

**‘Back to my Roots’:
artifak and festivals in Vanuatu, Southwest Pacific.**

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The production of artefacts in Vanuatu (*artifak* in Bislama, the Pidgin Lingua Franca used in the islands of the archipelago) takes place in a context of cultural revival as well as tourism. Central to production of knowledge and art are notions of indigenised copyright (*kopiraet*), offering cultural as well as economic capital/value to producers and/or owners. While contemporary art in Vanuatu is restricted by customary copyright legislation, customary art production and performance is promoted by different aid- and funding bodies. Customary arts feature in a context of festivals, entwined with cultural revival as well as tourism and held at regular intervals in the outer islands of the archipelago. During festivals, notions of ‘otherness’, of the authenticity of people and things, are negotiated by all involved (performers, local audiences, and visitors such as tourists and art collectors). During festivals, also, authenticity is turned into a commodity. This generates ambivalence and results in a feeling of loss of authenticity among local people and visitors alike, but it also generates a series of values that relate to status and prestige among locals. In Vanuatu, ‘the contemporary turn in ‘ethnographic art’ generates increasing participation by local people in globalisation processes and in the global art world.

Art – Anthropology – Vanuatu – Revival – Tourism – Commodity

In October 2009, during fieldwork in Vanuatu, I visited Lamap, a hamlet situated in the southeast of the island of Malakula and an important place in the history of the archipelago.ⁱ This was in-between longer stays on the island of Ambrym, where I conducted the major part of my research on material culture and art. Just prior to my visit to Lamap, I attended the Malakula Festival on Uliveo or Maskelyne Island in the Maskelynes, a group of low-lying coral islands to the immediate southeast of Malakula. At the festival, as at other festivals that I attended during my time in the islands, I witnessed several performances of ritual and art. At the Malakula Festival, however, I encountered for the first time a performance of what local people know as ‘the second kind of copyright’. During one sequence of the festival, Herna Abong, a traditional leader from Lamap, was wearing some ritual paraphernalia on his body on the performance grounds in silence. He was accompanied by two other men, like him

wearing objects on their body such as a headpiece and bows and arrows and, in Herna's case, two intricately carved and painted panels. It was only later, in Lamap, that Herna explained to me the context of this silent passage and that it served to sell what local people consider to be 'copies' of their paraphernalia of the past to expatriate visitors such as tourists and collectors. Within the second kind of copyright, things considered to be 'copies' can be sold to visitors undisputedly. The second kind of copyright is the right to the copy, to sell the copy.

This ethnographic vignette raises a number of questions concerning the reproduction and commoditisation of culture and art in Vanuatu. The most obvious question that comes to mind is that of what distinguishes a 'copy' performance from a 'real' one, when the sale of remade and highly valued paraphernalia is often highly disputed among local people. Another question is that of commoditisation itself, of why valued paraphernalia and their copies are remade and often also sold in the first place. I will discuss these and related questions in more detail below. The vignette also illustrates local people's innovative ways to continue to make and sell objects of the past, and it raises questions of methodology concerning ethnographic fieldwork. Because of my questions about the sale of objects, local people, knowing that they receive far less than they could in distant markets, often asked me if I was a collector. My explanation that I was looking at the sustainability for local people in the business meant that I got more involved, talking on their behalf. While to some locals I was a threat, others saw in me an access point to cash. Yet others called me an art promoter. The longer I was in the field, the more I was assumed to be acting as a middleman and a participant in the commerce of artefacts, arranging deals and setting prices. This role had both advantages and disadvantages. It affected how people engaged with me. An advantage was that I became an insider to some transactions. A disadvantage was that I was seen as a partisan by some people. On the other hand, an interesting interstice of my multi-sited ethnography, travelling between the different islands, was that I was often in transit and outside of the orbit of any particular field.

