EDITOR'S FORUM

JOHN FRUM: AN INDIGENOUS STRATEGY OF REACTION TO MISSION RULE AND THE COLONIAL ORDER[1]

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Introduction

In 1940, British District Agent James M. Nicol on Tanna, Vanuatu,[2] in the Southwest Pacific, discovered that a spirit-man, John Frum, was competing with him for authority in governing the Tannese people. Prior and subsequent events have been the subject of many articles and books, descriptions and interpretations. But the existing social order on Tanna and its impact on the Western institutions that attempted to dominate the Tannese have not been sufficiently considered. Evidence demonstrates that the dissatisfaction and eventual disillusionment of the Tannese led first to strategic planning, then to the emergence of the John Frum cult, and subsequently to the forced redirection of the strength of Western influences on Tanna from mission rule to governmental control. An indigenous reaction to Western influences, the John Frum movement was and is a culmination of efforts by the Tannese to reclaim, and revitalize, their culture.

The topics in this paper include examinations of 1) contact with the West, 2) the existing social order, 3) dissatisfaction and disillusionment, 4) strategic planning, 5) the John Frum movement, and 6) recent events.

Contact with the West

Contact with Western culture developed in Tanna not through programs, administrative procedures, or complex organizations, but through individuals and technology. Contact began in 1774 with the arrival of Captain James Cook, and whalers and sandalwood traders soon followed. From 1840 to 1865 the Tannese participated as crew members on boats involved in the sandalwood trade, receiving in exchange tobacco, tools, fishhooks, knives, and various European manufactured goods. Early missionary contacts were rejected, including a major attempt in 1858 by John G. Paton, Joseph Copeland, and John Mathieson.

By 1865 the island had been stripped of much of its sandalwood, but the Queensland labor trade was flourishing. By 1869, probably twelve hundred Tannese adults were working on Queensland plantations. Recruiters enlisted some men by simply offering their headmen a musket, supposedly to balance their economic and political loss. Other young men went to find adventure or to escape, for one reason or another. In any case, because of the muskets, traditional tribal rivalry on Tanna escalated into open warfare.

Cotton plantations, which operated in the 1860s and early 1870s, were shut down by 1875 because of the hostility of the Tannese and the decline in cotton prices. Missionary efforts continued, however, with Rev. William Watt baptizing converts in 1881 and thereafter. He was joined by Rev. Macmillan, and the two men and their supporters brought about 1) a permanent colony of Europeans on Tanna, 2) the beginning of the end of active warfare, and 3) deepseated changes in many aspects of Tannese society.

The influence of Dr. J. Campbell Nicholson, a medical missionary who arrived in 1903, was felt on Tanna for many years. Descriptions portray him as a hyperactive workaholic: "His horse on Tanna had to go full speed to succor those in emergency. His method of dealing with disease-infected native houses was unhesitating destruction. Dilatory natives braced themselves to energy when he was around.[3] The influence this man had on Tanna can be felt from the letter by the Resident Commissioner in Vila to the High Commissioner for the New Hebrides:

> Dr. Nicholson is a well meaning man . . . but he is of a very hasty and violent temper, and when that temper has command of him, I do not think he is always conscious of what he says . . . he has for so long exercised almost undisputed sway over the greater part of Tanna and the Tannese that he feels, and resents, the loss of influence and authority resulting from the establishment of a representative of Government in the island.[4]

Nicholson's two Tannese helpers, Lomai and Yawis, were able to increase their status through their association with him--and to control the Tannese by "Tanna Law," which had been implemented by the Presbyterians on the West side. Tanna Law included restrictions against many traditional practices such as kava drinking, dances, and exchanges of women between villages for marriages. It was enforced for converts and for the so-called heathen. At the same time, Kowkarey, a war chief on the East side, teamed up with Rev. Macmillan to increase his power. These

Tannese men skillfully used their positions to advance themselves, as well as the interests of the mission. Non-Christian informants, even in 1976 and 1977, were able to recite many almost legendary grievances about these mission helpers.They were feared and renowned for their punishments of those who would not join the missions. Severe punishments for Christians who did not do as the leadership wanted, as well as the harsh treatment of non-Christians, gave the Tanna Law era a bad name, although little documentation is now available as to the excesses. According to informants, the missionaries themselves were not always aware of these happenings. Their interest was in extending the influence of the Christian belief, not with the methods used. The social hierarchy of Tanna in the early 1900s was built by the men who convinced Nicholson and Macmillan of their fitness to control and convert the Tannese.

Macmillan and Nicholson were in charge when the Condominium government appointed its first agent to Tanna. Mr. Wilkes arrived in 1912 and took up his post with initially favorable reviews from all. The non-Christian Tannese were quick to ask for help in preserving their customs against the Presbyterian Tanna Law regime. Wilkes supported them only to a limited extent, but even that was enough to provoke the anger of the missionaries. He resigned under pressure in 1914 to volunteer for service in World War I. As the first representative of the governing powers on Tanna, Wilkes left his mark as an opponent of the missions and as a man who helped preserve customs, including the use of kava.

In March 1916, James M. Nicol was appointed as the Condominium agent. Nicol was a marine engineer, a man with an orderly, administrative orientation. His caution kept him from clashing with the opposition as Wilkes had. He accepted the system set up by the missionaries and worked within it. Nicol played an important role in Tannese affairs because he remained in nominal command for the next twenty-eight years until his accidental death in 1944. Yet his impact was not as forceful as that of the missionaries, Nicholson, Macmillan, and Watt. Nicol was determined to make things work without questioning the status quo. In effect, he introduced an administrative government to Tanna.

