Social Representations of Taukuka

A social knowledge approach to the preservation of Bellonese intangible cultural heritage

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Version 2
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ABSTRACT

Solomon Islands along with other Pacific Islands nations is adopting legislation designed to protect traditional knowledge and expressions of culture from misappropriation, attrition and loss of economic opportunity for owners. These developments require the state to engage across a highly pluralistic customary and social landscape. Ethnographic studies have shown that owing to such plurality unintended consequences may arise from attempts to rationalise indigenous conceptualisations such as customary laws to render them accessible to outside interests. The preservation of intangible cultural heritage requires understanding of the communicative processes that maintain its significance and value and which are involved in its continuation, transformation and transmission. This study approaches this challenge from the perspective of social knowledge; the common-sense and empirical reality experienced by the owners of a representative aspect of the culture. The case chosen for this research is the ritual taukuka tattooing practice of the Bellonese people of Solomon Islands. Social representations theory is used to show that the field of representation of this cultural practice is heterogeneous with consensual and non-consensual features. Whilst revival of the taukuka is unlikely due to prerequisite religious ontology, its preservation as significant heritage where ownership remains with the lineages and families may best be assured through cultural education and artistic representations.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and Objectives

This research uses social representations theory to identify and analyse representations of traditional and contemporary tattooing circulating within the Bellonese community in Solomon Islands. The study is in the context of development of the cultural sector and protection of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture (TKEC), which are at risk from misappropriation, attrition and the loss of economic opportunity for the owners. Tattooing is a form of intangible culture with traditional and non-traditional aspects. Content, structure, natural groups and functions are revealed through the analysis of representations made by Bellonese subjects with and without tattoos, tattoo artists and cultural experts.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Question

1.2.1 Problem statement

The traditional tattooing of the people of Bellona can be regarded as intangible cultural heritage because it has axiological dimensions associated with historical, cultural and spiritual identity. In pre-contact times the practice served to reaffirm ties between the gods, human beings and nature and the act of tattooing symbolised continuity of custom. In contemporary times, the practice was discontinued following the Bellonese conversion to Christianity in 1938. However, Bellonese proudly recall their ancestors who in living memory wore the special tauluka tattoo, and culture experts recall the full significance and contents of the symbolic order that went with it. It is a flagship of Bellonese cultural heritage.

As Pacific Islands countries enact laws regarding the protection of TKEC, the people of Bellona will need to consider what this means for their intangible cultural heritage, including the tauluka. Questions will be raised such as who the owners are, what qualifies, how its use in non-customary ways should be regulated and what positive protections should be considered.

Research has shown that the enactment of TKEC laws might be problematic given the Solomon Islands’ diversity, legal plurality and tensions between modern and customary
conceptualisations of ownership. Unintended consequences may follow if the provisions do not adequately allow for heterogeneity.

There is also likely to be heterogeneity within the Bellonese society in their knowledge and attitudes of cultural heritage. Whereas in pre-contact times myths, religion and other social knowledge would be taken for granted, modern society is characterised by a diversity of representations about similar issues. Since the sudden conversion from the old religion to Christianity, both culture and society have undergone considerable changes.

One would expect changes in the ways Bellonese think about their traditional culture, especially if the old practices such as the taukuka rituals have been largely discontinued. But is the concept of *taukuka* only to be experienced epistemologically as a heritage object, or does meaning continue to circulate experienced in a poetical or ontological sense?

The protection of TKEC depends not only on overcoming issues of institutional plurality and diversity but should be based on an understanding of how they are experienced individually and socially in order that their “living nature” and their functions in contemporary society are preserved.

This research aims to cast light on the social knowledge of the Bellonese in regard to this unique aspect of their culture.

1.2.2 Research question

*How do the Bellonese experience and understand their traditional and contemporary tattooing practices and what are the implications for legislation designed to protect traditional knowledge and cultural expressions and for the development of the culture sector in Solomon Islands?*

1.3 Core theories and research design

With this research I am seeking to understand how individuals’ phenomenological experience of intangible culture is represented within the field of social knowledge. The taukuka tattoo is experienced at once as a personal and social phenomenon. It can be
viewed with both traditional and modern perspectives. It is symbolic of core values of the Bellonese and their historical understanding of nature.

Traditional knowledge and cultural expressions such as tattooing are concerned with meaning-making at the level of the individual and social. A theoretical framework to understand them needs to be concerned with the socially negotiated production of meaning, where the individual is seen as an active social agent. Social semiotics, symbolic interactionism and social representations theory are all concerned with the way individuals interpret meaning socially (e.g. Veltri 2013).

1.3.1 Social representations theory

Social representations theory (SRT) is a body of theory within social psychology that explains how social knowledge is generated through the process of inter-subjectively anchoring and objectifying new information in the familiar. Unlike discursive psychology, it tries to address the relationship between the psychological and the social without functional separation of the subject from the object (Burr 2002:122). Social representations are generated communicatively and are themselves the “stock of common-sense knowledge” that we draw on as the basis for communication; thus SRT is fundamentally a theory of communication (Howarth 2011:6). Through the cognitive and cultural process of communicating, intersubjective understandings of the world are coordinated and maintained.

Anchoring and objectification “saturate” representations with reality (Moscovici 1981:193) and weave them into “the fabric of the group’s common-sense” (Wagner et. al. 1999:99). This common-sense has both epistemological and ontological dimensions, and is experienced as social reality; in other words social representation actually creates reality. The framework of SRT accommodates heterogeneity and consensual as well as non-consensual representations, explaining how different ways of thinking can co-exist.

1.3.2 Research methodology

This research is about the lived culture of Bellona, using social representations as the medium of inquiry. The basis is the cultural studies viewpoint, which “acknowledges that people can and do engage actively in their uses of cultural artefacts in making sense of their own and others lives” (Gray 2003:12). This viewpoint does not seek
generalisable results but to elicit examples of the lived experience of culture (ibid.). This is qualitative, phenomenological research.

Methods used in research on social representations depend on the subject. Ethnographic studies might involve interviews and observations of intersubjective actions. Other approaches may involve longitudinal studies or questionnaires. Generally qualitative methods are the first choice although quantitative analysis is also used (Wagner et. al. 1999).

Phenomenology is the preferred paradigm in this case because it focuses on lay knowledge over expert knowledge. I am not so much interested in the views of a few cultural experts but how traditional tattooing is socially represented and experienced. Phenomenology concerns the “empirical reality” of individual experience.

1.4  Context outline

Since around 2010 the Solomon Islands government and development partners have been addressing marginalisation of culture in development with a new culture policy that mainstreams the development of the culture sector. The policy has a tripartite approach that promotes economic development and cultural industries, the revitalisation and celebration of traditional culture, and the protection of traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and heritage. In parallel, regional countries have been developing *sui generis* laws for the protection of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture (TKEC) based on models derived from western liberal notions of intellectual property rights.

Traditional knowledge in ethnolinguistically diverse Solomon Islands is deeply embedded in *kastom* (customary practice) and shapes customary law and these developments need to engage across a highly pluralistic social landscape. Unintended consequences may arise as a result of mismatch between the conceptualisations of the islanders of their TKEC and the way it is represented in enacting the protections. Problems arise when diversity and heterogeneity are glossed over with over-simplified models of how Solomon Islands society is organised.
1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Traditional Knowledge

*Traditional knowledge* (TK) is defined by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) as “a living body of knowledge passed on from generation to generation within a community. It often forms part of a people’s cultural and spiritual identity\(^1\)”.

A more technical definition was developed at the UN Earth Summit in 1992: “Traditional Knowledge consists of practical (instrumental) and normative knowledge concerning the ecological, socio-economic and cultural environment. Traditional knowledge originates from people and is transmitted to people by recognizable and experienced actors. It is systemic (inter-sectorial and holistic), experimental (empirical and practical), handed down from generation to generation and culturally enhanced”. TK can be understood as a broader category that includes *indigenous knowledge* created by a particular indigenous community.

TK is characterised as being practical, based on teachings and experiences and consisting of deep knowledge of holistic nature including humanistic, spiritual and linguistic aspects (as opposed to scientific knowledge). It is an authority system, a wise way of life and gives credibility to a people\(^2\). It often consists of and can be transmitted via songs, legends, stories, performances and other practices.

People also possess *local knowledge* that does not have its origin in tradition but through direct interaction and schooling, and indirect exposure (e.g. the media) to non-traditional values, attitudes, institutions, etc. Traditional and non-traditional knowledge articulate to produce a frame of understanding and validation that give meaning to the world around them\(^2\).

*Traditional ecological knowledge* (TEK) has been theorised as a knowledge-practice-belief complex incorporating knowledge of animals and plants, a resource management system, an appropriate social institution with rules and norms and a worldview which shapes environmental perception and gives meanings to observations of the environment (Nainoca, 2011:118).

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\(^1\) [http://www.wipo.int/tk/en](http://www.wipo.int/tk/en)

1.5.2 Tattoos as intangible cultural heritage

Tattooing as a traditional practice, such as the taukuka of Bellona, may be considered as an example of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003)3 defines ICH as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage", manifested *inter alia* in the five domains of oral traditions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and traditional craftsmanship (Martí, 2010:2).

Not all Bellonese tattooing practices are cultural heritage, as modern tattooing is best described as creative art. The taukuka, however, is a tradition that includes an axiological dimension (it has worth to society) and fits UNESCO’s definition4 as “an essential source of identity deeply rooted in the past” (ibid.). The tattoo would be meaningless without the body or the “extra-somatic” component, i.e. the context, knowledge and accompanying cultural representations. When the bearer dies, the tattoo maybe no more, but the taukuka most certainly persists, along with the values to which it is tied and are viewed positively by the society that practices it.

The safeguarding of ICH stresses its recreation and transmission rather than its freezing in some “pure or primordial form” and stresses the reinforcement of those processes wherein the continued transmission, interpretation and evolution of ICH takes place.

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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Bellona

Solomon Islands is a small, ethno-linguistically diverse nation in south-west Oceania with a population of 0.6 million consisting mainly of Melanesians with Polynesian, Micronesian and other minorities.

Rennell Bellona is one of the country’s provinces situated 100 miles south of the capital Honiara, rarely visited before 1940. According to oral histories the two islands MuNgiki (Bellona) and MuNgava (Rennell) were populated by eight original clans who voyaged in one of the Polynesian back-migrations some 26 generations ago (Tickle 1977:7). The point of disembarkation, Uvea, is put in today’s territory of Wallis and Futuna. Kuschel (1988:48) points out alternative accounts of the migration based on archaeological field work. Linguistic analysis carried out by Elbert and Monberg (1965) shows the language is related to Samoan.

Society in Bellona was and is decentralised organised around approximately seven lineages by clan, sub-clan and family. Primogeniture was practiced with men owning the land, usually via the first born of a family. Today, all Bellona’s existing population of some 3000 or so are descended from two of the original sa’a (clans) namely Kaitu’u and Taupongi. A similar number live in the capital Honiara and there are small numbers around the country and overseas.

During traditional times blood feuding with cycles of killing and vengeance had been a way of life in Bellona (Kuschel 1988). Their traditional religion incorporated a number of categories with sky-gods, district deities, ancestors, culture heroes and harmful gods (ibid:78). The gods were not treated as omnipotent and could to some extent be controlled through ritual.

The Rennell and Bellonese converted almost en-masse to Christianity in 1938. In preceding years some Rennellese had received missionary training in Western Solomons and there was some fore knowledge of the new Christian god (ibid:233). The conversion took place during two crises in 1938 with the so called Niupani madness on Rennell first, and Bellona shortly after. During these events the strength of the new god was tested against the old. At Niupani this was accompanied by mass hysteria during
which the battle between the old and the new was experienced socially and symbolically (Monberg 1962). Bellona’s conversion came shortly after with the arrival of a Rennellese missionary who proceeded to destroy religious sites but this did not result in him being punished by the gods. The Bellonese were impressed with the strength of the new Christian god. They had been living in a state of great tension due to the continued blood feuding. The message “thou shalt not kill!” was very appealing to them. Once the might of the new god had been proven beyond doubt, the population willingly accepted Christianity.

