The Impact of Colonial Administrative Policies on Indigenous Social Customs in Tahiti and New Caledonia

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IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 19TH CENTURY, AND WITH AN INTERVAL OF 11 YEARS BETWEEN the two events, France secures a foothold in two Territories of the South Pacific: Tahiti in 1842, and New Caledonia in 1853. Following a period of joint administration, the two colonies continue to be run by administrative personnel answering to the same higher authority, some of whom serve successively in both Territories. Yet this Administration rules over two very different indigenous societies. The first Europeans are quick to notice these differences and to exaggerate them greatly.

Furthermore, between the two Territories, the colonial objectives are somewhat different, and the potential for colonisation unequal. The establishment of the protectorate in Tahiti in 1842 stems from the personal initiative of Rear-Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, whose only commission from the French government was to take possession of the Marquesas Islands, with the intention of providing a refitting station for the whaling fleet and a logistics support base for the navy in the Pacific. So, there is no colonial policy at the time of the estab-

1 This study considers only Tahiti and its neighbour island Moorea, and not the whole of the 'Etablissements français de l'Océanie', which became 'Territoire de Polynésie française' in 1957. The time span required for the assembling of the Etablissements français de l'Océanie (from 1842 to 1901), and the variety of forms taken by the French presence (protectorates, annexations), would make the study of the whole very complex. It was in Tahiti, and mostly for Tahiti, that the major colonial policies were elaborated, before being applied to the other island groups where this was possible.

2 Until 1860 New Caledonia came under the Etablissements de l'Océanie, for which the headquarters were in Tahiti. Although granted the status of a separate colony at that date, it did not have its own Governor until 1862.


4 In a chapter called 'De la colonisation dans l'Océanie', Vincendon-Dumoulin mentions this division of the Pacific into two distinct human families: 'The people who inhabit the islands of the Southern Ocean are divided into two different categories, according to the difference in skin colouring. The yellow or coppery race covers the Eastern and Southern portion of Oceania, while black skinned natives occupy the Western part of the South Seas. When one journeys through these fascinating islands, one is soon impressed by the high level of social sophistication of the yellow people, especially when compared to that of their black neighbours.' C. A. Vincendon-Dumoulin and C. Desgraz, Les îles Taiti: Esquisse historique et géographique (Paris 1844), 103.

5 Dupetit-Thouars did the same thing the following year, by causing the annexation of New Caledonia, acting on secret and limited instructions from the Minister of the Navy and Colonies, without referring to his government, and after the Minister had resigned. The French government did not follow up his action. (Joel Dauphin, 'Du nouveau sur la première prise de possession de la Nouvelle-Calédonie par la France (1843–1846)', in Paul de Deckker and Pierre-Yves Toullelan (eds), 'La France et le Pacifique', Revue française d'histoire d'Outre-mer, 76 (1989).
lishment of the protectorate, and the Franco-Tahitian war of 1844–47 does not help to raise hopes of a rapid development of the country. It will not be until much later that the local administrators will attempt to turn the island into a commercial centre and to promote agriculture. In any case, these types of colonial projects are more the concern of the local Administration than of the French central government; neither do the metropolitan planners contemplate making Tahiti a centre of European settlement.

By contrast, the annexation of New Caledonia reflects a deliberate intention of the French government: that of providing a colony able to support penal settlements. The size of the island, its climate, the presumed fertility of its soil, raise hopes of an eventual large European colonist settlement. This vision of the potential of New Caledonia is a new thing at the beginning of the 1850s, as can be seen from the report of Dr Proust, ship’s surgeon on board the Alemène in 1850, which appears to have influenced the decisions of the government: ‘On the day when New Caledonia, now thoroughly untamed, becomes the fief of a civilised people, it will, in my opinion, rapidly progress toward prosperity. The excellence of its climate, its fertility, its wholesomeness, its many riches, and its proximity to large Australian colonies . . . are all guarantees of success for colonising ventures in this great island.’6 This glowing description is in stark contrast to reports of the poverty of the soil brought back by Cook and D’Entrecasteaux. In 1844, the poverty version still predominates: ‘Among all these tropical lands, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands are the only ones remarkable for their aridity . . . we must name New Caledonia, of this entire portion of the Southern Ocean, as the least suitable location for a farming colony’.7

This essay attempts to explore some of the ways in which the colonial Administration policies have affected the organisation of, and given new directions to, the indigenous societies of both countries, through control of the land and of the structure of political authority. The similarities and the differences between the Tahitian and the New Caledonian situations will tend to show that there has not been a single process of French colonisation in the South Pacific, even though in both cases the actions of the Administration have focused invariably and foremost on the fundamental control of authority and land ownership within the colonised societies.

**FACED WITH** a Tahitian society which already possessed European-type institutions - a legislative assembly, a code of laws and a judiciary independent from political power - which the protectorate recognised by agreeing to a sharing of power, the French Administration decided on a policy of assimilation. It placed

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7 Vincendon-Dumoulin and Desgras, _Iles Taiti_, 101–2.
the subjects of Queen Pomare and the European colons under a common code of regulations and laws.

