

Ethnic Mobilisation and the Genesis of Development Agencies in the Melanesian Rural Sector

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Ethnic Grouping and Political Mobilisation

(...) an identity is not defined in a vacuum. It is constructed out of whatever is there - language, religion or characteristic ways of life. Nevertheless, it is clear that linguistic and religious homogeneity or attachment (*a fortiori* the attachment to a particular way of life) are social creations that cannot just be considered as the pursuit of an eternal tradition. They are created, with great effort, during difficult times (Wallerstein, p.319).¹

One of the most obvious ways in which individuals are able to perceive one another in New Caledonia is via ethnic grouping. But since the question of independence - and of "Kanak independence" - has become since 1977 the main factor in determining political oppositions, the domain of interethnic relations has become one of ideological confrontation. Those who believe in the maintenance of the territory within the French Republic oppose the aims and symbolism of "Kanak independence" by the notion of a "multiracial society". The symbolism of social projects with an ethnic slant has thus become the site of political activity and one of the sites where the struggle for the control of power occurs. In the case of New Caledonia, the activation of the notion of ethnic legitimacy owes a great deal to the ethnic components (in the political and cultural sense of the term) of a thrust for independence which - because it belongs to a minority within the electoral body - must try to impose itself by arguing for the political disfranchisement of a part of the population, all of this within a society characterised by the instability of certain of its elements and the relatively small demographic difference between the two main groups.²

Within this European settlement colony, fragile because - unlike nearby Australia and New Zealand - it did not offer land and resources capable of sustaining a wider colonial settlement, European domination has never been expressed in terms of a demographic hegemony.³ From 1880 on, when the territory sought Asiatic labour, the question of ethnic balance was posed. The response was in terms of a diversification of sources of

immigration, to which New Caledonian society owes some of its present elements.⁴ If the European attitude towards the Melanesians was steeped in the notion of their decline,⁵ the attitude towards non-indigenous races was governed by the need to control their intake by administrative procedures which could possibly be supported by white settlers.⁶ The repeal of decrees restricting movement and job access and the repatriation of Indonesians and Vietnamese between 1947 and 1964 mark the end of the ethnic question in classical colonial terms.⁷

The nineteen-sixties constitute a turning-point, characterised by Melanesian demographic growth, mass immigration and the genesis of the independence movement. Between 1960 and 1965 the GDP grew by thirty-six per cent. It grew by a further eighty-six per cent over the following six years (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.10). This expansion accelerated the immigration that had been occurring since the early fifties.⁸ Between 1968 and 1972, the population grew by twenty-five per cent and the number of salaried employees by sixty-four per cent.⁹ This influx reduced the relative size of the Melanesian ethnic group, reinforcing the loss of demographic superiority that had already occurred at the beginning of the decade.¹⁰ While they are a constant factor within New Caledonian society, interethnic relations are thus characterised differently according to different periods. Whereas the classical colonial period controlled ethnic movements, the following one, characterised by the demand for "Kanak independence" that had become by the end of the seventies the attitude of the majority of the Melanesian electorate, encouraged the notion of a "multiracial society" as a social goal, the key weapon of the ideological battle against independence. The challenge at the end of the sixties to the relationship between coloniser and colonised and of the colonial relationship as a dimension of social life led to a questioning of the relationship between the territory and metropolitan France¹¹ and to a debate about the ethnic composition of independence. These factors tended to crystallise around two poles, the immigrant and the indigenous.

A world-wide growth of ethnic activism and ethnic divisions underlines the specificity of the contemporary situation compared with earlier ethnic activism.¹² Thus we can suggest that the notion of "Kanak independence", which gains credibility from the history of colonial conquest, cannot solely explain by this alone the full extent of its support or even its genesis. "Kanak independence" as a notion emerges because of the massive concentration of Melanesians on the periphery of the socio-economic structure which, by discouraging their social differentiation, fails to allow the development of *interethnic* social categories favourable to independence, but rather produces an ethnic polarisation in this

respect.¹³ After situating the Melanesians in the social structure, we will study the impact of ethnic mobilisation on the present composition of the Melanesian rural sector, where the largest part of the ethnic group is concentrated.

Social Situation and Ethnic Situation

1. The Urban Pole and the Non-Agricultural Areas of Economic Activity

In 1982, New Caledonia had the highest *per capita* income in the South Pacific, far higher than most of the countries of the region.¹⁴ However, this high average conceals vast disparities in terms of job opportunity and income, which tend, as in many multiracial societies, to be related to ethnicity.

An obvious characteristic of the territory is the difference between urban Noumea and its peripheral communes, where most of the economic activity is concentrated, and the rest of the main island and outer islands, which, apart from the mines and tertiary jobs available in small localities, depend on agriculture whose contribution to the GDP has continued to decline over the past twenty years. In 1983, the greater Noumea urban area accounted for eighty-two per cent of non-agricultural jobs.¹⁵ This zone, which includes fifty-eight per cent of the population and seventy-eight to ninety-five per cent of the various immigrant communities, includes less than twenty-seven per cent of Melanesians (INSEE, 1984, p.81). These figures indicate the first social division in the territory in such an obvious fashion that it has been claimed that nowhere else in Melanesia has the spatial duality of development and underdevelopment been as marked as in New Caledonia.¹⁶ In this way one can contrast an indigenous population tending towards the rural and agricultural sectors, and immigrant populations which, taken as a whole, tend towards secondary and tertiary urban employment.

The relationship between ethnic and social situation is present at all levels of society, although in its least complex fashion in the agricultural sector.¹⁷ Thus the employment pattern in the primary sector of the mining industry, and in the combined secondary and tertiary sectors, is characterised by a preponderance of Europeans (in the tertiary sector) and by an over-representation of Melanesians and Wallisians in unqualified positions, which account for half of the employed workforce outside of the agricultural sector. The other ethnic categories (Vietnamese, "other races", Indonesians, Tahitians) fall somewhere in between, the first two groups tending to provide tradespeople or people in service industries, with the two others providing manual workers.

