This thesis is the original work of the author except where otherwise acknowledged

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To Isa and Alicia
ABSTRACT

In this thesis I investigate Lifuans' construction of identity in the context of their interactions with outsiders in the region and with Europeans. I illustrate the articulation of values and motivations embodied in the indigenous construction of identity by highlighting Lifuans' notions of authority, hierarchy and adoption. I introduce the notion of boundaries of difference as an analytical category to explore how the construct of identity has shifted in different historical contexts and how it is deployed by women and men of Drueulu (Lifu) today.

I also explore custom, religion and place as elements which have become salient in defining the identities of men and women through time. I am concerned to examine how representations of indigenous gender relations are woven together with exogenous influences. Women's and men's articulation of tradition and modernity varies. Women predicate their engagement in the wider social arena in terms of motherhood, and, by doing so, have been able to engage in new forms of collectivities and acquire wider autonomy in terms of greater social and geographical mobility. Men, in contrast, make use of custom as a language of resistance in their articulation of tradition and modernity.

I consider the various ways men and women have expressed their concerns as different ways of using boundaries of difference. This analytical category should be understood as a way of mapping one's construction of identity, of seeing which elements are put in the foreground, allowing for a redrawing of how men and women represent themselves in different contexts and to outsiders, myself included. I perceive boundaries in a flexible way, meaning that they are informed by intersecting elements and that people consciously redraw them. Thus boundaries of difference should not be seen as a way of juxtaposing Lifuans to outsiders in order to essentialize them, but as a way to reformulate the way they represent themselves in the face of social and political changes.

In the latter part of the thesis I analyse women's lives in both village and urban settings. Women construct and live in the two milieux as permeable spaces. The values and the formal and informal support networks of the village accompany people when they move into town, enabling women to render an alien space into a familiar place.
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<td>AAN</td>
<td>Archives de l'Archevêché, Nouméa</td>
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<td>ADCKA</td>
<td>Agence de Développement de la Culture Kanak</td>
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<tr>
<td>APM</td>
<td>Archivio dei Padri Maristi, Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFP</td>
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<td>CRS</td>
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<td>VM</td>
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## Drehu alphabet and phonetic equivalents

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## Glossary of Drehu terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ange</td>
<td>people</td>
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<tr>
<td>api</td>
<td>nephew, niece</td>
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<tr>
<td>atr</td>
<td>man</td>
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<td>atresi</td>
<td>adviser</td>
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<td>fœe</td>
<td>woman, spouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>haetra</td>
<td>eldest</td>
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<td>hale</td>
<td>ancestor</td>
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<tr>
<td>helep</td>
<td>cultivated gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>hmelôm</td>
<td>bachelors' house</td>
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<tr>
<td>hmi</td>
<td>religion, to pray</td>
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<tr>
<td>hnafetra</td>
<td>root-place</td>
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<tr>
<td>hnalapa</td>
<td>dwelling-site; named position</td>
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<tr>
<td>hunahmi</td>
<td>contemporary tribal settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>hunapo</td>
<td>past dispersed tribal settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>iôlekeu</td>
<td>yam feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inatr</td>
<td>hut central pole</td>
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<tr>
<td>itra</td>
<td>earth oven dish, bougna</td>
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<tr>
<td>jin</td>
<td>subject, younger brother or sister</td>
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<tr>
<td>jo</td>
<td>lateral beans</td>
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<tr>
<td>ka xet</td>
<td>young banana leaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>kamadra</td>
<td>white, European, French</td>
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<tr>
<td>koko</td>
<td>yam</td>
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<tr>
<td>lapa</td>
<td>clan, family</td>
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<tr>
<td>maathin</td>
<td>mother's brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>meitro</td>
<td>round hut</td>
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<tr>
<td>nôj</td>
<td>pays</td>
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<tr>
<td>qatr</td>
<td>elder</td>
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<tr>
<td>qene nôj</td>
<td>the way of the land</td>
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<tr>
<td>qêmek</td>
<td>gift</td>
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<tr>
<td>sinelapa</td>
<td>chief's adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>tixe</td>
<td>chief, elder brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>trenadro</td>
<td>master of the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umepö</td>
<td>hut within chiefly compound</td>
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DES MILLENAIRES

Hier avant leur arrivée
dans notre histoire
aux racines récités
aux origines mémorisées
qui tu fus exactement
que fut ta place
dans le monde de notre peuple

il t'appartient ô ma mère
il te revient ô ma soeur
d'essayer de la chercher

non à l'ethnologue
non au sociologue
de l'Occident capitaliste
non au missionnaire
'civilisateur' 'pacificateur'
non au petit-bourgeois idéaliste
qui chanteront que

tu n'étais rien du tout
ou bien tout reposait sur toi dans le clan
ou bien tu étais pire qu'une bête de somme
ou bien tu étais la source de toute vie

Des Millénaires
ils ont parlé écrit décidé
pour toi
à ta place
ô ma mère ô ma soeur

Il est grand temps d'arrêter
et le manège
et le carnage
et de LUTTER
pour te définir
TOI-MÊME
de même que ta place
au cœur de ton peuple
et partout ailleurs

MILLENAIRES

Yesterday before they came
into our history
our roots were chanted
our origins memorized
who you were exactly
what was your place
in the world of our people

it is yours O my mother
it is up to you O my sister
to try and search for it

not the ethnologist
not the sociologist
from the western capitalist world
not the missionary
the 'civilizer' the 'peacemaker'
not the idealist petty-bourgeois
who will sing

that you were nothing
or that everything in the clan leant on you
that you were worst than a beast of burden
or that you were the source of all life

Milennarians
have spoken, written, decided
for you
on your behalf
O my mother O my sister

It is time to stop
the manipulations
the slaughter
and to FIGHT
to define yourself
By YOURSELF
as well as your place
within your own people
and everywhere else

Dewé Gorodé, November 1974
Part One
Preliminaries
A QUESTION OF NAMES

New Caledonia was the name given by Captain James Cook during his second voyage in 1774 to an island which reminded him of Scotland. In the colonial period the label New Caledonia and 'dependencies' referred respectively to the main island, to the Loyalty Islands and other offshore islands. Nowadays the name is used to refer to two vastly different areas: the large mountainous island, locally referred to as Grande Terre (400 km long by 50 km wide); and east of it a group of four main coral islands, the Loyalty Islands (Map 1). The latter were precisely located by Europeans only at the end of the 18th century by Raven, commandant of the Britannia. They were charted in 1827 by Dumont d'Urville, who is credited with determining the boundaries of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia as they have been used in modern anthropological literature (Thomas 1989b:27-34). However, Dumont d'Urville had no contact with the indigenous population of the Loyalties and to this day it is uncertain why they came to be so called:

I am unable to say where the name Loyalty comes from. It appears for the first time on the maps of Arrow-Smith and in the instructions of d'Urville (M. Jouan 'Notice sur les Iles Loyalty', Moniteur Impérial, 10 November 1861).

At the beginning of this century Sarasin expressed the same view: 'On ignore qui lui a donné le nom d'Archipel Loyalty' [We don't know who named the Loyalty
Map 1: New Caledonia

Belep Is.