Vanuatu art, *kastom*, and copyright

Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides, is an island nation-state in what is traditionally referred to as the culture area of Melanesia, in the Southwest Pacific. As the New Hebrides, it was ruled by a joint Anglo-French Condominium from 1906 until 1980, when it gained Independence and took on its contemporary name. The area was documented from early contact history onwards, first by whalers, labour traders, missionaries and the like and since

the late 19th-early 20th centuries by some of the earliest anthropologists. Then Cambridge students John Layard and A.B. Deacon carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Vanuatu respectively in 1914-15 and 1926-27. Layard, a pupil of W.H. Rivers at Cambridge, worked on the Small Islands just off Northeast Malakula (Vao, Atchin, and Wala). Deacon, who was a pupil of A.C. Haddon, worked in Southwest Bay Malakula and very briefly on Ambrym. He died in Southwest Bay nearing the end of his fieldwork. Layard only published some of his main findings, abundant with data, in 1942 (on Vao; volumes on Atchin and Wala were supposed to follow), while Deacon's work, based on fieldwork only some years later but of a rather pessimistic 'salvage anthropology' kind, was posthumously published in 1934.ⁱⁱ On present day Malakula, these pioneer's works provide the background to cultural revival. Local people now use Deacon's and Layard's volumes (some copied pages or sometimes a copy of the whole work) to retrace their ancestry and claim their rights to ritual and objects.

In this text, I look at the reproduction of knowledge and more specifically at its material component: the reproduction, use, and sale of what in the West is called art and what local people in Vanuatu today refer to as artefact (*artifak* in Bislama, the Pidgin Lingua Franca of Vanuatu) in a context often described as cultural revival/revitalisation and relevant for the area as well as larger parts of the Pacific and elsewhere. For Vanuatu, the revitalisation of what is generally known as *kastom* (custom), sometimes also referred to as *kalja* and *tredisin* (culture and tradition, see Ligo 1980, Bongmatur 1994, Bolton 2003), is rooted in the period towards Independence and the years following, when *kastom* discourse accelerated and became a vehicle for unification of the nation-state. From a general perspective, Foster has also noted this, writing that the site of artistic transformation is that of political transformation (1995: 302). While *kastom* is something being played out in the national arena, most if not all authors on (the politics of) *kastom* as a nationalist discourse saw it as a fluid concept, with an emergence in most places of 'creole' practices rather than a unitary *kastom* (e.g. Tonkinson 1982, Jolly 1982). In contemporary Vanuatu, probably more unifying than the troubled concept of *kastom* itself is, rather, people's commitment to it. Of major concern to most ni-Vanuatu, as the inhabitants of Vanuatu call themselves, are copyright issues, about which design or type of item belongs to which family or individual in *kastom*. Questions revolving around *kastom* and copyright that I address in this text concern *kastom* disputes and mistakes, or when valued items of the past are misappropriated by people. This once more relates to Foster (1995) and to notions of authorship and 'alterity' or (constructed) otherness.

Copyright, also referred to as *kastom kopiraet* in Bislama, was institutionalised by the State in the Copyright Act of 2000 (see Geismar 2003a, 2005a, b). According to Geismar, the fusing of ideas about copyright with *kastom* entitlements in Vanuatu was precipitated by the success of some men, particularly those from North Ambrym, in developing an international market for their carvings (2005b: 37). Since 2000, the Copyright Act's main aim has been to ensure that production and sale of certain designs and things are reserved to certain families or even individuals and that the materials are restricted to *kastom* materials. The main actor to see to it that copyright nomenclature and prohibitions are respected by all is the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC, *Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta* or VKS in Bislama) in Vanuatu's capital town Port Vila on Efate Island.ⁱⁱⁱ The VCC and, from another perspective, the VTO (Vanuatu Tourism Office) are also promoters of cultural revival in outer island locations such as Ambrym and Malakula and, in the extreme north of the archipelago, the Banks and Torres Islands. However, copyright issues also have an impact on contemporary art production. Contemporary artists such as Emmanuel Watt, Moses Jobo, Juliette Pita, Joseph John, and Michael Busai, members of *Nawita*, the first contemporary artists association of Vanuatu (founded 1989), all use *kastom* themes and techniques in their work and images and forms taken from customary practice in innovative ways. Doing so, their materials were from their beginnings restricted to acrylic paint, watercolour, tapestry, wood, and clay (Geismar 2003b: 4).^{iv} In Vanuatu, the power of 'the ethnographic' -as in Foster's 'ethnographic turn'- has remained so strong that contemporary artists work more 'ethnographic' than 'contemporary', while in so-called 'ethnographic art' there has been a turn from 'the ethnographic' to contemporary practice. In this text, I focus on what I term 'the contemporary turn in 'ethnographic art''.

