

“What has the Church to do with the State?”

Dual Governance: A Historical Analysis of

Church and State Relationship in Ngella,

Solomon Islands

1932 – 2007

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ABSTRACT

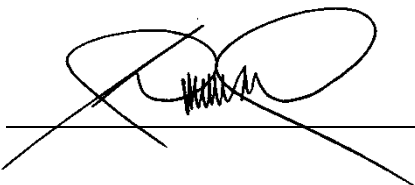
Church and state relationship have always come under spotlight when there is public suspicion and criticism on matters related to affairs of the people. This thesis argues that the core problem of church-state relationship in Ngella was founded on the paternalist attitudes of the government during the colonial period and later shifted to the issue of corruption within the government after independence and during the post-colonial period. This problem has led to a negative perception of the Ngella people to regard the state as an institution that involves in corruption and injustice while the church was perceived to be compassionate and just. This makes it very difficult for church ministers, priests and or bishops to be involved in politics and/or in state affairs.

In difference to this negative perception the cooperation between church and state in Ngella was harmonic and functional over a long period of time. The thesis investigates the history of the relationship of church and state in Ngella from the colonial era up to the time of independence. It tries to discover possibilities of cooperation between the two entities and to identify the roots of problematic developments that led to the current negative perception of the people. It concludes with suggesting a “tripod governing system” of society which involves the amalgamation of the three pillars of governing bodies in Ngella namely tradition, church and state (politics) forming one body. This is meant to establish an avenue for transparency and accountability in a consultative manner for sharing common interest to govern and serve the interest of the Ngella society.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 32,217 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter), has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed:  _____

Date: 9th September 2019

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife and my four children

&

In memory of my late dad James Boro Pou and late mum Salome Kaka.

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Above all, the completion of this work is mine and I take the full responsibility.

Abbreviations

ACB	Anti-Corruption Bill
ACOM	Anglican Church of the Province of Melanesia
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
DOCM	Diocese of Central Melanesia
DOCS	Diocese of Central Solomons
IFM	Isatabu Freedom Movement
MEF	Malaita Eagle Force
MP	Member of Parliament
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RCDF	Rural Constituency Development Fund
SICA	Solomon Islands Christian Association
SICHE	Solomon Islands College of Higher Education
SSEC	South Seas Evangelical Church

Glossary

Kao mana Bulale	This is the name given to watchmen who were assigned to alert the whole community when danger was approaching.
Kema	The name literally means tribe. This is the general name given to the divisions or groupings of people. Each of the six divisions in Ngella were called kema apart from their own tribe names such as Gaubata, Hogokama, Kakau, Hogokiki, Hibo and Lahi.

- Kiala ni mane** The name refers to the young men's house. This house was solely used by young boy or those who do not marry or the heathen priest who prepared to do sacrifice in the following day and required not to reside with his family. Sometimes a father with adult daughters residing on the same house would be required to reside in the Kiala ni mane to avoid incest.
- Kiramo** The term literally means totems. The word refers directly to the gods of a particular tribe. Each of the six tribes had their totems different from one another that can be worshipped to foresee and confront any challenge. This Kiramo can also be in a form living things such as snake, bird, shark etc.
- Kolu kema** This is the term used for the initial formation of the six tribes in Ngella. The process involves the apportioning of people and properties into six divisions called kema or tribes.
- Malagai** This word refers to a warrior. A malagai is someone who sometimes a chief of a political unit and a warrior himself like Chief Kalekona of Gaeta district. Usually a malagai is a warrior of a particular tribe or political unit different from the chief.
- Mana** This is the Ngella term used for supernatural power that can affect practical reality. This power can be obtained from ancestral spirits or from the gods animated into animals and natural things such as snake, stone, etc. This power is a practical power that can interact with human beings and can be used to enhance life.
- Sukagi** The term literally mean sacrifice but had a strong connotation with the act of burning the actual elements of sacrifice such as pigs and

mashed puddings of panna and red yam to the gods. The word can also mean the act of worshipping the gods during time of desperate need.

Tei Belaga The name of the powerful god that lived along the coastal area between Belaga and Kobe Villages. This is a dangerous spirit whom people believed to have possessed a strong power. Many people who have died of sorcery were believed to be killed by this god.