At Lenakel Hospital, Dr. William Armstrong reigned from 1925 through 1929, when Dr. Daniel McLeod arrived; he would remain until 1937. Dr. and Mrs. MacLeod used the Oxford Group method, which sought to produce a type of spiritual rebirth. Their tenure at Lenakel Hospital included small intensive groups, peer pressure, confessions, conversions, and spiritual changes. Armstrong later took over again, working until the 1950s. Armstrong and his wife were, like Nicholson, hard working and dedicated. Armstrong described his time as

> occupied with the patients who need skilled attention, occasional surgery, dispensing and general supervision. Part of the day is always taken up with some general handyman work or other . . . The mid-week service and a weekly elders prayer meeting occupy most of two mornings.

Armstrong found that his help was unable to make bread, so he took the responsibility. When he got a horse, he spent at least three days a month traveling.

In summary to this turning point, individuals appointed by the missions and the colonial government, who had power by virtue of their affiliation with the Western world, entered Tanna, told the people they must follow certain ways of living and belief, set up an institutional structure different from the Tannese way of doing things, managed administrative affairs (with a district agent carrying out the wishes of the mission), and kept busy subjugating the heathen. The heathen as might be expected, resisted. It was not until John Frum emerged though, that the resistance spread to the converted, like an epidemic.

The Existing Social Order

By 420 B.C. Tanna was settled by people practicing shifting agriculture, raising pigs, dogs and fowls, and gathering shellfish from the sea.[6] For about 2400 years then, a social system has evolved with occasional intrusions from elsewhere in Melanesia, Polynesia, and more recently, the West.

Several themes provide bases upon which Tannese culture revolves, including the cult of the ancestors, stone magic, and use of kava. The Tannese are strongly oriented to the past, and the present/future is only an approximation and transformation of the past. The ancestors were and are prominent, as the origin of all that now exists.[6] Names of ancestors are given to children, and the children grow up to assume the role of the ancestor within the social system.

Stone magic is fundamental to understanding the beliefs and practices of the traditional society. In the beginning, it is said, the different foods were men, but after darkness was created the foods became wood and then solidified into stone. Now these stones are "like a brother to men" and certain stones can be "worked" to insure that particular foods grow. Men can work other stones to influence the weather, thereby creating rain, sun, and wind. A man named for an ancestor who performs such

magic is obligated to play that ancestor's role in order to assure a bountiful harvest. The spirits residing in stones are powerful and potentially evil as when used in sorcery.

Kava provides a slightly narcotic drink that gives relief to males from social tensions and constant political competition. A muscle relaxant, kava is nonaddicting. It is domesticated and most adult males have at least two kava gardens. Kava is a central mechanism of social exchange and symbols. Perhaps more important, however, kava enables men to communicate with the spirit world. Every evening nearly every adult male drinks kava and then meditates on the past, the gods and spirit world, the right paths to follow, and the correct and appropriate behavioral patterns.

Further insight into Tannese culture can be gained by looking at its institutions: political, social, economic, legal, educational, and medical. Political power revolves around older men, the past, and conservative individualism. Self-reliance and independence give the Tannese strength, and strong egos abound among the men who are the leaders of relatively small villages. Village organization revolves around these men and the *nakamal*, the village meeting place, a clearing in the jungle used by the men for meetings, dances, and kava drinking. Intervillage meetings, traditional exchanges of gifts, and celebrations are frequent and are recorded in memories or songs assigning future responsibilities and obligations to repay past trades. There is however, no operational, islandwide, traditional organization, only individual events join people together.

One important social phenomenon has been organized: competition. Competition can be intense among individuals within a village, but intervillage competition is almost always present, and alliances, intrigues, and disputes are constant. The *nekowiar*, for example, is an intervillage competition in which one man challenges another from a different village. Each then gathers as many allies as possible, attempting to demonstrate greater power. The show of strength consists of a series of dances and preparations, then a killing of pigs, and ritual ceremonies and dances. The side that kills the most pigs is the acknowledged victor, though an approximate balance is desired and reached. The man and village winning the competition are highly respected.

Tanna's economy once-depended on subsistence agriculture, with rich and well-worked gardens. Now, the marketing of copra, beef, vegetables, and other items is well established. Extra work is generally rewarded with crops and/or pigs suitable for exchanges with others to assure increasingly important roles and obligations. Land is inherited by individuals patrilineally, and heirs protect their land jealously.

The production of copra is dependent on world and local prices. Copra provides cash to purchase material goods from the trading stores or cooperatives. Clothing, bush knives, western foods, soft drinks, beer, payment for children's schooling, and travel to Port Vila consume much of the money.

Village Big Men play an important role as mediators in marriage exchanges. The Tannese kinship system, Dravidian Iroquois, classes adults in four categories: brother, sister, brother-in-law (husband), and sister-in-law (wife). Sons in the patrilineage marry women from nearby villages, with the preferred marriage being between cross-cousins.[7] Women are exchanged between certain nearby villages for marriage to appropriate men. The Big Men make the arrangements and enforce the exchanges.

Intervillage meetings settle disputes and serve as courts of law. Disputes are argued before neutral witnesses, and the decisions made are sanctified by a kava ceremony. Arguments most frequently take place over females, female exchanges, land, and the supernatural realms (sorcery). Penalties are fines of pigs and kava. The district agents now try major cases but usually support the decisions made in the village meetings.

Traditional education, involving the learning of lifelong roles, plays an integral part in the indigenous culture. Among the Tannese, certain names are passed down through generations, and a child is named after some late relative such as a grandparent. This cycle of names is also a cycle of roles: as a child grows older, his role approximates that held by the former carrier of the name. Taking the place of one's same-name relative involves gradual assumption of land inheritance, knowledge and practice of magic, social and political status, and even character. Given this situation, men and women take time to see that the cycle goes well and make sure the child properly learns the role he or she is to fulfill. If living, the person teaches his or her *mind* to their young namesake. If deceased, relatives are quick to describe the character, habits, and ways of the departed person to the child. Such formal orientations are still maintained and followed by people who retain the traditional customs, though they are less important in more Westernized villages. By participation, modeling, and imitation, the children of Tanna learn to take their part in the culture. Specialized roles involving songmaking, medicine, magic, and so on, are further developed by apprenticeship with the persons in the lineage who know the skills.