Right from the beginning, fear of losing control of the land had been the central feature of Tahitian society's relationship with the outside world. Even though the European presence remained limited — at the end of the 1830s there were fewer than 100 European residents in Tahiti, with approximately 8,000 Tahitians — the Tahitian legislators of Pomare's kingdom decided in 1835 to ban marriages between Tahitian women and foreign men, and, in 1838, all sale of land to foreigners. A law passed in 1838, contemporary with the land-sale ban, had decreed, on moral grounds, the compulsory marriage of a Tahitian woman and a foreign man by whom she expected a child. The 'whereases' of the law of 1842 confirming the ban on marriages between Tahitians and foreigners were quite clear on the purpose of the ban. The point was to prevent the grabbing of land by foreigners — that is, Europeans — who were thought to be bent on this: 'from the notion that the land belonging to a woman of Tahiti, as well as the properties of her family, would be taken over if she entered into a marriage with a foreigner . . . the belief of the law makers being also that the coveting of land in the territory is the true source of the sentiment which induces in foreigners the strong desire to wed Tahitian women'.

There does not appear to be a consensus of opinion about the form of land ownership under Pomare's reign, whether individual or collective, among the historical or anthropological authors, or even whether any form of ownership existed. For example, Michel Panoff thinks that 'whereas the European concept of land ownership is totally alien to Polynesians, the concept of land tenure, which is to say a complex amalgam of multiple rights to the land, is perfectly familiar to them'. This last point may be contrasted with the definition of land ownership in Tahitian society at the time of the first European visitors, as given by De Bovis in 1855:

the particular character of Tahitian land ownership is to be hereditary and indivisible among members of a single family; it can be taken away through acts of war, or given away through voluntary gifts, or can be confiscated — although this last occurs but rarely and is more of an accident than a custom. It isn't their habit to exchange or sell their estates. So that, even today, Europeans can only manage to acquire land in the territory with great difficulty.

And in his description of the social hierarchy, De Bovis makes the distinction between the ariti, who are the chiefs, the raatira, who are simply land-owners, and

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10 Article 1 of Law VIII of 1842.
existence of land ownership in Tahiti in 1842 seems well established in the code of laws of that year for the period immediately prior to the protectorate. Let us note also that Jean-François Baré mentions a body of laws on ‘private property’ as early as 1825.13

Article 1 of Law VIII banning marriage between Tahitians and foreigners states that

land ownership in Tahiti takes a different form, and does not correspond to what happens in any other country. In Tahiti, the woman owns the land outright, herself and her family are the true owners; there are no others. In Oahu, and in some other countries, the land remains in the hands of some exalted individuals descended from the ancestors through the successive generations, and it cannot fall in the hands of persons of inferior rank.

This land ownership can even be individual, as indicated in the first paragraphs of Article 3 of Law XII on the ban on land sales. This article specifies that ‘a man who would attempt to sell his own land outright — his family having been made aware of the contract and having failed to prevent it — this man, seller of land, will be sentenced’. Finally, Law XXVI of the same code sets down the rules of judgement in the case of a dispute over the identity of the owner, or over the location of the boundaries, and institutes the keeping of a ‘book of property boundaries’.

It would be difficult to describe the process through which the ancient political territorial boundaries, based on the relationship between a chief and scattered social groupings, evolved into administrative circumscriptions, or to date this process. It would appear, however, that the change was swift, and had been essentially completed by the end of the 1850s. In 1851 Félix Ribourt, ADC to the Governor, wrote about the old districts of the Tahiti peninsula: ‘it is rather difficult today to find the boundaries of these old subdivisions; the Indians [sic] themselves have forgotten them, and very rarely agree among themselves in the indications that they give’. He went on to list, for the peninsula, seven adjacent districts. In Moorea, on the other hand, most of the districts at that time were still made up of ‘small separate entities, sometimes a considerable distance apart’.14

Although an official list setting down the names of the districts of Tahiti and Moorea was published in 1859, it did not specify the location of their boundaries. The law of 1868, which introduced the notion of ‘village’ and gave precise limits to residential areas, continued the regrouping of scattered territorial units. The

10 districts of Moorea were thus regrouped into four villages. These, called 'villages' at first, took the name of 'districts' by the beginning of the 1880s. The register of French Establishments in Oceania for 1877 still made the distinction between district and village, the latter sometimes made up of several villages. The results of the 1881 census were given for village units, referred to as 'districts'. This denomination remained in force, with some modifications in boundary location, until the establishment of the municipality system in 1971, which regrouped the less populated districts into 'communal sections', then into 'associated municipalities'. These 'communal sections', later called 'associated municipalities', represent a lower administrative level than the 'municipality'. The voters in each communal section elect one or more municipal councillors to represent them. Together, these councillors form the municipal council. Nowadays the old structure no longer exists, except within the Tahitian Protestant Church, where 'prayer groups' still correspond to the districts of the first half of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{15}

