

5 URBANIZATION AS A PROCESS OF RURAL CHANGE. THE FRENCH POLYNESIAN CASE:
TAHITI AND MOOREA

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As a specialist in Economic Anthropology, and in view of the past orientation of my research in a rural environment, I propose to explain how the development of a salaried economy contributes to the urbanization of rural society and how, in the end, this urbanization is a process of rural change.

The site chosen for my study is Moorea, a small island of approximately 5,000 inhabitants, situated near Tahiti, about 10 nautical miles to the North West of Papeete and bound to the town by means of constant schooner and air services. This island, very close to the town, has always been noted for its particular characteristics, and until the beginning of the 1960s, it remained outside the economic and technological evolution which was transforming Papeete and Tahiti. For more detailed research I chose Maatea, a village of 300-400 inhabitants in the 'district' of Afareaitu. At the beginning of my survey this village offered particularly interesting material as, though situated in a still agricultural area, it already had a considerable number of wage earners.¹

In the field of Economic Anthropology, the study of precise phenomena, such as the urbanization of rural society, constitutes an approach which may well enrich results obtained through more general classical research on development and modernization.

The study of modernization on Moorea, and the changes which it brings about, must be considered against their historical background. In fact, and despite it being a rural society, Moorea has always been very closely linked with Papeete, whose influence is strongly felt by the population of the island and whose market provides a strong economic tie. The development of a salaried economy, which was the first vector of urbanization, created a break in the traditional relationship between Tahiti and Moorea.

After this necessary description of the historical background, I shall speak of the signs, vectors and forms of urbanization on Moorea. For the use of the term 'urbanized rural society' demands justification. Finally, I shall try to show which aspects of rural life are transformed by this process.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Moorea was tightly implicated in the network of chiefdoms which covered Tahiti, and it can be deduced from traditions that between the two islands there was an intense ex-

change of people and ideas.² On the arrival of the Europeans, the conflicts which opposed the members of the Pomare family to their rivals spread to Moorea.

In the very first conversion of the Society Island to the Gospel, Moorea was the first area to be won over, and thus became the central base from which preachers went forth to the larger neighbouring island. When the missionaries settled the first plantations were laid out in the centre of the island which was gradually being deserted (or was already deserted) at this time (Green 1967).

The colonial period, properly speaking, began with the establishment of the French Protectorate on the Kingdom of Tahiti, which had included Moorea since the conquest of Pomare I.³ On the level of economic and social relations between Tahiti and Moorea this had three consequences:

1. The development of Papeete.

2. The arrival on Moorea of 'colonials' who settled. This fact is related to the social evolution on Tahiti during the 19th century (see surveys made by Newbury (1967) and Doumenge (1966)). With the establishment of the Protectorate came a wave of colonization which was notably marked by the installation on Tahiti of minor civil service employees and military contingents. The works of O'Reilly and Teissier (1962) clearly show their lineage. From these very large families, the younger members went out to the other islands; thus Moorea became colonized by members of the second generation.

3. The acquisition of land and the constitution of private estates. Panoff (1966) has retraced how the population, under the impulsion of French colonization, developed an individualistic conception of property. Colonials were thus able to constitute estates either by the acquisition of constituent plots or by obtaining them by marrying into the adopted village. In this way a few large coastal and inland estates, and many smaller coastal properties, were established. The underlying motive of this was to 'give full value' to the land, or more exactly, to develop plantations linked with the European markets in cotton, sugar-cane and copra which flourished at the end of the last century, in addition to other cash-crops such as vanilla and coffee.⁴

Before describing the traditional system of economy, valid until the changes which occurred during the 1960s, a word must be said about social and economic evolution. On the one hand, the fact that Europeans married into the Polynesian society, together with the effects of the succession of generations, resulted in the ethnic mixing of the colonials and in the splitting up of the original large estates. There was thus in Moorea a class of mixed ancestry or 'Demis' planters (*ta'ata afa papa'a*) who were either descendents of the original colonials or newcomers from Tahiti. With the irregular, though sometimes very large, profits gained from vanilla, some acquired land. As a result, through-

out this present century, there has been a continual dividing-up of property, which finished either in the splitting up or grouping together of pieces of land. On the other hand, the growing of cash crops spread beyond the colonial class and its descendants and reached the Tahitian population.