Europeans are over-represented by more than fourteen per cent in managerial, professional and other white collar employment categories, and substantially under-represented in manual employment. Conversely, the Melanesian, Wallisian, Tahitian, Indonesian and Ni-Vanuatu groups are concentrated in the latter categories with the Melanesians standing out by virtue of their under-representation in the category of qualified workers. The largest demographic group in the territory thus only provides twenty one per cent of the workforce in the dominant sectors of the economy into which it has been integrated for twenty years or so. This distortion of the Melanesian workforce has occurred to the general detriment of agriculture.

2. *The Rural and Agricultural Sectors in New Caledonia*

The rural sector of the main island is made up of 11,300 Europeans (21% of the ethnic group), 1,200 Indonesians (24%) and 28,200 Melanesians (45%). To these should be added the almost totally Melanesian population of the islands (17,000 or 27% of the ethnic group). The Wallisians, with eleven per cent of their total number or 1,300 people, are concentrated in the mining areas, although they have recently spread to certain centres on the west coast.¹⁸ The interior of the main island and the other islands, which make up more than ninety per cent of the territory's surface (DTSEE [see note 19], 1985, p.25) and forty five per cent of its population only account for eighteen per cent of non-agricultural jobs. Alongside the mining centres, whose activity fluctuates, agriculture provides the mainstay of this part of the territory which contains nearly ninety five per cent of those engaged in this activity (INSEE, 1984, pp.1943-45).

In contrast to other Melanesian countries, agriculture is the Cinderella of the New Caledonian economy. In the aftermath of colonial implantation, with all its failures, the decline of agriculture - already apparent before the war - has continued ever since. Its proportion of GDP has dropped from ten per cent in 1960 to five per cent in 1971 and to below two per cent in 1980.¹⁹ Along with the mining and metallurgical industries, construction, public works and engineering, agriculture is among those sectors of the economy whose added value fell by around fifty per cent between 1974 and 1983, within the framework of a recession which severely affected the production sector but which only represented an overall fall of thirteen per cent.²⁰ As with many social formations brought about by the conquest and subsequent integration of indigenous populations into a new system of production,²¹ New Caledonian agriculture is based on a juxtaposition of ethnic groups, lands and methods of land exploitation that brings into contrast European

agriculture often needing a great deal of space, and Melanesian agriculture, still largely devoted to subsistence and to small areas under cultivation per worker, but which involves eighty eight per cent of the agricultural workers of the country.²²

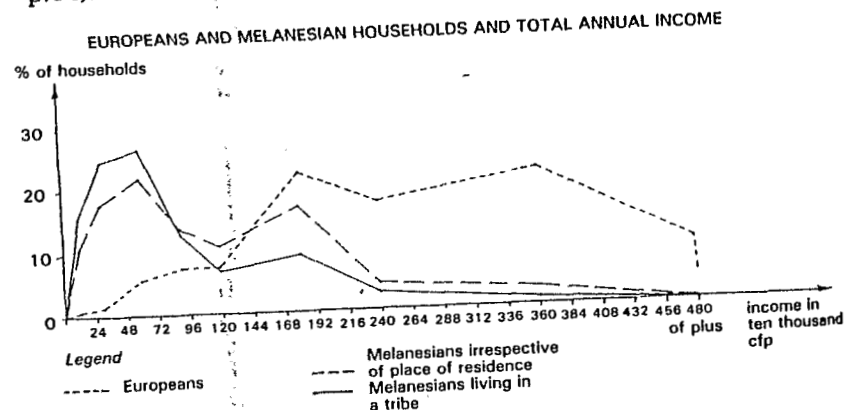
Although it is difficult to determine, the economic differentiation resulting from Melanesian agriculture remains small; where it has occurred, it does not seem to have been measured in terms of capital value so far.²³ However, there are vast differences in the European sector, due to the initial distribution of land and its later concentration.²⁴ In 1976, "120 proprietors (4.5% of the total) own more than half the allocated land". Eighteen individuals or companies (0.6% of the total) controlled one third.²⁵ Conversely, nearly fifty four per cent of the European properties in the west coast valleys and forty two per cent of those on the east coast were less than fifty hectares.²⁶ But the inequalities were above all apparent between the two sectors of production since immediately prior to the 1978 land reform, 1,000 non-Melanesians owned 370,000 ha of land and rented 120,000 ha, while more than 25,000 Melanesians only had at their disposal 165,000 ha of reserves and 40,000 ha of rented or owned land.²⁷

3. *Villages and Melanesian Agriculture*

It remains difficult to treat Melanesian agriculture with any great accuracy on account of the lack of anything like complete statistics in the areas of commercialisation and the breakdown of income. Thus, the 1980 INSEE socio-economic report remains the only comparative approach to income based on the two criteria of ethnic group and geographical location. Within these criteria, the income of Melanesians residing in Melanesian villages is notable by its modest level and for the importance in this respect of subsistence agriculture. Average annual family incomes are from thirty to fifty per cent less than those of the two categories comprising non-European and non-Melanesian rural dwellers, and Melanesian rural dwellers. They are over three times less than the highest incomes, which are those of European families living in urban areas (INSEE, Service territorial de Statistique (abbreviated hereafter as STS), n.2., p.31). But whereas some categories refer to very limited numbers of people, the category of Melanesians living "in a tribe" appears to refer to twenty-five to thirty per cent of the population in 1976 (INSEE, STS, n.d, pp.14 and 27).

Even though they make up the most disadvantaged group in terms of locality and socio-economic standing, Melanesian villages still contain substantial internal disparities of income. Income distribution figures indicate that fifteen per cent of all village households have at the most one fifth of the average Melanesian

household income, and forty per cent of all Melanesian households receive less than half the average income (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.335). There are apparently many agricultural workers in this category.²⁸ At the beginning of this decade, more than sixty per cent of Melanesian households, that is nearly half of all Melanesian households, belonged to the agricultural sector (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.14):



Melanesian agriculture must also be situated within the dynamics of the New Caledonian post-war economy. Although within the present period the use of money increased within the Melanesian village sector, it is still characterised by extremely low income levels. It is significant that commercial production (coffee, stock farming, food crops, citrus fruits, copra, fishing), often on a very modest level, remains the same throughout the period, and that for the most important of these - coffee and copra - production declined substantially.²⁹ Integration in the workforce and urbanisation, far from stimulating the organisation of production as was the case at the outset of the European capitalist economy, brought about a diminution in the number of agricultural workers, a regression in techniques and a decline in food production. While these phenomena are well established in Melanesia,³⁰ they were so marked in New Caledonia that in the space of thirty years, the Melanesians living there became the most urbanised population of the region.³¹ In 1956, 2,400 Melanesians, or seven per cent of their total, lived in Noumea. They were 7,000 (15%) in 1969, and 16,600 in 1983 (INSEE, 1957, pp.3-5; 1969, pp.25-26). At this stage they comprised twenty-seven per cent of their ethnic group

(INSEE, 1984, p.61). The number of salaried workers increased in proportion.