Although the Rennellese and Bellonese share the same language, culture and traditions, it is said that tattooing is more associated with Bellona\(^5\). In this study I will therefore refer only to the Bellonese although the findings may equally apply to the Rennellese.

2.2 Bellonese tattooing

Tickle (1977) describes ritual and traditional tattooing practiced in Bellona before 1938. Almost all the people would have worn tattoos, and there were prescribed designs for men and women.

The *taukuka* refers to both the priest-chiefs of the pre-Christian times and a component of the ritual tattoo design reserved only for priests and *hakahua*, those men who had raised themselves to chiefly status in the eyes of their clan, partly through birthright but only providing they had proven their worthiness. The *taukuka* had religious significance having been said to have come direct from the gods. The ‘beating’ of the *taukuka* was therefore a sacred re-presentation of the mark of the gods - a reaffirmation of custom signifying continuity and the extending of ties between men and gods to the next generation. It was therefore always conducted with great ritual and ceremony, and close attention to the accuracy as the design was prescribed by the gods and there was no room for artistic license.

Attaining the rank of *hakahua* would not be automatic, it depended on prestige earned through ability and demonstration of values held of importance such as generosity, kindness, modesty and diligence. The right to bear the *taukuka*, so earned, was therefore of considerable social significance; a permanent mark of integrity, earned respect and courage and came with the powers of a priest-chief. (ibid.).

\(^{5}\) My informant M1; also the main literature on tattooing relates mainly to Bellona (see Tickle 1977)
Besides the *taukuka*, and with variations between the two main clans, existed an intricate repertory of prescribed tattoo designs for the chiefs and lay men and women. To not take the *tatau* would be unthinkable, it would result in scorn and ridicule (ibid.). All young men looked forward to the time when they should reach the age and acquire approval to take the *tatau*. Men other than chiefs would start with the obligatory centrepiece *hakapulonga* centred on the chest. Women also wore their own designs to mark entry into adulthood and according to conventions to signal rank, prestige and convey symbolic support for male members of their lineage and families.

![Taufuka Paul Sa’ANGEKA of the Ngikobaka clan Mungiki 1972](http://siagency.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-last-priest-chief-of-mu.html)

Figure 1. A rare picture of one of the last Bellonese to wear the full taukuka tattoo
(source: http://siagency.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-last-priest-chief-of-mu.html)

Tattoo artists, *mataisau*, could be of either sex and were recognised on the basis of natural talent. The taukuka design is derived from the markings of the *lichomangi*, a
beetle found in coconut tree flowers. Other motifs also reference the natural world. For the men, large areas of solid black colouration were characteristic and the process involved considerable pain. For this reason it constituted a rite of passage. To alleviate the discomfort and distract the subject into a trance-like state, the beating of the tattoo was usually accompanied with the recitation of a chant called *saka*.

Figure 1a. Analysis of a male hakahua bearing the taukuka reproduced from Tickle (1977)
When in 1938 the Bellonese converted to Christianity en masse the old gods fell into disrepute. The tattooing practice was largely discontinued. By 1977 only two elderly men wearing the full taukuka were still alive and the motivation and social criteria which determined the practice had “already gone” (Tickle, 1977). It would not be long, Tickle feared, before “the art is lost in the ground and the patterns themselves forgotten”.

Figure 1b. Analysis of a woman bearing traditional tatau (reproduced from Tickle (1977))
Figure 1c. Taukuka (chest centre) with supporting designs.

Reproduced from original drawings by Professor Les Tickle with permission.
Figure 1d. Tattoos typically worn by those other than chiefs. The “W” shaped motif on the chest of the man is *hakapukonga*. Reproduced from original drawings by Professor Les Tickle with permission.
2.3 Tattooing research

Tattooing has been studied from various methodological perspectives that are useful in my analysis.

Bellonese traditional tattooing aligns well with Gell’s ‘plane of tattooing’ developed from an analysis of the role tattooing has played in Polynesian societies across the Pacific (Barnes, 1997). Gell differentiates Polynesian political systems into three categories; conical/hierarchical, devolved and feudal. These can be mapped to particular physical aspects of tattooing such as wounding/bleeding, healing, aesthetic and ornamental. The Bellonese case would appear to fit the healing stage, where tattoos are visible marks of endurance, “dedication and submissive heroism” (ibid:195).

Hennessy (2011) adopts a constructivist, social psychological stance for her doctoral research involving Australian subjects with tattoos and explored the psychological reasons for tattooing, reasons people gave and the views they had of themselves and others. Her methodological approach is based on personality and cognition theorised as Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1991).

Martin (2013) is interested in the polysemic nature of contemporary tattoos and adopts a methodological approach based on Structuration Theory (Giddens 1991). In late modernity the self is seen as a reflexive project where the body is connected to an ongoing process of actualising self-identity. This emphasises the role of the tattooist as a knowledgeable actor who “draws on rules and resources” within contexts of structures of influence. Thus tattooing “must always be understood as both an individual and cultural affair”. Martin’s interviews elicited stories of the tattoos which he analysed from the perspective of “referencing” (historical/cultural) and “mapping” (personal) of meanings connected to the subjects’ self identities.

Hiramoto (2013) studied tattoos of Japanese migrants in Hawai’i in order to illuminate transnational cultural histories. He shows that the indexical meanings of the tattoo designs draw on Japaneseness but do not share traditional Japanese values, and the perceptions of native Japanese of the tattoos as bizarre or “unthinkable” suggest that “because of their mobility, the immigrant Japanese group went through a radical transition and created new cultural values in a new homeland”. This perspective might be useful in understanding how meanings change when Polynesian tattoos “travel”. 

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2.4 Protection of traditional knowledge

2.4.1 Development of the culture sector

A cultural mapping study of the Solomon Islands by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC, Lidimani 2011) concludes that culture has been marginalised in development and policies contributing to a systematic loss of traditional knowledge, and calls for a national framework to address this. The weak cultural policy environment stands in contrast to the rich diversity and the all-pervasive daily experience of traditional culture or kastom.

Deeply grounded values are important for the regulation of modern life under the pressures of globalisation. Regional scholars have highlighted the salience of cultural values in developmental areas such as governance and education and in fighting corruption (Huffer and Qalo 2004, Huffer 2005).

A significant policy milestone was reached in 2012 with the launch of the Nasinol Policy Framework blong Kalsa ⁶ aiming to mainstream culture in nation-building and development. The importance of kastom in regulating lifestyles is recognised as an essential component of the socioeconomic, political and spiritual development aspirations of Solomon Islands. The policy is structured in three sections; culture and creative industry, kastom and TK and cultural heritage. The first section emphasises active participation in economic development and re-vitalisation of creative cultural works. The second section describes defensive and positive approaches ⁷ for protection, including education and a strengthened role of traditional institutions in formal government. The third section has a decentralised focus, looking out to the provinces to raise the profile of cultural heritage nationwide, including cultural centres and the role of the media and churches. The strategy is devolved across a partnership of stakeholders, administered via the establishment of a cultural commission.

⁶ Available from http://www.spc.int/hdp/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=387&Itemid=4

⁷ A definition of defensive and positive intellectual property protection is given by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) at http://www.wipo.int/pressroom/en/briefs/tk_ip.html
2.4.2 Protection of TKEC

Alongside the prominence given to culture in recent years has been a growing awareness of the commercial value of intangible cultural heritage. This is seen as an abundant “resource” that could be used as a tool for development through job creation, niche markets and creative industries (Serrano 2013: 79-80) and has led to calls for frameworks for the protection of TK and ICH. The Solomon Islands has drafted a Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture Bill 2015.

2.4.3 Evolving legal framework

The history of this legislature can be traced to the Regional Framework for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture (SPC 2002). The Framework has its roots in the UNESCO Symposium on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Indigenous Cultures in the Pacific Islands in 1999 and was given momentum by the subsequent Action Plan of 2009. In parallel, a sub-regional Framework Treaty on Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture has been agreed by Melanesian Spearhead Group members signed by Solomon Islands in 2011. International partners include the European Union and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

The evolving TKEC frameworks give both economic and moral rights to TK holders and encompass three main concepts: defensive against the misappropriation of TK, the conservation of TK in the face of rapid social change, and the facilitation of commercialisation of TK by the TK holders themselves (Forsyth 2012:191).

2.4.4 Criticism of the framework

The Framework Treaty on TKEC tried to find a balance between intellectual property (IP) regimes based on Western liberal thinking and capitalism on one hand and traditional cultural rights based on customary laws on the other (Serrano 2013:83). Exogenous values centre on the commodity value of knowledge and individual rights,
whereas endogenous perceptions of cultural property involve “networks of exchange and reflect continuums between past and present” (Farran 2012:1). Thus, articulating laws which meet the demands of modernity whilst satisfying the values of tradition is a challenge in Oceania (ibid).

Critics of the evolving frameworks claim that the spirit of the Action Plan which was developed in the context of trade has been an opposite force to the Model Law (Serrano 2013:85) resulting in the commercialisation of TK being prioritised over the other objectives. Furthermore, critics claim the approach outlined in the Action Plan is “top-down” with community consultation occurring only significantly down the track and even then, more of a way of informing TK owners of the implications than true participation, risking state-centric interpretation and implementation of the law (Forsyth 2012:199). A law that is state-centric tends to see TK and customary law as inert when it is in fact more of a continually evolving process – an “ongoing dialogue about the way things should be done in the community, mediated by the customary leaders” (ibid:194).

The Model Law requires that a distinction is made between customary and non-customary and aims to regulate only the latter. Lack of clarity around this risks confusing new uses and innovations and undermining decisions made by customary authorities (Forsyth, 2012:17-21).

Determining who the holders of particular TK or ICH are is likely to be troublesome even though collective ownership is recognised, because in kastom, ownership and boundaries tend to be fluid and decided collectively, whereas modernity requires finite groups of owners to be named, potentially causing rifts amongst families and within and across communities. Ownership in the sense used in the legislation is not a customary concept (Forsyth, 2013:24), and fragile customary authorities may not have sufficient basis to address claims arising (ibid). The potential for conflict is similar to that associated with customary land tenure when, for instance, disputes often arise over boundaries and ownership as logging companies attempt to strike deals with land owners, bypassing the more “holistic” modes of customary justice in favour of the liberal proprietary approach. McDougall (2015:463) illustrates this for a case in the Western Solomons where “prior to logging, solving property disputes did not involve a
conclusive determination of clan ownership: the chiefs’ committee exhorted the disputants to see one another as brothers”.

Furthermore, a requirement of state assent for non-customary use of TK would seem to stifle the spirit of creative innovation and cultural growth as elucidated, for instance, in the Solomon Islands culture policy which encourages modern forms of culture including creative derivative works.

Finally, the provisions do not sufficiently strengthen customary institutions in regard to dispute resolution. This brings attention to the central role of the customary authorities.

2.4.5 Role of customary authority

TK is not *terra nullius* (Forsyth, 2012:214) but is deeply embedded in traditional systems of regulation where each customary group is allegiant to its own system of customary law (Menzies, 2007:3). Whereas the persistence of such plurality is sometimes put down to “resilience” in the absence of a weak state (McDougall, 2015), in fact many customary authorities are fragile, already challenged by the ethnic tension of 1998-2003 in their role of conflict resolution (Menzies, 2007:12) and viewed with reduced relevance by the more educated elites (McDougall, 2015:467) and because of generational change (Menzies, 2007:10-11).