The ancient power of the arii, deriving mostly from the sacredness of their persons, had already been greatly eroded by the conversion of the Tahitians to the Protestant religion begun in 1815. The rise to political power of the Pomerans, and the concentration of power in their hands, had then transformed the arii into tavana, or simple king's representatives in the districts, where tavana, a Tahitian corruption of the English word 'governor', is still used today to describe the mayors of the municipalities. One of the articles of the Convention signed in August 1847 between the queen and the French viceroy sets down the rules for the appointment of district chiefs. This Convention, which provided the framework for the organisation of the protectorate — although never ratified by the French government — decrees that the district chiefs, or tavana, are to be appointed by the queen and the commissaire du roi on recommendation from the hui-raatira. Hui is a traditional form of honorific plural applicable to both raatira and arii: 'it was seldom said of a man that he was a Raatira, although he belonged to the hui Raatira'.\textsuperscript{16} From this period on, the term hui raatira tends to be applied to all the citizens of a district. The district chief had, however, to be chosen from among the family of the last chief to hold office. But the decline in population numbers, which saw certain chiefs dying without descendants, allowed the election of raatira to the office of chief. Thus, at the end of the 1870s, among the 22 districts of Tahiti and Moorea, 12 district chiefs had no kinship relationship with the former holders of the titles.\textsuperscript{17} The law of 1855 further limited the power of the district chief. It created district councils made up of four members — the

\textsuperscript{15} Claude Robineau, 'Sociologie et histoire, l'exemple de Moorea', Journal de la Société des Océanistes, 74-75 (1982), 87.
\textsuperscript{16} De Bovis, \textit{Etat}, 55.
\textsuperscript{17} Colin Newbury, \textit{Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia 1767–1945} (Honolulu 1980), 185.
chief, a judge and two hut-raatira — with the chief merely acting as president, and the other three members elected by the whole of the hut-raatira. The main function of this council was the application of the regulations and the implementation of communal infrastructure works ordered by the protectorate government.

The annexation of Tahiti in 1880 put an end to the protectorate, and bestowed French citizenship on the subjects of Pomare. This evolution should have caused the disappearance of the chiefly institutions, but it was not until 1887 that municipal commissions could be established in each district. These were designed to be elected by popular vote, the commissions in turn electing a president from among their number. This attempt at administrative reorganisation ended in failure, few of the districts having voted according to the rules; so the old district councils were reinstated until 1897. At that date, the office of Member of the district council became elective by popular vote, with its president appointed by the Governor from among the successful candidates. In 1900, control by the colonial Administration was increased with the possibility of the Governor appointing a council president from outside the elected council. It was not until 1935 that the council members were able to choose a president from among their own ranks. The present system began in 1971, with the disappearance of the district councils, and the creation of the municipality system over the whole of the Territory. A few municipalities had been created before this date: Papeete in 1890, headquarters for the Territory, then Uturoa in 1945, main population centre for the Leeward Islands, finally Pirae and Faa, two districts of rapid urban growth, in 1965. From then on, the presidents of district councils were replaced by mayors.

The French Administration attempted, with varying amounts of success, to oppose the scattering of residential units, and to restrict the mobility of the Tahitians, two factors which interfered with its desire for organisation and control. In this manner, its efforts followed the steps of the Protestant missionaries and of the Tahitian law-makers of the 1840s. Article 4 of Law XIV of 1842 states that:

> it is desirable that the people make an enclosed field for fruit and other food crops, close to the village, near the dwelling place of the missionary; and if they wish to fence off another field for their crops on their own property, at some distance, they may do so, but must then return to the village, which is where the major part of the planting must take place, and where they must make their home.

In 1859, certain decisions of the district council — one cannot tell whether they were spontaneous or coerced — requested the concentration of the dwellings around the residence of the district chief. Through the decree of 21 May

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18 Arrêté of 22 Dec. 1897.
19 Arrêté of 3 Jan. 1900.
1861, this regrouping became compulsory for all Tahiti and Moorea districts. A further decree, of 19 February 1863, defined the list of these regrouping centres, called 'villages', and another, on 14 August 1864, defined the boundaries of the 'villages', within which the French or any foreigners would no longer be allowed to acquire land. An exception was made for Frenchmen married to Tahitian women, and for their legitimate descendants. These measures, seemingly made for the protection of Tahitians, aimed also at facilitating the settlement of European colons in the areas between the villages. A few triumphant early reports notwithstanding — 'News from the districts announce that the village of Punaauia ... is completed; so is the village of Arue; the others progress rapidly ...'20 — the Administration soon admitted to encountering difficulties, and, in 1876, it put an end to the attempt: 'From now on, anyone may build his house, or have it built, wherever they wish, as long as they comply with the existing regulations regarding roadways'.21 It was not until after the Second World War, with the demographic boom and the development of the Administration, of education and of health services, that denser population centres were created. The urban growth of Papeete pushed this phenomenon to its extreme, beginning in the 1960s, within the seven boroughs which make up the municipality.