Between 1969 and 1981, the increase in the purchasing power of Melanesians of all social categories was 2.9% p.a., compared with only 2% p.a. for Europeans and 2.1% for Wallisians (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.43). And at 3.4% p.a., the increase within Melanesian villages was the highest of all. These figures reflect the integration into the salaried workforce of individuals who had previously been in the poorly paid sectors of agriculture and domestic economy. They also reflect a later change in the economy and a change in the rural exodus which was replaced by on the spot integration into the tertiary sector thanks to public sector employment.³² The increase in purchasing power is however unevenly distributed, since only thirty seven per cent of households in the category had someone in the workforce (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.39), and the absolute gap increased due to a drop in the value of subsistence work from nearly thirty one per cent in 1969 to only twenty per cent in 1981 (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.43). Whereas the increase in monetary revenue is 4.6%, that in respect of food crops is only half. The increase in welfare payments after 1978 is one form of state intervention that attempted to contain one of the consequences of the restructuring of the mining and metallurgical sector, which was a return of a number of Melanesian wage earners and, to a lesser extent, of non-Melanesian wage-earners, to the rural sector.³³ One must recognise that the 1974 to 1978 period marked the first wave of the recession and the disturbance of the existing political and social structure. It was also the gestation period for the themes adapted by the Melanesian nationalist movement after 1978 and which constitute new political and social issues enabling the Melanesian rural sector to take a new and wider role that had previously only revolved around the land question.

A Multidimensional Crisis

1. Economic Crisis, Political Process and the Development of Social Issues : the Genesis of Rural Melanesian Development Agencies.

There has never been in the history of New Caledonia any attempt at a coherent policy of Melanesian development which took heed of their evolution and was based on human reality rather than the power of words. It was worse than a botched job; nothing at all was done!³⁴

Social relationships are never as apparent as when they are in a phase of crisis, when the accompanying naturalisation process ceases, and when they are brought into question via the political process of change which occurs prior to a redefinition of social

positions.³⁵ The genesis of rural Melanesian development agencies is thus related to the economic and political crisis affecting New Caledonian society and to the ensuing process of polarisation. It was reinforced by the dialectic of a confrontation, leading to a restructuring of society and a policy of redressing the balance in favour of agriculture and rural areas.

Aid to the Melanesian rural sector was in the main *ad hoc* in the early stages, and later on the result of certain trends. It only became substantial as a result of economic and political problems which led to broader areas of Melanesian demands between 1974 and 1978 (although no movement had yet been constituted as such) within the framework of a multidimensional crisis³⁶ in which any action affecting the Melanesian rural area became inseparable - both politically and in terms of the symbolic logic used - from movements for cultural recognition, the reform of schooling and the restoration of lineage land. But whereas political unification of the majority of Melanesian parties involves a symbolic unification (the constitution of the "Kanak") which may subsequently appear as a collective project, quite separate kinds of action were taken in the various areas of dispute. Thus the Progressive Multiracial Union (UPM) campaigned for the creation of a fund for rural and island development (FADIL).³⁷ The creation of this fund in 1975 was part of a sustained policy of agricultural redevelopment, with its rhythm related to the spread of the crisis and the renewal of the State's administrative structures in 1981. It is reflected by increased financial aid; an attempt to diversify production; greater protection of internal markets; the establishment of land reform; and by growth in technical and educational aid. This reshaping of the rural sector gradually became inseparable from the reorganisation of the territory's economy, within which the hegemony of nickel seemed at last to be ending.³⁸ Within the context of a crisis that was all the more severe because it affected an economy unbalanced by the weakness of the productive sector and by strong demographic growth, monetary transfer no longer seemed the only economic safeguard.³⁹ The holding of a Development Summit prior to the first Triennial Plan was one of the highlights of a form of reorganisation based on the control of internal markets, agricultural development, diversification of local industry and the mining sector, and the strengthening of tourism and fishing.⁴⁰ The decisions of the Independence parties in respect of self-sufficiency in food production and development, as well as the debates at several Independence congresses about participation in regional institutions, transformed the notion of "development", which ever since annexation had formed a "European" ideological mainstay,⁴¹ into a hegemonic notion.⁴²

The creation of the FADIL constituted a break. For the first time, at an institutional level, the question of Melanesian agricultural development and of how it could be achieved was raised. Before this date, there were really no institutions apart from the churches and the administration - when coffee growing was imposed⁴³ - playing a role in the Melanesian rural sector. It was not until after the foundation of two religious associations which between 1946 and 1953 laid the way for their organisation into political parties, that the Melanesians were able to make their own claims. The rise to power of the Union Calédonienne, the framework law [loi cadre] of 1956 and the nomination of Melanesian ministers gave practical results in the form of the first significant land redistribution.⁴⁴ It was also in 1956 that Basic Education started, with Melanesian personnel and extremely modest means; for a long time it was the only example of a territorial institution working within a Melanesian environment - if one excepts occasional help from the Services Ruraux [Rural Agency].⁴⁵ Twenty years later, the FADIL approached the same question in different terms by tackling the legal and economic handicap (the inalienability of reserve land and the insolvency of the inhabitants) blocking credit access for Melanesians. Set up in order to help the development of agriculture, stock-farming, fishing, reforestation, cottage industry and tourism, the FADIL acted as guarantor vis à vis the lending agency and encouraged investment by giving bonuses and reducing interest rates. In 1982 it was replaced by the ODIL (Interior and Island Development Office) which retained its aims, but neither its mode of operation nor its style. The social trends and the elections between 1984 and 1986 led to the nominal replacement of the ODIL by the ODER [Regional Development Office] and then by the ADRAF [Rural and Land Development Agency].⁴⁶ all of which weakened the ability of French institutions to contribute to Melanesian agricultural development.

