3 Postcolonial semantics and popular geopolitics

3.1 Introduction

The study of Popular Geopolitics emerged out of Critical Geography, with the aim of bringing together the study of popular culture and the study of geopolitics (Saunders 2018: 103; Saunders and Strukov 2018). As an interdiscipline, Popular Geopolitics has focused on utilizing evidence from films, video games, comic books, etc. in order to study popular representations of "places" and "people in places". One of the key insights is that these representations "from below" can have tremendous influence on top-end politics and world affairs. In their theoretical conception of Popular Geopolitics, Saunders and Strukov draw on language as an analogy. They say:

> Popular culture is a language. It displays universal principles and local variations. Like Mandarin, Swahili or Faroese, it has syntax, morphology, phonetics, and as well a grammar, dialects, stylistics, and semiotics. (Saunders and Strukov 2018: 2)

This analogy to "languages" suggests inherent variability and universal relevance, and it also models the discursive complexity that is constituted in and by popular geopolitics (Saunders and Strukov 2018: 17). The claim that "popular culture is like a language" needs to be supplemented by another perhaps more foundational claim that is not analogical by nature, namely that "language *is* popular culture". As Edward Sapir memorably phrased it: "language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations" (Sapir 1921: 235). Acknowledging that word meanings are not just *like* popular culture, or as the cliché has it, "a window on cognition", but *are* popular cultural cognitions par excellence, we can take Popular Geopolitics one step further.

Postcolonial Semantics shares with Popular Geopolitics this interest in "place", and "people in places", and while studies in Popular Geopolitics often have taken an active interest in incorporating linguistic ideas, for instance by studying formulaic tenets of identity, joke-telling, slogans, and similar repertoires (Saunders 2018: 103), semantic analysis has not yet been employed to any significant extent within this interdiscipline (but see e.g. Fernández and Levisen 2021). This is a shame, because construals of place as found in the everyday meanings of words and constructions have much to offer precisely because they offer insights into the "naive picture of the world" (Apresjan 2000) that everyday language mirrors and affords. Contexts, of course are important too, but as linguistic worldview scholar Adam Głaz reminds us, they are equally constructed:

https://doi.org/9783111337432-003

> Geopolitical contexts are not "just there", they arise in discourse; geopolitical spaces are not given, they are instituted and constructed through human symbolic activities, of which the use of language is probably the most fundamental. (Głaz 2021:132)

The totality of discourse that makes up a universe of meaning is characterized by invisibility and hiddenness (Wierzbicka 2006a). While sound waves of spoken words can be heard, and black dots of written words can be seen, meanings are more elusive. They are, by default, below the threshold of awareness, and while they can occasionally attract attention in public discourse, most meanings never attract any attention at all. This is why lighting up "the thick darkness of language", to use Whorf's metaphor (1956), is the primary task for a semanticist.

Not all words, of course, were made to convey meanings related to geopolitics. And to be sure, not all words are "popular" either. Indeed some words belong to academic vocabularies and professional registers. But importantly, common words and the language rituals of everyday life should be thought of *as* products of popular culture. And very small words can have major geopolitical significance. Consider for instance Rita Vallentin's (2020) study of the adverb *aqui* in the context of rural communities in Guatemala, where deictic place-talk has emerged as an alternative to the ethnically defined government discourses. Local discourses of belonging based on *aqui* 'here' seem to be an unconscious geopolitical intervention against official categories such as "indigenous" and "non-indigenous", and perhaps precisely because of its smallness, *aqui* has powerful discursive affordances. In my own study of construals of Greenland, I have documented that humble-looking prepositions can be fraught with geopolitics. The two Danish prepositions *i* 'in' and *på* 'on' provide two different construals: *På Grønland* 'on Greenland' establishes a traditionalist, colonial frame, in which Greenland is viewed as an *ø* 'island' belonging to Denmark, whereas the prepositional phrase *i Grønland* 'in Greenland' portrays Greenland in a progressive and postcolonial frame as a *land* 'country' with sovereignty as its natural trajectory (Levisen 2020).

This chapter scrutinizes common words in Anglo geopolitical discourse and denaturalizes them through the lens of the linguacultural worldview of Bislama. The chapter begins by discussing the Anglo discourse of "place and space", and Anglo keywords of place. Then ni-Vanuatu keywords of place will be analyzed, focusing on *graon* 'ground, home', *aelan* 'island, home island', and *kantri* 'country'. After a short excursus into the Eurocolonial concepts of *colony* and *colonization* the chapter ends by studying the popular geopolitics of paradise, focusing on the meaning conveyed in the English word *paradise*, vis-à-vis the Bislama *paradaes*.

3.2 The place and space of Anglo discourse

The distinction between *place and space* is a well-versed discourse topic spanning several disciplines of Anglo academia, from geography to anthropology. In fact it is difficult to say much about *place* in English without invoking also its twin concept of *space*. As quintessential concepts, in a constellation of great importance, the *place and space* of Anglo ethnogeography can perhaps best be likened to *body and mind,* another strong pair, from Anglo ethnopsychology. The analogy to *body and mind* is striking, not only from a perspective of keyword status, but also from a cross-semantic viewpoint. The English words *body* and *place* appear to have translational equivalents across linguacultures, and the concepts they carry, does indeed seem to be what Wierzbicka calls "basic human" (2014: 195). But the story of their twin concepts 'space' and 'mind' is a very different story. Both these concepts are hard-to-translate Anglo English keywords without global equivalents. *The mind* is a particularly translation-resistant case. It does not travel well even within European languages – consider French *esprit*, or Danish *sind* (Wierzbicka 1989; Levisen 2017c; Peeters 2019a, 2019b) – let alone across other Englishes (Levisen and Jogie 2015).

In many ways, the case of the English *space* is similar to that of the *mind*. Deeply entrenched in academic reasoning, with numerous elaborations, such as *spatial cognition*, *spatial relations*, *spatial language*, *interactional space*, and *postcolonial space*, to mention just a few, *space* lays claims to universal relevance and natural precedence. In his book "*The Fate of Place*", philosopher Edward S. Casey weighs in on the "place–space issue", assigning primacy to 'place' over 'space'. He says:

> Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is a requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact? (Casey 1997: ix)

Casey's assignment of 'place' as a primal fact is well argued, and it is also backed up by cross-linguistic evidence (Goddard 2021). 'Space' does not even travel well across European semantic traditions. Contrasting the Anglo English *space*, and the German concept of *Raum,* the geographer Kenneth Olwig (2002), concludes that "whereas the English space is conceptually distinct from place, *Raum* has a double meaning, combining elements of both space and place".

The question of *place and space*, then, seems to be a question that in itself is a product of a particular knowledge sphere: it has emerged as a central question in the Anglo order of knowledge. Arguably, the pairing of *place and space* in Anglo discourse is tied together with a musical glue of monosyllabicity and rhythmic symmetricity that provides a poetic rationale for its pairing. Nevertheless, in a cross-linguistic semantic perspective, we need to break the two apart. And from the cross-semantic perspective it seems to be the *space* concept, and the *place and space* duality that needs to be deconstructed. Testing these ideas against Bislama, we find *ples* 'place' to be both lexicalized and prominent in discourse. The word *ples* is an important word in its own right in Bislama discourses, but it also serves as the basis of numerous elaborations of "people in places". Take for instance the central concept of *manples* 'people of the place', a concept that roughly conveys the meaning of "local Melanesian people" (in contrast to whites and Chinese people) (Crowley 2003: 160, see also Chapter 5), or the concept of *ples nogud* 'bad place, a dangerous place to go (because of spiritual agency)'.

