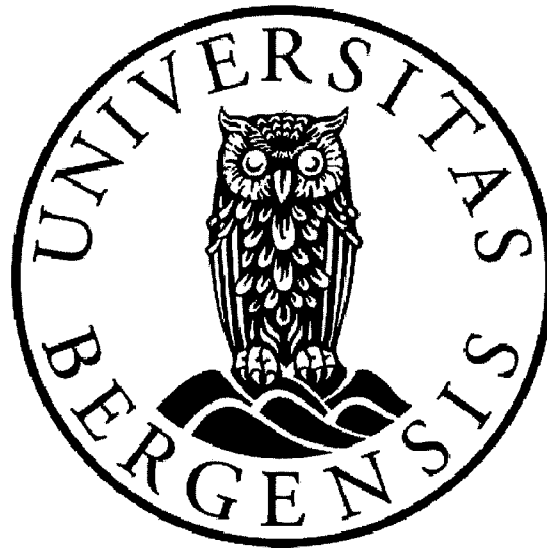


# **“A Chief is a Chief Wherever He Goes”**

*Land and Lines of Power in Vella Lavella, Solomon Islands*

**Cato Berg**



Dissertation for the degree of dr.polit  
at the University of Bergen

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## PREFACE

### **Understanding the present: history comes alive**

In June 2000 a joint operation between members of the Solomon Islands police field force, the regular police and members of the newly formed Malaita Eagle Forces (MEF, or “Eagles”) took control over the Solomon Islands capital Honiara, ousted the Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu (himself from Langalanga Lagoon in Malaita) and set up an interim government headed by Manasseh Sogavare, a member of parliament from Choiseul. Although the coup and the entire operation were claimed to be an act of defence against forces from the Isatambu Freedom Movement, the indigenous Guadalcanal militia that since 1998 had driven thousands of Malaitan settlers away from areas in eastern and western Guadalcanal, the whole affair soon diversified into a sustained campaign of extortion and personal vendettas (see the overviews by Fraenkel (2003), Kabutaulaka (2002, 2004) and Moore (2004) for details on this challenging period for the Solomon Islands nation)

When I returned to do doctoral fieldwork in Solomon Islands in August 2001, it was against the backdrop of this so-called “ethnic tension” (“ethnic” being a euphemism insofar as the conflict really was about inequalities in access to land, resources and national infrastructure). Nevertheless, I was eager to seek out my old acquaintances with which I had lived and worked in 1996 during fieldwork for my Masters Thesis. But Honiara had changed, and was no longer the cheerful town I remembered from my first fieldwork. I was immediately reminded of this when we were stopped by a roadblock manned by armed militants, only ten minutes’ drive from Henderson International Airport to the east of Honiara. Only my good command of Solomon Islands Pijin prevented the militants from extorting a “protection fee” from me. My driver, who was also from Malaita, assured me it was in my best interests to be protected from the militants from Guadalcanal, and that *Igol* (“Eagle”, from Malaita Eagle Force) really only served for the interest of the town. After an uneasy night at the King Solomon Hotel, sleep being interrupted by sounds of gunfire in the hills, I took a taxi to my old haunts at Koola Ridge above Chinatown, in the eastern part of inner Honiara. When the taxi climbed the hill, a scary sight met me. Talise, a rest house not far from the one where I had lived in 1996, was not there anymore. The few remains of the building were blackened by soot, and the house had obviously been

burned. Going over to Pakoe Lodge only a few hundred meters away, I found that the family who had been my hosts in 1996 and whom I had come to see as kin had left Honiara. The neighbouring house of another friend of mine had also been burned. I felt uneasy and left the area, something the taxi driver had advised me to do anyway, warning me that this area was “not safe anymore”.

I later found out that in 2000, forces from MEF came to Talise guesthouse, threatening the owner Akuila Talasasa, and also the owners of the neighbouring Paque guesthouse. At Talise the soldiers initially asked for money, but were turned down by the owner. The group then threw everyone out of the compound and looted and burned the houses. Shortly after, both Talise owner Akuila Talasasa and his nephew Ronald Ziru fled home to the Western Province with their families. The flames and smoke rising above Koola Ridge that evening and night were the epitome of a story that began over a century ago. It was more than a simple act of revenge on powerful members of the Western Solomons elite who resided more or less permanently in Honiara, and it was only errantly believed to be a mere act of ethnic violence. The destruction in 2000 of the rest houses on Koola Ridge is a story of how a part of the Solomon Islands became connected to the wider Pacific world and beyond. It is a story that connects 19<sup>th</sup>-century headhunting with the early establishment of mission stations, with the development of the Solomon Islands colony into a sovereign state, and with the mounting problems of a weak state in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

After this disturbing start to my 2001 fieldwork, in the next few weeks I began to trace the events which had lead up to the burning of a substantial number of houses belonging to people from New Georgia in the Western Province. Although I had initially set up my research design with the ambition to frame a contemporary logging conflict within structures of descent and leadership (based on initial observations from 1996), it became obvious that I was well short of more than a few pieces of information. Ultimately, to understand not only the present-day logging conflict in Vella Lavella, but also aspects of the “tension” which led to the burning of houses and chasing away from Honiara of my close friends from New Georgia, I had to delve deeply into past histories of headhunting, the early phase of Mission Stations in