2. The Melanesian Agricultural Sector: Aid and Restructuring

During a period of social change with underlying political factors⁴⁷ it is difficult to abstract from what may be temporary gains and losses the major pointers of change in the social hierarchy, since these can be questioned with hindsight. From 1975 to 1986 the creation of a new field of aid relating to Melanesian agricultural development was followed by its consolidation at an institutional level via transformations in the autonomy and *modus operandi* of development agencies. With hindsight, the decade in question can be treated as a unified whole, characterised - however the stakes shifted and whatever the changes in socio-political temperature - as a period of crisis. The institutions of Melanesian rural development

thus appear to have had an induced birth within a context of urgency from 1975 onwards.⁴⁸ Three new fields of action emerged, each with its own rhythm of development: the development agencies and their work of education, technical assistance and diversification of production; the access of Melanesians to public decision-making structures; and rural and land policy-making.

2.1. Agencies for the Development and Diversification of Production

In a recent interview the director of ODIL estimated that 2,000 to 2,500 projects out of 10,000 had been supported by the FADIL and ODIL since 1975.⁴⁹ Given the number of Melanesians engaged in agriculture, these figures reflect the volume of aid, even if in half of the cases the projects failed.⁵⁰ The work of the FADIL cannot however be dissociated from that of the Rural Agency which, shortly before the FADIL was set up, began to play a more important role in the Melanesian sector in relation to projects that helped the former to begin its work. The Rural Agency helped subsequently in terms of technical aid when the work shared by the two bodies was divided.

Whereas the entire history of Melanesian agriculture, especially when coffee growing collapsed, was characterised by very limited commercial production, the public agencies have created in the past ten years the basis for a diversification whose ramifications must not be underestimated. Reafforestation, "operation" coffee, honey, orchards, copra, "FADIL boats", reestablishment of cattle raising, the construction of poultry-houses and pigsties, the raising of small animals - all of this is accompanied by training courses⁵¹ and the reinforcement of technical assistance to groups. Aid to the Melanesian sector increased even more because it took place within a context of general agricultural development and redefinition of the respective positions of European and Melanesian agriculture. After the 1985 regionalisation statutes, the adoption by the Independence Front of the strategy of development was in line with the aims of the metropolitan government, from the "Dijoud Plan" to the 1982 and 1985 statutes. This convergence of aims, along with land redistribution and the injection of funds, accounts if not for the form (family and group projects), at least for the extension of development projects from 1985 on.

2.2 A Redistribution of the Powers of Decision

The social pattern that was about to enter a phase of crisis was marked by the 1946 decrees introducing the equality of civic rights. While this represented an important weakening of the colonial relationship,⁵² the participation by Melanesians in power

and decision-taking structures was accompanied by a "Melanesian void" in respect of other institutional domains. Thus, until it became an issue, no policy of preservation of the Melanesian cultural patrimony was put in place. The 1975 to 1979 period was marked by a certain number of initiatives associated with the preparation of the seventh quinquennial plan, the holding of the "Mélanesia 2000" Festival, the creation of agencies such as FADIL, the Bureau of Vernacular Languages,⁵³ the Melanesian Cultural Institute, and the inauguration of the first land reform. These initiatives gained impetus with the coming to power of the socialists and the 1984-85 troubles, along with the regionalisation statutes that ended them. Contrary to what occurred in the preceding seven years, the land, cultural or development agencies that were created during this period (ODIL; Land Reform Agency; Kanak Scientific, Cultural and Technical Agency) did not depend on the local administration with its possibility of impeding progress. The statutes opened the way for further developments associating custom structures (created by the statutes) with territorial and regional authorities, for instance within the governing bodies of public agencies, including the ones just created.⁵⁴ The ODIL thus contrasted strongly with the FADIL on account of its status as a State body and by the association of custom representatives with its activities as well as members of its governing council. The Melanesian dimension could thus become an institutional part of territorial life, as instanced by the participation of custom representatives in the Development Summit or by the nomination of representatives of Melanesian professional organisations (union of graziers, producers' groups) to the governing bodies of various public or semi-public agencies. This State-centred tendency - present in an embryonic form during the previous seven years but running contrary to the territorial political majority - culminated in the powers linked to regionalisation and the drawing of electoral boundaries that gave the Independence Front control of three out of four regions. The powers of decision-making and financing, along with the legal institutions introduced by the statutes, broadened the perspectives already created by the development agencies, going outside the agricultural sector to bestow powers in the realms of economics, professional development and territorial development. These aid facilities provided the basis for an economic and ethnic redistribution of power wherein the new distribution of political power had a central place.

2.3 The Land Reforms

The "Dijoud Plan" broke with twenty-five years of *ad hoc* land redistribution that fell short of the increased need,⁵⁵ and

established the territory's first land reform. It founded the reform's legitimacy by giving the relationship between ethnic groups a moral dimension and admitted the cultural aspect of claims as a basis for both reform and its limits. Responding to the complete transfer of land sought in terms of the cultural claim,⁵⁶ the plan postulated that the "mythical value of land" only applied to specific sites (hillocks, "sacred sites") that could be separated from their surroundings: "geographical areas of varying size that are sometimes claimed although they cannot be considered as symbolic zones essential for the Melanesians".⁵⁷ Land redistribution was to be accompanied by attempts at development involving all ethnic groups.