What then about *space*? A modern Bislama word *spes* formally resembles Anglo English *space*, but it is a marginal word, and also without the same coverage semantically or discursively as its Anglo English look-alike. The meaning of *spes* is closer to 'room, have room for', as suggested by Crowley's example *ating i no gat naf spes long trak* 'maybe there's not enough room in the car'. (Crowley 2003: 209). Traditionally, life in the Pacific sets up a different basic premise than that which undergirds the various European traditions of *space*, *Raum*, etc. where the concepts are based on an experiential world of people living a considerable part of their daily lives inside houses, as well as in the "urban spaces" of cities. As Schneider's account of "saltwater sociality" (2012) suggests, Pacific worlds are fundamentally different. With *solwata* 'the sea, salt water' as the center of the experiential world, there is a different type of mobility at play, and a joint focus on place and movement. A resonance of this logic can be found in the most common ritual questions of Bislama: *Yu blo wea* 'where are you from?' and *yu go wea?* 'where are you going?'. The Bislama axiom "*yu blo wea*? *yu go wea?*" suggests a different orientation for Popular Geopolitics, centered around 'place and movement', rather than 'place and space'.

It is 'place', and not 'space' that seems to be the shared emic idea central to human meaning-making. This, of course, does not render the analyses of space, or the existing studies on "postcolonial spaces", "spatial cognition", and "interactional space" useless or futile, but the space frame does seem to exert some kind of Anglo analytical power that needs to be addressed. Prompted by the emic commitments of Postcolonial Semantics, we need to ask new questions that are not locked into the Anglo *space* frame and its *place and space* discourse, and

resist the temptation to think that these logics are mandatory. The linguistics of listening is a practice that not only brings us into close contact with words, but also commits us to listening to what "they have to tell us" (Evans 2009). Perhaps we should add here that listening to what is not being said, or what is seldom being said, is also worth paying attention to, if we are to break free from Anglo schemes, frames, and orders of knowledge (on 'place' in Postcolonial Pragmatics, see also Levisen and Sippola 2020a, 2020b).

3.3 Anglo keywords of place

In Anglo discourses of place, some concepts are taken for granted, and treated as facts. *Country*, *land*, and *nation*, for example, are Anglo keywords of place around which whole discourses are organized. In his study of "Key Anglo English words for talking and thinking about people in place", Cliff Goddard (2020a) writes:

> The importance of the words country, land, and nation, and their derivatives, in Anglophone public and political discourses is obvious. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that, without the support of words like these, discourses of nationalism, patriotism, immigration, international affairs, land rights, anti-colonialism, and postcolonialism would be literally impossible. (Goddard 2020a: 8)

In order to denaturalize Anglo keywords of place, it is helpful to think of *country*, *land*, and *nation* as both concepts and constructs. They are concepts in the sense that they help organize the Anglo order of place-knowledge. Aired and shared within a specific sociality, these concepts have gained currency, and have come to be thought of as natural and neutral. They are also "constructs" in the sense that they "came from discourse" – that is, they emerged out of particular historical contexts (Levisen and Waters 2017b). As semanticizations of particular discourse traditions, the meaning of *country*, *land*, and *nation* are the conceptual products of a particular imagination, and this particularity is partly an "Anglo" particularity, and partly a "Eurocolonial" particularity. Postcolonial Semantics takes a special interest in how these Anglo and Eurocolonial concepts and constructs of place are constituted, but also how "somewheres" are conceptualized outside of the Anglosphere/Eurosphere.[1]

1 Anglo keywords of place have counterparts in European languages, although the conceptual semantics of European languages, including other colonial languages such as French, Portuguese, Dutch, German, and Danish, are known to vary considerably (Wierzbicka 1997; Goddard 2020a). There are both colexification differences and genuine conceptual differences. For instance *Land*/*land* in German, Danish, and Dutch can cover both 'country' and 'land', with the

Keywords of place in the geopolitical sense include several domains and subdomains – for example, named world areas, such as the meanings of words like *Africa*, *Melanesia*, and *the Arctic*. In recent years, the field of colonial and postcolonial toponomastics have evolved into a major research area (Stolz and Warnke 2018; Levkovych 2020). Semantic studies in landscape and cityscape terms have also centered on postcolonial themes. Consider, for example, Bromhead's study on the concept of *desert* in British and Australian English vis-à-vis the Pitjantjara/Yankunytjatjara concepts of *puṯi* and *puḻi* (Bromhead 2018; see also Bromhead 2011, 2017). The English *desert*, while differing in British and Australian English with regards to the conceptual emphasis on *sand*, both construe *deserts* as dry, arid, and empty, whereas Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara words emphasize the richness of life and food sources in the *puṯi* and *puḻi* eco-zones (Bromhead 2018: 121–136). Or consider the cryptodiversity of the English words *suburb* and the Brazilian Portuguese *subúrbio*, studied by Braga Mattos (2017). The prototype semantics of English *suburb* portray a safe, but dull, middle-class place, whereas Brazilian *suburbia* conceptualizes a poor and dangerous, but lively place. Studies in sayings and ritualized language also have great potential for understanding Popular Geopolitics. Consider, for instance, Jan Hein's (2020a) study of the Porteño Spanish, the Spanish of Buenos Aires, where ritual analogies such as *Buenos Aires es la París de Sudamerica* 'Buenos Aires is the Paris of South America' maintain orders of "Europeanness in Argentineity", or in (post)colonial riddles such as the Danish *hvad var den største ø i verden før Grønland blev opdaget?* 'what was the biggest island in the world before the discovery of Greenland?', as studied by Levisen (2020a).

In Anglo popular conceptions of place, there is a sharp distinction between "imaginary places" and "real places", which should be kept apart. The distinction between *imagined* and *real* is semantically reflected in the lexicon of English, and presumably, this way of looking at place can be traced back into the formations of British (and European) Enlightenment discourse. In comparison, consider Storch's study of West African discourse, where spiritual places, entire spiritual villages and kingdoms, exist to speakers (Storch 2017), or Lattas' (2010) account of modern secret travels by New Britain villagers where "extraterritorial worlds", such as Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, Rome, Canberra, and America have been reached through dreams and visions. Only a radically emic approach can

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additional layer of non-compatibility in the polysemy that the English phrase in the country (countryside) does translate as Land/land. With regards to nation, as pinpointed by Goddard (2020), the "words approximating English nation/s vary quite markedly … even in languages that possess an apparent near-equivalent" (2020: 24).

help us to research a semantics of understanding where keywords of place and other place-related words are accounted for in a way that is faithful to the way in which speakers themselves conceptualize place. For all elaborations of "somewheres" are linguacultural constructs and concepts, equally imaginary and equally real. They are real insofar as they exist in speakers' discourse; they are imaginary insofar as they are the product of a shared history of world-conceiving activities.