Tindalo/Tidalo This is a general name for ancestral spirits or gods. The name may also refer to devil or any kinds of good or bad spirits.

Tinoni ni sukagi The term literally means ‘person who offers sacrifice’. This word always refers to the heathen priest. Now days, the word refers to a Christian priest.

Vaukolu Literally, the word translated as ‘gathering.’ The word used here refers to the gathering of the chiefs and people together in one place and discuss matters of the common concern.

Vunagi This is literally means big man or Chief. The term *vunagi* can be used generally but can be distinguished with responsibilities from the normal person.

Vunagi buto This is the title name given to a chief of a particular district or a political unit. The name was given to the chiefs of the four political units in Ngella. Currently in Ngella the term was translated as ‘area chief

- Vunagi ni kema** This is the title given to the chief of a particular tribe. Each of the six tribes in Ngella had their own *vunagi ni kema* who was responsible for the affairs of the whole tribe.
- Vunuha** The word refers to secret areas of sacrifice. It is different from alter because it covers a wide area of space with a proper demarcation of boundary. Everything inside the boundary of the *vunuha* were all sacred.
- Vigona** The name of the god use to calm the storm. The name *vigona* is a general name but the rituals and elements used to calm the storm were done differently. The *vigona* was purposely to calm the storm for the chiefs or warriors to travel from one island to another.

Introduction

The question “what has the Church to do with the State” seeks to uncover the church-state relationship in Ngella. This relationship began in Ngella when the missionaries arrived. The Melanesian Mission’s first contact with Ngella was in 1862 (Fox 1958, 179). It later established its headquarter at Siota in 1919 (Whiteman 1983, 180). The British government annexed Ngella in 1893 and initially established its headquarter at Tulagi in 1896 (Hilliard, 1978, 132). Charles Woodford was appointed as the first Resident Commissioner, answerable to the Governor of Fiji, who was also High Commissioner for the Western Pacific (Hilliard 1978, 132). As Hilliard noted, the church-state relationship in Ngella was a peaceful one:

Over the whole period from 1896 until the war, however, the Melanesian Mission saw its relationship with the secular power as one of peaceful coexistence. In ‘no part of Melanesia’, announced Baddeley in 1936, ‘is there justification for an opinion often popularly held that missions and governments are hostile one to another’ (Hilliard, 1974, 104).

The working relationship between the Melanesian Mission and British government was founded on a common upper-class Anglican background (Forman 1982, 49, 50). This relationship was maintained to the period of church and state independence and symbolised by residential visits by the High Commissioner at Siota the mission’s original headquarter; and by the bishop to the High Commissioner’s station at Tulagi (Garrett 1992, 347).

The church and state relationship was further strengthened by their reciprocal involvement in education, and health affairs of the Ngella people during the late 1960s (BSIP 1969, 49); and their cooperative involvement in the policy and decision making bodies of the government (Hilliard 1974, 107, 108). This church-state relationship was negatively interpreted by the Ngella people against the paternalistic attitudes of colonial masters who deprived them of their rights to equality. The paternalistic attitude of

colonial officers resulted in a negative perception of the Ngella people to regard the state as an institution that involves corruption and injustice in all its dealings with the people while the church was regarded as favourable, compassionate and just (Sorova, 2002). This negative perception also creates a distinction between the two entities in relation to their roles and functions since the Melanesian Mission advocates for evangelism to save souls while the British colonial government advocate for civilization of the Ngella society.

This research work explores the church-state relationship in Ngella within the colonial period (1932-2007) to post-colonial era. In doing so, it builds upon the work done by David Hilliard on church-state relationship in the Solomon Islands up to the period of World War II, but with specific focus on Ngella, a rural community far removed from the western world. The core aim of this research is to explore the church-state dual governance relationship and its evolvement during this period. It is also the intention of this research to critically look at the current mind-set of the Ngella people and that of the government – who claimed that the ‘church must keep out or must not meddle’ in politics. It is also the intention of this research to identify some of the challenges encountered.