Artifak and festivals

Ambrym, Malakula, and the Banks and Torres Islands are important places of culture history and cultural revival in Vanuatu. The Ambrymese, and particularly the North Ambrymese, are known in Vanuatu and outside as prolific woodcarvers and successful 'ethnopreneurs' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In the late 19th-early 20th centuries, what is often described in the literature as 'a trade in curios' was flourishing in the wider Melanesia-region (e.g. Welsch 1998). It is a period often typified as 'the expedition period' in anthropology. In Vanuatu, art objects, or, rather, objects regarded as art by their gatherers, were collected in several ways and for different reasons by early discoverers, missionaries, colonial officials, ethnologists, anthropologists, and collectors and dealers. Thousands of 'specimens', as these things were

called, were dragged out of the country, at a time when much change was already occurring. Overseas collections contain large quantities of material items from Ambrym, Malakula, and the Banks Islands, places considered by the early ethnologists to be least affected by ‘acculturation’ (e.g. A.B. Lewis in Welsch 1998: 375, and Speiser 1923, 1996). Formerly known as ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’, or ‘ethnic arts’, such things are now termed customary arts and are made and used, and often also sold, in contexts of cultural revival as well as tourism (Skinner and Bolton 2012: 467).^v Customary arts represent the ongoing relevance of the past into the present and the continuation of old art forms in contemporary social contexts (ibid: 467). Skinner and Bolton use the word ‘customary’ rather than ‘traditional’ precisely because the practices in which the arts feature are not static but represent processes of adaptation and change: ‘[t]he past does not appear in the present in an unchanged state’ (ibid: 467).

Islands such as Ambrym, Malakula, and Gaua, Vanua Lava and Mota Lava in the Banks Group are competitors in *kastom* as well as tourism through local festivals. In the Pacific, festivals serve as platforms for the reestablishment of socio-political ties and, particularly in Melanesia, for the reenactment of ritual and the remaking of its paraphernalia. However, festivals are also encounters between locals and tourists, or ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ (cf. Smith 1989). Tourism is Vanuatu’s fastest growing business, since 2010 with tourist numbers exceeding the hundred thousand per year (Wittersheim 2011: 325). Most tourists stay in hotels and resorts in the more developed areas in and around Port Vila and on Efate, in Luganville on Espirito Santo, and on Tanna. In recent years, there has been an increasing reach of tourism in the outer islands (Bolton 2007: 27). Tourists of the more adventurous kind travel to Ambrym in order to hike the volcanoes Marum and Benbow at its centre, or to Malakula to hike the Kula Trail. They combine this with some culture-on-the-side, paying the locals for one or another ritual performance during their stay. Others who get to these remote places are the masses of cruise ship tourists who dock at regular intervals at some of the remotest beaches of the archipelago, and ‘yachties’ as they are called in Vanuatu (people travelling on their own boats/yachts). While independent travellers struggle to get to these places, cruise ship tourists and ‘yachties’ get to the remote islands with relative ease. All of them consume nature as well as culture during their visit, and all of them attend festivals or, when no festivals are on, pay for a cultural performance. They almost always also buy one or another artefact that was used during the performance, a souvenir of their visit.

For Vanuatu, the festival that first infused the *kastom* and cultural revitalisation wave was the First National Arts Festival, held in Port Vila in 1979 and by Bolton described as the time