The missions had different concepts of education. Missionaries spreading their beliefs operated not only through their churches but through stations serving villages in the bush. The stations were called schools, and the men of the village came to hear a teacher tell the words of the Presby-

terians. Rev. Macmillan, probably more than anyone, entwined education with religion.[8] The struggle to control the young and to break up the families was real. "I look forward to the time when the power of the Big Men shall be broken" proclaimed Dr. McLeod in 1947.[9] "Whenever I am able, I encourage work for the children in the hope of breaking the power of the Big Men."

Compared with other districts in Vanuatu, Tanna is far behind in formal education. As a result of the John Frum movement many people left the church schools, creating a generation of young people who cannot read or write.

A wide range of traditional medical techniques are available to islanders, but some methods are known only to specialists. One of the most important techniques is the use of plants and leaves. A fresh-cut bamboo stalk makes deep, surgical cuts and may be used when broken bones are set. A piece of wild cane is used to make a custom-cut to the forehead or other body parts to reduce fever, headache, or pain. Another practice is psychotherapy; when feeling poorly, a person may be helped by talking with a Big Man or close friend. Usual payments for such "custom-medicine" treatments may be a chicken or a pig and a kava plant.

When the balance of daily life is upset by some inappropriate action, another type of custom medicine is employed. The masticating and spitting of a certain leaf is a remedy to restore the proper balance. The leaf is medicinal, and the sound of spitting is a way to let the spirits know that something is being done to atone for possible waywardness.

There is constant fear of disease-makers, the people who practice *nahakw*, or sorcery. A man upset with someone might obtain something belonging to that person--a strand of hair, a banana peel, a fingernail, a coconut husk, or any other such possession. The man takes the token to the disease-maker whom he pays to make his enemy sick. Word is then sent to the victim that nahakw is being worked against him. That person although in good health, will soon become ill, perhaps even dying unless able to find a way to counteract the sorcery.

On Tanna, anxiety about cyclones and weather (and consequently food) is great. This anxiety is dealt with by ascribing power to certain individuals who thus become taboo. Unless exact rituals are observed (the past providing the guide) it is believed that retribution from the forces of nature may follow--through the taboo individuals. The spirits and supernatural world are placated only if the instructions of the taboo men are precisely carried out. This gives immense power to the men who make magic and who have contact with the supernatural.

The greatest problem evident in the health care provided by the two governments is the pervasive duplication, which creates confusion and competition. Rather than coordinate medical programs, the French and British and missions establish clinics or dispensaries or hospitals on the basis of politics. This results in some regions having a great deal of medical care and others having virtually none, depending on strategies. Critics of this political gamesmanship have advocated a policy that controls and directs the various services or at least organizes the seven medical services in operation.[10] Other aspects of the health care system are similarly beset with political problems.

Dissatisfaction and Disillusionment

The John Frum cult and social movement was not a sudden irrational outbreak on Tanna in 1941. The appearance of John Frum, the spirit-man, was an expression of certain needs of the people that resulted from slow permutations and ultimately created the social movement.

The Presbyterian missionaries taught a fundamentalist brand of Christianity full of fire and brimstone. In 1915 near the volcano, a fall of ice, probably hail, was recorded.[11] The people nearby became fearful and began shouting that "the last day had come."[12] Their reaction was not surprising as unusual natural events were interpreted by Christian converts in the new, strict and rigid framework of the missionaries. The missionaries' God was a frightening God. In 1915 a man claimed a revelatory dream in which a spirit flew him above Tanna, like a bird. He said this spirit, the true god, gave him two signs: a big white stone and a bottle of the water of life. He drank the water, after which the bottle shrunk. He showed the people the stone, a marble, and the bottle, a hospital vial. The man told people that he had learned where a large amount of money was buried. To his loyal followers he promised rewards that seemed much like those the missionaries offered. Many people came to listen as he described these happenings and gave him gifts. He developed an origin story, with different names for Adam and Eve, but Nicholson noted that the man did not talk of Jesus or of a new Jesus. Soon his followers were building a house of worship for him near a tree with marks in it that, he claimed, were made by God and understood only by himself. But the money did not appear, and interest dissipated even before the temple was completed. This 1915 incident and its aftermath lacked only sufficient active followers to inspire a religious cult.[13]

In 1922, resistance to the government was reported. A man named Iahua prevented two men from going to report two cases to the Con-

dominium government agent. At his court hearing at Lonegi, 15 September 1922, Iahua asserted "that he was the door through which all cases had to come and also he had the power to cover up all cases." He was found guilty and sentenced to six months hard labor on the roads.[14] These and other signs of resistance to the missions and the government show a focusing of energies toward establishments viewed as oppressive.

Also in 1922, a drill show and demonstration were staged by Tannese and Aniwan former policemen and headed by a former sergeant giving orders. A later event planned for Christmas day also was to include a drill team, but it did not perform well and no performance was given. The Tannese quickly learned such interesting and useful behaviors, and were fully capable of putting them to their own use. Some seeds of resistance were present, though not readily apparent. After World War II, military-style drill performances surfaced as a method of demonstrating resistance to colonial power, particularly at Sulphur Bay.

For the Tannese, songs are like books. It is through songs that history is preserved, the future foretold, and ideas communicated. Songs, again like books, are one of the few things that cross over the linguistic, geographical, and political divisions that exist on Tanna. During the 1920s and 1930s many songs of prophecy circulated. Yeru, perhaps the most popular songwriter, or song creator, foretold the decline of the Presbyterians and even prophesied that one day a man would come to help the people maintain their customs and return to the good ways of the past. This, though of little note to the white population, was a matter of significance to Tannese and foreshadowed the coming of John Frum. More than specific events, though, the political climate of the 1920s and 1930s helped to generate interest in alternatives to the Presbyterian domination.