Furthermore, this research work is also intended to be part of the Ngella Anglican Church’s written history. As an Ngella man writing from within the Ngella context, this research aims to do a historical analysis on church and state relationship in Ngella. In doing so this research, will in a way, contribute to the rewriting of the history of the Melanesian Mission and the British Protectorate government in Ngella from an indigenous perspective. Ngella Church history has predominantly been written by European missionaries. This thesis is an attempt by an indigenous writer of the Ngella Anglican Church to record their own history of the Ngella Church.

The Problem

The thesis' starts from the notion that church and state relationship from the early contact period to the time of independent was founded on the philosophy that both the Melanesian Mission and British protectorate belong to the same state of England. During the post-colonial period, church-state relationship presupposes to be founded on mutual working relationship in health and education sectors; and through SICA, a recognized body that links the churches and Solomon Islands government in their working relationship. It was assumed that church-state relationship was later strengthened and formalized by the Solomon Islands government through the establishment of the Ministry of Home and Ecclesiastical Affairs to coordinate all church affairs; as a means to foster this relationship.

The problem of investigation is based on people's understanding that church leaders especially ordained priests, ministers or bishops cannot participate in political roles and affairs of the same people they serve in Church (Galua, 2002). The question "what has the church to do with the state?" is a question that seeks to clarify and investigate the reciprocal working relationship between the church and state; and to further investigate their overlapping roles and responsibilities. The question also represents the negative Ngella perspective of politics. The negative perspective of the Ngella people distinguishes the church and state as two different social entities with distinct functions that cannot be reciprocal. The question provokes a deeper investigation on the whole aspects of church and state relationship as well. The Ngella people firmly believe the church, whether in a form of the priest, bishop or any religious organisation or communities, cannot politically advocate for people's rights or to be a political leader in any level of leadership in government. This is because the role of politics is contradictory to the priests' or bishops'

ecclesiastical role. This was expressed by Chief Jacob Lee in a political gathering at Soso village in 2002, when he said:

A priest or an ordained person who leads God's people into spiritual life and into God's way of life and justice, is supposed by all the congregations that a priest has already been assigned by God to do His divine task. For a priest to be involved in political affairs of the people at any level of political leadership will automatically cease his priestly role and eventually lead him into corruption and injustice practices. Politics is about corruption and injustice (Siosi, 2002).

The same nature of the problem that provokes this research work was related to the strong statement echoed by the British Protectorate High Commissioner who claimed priests should not meddle in politics (Hilliard 1974, 115). In 1939 Reverend Fallowes stated the extension of the Kingdom of God sometimes required a priest to participate in political activities and thus, advocate for the equality of Melanesians with the Europeans.¹ Fallowes was summoned by the High Commissioner for his political involvement as Hilliard noted:

At this point Sir Harry Luke, the High Commissioner, arrived in the Solomons on his first official visit. A few days after the Ngella assembly Fallowes was summoned to his presence at Tulagi and lectured like an errant schoolboy for his dangerous and irresponsible activities. It was the duty of an Anglican priest, Luke maintained, not to meddle in politics but to confine his efforts to the moral and spiritual welfare of his converts (Hilliard 1974, 115).

This occurred again in 2007 when the Prime Minister (PM) was petitioned by the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) to solve the political crisis between his Members of Parliament. In response, the PM Honourable Manasseh Sogavare "Calls on Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) to stay out of Politics." (Kadamana 2007). The PM called on SICA to act responsibly allowing for a political resolution to the impasse as Kadamana noted:

¹ According to Hilliard, Fallowes was concerned for the political affairs of his adherents especially the Ngella, Ysabel and the Savo people whom he held meetings with them to discuss common needs and grievances which he later submitted to the High Commissioner (Hilliard 1978, 282-283).

As a church group SICA should be neutral in any form of conflict including the current political impasse by playing a reconciliatory role between the government and its defector MPs. There is a bold line between the church and the state or government. The government is an institution set up under the constitution. How the government is set up and can be pulled down is clearly spelt out in the constitution (Kadamana 2007).

These problems represent the three views of both the people and government to conclude that church and state are two distinct institutions with a bold line in between. They cannot be reciprocal in their roles and functions. The people and government both clearly said the 'church' or 'priest's must stay out or must not meddle in politics but concentrate on their religious duties.