Solomon Islands, complex interrelations of modern day logging companies, and the workings of the Solomon Islands government, its functionaries, and its politicians.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is about the lives of villagers in Iriqila and their wider historical and contemporary engagement with the world they live in. I am forever indebted to the villagers that took me into their lives and homes. I particularly would like to thank David Livingstone Ziru, Ruth Ziru, Margaret Ngalasole, John Sina, Manaseh Kovere, Gidion Dukae, Gordon Dukae, Beryl Raneijiku, Nathan Vilumata, Lasa Joefisher and Tibo Livingstone. *Mateuri, ngo Uluke Susu Sauro toutou! Ake sapo!* Throughout Solomon Islands I have had the pleasure of being looked after and enjoyed many lasting friendships and I will particularly give my heartfelt thanks to Ronald Ziru and his family at Munda. They looked after my wellbeing both in 1996 and 2001-2002. The Ministry of Education and The Western Provincial Government graciously granted me a research permit, and I will particularly thank the Provincial Secretary Narcily Pule for our long conversations and assistance in that matter. In Gizo I had the pleasure of not only living with but being incorporated into the family of Mishak at Naqua Rest house. In Honiara I stayed with my old friends at King George VI, and had many enlightened conversations with the family and friends of David and Margaret Sokaika.

The study was enabled by a generous grant from the Norwegian Research Council, which enabled an ample time of fieldwork, and also a month's stay as an affiliate of University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and later also at the University of Cambridge, UK. I have had enormous benefit from participating at the various conferences and workshops at the American Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) over the years, and would particularly like to thank Rick Feinberg, Jan Rensel and Jean Mitchell for always making me feel at home. The discussions with Debra McDougall and Christine Dureau in Vancouver in 2003 particularly helped to sharpen my ideas regarding this study. The staff and students at the Centre for Pacific Studies at UH at Manoa, and the staff at the East-West Centre, Hawai'i, graciously accommodated me and helped with my archival and library research when there. Professor Christine Jourdan, University of Quebec, has been of great assistance over the years, and have made valuable comments regarding the urban aspect of this study as well as regarding help with my Pijin from 1996 and onwards. Dr. Graham Baines was very generous and shared his material and ideas on Vella Lavella with me, and



provided a good discussion partner on the intricacies of non-Austronesians when he visited Bergen not long ago. In the same vein Dr. Tim Bayliss-Smith of the University of Cambridge, has been extremely helpful regarding materials and literature which have benefited this study. Tim also kindly helped me find my way around Cambridge when I was there.

My colleagues and friends at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, have provided both academic and social support over the years. I will forever be indebted to them for input regarding this study and good, long conversations on all topics. Both the on-going research seminars by the Bergen Pacific Studies Group, and the doctoral programme led by Professor Bruce Kapferer gave a great stimulus in academic learning, as did the ongoing conversations with past and present colleagues in the hallways of the department and in the lunch room. Lars Gjelstad and Rolf Scott have been good friends for more years than I care remember, and have provided both scholarly and social companionship. I greatly appreciate the conversations we have had over these years. My companions on various fly fishing expeditions, both at home and abroad, have also been good friends these years. None mentioned, none forgotten. Jørn and Hilde Hetland have been particular good friends over the past years, and also gently nudged this process along. Jørn has also greatly assisted with the graphic technicalities of this thesis. My family, and especially father and mother Arne Berg and Kirsti Berg, have always stood behind me these long years towards the completion of this thesis, and I am very grateful for all their assistance and caring. My affinal family has also greatly supported the work over the years by providing companionship and a home away from home. The vacations we have taken have been a respite from work, and provided an opportunity. The death of my mother-in-law, Agnethe Solheim, in 2006, was far too soon and unfair, and I know it would have pleased her greatly to finally see this work completed.

Two people deserve particular attention in relation to this project. Dr. Edvard Hviding has never lost faith in neither the project nor the study, and provided assistance, friendship and invaluable comments far beyond the requirements of any academic tutor. Although this thesis is my responsibility and I alone stand responsible for any faults and misinterpretations, this work would not have been possible without his help. *Via hola, tinoni pa* Marovo!

My wife Benedicte Solheim has also stood by me these long years, and the completion of this study would not have been possible without her loving care and unselfish assistance, not the least towards the finish. She endured not only a long and testing period when I was doing fieldwork, and through the years it took to complete this project. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel. I only hope to live up to her expectations, as she always has exceeded mine.

## NOTES ON LANGUAGE AND ORTOGRAPHY

The variants of Vella Lavella languages are non-Austronesian, namely the Yele-Solomons-New Britain subgroup of the East-Papuan phylum. The most common dialects in Vella Lavella, Vekalo in the North-Western corner, Dovele in the North-East and Bilua are all fairly similar, with slight differences in pronunciation. I have followed the standard Vekalo orthography here, and then mostly as I learned it in Iriqila. Commonly used vernacular terms are italicised throughout the study. Since I learned language in Iriqila, I have used the orthography introduced and also pervasively used by the Methodist Mission, (later United Church).