Provincial boundary

Provincial capital

Main village

Kilometres

Pourrii

'ouebo

Ouvea

LOYALTY

Koumac

Hienghène

Touho

Poindimé

Ponérihouen

Houailou

La Grande Terre

Poya

Bourail

La Foa

Bouloupari

La Tontouta

Nouméa

AUSTRALIA

Isle of Pines

Location
Archipelago] (1915:1). This was still accepted by Howe in his work on the Loyalties (1977:165), although there is some possibility that the name was conferred by Raven (Robert Langdon, pers. comm. November 1993). The name remained even after French annexation in 1864, though later it was Gallicized as Loyauté (R. Leenhardt 1980:6).¹

New Caledonia is a French Overseas Territory. Kanaky is the name it will assume once it is independent from France. I will use the name New Caledonia here, though I refer to the population of the country and of the community where I worked as Kanak not Melanesians. This decision is based on the fact that people in Lifu refer to themselves as angetre Drehu [people from Lifu] and also as Kanak. They refer to the country by using the indigenous names for each island, or nøj [land] when referring to Lifu itself. Kanaky is used by the people in more politicized contexts and discourses. Following Bensa (1990b) I use the term 'Kanak' in its invariant form. The word has an interesting history in terms of both its changing connotations over time and its spelling. It is a Hawaiian word that came to be used in a derogatory way to refer to indigenous people of Melanesia. Whereas nowadays in Papua New Guinea and in Australia 'Kanak' or 'Kanaka' are still derogatory terms (but see Moore 1985), in New Caledonia the indigenes have inverted this connotation, transforming it into a symbol of positive cultural identity.

The independence movement has also chosen a spelling that replaces the French form 'canaque'; although it should be noted that in early French documents the word is likewise spelled with a K. O'Reilly (1953) argues that 'Kanaks' was used by travellers, officials and people from Nouméa generally, but it was not used by missionaries, who used terms such as 'islanders', 'indigenes', 'pagans', 'Caledonians', or the name of the place they came from, 'mais jamais on ne parle de Canaques' [but one never speaks of Canaques] (1953:205). In the Marists' correspondence from Lifu the missionaries usually refer to the indigenes by the term 'les indigènes' [the indigenes] or by making a distinction between Catholics and Protestants (often referred to as 'hérétiques' [heretics] and 'païens' [pagans]). But I also came upon several instances where the missionaries used the word 'Kanak', its spelling changing over time. Fabre, in a letter of 1864, uses 'Kanak' when writing about both the people and the vernacular language (1 December 1864, APM/ONC 208). The same missionary in 1866 writes

¹ Although scholars, such as Guiart (1953, 1957, 1992) and Lenormand (1950, 1990) have kept the spelling 'Loyalty' in their works.
'Kanač' (27 July 1866, APM/ONC 208). In 1872 Gaide describes the instability of Christianity: 'Nous bâtissons sur le *kanakisme*, c.a.d. sur le sable' [We are building on kanakisme, that is on sand]. But in 1873 the missionary Janin visiting Lifu writes 'les canaques' (1873, APM/ONC 208). In the French census, on the other hand, the indigenous population was and is still referred to as 'les Mélanésiens'. In New Caledonia this term is still widely used, mainly on Grande Terre, to refer to the indigenes.

**QUOTATION CONVENTIONS**

Quotations from oral interviews were not recorded unless otherwise specified. Each quotation is documented as follows: author's or interviewee's name, and then date on which oral or written narratives were produced, e.g. (Kamaqatr, April 1990). In referring to archival documents with unknown author or incomplete date, I indicate them by a question mark, e.g. (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208). Emphases are present in the original texts, unless otherwise specified. I have decided to use the full name of the interviewees. I think the women I have worked with will be pleased to find themselves thus mentioned. When sensitive subjects are being discussed names are omitted.

All French quotations, whether oral or written statements, are in italics, whereas Drehu terms are in bold. In the use of Drehu orthography I follow *Langue Drehu propositions d'écriture* by Uné and Ujicas (1984) and the *Lexique Lifou-Français* by Sam L. Drilé (1980). Toponyms and personal names are not differentiated but appear in normal characters. If not otherwise stated the interviews were conducted in French. The translation of both written and oral sources from French into English are mine, unless otherwise specified. French linguistic and cultural conventions specify the use of initial capital letters differently from English. In the transcription of interviews I capitalize 'les Catholiques' [Catholics] or 'les Protestants' [Protestants] only when they are used as nouns.

REFLECTIONS ON LINGUISTIC TRANSLATION

Before discussing the writing process there is one important element that needs to be brought to the fore: contestation of culture and linguistic translation. What does it imply? Can there ever be a neutral translation even when it is a literal translation? Or isn’t translation itself a process of filtering, a process of interpretation? (Clifford 1980).

My concern with linguistic translatability should not be viewed as simply a concern with narrative device or postmodernist ethnographic experiments (see Clifford 1988:ch.4 and above). An example – that of autobiography – might help clarify what I mean. As a literary genre, Todorov defines autobiography on the basis of two identifications: 'the author's identification with the narrator, and the narrator's identification with the chief protagonist' and the first identification is what 'separates all the "referential" or "historical" genres from all the "fictional" genres' (Todorov 1990 [1978]:25). Thus we are dealing with a speech act that codifies both semantic properties (implied by the narrator-character identification; one must speak of oneself) and pragmatic properties (by virtue of the author-narrator identification; one claims to be telling the truth and not a fiction).

But if we consider this genre within anthropology, we find that the two identifications do not work in the way Todorov tells us. The role of 'the ethnographer as editor/agent/author' (Keesing and Jolly 1992: 230) is critical. This comes into play in different ways. If a life history becomes a narrative frame for stringing together life cycle rituals then I do not think our assumptions have changed; they are just better masked. But a life history can also become a generational history experienced by a man or by a woman; that is, it can be told through the subjective experience of one individual and thus it not only historicizes the life cycles but also brings to the foreground the question of the unique character of a life history and indeed the role of the editor/interpreter/author in constructing this (e.g. Young 1983b, Keesing 1985b).

When back from the field and working through my ethnographic and historical material I found myself caught in a dilemma: how to do justice to my material and yet not confound Anglo-Saxon linguistic conventions. Most of my communications in the field were conducted through New Caledonian French, which is the lingua franca of the country. It is different from Standard French in that it has undergone changes and has incorporated borrowed words from Pacific languages, from English and from West Indian French (Tryon 1991). People in...
Lifu speak Drehu, the vernacular language; French to them is a second language. I took informal lessons from a woman in Drueulu but, because my fluency in French progressed much faster, I relied on it more than on Drehu for long conversations and intensive interviews. Sometimes I would ask questions in French and people would reply in Drehu. In writing I have been confronted with several issues of 'translatability', first how to deal with the language – be it oral or written – of the original utterances. French is a second language for Kanak, while I myself had to deal with a source language (French) and a target language (English), neither of them my mother tongue. Translation is not a neutral process. As a brief but telling example, consider the three English translations of Irigaray's 'Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un.' Both translations signed by women are titled *This Sex Which Is Not One*. The one signed by a team of two men reads *That Sex Which Is Not One.* (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:94, emphasis is mine).

Keeping these questions in mind, I therefore decided as a compromise solution to provide in the left-hand column an English translation of each oral or written text quoted, placing the original text on the right.² In the case of early British missionaries working on Lifu, the problem does not arise as their texts are already in English. Having resolved to present both texts side by side, I was then confronted with another issue. In Lifu people speak the vernacular language, Drehu, and French. Speaking Drehu is still today a very important indicator of Lifuan cultural identity, yet one cannot ignore the fact that French, albeit the colonizers' language, is the lingua franca in communication among Kanak from other linguistic areas. Lifuans speak French while imposing Drehu patterns of grammar and world view. Yet it has not developed into a creole but is rather considered by most speakers of Standard French as 'broken French'. Because of the lack of social legitimacy of this variety of French which is connected with the social status of the speakers, I was confronted with the question of how to present these texts. Some French researchers warned me about making the people appear to talk *petit-nègre*, and at first I decided to edit the oral texts I was presenting.³ However, looking up the English translation of *petit-nègre* [Pidgin]⁴ I realised

² In the case of a published English version, such as Leenhardt's *Do kamo*, I use it directly in English.

³ The Italian-French dictionary I consulted (Boch, Bologna: Zanichelli 1987) for *petit-nègre* for want of an Italian equivalent explains to the reader: 'linguaggio scorretto, approssimativo e povero, caratterizzato dall'uso sistematico del solo infinito dei verbi' [inaccurate, approximate, and poor language, characterised by the systematic use of the verb only in its infinitive form] (1987:748).

the issues at stake. A language which does not conform with the standard language is not recognized as such but instead is patronized and deprecated.\(^5\) I thus decided not to edit but to give a verbatim transcript of the parts of interviews I was using. I think Drueulu women want to recognize themselves in the actual words they speak rather than be revised by me as more 'standard', although, not presuming to be able to render their French words in similar nonstandard English, my English translation is standard.