Since the intention of this research is to analyse the dual governance relationship between the church and state in Ngella, the demanding questions intended to guide this research work are as follows.

1. How does the State in its role of promoting the social, economic and political wellbeing of the people see itself as fulfilling a religious mission and extending the Christian faith in Ngella?
2. How does the church in her role of propagating the gospel see herself as the State's agent to advocate for social and political justice in Ngella?
3. In what ways can the church and State cooperatively contribute to the social, political, economical and religious wellbeing of the same people they serve?
4. How did the church and state relationship evolve from the colonial, to independence and during the post-colonial periods?

Methodology

The task of analysing and interpretation of the history of church and state relationship in Ngella involves the use of historical analysis methodological approach. The historical analysis method of interpretation is an inter-disciplinary approach that

integrates the anthropological, sociological and theological perspective in dialogical manner that provides a multidimensional approach of analysis and interpretation. This is a comparative historical approach used to analyse the historical social, political and religious setting of the Ngella society; and to analyse the historical establishment of the Melanesian Mission and the British protectorate government. The comparative historical analysis method is also used to analyse the historical development of church-state relationship during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

The historical analysis method was employed to analyse two sources of materials as follows: (1) Missionary documents on literatures such as journals, reports and books; and (2) information obtained from interviews. Since this is a demanding area of research, there were limited numbers of material resources available to the author during the time of writing.

Scope

The scope of analysis is inclusive that covers a range of historical periods as from the early establishment of church and state to the period of contact. The most aspired periods of analysis include the colonial periods (1932-1977) to the post-colonial era (1978-2007). This is the period when the relationship of church and state evolved and was confronted with challenges and changes.

Finally, the scope of this thesis work is limited to the historical analysis of church and state relationship in Ngella. The author is mindful of the context, time and space to confine discussions only on Ngella Island. However, there is a tendency in demanding situations the author will make references to other islands in the Solomons and within the Pacific region. The overall scope however is to make a written history and proper documentation of the Melanesian Mission and the British colonial government working

relationship in Ngella. It was also the scope of this paper to make a contribution and fulfilling the task of doing history in Solomon Islands and Melanesia.

Chapter Outline

The thesis is structured into three chapters. The first chapter presents the overview of geographical and structural setting of Ngella pre-contact period. The structural setting of Ngella initially was organized in its own religious, political and social setting that forms the basis of life throughout the Ngella society. Chapter one also presents the initial establishment of Melanesian Mission and the British colonial government in Ngella. It is obvious that these foreign institutions came into contact with Ngella at different times with different missions to fulfil. This chapter also offers some critical contributions to various discussions on the Ngella initial setting, the missionary methods used by missionaries, the Ngella response to the new religion of the mission; and the new social and political governance introduced by the British government. The overall aim of this chapter is to explore Ngella in its original religious, political and socio-cultural setting; and the establishment of the Melanesian Mission and the British Protectorate in Ngella.

Chapter two discusses the church and state relationship in Ngella since the early contact period to the time of independence and the post-colonial era. The analysis covers the period from 1932 to 2007. The period of analysis is divided into historical phases that includes (1) Church and state relationship in the early period, (2) Church and state relationship during the period of absorption and growth, (3) Church and state relationship during the period towards independence, (4) Church and state relationship during the period of post-colonial era. The chapter also discusses the challenges encountered in the course of this church-state relationship as part of the critical analysis. The aim of this chapter is to make an analysis on the relationship of church and state and its evolvement over the periods.

Chapter three presents the Historical Reflection that intends to discuss the legacy of church and state relationship in Ngella. This chapter presents the historical evolvement of social, political and religious development as the result of church and state working relationship in Ngella. The legacy of church and state relationship in Ngella does not exist in a vacuum but has a strong connection in history. Accordingly, this chapter analyses the legacy of church and state relationship in a whole spectrum of social, political and religious settings of the Ngella society from the period of history to the current time. This social, political and religious aspect of life becomes the basis of the governing system in the Ngella society today. The aim of this chapter is to probe and analyse the outcome of church and state relationship that shapes the Ngella society to its current phase.