The impact of the missionaries on their followers was great. Given power and sanctioning by the missionaries, the Christian converts used tactics to gain new adherents that led to Tanna Law and the prohibition of many past customs. Social, economic, political, and other changes were occurring; the result was a non-Christian group competing with the more powerful Presbyterian-backed people. The advancing stations of the mission and their strictures against customs--the banning of traditional dances, the disparaging of the grass-skirt and the *nambas*, or penis sheath, and the prohibition on kava--became well known to the people who simply tried to live their lives and to follow the customs of the past. There was fear that their traditions would be lost, that their children would never know the old customs. During this time, traditional-minded Tannese developed a strategy, indeed, a rich philosophy for dealing with encroachments by outsiders.

The climate of Tanna Law was set by Yawis of Sitni Village on the west side of Tanna, and Kowkarey of White Sands on the east side. These men used their close relationships with the missions skillfully, relying on the missionaries, their Christian god, and the promises of eternal life for power in the eyes of the Tannese. They also relied on other Tannese converts for muscle in executing the tasks of the church--Yawis and Kowkarey were in charge of the police and thus the law. When men were arrested, they were put to work breaking stone to build roads and fences. According to informants, the arresting process sometimes involved beatings, while the work on the roads was sufficiently rough for some men to die from exhaustion.

Informants also relate that the traditionalists met to discuss strategies for dealing with the harassment and arrests. An agreement was reached to defend their customs with muskets, bows and arrows, axes, clubs, and other weapons. One time, a large group put on a big dance at one of the villages. That night a man from a neighboring village was sent to tell Yawis that if he came to the dance or tried to arrest people from the villages he would surely die. After the dance, the villagers, heavily armed, waited.

Many of the police and Tanna Law people wanted to break up the dance, harass the supporters of native customs, and arrest their leaders. Some sixty men waited for Yawis to begin the move, which needed the approval of both Yawis and Kowkarey. Yawis, as leader of the west side, had to provide the leadership. Instead, Yawis claimed he had had a dream that things would go badly if his men attacked, and he ordered them all to stay back. The men were almost angry enough to fight Yawis, but he persisted in his refusal to attack. It was a decisive victory for supporters of custom.

Later, many men came and arrested Yasu, possibly for having two wives although this is not clear. He was confined to a different village and ordered to work on the roads. But Yasu left and walked home. Fearful of being beaten and harassed., he ordered preparations for defense. On 23 September, 1923 British District Agent Nicol[15] sent three policemen and twenty-nine appointed police helpers to arrest Yasu. After surrounding Yasu's house the three policemen approached. Yasu fired and killed Ielkuaien, a man appointed by Nicol. He tried to fire again, but his double-barrelled weapon jammed. Yasu then tried to escape but was caught and taken to White Sands on the other side of the island.

At White Sands, where the police wanted to kill Yasu, an assessor, Tom Koat, made a fervent plea for the prisoner's life. He was concerned that if Yasu died, custom would end, either literally or symbolically. The

British district agent had. him sent to Vila for trial.[16] The British resident commissioner in Vila informed the French of this fact in January 1924, and it was proposed to try him before the Mixed Court. Eventually, however, Yasu was returned, first to Aniwa and then to Tanna, serving in all less than two years. Again this was a victory of sorts for the non-Christian Tannese.

Another tense situation arose when the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) started a mission on territory formerly sacred to the Presbyterians. Nicol[17] wrote to the resident commissioner that some two hundred demonstrators from the Presbyterian mission had walked to Port Resolution to ask Mr. Perry of the SDA to leave. Threats were made on both sides, and Nicol felt the irony that in addition to the normal differences between Christians and heathens there should now be problems between two branches of Christianity. A series of letters was exchanged. Nicol concluded that at the root of the conflict was the reaction of older Presbyterians to the young men joining the SDA.

Other new influences were being felt. A French district agent came to Tanna, and soon afterward the Roman Catholics began a mission. The worldwide depression led to a decline in copra prices, and the European population on Tanna sometimes owed money to the Tannese, even becoming dependent on them for food. Various cases of illegal liquor importation were tried in the Native Court.

Just prior to the advent of John Frum, the churches and the hospital were active. A census in early 1939 found the East Tanna people included 2,281 Presbyterians, 278 Seventh Day Adventists, and 222 non-Christians. The West Tanna figures were 1,100 Presbyterians, 378 Seventh Day Adventists, and 72 Roman Catholics, with 1,437 non-Christians.[18] Armstrong attributed the differences to the long-term presence of Macmillan and Watt on the east side, in contrast to the relatively short tenures of the seven different men who worked on the west side. Further, though the hospital provided a point of contact, it consumed so much time and energy that little evangelism could be conducted. Interestingly, Armstrong pointed out that there was no real educational policy, nor even a means for education. He described the hospital as inefficient and the financial and staff support of the mission as low, claiming that many of the natives were far from Christianized.

Strategic Planning

Determining whether strategy was involved in the John Frum movement can be done by 1) reviewing evidence regarding the development of

the John Frum cult directly, and 2) examining examples of strategic planning encountered during fieldwork. This latter, indirect approach may offer some insight into the cultural style of political and social planning in Tanna. Two examples encountered during fieldwork in 1976-1977 are cited below, then evidence about the development of the cult is examined.

Example 1. The British resident commissioner (BRC) sent a message to the district agent (BDA) to the effect that he would visit Tanna for two or three days. During that time, he wanted opportunities to visit some of the people in various areas of the island to inform them that independence was likely to occur in the near future and to hear their concerns. The BDA then sent a message to the people in the area we were living that such a visit was planned.

The men of several villages called a meeting. There was a concensus that a meeting with the British officials would be good, but it was acknowledged that the district agent and the resident commissioner represented two different levels of authority. They understood that the BRC was the leader and the BDA was a subordinate assigned to Tanna. They discussed ways in which to communicate with the BRC, but not the BDA, about a specific concern.