A further issue pertaining to linguistic translatability, its limits and constraints, has been central to this work. I found myself having to render in Anglo-American categories anthropological concepts I had spoken about with people in a different language. In the field, I was not so struck by these differences because French and Drehu seem in some cases to overlap. For example, the range of contexts in which Drehu uses \textit{u} is similar to the French \textit{'esprit'}. I am not implying a particularly close mapping of French onto Drehu; for instance, there is no semantic equivalent to \textit{qene nöj [custom]} which French glosses as \textit{la coutume}. However, French sometimes offers closer correspondences to the Drehu concepts, as in the case of \textit{u} (see Chapter Three). Despite the inevitable distortion in both cases, it is somewhat different to render \textit{u} in a language that centres the human being on a notion of 'body/soul' or 'body/spirit' rather than 'body/mind'.

I am not arguing that one language makes the task easier, nor do I intend to regard oppositional reasoning as a peculiarity of the English language;\(^6\) I simply want to problematize the issues involved and not 'rely uncritically on concepts such as "mind"' (Wierzbicka 1992:26). Looking at another society through a particular language prism makes a difference. Too often we tend to overemphasize differences between western/non-western languages and to downplay diversities within western languages. As Wierzbicka argues, unlike the concept of 'person' which is universally available, the concept of 'mind' is not. But "'Thinking", "knowing", "feeling", and "wanting" ... appear to be lexically embodied in all the languages of the world' (1993:214).

\(^5\) Here I am thinking also of French spoken in Quebec, to which I have also been exposed. See Weinstein 1989.

\(^6\) Although my research has been conducted mainly in French, I became more concerned with issues of translatability when I was back in Canberra writing up my thesis. However, these concerns are not new for me. Having translated Anthony Smith's book \textit{The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World} (1981) into Italian (\textit{Il revival etnico}, 1984), I have been sensitive to issues of translation in the written process well before writing this thesis.
CURRENCY CONVENTIONS

The rate of exchange between the New Caledonian currency (CFP) and the French franc (FF) has fixed parity: 100 CFP equal to 5.5 FF. During the period of my fieldwork the average exchange rate for the Australian dollar (A$) and for the American dollar (US$) was 100 CFP = A$1.25 and US$0.90 approximately.

Plate 1a: Thérèse (centre), Anna (right), Kamaqat (left), Drueulu, 1992
Prologue

THE RESEARCH SITE AND PROCESS

Should mobility be constructed as migration? Was migration a special case of mobility? Such basic questions remained unresolved (Lowenthal 1985:318).

... mobility can no longer be conceived as a simple removal from one place to another or as a neutral and informal phenomenon. Rather it is a journey in the cultural sense of the word (Bonnemaison 1985:32).

This thesis is about the lives of Lifu women in both village and urban settings. I conducted fieldwork in New Caledonia in 1989-90 and again in 1991-92 for a total of 18 months, 12 of which I spent in Drueulu (a village on the west coast of Lifu), and the rest in the urban milieu of Nouméa (see Maps 1 and 2). Drueulu is the second largest village on the island, with a total population of 1100, but at the time this research was undertaken (1989) half of the population lived in Nouméa.¹ This study is primarily ethnographic in nature, although necessarily informed throughout by historical and demographic considerations.

The choice of Lifu as a site for my fieldwork emerged from the long history of the islanders' interactions with foreigners, both on the island and beyond. The choice of a village in which to live was mainly due to connections my friends in Canberra had with people from Drueulu living in Nouméa. When I arrived in Drueulu I knew that the majority of the people were Catholic (in a mainly Protestant island), and I considered this very interesting. I also knew that women

¹ Source: Etat Civil de We, 1 January 1990.
were part of the flow of people from Lifu to Nouméa but did not know then that an organized women's group was active in the village.

While in Drueulu, Alicia, my daughter, and I took part in the social events of the community: Christian, customary feasts, death and wedding ceremonies, women's activities, etc. We lived in a large household and shared our daily life with members of the family. During our first long stay we had a room to ourselves, but on our second trip we shared sleeping accommodation with all the other children and women of the family in a large circular hut, part of the household compound. Though we were living with a Catholic family and I spent a lot of time with the Drueulu women's group of Catholic women, I was not exclusively identified with them. Alicia went to the public school in Drueulu and had as classmates the children of Protestant families and I had good relations with the Protestant community in the village throughout my stay. One Sunday when I wanted to participate in the ceremony of the first ordination of a Kanak woman, held in Traput, a village 30 km away from Drueulu, there was no petrol available on the island. My hopes of participating in the ceremony had almost evaporated, when Elé Ele Hmaea, deacon of Drueulu, understanding what that event meant to me, at the last minute organized two young men of the village to drive me in his light lorry from Drueulu to Traput.

Throughout my fieldwork I made use of the usual anthropological techniques - a village census, genealogies, interviewing, participant observation - each one opening a different window on social life. Some interviews were the outcome of formal meetings and were structured, others proceeded more casually. The subjects under discussion and the context as well as the age or sex of the interviewee dictated my use of the tape recorder. Generally speaking, elderly men were most willing to allow the recording of their views. This generated many texts, some of which I reproduce here. Of the many voices which informed the narrative, a number will recur in the text again and again: Pohnimé Haluatr, responsible for the Drueulu women's group; Sipo Wamo, who has a great knowledge of the mechanisms of 'making custom'; Awa Taua (Awaqatr), born in 1916, one of the oldest women of Drueulu. (The suffix qatr attached to a name is a marker of age and of respect, and I use it following villagers' usage.) My thesis draws also from discussions I had with Marie Waitreu (Mariqatr), who shared with me her interpretations of 'custom'; Waxōma Zeula, teacher at the local school; in Nouméa, Zanesi Ausu, an invaluable source of information for locating Drueulu people in town; and finally Kama Haluatr (Kamaqatr), who liked to recount anecdotes of the time she attended the Catholic Mission school.
The men who significantly contributed to this work were the late Paul Zöngö (Paulqatr), a catechist born in 1909, with whom I had long conversations before he was hospitalized in Nouméa, where he recently died; Haijengo Haluatatr, master of the soil of Drueulu, now living and working in Nouméa, but returning frequently to the village; Elé Ele Hmaea, deacon of the community; Louis Case, spokesman for the high chief; and Bill Wapotro, from Lösi, a very fine interpreter of the contemporary situation in Lifu.

Our arrival in Drueulu was expected. At that time I did not understand which channels had been activated to let our host family and the high chief know that
Plate 1d: Paulqatr (with book) talking to high chief Zeula at the Mission, Drueulu

Plate 1e: Kelaqatr
Map 2: Lifu

- Provincial capital
- Chiefly village
- Village
- Locality
- Aerodrome of Wanaham
- District boundary
- Major road
we were coming. Billy Wapotro and his mother from the southern district of Lösi accompanied us and introduced us to our host family. Then they guided us to the chiefly compound, at the end of the village, to 'make custom' to the high chief, Pierre Zeula, Drueulu being the seat of chiefly residence. As it turned out, we had followed a good 'chemin coutumier' [customary pathway], by reason of Wapotro's intermediary role between the chefferie of Lösi and that of Gaica.

Drueulu is one of the four tribal villages of the district of Gaica, the smallest of the three districts into which the island of Lifu is divided (Map 2). The terms 'tribe' and 'district' are administrative designations. Tribus [tribes] are in fact administrative units; everybody accepts this definition, yet today they have taken on a different meaning for those living within tribal boundaries. Furthermore 'tribe' and 'village' are used interchangeably in Lifu, an island where the overwhelming majority of the population is Kanak. The same does not apply on the main island, where a sharp distinction exists between indigenous settlements, referred to as 'tribes', and white settlements, referred to as 'villages'. The district is another administrative partition whose boundaries, as I will explain in the next chapter, do not overlap with the chefferie; the difference lies in their being clear-cut bounded spaces and not overlapping contested borders as are those of the chefferie.