Finally, this chapter discusses a new approach to governance and leadership system as a way forward for the Ngella society. The recommended tripod system of leadership and governance is believed to be an innovative method that aims to create a fair and a balanced participation of church, state and cultural leadership and governance system in the Ngella society. The tripod system also involves to foster community development and improve delivery of basic services to the Ngella society.

Chapter 1

Establishment and Continuity of Church and State in Ngella

The establishment and continuity of church and state refer to the period of initial contact by the Melanesian Mission and British government and their establishment on Ngella. That was when Ngella society, culture and way of life began feeling the impact of foreign influences. The establishment of the church and state began when Ngella society was confined to its own traditional setting and governed by the traditional chiefly system. The discussion of this chapter intends to encompass the Ngella pre-contact period, the dawn of the Melanesian Mission and establishment of the British protectorate in Ngella.

1.1. Ngella in the Pre-Contact Period

The pre-contact period refers to Ngella society had no prior contact with the Melanesian Mission or the British government. Historically, Ngella society was organised into religious, political, and socio-cultural settings that gave meaning to life (Lambek 2007, 36). One language together with common cultural norms and practices were used throughout the island.

1.1.1. Geographical Setting

Ngella Island was usually known as the Florida Islands consisted of three segments divided by narrow channels right through from north to the south. The first Spanish explorers, commanded by Pedro de Ortega with Gallego as pilot, set out from Isabel on a boat, Brigantine, and sighted Florida Island on 16th April 1568 (Sharp 1960, 43-45).

The Florida Island was estimated to be about 12 leagues in circumference and ran east and west. La Florida the name given by the Spanish explorers was 9 ½ degrees, lay

east and west with Buena Vista, and was about 25 leagues in circumference (Sharp 1960, 44). The three segments of Ngella Island were initially known as Ngella pile, in the east, consisting of Gaeta and Hongo, and Belaga where Siota the first mission station was located. The central part was known as Ngella Sule, earlier known as Boli. These consisted of Tulagi, Halavo, Gavutu and Taroniara. The two islands lying close to the western tip of Ngella were known as Olevuga and Vatilau (Sharp 1960, 45). The island of Olevuga included Ravu were known as Sand-fly while Vatilau was known as Buena Vista. According to Miss Florence Coombe, Ngella Island was “second to none in natural beauty” (Mission April 1, 1942). At the latest census in 2001, the population of Ngella Island was estimated to be about 13,660 (Rapemora 2001).

1.1.2. The Religious Setting

The religious setting of Ngella refers to the original traditional religious belief system of Ngella society prior to Christianity. This was based on the belief of ancestral spirits or ghosts that possessed power or mana providing meaning to human life.¹ Observing sacredness and profanity were also integral to the Ngella traditional religion and belief systems as well.

The religious worldview of the Ngella people regarded themselves and the world they lived in as the integral part of the spiritual and physical realities. The people were believed to have their existence within religion thus traditional religion, to a large extent, permeated the life of the community (Whiteman 1983, 64). The Ngella people did not believe in matters that were impractical or on abstract things of the mind that were

¹ Mana is an overall understanding in the Pacific and especially in the context of Ngella that literally means power. This power is a supernatural force that goes beyond human strength. This supernatural power was believed to be the power of supernatural beings called the tidalo, ghosts or ancestral spirits. This power interacts with the physical world and with human beings and is invoked to effect human life.

rational. Rather they believed in realities which were experienced in their stomachs than in their heads (Whiteman 1983, 66).²

The Ngella religion was known as ‘Animism’ that believed on spirits embodied on living and non-living things (Fox 1967, 13). The Ngella people believed these embodied spirits were the spirits or ghosts of dead ancestors who lived in the same world with their people in another form of being to protect them (Kapu 2012, 12). It was also believed that ancestral spirits possess mana and other skills of life. The ancestral spirits can be venerated, worshipped and offered sacrifice if it is proved effective (Codrington 1891, 125).

The Ngella traditional belief system regards mana as one central phenomenon that forms the basis of the Ngella religion. It was believed that the spirit beings or gods possessed mana that could provide material benefits to enhance human life (Whiteman 1983, 67). Mana is regarded as the powers of all powers that is supernatural, can be invoked and acquired from gods or ancestral spirits (Tarika 2002). It is practical and effective either to destroy or to enhance life (Tarika 2002).³ It can be used for good or bad purposes and is believed to be effective, practically available to enrich life (Codrington 1891, 53).