‘when the country saw itself as a country for the first time’ (2003: 30). Festivals such as the Pacific Arts Festival have been taking place every four years since 1972 in different locations throughout Oceania, and local festivals have been continuously held, in Vanuatu starting with the Pentecost Island Festival of 1982. By 2009, the time of my fieldwork in North Ambrym, the biggest local festival for Vanuatu (visitor wise) was the Back to my Roots Festival of Halhal Fantor. Back to my Roots (hereafter BTMR) had started out small, with no or hardly any visitors attending the first years (it had started in 2001, making 2009 the eighth edition). In 2009, about twenty yachts sailed in for the festival, some other tourists were present, and one dealer and one anthropologist (myself). The organiser of the festival is Chief Sekor. He is in charge of the *kastom* matters that come with organising a festival. Sekor collaborates with Norbert Nabong, the School Principal of one of two secondary schools in North Ambrym. Norbert is in charge of the practical matters. Norbert also gave the festival its name. ‘Back to your Roots’ is not just English. It is also a phrase that suits visitors’ desires and expectations: seeing the roots of these peoples, their cultural traditions. As Norbert told me in 2009, BTMR is not intended for profit only but first and foremost ‘to show the youths the old *kastom* ways’, ‘to encourage them to go back to their roots’. As the presenter at the festival, he announces each year in both French and English that it is ‘pour l’éducation de nos enfants, for the education of our children’. It is this in a twofold way. First, it is to show the youths the *kastom* ways. Second, the entry fees are used to pay for the children’s school fees.

On the festival program were several dance performances, such as *bata* (a dance associated with boys’ incision), music demonstrations (drums and flute), the culmination points of two *mage* male grade-takings, and a *rom* performance.^{vi} Job Tiningkon of Halhal Tawor took the grade *bwerang ver* and, on the third day of the festival, the right to *rom*. At the time of the festival, he attended secondary school in Port Vila, sponsored by festival incomes. As payment for entry into *bwerang ver*, he offered a pig to his ritual sponsors. In return, he received a stone that from then became his property, a marker of his newly acquired status. Norbert took the higher *mage ne sagaran* grade, together with a man from Neuiha village. Doing so, they climbed a bamboo platform that was erected on the ritual ground. Their ritual sponsors (men who already hold the grade) mounted the platform before them. Under the platform was placed a *bwerang*: a carved and painted tree fern statue, in this case for the *mage ne sagaran* grade. Much as in the old days, Norbert and his fellow grade-taker, once on the platform, were stoned by other men, dancing together on the ground underneath them in a circular dance called *gaum*. After the stoning, still on the platform, both men proclaimed their

new names and bestowed upon themselves the title of *sagaran*, spreading their arms like the wings of a hawk and, coming down, accepting the leaves that were now the markers of their newly acquired status. Norbert paid Sekor for his *sagaran* grade with a tusked boar. However, *mage* performed at BTMR incurs only a fraction of the former costs that entailed transfers of energy and wealth for each item to which the candidate gained access (sacred insignia, dances, songs, the right to perform the hawk) and community participation in certain sequences, all of which has no place in today's revived *mage* that is performed by only a few men.

Illustration 1. Norbert Nabong and fellow grade-taker claiming the *mage ne sagaran* grade on the platform at Halhal Fantor, North Ambrym, BTMR 2009 (photograph by the author).

Illustration 2. *Mage ne sagaran* tree fern statue with carved lizard underneath the platform at Halhal Fantor, North Ambrym, 2009 (photograph by the author).

On the third and last day of the festival, the *rom* was introduced by Norbert as a 'rite sacré', 'le numéro un de la festival, the highlight of the festival', a performance which was going to last an hour. The *rom* masked dancers emerged from Sekor's *rom nakamal* (men's house) or *ngor*, close by but hidden from view in dense bush, slowly making their way onto the ritual/festival ground. Two *rom tatatoro* or *rom* 'with pipes', generally regarded as the highest graded *rom*, led the other, lesser graded masks. Together, the formation included some twenty *rom* masks, of many different designs and colours. Among the dancers, Job was now wearing his newly acquired mask and the traditional attire that goes with it, consisting of a banana leaf cloak or *rablarr*, a set of rattle anklets called *wongbal*, and a 'wicker arm' *veran rom* (cf. Patterson 1996: 255).^{vii} The masks are made of a variety of light, natural materials, although nowadays there is a variant in hardwood, un-wearable and 'made for sale only'. The right to *rom*, at its essence, is the right to its colours and designs. When the colours fade, *rom* masks lose their power and are destroyed: buried, burnt, or sold. On Ambrym, *rom* masks are offered for sale for the fixed price of fifteen thousand *Vatu* per piece (the *Vatu* is Vanuatu's currency; fifteen thousand *Vatu* is approximately one hundred and fifty AUD or one hundred and thirty Euro). A *rom tatatoro* mask can cost up to twenty thousand *Vatu*. When BTMR was over, Job could sell his *bwerang ver* stone, because he was now its owner, and Norbert his *mage ne sagaran* tree fern statue. Other items offered for sale range from wood and different tree fern carvings and carved stones to woven mats. The most popular 'tribal art' item from Ambrym that is represented in museums around the world and that is still for sale on Ambrym is the Ambrym style standing slit drum, which is characterised by an elongated body and face.