When the meeting took place a few days later, we sat with the men as they listened respectfully to the speech by the BRC. Afterwards, he indicated his desire for informal discussion and the chance to hear their views. The spokesman for the villages addressed the BRC and the BDA. He proceeded to phrase a. question in Bislama. The BRC did not speak Bislama, so the BDA had to interpret, but he was unable to translate the question into clear idiomatic English. A literal translation was made and both men were left trying to understand its meaning. The question was difficult, mystical, and symbolic. Essentially, the spokesman stated that in the past they had given kava and pigs to the British visitors, that they shared certain experiences, that it was good that the British were leaving if that was what they wanted, but that the British should think carefully about what they had contributed to Tanna. "Man-Tanna" had given pigs and kava to a resident commissioner at a previous time. Did the present resident commissioner even know about the previous gifts? Further, did he care enough to find out specifics or to consider the matter generally?

The BDA was indifferent. He did not attempt to figure out the puzzle posed so carefully. He presumably knew little about the import of balanced exchanges between parties, requiring that gifts received should later be reciprocated. It mattered little to him that "accounts" were not balanced.

On the other hand, the BRC was concerned with the philosophical question or riddle. He attempted to figure out the general intent, and tried to respond then. Later, the BRC questioned us, a trader on Tanna, and others seeking further meaning and significance in the question. At the time, the Tannese men expressed their satisfaction that the commissioner had at least a glimmer of the intent of the question and demonstrated enough interest to pursue an answer. The eventual response by the BRC involved his return in 1978 to offer a gift of five clay pipes and a signed photo of Prince Philip, which was an appropriate return.

Strategic planning had resulted in a communication through a subordinate who ended up with little idea as to what information he had conveyed. The personality of the visitors had been appropriately judged. The "accounts" were balanced, and symbolically, at least, the British were cleared of "debts."

Example 2. The French district agent (FDA) arranged a tour of the various areas of the island for his superior, the French high commissioner (FHC). The Commissioner was interested in traditional customs and dances, so a traditional village (Village C) was contacted. The FDA agreed to provide beef and rice as an exchange if the people would demonstrate traditional dances.

The big men in Village C initially agreed to perform dances at a village close to the sea (Village A). This was a convenient location because of the frequent inclement weather, which caused difficulties on the narrow and slippery roads. Later, at a small meeting, relations with a neighboring village (Village B) loyal to the French, were discussed. The big men of Village C had some minor disputes with the French village (B) and therefore wanted to demonstrate their superiority over them. Two different routes were available to get to Village C. Road two had recently been improved by the French because of their school in Village B. The discussion that followed reviewed the merits of various sites, and the big men chose Village C as the proper site for a dance. It was the home of the big men of the traditionalist movement, and its choice as the site would clearly demonstrate the importance of Village C. Whether the visitors came on Road 1 or Road 2, the people of Village B would know that the high commissioner was visiting Village C. If the dances were held at Village A, this demonstration of superiority would not take place.

A delegation returned to the office of the FDA and declared that the people would dance only at Village C. The FDA was upset but eventually agreed. When the visitors came a few days later, they used Road 2, and drove by Village B on their way to Village C. The big men of Village C commented cheerfully on how they had been able to make the high com-

missioner and the FDA come on their terms and thereby demonstrate the importance of their village. After the dance, the high commissioner, the FDA, and other guests went to the school at Village B for a meeting, but this did not detract from the significance of the event. The administrators had no idea of the importance attached to these maneuverings.

In both these examples, relationships with Western political leaders gave the Tannese an opportunity to compete. The competition is not necessarily apparent to the Western leaders, and is not concerned with power and control per se. Rather, events are used to enhance the personal and village status of Tannese men. The in-group versus out-group competition is prevalent in historical records, contemporary political organization, and indeed, in Melanesian culture. For the Tannese every event, no matter how small or insignificant, has within it the opportunity to outsmart and outmaneuver others.

The John Frum Movement

In 1939 vague talk and rumors surfaced about a spirit in the southwest part of Tanna. An apparition would appear in a clearing at night, sometimes praising the government and the mission. According to informants, the being was described as human but in spirit form. It would appear at kava time at dusk at Green Point, usually dressed as a man although sometimes shrouded. People looking at the being's face did not see a human face, but something strange and unknown. The being would accept kava and food and would make pronouncements about many things. The language would vary, and informants said the spirit could speak all languages. Sometimes the being wore European clothing including "flip-flops," the now relatively common shoe.

Those who attended the kava ceremonies became convinced that the being was superhuman and began to invite others to attend. Invitations were sent to the missionary villages selectively to insure that *nimrukwen* and *koyometa* big men were invited simultaneously--a precaution to prevent a recurrence of the ancient schism that has long existed on Tanna.

In the area of Tanna where we were located, informants recalled that an invitation had been sent to them to attend a kava ceremony and meet the apparition. They had discussed the matter and decided that it was not essential to attend; instead, they sent a messenger with a *wulbie,* a small very sweet finger banana that is regarded as a food of the ancestors. This symbol was followed by a return message from the apparition indicating its understanding that the people of the area were in full accord with the goals set forward by the apparition. Attendance was not necessary.

Kava drinking and traditional dancing, prohibited by Tanna Law, spread rapidly in 1940. A tour of the island by Bell, a Presbyterian minister, and one of his pastors in early 1941 revealed that a return to traditional ways was taking place.[19] In April and May 1941 men began to drink kava openly, and many also began to spend all of their European money, abandon their gardens, and stop working. On 11 May, 1941, virtually no one attended the Presbyterian church at Lenakel. The churches everywhere were empty. While Bell reflected about the susceptibility of the people to superstition, District Agent Nicol tried to stop the escalating events. After returning from a trip to Aneityum, Nicol sent police to burn the houses used by the John Frum followers at Green Point and arrest the men. The men were taken in handcuffs to the Isangel prison where one, Manahewey, was chained to a tree without clothing as an example. He and another man were sent to prison at Vila, followed by many more over the next year. Any John Frum activities were interpreted as resistance to the government and led to incarceration in Vila. Those imprisoned included all of the big men from Green Point and later the Sulphur Bay big men from the east side of the island.