Connections between Lifu and the main island are mainly by plane. The air strip at Wanaham (Northern Lifu, see Map 2) was built in the mid-1950s. Today, flights leave from Magenta (Nouméa's domestic airport) for Wanaham twice a day. A new inter-îles flight links Maré-Tiga-Lifu-Ouvéa (Loyalty Islands) twice a week. In 1988 the sales office in Lifu represented the second largest sales outlet of Air Calédonie in the country, with 52 000 passengers and 250 tonnes of freight registered between Lifu and Nouméa. The inter-island vessel, the Cap de Pins, connecting the main island with the Loyalties, during the time of my fieldwork was old and unsafe and had an unreliable schedule, yet it was the most used means of transport for goods to and from Lifu. The acquisition of a new, more reliable ferry boat for freight as well as passengers was planned by the old Région des Iles Loyauté. This project was accomplished only in June 1992 by the newly established Loyalty Province. The ferry, which began to operate in New

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2 Passages, magazine d'Air Calédonie, 1989:23.
3 Interview with Yeiwene Yeiwene, the late president of the region, in Construire, bulletin de liaison centre nord et les îles, n.8 août/sept. 1987:3.
Caledonian waters in 1994, was named President Yeiwene, honouring the late president of the region and independentist leader, who was killed in 1989.5

Drueulu, on the west coast of Lifu, is situated between Sandalwood Bay and a limestone cliff. The modern village has developed along two main axes (see Map 3). Facing the two paved roads are dwelling houses and public buildings. Entering the village along the road from We one encounters one of the two sports grounds and then the new cemetery. The main road descends and enters the old core of the village. Public buildings here include a large roofed platform used for meetings such as those of the Council of Elders, the Catholic preschool and primary school, the Church and the Church Hall [Mission], the Maison des Femmes [Women's House] and the dispensary. At the end of the village the main road bifurcates. At the junction there is an elevation on which is located the chiefly compound enclosed by a fence of wood and stone. The Protestant church and a large roofed platform used for religious gatherings [Eika] lie ahead of the fork. The old cemetery is accessible only by a small path running along the coast. A sandy road runs from the chiefly compound along the coast back to the centre of the village overlooking Sandalwood Bay. Returning to the village's main intersection one can proceed along the main road to Wedrumel, where the state kindergarten, primary school and the second sports field are located.

Today the local economy relies less on primary productive activities (gardening and fishing) and more on welfare payments, salaried jobs (mainly in the public sector) and remittances and commodities from employed relatives in Nouméa. The village has had electricity since the end of the 1980s. The economic activities of the village consist of two small family bakeries (bread is made daily and sold in the village or taken to We) and three small magasins [food shops], of which only the Co-op is regularly open. It employs a young man from the village.

In contrast with the other two villages in Lifu which are seats of chiefly residence, Drueulu is bi-denominational. Mu, situated in the Protestant district of Lösi, is inhabited by Protestants and Hnathalo is a Catholic enclave in the

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5 Yeiwene and Tjibaou were killed on Ouvéa by Djubelly Wea on 4 May 1989. The killing took place a year after the massacre of 19 Kanak by French military on the same island and on the eve of the implementation of the Accords de Matignon. The agreement was signed in Paris in June 1988 by French Prime Minister Rocard, the late Tjibaou (former leader of UC and president of FLNKS) for the Kanak, and Lafleur for the French settlers (see Henningham 1992). Yeiwene and Tjibaou who had advocated the Accords were considered by some responsible for selling out the independentist movement (see Ounei-Small 1994).
Protestant district of Wetri. Catholics represent a minority of the population in Lifu but in Drueulu they constitute the majority and include the chief's family.

Today the old core of the village has expanded, and recently married couples have installed themselves in more peripheral areas, though new households have also been established along a third road, which connects the two major ones (see Map 3). People tell of the 'old time' when people lived scattered around the place; some people inhabited what is today known as Drueulu,6 but the concentration of people in a village settlement was, they say, a consequence of the arrival of the missionaries. In the old part of the village people belonging to the same clan live next to each other: Ange hnalapa next to the chiefly compound, then along the coastline Ange Api Zeula and Ange Api Canyö. Ange Cipa households are located near the cliff and Ange Triji dwellings are found where the two main roads intersect. In the distribution of new plots of land, a similar principle has been followed, in the sense that people living next to each other have some clan or customary links.

The old part of the village is divided in four sections,7 or quartiers, as Drueulans call them: Hunöj, Feneiwewe, Bewe and Qasany. These toponyms are mentioned in connection with some community activities. For example, for a religious fête each quartier might have specific duties to carry out. On other occasions these distinctions are eclipsed by denominational affiliation.

The hnalapa is the dwelling site typically of one nuclear family, but often extended to include an elderly parent or younger unmarried classificatory brothers and/or sisters. Nowadays flowers and screens of bushes or fences somewhat separate one hnalapa from the other. Nevertheless it is often possible to go from the back of one compound to the neighbouring one. The access to each compound from the street is always open. Most of the gardens are outside village boundaries.

The dwelling ground, the property of a family group, consists of several buildings, diversified in terms of material used and functions. It comprises the Lifuan circular hut [meitro], a wooden thatched structure with a very low front door (see Chapter Two) today used for sleeping and receiving people; a concrete rain-water tank; a one-room corrugated iron or concrete dwelling for cooking and eating, another for sleeping and keeping one's personal belongings; a latrine and a shower. An outside wooden shelter for cooking completes the dwelling place.

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6 In the early Marist missionaries' records Drueulu is referred to as Ngaxa (Gaica).
7 Drueulans do not seem to attribute special significance to the number four.
Young married couples, except for the eldest married son and his wife, who inherit his parents' dwelling site, usually move to a ground furnished with a water tank, a cooking shelter and a one-room house made of corrugated iron. As time goes by and the family grows larger the dwelling ground generally becomes more organized. The couple, daughters and young male children will sleep in the hut [uma ne mekol], whereas older sons sleep separately. Our hosts, a young couple in their thirties, upon their marriage had moved to the ground of the husband which he, as the second male born of his family, owned as hereditary property. They lived there for several years in a small corrugated iron one-room dwelling. They were both employed, saved money and were able to fund the building of a thatched hut; recently they were able to take out a mortgage from the bank to build a brick house. The couple and their three male children (a fourth, a girl, was born after my fieldwork), an adolescent adopted daughter, the husband's mother (a widow), his unmarried sister, her young son and one of his cousins were living together in this new house. In the cold season meals were prepared inside and we would all eat in the house or under the porch. The hut was still used for sleeping purposes by the male children, the other female relatives and ourselves while the couple slept in their bedroom in the house. However, they always received visitors in the hut.

Lifuan men and women consider the circular hut the traditional dwelling and refer to it as to a symbol of cultural identity. In order to apply to the provincial Social Housing Program, operating since 1992 with the objective of building each year 70 logements [dwellings] in the provincial territory, people must satisfy several requirements, such as having low income, being a Lifu resident (i.e. spending at least nine months a year on the island), owning the chosen plot of land, and having built a case traditionnelle [traditional hut] on it. This was explained by Macatre Wenehoua, at the time of my fieldwork technical adviser to the Province, as a way to motivate young people to build Lifuan huts.