Illustration 3. Chief Sekor and the *rom* dancers on the ritual ground at Halhal Fantor, North Ambrym, BTMR 2009. The colossal carved slit drum on the left at the time was negotiated for purchase by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (photograph by the author).

Illustration 4. *Rom* masks on sticks, offered for sale to tourists by Chief Sekor outside of his *rom nakamal* or *ngor*, Halhal Fantor, North Ambrym, 2009. The mask on the left was bought by the tourists for fifteen thousand *Vatu*, the one on the right is a *rom tatatoro* and was priced twenty thousand *Vatu* (photograph by the author).

In 2010, Norbert, representing the BTMR group, applied at the Vanuatu Ministry of Tourism and Trade to be part of the official delegation to the World Expo in Shanghai, China. Adding a DVD with video footage of the 2008 edition of the festival, his application was successful. Nine BTMR men travelled from remote North Ambrym to Shanghai to represent Vanuatu at the World Expo in 2010. In 2008, the group had also performed a *rom* dance at the opening of the exhibition ‘Ambrym: art from Vanuatu’ at Annandale Galleries, Sydney (22/07-20/09 2008). For this exhibition, an Australian art dealer had bought all objects at the BTMR edition of the previous year (2007). By the time the exhibition was finished, all objects were sold. The group was to perform another *rom* dance at a gallery in Brisbane, arranged by the same Australian dealer. That performance was cancelled, however, due to the dealer’s sudden death. At the time of my fieldwork in 2009, the Sydney *rom* of 2008 was still a topic of heated discussion in North Ambrym. In Australia, an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (25/07/2008) entitled ‘For a culture’s sake, chiefs sell sacred works’ had reported on the Ambrym exhibition. Back on Ambrym, however, the tumult was not because chiefs had sold ‘sacred works of art’ but because one man who had joined the group, Pierre Celestin, had died in North Ambrym soon after their return from Sydney. He had dressed up with pigs tusks and danced the *rom* while on Ambrym everyone knew that Pierre had never bought the (copy)right to the *rom*, nor did he have the right to dress up like a *Big Man*, with pigs tusks.^{viii} It is no wonder, people said, that he died, for he had made a severe ‘*kastom* mistake’.

Two kinds of copyright

In recent years, ways have been found to ignore the rigid restrictions of copyright. As I noted above, it was in Lamap, on Malakula, that I first heard of two kinds of copyright, or *tu kaen kopiraet*. The second kind of copyright is a recent one, developed since 2000 and locally translated as ‘the right to make copies’, in which copies stand for ‘things made for sale only’. As I also noted, it was Herna Abong in Lamap, an important revitalised *Big Man* for his area, who first told me about *tu kaen kopiraet* and the fact that people are now entitled to two kinds:

original copyright, or the right to reproduce objects and designs, and another kind, the right to make and sell copies of things that usually require copyright. Copies are produced expressly for sale to outsiders (cf. Steiner 1994: 35). In Vanuatu, they are what now can be sold undisputedly, but not without first securing agreement as to who has the right to the copy, the ‘copy-right’, the right to sell the copy. The difference between what local people interpret to be the ‘real’ and the ‘copy’ lies in the way a thing is performed: ‘real’ artefacts are performed in revived ritual performances, commercialised or not, while ‘copies’ are walked/worn without musical accompaniment. Copies are ‘made authentic’ for sale. What Pierre Celestin had done wrong in Sydney was that he had danced a ‘real’ *rom* mask that in *kastom* did not belong to him. Moreover, he had performed it in a ‘real’ ceremony, accompanied by singing and drum beating. Such practices are certainly not accepted as *tu kaen kopiraet*.