The traditional economic system was therefore mainly based on *Demis* owned plantations. These properties were either administered directly (possibly using local labour), or let to tenant farmers. The greater part of the Tahitian population lived predominantly on a subsistence economy. This was augmented by earnings from copra and sometimes by occasional wages earned by working for other landowners. Subsistence activities (fishing, taro-growing) provided a small commercial production for the local market at Papeete. Cash crops and this limited production for the local market enabled the population to buy essential manufactured goods, i.e. a few vital foodstuffs, clothes, building materials such as wood, etc. The town of Papeete, therefore, played a considerable role, because it was part of the traditional system; but it was not of prime importance. It was valuable as a market, and as a centre for the diffusion of ideas and models from the outside world in an otherwise closed rural economy. This system fell to pieces when the Tahitian economy underwent great changes in the early 1960s.

It was then directed towards tourism which even before 1960 created a need for labour in the construction of the first large hotels on Tahiti, a modern coast road and a jet airport. With the arrival of the Nuclear Experiments Centre, a policy of extensive public works⁵ and the promulgation of a 'hotels policy', this need for labour grew greater, and resulted in a progressive increase in earnings from wages. It must therefore be considered that, as from 1960, a growing pressure was exerted on rural populations to accept a wage-earning economy.

In the early 1960s Moorea suffered an agricultural crisis with regard to vanilla (fewer crops owing to disease, plus a lowering of world prices). Cultivated mainly by Chinese and Tahitian workers on contract as tenant farmers, vanilla quickly disappeared from Moorea, and producers took up either market-gardening, or some salaried employment, or else left the island. In a survey of the economy of Moorea (Robineau 1970), I have shown that between 1959 and 1967 vanilla, which had represented three-quarters of the island's resources, more or less disappeared, and that the major part of these resources had, during this same period, decreased by more than two-thirds.⁶ There was also a lowering of world copra prices which, together with an increase in the cost of living, and at the same time the decaying state of the coconut plantations and attacks by a predatory insect, considerably reduced the resources of producers. From 1968 on copra began to be abandoned. Only market-gardening continued to flourish. On the other hand, thanks to organized publicity and efforts in the Territory, the tourist industry was to develop gradually on Moorea, and from 1968-1969, the creation of a regular air service helped to stimulate it.

The abandoning of traditional agriculture and a reversion to a wage-earning economy on Tahiti, plus a local tourist trade constitute a complete change in the island's economy, and traces of this may be found in the population growth of this period. With a natural growth rate of 3.1% per year, the population increased only by 10%, because the first two years were marked by fairly large-scale emigration (9% per year) which was not compensated for by a similar rate of immigration. After 1964, though there was still a large number of departures (6.3% per year) there was an even greater number of arrivals (7.2%). This may be interpreted as follows. The vanilla crisis brought about the first departures, the call for labour in Papeete explains the continuing emigration after 1964, and the tourist industry together with its accompanying trades provides the incentive for more recent movements. These new migrants find employment as hotel staff, labour foremen, specialized workers for building and public works, minor transport agents, artisans and souvenir sellers. It is, moreover, this large-scale development of new construction activities and public services which raises the question of urbanization.

URBANIZATION: SIGNS AND VECTORS

It is easier to speak of urbanization in connection with an agglomeration and its surrounding area than to do so in the case of Moorea, which is separated from the capital by a stretch of water, and is without a proper urban centre from which suburban zones may develop. So, in the first place I shall define the meaning I intend to give to 'urbanization' so that there will be no ambiguity over the propriety of the terms used nor over the facts described.

In my opinion, urbanization is a gradual process. I shall therefore start from the prior notion of the *urban fact*. Towns are characterized by their specific space and functions. *Urban space* is characterized by a great density of population, a concentration of activities and heavy traffic. These characteristics gradually disappear as the distance from the urban centre becomes greater and the pressure of rural surroundings becomes stronger. *Urban functions* are of an industrial, commercial, financial, administrative and even political nature. *Urban activities* concern secondary and tertiary sectors. They support the urban population but are also responsible for the economic life of the surrounding rural area. The town buys its produce and provides it with services and manufactured goods, even when the economy is of the colonial type where cash crops and manufactured goods do no more than pass through the town. Urban space and urban functions have one certain effect: they create an *urban way of life* characterized by specific forms of employment and consumption.

What does *urbanization* really mean? The development of the urban fact is related to two things, depending on the point of view taken, that of space or that of population. Urbanization may be - and is - conceived as the extension into the surrounding rural area of urban characteristics or urban functions. In the urban zone there is a centre (the town) and

the outskirts through which the urban gradually gives way to the rural. Urbanization may be - and is - also conceived to be the extension of the urban way of life into the surrounding rural area.