I follow McDougall here as the pronunciation in Ranongga is fairly similar to Vekalo, no the least because of the frequent blending of terms that have a long history in the region(see chapter three), but different from e.g. Marovo, as they do not have the characteristic ch- sound (Hviding 1996). These are the vowels.: *a* as in car; *e* as in bet; *i* as in tree; *u* as in tool; *ei* as in way, and *ae* as in try (most of these explanations are from McDougall 2004:viii). The consonants are also fairly similar to English, apart from the following three:

*q* voiced velar stop (English: “finger”)

*g* voiced velar fricative (no English equivalent; a soft g that goes to h)

*ng* velar nasal (as in English “sing”)

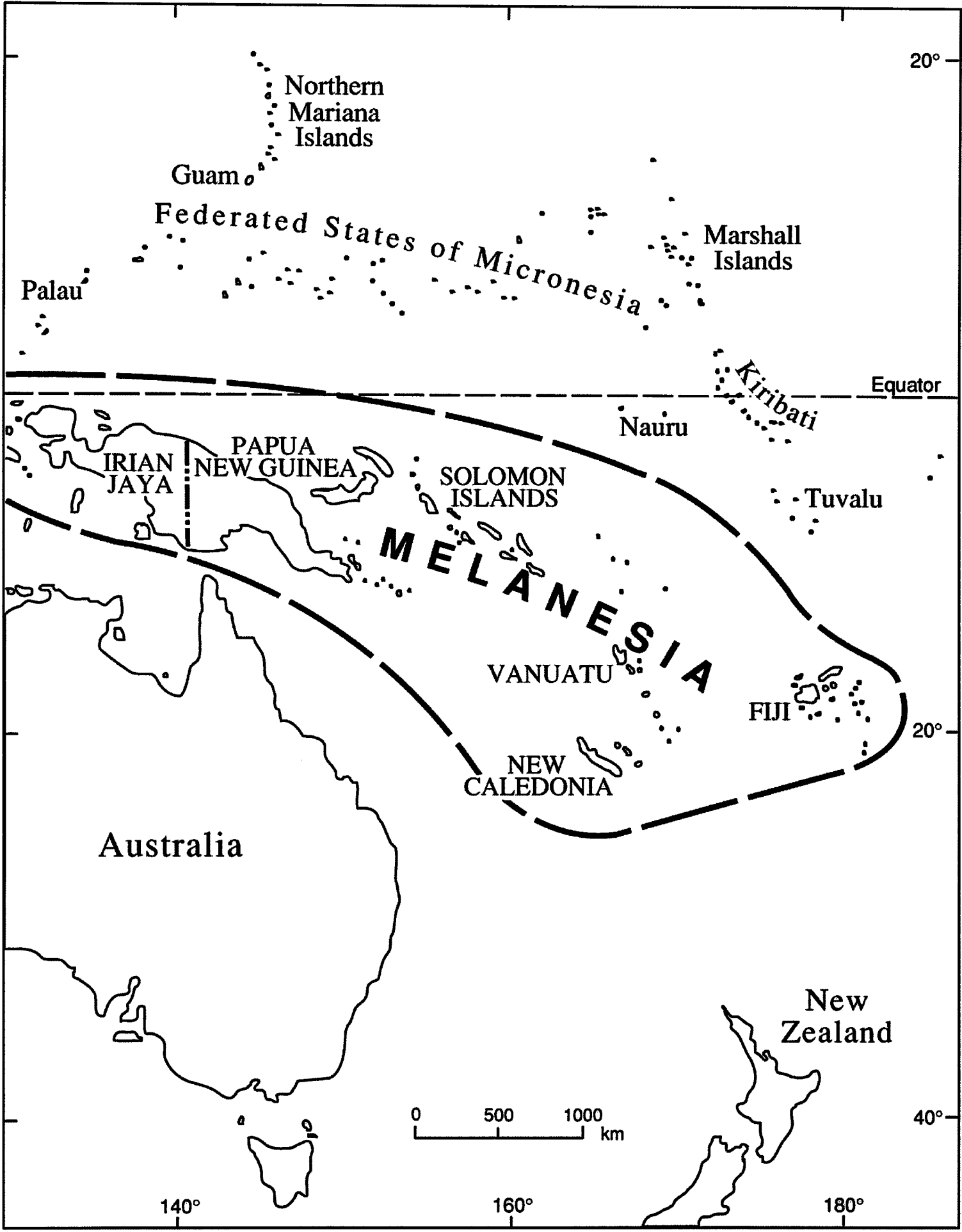
*b* *bangara* sounds *s* *mbangara*, Kubokota as *Kumbokota*