3.4 Ni-Vanuatu concepts and contexts

The transformation of the British-French condominium New Hebrides/Nouvelles-Hébrides into the modern nation-state Vanuatu was an important event in the history of political decolonization and in Pacific geopolitics. After a string of independence declarations in the Pacific in *Melanesia* – Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978, and Vanuatu in 1980 – the political window for decolonialization closed. West Papua (previously Dutch), is today ruled from Jakarta, and Kanaki (New Caledonia) from Paris. Most recently Bougainville, a part of Papua New Guinea, located within the Solomon Island archipelago, voted in a referendum to leave Papua New Guinea to become the world's 196th country.

Within this geopolitical context, the discourse of *kasem independens* 'getting independence' is both a discourse of celebration and a discourse of liberation. A fondness of *ol flae* 'flags' of the Pacific, many of which are *kalkala* 'multicolored and visually conspicuous' contributes semiotically to these discourses. The World Cup fanatic population of Port Vila has a special fondness for all the flags of the world, and during world football events, ni-Vanuatu busses and houses fly Brazilian, Argentinean, Spanish, German, and even Belgian flags in a celebrations of not only football, but of *ol kantri blo wol* 'the countries of the world'. The semiotic prominence of flags in the plural bear witness of a semantic-conceptual innovation, namely that of "countries" (on the visual semantics of color and belonging, see also Aragón 2017).

The Bislama word *kantri* 'country' is a recent historical construct, and its current importance has been fostered through the fight for independence, and the continued political fight for decolonization of other Pacific peoples. Thirty years ago Crowley stated that "the islands of Vanuatu must have been one of the last modern nations on earth to have come under a system of national government" (1990: 4). The contemporary proliferation of "*kantri* talk", then, seems closely linked with this new paradigm of national cognition – and the new semantics and semiotics that followed in its footsteps. Vanuatu is commonly talked about as *kantri blo yumi* 'our kantri', with the inclusive first person pronoun *yumi,* or *kantri*

blo yumi evriwan 'the *kantri* of all of us'. While these national sentiments go deep, and *kantri* has climbed the latter of lexical importance, there are some older, and perhaps even deeper conceptual constructs that undergird, and partly contradict, the discourse of *kantri*. One of these concepts is *graon*, a hard-to-translate Bislama concept with a lexical origin in English *ground*. Another key concept is *aelan* 'island'. In the following, I will develop paraphrases for the semantics of Bislama *graon*, *aelan*, and *kantri*, in a dialogue with Anglo concepts.

3.4.1 Graon 'land, territory, home'

Graon (alternative spellings: *kraon*, *groun*) is a Bislama keyword with a wide scope, ranging from poetry to politics. Like many other keywords of place, the word *graon* is polysemous, and at least a three-way polysemy is required to account the different meanings associated with *graon:*

Graon 1 'land, home'
Graon 2 'the ground'
Graon 3 'soil, clay'

Unlike the place construct *graon*-1, which is the focus of the present study, *graon-2* 'the ground' and *graon*-3 'soil, clay', are conceptually 'something', rather than 'a place', and it is *graon* as a place concept that is the culturally rich and hard-to-translate construal which our analysis is aimed at. English semi-translations of this sense range from "land" and "home", to "territory" and "property", but all of these translations smuggle in Anglo baggage which distorts the emic perspective.

At the time of writing, one of the most successful political parties of Vanuatu is called *Graon mo Jastis Pati*, most often translated as "Land and Justice Party". A formulaic tenet of a major concern in ni-Vanuatu politics is *fasin blo salem graon*, roughly translated, 'the problem of selling *graon*', in which private foreign property investors attempt to buy or lease land from ni-Vanuatu people, causing severe disturbances not only to the ecology, but to the entire philosophy of existence for the people concerned. The arguments against ownership and lease from foreigners are many: foreign owners, unaware of the significance of the place they buy or lease, tend to transform it into the image of their own vision of paradise, thereby de facto reversing the sovereignty that was achieved during the political decolonization of the Pacific. A second central argument is that loss of sovereignty will effect the *pikinini blo tumoro* 'the children of tomorrow' of these

places, and endanger their futures in return for *kwik vatu* 'quick money'. Listening to the stories and songs about *graon*, and trying to understand the semantics it stands for, it becomes clear that *graon* is more than just affect and a "love for country".

Consider the following examples, two from a conversation (5–6) and one from a popular song (7):

(5) *Kastom hemi talem se graon hemi pat blong man mo yu no save salem. Graon hemi aset we yu no save salem from hemi pat blong yu...be waetman hemi se graon hemi wan aset we yu save salem blong mekem mani.*
'*Kastom* [roughly: traditional ni-Vanuatu culture] says *graon* is a part of people and that you can't sell it. *Graon* is an asset that you can't sell because it's a part of you, but *waetman* [white people] say that *graon* is an asset that you can sell in order to make money.'

(6) *Manples kastom hemi talem se yu bon ikam long graon yu wokbaot long graon mo yu mekem karen mo tru long yu faenem kakae. Graon blong yu hemi givim yu laef. Bae yu ded afta bae oli berem yu graon blong yu. Mekem se man wetem graon tufala i wan nomo.*
'*Manples kastom* [roughly: the culture of the people of the place] says that you are born and come to *graon*, you walk on *graon* and you make *karen* [cultivated land, garden] and because of that you will find food. Your *graon* will give you life. When you die, they will bury you in your *graon*. This means that people and *graon*, those two are just one.'

(7) *oo Tana graon yu givim laef long mi /*
yu yu graon blong laf mo pis /
yu yu fulap wetem joe /
wan paradaes tasol blong mi stap long hem
'oh Tana *graon* you give me life/
you are the *graon* of love and peace /
you are full of joy /
simply paradise for me to be in' (Noisy Boys)

The differences in *lukluk* 'view, perspective' between what is here framed as *manples kastom* 'culture of the people of the place', and *waetman* 'white people' is one that points to radical difference in conception. *Lukluk blo waetman* 'the white perspective' is linked with money, sales, ignorance, and lack of understanding, and *lukluk blo manples* 'the perspective of the people of the place' as

one of deep unity between *graon* and people, an existential given, but also an ancestrally motivated bond. The feelings towards *graon* are commonly expressed in local reggae music (7), and "*graon* address" is common reggae lyrics. The *graon* address pronoun is *yu* 'you'. It provides a keying that expresses a deep sense of belonging.

A first attempt to paraphrase *graon* in cross-translatable concepts is provided below, first in a Bislama version, and then in Anglo English. The paraphrase has three sections. The first part represents the basic frame of linkage between a particular place (e.g. "one place"), and particular group of people ("some people"). It links the existential concepts of living in this place, and dying in the place, with an anchor in the past, represented via the semantic molecule *ol bubu* 'ancestors'.

Graon
wan ples
sam man i liv lo ples ia
ol man ia oli bon finis lo ples ia,
olsem ol bubu blo ol man ia oli bin bon finis lo semak ples longtaem bifo
ol man ia bae taem oli ded lo ples ia, bae oli ded lo semak ples olsem ol bubu blo man ia
i ded finis lo semak ples longtaem bifo

one place
some people live in this place
these people were born in this place,
like the *bubu* 'ancestors' of these people were born in the same place a long time before
these people will die in this place, like the *bubu* of these people died in the same place
a long time before

The second part portrays the "knowledge of place", and the exclusivity that characterizes the depth of the "knowledge of place". This is linked with three spheres of knowledge represented – in part – through the molecules *anamol* 'creature, animal', and *speret* 'spirit' – but also through the concept of growing (Bislama: *gro* 'grow').