When I started fieldwork at the end of 1989, Lifu and the whole country were experiencing a period of relative peace after the political mobilizations [événements] for independence which had swept the country in 1984-85 and again in 1988 and early 1989. The new political climate could be felt in Drueulu. Both nationalists and loyalists had accepted the move towards normalized relations. The elections of 6 November 1988, when people went to the polls to

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8 It is not the only brick house in the village; such houses belong to families who have at least one employed member.
vote on the Matignon Accords, gave the following results in Drueulu: 310 yes, 31 no and 2 void (from *Journal Jeunesse* 1988).9

During the événements young Drueuluans were politically active both in Lifu and on the main island; some of them were engaged in the EPK (*Ecole Populaire Kanak*). A few Drueulan children were taken out of the government and church schools and sent to Hapetra, the village next to Drueulu, where an *Ecole Populaire Kanak* was operating. The Hapetra experiment was over by 1989. People recall how during the événements they were bitterly separated by political cleavages even though they belonged to the same clan or to the same church. Sometimes people strategically invoked customary paths to prevent people on the opposite side from reaching their ends. Recounting the boycott of the 1984 elections in Drueulu, Mariqatr told how a man from a nearby tribe had gone to see the high chief to ask him to intervene to allow free access to the road between Drueulu and We, which was blockaded by barricades preventing people from voting. The man belonged to a clan of which Mariqatr's husband was the chief. Thus later, she reproached the man for having gone directly to the chiefly compound without following the right customary path, through her husband. However, this incident demonstrates that the protocol of following customary paths can be strategically used both to achieve one's own political ends (to request the intervention of chiefly authority) and to prevail over a different political/ideological affiliation.

The year 1985 was a critical time for Drueulu. Celestin Zöngö, aged 18, was shot dead at the end of a demonstration in Montravel (Nouméa). His corpse was buried in his home village. Waxöma, my host, a sister of Celestin's father, recalled the tension at the funeral. Celestin's family's members are well known in New Caledonia for their involvement in the Catholic education system, and at the burial several kamadra [whites] had joined with the family from Nouméa. The young men of Drueulu responded to the arrival of the outsiders with barricades. Only the intervention of Luatre, Waxöma's brother, but also the maathin [mother's brother] of one of the young men, a political activist, brought the situation under control. The kamadra were thus allowed to enter the village.

At the end of 1989 the same young men involved with the barricades were the promoters of the Youth Association, *Drui*, a group created with the aim of involving young people in the economic, cultural and social life of the tribe, a

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9 For a different interpretation of the Matignon Accords at the grassroots level, see Susanna Ounei-Small (1994).
change symptomatic of the new political climate. During the second period of fieldwork the political climate again altered as the Matignon Accords were implemented. In the reorganization of the early 1990s following the decentralization process put forward by the Matignon Accords of 1989 (cf. Chapter Seven), We was designated as the administrative centre for the newly constituted Loyalty Islands Province (see Map 2). Branches of government service agencies were thus located there. They included the provincial administration, territorial public works and a section of the law court (Administration judiciaire). Other provincial agencies, such as the DPASS (Direction Provinciale de l'Action Sanitaire et Sociale), were also temporarily located in We. Then in 1993 DPASS moved to Maré, as a part of a provincial decentralization initiative. The opening up of new job opportunities in Lifu has involved the transfer of Lifuans who used to work for the Administration in Nouméa and the arrival of French white-collar workers. New dwellings were built to accommodate the civil servants and their families. The policies of the new province - ranging from economics to health and education domains - were perceived by villagers as an outside intrusion into village life (see Chapter Seven). This brings me to the central questions I pose and the process of writing this thesis.

THE WRITING PROCESS AND THE THESIS OUTLINE

First, I raise some preliminary methodological issues about the use of both ethnographic and historical sources which I have integrated into this work, issues to which I return in Chapter Two. Although I have dealt with archival material in previous research when I was in the Department of History at the Università di Bologna and although I have had previous experience of fieldwork among the Navajos in the south-west of the United States, combining and integrating ethnographic and historical materials was a new challenge. Although my training in history prominently featured the French Annales school of historians such as Braudel and Le Goff, I found this a genderless vision of society and of history. I was thus confronted with a new set of questions. The most pressing were how to render Kanak women's lived experience the focus of my work and not just a tangential aspect of it to be relegated to a few introductory and concluding pages and how to present them not as 'victims' whilst using archival texts, written mainly by European men, in which references to women are scanty and their
representations are filtered through the lens of European constructs of gender. In many narratives women and their experiences have been neglected, marginalized or portrayed in stereotyped ways. My research has been carried out from a 'consciously gendered female perspective' (Zinsser 1993:24), to which I hope to be faithful in the chapters that follow. It is a perspective that 'opens up the other half of the history' (Kelly 1984 [1976]:15) but also views women's biographies not so much as isolated stories but as rooted in collectivity (Arendt 1977).

Guiart (1992a:223, 445) has argued that Lifuan women play an important role in political and social relations in a society 'traversée en permanence de tensions fortes et ne pratiquant nullement par principe la charité chrétienne' [continually crisscrossed by strong tensions which does not practise at all Christian charity as a principle] (1992a:217). Guiart's prolific writing, mainly in French, based on his 'inventory method', does not address the questions I pose. He has overlooked women's collective expressions, expressions which I explore (see especially Part Two). There is scanty material published on Lifu in the Anglophone anthropological literature.

As the title suggests, this thesis attempts to understand Lifuan women's ways of making collectivities in the broader context of rural and urban society. 'Boundaries of difference' should be understood as an analytical construct, mapping how women and men assert identities in different contexts, not only vis-d-vis each other but also in relation to outsiders, myself included. Boundaries are fluid both because they are generated by intersecting elements of difference and hierarchy and because people consciously redraw them. Thus this notion of boundaries of difference should not be seen as an organizing principle or as essentializing Lifuans, but as suggesting the process whereby they represent themselves in different historical and socio-political contexts. The subtitle 'Geographical and Social Mobility by Lifuan Women' encapsulates the specificities of the work: how Lifuan women live in rural and urban settings and how they deploy constructs of identity in the two milieux. Given the male domination of the social structure one might question the appropriateness of the subtitle of the thesis in encapsulating this work. The subtitle should be read as stressing the interest which has driven this work: namely women's lives and experiences, which in the particular context of Lifuan society is today, as it seems to have been in the past, marked by the notion of mobility, both in terms of
spatial movements\textsuperscript{10} and in terms of social movements. The second half of the thesis focuses more specifically on women, yet even when dealing with more visible male ways of making collectivities, as I do in Chapter Two, I consider them from a gendered perspective.

This thesis is not a standard ethnographic monograph of village life, nor is it a study of female migration. As will become clear, the focus of my research and my work is women's lives and experience in relation to contemporary society and past history (see Ralston 1992). The thesis has been conceived in three parts which are integrated by the argument that, in order to appreciate women's contemporary lives and experiences, historical contextualization of Lifuans' identity is necessary. Both Parts Two and Three stress the centrality of processes of continuity and change, a seemingly simple but very difficult opposition (which I consider later).

In Part One, I introduce the research site and the broader theoretical contexts in which to situate my work. In Chapter One I introduce my theoretical perspective – positioning myself in the field, explaining the partiality of my representation and the situational context of my interpretation. In Part Two I deal with the broader historical contexts in which to situate Lifu and Drueulu. The next three chapters (Part Two) deal with the selective engagement of Lifuan men and women with foreigners' presence, commodities and ideas. I present this engagement by focusing on the agency of the islanders yet avoiding the conflation of the different interests at play under two unified antagonistic fronts: Lifuans/Europeans. On the basis of both historical and ethnographic sources, Chapter Two proceeds to introduce the selective engagement of Lifuans with colonial discourse. I explore indigenous notions of authority and hierarchy and how they shaped Lifuans' early interactions with foreigners. I analyze how the values of 'foreign' and 'autochthonous' in indigenous socio-political relations structured early engagement with outsiders, both Pacific Islanders and Europeans, and impinged on Lifuans' later engagement with foreigners. Chapters Three and Four build on the previous one, presenting in more detail Lifuans' conversion to Christianity and experience of the labour trade. I consider how Lifuans reworked new religious ideas and messages into local, community-generated notions. Here I focus on the differences between daily practices of Catholics and Protestants, in both past and present, drawing mainly from people's

\textsuperscript{10} If in the past this mobility was mainly male, male absences still had an impact on the lives of women who stayed behind.
contemporary accounts. Christianity is crucial in Lifuans' present sense of themselves. Through historical and ethnographic material I then explore the migrations of the past (on plantations as well as to towns), focusing both on the men who were taking part in them and on the women who remained in the village. I also consider how men and women perceived this mobility in the past and present and how it has shaped their notion of modernity.