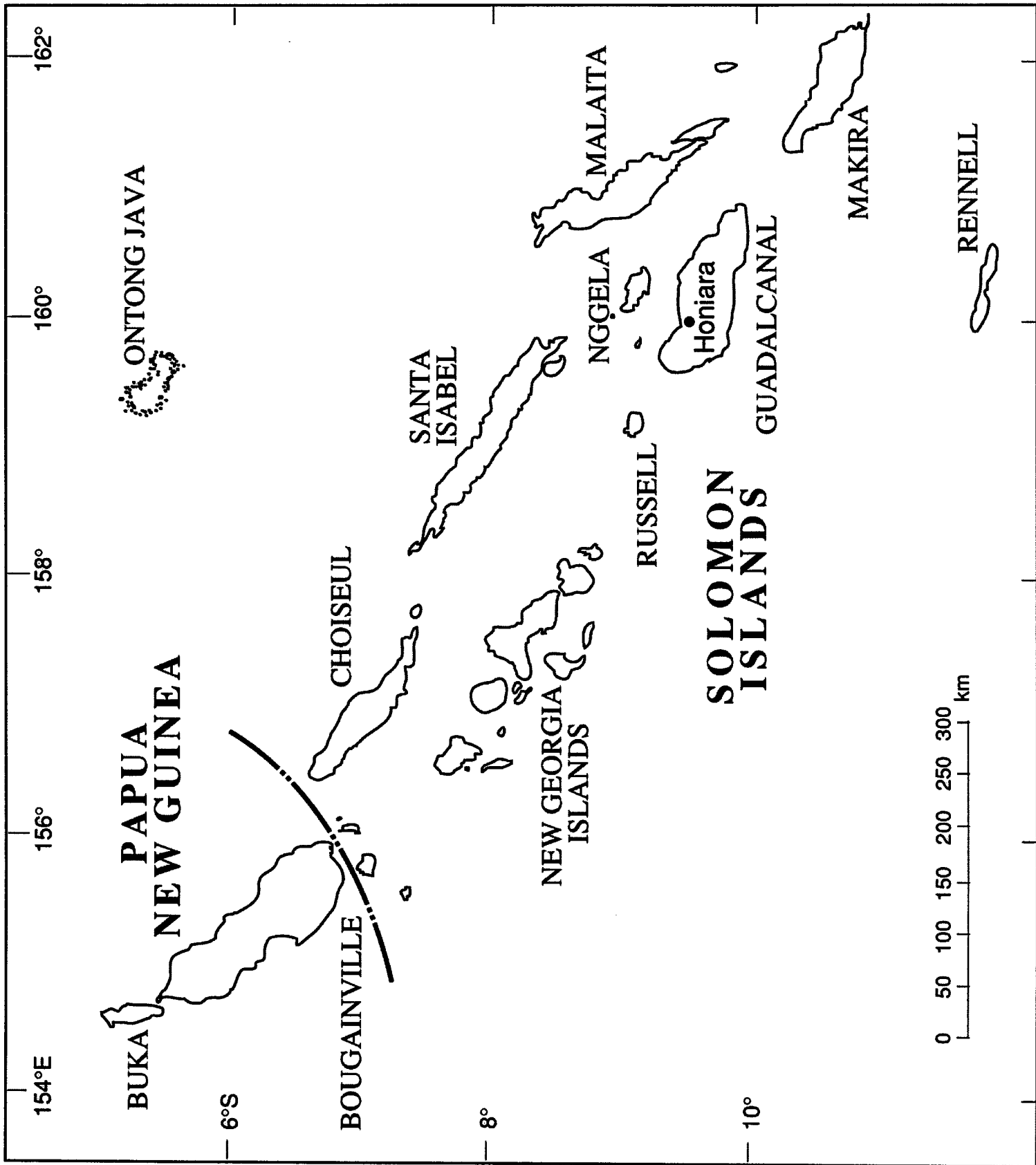
*d* *Duke* *Nduke*, *Modo*, *Mondo*

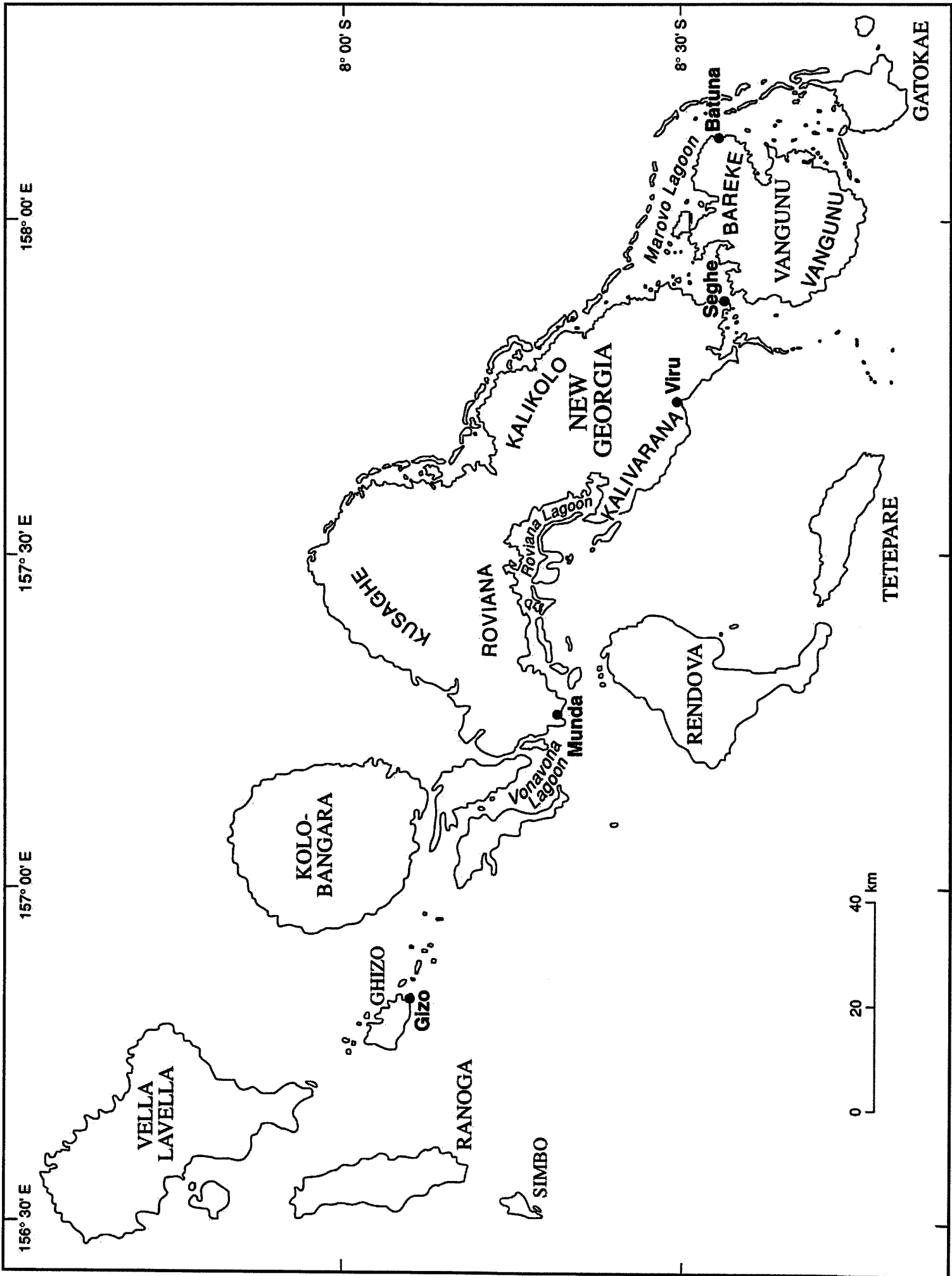
*j* *pajuku*, *panjuku*

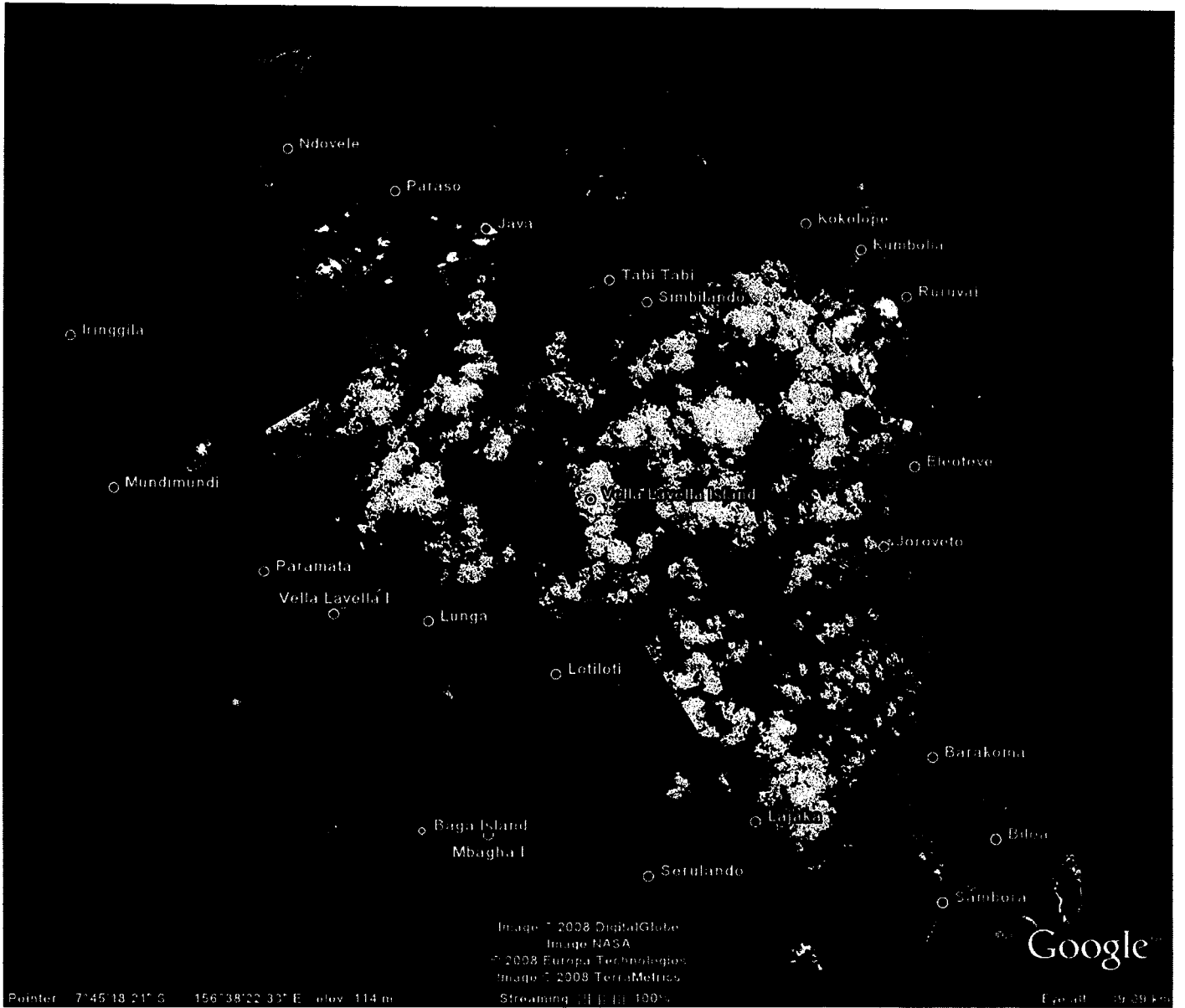
*q* *Qalaso*, *Ng-galaso*

I have supplied a list of the most common terms in Vekalo language in relation to the study at the end. There is also more on the particularity of this non-Austronesian language in the first part of chapter two, and also in chapter three.









Pointer 7°45'18.21" S 156°38'22.33" E elev. 114 m

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Iringgila

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## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL ORGANISATION, HISTORY AND CHANGE**

#### **Introduction: problems of power, conflict over land**

This is a case study of leadership and power in Solomon Islands, based on a total period of 20 months of fieldwork in 1996 and 2001-2002. It is based on an analysis of a localised matrilineage I the island of Vella Lavella in the Western Solomons and its relations to the wider world from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It is not, however, confined to this matrilineage alone, but portrays wider effects and problems of sociality in contemporary Melanesia. It is a study of a traditional line of power, upheld by a hierarchical notion of rank derived from an ideology of founders and precedence. In the past this line of power extended into vast inter-island networks of exchange and alliance, not unlike a smaller version of the kula ring in Massim, although what circulated in Solomon Island were captives, heads and shell valuables. But whereas the traditional line of power went through the autochthonous clan, by filial links, exchanges and alliance, the line of power is now directed to the state and the judicial system. What matters now is land, and what circulates is cash. The state is now, through its courts, the ultimate guarantor and has the power to transform fluid modes of customary land tenure and hierarchy.