Forsyth (2012:205) concludes that “a state-based system is seen to facilitate access to TK by outsiders” and argues for “deep plurality” in the way the legal framework engages with traditional systems and other non-state legal orders. Deep plurality is seen as the recognition of customary law outside the national legal system, supported through the framework and given space to operate in co-existence with the state. Weak plurality contrasts with this in that there is only one legal order, i.e. the state, that draws on two bodies of norms (ibid:197).

Forsyth (2013) argues that an alternative approach would be to do away with the idea of sui generis legislation based on proprietary rights in favour of an alternative non-proprietary approach. One possibility would be a “regulatory toolbox” deployed programmatically and involving the strengthening of customary institutions (ibid.). Some of the suggested tools are already aligned with Solomon Islands’ culture policy, such as the promoting the use of TK and cultural festivals, whereas others are clearly
supportive of the policy objectives, including the conservation, prevention of
misappropriation and the facilitation of commercialisation with benefits for the TK
holders and national economic development.

However, regardless of whether a legislative or regulatory approach is adopted, the state
and a plethora of customary authorities will need to work together in the protection of
TK/ICH. Therefore it may be best to acknowledge historical relationships, which in the
case of the Solomons have been shaped by disturbances from colonial times and
subsequent engagement with post-colonial authority (McDougall, 2015:456). Rather
than characterising customary authority as “resilient”, McDougall uses the term
“tenacious” to describe the commitment of “all the actors within the system” to the
maintenance of kastom and to engagement with the state in hope of positive change
(ibid). Menzies (2007:4) describes the Solomon Islands as a forum of “incredible legal
pluralism”, in which customary normative systems co-exist in a state of dynamic
interplay with the church, project and company law (for example fisheries law – itself
pluralistic), donor priorities, human rights norms and the state laws and constitution.
Where formal law meets with kastom, its application becomes confused and hybridised
(ibid:5).

2.4.6 The idealised community problematised

The state must work pragmatically and respectfully in law with customary groups in
order that the objectives of each are satisfied and the opportunities optimised. It will be
important to avoid any idealised view of the “community” or to rely on it as a
“convenient conceptual haven” (Forsyth, 2013:1). The “community” is unlikely to exist
as a coherent body with its members unified in their views about how best to manage
their resources including the commercialisation of TK/ICH. The empirical reality is
more likely to reveal ambivalence and contradiction (Filer, 2006:221) as such matters
are contested and politicised within the social group. For instance, Forsyth (2012:19)
shows through her case study of the nagol land-diving ceremony in Vanuatu the
“difficulties of deciding who comprises “the community” in a particular context, who
speaks for it, and what power dynamics are involved in questions of rights to control
particular aspects of traditional knowledge”.

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Solomon Islands diverse cultures largely fit a description of collectivism as valuing group membership, deriving self-definition through relationships, and yielding to obligations expected by friends, family, and community (Cozma 2011:11). However, to portray Pacific cultures as being purely collective with a single model of personhood would be unwise as local webs of custom and kinship compete for attention with the institutions and processes of modernity.

People need to satisfy both individual and collective needs in any culture and thus a purely individualistic or collectivistic society would be untenable. The encroachment of modern institutions in contexts such as the protection of TK tends to “increase the visibility of the individual facets of personhood” which “confronts existing social structures and institutions that tend to accentuate the relational aspects of personhood” (Bainton 2014, p249). McDougall (2014) describes how complex modalities of social relations such as egalitarianism and possessive individualism are elicited by particular kinds of situations. Attempts to define the customary in ways that make it accessible to outsiders can have unintended consequences because of the way differences in the community are stirred up. She calls for a change in approach from one that seeks to map people onto property to one that plays to the unifying forces of social life (McDougall, 2015:104). We should therefore look towards ways of protecting TK that are harmonising and inclusive.

2.4.7 Roles of churches

Denominational differences also complicate the idealised “single voice of the community”. Around 98% of Solomon Islanders profess to be Christian (1999 Census) and the churches have played a large role in the daily lives of Solomon Islanders and for over a century. Existing alongside and in interaction with kastom and traditional belief over time, the sociological, ideological and normative influence of the churches is complex.

Churches are seen as important development partners of the state due to their “intensely local roots but broadly global reach” and their potential “as alternative structures in the context of ineffective or even absent state institutions” (McDougall, 2008:1).

Traditional knowledge may incorporate pre-Christian beliefs and cosmologies and the question arises of the influence of the church. This question is sometime raised in the
context of traditional environmental knowledge, where modern developments aim to harness the age-old relationship of indigenous peoples for various ends including conservation or climate change adaptation. However, a tension may arise over the associations with what are seen as “pagan” beliefs. Research in Samoa on indigenous religion and Christianity in relation to the environment (Wildermuth 2012) revealed a “culture of whispers” surrounding the topic of Samoan indigenous religion “most likely because Samoans are afraid to degrade their modern Christian ideals”.
3 THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Social Representations theory

Social representation theory (SRT) is a body of theory within social psychology, similar to discursive psychology. SRT was formulated by Serge Moscovici (1961/1976) building on the works of social scientists including Marx, Weber, Durkheim (Gervais 1997:42). The “project” of SRT is to understand the character of social or “lay” knowledge, concerning the production of an intersubjective common-sense world through the objectifications of subjective processes (Gervais, 1997:44).

Social representations are system(s) of common values, ideas and practices that enable people to understand each other and communicate about similar issues and make sense of their histories (Howarth, 2011:2, Lopes and Gaskell, 2015:29). They have a twofold function of enabling individuals to orient themselves in their material and social worlds and to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange (Moscovici, 1973:xiii).

With its focus on intersubjectivity, SRT overcomes shortcomings of approaches based on methodological individualism and epistemology that separate the subject from the object (Wagner et. al., 1999:96). Representations are social in three ways; they belong to the ego, to everyone, or to others, which makes SRT a unique theoretical scheme linking the personal and social (Valsiner 2013).

3.1.1 SRT as a theory of communication

SRT is about “the role of representations in communicative practices, particularly in the transmission of knowledge and the presentation of identities” (Howarth 2012:6). Representations along with identity and culture are central to a social psychology of communication. Representations can only exist if there is intersubjective communication, and communication is meaningless without representation. They are both cognitive and cultural processes.

Communication is always cultural because people speak and interpret in patterned ways through encoding and decoding using shared repertoires of meaning and communicative

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behaviour. This suggests a parallel with Stuart Hall’s Theory (1980). Whereas SRT highlights the “cultural and ideological nature of the psychological processes that sustain communication”, Hall’s work deepens a more political reading of representation and presents an important reminder that “cultural meanings are not only ‘in the head’, but regulate social practices, conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (Howarth, 2012:16). This shows how representations connect with power, constrain identities and subjectivities and regulate what can be represented.

3.1.2 Social representations and culture

A tendency in intercultural discourse is to emphasise cultural differences. However, when heterogeneity and change within cultures is recognised, it becomes difficult to speak of ‘other cultures’ very meaningfully (Howarth, 2012:16).

SRT is a framework which is sensitive to diversity and transformation within cultures and thus avoids its reification. Whatever our understanding of culture, it only becomes accessible through social representations (Psaltis, 2012:377). Culture should be seen as something we ‘do’ through systems of representations rather than something we ‘have’ (Howarth 2012:5).

3.1.3 Genesis, anchoring and objectification

Social representations come into being and are then open to transformation through a process of “symbolic collective coping” or sociogenesis (Wagner et. al. 1999:97) involving a class of interdependent responses known as anchoring and objectification.

Anchoring concerns the process in which the unfamiliar or novel is made familiar within pre-existing frameworks. This is associated with diffusion; in the process of classifying unfamiliar representations they are “vernacularised” or decoded according to the cultural codes of the recipients. This is a psychological and ideological process (Howarth, 2012:11); other communicative genres such as propagation into play, for instance when anchoring is in particular sets of beliefs or propaganda, which tries to change ideology into culture and aims for a homogenous group identity.

Objectification takes this further by “saturating the unfamiliar with reality” (ibid), which we see manifested by the use of tangible metaphors that reveal the action of ideology. For instance, descriptions of tattooing “dirtying” the body may be reflecting
religious views. Objectification is the “figurative nucleus” of a representation (Wagner et. al. 1999:99) and takes place through discursive elaboration and the practices of actors who behave as if “the object had exactly those characteristics which it is thought to possess” (ibid:100). Alongside objectification are processes of de-objectification.

This processes works at different levels of social representation. For instance microgenesis describes objectification occurring at an interpersonal level which may involve discrete communications and ontogenenesis at the level of production of identities. The sociogenetic level frames both of these and is concerned with the cultural, historical and ideological aspects of communicative practices (Howarth, 2012:12).

3.1.4 Structure

A model of social representations must account for their contradictory features. Social representations are somewhat stable and somewhat flexible, somewhat consensual and somewhat marked by inter-individual differences.

The basic unit of representation for elaboration of meaning was elaborated by Bauer and Gaskell (1999) as the “Toblerone model”. This unit has a minimum of two subjects and the object being represented. Adding a time dimension denotes intentionality and binds subjects through mutual goals, interests, activities and concerns (Gal 2008:137). The social representation is now seen as emergent with a history of social interaction and negotiation which will need to be continually reconstructed on light of the subjects’ goals (ibid.).

The central nucleus theory models social representations structure as having a stable core and flexible periphery (Abric 1993). The central system consists of stable elements that give the overall meaning and are tied to the collective memory and group norms and history. The peripheral system consists of those elements that allow for flexibility and inter-individual differences, allowing for variable contexts and thus protecting the core meaning from circumstantial transformations and importantly this allows for the contradictions.

Connected to expression of social and group identities, representations may be stabilising and homogenising, or differentiating and dynamic. Hegemonic
representations are stable and shared by all the society. They constrain dissent and limit options for improving a group’s position. They are more like collective representations, saturating the common sense, similar to ideology (ibid). Emancipated representations are produced by subgroups of society, often as a result of exposure to new information. They are generated through exchange and dialogue and circulate unattached to the originating subgroups. Polemic representations express rivalry or incongruity between representations and are formed usually in relation to some sort of dispute or social conflict (Ben-Asher 2003:6.3-4).

3.1.5 Historicity and narrative features

SRT maintains that “social psychological phenomena and processes can only be properly understood if they are seen as being embedded in historical, cultural and macro-social conditions” (Wagner et. al., 1999:96). There is always a historical perspective; the meaning of social objects has been shaped by past events. Drawing on collective memory as well as short term, semantic and episodic memory is a stage in anchoring and objectification (see model in Santamaria 2010:521).

Anchoring and objectification also organise the central core of social representations into “coherent, culturally acceptable narratives” (Lazlo 1997:164). This in turn provides anchors for capturing new social thinking (Jovchelovitch 2012:13).

Stories “produce and reproduce the traditions, the practices, the mythologies and the accumulated wisdom of human communities” (ibid:5).

Stories enforce rules, prescriptions and moral codes (ibid:12). They build the plot for historical events and thus a meaningful architecture “that gives shape to social thinking and inscribes itself in cultural artefacts and rituals of community life”. The narrative structure therefore works as a metasystem to check, govern and drive social representations (ibid).

Methodologically, narratives provide information regarding intentionality of social thinking, and reveal the positions of individuals and groups. They provide identity protection, social cohesion and social differentiation and individual and collective stories jointly provide a “thick narration” of phenomena which then can be analytically scrutinised (Lazlo 1997:164, 2003).
3.1.6 Cognitive polyphasia

Traditional knowledge is not swept away. It survives along with multiple ways of thinking in a field of social representation that constitutes a contemporary social reality. Social life is inherently contradictory, and thus deontic logic – based on obligations and permissions - is more applicable to SRT than classical logic (Valsiner 2013).