Mobility is a central notion in the thesis. It is not confined to the geographical movement of persons, but denotes the fluidity of collectivities and the processes of interacting with outsiders. I introduce the notion of boundaries of difference as an analytical tool to explore how identity constructs have shifted in different historical contexts and how today they are differently deployed by women and men of Drueulu.

In Part Three, in Chapter Five, I introduce the population profile at the time of my fieldwork. I present the age distribution, sex ratio and how norms of mobility and household strategies have changed. Though this chapter is more demographically informed than the others, these data are not viewed as 'indicators' against which to measure Kanak women's achievements (see Mohanty 1991:6). Rather, I interpret them in the contexts of women's collective situation, Kanak notions of persons and the bipolarisation of the population as either Melanesian or European. New Caledonia lacks a social category of 'demis' [mixed blood], such as is found in Tahiti and most other parts of the present and former French colonial empire.

I then move in Chapter Six to consider gendered representations of social life and how they are deployed in social relations. I juxtapose these constructions of gender with missionary discourse on motherhood and the feminine body. While collectivity is primarily male dominated and male defined, women have their own ways of engaging in it. I finally consider how women 'negotiate' constructions of feminine identity and create new collectivities based on such identities. Women and men from Drueulu ground their Kanak identity on both qene nöj [custom] and Christianity. I address their articulation in Chapter Seven by considering and differentiating their modern commitments to custom and their engagement in Christianity. I analyze women's 'negotiation' of identities and consider how new elements and circumstances in the socio-economic setting resulting from the Matignon Accords have produced concerns that have been addressed differently by women and men and how this has reconfigured their construction of boundaries of difference. I also explore the notion of la parole [speech] with respect to these issues. In the conclusion I argue that boundaries of
difference which are rooted in indigenous social relations are different for women by reason of their lived experience and the place they occupy in collectivities. This allows women's groups to acquire greater visibility. Though this chapter focuses on the rural context while Chapter Eight addresses questions pertaining to the urban milieu, my intention is to present the two environments juxtaposed, rather than as discrete spaces. Rural and urban are not perceived as a disjunction, or as opposite poles on a continuum, but rather as part of the same universe.

Although, as I have stated in the opening paragraph, several months of my fieldwork were spent in town, only the final chapter focuses on the urban scene. Yet the question of rural/urban relations is considered elsewhere (e.g. Chapter Three and Chapter Five). I made this choice for lack of balance as I became aware, working in town and later on my urban materials, that to understand the interactions of Drueuluan women in the urban milieu one needs to have as privileged interlocutors not other urban neighbours but rather rural Lifuans. (I hope this will become clearer in reading that chapter.) 11

Women render an alien urban space into a familiar place by activating support and networking through village connections.

In the final chapter I thus address issues of the interpretation of urbanization and women's social space, refuting the current stereotype that sees Kanak living in Nouméa as merely 'urbanized citizens'. In contrast, a complex relation of change and persistence is at work amongst women both in the village and in the urban community. In the Epilogue, instead of recapitulating what I have discussed in the body of the thesis, I attempt to draw a parallel with the situation of women's groups in the rest of Lifu, and more generally in New Caledonia. These last pages thus raise issues and questions for further investigation. Although in this part of the thesis I make comparisons with other areas of Melanesia and the South Pacific, I have not attempted systematic comparison throughout.

A final point on writing: I have attempted to write in what can be considered an acceptable variety of English. Yet the Italian way of writing - longer and more verbose sentences - may still reverberate in some of the following pages.

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11 The example of Bonnemaison is telling. In his book on Vanuatu (1994 [1986]), he explains why, after having started to work in the 1970s on migration and urbanization processes, he became interested ‘dans la société traditionelle’ [in traditional society]: ‘j'ai découvert que les processus de mobilité ne pouvaient s'expliquer que par ... la force de l'enracinement et du lien au territoire’ [I discovered that mobility processes could be understood just by .... the strength of roots and link to territoriality] (1986:10, Introduction to the French Edition).
Chapter One

ENGAGEMENT AND THEORY. FROM PARMA TO DRUEULU: FEMINISM, ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PROBLEMS OF REPRESENTATION

How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? (Edward Said 1979 [1978]:325)

woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally (Joan Kelly 1984 [1976]:57)

Criticisms from inside and outside anthropology have challenged the assumptions upon which anthropologists have conceived and represented other societies. Postmodernists argue that interpretations are situated and partial; thus, there cannot be a correct interpretation or a univocal way of representing the people of another society. This undermines the notion of truth or validity of ethnographic representations. Not only do we perceive the societies we study differently depending on the historical and intellectual location we speak from, but ethnography cannot rely any longer on the monological voice of the anthropologist or on the voice of one single person, typically male, as representative of the 'native point of view' (see Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fisher 1986, Clifford 1988, but cf. Abu-Lughod 1991, Kirby 1989, 1993). Postmodernist approaches thus call for a reshaping of conventional fieldwork and ethnography. All the tenets of the discipline have been shaken: monolithic, essentialist, timeless representations of foreign societies vis-à-vis our own have been dismantled. Not only is the authority of the anthropologists being questioned, but even their right to represent at all. However, many of the issues raised concerning the politics of representation, the character of ethnographic and
historical narratives, and our way of carrying out fieldwork cannot be addressed only at the level of our ethnographies; they demand a challenge to anthropological practice in general and even to how we live in our own society.

Postmodernisms within anthropology are diverse and cannot be presented as a singular discursive domain. It is not within the scope of this thesis to analyze postmodernist strands within anthropology; yet, having chosen to prominently feature narratives (both indigenous and colonial) in this thesis, I am compelled to position myself with respect to postmodernist stances on textuality. My intent is not to give an exhaustive overview of the themes, or of positions, but rather to highlight the rhetorical modes and narrative experimentations proposed by some influential postmodernists within anthropology, particularly Clifford. I argue the limitations of this approach to the politics of representation.

How can we avoid essentialism in our ethnographic texts when we decide not simply to ‘represent’ the women and men with whom we have worked but allow them to speak for themselves? As authors, we still have the control of the text (Young 1983b). Western positivistic philosophy has assumed the production of knowledge is universal and gender-neutral. But knowledge is embodied in individuals of the two sexes and is thus, feminist philosophers argue, partial knowledge. What does it imply to challenge this assumption at home and in the field? The following sections of this chapter attempt to relate the anthropologists’ claims to represent others to the feminist concern about the partial, masculinist character of knowledge.

LITERARY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC GENRES AND NARRATIVE

The choice of a different style of writing, of a different narrative genre, has been proposed to revolutionize anthropological writing - changing tense: moving from the ethnographic present to the use of different tenses, past, present and future; changing subject: moving from the ‘we’ to the ‘I’ of the narrator; allowing for different rhetorical modes: moving from a normalized, distanced discourse expressed in an authoritative way to the use of more diversified rhetorical modes such as personal confession or self-deprecation, satire and irony in order to distance oneself from the dehumanizing objectification of conventional anthropology. These choices are important. It means rejecting the idea of an objective way of representing distant realities (our and/or their past, the time we/they live in, and so on). It means not representing these societies in a timeless
limbo. I agree with Rosaldo's argument that 'no single rhetoric ... has a monopoly on objectivity' and that an increased disciplinary tolerance for diverse legitimate rhetorical forms' (1987:106) should be sought. But, though necessary, this is not sufficient if anthropologists are to dramatically transform their projects.