Graon (continued)
from hemia ol man oli save gud ples ia
oli save wanem i save gro lo ples ia
oli save wanem kaen anamol ikat lo ples ia
oli save wanem kaen speret ikat lo ples ia
from hemia ol man lo ples ia oli save mekem fulap samting lo ples ia,
ol nara man oli no save mekem semak samting

because of this, these people know this place well
they know what can grow in this place
they know what kinds of *anamol* 'animals' there are in this place
they know what kinds of *speret* 'spirits' there are in this place
because of this these people can do many things in this place,
other people can't do the same things

The third part represents the idea that these people can make claims about this place based on their deep connections, and the exclusivity of belonging to this particular place. This takes us from a descriptive perspective to one of social cognition founded on we-based ideas. The idea portrayed here is that all people have *graon*, but that the *graon*–people link is distributed, and that this distribution is based on a deep ancestral logic of living in this place:

Graon (continued)
ol man ia i save talem:
"mifala i liv lo ples ia,
mifala i bin stap lo ples ia blo longtaem we longtaem finis,
lo mifala ples ia hemi no olsem eni nara ples"
ol nara man oli no save talem semak samting abaotem ples ia,
oli save talem semak samting abaotem wan nara ples

these people can say:
"we live here,
we have lived here for a very very long time,
to us this place is not like any other place"
other people can't say the same about this place,
they can say the same about one other place

As the paraphrase attempts to show, the *graon* concept is rich and complex. It follows logics that are rather different from that of the Anglo prototype semantics of words such as "country", "land", "home", or "property". The key cultural logics are based on ancestral cognition, on natural–spiritual knowledge, and the exclusivity of belonging that follows from these logics.

3.4.2 *Aelan* '(home) island'

The importance of *aelan* '(home) island' in Bislama discourse can hardly be exaggerated. In urban social life it is common for people to meet other people that they don't know already, or don't know well. In those situations, and especially for "early interactions" there is one burning question: *wanem aelan blo yu?* 'what's your *aelan*?' The question is sometimes a topic of cognition, rather than an open part of discourse, partly because "*aelan* belongingness" on the one hand is a social fact of life, but on the other hand a potential source of conflict. Successful *aelan* discourse must accommodate two deep-seated communicative logics, one of "wanting to know", and one of "not wanting to say: you are not like me". This double aim can be achieved in many ways. I noted the following formulae (8):

(8) *Angkel, yu kamaot lo wanem aelan blo yumi man Vanuatu?*
'Uncle [*angkel*], you come from which *aelan* of us-people-of-Vanuatu'

This well-formed semantic balancing act was overheard in a brief encounter between two strangers in an airport. One of the interlocutors was an elderly man, the other was a young man. Following the standard linguaculture of address, the younger man addressed the elderly man as *angkel* 'uncle'. By emphasizing the shared nationality of the two via the social category concept of *man Vanuatu* 'Vanuatu people' and shared sense of belonging of people from all *aelan*, the young man eloquently achieved the goal of getting an answer to his question.

With much less interactive sophistication, people in other circumstances might simply follow the ritual "adjacency pair", exemplified in (9):

(9) *A: yu blo wea?*
'where [what *aelan*] are you from?'
B: (Mi blo) Malakula!
'(I'm from) Malakula!'

On the face of it, the question in (9) might look like a simple question, but it is not. The answer cannot be satisfactorily answered without revealing the *aelan* belongingness that the question demands. There are two ways of approaching the built-in *aelan* assumptions in the question. We could interpret it as a simple presupposition – that is, that the *aelan* is contextually deduced from the words y*u blo wea?* Or we could think of the whole construction as a unit that is based on

the semantic molecule *aelan*. I will opt for the latter, given the ubiquitousness of the phrase.

The Bislama *aelan*, then, seems to be something much more than just "an island". The translation "home island" seems closer to the conceptualization that hides behind the word (on islands and language, see also Nash et al. 2020). The Bislama "*aelan* belonging" seems quite different from the Anglo concept of *identity*. For instance, an urban Bislama speaker might have never set her foot on the *aelan* of her belonging. This is where the popular geopolitics of the Anglo ritualistic question *where are you from?* shows its individualistic and presentist ideology. Although sometimes the extended, and somewhat prying, Anglo version, *where are you from originally?* takes the curiosity of "wanting to know" further, the Bislama idea is that a person can be from a place that this person has never been to, and where perhaps not even her parents have been to. This type of belonging is not alignable with the individualist Anglo ideology of *identity*. The determination of one's *aelan* belonging is not about choice, or heartfelt feelings, but about one's perceived sociobiological history. *Aelan* belonging, then, makes the past an obligatory part of the present.

In the context of urban life, it has become quite common to have a mixed *aelan* belonging, where the paternal and maternal *aelan* are not the same. This can be solved as it is in (10):

(10) *Mi Pentekos-Ambae*
'I'm Pentecost-Ambae'
Mi Santo-Malakula
'I'm Santo-Malakula'

Through *aelan*-name compounding, a person can convey, say, that her father is from Pentecost and her mother from Ambae. The order of the sequencing of compounding might depend on different traditions. In principle, this compounding could expand, but it tends to stop with two *aelan* names. The complexity of urbanized life, with the potentially kaleidoscopic multi-*aelan* belonging that some young people have to account for, occasionally leads to answers that challenge the logic.

(11) *Mi mi blo Vila nomo*
'I'm just from [Port] Vila'

I recorded (11) from a young woman, who felt the constant pressure of the *aelan* question, and, inspired by the English logic of *where are you from?* attempted to make Port Vila, the capital, her place-of-belonging. While saying this she was laughing quietly about her inability to answer the question in the culturally acceptable way, and when further questioned, she was in fact able to meticulously account for her complicated *aelan*-belongings.

Much as the *aelan* is held in high regard, the discourse of ni-Vanuatu urban dwellers also sometimes invokes *aelan* in the frame of backwardness, and lack of *divelopmen* 'development'. This ambivalence in *aelan* discourse produces contradictory narratives of the *aelan* as a place which has maintained the original order of life, but at the same time is lacking in sophistication. When crimes and bad behaviors are publicly discussed, the construction *kobak lo aelan blehem* 'go back to his/her island' suggests that the person is not fit for urban life, and that he or she needs to be re-educated into the respectful ways of life that the *aelan* socialities are believed to secure. One register where the ambivalence of *aelan* seems fully resolved is in the "place-praise" registers of music, including reggae lyrics (12), and string band lyrics (13). Here, specific *aelan* are keyed unambivalently as small wonders of world, and the lyrics performed with a sense of intensely felt place-belonging.