SRT explains such contradiction through the hypothesis of “cognitive polyphasia”, as how mutually incompatible presentations and different ways of thinking and can co-exist within our psychic and social realities. For instance, some kinds of traditional beliefs may appear to be counter to modern scientific thought, but nevertheless persist.

3.1.7 Social constructionism

“For an object to figure in a group’s world, i.e. to be an object for a group, it must be socially represented. As a consequence, social representation theory is a social constructivist as well as a discursively oriented approach.” (Wagner et. al., 1999:101).

Moscovici’s original study revealed that social representations are symbolic phenomena, collectively realised and rooted in social life, and constitute the material, social and symbolic worlds in which people live: “They are not merely epiphenomena which would reflect people’s social conditions” (Gervais, 1997:42).

As such, SRT is concerned with the social construction of reality. Gervais (1997:46) argues that SRT makes ontological claims by its "strong" version of social constructionism and quotes Moscovici as saying that this "gives a kind of public reality "out there" and ontological status to our representations ... we situate ourselves in a world of shared reality" (ibid:47).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Social representations research

In this research I am interested in the field of knowledge of Bellonese about their cultural resources, using a particular cultural practice – traditional tattooing – as my case study. My proposition is that there is no monolithic understanding and that different groups hold varied stand points, with implications for the preservation of this
important heritage. The methodology therefore needs to be sensitive to commonalities, differentiation, intergroup relations, history and power dynamics.

3.2.1.1 Anchoring and objectification

Any study of social representations must identify the processes of anchoring and objectification as these are fundamental to the elaboration of representations. Narrative features of social representations are often indicators of how meaning has been anchored.

3.2.1.2 Consensus

Social representations can be thought of as fields of representation with stable or core elements and more flexible and open peripheral elements. They are characterised on one hand by a dimension of “consensual reality” (Rose et al., 1995:4) which draws on histories of meaning production and contestation. There are repertoires associated with this stable dimension, including the retelling of narratives and consensual ritual practices which objectify that which is beyond dissent. On the other hand there is the level of social interaction between individuals and groups which includes argumentation and intersubjective interpretation (ibid.).

Consensus in the field of social knowledge should not be equated with “static agreement”. It should rather be thought of as the stock from which everyday discourse is drawn, the knowledge background which provides a basis for talk and argument. There may be contradictions which are socially known and tolerated, or drawn on at different times.

A level of consensus is essential for communication to take place – it would be impossible with no common ground - but in modern society representational activity must also accommodate historical and intersubjective tensions of daily life13. “Thus, social representations include in their very structure the resources for dilemmatic thinking…. the simultaneous presence of divergent concepts, inconsistent ideas and paradoxical meanings” (ibid.).

13 This is fundamentally why Moscovici discarded Durkheim’s theory of collective representation.
This theorisation is important in understanding how different identities and behaviours drawing on different and contradictory representations may emerge in response to different situations. Social representations contain elements of deeply embedded traditional knowledge which are experienced ontologically affecting behaviours in ways that might sometimes appear irrational.

3.2.1.3 Natural groups

_Natural groups_ in society may anchor and elaborate representations in relation to specific projects within their milieu (Bauer and Gaskell 2008:349). They are characterized by common socio-historical projects that bring members together through shared experiences, activities, and interests. _Social milieu_ may be thought of as communication systems that generate representations serving the projects of the groups through three communicative processes: diffusion, propagation and propaganda. The consensual reality of social representations can be thought of as the outcome of power struggles associated with such processes. Different groups may have different authority - “there is power in the symbolic field” (Rose et. al. 1995:5). Rather than seeing each group as having sole authorship of its own representations, social representations are more likely to be co-produced with contributions made with different motivations taking place over time (Breakwell 1993:3).

3.2.1.4 Mode and medium

Representations are manifested through different communicative modes and mediums. These may require different research methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes</th>
<th>Mediums</th>
<th>Research methods</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Habitual behaviour</td>
<td>Bodily movements, rituals, tattooing</td>
<td>Observations, ethnographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual cognition</td>
<td>Words, lingual/non-linguistic sounds, motifs</td>
<td>Interviews, questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal communication</td>
<td>Conversations, stories, unofficial symbols</td>
<td>Group interviews, focus grps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal communication</td>
<td>Press, mass media, official documents and symbols</td>
<td>Content analysis of documents and mass media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Modes, mediums and research methods. Adapted from Gal (2008:147)
3.2.1.5 Implications for research

Bauer and Gaskell (1999:176-9) provide methodological guidelines comprising seven defining characteristics with implications for idealised research on social representations:

1. Content and process. Structure, core and periphery, inventory. The communication process through which the content is functional: diffusion, propagation, propaganda.

2. Social Milieus, natural groups and intimation. The carrier systems, groups with a common project, favouring certain anchoring and objectifications.

3. Cultivation studies within groups. How representations are cultivated within the natural groups.

4. Multi-method (mode and medium) analysis. Analysis of communicative action as defined above.

5. Time structures and longitudinal data. Histories of the representations. Discussion of the impact of past on the groups project.

6. Crossovers of cultural projects and trajectories. Social representations research can be most productive when it focuses on times when society is challenged causing representational activity as a means of coping, and when the “societal fault lines” are exposed.

7. The disinterested research attitude. An attitude of “live and let live” towards the object of study is called for.
3.2.2 Method

The paradigm and instruments depend on the communicative aspects of social representations that are being researched, as shown in table 1. In this case the approach is phenomenological because we are seeking to understand the representational phenomena experienced by individuals in order to make inferences about social knowledge.

3.2.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology focuses on the “empirical reality” of individual experience; i.e. structures of experience or consciousness. As a method it is aimed at accessing other people’s sensory embodied experience (Pink 2008:134). Qualitative research using this method involves the study of the subjective experience of a small group of individuals, analysing the structure of perception, thought, imagination and volition and action.

Perspectives in regard to phenomenology include the intentionality of consciousness, or its ability to form representations. We can think of these representations as the noematic content of intentional thought and associated with a wide range of phenomena, as for Husserl, from perceptions, judgements and memories to inter-subjective experience. Ontology, the “study of being”, is often present in discussions of phenomenology regarding the nature of mind-body. In the context of social representations, taking a strong constructionist stance, the ontological correlates of representational phenomena are experienced as social reality.

3.2.2.2 Immersion

I have been immersed in the society that I am researching for many years through marriage and profession. This immersion gives me common ground with the researched, as I am experiencing social phenomena from the same representational fields. However, the “disinterested researcher” approach requires that I approach the analysis with an open mind. This research is concerned with the socially constructed “common-sense” knowledge which is not definitive but interpretive at the collective level and that of subgroups and individuals. In other words, the force of social representations is not

necessarily proportional to their truth value (Sayer 1999:8). I must be aware of the risk of being judgemental of my informants’ judgements as that may “obfuscate the specific logic of struggles that take place in the anchoring or de-anchoring of meaning”.

3.2.2.3 Methods and instruments

This study researches communications at the level of individual cognition (see table 1) and thus semi-structured interviews were chosen. For those informants who wore tattoos, a visual analysis was conducted providing permission was given.

Social representation research which aims to provide generalised and quantitative findings often use surveys. Surveys tend to provide “snapshots” of the attitudes over large representative samples and focus on consensual opinions (Rose et.al. 1995:2). However, in this study I am more interested in heterogeneity (including minority representations) and history given the nature of the subject and research question. We know that narratives are important as they illustrate historical anchoring of meaning. It is fitting therefore, to treat the interviews as pseudo-narratives, “guided by the interviewer, that provide groundings to the researcher from which he/she can uncover the system of meanings or the interpretative context of the phenomena in focus” (Lazlo1997:163).

Semi-structured interviews were designed (see Annex 1). Hennessy (2011) suggests some useful interview strategies including credulous listening or suspending one’s beliefs and devoting one’s attention to what the interviewee says, taking it at face value. The other useful strategy is the asking of “opposites” in order to elicit internalised or pre-vocal understandings (ibid.).

A more extensive study could have included other methods from which to triangulate. For instance, content analysis and a longitudinal component linked to some aspect of the culture policy. The literature survey has gone some way towards this.

3.2.2.4 Sampling

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to select 9 informants of whom 7 are male and 2 female. These are referred to below as M1-7 and F1-2. The sampling relied on my own Bellonese extended family and networks.
Owing to the constraints in which the research was carried out, it was not possible to interview anyone resident on Bellona itself. As with many Pacific communities, Bellonese are quite mobile (Holst and Plange 2007:66) and ideas and representations are shared freely between the two locations owing to the two-way migration between the island and Honiara via sea and air. I had also wanted to mainstream gender in the study by achieving (a) gender equality in interviews, (b) asking secondary questions to genderise responses and (c) specific questions. In the first instance, it proved difficult to find female informants to agree to be interviewed. This is cultural and was also noted by Kuschel (1988:28). These factors may be seen as limitations of the research, although I am not seeking to produce generalised findings.

The interviews were over an hour long each, and their analysis was based on open coding, with identification of themes, and has been summarised in chapter 4 the form of pseudo-narratives.
4 RESULTS

Summaries of the interviews are given below. Rather than attempt to categorise, I seek to avoid ‘categorical segregation’ by presenting the results as pseudo-narratives. These are partly profiles, partly narratives and are my own interpretations based on the principle of immersion and guided by the analytical frameworks described previously.

4.1 A continuum of authentic tradition

_Receiving the Taukuka was like being knighted_

M1 is male, Bellonese, aged over 60 years. He is an elder statesman having served three times as MP, as a trade union leader and head of an anti-corruption organisation. He played a role in the achievement of Solomon Islands independence and is a leading thinker on the constitutional reform process.

The Taukuka is an embodiment of honour and integrity which are highly valued by Bellonese. There is collective pride in the tradition. The tattoo is unique and significant, and is inseparable from the traditional religion. The main threat is that the taukuka becomes meaningless if detached from the accompanying rituals. The core element of ritual religious content has been confused or problematised by Christian belief and is therefore adrift from its core function. The original taukuka practice remains open as a personal choice and moral decision. There is a continuum. Knowledge and personal choice whether to tattoo are something to be passed on to the next generations.

The meaning of taukuka is anchored in its historical context regulating Bellonese class society and the associated rules of qualification for leadership based on character. It is objectified as “like being knighted”. The practice served to reproduce the class society and thus without rules it is “nonsense”. These meanings are re-appropriated into modern democratic beliefs and associated with the constitutional reform seen as being more compatible with Bellonese decentralised society based around lineage, family and more generally: “in Solomon Islands we live as communities not as individuals”. The symbolism of taukuka is operationalised to “preserve the concept of community”.

This representation is made in the context of modernity and leadership, characterised by guardianship claims based on academic and historical expertise. Thus, the nature is
primarily cybernetic and the mode of thought logico-scientific and rational. The project is to maintain the authenticity of taukuka and defend the taukuka from loss of meaning. “If you are not doing it the proper way, your name will not be added to our list”.

It is possible to respect traditional spirituality represented by the taukuka practice and to take pride in it; although Christian faith cannot accommodate it, the two can be reconciled. Religion is part of one’s morality rather than vice versa. One can have intrinsic and quest orientation, remaining confident in Christian faith but open to possibilities to enrich one’s religious knowledge and experience.

“My father was a full chief priest. I asked him if the traditional or Christian religion was more difficult to follow. He said the traditional religion (because the) Christian religion has the concept of forgiveness and confession. My traditional religion does not have that concept, abuse of confession”

4.2 An invented tradition

Custom is like a god

F1 is female, aged in her 40s and Rennellese married to Bellonese. She is head of her female line, educated to secondary level and works part time as a phonetics teacher. She is an expert weaver of mats and cultural products.