What is the nature of the case of Papeete? There is an urban centre represented roughly by the *commune* where essential functions are concentrated: market, banks, large commercial enterprises, industries, high-schools, and all administrative services. There are also suburban neighbourhoods occupied mainly by the working-class population and where handicrafts or industrial activities may be found. These may be outlying areas, valleys penetrating into the mountains or suburban *communes*. Thirdly, there are purely residential areas, situated beyond the suburban *communes*; the agglomeration stops there. Beyond this is the rural area where the influence of Papeete is felt only through the animation it provides, and even this decreases as the distance from the town gets greater. If I may be allowed to use French geographical terms, I should say that the rest of Tahiti Nui is the 'small suburb', that the Tairarupu (Tahiti Iti) peninsula and Moorea are the 'medium suburb', and that the Leeward Islands are the 'great suburb', defined in terms of the ease, frequency and cost of communications. As for urban functions, it must be emphasized that with the almost entire disappearance of cash crops comes the extension of urban employment, increased redistribution of produce and money, and the diffusion of new life styles.

What therefore can be said about Moorea on the subject of urbanization? The criterion of population density is not decisive.⁸ On the other hand, the trend of activities towards secondary and tertiary sectors is evident, but, in 1968, this was so only in certain districts - those in the North (Paopao and Papetoai) and one in the East (Afareaitu). There were two strongholds of the rural world manifesting remnants of the traditional economic system which had been in existence up to 1960 - in the North-east (Teavaro) and in the South-west (Haapiti). Why these two strongholds? For Haapiti, this seems to be the result of its distance from Papeete coupled with badly organized transport. For Teavaro, it was not a question of distance but the absence of wage earners and the fact that the tourist industry had not reached the area.⁹ By contrast, there were two strongholds of urbanization: one was Afareaitu, centred on salaried employment in the town, and the other was the northern coast, based on tourism. Other objective signs of urbanization are as follows:

- since the establishment of an air service, there has developed a greater frequency in relations between these districts and Papeete, particularly along the northern coast;

- there is a greater intensity of commerce, handicrafts, building and transport agents along the northern coast;

- certain essential services such as car repairs and a secondary school have become concentrated along this coast; since 1968, similar services have increased and may be found almost anywhere around the island.

The tourist industry, a salaried economy in the town, and a certain 'decolonization' of enterprises from Papeete to Moorea seem to constitute the vectors of this progressive urbanization. In order to measure its effects, I shall discuss the wage-labour both in the town, and in the village of Maatea in the South-eastern region of Moorea.

AN URBAN WAY OF LIFE

From 1960 to 1967 the population of the village of Maatea increased by 26% and over the same period the active population grew by 28%. There was also a change in the distribution of activities. The number of farmers and fishermen decreased by 40% while the number of wage earners grew fivefold. It should be noted that the agricultural workers who also cultivate a piece of ground for their own benefit and fish for their own needs have been counted as farmers/fishermen. The workers qualified as wage earners are therefore either employees of the Public Works service at Moorea, workers employed in Papeete itself, or civil service employees working in Moorea. Wage earners are therefore employees carrying out urban-type work which can be distinguished from rural-type employment on several counts.

Unlike the rural worker, the wage earner earns a wage which is neither directly nor immediately the result of his work as such; rather, it automatically follows his *presence* at work. Moreover, it is personally linked to the worker, and not to the family group nor to the landowner holding the means of production. In the case of salaried rural employment, the family group or the landowner may have an influence over the autonomy of the worker. In the case of urban employment, the break with rural life is clear, and the economic autonomy of the worker more real, the wage is also received regularly, in small amounts, over short periods of time and is consequently adapted to regular consumption.

The worker is not free to do as he pleases, but is obliged to respect rigorous working-hours, and ensure his arrival at the place of employment. For half the wage earners in Maatea in 1967 this implied leading two separate lives: in the town during the week, and at home during the weekend. There is also a consequence that domestic equipment cannot be obtained so easily as in the case of rural employment, since urban employment does not bring in large incomes at certain moments. However this is modified by the fact that saving is sometimes possible, and, even if it is not, articles may be bought on hire-purchase.