(12) *Ooo, aelan blong mi / mi laekem yu /*
nogat wan i olsem yu /
yu ruts blong laef o yes /
mi mi laekem yu long wei mo laef blong yu
'Oh, my aelan / I like you
there is no one like you /
you roots of life, yes
I like you for your ways and your life' (Naio)

(13) *Mi botem sip MV Noten Sta sel awai long hom Nguna aelan /*
mi lukim Malakula aelan silip sore long solowara /
Tautu velej paradaes peles bilonga mi /
Sampela taem mi misim yu, mi mas kambak
'I boarded the ship MV Northern Star, sailed away going home to Nguna *aelan* / I saw Malakula *aelan* sleeping peacefully in the sea /
Tautu village, my paradise place /
Sometimes I miss you, I have to come back' (Ruato)

The *you*-address, speaking directly to the *aelan* with words such as *mi laekem yu* ('I like/love you') and *mi misim yu* ('I miss you)' is common, and in *aelan*-praise there is both a richness of descriptive and evaluative words. I will return to the question of "place-praise" in the section on the discourse of *paradaes* 'paradise' (Section 3.6).

The first section of the semantic paraphrase spells out the boundedness, the specificity, and the richness of *aelan*, as a place of one kind that exists in many kinds and types. Also, the *aelan* concept is depending on the concept of 'sea' (Bislama: *solwata* or *solwara*). This takes us to the following paraphrase:

Aelan
wan kaen ples
ikat fulap fulap ples lo kaen ia,
 sam oli big, sam oli smol
ikat fulap ples lo wan ples lo kaen ia
ikat solwata lo olgeta saed lo kaen ples ia

a place of one kind
there are many many places of this kind,
 some are big, some are small
there are many places in one place of this kind
there is sea on all sides of a place of this kind

The second section focuses on *aelan* living. The themes resemble those found in *graon*, but emphasize the distributed ways of living, where some people live in some places on the island, and others in other parts, each upholding a specific way of life:

Aelan (continued)
fulap man oli save liv lo wan ples lo kaen ia
lo kaen ples ia sam man oli live lo sam ples,
 nara man oli liv lo nara ples lo ples ia
sam man oli liv lo wan fasin, ol nara man oli liv lo wan nara fasin

many people can live in a place of this kind
in a place of this kind some people live in some places,
 other people live in other places
some people live in one way, other people live in another way

The final section spells out the aspect of belonging and social cognition, in similar strong ways as in the semantics of *graon*.

Aelan (continued)
ol man ia i save talem:
"mifala i liv lo ples ia,
mifala i bin liv lo ples ia blo longtaem we longtaem finis
lo mifala ples ia hemi no olsem eni nara ples"
ol nara man oli no save talem semak samting abaotem ples ia,
oli save talem semak samting abaotem wan nara ples

these people can say:
"we live here
we have lived here for a very very long time
to us this place is not like any other place"
other people can't say the same about this place,
they can say the same about one other place

The meaning of the Bislama *aelan* is Popular Geopolitics in its purest form: an entanglement of words, people, and place. It is a foundational word for thinking, speaking, and feeling, for relating to others, but also for a more existential geophilosophy of life.

3.4.3 *Kantri* 'country'

In this section, I will take a closer look at *kantri* 'country', a keyword of postcolonial discourse in Vanuatu. In popular translation, *Vanuatu* is sometimes rendered as "our land forever", "land eternal", or "the land that has already existed", based on its formal compound constituents *vanua* 'land, home' and *tu* 'stand'. Semantically, however, the toponym *Vanuatu* clearly relies on *kantri*. *Kantri* serves as a semantic molecule in the meaning of *Vanuatu*, just as it serves as a molecule for other Bislama toponyms: *Ostrelia* 'Australia', *Papua Niugini* 'Papua New Guinea', and *Jemani* 'Germany'. The modern *kantri* concept affords a wealth of discourses, both in terms of the visual semiotics of flags that we have already discussed (see Section 3.4), and numerous concept formations related to modern statehood. In a simple paraphrase, we can represent this aspect as follows:

Vanuatu/Jemani
wan kantri
nem blo kantri ia hemi Vanuatu/Jemani ...

one *kantri* 'country'
this *kantri* 'country' is called Vanuatu/Germany

The national toponymic practice modelled in the paraphrase above is a common feature of modern "international cognition", and a template that can be found in most if not all national languages of the world. The paraphrase for independence-seeking territories such as *Kanaki* (or *Kaldoni)* 'New Caledonia' and *Bogenvil* 'Bougainville' require a slightly more complex paraphrase:

Kanaki/Bogenvil
fulap man lo ples ia oli tingting olsem:
"mifala i wantem blo talem olsem abaotem ples ia:
ples ia hemi wan kantri olsem olketa nara kantri
nem blo kantri blo mifala hemi Kanaki/Bogenvil"

many people in this place think like this:
"we want to say this about this place:
his place is a *kantri* 'country', like all other *kantri* 'countries'
our *kantri* 'country' is called Kanaky/Bougainville"

At first sight, *kantri* looks like an exact semantic copy of *country*, and as an adaptation of the Eurocolonial toponomastic practice of "naming countries". At the same time, I am not convinced that *kantri* fully equals *country*. Treading cautiously in a semantic landscape where cryptodiversity is common, it is wise to not automatically equate Anglo *country* and Bislama *kantri*, for as we know, the transference of words does not guarantee a full transference of meaning. Semantic additions, reductions, or even radical reconfiguration are likely to take place (see e.g. Clyne 2003, on the "dynamics of transversion"). On the other hand, lexical borrowing is also attractive, precisely because it can fill a gap that speakers can feel, especially in the context of contact-zone semantic negotiations. It seems to me that *kantri* draws heavily on the semantic contours of Anglo *country* but that some of the logics of *graon* 'land, home' can also be found in *kantri*. Perhaps it is even possible to somehow think of *Vanuatu* as *graon* recast as *kantri?*

Let us take a look first at the Anglo English *country*. Goddard's (2020a: 11) in-depth semantic analysis of *country* provided the following paraphrase of *country*:

Country (Anglo English)
a big place of one kind
people can know what this place is called
there are many places of many kinds in a place of this kind
many people live in a place of this kind
many people are born in a place of this kind
these people can think like this:
"we are people of one kind
we do many things not like people in many other places"
there are many places of this kind on earth

On the face of it, the key ideas expressed here seem very similar to that of Bislama kantri. But when Goddard talks about the "inward-looking" and "we-based" element of the meaning of country – modeled in the third part of the paraphrase – it seems to me that these elements of meaning seem partly at odds with the idea found in kantri.[2]

Consider some of the most prominent examples of *kantri* in ni-Vanuatu discourse, such as the ones we find in the national anthem of Vanuatu "*Yumi, Yumi, Yumi*" '*We, We, We*'.

(14) *Yumi, yumi, yumi i glat long talem se /*
Yumi, yumi, yumi ol man blong Vanuatu
'We, we, we are happy [*glat*] to proclaim that /
We, we, we are the people of Vanuatu'

Consider also, two very common *kantri*-constructions:

2 Goddard identifies several lexical units and provides several explications for *country* (*country*-1, *country*-2, *country*-3, etc.). In this comparison, I have chosen the unit that more directly can be compared to Bislama *kantri*.