However, the basis to maintain the efficacy of this power or mana, was based on the belief and strict observance of the profane things that were distinguished in opposition

² The bases of the traditional religious belief system of the Ngella people was expressed by Whiteman who said; “A religious system concerned with metaphysical absolutes and buttressed by dogma is totally alien to Melanesian belief and practice. Melanesian religion is more experiential than it is cerebral. It is a religious experience that people feel more in their livers or stomachs, than in their heads” (Whiteman 1983, 66).

³ The Ngella religious understanding of mana and its practical effect on the whole human life was expressed by Codrington who said that: “If a man has been successful in fighting, it has not been his natural strength of arm, quickness of eye, or readiness of resource that has won success; he has certainly got the manna of a spirit or of some deceased warrior to empower him, conveyed in an amulet of a stone round his neck, or a tuft of leaves in his belt, in a tooth hung upon a finger of his bow hand, or in the form of words with which he brings supernatural assistance to his side. If a man’s pigs multiply, and his gardens are productive, it is not because he is industrious and looks after his property, but because of the stones full of manna for pigs and yams that he possesses.” (Codrington 1891, 53).

to the beliefs system (Lambek 2007, 40, 41). Sacredness and profanity cannot be isolated from the concept of mana and were central to Ngella's religious belief system. The place of sacrifices is called the vunuha that must be strictly observed in order to acquire mana. (Codrington 1891, 175).

1.1.3. The Political Setting

The traditional political system in Ngella involved two chiefly systems – the chieftain and big man systems – with their different functions and responsibilities. The chieftain system was used to govern respective tribes within their own political hamlets and the big man chiefly system was established to govern a political unit or a district in Ngella. The political demarcation of Ngella was naturally done by its geographical setting into four political units. The movement of people within these political units was caused by inter-marriages between tribes because the rule exogamy prohibited people to marry within their own tribes (Usi 2002).⁴ These two complimentary political structures of Ngella are worth discussing since they hold the basis of political system in Ngella.

The chieftain system has been the earliest political structure adopted in Ngella that governs the one earliest community established at the locality called Valevila. The people used uniform cultural norms and practices under one political leader. The paramount chief of Ngella during this period was Beata who later became a tribal chief of the Gaubata tribe after the schism and kolu kema (formation of the six tribe) at Valevila (Siosi 2002).

⁴ The rule of exogamy maintained a cultural understanding of the same tribe as people of the same origin despite of several generations back in history. The rule of exogamy regards people of the same tribe as brothers and sisters who strongly linked to the same blood relationship through matrilineal lineage. To marry within the same tribe is like marrying within one's family that is offensive to the ancestral spirits. This can bring continuous calamity and death to the children of the concerned parties and tribes as a whole.

The schism of Ngella's one political community resulted in people being affiliated to one of the six tribes under a matrilineal kinship system.⁵ The six tribes in Ngella are; Gaubata, Hogokama, Kakau, Hogokiki, Hibo and Lahi. Each of the divisions have their own tribal chief (Vunagi ni kema), the warrior (Malagai), the Kiramo (totem), the heathen priest to offer sacrifice (Tinoni ni sukagi), and a watchman (Kao mana bulale) to alert everyone when death confronted the community (Siosi 2002). The six tribes settled within Ngella and established their own political hamlets. The political head of a respective tribe is the tribal chief responsible for the welfare, security and to ensure fair distribution of land and wealth amongst tribal members (Bennett 1987, 14).

The big man chiefly system in Ngella was established after the formation of the six tribes with their respective tribal chiefs. The big man system is where a chief in his status gained his authority from the powers of his tidalo's or the spirits. The chief is known as the Vunagi buto (chief of the political unit) who has an extensive power over a political unit (Kapu 2012, 8).⁶ The four historical boundaries of political units in Ngella are Gaeta and Hogo in the eastern segment known as the Ngella Pile (Small Ngella), Mboli in the central segment now known as Ngella Sule (Big Ngella) and Olevuga including Ravu and the islands of Vatilau are located at the western end of the island. The district of Gaeta was governed by Chief Kalekon and Hogo was under the authority of Chief Tabukoru, while Boli was ruled by Chief Takua. The district of Olevuga including Ravu and Vatilau was governed by Chief Lipa and was assisted by Chief Dikea of Ravu. The political

⁵ The meaning of schism here refers to the breaking away of people from initial established community at Valevila and apportioning of the people into the six tribes. The schism marks the time when the locality of Valevila, (the first Ngella community) was abandoned and the beginning of exodus of people into their respective tribal hamlets.