It is taken for granted that tattoos have function. They have a practical use to show your place in Renbell society. Tattoos are to be displayed to show identity, social status and lineage. Tattoos furnish the cultural geography of Renbell. She should wear her tribe’s female tattoos due to her status as head of the female line but does not because of her Christian belief. The Taukuka signals birthright and membership of a chiefly family. Custom is equated with tradition. “Custom is like a god” pervading all aspects of everyday life.

F1 wears the ghupo (fish) and taohakasanisani (ritual spear/club) tattoos on her left arm and a non-traditional tattoo (flower) on the right arm. The ghupo as a string of eight on the top of the arm are worn in the traditional place for women (see Tickle 1977) with the ninth below representing herself as the ninth head of her female line.
The single ghupo worn on the left arm (women) or right (men) is neo-traditional as it would not have been used in that way during the old days. The taohakasanisani band below has multiple meaning for her, in particularly it symbolises Rennell-Bellona identity and more recently took on additional meaning as it ontologises the memory of her late mataisau son who had created it. Her flower tattoo signifies quality for her; it is a particular type she says is found only around her home area in Rennell Island.

As such, F1’s tattoos operationalise symbols in three ways that display a distinct historicity; firstly worn as according to the traditional rules for women and rank. This act may have a “perlocutory” force propagating traditional ideas of societal structure. Secondly the tattoos are worn in the fashion of an invented tradition that symbolically reformulates cultural identity following the church prohibition. This is objectified with the ‘common sense observation’ that “you can’t be from Renbell if you don’t have a tattoo”. Thirdly, they are worn in the fashion of contemporary-style polysemic tattoos which incorporate “referencing and mapping” (as discussed by Martin 2013).
4.3 Originality and symbolism

**Kissed by the sky-god**

M2 is Bellonese and male aged in his 40s. He attended tertiary education in Fiji and is a qualified primary school head teacher. He is from a chiefly family and would be eligible to wear the taukuka on that basis if other social conditions would apply. He takes pride in his deep cultural knowledge.

M2 has traditional tattoos covering the lower chest on both sides. He explains that the frontal part, ‘una, is a component of the taukuka (also see Tickle 1977) and that the design is inspired by the turtle shell. The ‘una and the kasotu’a running down the spinal column are reserved for the hakahua (chiefs). The designs on the lower back are ingi which are based on the fan used in ritual dances (reflected in woven fans sold as cultural products) and are part of the supporting design around the taukuka. He also wears the neo-traditional lingo tattoo on his right arm stylised with ghupo.

![Figure 4. Analysis of tattoos worn by M2](image-url)
The tattoo system is unique, can’t be matched with others. Because it is uniquely derived from the Bellonese environment and symbolic of man’s relation to nature. The taukuka stands for pride and maturity.

The traditional tattoo is complex symbol of social values. It is anchored in M2’s concepts of originality and traditional rapport with nature. In his view the symbolism is loaded with references to “our life and our nature”. He points to iconographic references in the taukuka design, for instance the turtle, the linghomanu beetle which is only found in the coconut tree revered by Bellonese as “part of our soul”, the hakapulonga (central component of design for men other than chiefs) symbolising the heart, and the taukuka itself as a sign one has been “kissed by the sky-god”. The tattoo must signify something in heaven or nature to be meaningful.

The symbolic process of taukuka is objectified through personal narrative. In M2’s own journey of hakabaka, or getting onboard, he recollects that as a young man “the value of tattoo in our culture was not really injected in myself”. He first acquired a neo-traditional tattoo, the lingo, during the ethnic tension when ethnic identities were heightened. Later he developed a critical consciousness when meeting artists from other Polynesian countries at a festival who valued his cultural knowledge, and he resolved to take the tattoo as his birthright, a personal decision absent of the traditional protocols that would have imbued the act with moral and spiritual meaning. Instead, he anchors moral meaning in the process of acquiring the tattoo, which became quite a significant personal rite of passage. The tattooing was extremely painful and once started, he felt committed to see it through or “it would have been a (humiliating) history”. Once acquired, he feels a new confidence “I feel I can face anything”, great pride and “the feeling of a chief”. The triumph over pain symbolised for him the right to wear the taukuka and has earned him respect. By enduring the ordeal he has ontologised his cultural knowledge and identity.

One no longer needs to be kissed by the sky-god but it is still “not right that anyone should get it, only those qualified”. Even though his own taukuka tattoo is deeply meaningful to him, the meaning is derived from symbolic originality coupled with rite of passage.
4.4 Tradition as an ongoing project

*Legs standing between the past and the future*

M3 is a Bellonese male in his 40s. He is a postgraduate academic who has resided in Europe for over a decade and worked with anthropologists who have studied Rennell Bellona.

The historicity of tradition is all important. Culture and tradition are dynamic processes. Tradition is an on-going project which includes heritage, history and a hopeful future. Even during the pre-contact times, tradition was never static and just as now, innovation contributed to stability. There is pride in the living memory of ancestors who wore the taukuka and this is shared socially as collective memory. However, the taukuka symbolises a way of life that is no longer practiced. Its continuation lies in the education system. In general, meaning is grounded in the experience and memory of the current generations to whom the living taukuka is still a personal affair, experienced through the recollections of recent ancestors.

Christianity displaced traditional religion “100%” unlike other ethnicities in Solomon Islands that retain “pagan” beliefs in parallel with Christianity. Because so much of the tradition was bound up in the religion, those were prohibited by the church and as a result “we Bellonese struggle to put on tattoos, struggle to read poetry”. The previous way of life was naturalised as sinful by the church.

Tradition is not seen as something from a ‘time before’ and neither is the knowledge and practices that go with it. The pre-Christian times symbolised by the taukuka should be seen as but one era in the continuing story of the Bellonese.

Narratives are used repeatedly in the interview. M3’s consciousness came when he first encountered Samoans, Maori and Hawaiians and realised their tattooing was not sinful. Today, the Bellonese are in an “early state of rebellion” reclaiming and developing the tattoo anew – not recreating the lost religion, but sharing in a “pan-Pacific explosion of tattooing”. Cultural diffusion is a fact of life and to be welcomed. Sharing of the tattoo designs is not to be regulated. The church hegemony over traditional practices is likely to relax over time, Compared to others, it is very short time since the conversion to Christianity in 1938. We can see the future in other
societies such as the Samoans and Tongans; “they have traditional dancing inside the church – in about 100 years you will see my people playing reggae in our church and dancing for Jesus”.

The continuation of tradition depends on a new cultural education, with much more relevance than currently because “We are educated under palm trees how to survive in London. You don’t know the direction of the wind; you no longer look up and say wow! it’s time for fishing! It’s gone from our minds because we spend most of our time in classrooms overseas”.

Whereas M2 emphasised the aspect of hakabaka or getting onboard, M3 completes the story of the traditional tatau by relating that if followed through to the fullest extent, the final act would be to tattoo the arsehole, after which all the tattooing instruments kept by the man would be thrown away.

4.5 A tale of resistance

Like a spinning wheel

M4 is a community worker, aged in his 50s, resident in Honiara. He has helped to select and mentor young Bellonese who are to attend festivals and sports events overseas.

Meaning is anchored in the traditional pre-Christian context. The taukuka is a traditional cultural object and a project. Taukuka was given by the gods to be inherited by one generation to the next. It had practical value in daily life functioning as protection. It is to be respected, and is our pride. Everyone owns taukuka but only some can wear it. Taukuka requires permission from the gods, significant preparation and big ceremony. Its meaning is operationalised through subjugation to the gods resulting in continuation of custom.

A state of cognitive polyphasia exists because at the same time there is a tension with the representation made by the church, which prohibits traditional. “Culture has been lost and there is now nothing to preserve”. This is resisted but up to a point only. Questions are raised in regard to the church teachings, for instance teaching of end
times causes “big confusion”. These messages are dissonant and the confusion is objectified as “like a spinning wheel”.

Although the displacement of the taukuka’s core element traditional religion is noted, it is still open for those that if done authentically including ritual. There are some who wear taukuka, a significant number, but without the attendant ritual. There is a threat of erosion of meaning resulting from those not qualified wearing it. Those who wear it without the respect, do so to decorate the body, which is meaningless.

Bellonese symbols as tattoos may be used to signify modern Bellonese identity. These include the taohakasanisani (ceremonial spear/club). However, the authenticity of the modern version of ghupo is challenged, as it is not worn in the right place.

Tradition is something that has meaning in daily life. Must be protected as a normal activity in the community and from erosion of meaning from within society. Tattoo designs without embodiment have no cultural value, and to protect them as such would be meaningless.

Meaning is anchored with narratives. M4 is old enough to have witnessed the full taukuka with his own eyes. His own grandfather had decided to resist the ban of the early missionaries and maintain some traditional activities like singing and dancing, and in stories he related how the preparation for taukuka used to take up to a year (“these days - 1 hour!”). In his youth he followed a trend to wear tattoos from the outside tolerated by the church such as Chinese tigers and dragons. In his 30s he realised they have no value whatsoever. On the other hand, he became aware that traditional tattooing might not be sinful through exposure to the outside world and from the interest of anthropologists This legitimised his interest in the tradition and in later years he helped to select and mentor young Bellonese to attend overseas cultural festivals.
4.6 Define and preserve

The taukuka getting drunk has no meaning for me

M5 is a Bellonese male, aged in his 20s who has had a tertiary education overseas. He is a qualified healthcare scientist but works presently as a rural development manager.

The taukuka signifies integrity, respect and that the bearer is a complete cultural person. People have personal memories through elderly relatives’ accounts of ancestors who wore the taukuka with pride. The meaning in modern times has changed and now seems to function as a status signal, but the bearers have not demonstrated the traditional values associated with taukuka. Those trying to revive the taukuka are viewed as retarded, drug takers.

Tattooing in general is associated with representations in popular culture, such as of rascals. There were historical trends where men would put on decorative tattoos with no cultural significance such as eagles and dragons. The modern mixed tattoos are anchored in sporting culture, “in my mind the rugby players with tattoos are heroes”. Tattoos deploying Bellonese symbols such as the ghupo are associated with group identity. Within this invented tradition, there is some differentiation. For instance those from certain localities of Rennell may wear a dolphin or a frigate bird. These are not traditional tattoos but have more than simply aesthetic value.

Traditional knowledge is a resource for coping. It is accessed and used in daily life, operationalised in custom and social rules. It has practical uses relating to nature and the environment and can be personal, within families as well as more collectively owned. Concurrently, culture and development appear divergent, causing confusion. There is a loss of identity, and “we don’t know who we are any more”. People feel confusion because TK is ill defined. Defining what should be protected is the first step. Traditional knowledge resides in certain people, and they should be recognised and given prestige and honour. A woman who recently died was the last person with skills to create a certain traditional artefact, an armband which is now symbolised by the lingo tattoo.

Traditional cultural expressions could be integrated into religious life. Although the early missionaries, who were from the Western Solomons with no tradition of tattooing
“abolished everything” because they feared it, later “we took back some things that are good in culture and religion (like the Africans)”. There are some signs this is happening, for example an Adventist choir recently performed traditional dances during a trip to PNG.

4.7 The mataisau’s story

*Passing on what my grandparents told me*

M6 is a Bellonese male aged in his 20s. He is a popular tattooist.

“Tattooing is about our identity. Traditional tattooing today signifies Rennell Bellona identity and it is meaningful for us. Today’s generation use the tattoo for aesthetic reasons. Some of us are not ashamed to tattoo. We believe tattooing belongs to us as Polynesians. They are used in sport, especially with our Polynesian tattoos, when someone with our tattoos plays a sport like rugby, we feel pride”.

![Figure 5. Analysis of contemporary, “mixed style” non-traditional tattoo, Bellonese male aged 26 resident in Honiara](image-url)
“We are proud of our traditional tattoos as they cover the full body, quite unique compared to the other Polynesians. Some are still used today, for example the ghupo which should be on the right hand for men and left for women. Some young people don’t appreciate the history but feel they need that “trademark”. I think shows a will to indicate unity. If someone does not wear those trademark tattoos, they look odd to us”.