(15) *Kantri blo yumi*
'Our *kantri*'

(16) *Kantri blo yumi man Vanuatu*
'The *kantri* of us people of Vanuatu'

It seems to be a salient pattern in *kantri* discourse that it attracts the *yumi* pronoun, a pronoun traditionally described as an "inclusive first person pronoun". This pronoun differs from another we-word, *mifala* 'we', which in traditional accounts is called the "exclusive first person pronoun". This structuralist account of we-words might be too simplistic, but one thing is interesting here: where *kantri* attracts the *yumi* pronoun, *graon* 'land, home' and *aelan* 'home island' attracts *mifala*. (On the cross-semantic complications of "we" pronouns, see also Goddard and Wierzbicka 2021).

Kantri, then, does not seem to follow the dominant European ideology of nationalism with logics centered around: "one people, one language, one country". *Kantri*, by contrast, has a built-in theme of diversity that does not sit well with the idea in the concept of *country* that 'we are people of one kind'. This causes us to rethink the *kantri* concept, and its cryptodiverse relationship with *country*. In a paraphrase, we can instead propose the following aspect of social cognition in *kantri*.

Kantri (social cognition)
olketa man ia oli save tingting olsem:
"ikat fulap kaen man lo ples ia"
lo semak taem oli save tingting olsem:
"ol man lo ples ia oli wan"

all these people can think like this:
"there are many kinds of people here"
at the same time they can think like this:
"people here are one"

This element models a double cognition that is crucial in *kantri:* one thought maintains the recognition that there are many kinds of people in the place, but at the same time it conveys another idea, namely that all these kinds of people "are one". This double social cognitive element allows for the logics of *graon* and

aelan to co-exist with some of the logics of *country,* which in turn makes the semantics of *country* and *kantri* unaligned – but in linguaculturally motivated ways.

3.5 Excursus: The semantics and discourse of *colony* and *colonization*

In this excursus, I would like to offer some reflections on the Anglo words *colony* and *colonization*, contextualized through Pacific and postcolonial perspectives. I will not provide any new semantic analyses or paraphrases; rather, in this section I will provide a semantic reflection on *colony*, *colonization*, and related concepts. These words are geopolitical keywords and central concepts in Postcolonial Language Studies, Decolonial Linguistics, and also more widely, they are key concepts in global humanities and social sciences.

The first point to make is that the Anglo concept of *colony* does not stand alone. It is – and was – a part of a more general Eurocolonial schema of meaning-making, reflected in words such as French *colonie*, Spanish *colonia*, Portuguese *colónia*, German *Kolonie,* Danish *koloni,* and so on (Stolz, Warnke, and Schmidt-Brücken 2016: 2; see also Corum 2021b). We can think of this cluster of words, and the semantic elaborations they allow, in terms of "areal semantics" (cf. Matisoff 2004; Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Liljegren 2017), and as the product of a distinctly European (Stolz 2006) and Eurocentric outlook on the world. The complex history of this areal–European concept requires an "internal comparison" (i.e. a cross-European examination), but a global cross-semantic confrontation is also needed. Alternatives to the Eurocentric history and geopolitics embedded in the concepts of *colony* and *colonization* can be found, for instance, in the Swahili concept of *maafa* 'great destruction', which serves as a conceptual intervention that challenges that of *colonization* (cf. Akinyela 2000: 250; Stolz, Warnke, and Schmidt-Brücken 2006: 3).

Colonization, of course, is not a concept that simply describes "how it was". In all conceptualization activity, there is an element of paying attention to the world, and all concepts contribute to emerging linguacultural worldviews. The naive realism and descriptive pride that can be found in high-profile dictionaries, is worth studying critically, and conceptually. In the "*Oxford Learner's Dictionary*", *colonization*, for instance, is modelled as a value-free term. The word is defined as:

> the act of taking control of an area or a country that is not your own, especially using force, and sending people from your own country to live there (OLD, colonialization).

It seems to me that the matter-of-factness in this definition is a not a semantically updated account of the word's meaning. *Colonization*, increasingly, seems to be a concept with a negative valence – consider its common collocates such as *slavery*, *exploitation*, *imperialism*. As a semantic category *colonization* seems to be shifting from a descriptive into an axiological category, or more precisely, a category of immorality. Despite these apparent shifts in public discourses of *colonization*, it seems that many dictionaries remain conservative. The "*Oxford Learner's Dictionary*" definition of *postcolonial* also refrains from making any attempts to model the axiological aspect of the term, stating simply that postcolonial means "occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule". The point here is not to criticize dictionaries for a lack of social activism, but rather for being scientifically inactive and inert: when axiologies and moralities are – or become – part of the constitutive setup of words, it is misguided to insist on keeping words that are not just descriptive, descriptive.

From a Pacific perspective there are several trends to follow and study carefully. The semantics of Bislama speaks into the interface of colonial discourse and popular geopolitics along two major lines. The first trend is what we could call a radicalized semantic account of colonial meanings, where local concepts not only maintain the colonial-semantic legacy but actively enhance and promote the colonial narrative. One such example is the concept of *daknes* 'heathen darkness', a strongly negative Bislama concept that refers to pre-Christian, premodern Pacific beliefs and social organization. The phrase *taem blo daknes* 'the time of *daknes*' not only drives contemporary discourses about the past, but also about the present. About certain villages it is said that *oli stap lo daknes yet* 'they are still living in *daknes*', that is, they continue to follow traditional pre-Christian beliefs. These spots of un-Christianized strongholds of *daknes* are especially prestigious mission fields for missionaries from Fiji, whose national narrative is founded on a fierce initial resistance to Christianity, and therefore also, according to the same narrative, a heightened obligation to take the good news to the most reluctant Pacific communities. Contemporary *daknes* discourse can be viewed as a radical continuation of nineteenth-century Anglophone missionary discourses where the *darkness–light* metaphor figured prominently. This trope portrays modern, scientific, European, Christian ways of life as "light", and premodern, prescientific, and pre-Christian Pacific ways of life as "dark". A key text on missionary history, still promoted in the ni-Vanuatu public today, is unironically called "*From Darkness to Light*" (Gill 1994 [1894]). Anthropologist Margaret Jolly (2011) says:

> In much of the Christian Pacific the language of darkness and light used by early missionaries to contrast the time of heathen darkness with the spreading light of the Gospel has

> been indigenized and is the conventional metaphor in which people daily talk about past, present, and future. (Jolly 2011: 174–175)

In contemporary Bislama, the word for 'dark' is *tudak*, and it seems that the metaphor in *daknes* may not be as active as in English. Nevertheless, as a keyword of popular geopolitics, history, and spirituality, the *daknes* concept remains a prism for understanding and interpreting the world, in ways that not only aligns with colonial narratives but radicalizes them.