Unlike the situation in New Caledonia, no reserve of colonial government land was ever established in Tahiti. The Franco-Tahitian war of 1844–47 had led to the confiscation of certain lands belonging to the 'rebels', and the beginning of a government estate.22 But the opportunity never arose again and, shortly after the take-over, the Administration had to admit to potential immigrants that as far as land grants are concerned, the administration has had to consider, to start with, whether it was possible to establish a government land-reserve which would allow such grants. The local administration, when consulted, has replied that the establishment of such a government land-reserve would be, if not impossible, at least very slow and difficult.23

Hence, the creation of estates for the purpose of raising exportable crops was accomplished, for the most part, through the regrouping of properties by half-caste families — unlike in New Caledonia, in Tahiti the half-castes constitute a specific social class — by chiefs, by members of the royal family, or by family groups who were able to take advantage of their participation in the traditional land ownership structure and of their knowledge of the French legal framework. From the rapid subdividing of these great estates, and the appearance of the

20 Messager de Tahiti, 28 Nov. 1863, 222.
21 Article 4 of the Ordonnance of 22 May 1876.
23 Ministère de la marine et des colonies, Les colonies françaises en 1883 (Paris 1883), 214.
pieces on the property market, some small colonists gained access to land ownership.

Partly to facilitate these sales, the Administration endeavoured to establish a registry of births and a census in Tahiti. In 1883, M. Bonet addressed the colonial Council to remind them that 'the notion of civil registry is intimately tied to that of private property'. The first law to this effect, dated 11 March 1852, made the registering of marriages, births and deaths of Tahitians compulsory. The register was in the hands of the district judges. Article 27 of the law specified that 'beginning with May 1st 1852, any child whose birth is not entered in the register of his district, according to the terms of the present law, will not be allowed to inherit from his parents'. But this attempt also ended in failure: in 1866, the registers being incomplete and full of errors, a census was organised, aimed at preparing fresh ones. This action itself having met with no success, a new registering of the population was decreed in 1877. Ten years later, one of the members of the General Council was quoted as saying that 'civil registry of Tahitians is based on so many mistakes that it would be better if it didn't exist'.

Decree as early as 1852, the handing down of the family name to the children proved difficult to enforce. As recently as 1927, we come across this reminder, from the Agriculture Board, of the extreme difficulty in enforcing the rule:

> considering that the practice of name-changing, current among Tahitians and Asians, makes the attribution of property frequently very difficult, this Board would wish that the head of the Judicial Department seek a suitable way of securing civil registration by family name and no other, and enforce all necessary regulations to this effect.

Similar difficulties encountered in the establishment of a registry of lands made all property transactions delicate, and prone to a multitude of law suits. The situation was further complicated by the passing of the Tahiti Civil Code in 1866; within the traditional system, rights to a piece of land could be lost through long absence of the owner, or a long break in relationships with the occupants of the land. The implementation of the Civil Code resulted in the freezing of inheritances. This led to the multiplying of co-owners, a tendency further compounded by demographic growth. The decree of 1868 gave jurisdiction over land disputes between native owners to the native courts — the only jurisdiction left to them. This measure, upheld after the take-over through the wishes of Pomare V, faded away during the 1930s.

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24 Messager de Tahiti, 15 Nov. 1883, 319.
26 Speech by M. Alby during the 26 Dec. session of the General Council.
27 Article 21 of the Law of 11 Mar. 1855 states that: 'the family name must be handed down from father to son, without possibility of change, so that from now on there be no uncertainty about the ancestors of families, which has been the cause of never-ending litigation in the matter of inheritance'.
IN NEW CALEDONIA, pre-colonial land rights were based on belonging to a patrilineal kinship group, conceptualised in terms of 'lineage' or 'clan'. These lineages are themselves part of an encompassing patrilineal order made up of divisions of the same structural level. Kinship by descent and by marriage provided the only accesses to land, these being by and large a reflection of aboriginality or non-aboriginality. Any local group could thus claim land-rights to its place of residence, as well as rights to territory scattered all over the island, even if the concept of 'rights', and its legal background, could be ambiguous. In fact, within the pre-colonial systems, the extent and nature of the control of land represented the expression of a social situation. Acquisition and enforcement of 'rights' were the result of agreements between the parties, which could be abolished through a change in circumstances. Land gifts could be taken back — and their beneficiaries run off the land — or they could be voluntarily returned by the beneficiaries to their former owners upon departure. Thus, it can be justified, in a study of land ownership structures and the legal nature of property, to shift the emphasis from the rights of individuals to the background of social relationships. Land-rights, then, were obtained through transfers which invariably involved political or matrimonial alliances. Outside the community structure created by patrilineal ties, all political alliances and all group acceptances went through matrimonial relationships. Locally, such political and matrimonial relationships could take the form of either integration within a prior hierarchy, or the creation of a new hierarchy. Thus rights to land came as a result of the meanderings of the family lines since they left their original settlement. This latter nevertheless remained the fundamental reference. It was on a par with social identity, and with the prior rights of the original group of patrilineal kinship, and established the fundamental concept of 'journey'. When the location of this original settlement was clearly known — and it frequently was not — the identity of a lineage group passed through the two notions of place of origin and of this 'journey' (called bwevârâ in the A'jië language). Yet, in contrast to the