In the past the line of power was highly depended on the ability of chiefs and big men of important *toutou* (the local expression for, among other things, matrilineage), and their ability to mediate relations between own and other clans, and hence extend networks of alliance and exchange outwards, The arrival of mission stations in Vella Lavella in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century erupted this balance, both by challenging chiefly authority and allocating the primary means of power- land- themselves. Under the umbrella of the state, and an increasing number of land cases and logging, this has further decentred this hierarchy. I thus challenge the idea that systems of customary land tenure can be studied in themselves as mere natural resources, without including terms such as history, power, leadership and appropriation. In this region land has been appropriated for commercial purposes for well over a century. Even churches such as the Methodist Mission took part in this large scale alienation, where coastal lands were turned into economic ventures, and congregations became cheap labour.

Although some of these appropriations were later returned to the customary owners, others are today the objects of heated court cases and social conflict.

Addressing the overall metaphor of modernity, a number of scholars have explored new emerging phenomena in Oceania, such as class (e.g. Keesing 1996, Gewertz and Errington 1999), emergent nationalisms (e.g. Foster 1995, 2002) and novel takes on land and conflicts (e.g. Dinnen 2001). Above all, these authors argue that we must seek new ways of understanding power in the postcolonial world of Melanesia (see Knauft 1999). My study is thus a partial response to these problems, as I seek to examine contemporary leadership as it expands and works in village, provincial town and capital city, under an overall backdrop of a “weak state” – the latter approaching oblivion during my latest period of fieldwork. My study is based on the time-honoured “extended case” method, in its original sense, by using “situational” (Gluckman 1956, Mitchell 1956a) and “event” analysis (Barth 1989). However I combine these analytical perspectives with the practice-based approaches developed by Bourdieu (1977), and with Foucault’s notion of power (e.g., 1983). I thereby argue that any anthropological study of this kind – whether in Melanesia or elsewhere – must by necessity take into account the two-fold concepts of structure and process (Carrier and Carrier 1991) or of ideology and culture (cf. Lindstrom 1990).

Weber’s (1958) model of legitimate domination has been an implicit and explicit archetype for the most influential work on leadership and leadership types in Oceania, as demonstrated in classic work by Sahlins (2000:71). The big man’s form of power is highly personal (cf. Sahlins 2000:75) and is based on individual merits and transactions. As my study is above all concerned with contemporary leadership and how it is made and remade in relation to conflicts over land resources, the Weberian way is an apt one for conceptualising power. But as will also become evident, we need additional models in order to understand the manner in which power and people are further structured (Giddens 1990) as actors, relationships and events move among many levels of institutions in modern-day Solomon Islands.

### Sketching a theory of practice

This brings me to the relationship between notions of structure and of practice (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1990, Holy and Stuchlick 1983). As Bourdieu argues:

...the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices, which is the precondition for establishing an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification (original emphasis; Bourdieu 1977:72).

I intend to use Bourdieu in the manner of evoking certain important concerns in this study, namely the relation among descent structure and practice, the importance of the history of certain structures, and of keeping in mind that the social world is always replete with interest, and contested by certain struggles for both symbolic and economic capital. I am aware that the position of Bourdieu has been contested (see Knauff 1993 for a review of this debate), but believe that his take on practice theory is fitting for the case study presented here. Above all, the struggle for precedence and land also includes the strategic uses of kinship, of which I will deal with below. Also, following Bourdieu (1977) regarding terms such as “interest”, “strategy” and capital simply mean to evoke the manner in which these terms are conceptualised by people in Vella Lavella themselves. As Kapferer (1997) argues regarding his use of the concept of intentionality, in relation to sorcery:

I must stress that in my use of the term *intentionality* there is no sense of an underlying reason, motive, or guiding value. Such meanings are implicit in the ordinary English word *intention*, which should not be confused with my application of the term *intentionality*. When I write of intentionality I am merely stating that human beings as a fact of their existence are directed into the world” (Kapferer 1997:5).

I will only add, in the context of my study, that people are also directed in ways in terms of land, resources and also struggle for these same resources. It is not my intent either to revoke the “Melanesian Capitalist Man” of some former descriptions (cf. Epstein 1968), but rather stress the manner in which these words guide our present query. Further, Foucault’s (1983) notion of power as being truly relational, and dependent on both structure and process, demonstrate the fluid and extrinsic nature of such a slippery concept. Indeed, as seen in the comments by these scholars and others, modernity in the culturally diverse and anthropologically influential region of

Melanesia is to a large degree precisely about power: how to attain it, how to keep it, how to use it. The concept of power has been a sort of step-child in anthropological theory, as the discipline often has focused on the dominated, and not necessarily the dominators. It is far too easy to be accused of inventing a historical materialism (see Godelier 1986 on this), or introduce class struggles (cf. Keesing 1992), where people do not acknowledge themselves. For instance, the debate on resistance in the 1980s and 1990s, theoretically fuelled by readings and interpretations of Gramsci (1971) revealed the subtle means of both domination and resistance (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Keesing 1992, Scott 1984). What emerged as a key focus in these studies were the symbolical means of resistance and appropriation people employ in fighting back. If real power and violence could neither be had nor employed, people reverted to other means. In addition, these studies also stressed greatly the cultural transformations taking place when traditions and societies were challenged (see Handler and Linnekin 1984, Jolly and Thomas 1992, White 1993 for a full review of these studies). Then as now people's material circumstances were the key foundations for both inventing, revitalising and appropriating own cultural distinctiveness. More often than not it was land which was at stake. This is where I seek to position myself.