The facts reveal that workers who abandon the traditional system to become wage earners immediately benefit economically, bringing greater financial resources to their nuclear families and consequently improving their living conditions. Competition in the increasing of salaries in the town has provoked similar increases in agricultural wages which more than doubled between 1964 and 1968, while the cost of living increased to a lesser extent.¹⁰ Moreover, young people tended

to start work very early, sometimes before the age of fifteen, and so certain households received more than one wage. On the other hand, the employment of many youths as unskilled labourers was only temporary, so that the effect of these multiple earnings is not fully realized. However, the money brought into these households made possible the purchase of domestic equipment, be it houses, means of transport, fishing equipment, domestic appliances, or equipment for pastime and leisure activities. It must be emphasized that this effort to obtain equipment was successful only because daily consumption remained frugal, the inhabitants were able to benefit from bank loans,¹¹ and the Nuclear Experiments Centre had created a situation in which wages increased considerably.

How did the village react to this new economic system, based on a wage earning economy? First of all, it led to the valley being almost completely deserted after having assured the villages' subsistence for many years. Only a few of the poorest inhabitants continued cultivating the soil or picking fruit and leaves.¹² The only activity in the village came from the women going to do their shopping at the village stores or from the school-children. Apart from that there was the truck which passed on its way to and from the hospital at Afareaitu, and also, periodically, a delivery of drinks or butane gas. The men who worked on Moorea left home early in the morning about five or six o'clock and came back in the evening also about five or six. Those who worked in town left by boat about midnight each Sunday evening, and came back the following Friday night or Saturday morning. As a result the village only lived - and then it really came to life again - from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. The weekend, however, was organized in the modern Tahitian way, with chatter, drinking, billiards, or singing and guitar-playing on the Friday evening; odd jobs, fishing, fruit and vegetable picking for the Tahitian-style Sunday lunch on Saturday morning; football training for youths' teams in the afternoon; cinema or dancing in the evening; religious service on Sunday morning; football matches in one of the island's villages on Sunday afternoon.

The striking thing about this typical weekend is its strongly urban character. First there is the break with the week following a strictly urban rhythm, and then the urban character of the occupations and pastimes enjoyed by the population at the weekend. Within the framework of a life which has become urban because the obligations and rhythm of employment for wages have imposed themselves, the population tends to adopt an urban way of living. Maatea is the example of a village which, within a few years, has adopted such a way of life. This seems on the one hand to have been imposed by the wage earning system of employment, and on the other hand to have been instigated by the workers, particularly of the younger generation, who, in daily contact with city-dwellers, have carried back to Moorea those features of urban life which they valued and which could be easily transported. As to knowing whether this may be called progress, only time will enable us to judge.

NOTES

- 1 From 1967, the agriculture was rapidly abandoned in the 'district' of Afareaitu.
- 2 In particular the traditions reported by Arii Taimai (Adams 1901) show the intensity of the relations between Tahiti and Moorea. The same thing is emphasized by E. S. C. Handy (1930).
- 3 Towards 1775 and in 1777 at the time of Cook's third voyage; then in 1790 after Bligh's first visit.
- 4 For more details, see Robineau (1970a).
- 5 Papeete harbour, sea front, government buildings, technical college, general hospital, extensive offices.
- 6 In 1959 vanilla represented the sum of 37 million Pacific francs out of 52 million for all the cash crops together. Production, which at this time was at 135 tons, decreased to 6 tons in 1967. Besides, between 1959 and 1967, incomes earned on cash crops went down from 52 to 16.5 millions, not taking into account the decrease in spending power between these two dates.
- 7 For terminology, see Clark (1940).
- 8 As it is essentially the coastal region which is densely populated, approximate population density can be calculated using the coastal plain. By estimating this plain to be 18 square kilometers, a density of 243 inhabitants per square kilometer is obtained, therefore very inferior to that of a moderately condensed urban habitat.
- 9 All this is now changing rapidly (June 1971).
- 10 On Moorea, average agricultural wages have increased by more than 50%, while the cost of living in French Polynesia has increased by 38%. It must be added that agricultural wages were inferior to industrial wages.
- 11 The SOCREDO (Société de Crédit et de Développement de l'Océanie) is a state company which lends money at a very low rate of interest for domestic equipment.
- 12 Tahitian chestnuts (*mape*, *Inocarpus edulis*) sold at Papeete market, and to spectators at sports grounds during football matches; pandanus (*fara*, *Pandanus tectorius*) plaited in order to be used as roofing on Tahitian-style constructions and sold at Papeete.

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