I started this essay with a vignette of my witnessing of a transaction of the second kind of copyright, without realising it at the time, during the Malakula Festival on Uliveo, an island in the Maskelyne Group of South Malakula. This was in-between stays on Ambrym, at a time when my own role was increasingly evolving into that of some sort of a middleman in transactions of art for money. By the time of my stay on Uliveo, the news had spread particularly among ‘yachties’ that I was an anthropologist with a research interest in the arts. Some of them now approached me and asked if any of the artefacts that had been performed were going to be offered for sale. I told them that I did not know but that I could easily ask someone. By then, I knew that most local people are quite eager to sell. That same day, I went up to Fred Numa Longga, Director of the Malakula Cultural Centre in Lakatoro, in North Malakula, who I had met before, and asked him if there was going to be anything for sale after the festival, to which he replied: ‘yes, but we first need to arrange the copyright’. But how could the copyright of things have to be ‘arranged’? Is such a thing not simply something you have and hold on to? What Numa was referring to, of course, was the second kind of copyright, that of the sale of copies of things, doubles, ‘for sale only’. This is something to be arranged, to be agreed upon by all those concerned, at any time prior to a sale. It is not fixed like regular copyright, when everyone knows what, in *kastom*, belongs to whom.

When the festival on Uliveo was over, another ‘yachtie’ couple approached me, asking me to follow them to a corner of the festival grounds, where some artefacts were now offered for sale. I realised that by now the copyright was probably ‘arranged’, although I still did not fully understand what this meant. Not knowing what to expect, I followed the tourists, to advise them about what to buy or not to buy. This was my first interaction in such a

transaction. The tourists' inquiries were about the 'real'-ness of these things, about their 'authenticity', and also about their aesthetics, whether or not they were well made. The seller was an elderly man from Tisman, a village on the east coast of Malakula, north of Lamap. Later, in Lamap, I learned that his name was Bongtete, and that he was from a bush village close by Tisman. I also learned that Tisman has a *kalja klab* for tourists, 'where men perform *kastom* dances for *Vatu* only'. This is regarded as a bad thing by most local people. Bongtete is regarded as a man with a genuine interest in *kastom*. This is why it was decided he deserved 'the right to the copies'. But this is what I discovered later. On Uliveo, Bongtete was now selling the objects that Herna Abong, the *kastom* leader from Lamap, had been wearing on his body during a silent passage at the festival. The tourists had recognised these things and had photographs of Herna wearing them. I too remembered seeing them, thinking this was a strange passage of a leader walking the grounds in *kastom* dress in silence.

The copies on Herna's body that were for sale afterwards were two panels, one that he had worn on his chest and one on his back. Herna had been accompanied by two younger men wearing the *nambas* or penis sheath like himself and carrying a bow and arrows. One also wore a headpiece. That all these things were considered to be copies by local people was outside of the tourists' knowledge. After all, copies look exactly like 'the real', or they are the same thing, the only difference being that they are not danced. As I noted above, Herna later explained to me that he had walked the copy items for sale, after my questions about his passage at the festival. He had been asked to 'walk' the items because he is entitled to do so, as a chief and a leader. Herna's short and silent passage in *nambas* and carved and painted panels on his body and his compatriots' carrying of bows and arrows and headpiece in the end resulted in the amount of twelve thousand *Vatu* (approximately one hundred and twenty AUD or one hundred Euro). The 'yachties' initially bought only one of the panels, the one they liked most, for ten thousand *Vatu*. After negotiations with Bongtete, through me, they bought the whole lot for only two thousand *Vatu* extra. In the process, Bongtete had been annoyed that he was not selling everything at once. In the end, he told me in Bislama to tell the tourists that he would have to burn or bury the other things if they did not buy them. His strategy of 'art for sale or to be burned later' worked. He sold everything and gained two thousand *Vatu* extra. Bongtete, at first appearing powerless in the transaction, in fact had strategies that allowed him, up to a point, to effect the transaction to his advantage.