### **The global in the local**

I approach it differently, from a particular empirical set of circumstances of local-global connection, which certain key difference in contexts of land ownership expected, echo recent studies of capitalist intrusion and local dispossession in places like Philippines (e.g., Brosius 1990), and Latin America (e.g. Escobar and Alvarez 1992). While Solomon Islanders, unlike tribal peoples of Southeast Asia and Latin America, own their land and forests through constitutionally enshrined privilege, the study represents a comparative pattern. I firmly believe that when transnational logging companies rob villagers in Solomon Islands of the resource wealth of their forests, in return for ridiculously low sums of money, we see the relations of power of the contemporary world openly at work. When (sometimes self-appointed) "community leaders" in Solomon Islands convince their fellow village people of the benefits of logging, we see very visible lines of contested power in the social landscape. We need a definition of the concept of power, and I will approach it here. There is a need to go beyond simplistic models of power and leadership to understand

these processes. If decision-making processes in villages are influential from other fields of activity, we need to model those fields. Foucault's (1983) take on power demonstrates exceptionally well how the concept has a way of reconceptualising its subject – be it people, institutions, or concepts. Thus, leadership reinforces existing relations of power, but is in turn transformed by these very same relations. In a similar manner that I propose to use the concept of structure and practice, Sahlins (2000) argues on the relationship between structure and event in his insistence for an anthropology grounded also in history:

Notice that the too-simple dualism of “event” and “structure” is causing conceptual problems. What is generally called “event” is itself complex; at once a sui generis phenomenon with its own force, shape and causes, and the significance these qualities acquire in the cultural context, significance in the double sense of meaning and importance (Sahlins2000:300).

I believe this is important, and do not claim that there is a one-to-one relationship between structure and practice, and that events only demonstrate a “mechanistic“ or “rebellious” compliance or non-compliance with a higher order set of rules and conduct (see Holy and Stuchlick 1983 for a fuller discussion of this aspect of social theory) . Being somewhat sceptical about Bourdieu's take on these things, Sahlins (2000) continues: “Indeed, in common historiographic practice what makes an act or incident an event is precisely its contrast to the going order of things, its disruption of that order” (Sahlins 2000:301). Sahlins' solution is the introduction of the concept “structure of the conjuncture”：“...meaning the way cultural categories are actualised in a specific context through the interested action of the historical agents and the pragmatics of their interaction” (Sahlins 2000: 341).

The notions of conflict, disputes and interest are important in this study. I will take up each of them now. I follow Gluckman (1956) when I argue that conflicts may more than anything open up a window for us into those aspects of society formerly hidden, and then also lay bare the fundamental oppositions within which people live. As Kapferer (1997) notes:

One argument of Gluckman and his students was that practices, especially in the problems they addressed, opened dimensions of cosmological and cultural realities. If the structures of practice, for example, were directed in accordance

with customary principles, then the nature of these principles and their potential contradictions was exposed in practice. This is a key rationale behind Gluckman's interest in conflict and sorcery. That is, such events bring to the surface of life the problematics of social relations and their underlying cosmological and ontological assumptions (Kapferer 1997:20).

The conflict approach, as seen in Gluckman (1963a), thus lends itself not only to a localised description of events and their meanings, but also as of a grounded approach through Sahlins (2000) "structure of the conjuncture":

The event unfolds as a conjunction of different structural planes respectively marked by phenomena of a different order. It entails a dialogue between the larger relations and forces that constitute the historical object, such as the Fijian kingdoms whose history is an issue, and the local interactions through which this history runs its course (Sahlins 2000:341ff).

Sahlins' concepts enable us to perform a careful re-examination of historical events that combined not only to shape present day sociality of Vella Lavella, but also to contextualise sociality in the present:

The synthesis requires complementary processes of mediation: the devolution of the global forces to the terms of the local action and conversely, the expansion of local actions to global significance. It is thus half-true that the event is the realisation of a general structure; the other half is the realisation of the unique event as a new general order (Sahlins 2000:342).

This is Sahlins' (2000) take on the problem of structure and practice, or structure and event. These conceptualisations will come out further in the proceeding chapters. Thus I will argue in the proceeding chapters that the logging dispute in Iriqila bring out notions of hierarchy and power, in a conjuncture with history and modernity. There are specific challenges posed by the study of power relations in Melanesia. Local models of power in this region more often than not refer to objects and secret knowledge- to vital concepts in the ongoing differentiation of leadership and in the means to dominance. More importantly, the right to speak about such matters may regulate hierarchy, as Lindstrom (1990) has convincingly demonstrated for Tanna in Vanuatu. Leaders within the John Frum movement all vehemently guard the orthodox knowledge of events contained in the sacred lore of John Frum. Following Foucault, Lindstrom labels Tanna society a "conversational economy" where what is said, and not said, strictly regulates leadership in the John Frum movement. By introducing a

more hierarchic notion of society, rather than relying on a more all-encompassing and holistic notion of “culture” (see Keesing 1989 for a critique of this concept), Lindstrom portrays the discursive qualities of one such Melanesian society. Also, the important work of Strathern (1988, 1991) and Wagner (1991) have depicted how conceptions of personhood in Melanesia are both engendered by and through exchange creating a concept of fractal personhood. The ability to work upon relations of exchange, and the material means of existence is thereby a manner in which to approach power. See also Rio’s (2007) description of Ambrym, where chiefs often have a guarantee of their power elsewhere, namely as the “Third Man” implicit in every relation of exchange. Power thus becomes a result of perspective, and the ability to influence other people’s perspective on the world. To some extent this is also a guarantee for hierarchy in Vella Lavella. Hierarchy always ascends from branch to branch in a *toutou* relationship, and the ability to reveal this ascension of links is a real power in relation to land and logging.