“My grandfathers told me about the taukuka. It was a very significant tattoo and signified a peaceful, respectful man of that tribe, and the tattoo was worn to be passed on the next generation. It showed he was head of the tribe and provided guidance. If the tribe got into trouble it would indicate a need for respect. The tattoo would be respected and one would never willingly soil or “dirty” it”.

“In my family, four brothers received the taukuka. If my grandfathers had passed it on to the first born sons, and if it had continued I would have had the taukuka. But as they accepted Christianity, they did not pass it on. I see some today who wear parts of the taukuka, but I think they do not have the background suitable for it. Today it is still meaningful but because they have accepted Christ, the taukuka meaning is assigned to history. The taukuka was owned by a god, if you would come to church with it, it would look “a mess”. It is still meaningful, no matter if people are Christian, when they feel their custom they are proud. Even if things are now “under Christian belief” the taukuka should still be passed on. It is important for symbolising continuation of social order, family and tribe. The tattoo is respectful, so people would honour it when it comes to making any decision, for instance regarding land issues.”

“When someone was to have the taukuka, family would appoint the mataisau. I am proud that on both sides of my family they have a history of mataisau and I am proud and confident to follow. One old man on one side of my family was given the title tuata. Initially when young I was not interested, but I was proud of my late brother who was a well regarded tattooist. When he died, I missed him. I saw some people who had tattoos he had started but not completed. So I had the idea to complete them to honour my brother’s memory. I felt confident because of our history and the title tuata.”

“My work is my own. People ask, do you have a book? I say no, you should have your unique design. I do not tattoo custom tattoos, only my own designs. This kind of mixed modern tattoos should be under free law. Some Solomon Islanders from other islands
get our tattoos if they have some connection with Rennell Bellona. If any foreigner says I want taukuka I would say no! I would punch him!”

“We modern Renbell tattooists feel team spirit. We share ideas and would like to have a tattooing business together. We would appreciate official support. We are as yet only men doing tattooing today, but it is quite possible for female tattooists to join us.”16

16 This narrative is an interpretation written by the author based on the interview.
4.8 A believer’s perspective

The taukuka washed of meaning

F2 is a female aged approximately 30. She is well educated and is a development worker resident in Honiara.

For F2, if one is a true Christian, there is no room for traditional tattooing and their associated beliefs. Bellonese who wear tattoos are following their individual interests. Christianity changed everything and the church doctrine is incompatible with that belief system. It would be “absurd” if the pastor wore the traditional tattoos. Those with existing traditional tattoos are accepted but when baptised, the meaning is symbolically washed clean. The traditional tattoos are said to “dirty the skin”.

There is little discussion about tattooing in F2’s family and her strong Christian belief eliminates the need to elaborate deeper ways of thinking about the traditional tattooing. In her milieu, consensus is well achieved and there are limited repertoires regarding the significance of taukuka today.

This does not mean that the historical record is erased from collective memory. The conversion to Christianity in 1938 is still recent enough that most Bellonese have close personal connections with the traditional times through direct recollection of ancestors or second or third hand through the stories of their grandparents.

F2 is no exception. She tells the tale of her grandmother who played a vital role in the ending of one of Bellona’s blood feuds just before the coming of Christianity; a massacre that is still remembered today that took place in 1936. Taking on the woman’s role of peace maker, her grandmother was required to enact symbolic submission of behalf of her tribe by crawling through the legs of the victors. If it were not for this act, “the men would have been thrown in the sea”. As other informants have mentioned, the missionaries message of “thou shall not kill” was very persuasive and attractive to the Bellonese at the time.

F2 does wear some tattoos. These are the neo-traditional type including the lingo (arm band). She recalls that peer pressure led her to have them done when she was much
younger. They do not mean much to het these days and she would not feel any different if she did not have them.

4.9 Looking to the future

*People will look back and long for their traditions*

During the course of the field work I met with another Bellonese, who I will refer to as M7 although I did not conduct an interview with him according to his own wishes. He is a leading cultural expert and academic specialising in the history of Bellonese tattooing. He shared some observations and gave permission for me to mention them.

The first observation is that the traditional arts that accompanied the beating of the taukuka and the rituals and practices associated with it are in danger of being lost. “They are slowly being chipped away”.

Improved awareness and clarity should help Bellonese to feel more anchored in their traditions, traditional knowledge and cultural expressions. However, women who were just as bound in traditional practices as men may have felt more lightened in their release, and may feel more threatened by a revival.

Although M7 feels that the meaning of taukuka was lost long ago, he observed the proximity of the current generations to their ancestors who practiced it and the freshness of the collective memory. In the future, perhaps in 2-3 generations time, people may look back in 2-3 and more acutely feel the loss of their traditions, should they be lost.

It is acceptable for young people to make their own meaning, and the artistic dimension should be kept separate from the protections of tradition and given room for growth.
5 ANALYSIS

5.1 Structure

5.1.1 Consensual reality

The consensual meaning of taukuka today is anchored in the memory of its original function but has been detached from the core religious meanings that gave it that function. This representation of taukuka is hegemonic and institutionally situated in the Rennell and Bellonese families. The taukuka is still deeply meaningful to the Bellonese. It used to objectify the core values of the society, including honour, integrity and diligence ensure they are passed down through the generations. If the continuity of the practice has been disrupted, the core meaning remains, perhaps in the natural regulation of daily life as expressed by F1; reciprocity, mutual respect and generosity are obligations enforced through custom which “has become like a god”.

The meaning is anchored in both in the collective memory and the historical record. It is objectified by close family memories of when it was still practiced in its fully coherent form. These memories are firsthand in the case of some older people, or are related by parents or grandparents to the younger generations. With time the personal memories will fade and society will rely more on the collective memory and the archives.

Common-sense tells Bellonese that the taukuka is detached from its core function. It remains an enduring symbol of traditional religion that ritualistically ensured the continuation of custom over many hundreds of years, but there is no sense that it could be revived as a living practice in its original form, because it hinges on traditional religious beliefs that are felt as incompatible with Christianity.

5.1.2 Historicity

The social retelling of stories by grandparents or those with experience of the living taukuka fixes meaning into the central core of the representation, just as narratives objectify Christian doctrines. Social transformations such as happened in Bellona in 1938 often serve to generate new narratives to anchor the new ideas into the social reality.

51
Before 1938, the taukuka would have “spoken for itself”. There would have been little room for innovation, and the role of the tattooing would have been completely “taken for granted”. It would have seemed absurd to refuse to tattoo – several informants mentioned this, as does Tickle (1977). The constitution of social knowledge would have been best described as collective representation (from Durkheim 1898).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Representational activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend &amp; oral history</td>
<td>Taukuka introduced from mythical Siba and/or direct from the sky god</td>
<td>Collectives representation of taukuka ensures stable continuation of custom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre 1938</td>
<td>Tattooing is a social/moral obligation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Influence of small group of Rennellese who had studied at an Adventist Mission in Western Solomons, Bellonese dramatically convert en-masse to Christianity</td>
<td>New information results in traditional religion falling into disrepute. The taukuka is problematised by polemic representation if the church of the taukuka as sinful, anchored in the doctrines, objectified as “dirtying the body/the body is a temple” and ritualistic practices washing the taukuka of meaning during baptism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s – 70s</td>
<td>Some start to wear ghupo in non traditional way</td>
<td>Possibly on a small scale, emancipated representations of traditional practices persist. Ghupo (fish) tattoo tolerated by church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somatic nature of taukuka ensures survival of the tattoo whilst bearers remain still alive</td>
<td>Representation of tattooing becomes hegemonic, taken for granted. The religious meaning of taukuka has been deobjectified. Meaning remains anchored in traditional morality and social organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anthropological research in Rennell-Bellona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign tattoos (tiger, eagle etc) fashionable</td>
<td>non Bellonese tattoos pose no representational threat to the hegemonic representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Festival of the Pacific Arts (“Preserving Culture”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last two taukuka alive in Bellona</td>
<td>Rennell-Bellonese aged 50 or more today may have first-hand memories of the taukuka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Solomon Islands independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80s – 90s</td>
<td>First TV arrives in Bellona, films depicting tattoos</td>
<td>Tattooing represented as deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure to other Polynesian</td>
<td>Representations of tattooing as not sinful, Bellonese tattooing tradition represented as part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 This is not to say there was no room for manoeuvre. In regard to traditional worship, for instance, M3 relates how one could chose one’s district deity based on outcome evaluation "(unlike Christianity) we created gods in our image ... they worship their district deities, if they don’t bless them they run away and change the gods... if I ask favour and it doesn’t happen I run away and go to another one!".

18 Drawing on Tickle (1977)

19 The fish symbol is polysemic and has significance with Christianity. I.e. the ichthys used by early Christians remains a popular symbol, also associations with baptism. This is in tension with the pagan origin. However, it is not known if there was any conscious projection of new meaning onto the Ghupo symbol. None of my informants made that connection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>tattooing traditions</td>
<td>of a pan-Pacific cultural repertoire. The axiological content of tattoos becomes important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Returning of Bellonese educated overseas</td>
<td>Tattoos representing Polynesian sports identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rennell Bellona Province created</td>
<td>Widespread use of a few traditional tattoos as Rennell-Bellonese social identity symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revival of interest in traditional practices (dance, tattoo, etc)</td>
<td>Representation of traditional practices by the young generation is polemic because it disputes the sinfulness of tattooing. Anchors meaning in cultural identity but not traditional religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2003</td>
<td>Ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Heightened sensitivity to representations of ethno-cultural identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Continued regional arts festivals globalisation, Internet, tourism,</td>
<td>Cultural expressions tattoo increasingly represented as cultural commodities and symbols of national identity (and national unity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tattooing becomes acceptable and fashionable in west</td>
<td>Tattoos represented as live style choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New genre of “mixed tattoos” evolves</td>
<td>This genre is represented as a modern art form. Meaning is anchored in social identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>New Solomon Islands Culture Policy launched</td>
<td>Propagates representation of tradition as something that has specific ownership and commodity value and as something to be preserved, protected and commercialised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Draft Bill on Protection of TKEC culture education, culture policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Possible futures for the implementation of the culture policy</td>
<td>Hegemonic representation of taukuka is anchored in collective memory of ancestors, the “authentic historical record”, objectified in feelings of pride but is detached from all religious meaning. Allows no freedoms for authentic revival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near future</td>
<td>??? Traditional dancing in the church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>??? People will look back and long for their tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid –long term future</td>
<td>Possible futures for the implementation of the culture policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. A representational timeline for Bellonese tattooing

In contrast, the relatively abrupt transition to modernity would have brought in a flood of representation, exposure to new ideas, interpersonal experiences and the media (see table 2). Education would have brought in new “scientific” representations, whilst the missionaries, growing network of priests, lay preachers, church groups and international evangelical media would propagate interpretations of church doctrine. These new ideas (in this case regarding tattooing) would have precipitated communicative (representational) work of anchoring them into existing frameworks and objectifying them as part of social reality.
New ideas also come in with exposure to ideas from the outside, such as the anthropologists of the 60s – 80s and arts festivals. The ethnic conflict heightened sensitivities to ethnic and ethno-nationalistic identities

This explains a certain evolution in thinking, but it would be a mistake to consider the history of social knowledge as linear: “heterogeneous representations … can and do coexist - in rival or complementary ways - in contemporary societies” (Gervais 1997:278). Through Moscovici’s hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia we can account for the co-existence of contradictory modes of thinking. For instance people may draw on traditional knowledge and scientific information in the course of daily life. Superstitions which may seem incongruous “in the clear light of modernity” may draw on nascent stocks of social knowledge that serve very real practical purposes, for instance to do with social cohesion – the continuation of custom. We live in an the “age of representation” but the collective representations generated in the past are still part of the stock of common sense knowledge today, and representations which have lain dormant for centuries often reappear and lend shape to new realities (ibid:87).