Going beyond the limit set by the previous legislation, the land reforms of 1982 and 1985 provided that "customary laws of another kind [could] pre-exist established laws of a European nature".⁵⁸ On the basis of this, the lines involving custom rights, private property, Melanesians and settlers - even Melanesians alone - had to be redrawn. After consulting the various levels of the region (the region having regulatory power in land matters) and its Custom Council, along with the Communal Land Commissions⁵⁹ and the Land Reform Office, the French High Commission would determine the perimeters within which custom rights could be exercised. These were assigned to the relevant local law groups (GDPL), that is the "tribe", "clan" or family group.⁶⁰ The purchase of land and possible help in developing it was entrusted to the Land Reform Office, a State body, whereas previous land operations had been a territorial matter. The transfers were to add up to 170,000 ha over ten years,⁶¹ that is, a doubling of the reserve area of the main island prior to 1978.⁶² The redistribution was not however separable from economic, political and legal measures accompanying it, measures which made development and the abolition of socio-economic imbalance between ethnic groups the main aim of two sets of statutes, especially that of 1985: "There is a need for global economic development (...) for balanced economic development and, dare one say it, development that leads to a balance."⁶³ Seen as part of a whole, land reform organises the redistribution of land, provides a new legal basis for its exploitation, preserves private property outside custom zones and sets up "new forms of legal relationships binding Melanesian communities and the European cultivators to the land".⁶⁴ The land reform provisions relate to the overall objectives by giving the presentation of development projects priority over retrocessions and by situating these projects within the framework of the rural revival. The ordinances also create rural development zones facilitating the establishment of farmers of all ethnic origins to whom the land is leased or given.⁶⁵ Leasing is the key to settling conflicts relating to

land-holding, whether inter-ethnic or not. This series of measures formed a basis for the large scale transformation of Melanesian agriculture.

2.4. The Large Increase in Melanesian Collective Agricultural Ventures

From 1978 to the end of 1985, nearly 59,000 ha, or about one half of the total land acquired, were ceded to Melanesians,⁶⁶ involving an almost unprecedented increase in the number of Melanesian stock raising companies or cooperatives. From four in 1975 their number increased to twenty-four in 1978, reaching seventy-one - either established or in the process of establishment - in 1985. It has further increased since then with the stabilising of the political situation.

The reforms represent a quantitative and qualitative reversal of the prevailing land ownership situation. Now that it has been freed from at least one of its handicaps, that resulting from the shortage of land, Melanesian agriculture has a new basis from which it can develop. Although this is very recent and in spite of the extremely variable impact of land redistribution, several general features may be observed. Thus the acquisition of land on the plains can bring about a differential advantage reinforcing the existing inequalities of development between plain and mountain villages, these inequalities leading in turn to a differentiation between collective agriculture in upland areas and those with rich pasture land. The sometimes latent disadvantages of mountain land have led, in certain favoured areas on the west coast, to internal land transfers between Melanesians holding land rights at the bottom of the valley and lineage or village communities in the mountains. These transfers reflect the change in spatial orientation and the change from the precolonial use of space that has been brought about by commercial exploitation and a lack of mobility that are diametrically opposed to the precolonial itinerant way of life.⁶⁷

The cession of land has also as it were "freed up" for the Melanesians the land situation brought about by colonial dispossession. It has freed up land demands, bringing to the fore not only conflicting claims but also the question of inequalities in access to land and the adaptation of land rights. Going beyond coffee growing, which had brought about the first alterations of tenure, the increase in the number of stock farming groups is showing, for the first time on this scale, the complexity of the changes in the structure of land ownership and access to land compared with the precolonial situation.⁶⁸ Commercial exploitation necessitating large tracts of land poses even more acutely the question of redistributing the piecemeal land rights of precolonial

times which had hitherto been maintained within the limits imposed by the imposition of reserves and the limited scale of commercial agricultural activity, where the dimensions involved were dependent on precolonial factors (the relationship between land control and lineal status) but also factors brought about by the history of colonisation (the settlement of lineages outside their ancestral land) and factors relating to monetisation and unequal lineal demographic growth not necessarily related to lineal land prerogatives. Seen not only as an area of precolonial political power but also as a future economic issue, land redistribution is frequently the object of either latent or real dissent, whether within "original" lineages or between these and "outside" lineages more or less without land. Thus the control - and even the actual working - of land is a domain of political action and alternative strategies (whether they are called "customary" or "political") relating to legal status and distribution. The choice between "clanic attribution"⁶⁹ and "enlargement of reserves" has become a choice of paradigms, with clanic stockraising on the one hand and tribal on the other, leading to alternative notions of "Kanak socialism".⁷⁰ Whatever the time scale and ways of implementation, and as much for cultural reasons (whereby the restricted range of social differences would be pertinent) as by reason of occasional political activism related to land occupation, land reform would be the means of the first land redistribution between lineages within a general situation brought about a century earlier by the policy of *cantonnement*.

Conclusion

With a belatedness characteristic of Melanesia and indeed insular societies in general,⁷¹ agitation for a new State has become a major phenomenon in New Caledonia. But beyond the telescoping of an initial situation - the annexation and the bringing about of a form of political domination crossing ethnic boundaries - and a contemporary situation characterised by decolonisation, the present crisis of New Caledonian society and the polarisation it has brought about lead one to question ethnic movements and the mechanisms of their political and symbolic unification.⁷² Although ethnicity is rarely the sole criterion of social situation and hence social, ideological and political positions never totally coincide with ethnic ones,⁷³ the tendency towards an ethnic bipolarisation with at the one pole the majority of the indigenous population and at the other the majority of the originally migrant population, is very marked in New Caledonia. The possibility that social divisions should occur with such force along ethnic lines therefore appears linked to the positions occupied by the ethnic groups within a socio-economic structure characterised by the weakness of its

productive sector and its demographic base and by monetary transfers that certain social strata - migrant and, to a lesser degree, indigenous - can extract from its attachment to a developed parent state. The various groups that have formed in the context of the independence question thus differ in their social makeup. The anti-independence group is characterised by a large degree of social heterogeneity linked to the economic and political uncertainties that independence - depending on the form it took - might bring about, as well as to the economic difficulties encountered in their homeland by the highly disadvantaged ethnic group of Wallisians.⁷⁴ Conversely, the pro-independence group is characterised by a greater social homogeneity, since less than half of the Melanesian workforce is wage-earning and only a relatively small stratum is in skilled occupations. The relegation of the majority of the Melanesian workforce to the non-skilled wage-earning sector or to a largely neglected agricultural sector thus creates the possibility for social divisions along racial lines. For reasons related to the size of the rural sector and the manner in which social differentiation is brought about within the ethnic group, the economic crisis and political agitation of the last ten years have allowed the Melanesian rural sector to emerge as a central political factor, reinforced by the cultural symbolism (essentially rural) of the independence movement. This sector has thus been affected by profound upheavals due to the creation of development agencies, the introduction of the first land reforms, regionalisation, and general political agreement that development should occupy a primordial place. Political shifts over the past few years - and the extent to which they have been challenged was one of the major factors in the change of French government in 1986⁷⁵ - have considerably increased the production potential of the Melanesian rural sector (in land, capital, managerial support, training, powers of decision). If the acquisition of regional political power appears in this respect as one of the keys to the growth of production and to the emergence of new social categories, it is certainly too early to tell what shape the new Melanesian rural sector will take, especially in respect of the economic outcome of development policies. Nevertheless, the more or less large proportion of workers that it will continue to represent, as well as the resolution of questions relating to availability of land, access to land ownership, and to the social forces that may be needed to control them, will constitute its cardinal features.