Narrative experimentation per se can be ineffectual and can even have a hidden agenda. It can support quite divergent projects. To disentangle the contrasting positions that argue for deconstruction and show that the political agendas are quite distinct, Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Ballerino Cohen (1989) claim that postmodernist experimentation with textuality and literary techniques often does not challenge asymmetries of power, but on the contrary masks them more efficiently. Moreover, power relations between the researcher and the indigenous people must be questioned and rearticulated, not simply slightly distorted by a shift in style. Subverting conventional narrative styles can be transgressive in literature, in film-making, and even in anthropology. But the mere use of more differentiated and more personal narratives is not the key to reshaping power in research relations.

So the assumptions we take with us into the field, the way we engage in a dialogue, sharing context and time with the people of the community who accept us, the ethnographic narrative strategies we opt for once back home to represent this experience, and the criticisms of our texts they may offer are all part of the same process. These issues are all closely related. I follow Rosaldo when he argues that 'how rhetorical forms of discourse are read depends not only on their formal linguistic properties, but also on how narrators are positioned' (1987:105). A politics of otherness cannot be reduced to a politics of narrative devices. Power does not become an issue only when we engage in writing our text. Textual strategies can call attention to the politics of representation, but the issue of otherness itself is not really addressed by these new experimental devices (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

If to familiarize what is perceived as different is a goal of our discipline, to defamiliarize the taken for granted in order to provoke 'the irruption of otherness - the unexpected' (Clifford 1988:145) is as much part of an anthropological agenda. Here two different questions are raised by Clifford. On the one hand, he

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1 Forrest Carter's *The education of little tree*, a memoir of a Cherokee boyhood, which recently climbed onto the *New York Times* bestseller list, is one of the many examples to which one might refer to show the limits and ambiguities of reducing everything to the text. Last year Carter 'was exposed as a white supremacist who wrote violently racist speeches for former Alabama governor George Wallace' (*The Gazette*, Montreal, 23 November 1992, p. A8).
is challenging the way anthropologists have created cultural otherness, the way they have represented alien realities, the way they have juxtaposed 'us' and 'them'. He is deconstructing the categories and the assumptions anthropologists have conventionally relied upon when trying to interpret the unfamiliar. On the other hand, he is advocating a new method that would allow anthropologists to reframe their work, a device that would allow them to leave behind their habitual view for a new transgressive gaze.

I have spoken so far of treating ethnographic narratives in ways parallel with literary texts. Another postmodernist stance in anthropology draws from graphic and visual art where the univocal relationship between words or images and reality has been subversively challenged. In Foucault's words, 'relationships of languages to the world is one of analogy rather than signification' (1970: 48). *Resemblance*, which implies a mimetic relationship between a model and a copy, thus gives way to *similitude*, where things are seen to be connected, not in a model-copy relationship but as a series of 'lateral relations'. Foucault's analysis of surrealist paintings finds common ground with modernist questioning in the social sciences. These commonalities are explored by Clifford in his chapter on 'Ethnographic surrealism' (1988), where he describes the intellectual milieu of Paris in 1920s and 1930s and shows how the blurring of categories advocated by the surrealist movement was embraced by ethnographers and how the two projects were framed in the same problematic way of dealing with the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Among the different borrowings from one domain to another — e.g. from the graphic, visual to the ethnographic — is the concept of collage (cf. the notion of *bricolage* by Lévi-Strauss, 1962). The anthropologist observing and participating in events, collecting data and synthesizing information has always been the one who has filtered and chosen where and how to cut and paste together a mass of information in order to represent the society he or she has been writing about. Clifford takes the procedures at the basis of this selection (cuts and sutures) and challenges the authorial voice behind them. He wants to 'hold the surrealist moment in view' and proposes 'to write ethnographies on the model of collage' (1988:146). But 'collage' is a metaphor applied to written texts (cf. Jolly and Keesing 1992, on 'montage'). Clifford advocates collage as the only way to 'avoid the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse' (1988:146). Further he states: 'Ethnography combined with surrealism emerges as the theory and practice of
juxtaposition' (Clifford 1988:147). But collage as an aim and as a preferred device are two different things. They need to be sharply differentiated.

In his call to break a monolithic representation of otherness and to blur the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar, Clifford leads the critiques of many others, inside and outside the discipline, who have challenged conventional anthropology (e.g. Fabian 1983, Rabinow 1986, Kirby 1989, 1993, Abu-Lughod 1991, Carrier 1992a). To follow Clifford’s deconstructionist project does not mean that the ways we choose to recast fieldwork or written representations of foreign societies or of our own society should be lumped together as collage. Struggling against a homogenized representation of a society or of an event does not necessarily entail a ‘collage’ technique in constructing a narrative pasting together of juxtaposed fragments of experience. Polyphony can become cacophony. Moreover, collage is not a panacea for the profound problems that beset the politics of representation. Collage may be an apt metaphor for a mode of representation and may be seen paradoxically to mimic the fragmentation of the world; but it can become a value in itself.

In making sense of other people’s realities, representing other people, often we tend to ‘an exaggerated and even false sense of difference ... so that signs of similarity become embarrassments ... [i]n a sense, signs of similarity become polluting’ (Carrier 1992a:203). Such questions of sameness and difference are crucial to Clifford’s view of the film *Trobriand Cricket*. If one views it, as Clifford does, as an example of ‘collage’ then authorship should be given equally to the indigenous people and to the film-makers. What was innovative was that the makers of *Trobriand Cricket* accepted these ‘signs of embarrassment’ as part of the film. A plastic Adidas bag is as much a part of Trobriand reality as is a yam festival. While this is an important choice of image, it is not ‘collage’ so much as a refusal to accept the rubric of authenticity/inauthenticity.

A concern with authenticity means that things that are identified as authentic are more noticed, esteemed, and presented than are things that are identified as inauthentic (Carrier 1992a:12).

And this applies to ethnographic texts as well. Works that did not embody ethnographic authenticity in the past were marginalized in the discipline, and often still are. A work that portrays an ‘inauthentic Melanesia’ - women in mother hubbards, men in shorts, personal motor vehicles - is a challenge to timeless or essentialistic representation of otherness (see Jolly 1992a). I advocate a reorientation of the discipline and consider it important to ‘leave manifest the
constructivistic procedures of ethnographic knowledge' (Clifford 1988: 147), yet I will not indulge in ethnographic surrealism or the 'collage model'. My use of narratives (colonial and indigenous, written and oral texts) in the chapters that follow is more conventional and should rather be considered as a way of mapping historical relations at a specific period of time (see Thomas 1989).

At issue is thus a linked set of questions. The acknowledgment that our own historical and intellectual location will shape our work; the awareness of asymmetrical relations in the field; the realization that our representations of a community are partial and provisional; the use of different rhetorical modes; the inclusion of multiple indigenous voices; critiques of our work by indigenes - all these are facets of the same process whereby anthropologists become 'deeply reflective about the political context of their work and the implicit assumptions that guide their projects' (Keesing and Jolly 1992: 240). The position of the anthropologist as a member of his or her own community (or society), as a researcher in the field and as a narrator in the text should be addressed as part of the same political project. All these issues, therefore, cannot be accommodated just by reformulating narrative devices; rather they demand a radical rethinking of our engagement with otherness in the field and of our modes of representation.