29 The concepts of 'lineage' and of 'clan' are often removed from the multiple meanings of the vernacular term that they translate (Jean-Pierre Doumenge, Paysans mélanésiens en pays Canala, Nouvelle-Calédonie (Bordeaux 1975), 45, 46; Patrick Pillon, 'Parenté agnate et par alliance, positions statutaires et circulation des offrandes. Le déroulement contemporain d’une cérémonie des morts dans la vallée de Kouaoua (Nouvelle-Calédonie)', Etudes Rurales (to be published), which refers to the concept of 'household'; Alban Bensa and Jean-Claude Rivierre, Les chemins de l’alliance: l’organisation sociale et ses représentations en Nouvelle-Calédonie (Paris 1982), 32, 55; Marie-Joseph Dubois, Gens de Maré, Nouvelle-Calédonie (Paris 1984), 72, 107). Following Bensa and Rivierre (Les chemins), we will still use the concept of 'lineage' to describe the patrilineal kinship group which forms the basic social and land-rights unit. The regrouping into a patrilineal clan, identified by a distinct name, among the Cémuhi people of the central north (Bensa and Rivierre,Les chemins, 55–66) is not as rigid farther south. (For social structures built around the concept of 'household' in the South Pacific and in Southeast Asia, see Claude Levi-Strauss, Cinquième partie. Clan, lignée, maison. III. Les problèmes de la Mélanésie (année 1978–1979), in Paroles données (Paris 1984), 200–208.)

30 Patrick Pillon, 'Listes déclamatoires ("vina") et principes d’organisation sociale dans la vallée de la Kououa (Nouvelle-Calédonie)' (submitted for publication to the Journal de la Société des Océanistes).

concept of journey, the concept of the place of origin was so important that the lineage groups frequently attempted to attribute to themselves a local origin. The two concepts of ‘place of origin’ and of ‘journey’ structure the fundamental division in any given territory between ‘original’ and ‘outsider’ lineages. The former, who claimed never to have moved, were supposedly dominant (demographically as well as politically). They were the keepers of the original political power and of the land-rights which are at the root of this power. It was the ‘original’ groups who welcomed outsiders into the territory, integrated these ‘journeymen’ within their political structure by making them land grants, and eventually invested them with the highly revered and sacred status of chief. Thus the place of origin of a single patrilineal kinship group constituted the major local territorial and political unit, the latter if but loosely. Such a territory — called mwuciri in A’jië language, and amu in Cémuhî — was usually made up of one valley, or a portion of coastline, and stretched from the shore to the watershed. It took the name of the dominant group, or one of its more prestigious family names.

Such a geographic unit usually encompassed several hierarchies, which were liable to modifications according to events, whether large or small, but most often resulting in land transactions. Apart from defeat in war, the inclusion of outside elements within the group’s territory accompanied high points in the group’s circumstances. These inclusions involved more or less substantial — and more or less permanent — attributions of land-rights, depending on the status of the newcomers, and how they were perceived by the hosts. Not everyone was welcome, and people coming with a reputation as trouble-makers would be received with superficial politeness only, given very little land, and that reluctantly and subject to cancellation. Their shortage of land greatly limited their political leverage, and they could be got rid of all the more easily. Conversely, as Emmanuel Kasarherou points out, outsiders could create a threat which would

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52 The myths show the original ancestors as having been born within the group’s territory, sometimes explicitly born of the land (Elaine Métis, ‘Le “clan” canaque hier et aujourd’hui in La Nouvelle-Calédonie, occupation de l’espace et peuplement (Bordeaux 1986), 96).

53 Bensa and Rivierre, Les chemins, 32; E. Métis, ‘Le “clan” canaque’, 266.

54 The example given by Joel Bonnemaison (Tanna: les hommes lieux (Paris 1987), 11, 94) about Tanna, showing that the origins of authority are of equal importance to seniority of presence on the site, is applicable to New Calédonia. The founders, through the mediation of their ancestor, are in fact the parties of the fundamental covenant with the land and its powers. They are the ones who, in last recourse, rule on what must be (Maurice Leenhardt, Vocabulaire et grammaire de la langue de Houailou (Paris 1935), 140–141; Jean Guiart, L’organisation sociale et coutumière de la population autochtone de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, in Jacques Barrau, L’agriculture vivrière autochtone de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (Noumea 1956), 23; Métis, ‘Le “clan” canaque’, 260). For Pierre Bourdieu (La noblesse de l’État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps (Paris 1989)), seniority is widely considered grounds for legitimacy.

55 Bensa and Rivierre, Les chemins, 102–3; Fillon, ‘Listes déclamatoires’.


57 Bensa and Rivierre, Les chemins, 52–5; Fillon, ‘Listes déclamatoires’.

require their integration on the best possible terms. In fact, it has happened that newcomers ultimately managed to evict the original landholders. Integration also resulted in a greater or lesser redistribution of social roles and functions. Other shifts in landholding patterns, this time unrelated to the integration of newcomers, could arise from the meanderings of kinship groups within the group's territory. They could be linked to the forming of new bilateral matrimonial alliances, alliances being always liable to change. Alliance through marriage was extremely important, as the two individuals or the two kinship groups concerned were bound to provide mutual help. The wedded allies fall under the rules of *vibéé* (literally 'go with, accompany'). However these ties, handed down through the women, took second place to the patrilineal ties, which structured the relationships between men, without feminine mediation.

The matrimonial ally was invited to move in — if only temporarily — and given certain land-rights as a result. These relocations within the group's territory, through matrimonial ties, could be assumed to be typical of more recent and land-poor newcomers.