The interview data shows how traditional knowledge is defined by informants not as a static resource from some “time before” but as having relevance in daily life:

M5: “Customs can be traditional knowledge, like fishing, gardening... we’ve reached this far because of those things that sustain us. We have these certain rules that confirm our practice”.

M3: “Traditional knowledge is that which is specific for a particular group of people in that environment, an experimental thing in our lives so after a long period of experimenting on Bellona, then we have that knowledge”.

F1: “Traditional knowledge that is our guideline, our guideline for keeping us alive in what every situation. Because you can’t do things from religion or education only, but culture is also very important”.

Besnier (2011:95) notes that Pacific Islands societies and culture can be “at once stubbornly resilient and constantly in flux”. Those resilient aspects are probably closest to what people feel are part of the traditional life (kastom). The material aspect of resilience can be seen in the traditional handicraft products such as the fine mats
expertly woven from dried pandanus leaves by Rennell Bellonese women. These skills along with the traditional knowledge that accompanies them (such as the harvesting of the leaves by moonlight, to ensure a light colouration) are passed down between generations of women. My Bellonese wife insists on waiting for a full moon before planting some dwarf coconuts that I brought back from a rural trip (M2: “the coconut in our life, it’s like a human being”). The continued tattooing practices, exhibited in various forms, may be thought of in the same way.

The material cannot be separated from the immaterial, the symbolism, values and connotation\textsuperscript{20}. Mats are traditionally exchanged as a term of respect, for instance during bereavements. In town blankets might be substituted if no traditional mats are available; the transcendence of the immaterial over the material. The protection of TK should recognise the process of kastom as well as the content; that is the social relations which are driven by TK. If the process is inaccessible as with the taukuka, it might be kept alive and contextualised through artistic displays, for example theatre performances or narrative film.

5.2 Peripheral elements

Within the representational field there are innovations around the hegemonic representation associated with natural groups within Bellonese society.

5.2.1 Authenticity

The project of the group of M1 is the preservation of authenticity judged according to the first-hand knowledge of elders and the historical archives. Questions of authenticity are brought up by the informants with implications for the protection of TKEC. It will be necessary to agree on what authenticity means, how it will be defined in ways that are compatible with the proposed legislation and how authority over it will be exercised.

The practice of taukuka is problematised by the modern situation. Attempts to revive it as a practice are perceived largely as non-sense by Bellonese society. It is as a cultural heritage object that it has meaning, as a “genuine practice” of pre-contact society whose significance is still experienced ontologically and epistemologically today. The concern

\textsuperscript{20}For those unfamiliar with the Pacific, this point can be appreciated through a viewing of the Rotuman indigenous film “The Land Has Eyes” with close attention to how such mats feature in village life http://thelandhaseyes.org
is that any such attempts to revive it out of context may degrade that meaning and offend the pride that Bellonese feel for it regardless of religious persuasion.

Motifs drawn from the traditional repertoire such as the *ghupo* and iconographic tattoos pointing to traditional artefacts such as the *taohakasanisani* and *lingo* might be called “invented tradition”, taken to mean “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by reputation, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). This would fit the historical Bellonese case because inventions of tradition occur “more frequently when a rapid social transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed” (ibid:4).

On the other hand, a social constructivist understanding of tradition attempts to discard the traditional/non-traditional binary replacing it with a general theory for cultural setting. Within this model, the structures and patterns of cultural production are seen as more important than questions of authenticity (Plant 2008:183). These nuanced perspectives are relevant to any discussion of authenticity when defining ICH.

5.2.2 Social Identity

Identity processes and processes of social representation are reciprocal (Breakwell 1993:3). The social representations approach focuses on co-production of representations as resources for public rhetoric in furtherance of a particular group’s aims anchored and objectified in particular ways consistent with their world view (ibid.). These processes are therefore associated with the construction of a social identity by the group.

The symbolic construction of Rennell-Bellonese identity is achieved by re-anchoring the meaning of selected traditional motifs in the modern narrative of Rennell-Bellona. That it is natural to put on these identity symbols is achieved with objectifications such as “*Renbell people are born to tattoo*, “*I am tattooed on the inside or the outside*” and “*if you don’t have a tattoo you are not from Renbell*”. These ideas seem to be quite grounded, even if spoken with humour, although they are not “rational” statements as not all chose to have tattoos.
Even though the taukuka as the sign of a hakahua is regarded as meaningless without the traditional regulatory and belief system, its residual significance as a status signal remains quite strong. This is illustrated by the story of M2 who felt compelled to wear a traditional tattoo, and whose choices came down to his status as a first born in a ‘chiefly family’. He chose to wear part of the taukuka only, and freely acknowledges the problematic nature of wearing the taukuka.

5.2.3 Symbolism of nature

Perhaps as a way of claiming back agency in regard to the tradition, M2 stresses the non-religious aspects of the symbolism that are less threatening to the consensual reality but which “reopen” the traditional knowledge content regarding Bellonese rapport with nature. As Tickle (1977) observed, many of the intricate taukuka design motifs were iconographic and referenced nature; “everything we put on our body it goes along to our soul, to our body, part of nature” (M2). M2 related how ritual performances including song, chanting and dancing during the taukuka ceremonies would also incorporate references to nature.

5.2.4 The church

In his classic call to decolonise development in the Pacific Islands, Hau’ofa (1994) wrote that in “a number of Pacific societies people still divide their history into two parts: the era of darkness associated with savagery and barbarism; and the era of light and civilization ushered in by Christianity”. This might be the representation of the natural group of F2 who make the representation of traditional tattooing as something which has no place in modern Bellonese life.

Hau’ofa also wrote that the “wholesale condemnation by Christian missionaries of Oceanic cultures as savage, lascivious, and barbaric has had a lasting and negative effect on people's views of their histories and traditions”, which is a sentiment reflected on by some of my informants in comments such as: “This whole notion looking back at our way of looking back at our way of life as sinful, it’s a different story because you struggle to put on tattoos, we struggle to read poetry, because they are all

21 Whereas Hou’ofa in the context of his famous essay makes a value judgement, I do not seek to do so in this research but to analyse the representations of my Bellonese informants as objectively as possible.
banned, even singing dancing and poetry, it is all banned in my culture because of the association with our religion” (M3).

Against this, we should consider the history of the conversion to Christianity as summarised in chapter 2. Because the very real history of blood feuding, the powerful god who came to enforce the peace was appealing. The social obligation for vengeance “thou shall kill!” was replaced with an obligation for peace “thou shalt not kill!” (Kuschel 1988:233) served as a very powerful objectification of the transformed social reality, which went from one characterised by collective representations to one characterised by social representations in a relatively very short period.

Of course such a process of social transformation could not happen without great emotional stress. The old gods, fallen into disrepute, retreated to the east of Rennell where they were still believed to exist (Monberg 1961). In those early decades the possibility of the old religion being revived may have been perceived as a very real threat by the churches. “Association with our oral religion has been wiped out because we are not allowed to tap on it because it will become a religion again” (M3).

The hegemonic representation of traditional tattooing is communicated at the institutional level through the network of pastors, church groups and parachurch organisations, and also at the level of the family. The communication type is propaganda as it systematically emphasises incompatibility. “It would be absurd” (F2) to think of a pious person putting on the traditional tattoos, tattoos are objectified as ‘dirtying’ the body which is ‘a temple of the Holy Spirit’. Pre-existing tattoos are ‘washed’ of their threatening content through the baptism.

Alongside the hegemonic representation, there appear to be various emancipated representations propagating more reconciliatory views. For instance, M1 anchored meaning in notions of democracy and freedom of religion, and his own philosophical orientation allows the traditional meaning of taukuka to co-exist without threatening his Christian faith. Others such as M2 and M4 are less able to achieve this balance. M3 predicts that in the future the church may be able to accommodate cultural expressions creatively into worship.
5.3 A communication for development perspective

TKEC is owned by all of society and should be preserved in ways that are meaningful to all. Thus, ownership of the process must not be confined to just the cultural curators, experts and authorities. All societies possess common-sense knowledge made of “descriptions, explanations and normative elements which derive from tradition and which coexist with scientific information or with popularized elements of science in the construction of everyday knowledge” (Emiliani 1993:1). In other words, it is not just the “scientific” knowledge of culture that is important, but the every-day social knowledge with which it coexists.

Most definitions of TKEC stress its dynamic and “living” nature. If we are to preserve TKEC meaningfully, we have to understand how it is experienced, its historicity, and thus the dynamic processes vital to its reproduction, transmission and transformation. These are communicative processes, and the solutions and strategies for the preservation are also likely to be communicative.

5.3.1 Programme communications

Shared social representations are important in effective communication, as they represent the common ground on which assumptions are made during dialogue. Studies have shown how things can go wrong when this is not the case. For instance, a study by Di Giacomo (1980) of a student protest movement showed that the student leaders and the body of students were “almost speaking a different language” because they were drawing on and anchoring meaning in different stocks of knowledge. For a development programme it is important that all partners including the modern institutions and development partners on one hand, and the owners of the TKEC on the other, have a common ground to refer to.

5.3.2 Working with multiple social identities

In a country like Solomon Islands, multiple identities are a fact of daily life as people’s lives are still regulated by custom whilst they attempt to manage aspects of modernity, and these identities emerge in response to different situations (e.g. Patterson and Macintyre 2014, McDougall 2005).
Solomon Islands went through a period of ethnic crisis between 1998 and 2003 and sensitivity to ethnic identity was heightened. Tension arising between the large provinces Malaita and Guadalcanal was driven by ethno-nationalism that formed in response to perceived grievances, and in the process custom was manipulated to serve group interests (Fraenkel 2004). My informant M1 foresaw the crisis from the time of independence:

“I could see that then and we have still not seen a uniting factor. Because in Solomon Islands even within an island there were autonomous arrangements. That’s why I support the federal system of government to come in because it is more similar to Solomon Islands cultural setting”.

Ethnicity is fluid and self-defined in Solomon Islands. Based on similar language, heritage, customs and ancestry, the large provinces contain many ethnicities. Ethno-nationalisms have featured only since colonial times and tend to assert themselves over national issues, for instance the distribution of resources.

One legacy of the tension is a renewed focus on national unity alongside a constitutional reform process. While many national leaders remain understandably reluctant to emphasise cultural differences for fear of stirring up ethnic tensions, the implementation of a national culture policy that seeks to celebrate diversity may come up against some resistance.

The Nasinol Kalsa Policy seeks to promote national pride in diversity in a number of ways including the teaching and transmission of culture. It stresses that cultural development is not a barrier to realising national development aspirations and that “traditional knowledge-based creativity should be encouraged and promoted to meet the needs of Solomon Islands’ contemporary communities”.

For the cultural policy to succeed, bridges need to be built between the two perspectives of (a) ethno-cultural differences as a threat to national unity, and (b) the celebration of cultural diversity as a necessary base for “development with dignity”. There is also a need to reach out to the churches; because in some cases such as the Bellonese taukuka, the revival of interest in traditional knowledge/practices may be seen as incompatible with the Christian beliefs.
The dilemma of the taukuka is that the actual practice is no longer a feasible option because of its core association with traditional religion which was displaced by Christianity and is now socially unacceptable. However, the pride in the taukuka remains and it is obviously felt as an important part of heritage and cultural identity. Most informants referred to the education system as the best means of protecting and preserving the taukuka, pointing to the importance of archiving traditional knowledge in textbooks to replace elders who are dying out, and the academic and scientific literature.

