auckland, pp 121-125.

Seymour, W. 1989, *Bodily Alterations: An Introduction to a Sociology of the Body for Health workers,* Studies in Society: Sydney, Allen and Unwin.

Seymour, W. 1995, *Remaking the Body: Explorations in the Sociology of Embodiment,* PhD thesis, Geelong, Deakin University.

Sharf, B.F. 1995, 'Poster art as women's rhetoric: Raising awareness about breast cancer', *Literature and Medicine,* vol. 14, no. 1, pp 72-86.

Shilling, C. 1993, *The Body and Social Theory,* London, Sage.

Smith, John K. 1992, 'Interpretive inquiry: a practical and moral activity', *Theory into Practice,* vol. 31, no. 2, pp 100-106.

Spradley, J.P. & McCurdy, D.W. eds 1987, *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology,* Boston, Little Brown.

Stanfield, J.H. Jnr. 1994, 'Ethnic Modeling in Qualitative Research', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* eds N. Denzin & Y.Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 175-188.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. 1990, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Subramani 1985, *South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation,* Suva, University of South Pacific.

Sullivan, A. and Norum, K. 2000, 'Poetic Representation of Data: But how do I know if the poem is any good?', paper presented at AERA arts-based educational research SIG First Annual Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Feb 19-20 2000.

Tapisuwe, A. 1983, 'Between two worlds' in *Gong: Young Voices from Vanuatu,* Suva, South Pacific Creative Arts Society, pp 86-87.

Taureka, R. 1973, 'Traditional values in health planning', *Pacific Perspective,* vol. 2, no. 2, pp 63-66.

Teasdale, B. & J. eds 1992, *Voices in a Seashell: Education, Culture and Identity,* Fiji, University of South Pacific.

Thorne, S. 1997, 'The art (and science) of critiquing qualitative research', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, Sage pp 117-132.

Tierney, W. G. and Lincoln, Y.S. eds 1997, *Representation and the Text: Reframing the Narrative Voice*, Albany, New York, SUNY Press.

Tilley, C. 1997, 'Performing culture in the global village', *Critique of Anthropology,* vol. 17, no. 1, pp 67-89.

Tollman, S. 1990, *Community Oriented Primary Care: Origins, Evolution, Applications,* Boston: Dept. of Population Sciences and International Health Programmes, Harvard School of Public Health.

Tonganivalu, D. 1995, 'Health and Education strategies for sustainable development', *Pacific Health Dialog,* vol. 2, no. 1, March 1995: PBMOTP (Uni. of Hawaii) and Fiji Medical School, Auckland, pp 65-68.

Trinh, T. M-ha. 1989, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Turnbull, C. 1990, 'Liminality: a synthesis of subjective and objective experience', in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual,* eds R.Schechner and W. Appel, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp 50-81.

Turner, B. S. 1992, *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology,* London, Routledge.

Turner, V. 1967, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual,* Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press.

Turner, V. 1974, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society,* London, Cornell University Press.

Turner, V 1982, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play,* New York City, Performing Arts Journal Publications.

Ulin, P. R. 1989, 'Global Collaboration in Primary Health Care', *Nursing Outlook,* vol. 37, no. 3, pp 134-137.

UNICEF/Vanuatu Government 1991, *A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Vanuatu,* Port Vila, Imprimeries de Port Vila.

Urry, J. 1990, *The Tourist Gaze,* London, Sage.

Van Manen, J. (ed) 1995, *Representation in Ethnography*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Van Manen, M. 1997, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for and Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd edition, Ontario, Althouse Press.

Van Trease, H. 1995, *Melanesian Politics: Stael blong Vanuatu*, Suva: Macmillian Brown Centre for Pacific Studies: University of Canterbury, Christchurch, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Wadsworth, Y. 1991, *Everyday Evaluation on the Run,* Action Research Issues associated.

Wendt, A. 1975, *Some Modern Poetry from Vanuatu,* Suva, Mana Publications.

Whyte, W.F. ed. 1991, *Participatory Action Research,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Wilson, H., & Hutchinson, S. 1997, 'Presenting Qualitative Research Up Close: Visual Literacy in Poster Presentations', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue,* ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 63-85.

Willis, P. 1999, 'Looking for what it's really like: Phenomenology in reflective practice', *Studies in Continuing Education,* vol. 21, no. 1, pp 91-111.

Willis, P. 1998, *Inviting Learning: An Exhibition of Risk and Enrichment in Adult Education Practice,* PhD thesis, Sydney, UTS.

Wolcott, H. 1995, *The Art of Fieldwork,* Walnut Creek, Alta Mira Press.

Wuest, J., & Merritt-Gray, M. 1997, 'Participatory Action Research: Practical Dilemmas and Emancipatory Possibilities', in *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue*, ed. J. Morse, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, pp 283-306.