The Tannese men imprisoned in Vila were forced to work at hard labor on the roads. But John Frum came in spirit form to the imprisoned men and told them to watch for a symbol. They felt secure and confident that John Frum would provide for them and the Tannese.

The symbol that John Frum promised did come--in the form of American troopships. Airplanes, ships, soldiers (including some blacks), and war material were an impressive and magical sight to the Tannese. Since the Americans needed manpower to build roads, airfields, and supply depots for the drive against the Japanese, the Tannese prisoners in Vila were released to help. They joined two boatloads of Tannese men brought to Vila to work for about four months. Their payment, although low (six dollars per month), was more than they had ever received, and it was more than the French and British wanted the Americans to pay. The awesome amount of war material, the wartime experiences, the black American soldiers, and, perhaps most of all, the gregarious American style of mingling removed the blindfolds imposed on the Tannese by their isolation, by the mission, and by the colonial power of the British and the French.

During this period the Tannese worked for the Americans always believing that John Frum had been instrumental in bringing America to their island. The war kept everyone busy and arrests for John Frum activities were secondary to larger concerns. Many of the wartime experiences in Vila were understood within the scope of the supernatural world, and many were related to John Frum. It was a magical time for this group of

men, awakened from a colonial backwater, suddenly sharing--without preparation--a wider view of the world. Because they interpreted the new sights and scenes within the only framework they had, their understanding was limited. But the missionaries and the government administration had also shown only marginal comprehension, not recognizing how limiting their role had been and still remained.

Who was John Frum, the man? Evidence from fieldwork and knowledgeable sources points strongly to Jack Kohu. Kohu grew up at Green Point, a highly traditionalist area. During the mid-1930s, according to informants, he had been a policeman in Vila for the British. Not long after his return, John Frum first appeared. Kohu was a tall, muscular, well-built man. Many stories today relate Jack Kohu to the spirit world. In later life, a stroke left him partially crippled. Kohu developed a fistula, and it was reputed he did not excrete or urinate for seven years before his death. Supernatural events are said to have occurred after his death, and his body disappeared from its grave.

It seems probable that Kohu created an initial deception, then developed a plan, and in time skillfully led the opposition to the mission and the government. One of the intriguing events was the initial involvement of Nicol, who was investigating the disappearance of a number of goats. Some men in the district disclosed knowledge of the disappearance, claiming that a mysterious entity had asked for goat meat to eat after drinking kava. Given the Presbyterian prohibition against kava use, the activities were secret. Under some pressure the mysterious entity was identified as John Frum, and Nicol subsequently pursued him, though with little success.

Devising spoofs and exploiting situations to ones own advantage are popular among the Tannese. It may well have been that Kohu appeared to drink kava and disguised his identity purposefully. Perhaps through his disguise he was able to add a chicken or two to his diet, and then turned to the goats accumulated by a man of another village. The disguise and spoof led gradually to the emergence of John Frum as a mystical figure making pronouncements of a return to traditional ways. Converts and disciples soon followed, and--inevitably, given the two factions prevalent in the late 1930s and since--an east-coast version appeared. Eventually it developed into a cult of resistance to the existing social situation. This movement was skillfully directed by Kohu and others on the west side and by Nampas and others in a splinter group on the east side to restore Tanna for the Tannese. The deception, due to ripeness of the social conditions, matured quickly into a social movement, following the phases artic-

ulated by Burridge: 1) an awareness of being disenfranchised, 2) the development of a "new man," and 3) the use of new organizational skills and sect development.[20]

The prophetic role of Kohu had ample precedent on Tanna, and indeed throughout Melanesia, in myths and legends of spirit men from the past.[21] Kohu fulfilled the role described by Burridge, who claimed that "a prophet . . . must articulate thoughts and aspirations and emotions that are imminent in the community to which he speaks if he is to be acceptable." The Melanesian culture provided a framework within which the specific manifestation of John Frum appeared, in the form of Jack Kohu.

Another point of interest is the ensuing reorganization among the Tannese. Those on the west side sought a return to more traditional social patterns, previous land tenure rights and obligations, and ritual behavior. The east-coast sect practiced worship of a red cross, experimented with a confrontationalist stance toward the colonial powers, and sought island-wide political power. In keeping with Lawrence's delineation of motivation and means,[22] the Tannese sought to regain control of their own culture and society. The means used on the west coast involved a reversion to tradition, while the more acculturated east-coast Tannese turned to political activities. These changes had (as in Lawrence) a conservative impact on both groups. The confrontations of the east-coast group prevented the introduction of information, ideas, and change processes. The west-coast group developed a rich philosophy justifying their rejection of the Western way of life, but given the problems inherent in the larger world, this retreat to their own culture can also be claimed an excellent choice.

Another factor to be considered is the role of kava. John Frum advocated its use, and when men, including those from Christian villages, came to see him, they were invited to drink kava. Actually many of the men in the traditionalist area had been drinking kava actively since Yasu's stand against the Presbyterians, or even earlier. Whether the social ties to the Presbyterian mission loosened before or after kava use resumed is hard to ascertain. Perhaps they occurred simultaneously. Once the emotional conflict began, kava became a symbol of allegiance for both sides: a kava drinker was a John Frum supporter, and a nondrinker was a mission follower. Interestingly, kava was drunk at all hours of the day, by younger as well as older men. Kava roots circulated from village to village as gifts and symbols of belonging; to the movement. The mission continued with little success to try to stop the use of kava.[23]

The larger political situation must also be considered, particularly as a cause for the continuation of the John Frum cult. The British and French

administration were ineffective during World War II. "Actual administrative technique has occupied so much time and energy that almost nothing has been done for the unfortunate native--no education, no medical service, and very little oversight," wrote Frater.[24] Although there were dedicated administrative officers in Vila and Tanna, the system of government prevented effective services to the people.