Translated by Michael Spencer

NOTES

1. E. Wallerstein, *Le Système du monde du XVe, siècle à nos jours.1: Capitalisme et économie-monde. 1450-1640* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).
2. In 1983, the Territory's population was 145,368, with 42% being Melanesian, 37% European, 8% Wallisian and Futunian, 3% Tahitian, 3% Indonesian, 1% Vietnamese and 0.85% Ni-Vanuatu (INSEE, 1984, p.61). Between 1976 and 1983, 10,000 people emigrated (DTSEE, 1985, p.41). Most were Europeans or Tahitians, the latter coming or going according to the economic situation of the two territories (see Jean Fages, "La communauté tahitienne de Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Cahiers ORSTOM, série Sciences Humaines*, IX, 1(1972):75-86). There is a turnover due to the arrivals and departures of metropolitan French on contract appointments, especially teachers. The more or less recent arrival of nearly a quarter of the population (i.e. born outside the Territory)(DTSEE, 1985, p.43) and demographic gaps readily explain that political debate is characterised by the questioning of the presence of either individuals or ethnic groups and that demographic relationships are one of the keys to the present political situation. As the Melanesians have one of the highest levels of those aged under 18, their voting proportion is thereby reduced. The independence movement is attempting to overcome this problem and justify its policies by promoting the notions of *autochthony* and *legitimacy* which would exclude non-Melanesians from any referendum (see Construire, 6 (1986)). Some opponents attempt to equate these notions with racial discrimination.
3. With a total area of 18,700 ha², New Caledonia is of modest size. The proportion of good farming land is only 2.6% of the total (50,000 ha), and of good pastoral land only 13.1% i.e. 250,000 ha. (See M. Latham, "Aptitudes culturales et forestières" in *Atlas de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Map 28, Paris: ORSTOM, 1981.) The history of all manner of attempts at cultivation (sugar-cane, cotton, vanilla, rice...) is one of great difficulties.
4. J.-P. Doumenge, "Diversité ethno-culturelle et expression politique en Nouvelle-Calédonie", in *La Nouvelle-Calédonie, Le droit et la République*, (Paris: Pedone, 1985), pp.37-63. Initially the workforce came from the New Hebrides. Later, the territory saw the arrival of Indians from Reunion, Chinese, Tonkinese, Japanese and Javanese (p.39).
5. Dorothy Shineberg, "Un nouveau regard sur la démographie historique de la Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 76, XXIX(1983): 33-43.
6. Doumenge, p.40
7. The classical colonial period saw the indigenous or immigrant population put to work by various forcible means (forced labour, capitulation tax, work contracts, fines), by various measures aimed at protecting the free immigrants (the banning of weapons and restrictions on movement within Noumea) or by measures restricting access to commercial growing to free settlers. These measures were common throughout Melanesia, for greater or longer periods. See J. Connell, *Migration, Employment and Development in the South Pacific*, Country Report no. 10, New Caledonia (Noumea: South Pacific Commission/International Labour Organisation), 1985, p.2. For Papua-New Guinea see A. Amarshi et al, *Development and Dependency: The Political Economy of Papua New Guinea*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.179.
8. See J. Bonnemaison et al in *Atlas de La Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Plate 26.
9. J.-C. Roux, *Le 'Boom' du nickel de 1968 à 1972 en Nouvelle-Calédonie : Mythes et réalités économiques* (Noumea: ORSTOM, 1976), pp.2-8.
10. Although recent studies (e.g. J. Connell p.15) suggest that the Melanesians became a minority group during the economic development of 1969-1971, this situation had already come about by the 1962 census (INSEE, 1976, p.10). Melanesian demographic majority has never been firmly established since the beginning of the century because in 1921, when at its highest relative level, the Melanesians only represented 57% of the population and two censuses prior to 1962 (in 1931 and 1945) show it at or below 50% (INSEE, 1976, p.10). The narrowness of the gaps between ethnic groups is thus also the result of a weak precolonial demography, usually estimated at some 40,000 (Shineberg p.34).
11. A distinction was made between *colonial link* [Fr.: *rapport colonial*] or political dependence on a parent country and *colonial relationship* [Fr.: *relations coloniales*] or legal or other relationships between individuals.
12. See Susan Olzak, "Contemporary ethnic mobilization", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9(1985): 355-74; R. Fenwick, "Ethnic Culture and Economic Structure : Determinants of French-English Earnings Inequality in Quebec", *Social Forces*, 61, 1(1982): 1-23; R. Lardinot, "Les Luttes de classement en Inde", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 59(1985): 78-83.
13. The crystallisation of ethnic gaps subsequent to the 1977-78 elections can be seen through the changes in the policies or ethnic composition of parties such as the Union Calédonienne or the Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (formerly Union Progressiste Multiraciale). Later attempts to close these gaps failed (lack of support for the FNSC) or are stagnating (OPAO, LKS).
14. *Per capita* income was \$A6,100, compared with \$7,200 in French Polynesia, \$4,100 in Guam and \$3,400 in American Samoa, all territories dependent on a parent state. It fell to \$1,800 and \$1,100 respectively for Fiji and Niue and \$980 for the Cook Islands (a State associated with New Zealand). Everywhere else it was between \$830 (Tonga) and \$420 (Kiribati). See South Pacific Commission: *South Pacific Economies in 1982 : Statistical Summaries* (1982).
15. INSEE, 1984, pp.194-98. S.a. P. Pillon, "Développement et enjeux sociaux en Nouvelle-Calédonie: l'opération café", *Les Temps Modernes*, 464(1985): 1623-53.
16. J. Connell, p.13.
17. P. Bourdieu, "Espace social et genèse des 'classes' ", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 52-53(1984): 4.
18. J.-C. Roux, "Un exemple de migration - enracinement dans le Pacifique-Sud : la communauté wallisienne et futunienne de Nouvelle-Calédonie", *Cahiers ORSTOM, série Sciences humaines*, XX1, 4(1985): 474-75.
19. INSEE, STS, n.d., p.10; *Direction territoriale de la statistique et des études économiques*, 1985, p.147 [abbreviated hereafter to DTSEE].
20. DTSEE, 1985, p.149. The drop in agricultural added value was 46%, whereas it reached 53% for engineering industry, 70% for building and public works, 68% for mines and 73% for metallurgy. The overall drop in productivity was 42%. Compensations in added value came from service and commercial activities and administration, which grew by 54%. Domestic salaries fell by 22%.
21. R. Fenwick p.6; D. Delaunay, "Indien, caboclo et paysan. Formation du paysannat dans un état nord-est du Brésil, le Ceará", *Cahiers ORSTOM, série Sciences humaines*, XX, 1(1984): 43-67.