⁶ All the people resided within the vicinity of a political unit are subjected to the authority of the Vunagi buto.

authority of district chiefs was recognised by everyone in Ngella but strictly confined to respective political units (Bele 2002).

The role of the chief of political unit was enormous which relates to his involvement that is termed as ‘jack of all trades,’ that has never been enthroned. His power was recognised through his acquaintance with the tidalos. As Codrington noted:

Thus according to a native account of the matter ‘the origin of the power of chiefs, vunagi, lies entirely in the belief that they have communication with powerful ghosts, tidalo, and have that *mana* whereby they are able to bring the power of the tidalo to bear. Public opinion supported him in his claim for a general obedience, besides the dread universally felt of the tidalo power behind him. Thus if he imposed a fine, it was paid because his authority to impose it was recognised, and because it was firmly believed that he could bring calamity and sickness upon those who resisted him (Codrington 1891, 52).

The district chief’s basis of authority was entirely on the efficacy or mana of his tidalos.⁷ The people rendered total allegiance and obedience to the chief in his role of maintaining social norms and practices and imposition of fines on offenders. (Siosi 2002).

The chief of a political unit in Ngella, while playing a protective role, also mediated for his people on matters pertaining to social security, peace and stability. Chief Kalekona of Gaeta mediated between his people and British naval officers regarding the murder of Captain Bower at Madoleana Island on Ngella in 1880.⁸ He saved the whole Gaeta district from being destroyed by the Navy (Wilson 1912, 73, 74). However, a successor to either a tribal or a chief of a political unit was recognized through the merit of his wealth, his success in warfare and effective powers of his tidalos Codrington 1891, 53).

⁷ Takua was a man from Mala and is a powerful chief of Mboli district who had a strong influence all over the Islands of Ngella. The power of his tindalos were proven effective during his victory over his enemies (Codrington 1891, 51-52).

⁸ The murdering of Lieutenant Bower of HMS Sandfly in 1880 happened at Madoleana island off the coast of Hongo district. He was accompanied by four crew for a swim on the island when five men of Gaeta district attacked and killed him. They placed his head at Kalekona’s canoe house. The following year HMS *Cormorant* was sent to investigate the matter and Kalekona was called as mediator on behalf of his people to surrender the murderers to naval officers to avoid the full destruction of Gaeta district (Wilson 1912, P73-75).

1.1.4. The Socio-Cultural Setting

The Socio-Cultural context of Ngella during this period can be referred as the initial setting of Ngella's social and cultural way of life. The discussion is intended to discuss the affiliation of people within the social structure and cultural way of life.

The social structure of Ngella was traditionally founded on the tribal system where people were affiliated to respective tribes with no central authority (Whiteman 1983, 56). The people were structured into the six divisions called kema under the matrilineal lineage groupings and resided in tribal hamlets. The affiliation of the Ngella people into kema forms the framework of society (Codrington 1891, 21).⁹

The affiliation of people within the respective tribes has a strong connection with blood relationship and is related to womb of a woman that provides societal identity and a sense of belonging (Kapu 2012, 5).¹⁰ However, tribal system is the fundamental basis of social structure in Ngella. The six tribes established their own social settings at their respective hamlets within various localities in Ngella. The Gaubata tribe established its headquarters at Hagevere, the Hogokama tribe resided at Beuberu while the Kakau tribe at Kolonakake. The Hogokiki tribe established its tribal hamlet at Vugati, the Hibo tribe resided at Leivatu, and the Lahi tribe at Hanulahi. These tribal localities have a historical significance that identifies the tribes with the place of historical origins (Sorova 2002).¹¹

⁹ The importance of kema in the Ngella society was expressed by Codrington who said that: "In the native view of mankind, almost everywhere in the islands which are here under consideration, nothing seems more fundamental than the division of the people into two or more classes, which are exogamous, and in which descent is counted through the mother. This seems to stand foremost as the native looks out upon his fellow men; the knowledge of it forms probably the first social conception which shapes itself in the mind of the young Melanesian of either sex, and it is not too much to say that this division is the foundation on which the fabric of native society is built up" (Codrington 1891, 21).