During the height of John Frum activities on Tanna, some Europeans armed themselves. Such weapons as hand grenades, machine guns, pistols, and rifles were available. People were fearful in an atmosphere they considered threatening, but their concern was more for personal safety than for repression.

The war raged nearby from 1941 through 1945, and thousands of American, British, and Australian troops fought against thousands of Japanese. It seems possible, although it is difficult to substantiate, that at least one reason for the repression of John Frum was the unstable wartime situation, and the tenuous position of the British and French as governors of Tanna. Sir Harry Luke was the ranking senior British official in command of the New Hebrides from his station on Fiji. He resigned in 1942. Frenchman Henri Sautot had been in charge of the New Hebrides, but when France fell he took over the New Caledonia headquarters and proudly declared himself and his followers for De Gaulle. As the first French official to declare against the Vichy government he should have been honored, but it was not long before he was unceremoniously fired. It appears that the policy of repressing the John Frum cult was made by high-level military men unfamiliar with the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and Tanna, during a time when there was some question about the ability of the governing forces to remain in power. The lack of experienced leadership may have contributed to subsequent policies and practices.

After the war the government sought to repress cult activities (and therefore the Tannese people) through harsh measures. There were repeated instances of John Frum outbreaks in locations scattered throughout Tanna. The government responded to each outbreak with the arrest and imprisonment of leaders and followers.

The repression of John Frum activities kept the courts busy, often over events that seem trivial in retrospect.[25] For example, six men planted another man's pipe in a garden to make it appear that he had stolen yams (14 October 1941). They conspired to do this because the man would not join John Frum. Nicol sentenced them to ninety days each at hard labor. A court case at White Sands (20 August 1943) concerned a man who claimed the mountains on Tanna were full of soldiers who would one day come forth to help John Frum. He received a three-month sentence. An-

other case on the same day involved three men who spread rumors that American troops would land at Sulphur Bay to help John Frum. The men also told people to keep John Frum strong by holding dances and drinking kava. Each was given three months in prison. Court Case 562 (7 May 1945) charged a man with sedition. He told people it was not good to work for Europeans and that John Frum would return to Tanna at the end of May. John Frum had given the people new laws, so there was no reason to follow the old ones. He received six months. Court Case 563 (18 May 1945) involved a man who claimed he was for John Frum and that people should drink kava and avoid the mission schools. He received one month for inciting people against the law and order of the Condominium.

The reaction of the government was also harsh in cases involving family relationships. One Native Court Case (1 March 1946) involved a woman convicted of adultery while her husband was in a Vila prison for John Frum activities. She received three months. A similar court case occurred the following year (18 July 1947). Another situation arose near Sulphur Bay, where two villages had won over their neighboring villages to Christianity some years before. In 1941, however, these neighboring villages opted for John Frum. By 1947, the two Christian villages sought again to convert their neighbors, and harsh government action followed this "John Frum outbreak." For their talk and activities, fourteen men were banished from Tanna, and the two villages were broken. The remaining people were sent to other villages and the wives of the fourteen men were told to remarry as they would never again see their husbands.

Repression of John Frum activities was achieved not only by using the courts to imprison offenders for relatively trivial offenses but also by sending leaders to Vila without benefit of court sentencing. Another special government policy[26] effected at the resident-commissioner level, was the establishment of "a regime of silence on the part of the European population in so far as concerns John Frum and all his acts past or conjectured most particularly in conversation with natives."

Why this repression occurred is a most important question. The Presbyterians faced their conflict with the John Frum movement with rigid and inflexible behavior,, not allowing their few remaining followers to associate with the "heathen" or the John Frum people, even when threatened. The Presbyterians felt defeated and discouraged for a time, but gradually they renewed. their struggle by working with a few children and hoping for a better future. The mission took an active role in again trying to outlaw kava and so may have been one cause of the political repression. This is another story, however.[27]

Recent Events

In October 1956 a new policy was set in motion after a meeting of the resident commissioners and the district agents. Strict adherence to the law was to be required, but the strange beliefs of John Frum were to be regarded as religion rather than an intent to disrupt. The new policy allowed both rumors and activities that honored John Frum. It seems that John Frum had united the Tannese people, and the repression had helped maintain the unity. When they no longer had to unite against the government, factions developed within the cult. Divisions that have long existed on Tanna arose again. This was to be expected, given the geographic separation of groups, the language differences, the split between *koyometa* and *nimrukwen,* the divisions caused by the British and French, and the differences found in the various contemporary religious groups. Because of these many factions, little unity exists in contemporary Tanna.

Some resistance continued and was dealt with by the government. Much of the resistance appeared due not just to hostility but to different ways of handling things. The Tannese traditional culture is viable, although atomistic, with workable methods of governing, a religion or set of beliefs, approved social behaviors, a sound economy, and so on. The Tannese enjoy their relationships with various governmental officials but do not usually accept subservient roles. When the government tries to install survey markers, arms permits, or road taxes, the Tannese block the attempt and go about their business. When the government attempts to treat yaws, take a census, or do something about the economy, the Tannese may or may not cooperate. They have a choice because their customs are strong, and they can survive and even live well by following traditional customs.

Given the power of the intrusion from the West and the rapid conversion of many Tannese, there is no doubt that the shock waves through the existing atomistic structure caused concern. This anxiety created conditions ripe for cult development, which, when it came, served to reduce the anxiety and to provide opportunity for a different type of competition. The Tannese had a chance to defend themselves against the influences of the West, and they chose this alternative. The strategy of a prophetic man, and then a number of followers, led the Tannese to greater control over their island.