Illustration 5. Passage of copy items, Malakula Festival, Uliveo Island, 2009. Herna Abong is walking in the middle, tourists and locals are watching the scene (photograph by the author).

Conclusion

In traditional ('tribal', 'ethnic') art history, the definition of an authentic work of art centred around the question: 'was it used in its traditional context?' (e.g. Olbrechts 1940). If it was, it was an authentic work of art. Local people know as well as anyone that their 'masterpieces of tribal art' need to at least look used. In contemporary contexts, 'making authenticity' is just this. It is the use in performance of objects such as Ambrymese slit drums, tree fern figures, and *rom* masks or any kind of item from Malakula or any other location, and copy-use in the case of copies, at festivals, to make them 'real', saleable, to achieve a better price. Those that are considered 'real', such as 'real' *rom* masks, made in a variety of light, vegetal materials, are often sold in secrecy in black plastic bags after performance, behind the scenes, in what MacCannell has called the back region of the tourist site (1976: 92). The sale of 'the real' is disputed by some, mostly by those who do not participate in revival. They criticise those who do that they are in *kastom* for the wrong reason, for money. The sale of copy items is less problematic. Copies can be the same as 'the real', with the notable difference that they are not 'truly used' but 'walked' in silent passages. They are offered for sale to all kinds of tourists and collectors/dealers. Sale is their purpose. Authenticity itself is a commodity (the authenticity of people, places, and things; cf. Cohen 1988), but it is also a type of valuation (cf. Foster 1995: 306). There is value attributed by local people to their revitalisation of culture and material culture, and there are things imbued with value for outsiders.

Festivals are vehicles for commoditisation. They are an example of the authenticity trade, aimed at providing an 'authentic experience'. Local people authenticate their *kastom* and validate their access to ancient *kalja* while onlookers consume the experience. The locals become aware of their authenticity as a form of cultural capital and use it to assert new kinds of power (Lindholm 2008: 91). For Vanuatu, this means that people are eager to revive the performative and material aspects of *kastom*, authenticating their connections to a strong and powerful past which was denied to them for a long time. It also means, however, that they wish to support their lives by providing the experience of authenticity to audiences for profit. At Back To My Roots and other festivals, culture is performed for visitors and locals who are proud to see some of their lost and powerful past again. However, today's grade-takings are attenuated ones, showing only the dramatic culmination points of the rites. The graded society system of the past is disrupted, with no or hardly any continuity of transference of grades or

knowledge. The yearlong preparations for the higher grades are ignored, the costs of ritual reduced, but to those who participate in revival it is important still to prove their ancestry in order to claim ownership of valued things. *Artifak* are such valued things. They offer cultural as well as economic capital to producers as well as *kastom* owners. Foster listed ‘art tourism’ as a possible threat, but also wrote that ‘the show becomes the spectacle where cultural capital collects’ (1995: 306). As I have shown, such capital collects on all sides.

Revival is a tool, representing the ongoing relevance of the past in the present by linking contemporary art practices with ideas of the past, while reclaiming the value of old objects in the present (Skinner and Bolton 2012: 467). ‘Natives’ vanished from the scene by the 1960s-70s but, more importantly, have been returning since the 1970s-80s. Now they are back, centre stage on their former ritual grounds, willing to perform themselves for us, ‘adopting the Western pursuit of alterity’, ‘becoming ‘other’ to their own selves’ (Jolly 1992: 53, cf. Foster 1995). The commoditisation of ‘otherness’ requires all ‘others’ to ‘look other’. The authenticity of ‘the native’ equals ‘cannibals’ and ‘savages’, and as a trope this sells in a Western market. Local people exoticise themselves (Stanley 1989, Lindholm 2008) in order to satisfy demand for ‘the authentic other’. They offer their culture-as-artefact (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) and their wares in created back scenes that serve as authenticators for the occasion. On the local level, this generates disputes revolving around rights and right or wrong use of paraphernalia. However, even a copy item, for sale, can have intrinsic value. Wearing the paraphernalia that were once signs of status and prestige gives pride to the wearer and, in the right circumstances, renewed status and prestige. But perhaps the clearest contemporary practice within the field of ‘ethnographic’- or ‘customary arts’ is in its current connection to the global art world, with former and revived ‘natives’ not just performing and commercialising their heritage but sometimes also having direct connections to collectors, dealers, and gallery- and museum curators in Australia, Europe, and the USA. Underlying the positive material benefits made through sale to outsiders remains a concern among all parties involved that these transactions form part of issues of appropriation and cultural loss.