22. INSEE, 1984, pp.184-85. There are factors suggesting that the last census may have underestimated the number of Melanesians in agriculture. For instance Belep was supposed only to have 4 persons out of 686 (INSEE, 1984, p.10) engaged in agriculture. A comparison between the 1976 and 1983 censuses also shows that if one excludes Ni-Vanuatu and Tahitiāns, it was only the Melanesians who dropped - by 15%. They are said to have fallen from 19,313 to 16,345 (INSEE 1976, table 20; 1984, p.185).
23. The work of J.P. Doumenge on Melanesian coffee growing shows that the size of coffee plantations varies from between less than 5000m² to more than 3 hectares (*Paysans mélanésien en pays Canala*, Bordeaux: Ceget/CNRS, 1974, p.10). These differences have not however led to social inequalities as has occurred elsewhere in Melanesia, (Amarshi, p.42). The reasons are perhaps due to the limited availability of land and workforce, the small variation in regional ecology and the monopolisation of the coffee industry by firms and white settlers.
24. A. Saussol in *Atlas de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, plate 36.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid. The European population is socially heterogeneous by virtue of its demographic size (Fenwick, p.19): a quarter of the 758 Europeans engaged in agriculture were agricultural workers (INSEE, 1984, p.185).
27. Saussol, ibid. Doumenge in *Atlas de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, plate 33.
28. This salary band of between 300,000 and 599,000 cfp has the highest proportion of those engaged in agriculture (of all ethnic groups, 26%). Salary bands below or equal to 599,000 cfp cover 72% of the territory's population engaged in agriculture, regardless of ethnic origin (INSEE, STS, n.d., p.35).
29. Coffee production, which was still in excess of 2,000 tonnes between 1962 and 1964 (see A. Saussol, "Le Café en Nouvelle-Calédonie. Grandeur et vicissitudes d'une colonisation", *Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer*, XX(1967): 275-305). It has fluctuated around 500 tonnes for ten years or so (see *Direction du Développement et de l'Economie Rurale (DIDER) Service des Études Économiques des Marchés et des Produits*: Rapport d'activité, Noumea, 1985). The production of copra diminished from 2 to 3,000 tonnes at the beginning of the sixties (see B. Antheaume in *Atlas*, plate 39) to 700 tonnes in 1981 (DTSEE, 1982, p.105). The estimated production of food fell by 40% between 1975 and 1984 (DIDERSEMP, 1985, p.87).
30. J. Barrau, *L'Agriculture vivrière autochtone de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, (Noumea: SPC, 1956), pp. 64 and 71. Subsistence Agriculture in Melanesia (Hawaii: Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin no. 219), p.12.
31. The level of urbanisation is 13% in Papua New Guinea (1980), 8% in the Solomons (1976) and 12% in Vanuatu (1979), all essentially Melanesian countries. It is 38% in Fiji (1976), a country with an Indian majority (J. Connell, "Islands Under Pressure: Migration and Urbanisation in the South Pacific", *Ambio*, 13 (1984):306-12), Pacific Islands Conference, Pacific Islands Development Program, Hawaii, East West Center, 1985).
32. Antheaume, *Atlas*.
33. Connell, Country Report no.10, p.28.
34. A. Saussol, "La Propriété foncière mélanésienne et le problème des réserves en Grande-Terre néo-calédonienne", *Cahiers du Pacifique*, 9 (1970): 124.
35. Bourdieu, p.6; P. Champagne, "La Manifestation. La Reproduction de l'événement politique", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 52-53 (1984): 38.
36. Wallerstein, p.256.
37. Union Progressiste Mélanésienne, Comité d'Action, "Fonds d'aide au développement équilibré" (1975); Bwenando, 1986.
38. *Commission des affaires économiques et du plan, Rapport d'information au Sénat*, no.234. (Paris: Senate, 1982).
39. Ibid.
40. *Nouvelle-Calédonie et dépendances. Préparation du premier plan triennal de Nouvelle-Calédonie. Rapport préliminaire*, Vol.1(1983). These measures are close to those adopted for French Polynesia from 1975 on. See G. Blanchet, *L'Economie de la Polynésie Française de 1960 à 1980*. Papeete: ORSTOM, Sciences Humaines, Notes et documents no. 10(1984), and *Commission*, pp.29-44.
41. P. Wallerstein, "Le Développement du concept de développement", *Sociologie et sociétés*, XV, 2(1984): 133.
42. This is shown by the work of the independence parties and within the regions controlled by them, via political mobilisation (see *L'Avenir calédonien*, no. 959); the transfer to the regions of powers formerly held by the ODIL (the awarding of bonuses); the setting up of development aid committees in institutions as diverse as cultural associations, the churches etc.; and very recently the title and content of the liaison magazine *Construire* of the centre, north and islands regions.
43. Saussol, "La Propriété foncière", p.20.
44. A. Saussol, *L'Héritage. Essai sur le problème foncier mélanésien en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: Société des Océanistes, 1979), pp. 368-70.
45. Personal information. See also the interview given by the director of ODIL to Bwenando (no.10, 1986): "The technical branch was used to working for the settlers and the FADIL clientele worried them". One should however note the role of this branch in setting up the first cooperatives and production companies in 1958 and 1969 (Saussol, *L'Héritage*, pp.410-30).
46. *République française, Journal Officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no. 6188 pp. 1633-41 (1982); no. 6388, pp. 1781-1825(1985); no. 6432, pp.1004-8(1986).
47. L. Boltanski, *Les Cadres* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), pp.63-153.
48. "The social stability and harmony of the Territory are to a large extent dependent on the participation of the Melanesians in economic development" (UPM, see note 37).
49. Bwenando, no.11(1985).
50. Bwenando, no.11(1985). Although it has been reproached in this respect, the work of the FADIL and ODIL has not been restricted to Melanesians. Social and economic criteria determine the granting of aid, and as the Melanesians form the largest ethnic group in the agricultural sector they therefore receive most of the aid. The size of the projects thus helped can be estimated by virtue of the fact that a lot of them are collective.
51. "More than 1,000 people have attended FADIL and ODIL courses" (Bwenando, no.12(1986)).
52. Y. Lacoste, Editorial to *Hérodote*, 37-38(1985): 3-30. The 1946 decrees put an end to the classical colonial development and the organisation of forced labour. Elsewhere in the Pacific, it was not until the nineteen-sixties that Australia carried out similar reforms in Papua New Guinea (Amarshi, pp.179-182), or that she gave freedom of movement, citizenship and civil rights to the Aborigines (see C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1978), p.222; S. Thiele, *Yugul. An Arnhem Land Cattle Station* (Darwin: ANU North Australia Research Unit, 1982), p.4.)
53. Attached to the Territorial Pedagogy Research and Documentation Centre (CTRDP), set up at the same time.