This fluidity of social norms and organisation rested with the segmentary character of pre-colonial New Caledonian societies and the relative autonomy they granted lineage groups within the local territorial and political unit, both in terms of land-rights and political power. Land-rights, then, did not constitute a closed and carefully guarded asset, but were only one aspect of the links that existed between individuals and between kinship groups. Therefore, the limits on land-use were determined by the social relationships from which the land-rights derived. The use of land obtained from maternal uncles was limited to the growing of annual food crops. On the other hand, fruit-bearing trees could be planted on land obtained from patrilineal descent. Two patrilineal relatives, or two individuals related through matrimonial alliance, would grant each other temporary land-use privileges, or cultivate their gardens either together or side by side, not so much because one of them was in need of land, or of help to work his own, but as an expression of the relationship which bound them. Similarly, the transfers of land-rights deriving from a matrimonial relationship were only one aspect among many of a system of distribution — which attempted to be equitable — of women, of foodstuffs, of children, and of ritual and military

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59 Dubois, *Gens de Maré*, 169.
60 The description of marriage customs as presented by Maurice Leenhardt (Du Kama. La personne et le mythe dans le monde mélanésien (Paris 1985), 169) refers more to the social model than to the actual practice. As indicated by Bensa and Rivierre (Les chemins, 114-15), the reality is at the same time more varied and more dependent on political strategies. See also Pierre Métais, 'Quelques aspects d'une organisation matrimoniale néo-calédonienne', *L'année sociologique*, 3 (1963), 37-9.
61 Pillon, 'Parenté agnaticque'.
assistance between kinship groups.\textsuperscript{43} Mediation missions at times of disputes and military help in time of war also involved land transfers — if only of small extent. The lands of a particular lineage frequently included areas, such as yam or house mounds, no longer part of the group's estate. These lots, which bore the names of their owners, were the tangible expression and the reminder of ties uniting two lineages. However, these entrenched land-rights tended no longer to match contemporary land-use.\textsuperscript{44}

The imposition of the reservation system has had a specific impact on this fluidity of social relationships, and on the land-rights structure associated with them. Many studies deal with land expropriations and their impact on agriculture;\textsuperscript{45} others focus on the judicial,\textsuperscript{46} sociological and ownership pattern\textsuperscript{47} aspects of the formation of the reservations. But few of the analyses approach the reservation as a specific socio-agricultural system, for which these elements are the components. Thus, just as they have contributed to the decline of horticultural practices,\textsuperscript{48} the features of the reservation system have seriously damaged the basic principles of independent land-rights and the pre-colonial political structure. They have also affected the types of land-use, particularly in the sector of cattle raising.\textsuperscript{49}

The formation of reservations was characterised by the transplantation — and the concentration — of formerly dispersed and politically autonomous kinship groups. In this, the reservation system interfered with the fundamental pre-colonial relationships between land, kinship, marriage, status, and political power. Thus, while certain tribes are now founded on the regrouping of lineages belonging to the territory on which the reservation was established, others result from the regrouping of heterogeneous elements and form composite entities, partly external.\textsuperscript{50} Even for lineages who have remained in their original territory, the change over to the reservation system could upset the land-rights structure, in the case of changes of residence or of loans of land. The situation varies from tribe to tribe, but the fact remains that expropriation and the formation of land

\textsuperscript{43} Bensa and Riviere, \textit{Les chemins}, 114; Maurice Leenhardt, \textit{Notes d'ethnologie néo-calédoniennes} (Paris 1930), 66.


\textsuperscript{47} Guiart, \textit{L'organisation sociale}; Guiart and Tercinier, \textit{Inventaire}.

\textsuperscript{48} Barrau, \textit{L'agriculture vivrière}; Doumenge, \textit{Du terroir}.


\textsuperscript{50} Lenormand, \textit{L'évolution politique}, 248.
reservations have multiplied the number of outsiders to the territories, and have created, for the kinship groups whose reserve covered a part of these territories, the necessity of facing a situation that was unprecedented in its extent and in the impositions it brought. The result, for many of these outsiders — no doubt for the first time on this scale and for such a long time — was a precarious situation where they were not properly and permanently integrated into the host territory, and therefore remained open to political subjugation. To this day, some of them still raise crops according to temporary land-use rights, as can be observed from the many disputes arising around the growing of coffee trees. The planting of trees being fundamentally linked to land ownership, it is hardly possible for a person operating under temporary land-use privileges to plant coffee without opening himself to trouble — as has frequently been the case. Because of the link between land-rights and social status, these outsiders did not always have a voice in the tribe’s Council of Elders. There again, local circumstances, and the number of outsiders to be accommodated, affected the details of these processes of integration. A few isolated individuals were easier to accommodate than a larger number organised around a chief.