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ⁱ Lamap, known as Navsak in local language, is one of only a few places where the explorer Captain James Cook landed in the islands, in 1774, when he circumnavigated and mapped them during his second journey to the Pacific. He named it Port Sandwich, but had to retreat hastily due to the 'unfriendly' welcome he and his crew received (Kaepler 1978). Ever since, Lamap has had a violent reputation, both between local people and against whites, with reports of 'savage cannibalism' on the spot (e.g. Monnier 1987). Later, it became the regional centre for the Catholic Mission and then the headquarters of the French Colonial Government for the area.

ⁱⁱ Layard himself touched upon this in his 'Note' to Deacon's 1934 publication, saying that when he visited Southwest Bay in 1914-15 'it was already almost completely depopulated' due to imported diseases, resulting in many deaths. At the time, North Malakula was still densely populated and rites were still being performed, even though alien presence in the form of missionaries and planters was also felt in this part of the island.

ⁱⁱⁱ The VCC, originally set up by the colonial government in 1956 as National Museum and Cultural Centre, over the years has undergone many changes. In the 1970s-80s, its focus was on the 'loss of *kastom*' and the early revival and re-performance of ritual. Under impulse of current ni-Vanuatu Director Marcellin Abong, the focus has shifted to claims for repatriation by families or individuals of their paraphernalia of the past from overseas museums. The National Museum at the VCC exhibits a range of customary and contemporary arts and its storeroom stores objects ranging from material items to film footage, photographs, and song recordings.

^{iv} In *The death of authentic primitive art* (1998), Errington referred to such movements as high ethnic arts and - artists, saying that they work with new media such as paint and canvas (1998: 139). Moving away from 'high primitive art', she saw the 'high ethnic' as a way out of the problem of the 'inauthentic'.

^v At an earlier stage and focussing solely on processes of touristic exchange, Graburn, in *Ethnic and tourist arts* (1976), distinguished and defined tourist arts as 'ethnic art and craft products produced for an external audience, an audience that is typically unfamiliar with the culture and aesthetics of the producers society' (1976: 8), adding that the study of tourist arts is 'the study of *changing* arts - of emerging ethnicities, modifying identities, and commercial and colonial stimuli and repressive actions' (ibid: 2). According to Graburn, commercial arts play a positive role in economically transitional contexts. They can provide a livelihood without being subject to wage labour discipline and bring prestige and pride to minority peoples rather than the low status attached to the forms

of manual labour that are usually available to them (in Graburn 1999: 338, cf. Graburn 1969). In *Hosts and Guests* (1989), Smith focused on the cultural exchange-aspect of the interaction and on the impact the ‘guests’ have on their ‘hosts’, and in *Being ourselves for you* (1998) Stanley focused on the ‘host’ side.

^{vi} In the ‘male graded societies’ of North and North-Central Vanuatu (e.g. the *suqe* of the Banks and Torres Islands, the *maki* and *nimangki* of Malakula and, related to *maki* and *nimangki*, the *mage* of Ambrym), men attained rank through public, competitive accumulation of prestige (wealth) and sacred status by means of ceremonial exchange and sacrifice of tusked boars (see Allen 1981 for an overview). *Rom* performances featured and feature in the secret *rom* society on Ambrym, coexisting next to the public *mage* society. *Rom* initiations usually take place after the yam harvest on Ambrym, when the intense labour of growing yams is over. *Rom* ceremonies know a continuity of performance and are popular among locals and tourists alike.

^{vii} For orthography of all North Ambrymese words, I use Michael Franjeh’s notation. Franjeh conducted the research for his Ph.D. in linguistics in North Ambrym at around the same time I was based there. He is the first linguist to concentrate his research solely on North Ambrym language.

^{viii} The Melanesian *Big Man* is a man who has reached high grade in the graded society system.