The Solomon Islands culture policy frames the role of education within its three main areas of culture industry, kastom (custom) and heritage. One critical impression is that culture is represented in the policy as something to be taught rather than discovered through education. Apart from specifying the incorporation of arts and music into the school curriculum, the policy stops short of aiming to introduce cultural education at school level. Instead, the policy calls for the establishment of custom schools dedicated to the teaching and transmission of traditional knowledge and arts, with syllabi that “cover more detailed topics not readily delivered in schools”. The role of developing cultural studies curricula is given to a national cultural commission established as part of the sector development.

M2, a head teacher in Rennell, indicated an ambivalent community support for cultural education: “I remember asking the school committee, what if I introduce some few cultural things... because its not included in the curriculum in Solomon Islands... but they just said it’s not important at this stage, you just teach them your normal program”.

A comment on the Rennell Bellona Facebook group points to resistance from the church: “the reality on the ground is that (cultural education) would likely encounter cold reception, if not outright resistance, because of religious belief systems that have roots now established deep in our people's psyche”.

M3 calls for a more relevant cultural curriculum: “we are educated under coconut palms how to survive in London ... we no longer know the direction of the wind, so you look up and say wow, it’s time for fishing!”
This is a sentiment shared by M4 who complained that centrally produced text books were inaccurate: “I read stories about Kaitu’u has come there, Mautikitiki there... there was no consultation. It is a good idea but it was a wrong start”.

The task faced by the developers of the cultural curricula would be to communicate the celebration of cultural diversity as a national treasure. There is something of a representational struggle over cultural education where the need to revitalise interest in culture is in tension with that of building a strong national identity and minimising ethnic-based disunity. In the case of the taukuka with its religious associations, a third competing discourse related to church representations may result in resistance at the community level. This implies the need for a communication strategy to accompany the implementation of the cultural policy.

An alternative or complementary approach to the centralised cultural curriculum might utilise a more experiential pedagogy based on discovery learning. This might reduce the reliance on a centralised curriculum and free it to creatively adapt to the local cultural environment. From this perspective, cultural education is conceived not only as about culture but as within culture (relevant, meaningful contextualised). Culture is cross cutting, and the local context provides rich resources in which teaching in many of the content areas can be grounded.

5.3.4 Defensive protection

As a genre, the taukuka is extremely heavy, covering the entire chest, unlike the discrete ornate designs typical of the Samoans or Maoris. It would be unlikely that the taukuka design would be used inappropriately as seen elsewhere. In any case, the Bellonese understand that the taukuka requires religious commitment and its meaning is reduced without the ritual content and process.

The threat to the significance of taukuka seems to be perceived more as a result of those who certain Bellonese who disregard or reinterpret the traditional authority over who is

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22 A project of UNESCO and the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources in the Marovo Lagoon region between 2005 and 2011 illustrates discovery learning in the context of the transmission of indigenous knowledge.

23 UNESCO has provided educational resources for embedding indigenous knowledge transfer in the curriculum, such as The Canoe is the People http://canoeisthepeople.org and the Marovo Reef and Rainforest environmental encyclopaedia and wiki

24 Nike Pro Tattoo sports clothing deemed offensive http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/nike-tattoo-leggings_n_3763591.html
qualified (which involved not only lineage, men and women but the gods). It should be for the Bellonese themselves to consider whether internal regulation is needed, enforceable and how it should be constituted. A key factor is the ownership and right to tattoo felt by Bellonese and a need to respect their decentralised democratic tradition.

The modern “mix” tattoos are seen as wholly non-traditional and any issues around intellectual property will be similar to those concerning creative art in general. The concept of copyright is not natural to the Bellonese and designs are freely shared. One informant points to the “pan-Polynesian explosion of tattooing”, where hybridisation and diffusion are seen as a source of richness: “diversity itself as a source of cultural vitality” (Hannerz, 1987:556). Any regulatory regime ostensibly aims to protect the rights of individual owners needs to be balanced against the risk of restricting such cultural flows and with it the natural growth of the creative arts.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This research makes a contribution to the field of ComDev by extending it to the preservation of cultural heritage.

One objective of this degree project has been to test social representations theory as a methodological framework for cultural and communication research. Elsewhere SRT has proved to be very versatile, having been used for research into diverse topics.\(^{25}\) Research using SRT might contribute to meaningful ways of operationalising cultural practices and traditional knowledge in areas such as traditional fisheries and climate change adaptation. Social representations can explain mixed results of framing manipulations in C4D campaigns aiming to change behaviours and cognitions regarding various social issues (Sibley 2006:4).

Using the example of Bellonese traditional tattooing, I have shown how SRT can provide nuanced understanding of the collective knowledge a society has for their

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\(^{25}\) Examples include madness (Jodelet 1991), the symbolic construction of the public sphere, the ontogenesis of gender (see Wagner et. al. 1999), Shetland Islanders rapport with nature (Gervais 1997), the implementation of information systems (Gal 2008) and masculinity in relation to gender-based violence (Lilja 2012). SRT can also play an important role in education development, as explored at length by Chaib, Danermark and Selander (2011)
traditions and cultural heritage. This can inform the agenda of the culture sector that aims to protect and preserve traditional knowledge and cultural expressions (TKEC).

The cultural policy and the incoming laws stress the living, dynamic nature of TKEC as essential to its transmission and natural evolution, and hence preservation. Bellonese representations of the taukuka emphasise shared ownership and the personal and collective memories of ancestors who proudly wore the taukuka. Furthermore, the original significance and function of the taukuka was intimately bound up in the genealogy and social organisation of the Bellonese. As some of the informants noted, the decentralised organisation of the community, whereby the lineages coexist in mutual respect, is a core component of custom and social reality for Bellonese. Therefore, meaningful preservation of the taukuka will not be achieved if ownership is perceived as a preserve of a centralised authority detached from the families and community.

Even if the taukuka can only be preserved as heritage, it needs to be maintained by the Bellonese pro-actively. A strategy centred around education would seem to be the most pragmatic, linked to the establishment of cultural centres where the research archives and growing body of literature and resources can be accessed locally. Under this scenario, which is consistent with the culture policy, one might imagine a time when Bellonese students, sensitised and empowered with knowledge of their heritage as a result of their culturally informed schooling, return as qualified scholars, researchers, authors, musicians and film makers to build on the indigenous resource base utilising multimedia and new technology. Indigenous film can be a powerful and creative way to revitalise interest and awareness of culture. Such artistic works can bring long lasting life to cultural and historical heritage in accessible ways that are complementary to “scientific” presentations, archives and text books.

We may then avoid a future foreseen by one of my informants, whereby in a few generations time people will “look back and long for their lost tradition”.

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26 See supporting literature for the Rotuman film “The Land Has Eyes”, available at http://thelandhaseyes.com
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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Interview Questions

These questions were prepared as a guide only. In practice the interviewees were encouraged to tell their stories naturally.

What is important to you about the tattooing tradition of Bellona?

What is the tattoo?

1. Is it an object, a meaning, a symbol?
2. Does it vary? Has it changed over time?

The story of your tattoos (tattoo variables)

1. How many tattoos have you and where located? (select a main one)
2. What is the story of your tattoos? When did you get the tattoos? Are they interconnected? Why did you have the tattoo there (arm, etc)? What are the main reasons you had the tattoo?
3. Discuss design of tattoo

Meaning of tattoo – discuss the meaning to you and to others

1. Does the tattoo refer to any groups? Here and overseas.
2. What do other Bellonese think of your tattoos? Family, etc (mother father, children)
3. Taukuka – discuss special meaning
4. What is the right and wrong way for a traditional Bellona tattoo?
5. How important is your tattoo to you as a Solomon Islander, Bellonese, and individual?

Tattoo psychology

1. Did it hurt? Does that matter?
2. How has having the tattoo affected you, what does it mean to you? Are you happy with it or would you change/remove it? What is the opposite of having the tattoo? What would it be like to not have the tattoos?
3. On what occasions are tattoos important? What situations do you feel you have to hide the tattoo?
4. Are you a person with tattoos or a tattooed person?
5. Who did the tattoo? Does it matter who the artist is?

About others
1. What opinions do Bellonese have about tattooing?
2. What sort of designs do Bellonese get, and what is the meaning for them and for you?
3. Has this changed historically
4. What do you think of Bellonese wearing non-Bellona tattoo designs?
5. What do you think of non-Bellonese and foreigners wearing Bellona tattoos?
6. What has been the role of the church, over time?

How is tattooing important for women?

1. What practices do you see and what is the meaning for them and for you when you see them?
2. Does tattooing have anything to do with equality (past and now)?

Modern creative arts tattooing.

1. What are your views on modern Bellonese tattooing and creative tattooing?
2. What is important about it, should there be some controls? Does it matter?

Protecting and preserving tattooing as ICH.

1. Who are owners
2. What should be protected
3. Who should protect and how?
4. Should non-customary use of the Taukuka (say in festivals) be allowed and regulated?
5. Should use of Bellonese symbols be regulated?

In terms of traditional ecological knowledge and Bellonese relationship with nature, does tattooing matter?
### What is important about the Bellonese tattooing tradition

The important thing to me is that it is indicating the maturity of a person. What type of person you are. If it happen you are the first born of the tribe on our society then you put up all your tattooing on your body, it is indicating to you are starting the process for getting to become somebody. That’s why when they start to make the tattoo they have to make a phrase or saying “hakabaka” hakabaka is the first staging of the tattoo, that is always to indicating the mark of hakapulonga in the chest, that is the first staging when he put hakabaka, that is starting to get on board, hakabaka. And the design of hakapulonga is always symbolising the heart, it is just like a W, that’s how they symbolise this hakapulonga. It’s the starting of somebody, so that’s why when people have a tattoo like that … not a nothing, he’s a somebody, become a pride to our traditional … of a person, of a tribe. Things like that.

The women have their own design too. For example the ha’o. The female they are allowed to make ha’o. It come out just like a Y, like necklace. (LOL) I don’t know why but that’s how they describe it.

Because when you try to look at every type of tattoo that we put on our bodies, something that every kind of design that associate with our life, our nature, with everything not only … alone, it has to symbolise something, one example is the hakabaka, the kaso symbolising the bone (long line on back)… (explains where it goes)

When you see some of the tattoos on our bodies… indicating anything in the nature just like the local coconut palm, the ingi, scale of turtle, so everything we put on our body, you know, put a mark on our body, its not only … alone, its indicating symbolises something that goes along to our soul, to our nature, anything… there are some tattoos .. on their legs, they are scale of fish, that’s how they do, so that’s how I see it that everything we put on our body it goes along to our soul, to our body, part of nature.

And most of the mark we put on our body, it must be instructed by our sky god. You don’t have to put it just by your own. When the skygod… in the starting of that one … then everyone has to look that one… when you have your …. ceremony just to … follow this type of pattern.

| The taukuka stands for pride, maturity. Anchoring – getting on board to become somebody. |
| Haka baka – “becoming canoe”. |
| Tattoo is complex symbol of social values. |
| The tattoos are all associated with our life our nature. |
| Iconographic signs of nature |
| Objectifications of our nature - which goes with our soul |
| Prescribed by cosmos, immutable origin |
Well in modern times, before when we have our ceremony its obvious that our sky god just has to get involved in that type of programme. But nowadays since we put out all these type of activities and a different type of belief, and nowadays people just put it just for decoration. So when this time they just put up for decoration, might be they put up their decoration also they treat it their pride, but before they had to use it the devil had to instruct them to go through this pain before you become somebody. Have to go through the pain. So that’s why anytime to make a tattoo ceremony, there must be a ritual there is a lyrics for the ritual of tattoo alone. You just don’t have to make it alone. There is a specific lyric song for every tattoo, when the ceremony to take place, then have to sing that type of … not every kind of custom song, there is a specific ritual song for that one.