The second aspect of the reservation system and of its specific impact is of a legal nature. Laws and regulations regarding the reserves brought about a redefining of the means of access to land ownership, and thus to internal political power. Reservation lands became the communal property of the tribe, placed under the authority of chiefs who were appointed — after nomination — by the Administration, and given considerable enforcing powers when compared with the pre-colonial situation.\textsuperscript{51} This power of the Administration-appointed chiefs was taken away at the close of the Second World War, and their representative role — deprived of any enforcing clout — was then vested in the Councils of Elders. These councils, of which the administrative chief was a member, were composed in theory of one representative of each clan of the tribe. The Council of Elders bears no more relationship to the pre-colonial structure than did the office of administrative chief, though it comes somewhat closer to the old model.\textsuperscript{52}

Under these various aspects, the reservation system has had — and continues to have — specific effects. As far as land goes, it set one of the limitations to commercial farming, particularly for coffee plantations and cattle raising. As for land tenure, it helped to redefine the structure of land ownership and occasionally shifted it from the original owner lineages and 'masters of the land' lineages\textsuperscript{55} to the administrative chiefs, then to the Councils of Elders. As for the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 257-69.
\textsuperscript{52} Guiart, 'L'organisation sociale', 96.
\textsuperscript{55} The office of 'master of the land' derives from belonging to one of the founding lineages of the territory. Although this office does not necessarily overlap ownership, the 'masters of the land' most frequently hold the largest estates.
socio-economic situation, it contributed to limiting the number of individuals having possible access to commercial farming, and to the development of new forms of commercial land-use. It also affected the fluidity of social relationships and of land-rights privileges.

Coming historically after the various population relocations induced by the reservation system, geographic and matrimonial mobility, as a by-product of wage-earning, helped increase the number of outsiders to be integrated within the tribes. The functions of political and matrimonial alliances are now defunct, although contemporary marriages are still conceived according to the pre-colonial model. Yet the concept of integrating outsiders, the concept of land grants, the political subordination of the guest to the host, are all linked together, and the total integration of the newcomers becomes the condition for access to land-rights. If, historically, the acceptance of an outsider to a territory could only have come from the original inhabitants, the oldest integrated 'guests' become gradually assimilated to first occupants when faced with the waves of newer arrivals. During this process, the individuals, formerly of outside origin, receive their political autonomy at the hands of their hosts. They can then aspire to the privileges reserved for the full members of the territory — including the right to receive outsiders — within the limits imposed by the size of the lands they control. This underlines the political nature of land grants in pre-colonial social systems. According to Louis Mapou, the pressure created by the land situation in the reservations may have led to a lengthening of the transition period toward the granting of political independence and of land self-sufficiency of the newcomers, the hosts wishing to delay as much as possible the time when these newcomers would in turn be able to accept newer arrivals, a process over which they would no longer have control. The formation of the reservations thus led to the imposition of constraints on the assimilation of outsiders into the group.

In pre-colonial days, the social order was an integral part of the cosmic universe:

The life of the land exists in symbiosis with that of the clan members. Any social disturbance, any transgression of the customary rules regulating the transmission of life (adultery, breaking of the traditional matrimonial alliances, promiscuity among the young, etc.) is reflected on the land, disturbs its fertility, causes droughts or the drying of rivers and springs, affects the yams, the plants.

While the pre-colonial political and kinship structures provided a tight control of individuals and family groups, the reservation system evolved toward a decline

54 Guiart, 'L'organisation sociale', 32-3; Fillon, 'D'un mode'.
55 Fillon, 'D'un mode'; Fillon and Ward, Groupements.
56 Mapou, Perception.
57 Bensa and Riviere, Les chemins, 91; Kasarherou, 'Identité', 18.
58 E. Méliai, 'Le "clan" canaque', 263.
of social control. Although this phenomenon stems from multiple sources — religion being an important one — it derives in large part from the actions of the Administration. Its central elements are, on the one hand, the very creation of the reservations, and, on the other, the characteristics of the reservation system, particularly the role attributed to the chiefs, both traditional and administrative.

To satisfy, through its policies, its own territorial and political requirements, the Administration managed to disrupt the coherent pre-colonial structure of politics and land-tenure (already prone to problems) and to weaken the level of social and political integration represented by the chiefly institutions.

A chiefdom makes use of a territory distinct from that of the neighbouring chiefdoms. But since land-rights depend on lineage, the members of various chiefdoms hold title to lands which do not belong to the territory of that chiefdom. The social — and in part territorial — entity which is called a chiefdom is based on agreements between its various lineage components, which are often descended from different ancestors. Thus the chief, and the political concept of chiefdom which he embodies, are the focal point of the process of integration.

The unifying role of the chiefdom is based on the assigning of the different patrilineal kinship groups to hierarchic regroupings and to positions which have been created to fill the organisational needs of such a political entity, with the chief at its apex. The person of the chief embodies the identity, the status, and the common achievements of the kinship groups, this success being a sign of favour from the ancestors and the local gods. This is the reason why, for instance, the name of the Mea Mebara chiefdom is made up by joining the generic name of the dominant kinship group in the Kouaoua valley and the name of the lineage of the highest chiefs.59 The role of the chiefs as focus of a federation is almost spelled out.