¹⁰ The tribal system was strongly grounded on matrilineal system that connected and identified people with their land and wealth, the respect to chieftain system; and maintaining of social relationship. Thus, marriage was to be done outside the tribe according to cultural norms of exogamy in respect for blood relationship

¹¹ According to Sorova, a tribe without historical hamlet in Ngella was not regarded as an Ngella tribe with no customary power to claim land ownership rights.

Tribal hamlets in Ngella were usually located inland to avoid attacks from headhunting expeditions from the islands of Isabel, Malaita and Guadalcanal. Tribal war was also another threat that could also be triggered by the violation of social and cultural norms; adultery, sorcery and stealing of property and brides from other tribes which culturally deserved the death penalty (Whiteman 1983, 62).

1.1.5. Challenges

Ngella society also encountered many challenges within its own traditional political, religious and socio-cultural systems. The two common challenges confronting the Ngella society during this period were the chief's political authority and tribal war.

1.1.5.1 Chief's Authority

One of the internal challenges in the traditional structural setting of the Ngella society is the authority of the chief. While the chief's role is to provide social security, peace and justice among his people, the legitimate exercise of his authority has no boundaries and limitation. The exercise of chiefly authority can be for his own political agenda and personal gain. His decisions can be corruptible and unjust for the people. The chief's power to administer his political empire or tribal members can be used for good or bad motives as Codrington noted:

It is evident that a chief of sense, energy and good feeling, will use his power on the whole to the great advantage of the people; but a bad use of a chief's power is naturally common, in oppression, seizing land and property, increasing his stock of heads, and gaining a terrible reputation (Codrington 1891, 53).

The tendency for a chief to abuse his authority is obvious when the chief has a conflict of interest on certain issues that involves himself, his family and property. In such situation, the chief can create an oppressive and unjustifiable decision favouring himself and his family. The chief could impose high fines to anyone he wished to do so

since no one could object his decision. This is because the chief's authority to impose fines was recognised (Codrington 1891, 53).¹² The chief's power was recognized to the use of his tidalos to impinge sickness and calamity upon those who refuted his orders. The reason for extreme abuse of chiefly authority during the early period was due to the fact that chiefs were not subjected to anyone or any law. This was one form of oppression and injustice to the community as a whole.

1.1.5.2 Tribal War

Tribal wars were another challenge during the early historical period and could be aroused by two socio-religious factors. Tribal war can be triggered by the use of black magic and sorcery to avenge the enemies or to destroy people or their properties. The Ngella people believed that misfortune did not happen naturally or by mistake. Whatever happens for good or for bad in life occurs as a result of mana or power impinged by the ancestral spirits (Bennett 1987, 18).¹³

Death within a family was believed to be caused by black magic when it was later revealed by the spirit of the deceased. This revelation will certainly lead to tribal war. Another religious factor was the demand for more human skulls to maintain the efficacy of mana from head sacrifice. The Ngella people believed that the dead man's spirit present in the human skull could be invoked for power or mana to enhance life (Codrington 1891,

¹² One classic example of the dictating use of chiefly power is chief Takua of Mboli district. He imposes a heavy fine to a man who wishes to marry his daughter. The man although disagreeing with the charge, paid what the chief had demanded of him. The charge had cost almost all his wealth (Codrington 1891, 53).

¹³ The core understanding of physical realities with the religious belief system in Ngella was that nothing happens naturally as expressed by Bennett: "In the Melanesian's view nothing happens by chance; people attempted to channel spiritual forces to their own ends. Consequently, whatever happened – be it illness, a famine, the death of a pig, the falling of a branch onto a child, the achievement of leadership, or victory in battle – all occurred because someone had access to power from the spirits" (Bennett 1987, 18).