The other trend that I would like to discuss is "semantic reconfiguration". The key example here is the word *kastom*, roughly, 'traditional culture'. Lexically based on the English word *custom*, this word originally belonged to the same cluster of words as *daknes*. Colonial *kastom* was originally conceptualized as "the old, heathen way", construed in opposition to *skul* "the new, Christian way" (for a semantic study, see Levisen and Priestley 2017). But in the political discourses that accompanied the Pacific push for independence, *kastom* came to be recast and reconfigured as a positive concept. Anthropologist Lamont Lindstrom (2008) says:

> [I]t was not until the 1960s that an expansive kastom discourse spread more widely and intensified, taking on new political functions throughout these islands. It was not until the 1960s, likewise, that many people could accept that tradition was something other than an unfortunate inheritance of the dark days of heathenism. (Lindstrom 2008: 166)

In this reevaluation of *kastom* (cf. Jolly 1994: 248), a new semantic category has evolved, a "postcolonial *kastom*" (cf. Levisen and Priestley 2017: 95). In postcolonial *kastom* the past has been given a new interpretation that takes a favorable look at the past and stresses the relevance of the past for the present. But more than just that, *kastom* has turned into a cultural value, and a cultural keyword around which whole discourses are organized. This axiological change is remarkable, but the semantic reconfiguration is not simply a change from 'bad' to 'good'. Tied to the political rhetoric of nation-building, and endorsed by the worldviews of Pacific Christianities, it has sometimes been remarked that *kastom* in the process of its reevaluation, has lost its "magical" core, or even suppressed it (Keesing 1982; Jolly 1997). And surely, the postcolonial *kastom* concept is semantically an innovation that does not reflect "past cognition" in a realist perspective, but in a conceptual framework that allows a discourse of "past ways of knowing" and "past ways of doing things" into present discourses of political deliberation and national memory work.

3.6 *Paradise* and popular geopolitics

Paradise is an important "place concept", yet rarely studied from the perspective of geopolitics. The idea alone of juxtaposing the two words *paradise* and *politics* seems unusual, if not comical. Yet from the perspective of Postcolonial Semantics all place concepts matter if they matter to speakers, and for Popular Geopolitics, *paradise* and *paradise*-related concepts seem crucial for understanding world affairs.

"The Middle East", of course, is a region, where paradise discourse figures prominently. In his comparative work on Arabic and Hebrew words and worlds, cultural semanticist Sandy Habib has disrupted the default discourses of international relations by publishing emic research results in the communicative register of scientific discoveries, such as "Angels can cross cultural boundaries" (Habib 2011), and by asking new emically founded research questions, such as "Can God and Allah promote intercultural communication?" (Habib 2015). Habib studies what he calls "folk religious concepts" including place concepts like Arabic *janna* and *jahnnam*, Hebrew *gan eden* and *geyhinom* – and their closest English counterparts *heaven* and *hell* (Habib 2018, 2020). An insight from Habib's work is that the polysemy of folk religious words often bridge the highly sacred and the mundane registers, and that this bridge can offer rich points for cultural-linguistic analysis. Also, the area of tension between traditional, religious, secular, and post-secular meaning-making figures prominently in this work.

Inspired by these ideas and tensions, this section explores Popular Geopolitics through two comparable semantic constructs, the Anglo English word *paradise*, and the Bislama word *paradaes*. Arguably, the Judeo-Christian narrative of *paradise* forms the historical backdrop for contemporary popular discourses of *paradise* in Anglo English. But importantly, numerous concepts comparable to *paradise*, be that non-human agentive forces such as *angels*, etc., or other place concepts like *heaven* and *hell*, have been semantically secularized. One of the hallmarks of secular cognition, as it is conveyed through secularized (or semi-secularized) linguacultures like modern Anglo English, is the strong division maintained between "real places" and "imaginary places": some places are there *in reality*, whereas others are not. Such divisions need to be accounted for in the semantic study of secularization, but from a semantic viewpoint, we will maintain that all place concepts are products of collective imagination, and, at the same time, that all these imaginations are real insofar as they are real to speakers.

3.6.1 *Paradise* and *paradaes* in the Contact Zone

In the case study on *paradise* and *paradaes*, I will take my point of departure in a situated popular geopolitics of the contact zone, more precisely in the conceptual encounter of *paradise* as conceived by Anglo tourists visiting Vanautu, and of *paradaes* discourse as understood by ni-Van locals. The Anglo tourist *paradise* is a common trope in discourses of holiday-making (on "paradise tourism" in Vanuatu, see also Taylor 2019). Semiotically, the tourist *paradise* links with a well-known visual trope in advertising that includes palm trees, beaches, and clear blue water as the prototypical constituents. Conforming to this trope, tourism agencies, resort owners, and tourists in Vanautu invoke *paradise* in their place-discourse. The examples below are taken from Anglo tourist discourses about Vanuatu:

(17) *Paradise awaits. Erakor Island is 16 acres of unspoilt tropical paradise perfectly positioned in the crystal blue waters of Erakor lagoon which flows to Pacific Ocean and beyond. From A$148.00 per person per night twin share.*

(18) *Welcome to Paradise. What more could you ask for. Palm trees, sandy beaches and clear blue ocean. HEAVEN ON EARTH!*

Paradisical semiotic capital translates very directly into economic capital in the Pacific. And in order to attract tourists, it is important to conform to exactly this semiotic potential. At the same time, the idealization comes with a price, as it can be very difficult to live up to the rhetoric of perfection that comes with the invocation of paradise. Behind the Anglo tourist *paradise* is a conceptual semantics that only hazily borrows from folk religious conception. This initial rhetorical frame of *paradise* can be represented as follows:

Paradise
people can say this word (paradise) when they want to say something very good about a place
someone can say it when he/she thinks like this about a place:
"this place is far from places where many people live
many people want to be in a place of this kind for some time (if they can)"

The important issue here is that *paradise*, in this sense, is not a "place of one kind", but rather a word that one can say when talking about a place, and also, it is a word that has intensity ("say[ing] something very good about a place"). Secondly, a key idea of the Anglo tourist *paradise* is that the locale is conceptualized

as being far away from the metropole (cf. the collocation "*tropical paradise*"), a desirable place, where people can only be at certain times (cf. the concept of "*tourism*", "*tourists*").

The idealized place conveyed by the semantics of *paradise* seems to portray a double scenario, one that conveys its visual characteristics, and one that deals with the emotions and affect of being in *paradise*. "They" in the paraphrase below, continue the perspective of the Anglo tourist.

Paradise (continued)
they want to be in this place, because places like this are like this:
there are many palm trees in these places,
there is a lot of water near this place
the sun shines at all times in this place
when people are in a place like this, they can do what they want to do
they don't have to do anything, if they don't want to do it
because of this they can feel something good at all times in this place
because of this they can feel something very good in the body
it is very good for someone, if he/she can be in a place like this for some time

The first scenario draws on the semantic molecules: *palm trees*, *water*, *the sun*, and *shines*, of which *palm trees* is the most specific molecule, and perhaps also the most *paradise*-invoking concept. The second scenario links the idea of 'doing' with ideas of 'feeling'. Tourists in *paradise* "can do what they want to do" and they also "don't have to do anything, if they don't want to do it" – ideas linked to aspects of *freedom, holiday,* and *happiness*. This results in the paradisiacal bliss of "feel[ing] something good at all times" and a state of bodily well-being, associated with the word *relaxation*. All these things taken together makes a stay in *paradise* highly desirable – consider the final line. This final component also stresses the transient nature of the *paradise* experience.