An increasing orientation toward France, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Port Vila is now evident among the Tannese. Much attention is given to the two major political parties and the fight they wage for political control in Vanuatu.[28] The fragmentation of the few Eu-

ropeans among very different reference groups located elsewhere, fits the style of the Tannese people. Frequently one or several villages joins a particular European faction to provide an ideology, to act as a go-between, or as an access to resources. An islandwide allegiance to a particular set of institutions does not exist. Fragmentation and atomistic social structure characterize not only the Tannese but also the European community. Yet allegiance to belief in John Frum persists among many of the Tannese. Indeed, there are sons of John Frum now who are spiritual descendents. Their future depends on the political situations that emerge, particularly the developments that take place because of independence, gained 30 July 1980.

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NOTES

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This paper was completed prior to the publication of the excellent book *Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia,* edited by Michael Allen (Sydney: Academic Press, 1981). A chapter by Ron Bruuton, "The Origins of the John Frum Movement" is of particular relevance.

1. Fieldwork was conducted on Tanna, Vanuatu in 1976 and part of 1977 under U.S. Public Health Service Grant NIDA DA 01129. At the time, Robert Gregory was a Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina and Janet Gregory was a doctoral candidate in the Department of Special Education at the Univeristy of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The study was designed to examine possible relationships between kava use and cult formation. The final report was titled "The Relationship of Kava to a Cultural Revitalization Movement." Part of this article is derived from the report. Its new title was suggested by Jean-Marc Philibert of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario in early 1979.

2. Vanuatu was known as the New Hebrides until it gained independence from both British and French colonial rule on 30 July 1980.

3. Editor, "Death of J. Campbell Nicholson," *Quarterly Jottings* 167 (1935):4.

4. W. Wilkes, Letter, 24 November 1913, Folder 6, File 79/1913, Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji. (The Archives have subsequently been moved from Fiji to the United Kingdom.)

5. M.E. Shutler and R. Shutler, Jr., "Origins of the Melanesians," *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 2 (1967):91-99.

6. J. Guiart, *Un Siècle et demi de contacts culturels à Tanna, Novelles-Hebrides* (Paris, 1956).

7. R. W. Casson and R. J. Gregory, "Kinship in Tanna, Southern New Hebrides: Marriage Rules and Equivalence Rules," *Anthropological Linguistics* 18 (1976)168-82.

8. M. Frater, "Dr. Thomson Macmillan: Notes," *Quarterly Jottings* 198 (1942):4-5.

9. C. McLeod, "News from the Field," *Quarterly Jottings* 215 (1947):6-7.

10. B. Paul, *New Hebrides Advisory Council Minutes,* 6th Session. (1962):51.

11. W. Wilkes, Letter to the British Resident Commissioner, 10 June 1915, Folder 79/1913-1915, Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji.

12. J. C. Nicholson, "From Our First Mission Station," *Quarterly Jottings* 91 (1916):8.

13. J. C. Nicholson, "From Our First Mission Station," *Quarterly Jottings* 91 (1916):9-11.

14. J.M. Nicol, Letters to the British Resident Commissioner, 7 November 1923, 13 November 1932, 23 November 1933, and 8 January 1934, Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji.

15. See note 14 above.

16. Missuaren, Letter, 14 Novemer 1923, Folder 29/1913-2 of the Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji.

17. See note 14 above.

18. W. Armstrong, "Letter," *Quarterly Jottings* 186 (1939):6-8.

19. H. M. Bell, "Letter," *Quarterly Jottings* 194 (1941):8-11; and Bell, "Nalau Keeps the Faith," *Quarterly Jottings* 209 (1946):9. In addition, we are indebted to Rev. Ken Calvert for use of a tape made by Rev. Bell.

20. K. Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York, 1969):155; Brunton, R., "The Origins of the John Frum Movement: A Sociological Explanation," in *Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia,* edited by M. Allen (Sydney, 1981).

21. Writing about the foremost deity in Fiji, C. Wilkes stated:

> No one pretends to know the origin of Ndengie, but many assert that he has been seen by mortals. Thus, he is reported to have appeared under the form of a man, dressed in masi (white tapa), after the fashion of the natives, on the beach . . .

Wilkes also found:

> Among other forms of this superstition regarding spirits, is that of transmigration. Those who hold it, think that spirits wander about the villages in various shapes, and can make themselves visible or invisible at pleasure; that there are particular places to which they resort, and in passing these they are accustomed to make a propitiatory offer of food or cloth.

See C. Wilkes, *U. S. Exploring Expedition* (Philadelphia, 1845), vol. 3, 82-84.

22. B. Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo: A Study of the Cargo Movement in the Southern Madang District, New Guinea* (Manchester, 1964).

23. For a more detailed explanation of the role of kava, see R. J. Gregory, J. E. Gregory, and J. G. Peck, "Kava and Prohibition in Tanna, Vanuatu," *The British Journal of Addiction* 76 (1981):299-313.

24. M. Frater, "The New Hebrides Today: Dr. Frater's Broadcast," *Quarterly Jottings* 201 (1943): 1-6.

25. Court Cases, Files of the British District Agency, Isangel, Tanna, New Hebrides, and Files of the Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji. This time period is discussed in J. Guiart, *Un Siècle et demi de contacts;* and in P. O'Reilly, "Prophetisme aux Nouvelles Hebredais: Le Mouvement Jon Frum à Tanna 1940-1947," *Le Monde Aux Chretian,* New Series 10 (1949):192-208.

26. Blackwell, 9 May 1947, Files of the Western Pacific Archives, Suva, Fiji.

27. See note 23 above.

28. J. Jupp, "The Development of Party Politics in the New Hebrides," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 17 (1979):263-82; W. Lini, *Beyond Pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu* (Wellington, 1980); and M. Lindstrom, "Cult and Culture: American Dreams in Vanuatu,"*Pacific Studies* 4 (1981): 101-23.