54. The preceding period had only seen the *Promotion mélanésienne*, a committee of the Territorial Assembly.
55. Saussol, *L'Héritage*, p.377.
56. Union Calédonienne, XVème Congrès de l'Union Calédonienne, 1984, p.14.
57. Secrétariat d'Etat aux Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer, 1978. *Un Plan de développement économique et social à long terme pour la Nouvelle-Calédonie. Le projet de la France en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, p.307.
58. See note 46, no. 6188, p.1638.
59. These commissions are structured to have representation from custom landowners and private landowners.
60. See note 46, no. 6388.
61. *Office Foncier* (Land Office), Annual Report, 1984, p.5.
62. The 1978 land claims amounted to 121,000 ha (see Saussol, *Atlas*, plate 36).
63. See note 46, no. 6388, p.1785.
64. Note 46, no. 6188, p.1638.
65. Ibid.
66. Land Office, 1986, p.22.
67. Barrau, *L'Agriculture vivrière*, p.54.
68. Coffee production brought about the first land problems of this nature. These increased with stockfarming as practised by farming groups, on the one hand because the areas are greater and therefore involve a larger number of custom claimants, on the other because the best land could be used for other purposes, which was not formerly the case with mountain land.
69. See note 46, no. 1511(1980), pp.627-28.
70. PALIKA, Kanak, 115(1986): 2-3; Union Calédonienne, XVème Congrès de l'Union Calédonienne (1984), p.15.
71. Lacoste, in *Hérodote*, p.6. Out of the twenty-five political entities making up the Pacific Basin Islands, nine are independent, and two have a government in association with another power. See P. de Decker, "Le Pacifique comme espace régional autonome, Australie, Nouvelle-Zélande et pays insulaires", *Bulletin de la Société des études océaniques*, XX, 236(1986):13.
72. P. Bourdieu, "Espace Sociale", p 11; P. Champagne, "La Manifestation".
73. L.A. Després, "Conclusion. Towards a Theory of Ethnic Phenomena", *World Anthropology : Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Rural Societies* (1975), pp.193 and 203; Wallerstein, *Le Système du monde*, p.15.
74. J. Connell, Country Report no. 10, p.19. The Wallisian and Futunian population of New Caledonia is as large as that of Wallis and Futuna, a phenomenon that is common in Polynesia and relates to the economic differences between Polynesia and Melanesia. See T.I.J. Fairbairn, *Island Economies. Studies from the South Pacific* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1985).
75. The Land Office and ODIL, State bodies, have been replaced by a single territorial body, the ADRAF. This has no custom representatives on its governing body, and its Melanesian representation (for the regions) is minimal (see note 46, no. 6432 (1986), pp. 1004-8.

8

The Churches in New Caledonia and The Colonial Order

Jean-Marie Kohler

1. From Colonial Collaboration to Dispossession

1.1 The Civilising Influence of the Missions¹

For more than a century, the collaboration between the Churches and the government administration counted among the most important factors in the development of New Caledonia. The first Marist missionaries were set down from a warship at Balade in 1843; for the first time on the archipelago the French flag was hoisted on the mission that was founded there. The ceremony consisted of a solemn mass and twenty shots symbolically fired from a cannon. As a plaque at the front of the cathedral in Noumea until recently bore witness, the Catholic church openly and for a long time claimed the credit for "giving this country to God and to France". The relations between the Church and the government administration have been good and beneficial to both sides from then till now; the occasional differences brought about by their competing for the control of the indigenous people did not weaken the fundamental solidarity uniting them within the colonial system.

On the other hand, Protestantism had difficult beginnings in the Caledonian archipelago, in spite of successful settlement in the Loyalty Islands from 1840-1850. It was encouraged by British colonial expansion and more or less allied to this movement, and was accused of serving the political and commercial interests of England. As a result it found itself exposed to the hostility of the French authorities until the turn of the century. It is only after coming under the control of the Society of Evangelical Missions in Paris and after a conflict between the anti-clerical Governor Feillet and the Catholic church, that the Congregational Churches of the Loyalty Islands were authorised to continue their work on the mainland. But from then on the Protestant denomination acquired, in its turn, legitimate status

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NEW CALEDONIA

ESSAYS IN NATIONALISM AND DEPENDENCY



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