Various factors contributed to the decline, now complete, of the sacred character of the office of chief. Among these are the two opposing phenomena of Christianisation and secularisation; but more crucial was the creation of the new administrative structures of 'tribe', 'reservation', and 'district', which superimposed alien land divisions and alien hierarchies over the pre-colonial spatial and social relationships. These disruptions, inherent in the confrontation of two modes of thinking, were at times intensified through a deliberate wish of the Administration to split local political entities in order to break up the political opposition of the moment. From then on, the Administration-appointed chiefs were no longer picked from the ranks of the traditional chiefly lineages. The rapid implementation of policies aimed at using the chiefs to help control the indigenous population, giving them considerably more power than they enjoyed in pre-colonial days, and making them the intermediaries of the Administration,

59 Pilon, 'Listes déclamatoires'.

doubtless widened the gap and intensified the tensions and the operational problems. After the end of the Second World War, when the administrative chiefs’ powers were withdrawn, and the institution of Councils of Elders was created, a strong power structure was replaced by a structure lacking in enforcement tools. The result was the weakening of the possibility of social control, even if this was not always expressed in the same terms in different locations.

In the past, the more serious conflicts culminated in wars initiated from within the kinship or political group, or, failing that, in voluntary or forced departures. The possibility of recourse to armed force having been eliminated, and the departures — although still occasionally seen — being discouraged by the reservation system and the general shift to sedentary life, the conflicts acquired a tendency to drag on. The regrouping into tribes interfered with pre-colonial cohesiveness and brought about specific conflicts; the creation of the reservations destroyed the pre-colonial methods for resolving tensions; the pre-colonial power structure had been eradicated at least on the main island, and the decision making process put in the hands of Councils of Elders which lacked any power of enforcement and never matched the integrative function of the older chiefdoms; and so latent internal tensions which may be transmitted through the generations characterise the reservation system to this day.

Several questions, then, underlie any comparison between the Tahitian and the New Caledonian situations, although both were colonised by the same European power. The first question is implicit in the attempt at comparison. A discussion of the similarities and differences between the two Territories implicitly questions the existence of common methods in the two colonisation processes. This question can lead in turn to a scrutiny of what distinguishes the history of French colonisation in the South Pacific from the colonial efforts of other European nations.

With regard to the similarities between the Tahitian and New Caledonian situation, the colonial administrative and land policies reshaped both the relationships with the land and the functioning of pre-colonial political and social control. For the fluidity of the interplay between land-rights and social structure, the tendency was to substitute a straight relationship of man to property. The emphasis was now placed on a rigid territorial confining of the kinship groups and of political authority. Yet, this phenomenon is far from being specific, since it refers to the more general political and territorial control exercised by the State apparatus. For this reason, we see this process already started in Tahiti during the missionary period, before the advent of colonisation.

The differences between the Tahitian and the New Caledonian models are just as significant. In the framework of the analysis parameters considered here, colonisation in New Caledonia is characterised by the reservation system. This
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND INDIGENOUS SOCIAL CUSTOMS

system, in turn, is based on the combination of two factors. First, on the adoption of legal principles which postulate that the indigenous population has but feeble 'natural rights'; this attitude was adopted right from the beginning of French settlement, mostly with an eye to the acquisition of land. The strategy adopted in New Caledonia — and it will be seen to run through all the land-oriented policies from then on — is based on the concept of 'vacant lands' (indeed the only colony in the Pacific where this did not apply was Fiji, where the colonial government in the teeth of settler opposition and Colonial Office inclinations recognised Fijian ownership of the bulk of the land, but even there much of the best land was alienated before colonial rule). Secondly, it is based on a policy of European population settlement. These two factors lay the foundation for systematic expropriations and for the creation of the legal, territorial, social and ethnic sub-system which is the reservation.

In Tahiti, the colonial state opted for the legal attitude that the native population enjoys 'natural rights': land could only be legally obtained through voluntary agreement or purchase. On this basis, faced with Tahitians who were reluctant to sell their land, the French State never — with perhaps the odd exception — managed to get its hands on any land for the settlement of colons. Mirroring the model of the first contacts between Tahitians and Europeans, as they were before the onset of colonisation, the acquisition of land by Europeans took place through inter-ethnic marriages. These marriages led to the creation of a specific social class: the *démis* (half-castes), since the pure Europeans never managed to reach a critical demographic mass. Symbolising this quasi-egalitarian aspect of the Tahitian codes of law, almost unique in the history of French colonisation, was the granting of French citizenship to all Tahitians as early as 1880. This special treatment was more than an accident. It was founded on the evolutionist theory of the relationships between nations, with the primitive populations eventually expected to reach the level of development and of civilisation of the colonising nations. Behind the attitude to colonisation in Tahiti, we sense the dream of the New Cytherea.

While keeping within the subject of the historical impact of colonisation on the redistribution of the land, of the institutions which control it, and of authority — which we have so briefly touched on in Tahiti and New Caledonia — it becomes possible to consider the specific aspects of the French colonising effort in the South Pacific, when compared to that of the other European nations. In as much as the particular details of the various approaches only can be different, one could suggest — granting a certain number of variables — that there is not a specific French approach to colonisation in the South Pacific within the

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framework of the topics discussed here. Tahiti and New Caledonia could then be seen as different expressions of a variety of European colonial policies whose major variables lie in the relationships between colonising and colonised populations on matters of demographic ratios, land ownership and distribution, and legislation.

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