### **Logging and transformations of society**

At its very foundations, this study is about a logging conflict in the village of Iriqila in North-Western Vella Lavella, a volcanic island in the New Georgia Group of the Western Solomon Islands. It is in the sense of theory and history a true extended case study, going back more than a century. To fully comprehend present-day conflict necessitates a thorough examination of descent, leadership, hierarchy, monetary economy, mission history, politics of law, neo-colonial state formation, as well as the recent “ethnic tension” that has characterised the past 10 years of Solomon Islands history. This study may appear as an analysis of only one village in a remote corner of New Georgia, but it also displays certain general patterns of transformations within the Melanesian region at large. My study also aspires towards highlighting some unique features of its own. It is as such not a study of “customary land tenure” in the rural Pacific Islands, but rather of what happens when land becomes contested and disputed, understood in the analytical context of the deeper cultural and historical causes of present-day claims and disputes. I will argue strongly that the claims and conflicts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries must be seen in their proper historical and cultural context – and that attempts to see present-day entanglements merely as an effect of a recent “modernity” are misleading. Disputes over land have a

long-standing history in this region, and despite overall patterns each and every dispute displays a certain unique character.

This study follows arguments by Hviding and Bayliss-Smith (2000) regarding a more transcendent intake on localities and events concerning land in present-day Melanesia:

... beyond the fields of agricultural practice, the present-day picture wherein a multitude of logging companies have descended on Marovo – in a brew of rapid resource extraction, environmental damage, bribery, ephemeral economic wealth, conflict, and government involvement – merits close attention (Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000:13).

We thus come one step closer to framing the main argument and problems pursued in the five following chapters. How is it that power and leadership are conceptualised and performed at the intersections between village and town in a part of contemporary Solomon Islands? How can power and leadership form both structural and relational parts of contemporary sociality? Is power made and remade in villages, or through the modern state? More generally, where is “power” in a “weak state”? In the nation of Solomon Islands, true power may be said to reside with localised landholding lineages whose rights are protected constitutionally by the state. It follows from this that the legitimate domination (Weber 1958) of consensus in land matters is to some degree what real, everyday power is all about. Further, following Foucault (1983) and his relational model of power, and the ability to work on other people’s relations, we find this with a direct impact on decision making processes. In Solomon Islands, to influence decision-making on local, provincial and national levels, one ascertains true power. Hence my argument that to follow these decision-making processes, one must seek out what sorts of “line of power” (Strathern 1984) are extending from villages to towns and back again, and more importantly, how this is relationally constructed by people moving back and forth between these contexts. As discussed above, issues of land are vital to this problem. As Keesing (1996) argued in a pessimistic review of the late-20<sup>th</sup>-century conditions in Melanesia: “Disputes over land and fission and conflict within clans and lineages, where traditional morality demanded solidarity, are rife in the contemporary Pacific” (Keesing 1996:171).



Apart from, but including modes of leadership, is the aforementioned relation between structure and practice (Bourdieu 1977), or as it has been conceptualised by Carrier and Carrier (1991), structure and process. I follow Bourdieu's (1977) use of these terms, particularly as he applied them to the concepts of official and practical kinship:

Abstract units produced by simple theoretical divisions, such as, here the unilineal descent group (or elsewhere age groups) are available for all functions, that is, for no single one in particular, and have practical existence only for the most *official* uses of kinship; *representational kinship* is nothing other than the group's self representation and the almost theatrical presentation it gives of itself when acting in accordance with that self-image. By contrast, practical groups exist only through and for the particular functions in pursuance of which they have been *effectively mobilized* (original emphasis; Bourdieu 1977:35).

We do now have ample descriptions of the deep ontological value that kinship and descent have for people (see Knauff 1999 for a full review of current past and current positions of these subjects), but it is important to keep in mind that these relations may be put to specific uses, or as Bourdieu (1977) further argues on the position of genealogies:

..they are the product of strategies (conscious or unconscious) oriented towards the satisfaction of material and symbolic interests and organised by reference to a determinate set of economic and social conditions (Bourdieu 1977:36).

Subsequently, one should treat kinship and descent constructs carefully, as they are connected to real-world interests, and also because they often represent partial versions of a story (see Lipset and Stritecky [1994] for a similar argument on gendered kinship ideologies). This perspective will become evident in my upcoming examination of the particular form of social organisation found in Vella Lavella, the *toutou* – a distinctive form of sociality and land ownership principles generally reckoned to be grounded in matrilineal kinship. The structure of hierarchy in a *toutou* is grounded in the matrilineal kinship system, and the idea of a founder ideology. But these days, the line of power that was extended through own *toutou* and outwards is now subsumed, or rather as LiPuma (2000) calls it, “encompassed” by the institutions of the post-colonial state, such as constitution, judicial systems and court systems.