Against this tourist Anglo *paradise*, let us now consider the Bislama word *paradaes*. There are several points of similarity between the two concepts, but also important semantic differentiations. As noted in Section 3.4.2, the discourse of "place-praise" is extensive in Vanuatu, and the praise typically centers on either *Vanuatu*, a particular *aelan* 'island', or a particular *vilij* 'village'. Consider some examples (19–22) of place-praise in these string band and *reke* 'reggae' lyrics, where Vanuatu (19), Tanna, (20), Mele (21), and Santo (15) in various ways are framed as *paradaes*. Unlike in Anglo English where "secular *paradise*" is commonly associated with holiday-making and registers of tourism discourse, the Bislama *paradaes* is a rhetorical concept that attracts musical registers.

(19) *Vanuatu blong mi bambae mi no save fogetem yu samtaem /*
Yes mi laekem stap long yu from yu paradaes /
Ples bilong mi oltaem /
Vanuatu blong mi bambae mi no save forgetem yu
'My Vanuatu, I can never forget you /
Yes I love to live on you my *paradaes* /
My place always /
My Vanuatu, I will never forget you' (Krosrot)

(20) *Mi luk wan ples long drim blong mi /*
Gudfala ples, wan paradaes /
We ol man oli stap glad oltaem /
Ples ia nao hemi ples blo yu mo mi
'I see a place in my dream /
A good place, a *paradaes*, /
Where people are always glad /
This place is the place of you and me' (Naio)

(21) *Tenkyu papa God yu givim wan swit paradaes /*
Yes mi bilif tru nao se mi stap long paradaes /
O yes mi bilif tru nao se mi stap long paradaes
'Thank you father God for giving a sweet *paradaes* /
Yes, I truly believe I'm in *paradaes* /
O yes, I truly believe I'm in *paradaes*' (Tjibajiroas)

(22) *Santo aelan paradaes ples /*
mi laekem yu swit hom blong mi /
bambae mi mas kambak long yu /
O Santo aelan mi laekem yu
'Santo island, *paradaes* place /
I like you my sweet home /
I have to come back to you /
Oh Santo Island, I like you' (Vetlis)

It is clear from these examples that the local *paradaes* is a simile-based construction: a place that is *olsem paradaes* 'like *paradaes*'. *Paradaes* is rhetorical, it is something people can say about a place, and in this way similar to English *paradise*. But one major difference in the prototypical scenario between the Bislama place-praise and the tourist Anglo *paradise* is that *paradaes* is conceptualized as

'here', whereas paradise is conceptualized as 'somewhere else'. The Anglo tourist *paradise* is transient. It is something that one can buy access to for a short while, whereas Bislama *paradaes* is permanent. This makes *paradaes* a place of we-belonging, pride, and gratitude. In a paraphrase, we can capture these ideas as follows:

Paradaes (continued)
ol man oli save talem toktok ia (paradaes),
taem oli wantem blo talem wan samting we i gud tumas abaotem wan ples
ol man i save talem olsem taem hemi tingting olsem abaotem ples ia:
"mifala i liv lo ples ia, mifala i bin liv lo ples ia longtaem we longtaem finis
lo mifala ples ia hemi no olsem eni nara ples
fulap gudfala samting i stap hapen lo ples ia"

people can say this word (*paradaes*),
when they want to say something very good about a place
people can say it when they think like this about this place:
"we live here, we have lived here for a very very long time
to us this place is not like any other place
many good things are happening in this place"

The ni-Vanuatu gratitude for *paradaes* is often linked with a conception of "plenty". This plenty can relate to both cultural and resources, and not merely *palm tree* semiotics. Rather *ples i fulap long evri samting* 'the place has a lot of things', as exemplified by Ruatu string band lyrics:

(23) *Ples i fulap long evri samting/*
volkenu, landaeva, wotafol, waet sanbij /
riva flos kasem solwora, wael hos, big big tris, smaeling fes evri dei/
Vanuatu hom swit hom
'The place has a lot of things /
Volcano, land diver, waterfall, white beach /
A river that flows into the sea, wild horse, big big trees, smiling faces
every day /Vanuatu home sweet home'

Perhaps an additional thought needs to be added, given the highly important discursive practices of linking the divine to place. In the ni-Vanuatu context, the Christian narrative of *paradaes* is not demythologized as in the Anglo tourist *paradise*. The emic concept of a loving *papa God* 'father God', an all-knowing

creator and active agent in peoples' lives, links well with a discourse of gratitude: *tenkyu papa God yu givim wan swit paradaes* 'thank you God for giving us this sweet *paradaes*'. In a paraphrase:

Paradaes (continued)
lo semak taem ol man oli save:
ples ia i olsem, from papa God hemi wantem se ples ia i olsem

at the same time people know:
this place is like this because *papa God* 'father God' wanted this place to be like this

As we have seen, the Anglo tourist *paradise* translates very easily into visual tropes – or semiotic clichés – which in turn can be commodified and turned into tourism advertisements. By contrast, the "place-praise" of *paradaes* seems to be much more verbal and sonic in its orientation, and it has no, or very little, commodifiable value. In the final section, the semantic molecule *singsing* 'sing' is needed here to account for this verbal and sonic expressivity.

Paradaes (continued)
taem ol man oli tingting olsem abaotem wan ples, oli save harem wan gudfala samting
from hemia, fulap taem bae oli wantem blo talem moa gudfala samting abaotem ples ia
from hemia, fulap taem bae oli save singsing abaotem ples ia

when people think about a place like this, they can feel something good
because of this, at many times they want to say many more good things about this place
because of this, at many times, they want to sing about this place

The cryptodiverse contact-zone semantics of *paradise* and *paradaes* afford different popular geopolitical discourses. In the parallel worlds of tourists and locals these words are often superficially brought together in "tourist–local interactions", but these interactions rarely lead to deep semantic-conceptual reflection. In other words, the two meanings, *paradise* and *paradaes*, are most likely to stay in their state of cryptodiversity.

3.7 Concluding remarks

Word meanings are not just a window into popular knowledge, they *are* knowledges and views of the world. This is what makes semantic studies of the

word–place–people complex so important for studies in Popular Geopolitics, and Postcolonial Linguistics. The hidden and cryptodiverse nature of meaning is accentuated in postcolonial universes of meaning where the same, and similar, words – such as *paradise*/*paradaes* or *country*/*kantri* – co-exist in different popular, prototypical conceptualizations. The knowledges and views of the world that are captured in linguacultural conceptualizations are often not brought into theorizing on popular culture and geopolitics in any substantial way. However, it is precisely these concepts that afford discourses, which drive discursive change and maintain discursive fixities. The metalinguistic monopoly of Anglo ideas about the world captured in English keywords of place and geopolitics can blur the vision, and erase other knowledges and views, precisely because of the hidden forces of Anglo conceptualizations and affordances that are unconsciously imposed. A good example of such hidden force is the general acceptance of "space" as a universal human concept, or the rigid division between real and imaginary places that Anglo conceptions suggest. The postcolonial semantic approach to the study of place, and people in places, insists on giving words and word meanings a central role in this analysis. The approach seeks to study some of the most taken-for-granted words and meanings, including those that have been elevated to metalinguistic status, and those which often have Eurocolonial baggage and/or a modern Anglo take on world affairs. To denaturalize these defaults, cross-semantic confrontations are needed. The Bislama universe of meaning is just one out of many that offers correctives to Anglocentric theorizing about people in places. Only if these many correctives are studied in depth we can envision a shift from a monopolar to a multipolar study of the word–place–people complex.