My stress on the metaphor of collage2 brings to the fore a key issue of deconstructionists, namely the displacement of essence. As the collections of essays in Schor and Weed (1994) argue, the problematic relationship between various strains of postmodernism and feminism entails a reconsideration of essentialism. The compatibility between the latter and the former projects in fact seems to part on the controversy about essentialism. But this controversy covers up another difference, which I consider more fundamental, between these projects. Both postmodernisms and feminisms challenge the assumptions of an essentialized, uniquely human person, but the proponents of the former approach fail to see this human as primarily male (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986). This critique is pertinent here not only because it is a contested issue between deconstructionists and feminists, and even among feminists, but also because essentialism is an issue which comes to the foreground in dealing with constructions of identity, a central theme of this thesis. In the following pages I

2 Another reason that has brought me to address this question here is doubtless the graduate seminar on textuality I followed while, back from the field, I was a visiting fellow at the University of McGill (Montreal) in the fall of 1992. The readings and procedures (e.g. several indigenous narratives relating to the same event laid side by side) presented as a corrective to the univocal representation of conventional anthropology left me quite unsatisfied in as much as they were merely addressing the surface of a very profound problem.
will try to position myself within feminism in my consideration of the
deconstructionists' critique of 'a fantom feminist essentialism' (de Lauretis

ENGENDERING KNOWLEDGE

The crisis of an epistemology predicated on a notion of universal, neutral,
objective knowledge has given way to many reformulations. In Trinh T. Minh-
ha's words, 'an inescapable awareness of the sterility of the unitary subject and its
monolithic constructs' (1991:6) has been central in reshaping the relationship
between subject and object in the anthropological endeavour. Deconstruction has
also challenged the assumption of a 'universal truth', since that truth is also a
construct which depends on the interests at stake. Truth is not neutral. A self-
reflective stance on the part of the anthropologist is advocated. This is framed as
an encounter, a dialogue between different historical subjectivities. As
Crapanzano (1979) stated, the ethnographic text is the result of a particular
ethnographic encounter. Not only should multiple voices be heard but the
anthropologist's presence should be visible and not neutralized. However,
acknowledging the multiplicity of interests, of positions, of voices, has been
taken so far as to stress that no view should be privileged (cf. Rabinow 1987).
This could leave intact forms of power, and, worse, could justify them under the
rubric of 'multivocality'. To stress the partiality of one's own position does not
mean that no position is privileged. It rather exposes the moral and political bases
of that commitment. As Abu-Loghod stresses, partial truths are always

Challenging 'universal truth' from a feminist position is different. Clifford's
project speaks of a plurality of voices, but only if we start by acknowledging two
voices (e.g. female and male) can we (women and men) break with the traditional
universal subject and allow for a plurality of voices to be heard. A central
concern of new ethnography is the inscription of otherness in such ways as to
accord them subjectivity. Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 in The Second Sex wrote
about the experience of woman's otherness and the inscription of women as
'other' in language and discourse. The debate of the female as 'other' was in fact
'the starting point of contemporary feminist theory' (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and
Ballerino Cohen 1989:11). And de Lauretis states: 'I would insist that the notion
of experience in relation both to social-material practices and to the formation
and processes of subjectivity is a feminist concept, not a poststructuralist one' (1994:7). The *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) project is not only far from recognizing that the universal subject is primarily a male subject, but also blind in acknowledging what feminist theories have produced. That whole project is in fact devoid of feminist insights (see Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Ballerino Cohen's critique, 1989).

Although social reality and power relations are constructed, they are not so easily deconstructed: they are embodied in the practice of individuals. I will introduce my perspective as a white Italian feminist, a position which informs my being-in-the-world and which shaped my relations in the field. My starting point is the theory of sexual difference [*il pensiero della differenza sessuale*], a theory of social-symbolic practice elaborated by one stream of Italian feminism. Drawing mostly on French and Italian women's thought, I need to specify what I mean by 'sex', 'gender' and 'embodiment of the subject', concepts which I use in conforming to established usage within this stream of the Italian feminist movement. In attempting to outline the meaning of these terms in the Italian context, problems of different cultural and historical contexts as well as questions pertaining to linguistic translation between Italian and English come to the fore. For example *sessuato* [literally 'sexed'] used in expressions such as 'pensiero sessuato' are generally rendered in English with the adjective 'gendered', as in 'gendered thinking' (see de Lauretis 1990b:21). Confronting three recent texts published in English dealing with Italian *pensiero della differenza*, one finds a crucial phrase from Cavarero (1987:180) rendered in three different ways. Cavarero speaks of 'l'essere sessuato nella differenza' (1987:180), which de Lauretis translates as 'being engendered in difference' (1990b:18); Bono and

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3 This applies to all the points I present, even when I use the expression 'Italian feminism'.


5 de Lauretis writes that in English 'sexed subject' is used as well but with a different meaning from 'gendered subject' (1990b:21). Gatens seems to my non-Anglophone ear, however, to use it in a way similar to the Italian 'soggetto sessuato' (1991a [1983]).
Kemp as 'being engendered in a different sex' (1991:16) and Violi as 'being engendered differently' (1992:164).6

In the Italian context, sexual difference is considered an original difference, which becomes in Cavarero's terms 'not negotiable' (1987:180)7; a difference predicated neither on a biological sex nor on a social gender but on an engendered body and its inscription in the world (see the latest 'Sottosopra', 1996).8 As aptly underlined by de Lauretis, the notion of an original difference is a basic assumption in this theory of sexual difference, a theory which is 'historically constituted' (1994:32, emphasis is mine). The 1996 'Sottosopra' clearly states that '[l]a differenza sessuale veicola la necessità della mediazione, ma non dà le risposte. Queste, le dà la storia, non si può dedurle.' [Sexual difference poses the necessity of mediation but it does not give answers. These are given by history, they cannot be deduced.] (1996:5).

Gender is the social construction of womanhood and manhood. Although a cultural and historical construct, it should not be viewed in opposition to biological sex. The articulation between the two is such that, as Gatens has suggested, speaking of 'feminine' and 'masculine' experience is quite different from speaking of 'female' and 'male' experience. 'Feminine' experience lived through a male body is 'qualitatively different from female experience of the feminine' (1991a [1983]:146). Thus, the world is inhabited by subjects who, in Gatens' terms, are sexed subjects. This viewpoint is not predicated on some form of biological essentialism, but rather 'holds that subjectivity cannot but be engendered' (Violi 1992:166). To speak of the partiality of the subject means that the world, both the symbolic and the socio-political world, must accommodate

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6 The same kind of problems loom in translation from English into Italian. For a telling recent example, see the translation in the Italian media of key concepts from the documents concerning the Fourth UN International Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995), such as 'empowerment', translated either as 'potere' (power) or 'autorità' (authority).

7 In the introduction to the volume Beyond equality and difference, Bock and James feel the need to explain that the essays by Italian authors require special comment, since they have not only been translated from one language to another, but at the same time been removed from their cultural background into a context where the special qualities of Italian feminism are not widely appreciated (1992:5). For a discussion of the notion of essentialism, see de Lauretis (1990a:255-270).

8 'Sottosopra' is a pamphlet which comes out of the Libreria delle Donne di Milano when women feel they have to communicate some new insights. It is a widespread practice in Italy to refer to the different issues by the color of the title, rather than the year of publication. The 1983 pamphlet was the 'Green Sottosopra'; the following one, which came out in 1987, was the 'Blue Sottosopra'. The 1996 one is the 'Red Sottosopra'. It is a collective authorship, although in the 'red' issue names of the authors appear on the last page. The move from collective authorship to individual names is a recent one in the Italian context.
two subjects. As Bono and Kemp write, 'Dual subjectivity admits the partiality of both male and female positions (that the world must accept man's difference as well as woman's) and provides a radical starting point for the Italian feminist theory' (1991:1). Thus, speaking of embodiment of the subject from this perspective does not entail a clear-cut distinction between sex and gender, a division which has been more marked in earlier Anglo-American feminist debate.

As Grosz (1987) argued, a sex/gender split risks the reinstatement of a corporeal/mental dichotomy. Thus she advocates a theory of the body which differentiates itself from a biological reading. The body should be approached 'from the point of view of its being lived or experienced by the subject' (1987:9). But as she rightly points out, even male thinkers, such as Foucault, who have questioned the dichotomized understanding of corporeality and subjectivity, have not questioned 'the implications of acknowledging the sexual specificity of different bodies' (1987:9). Challenging a monolithic representation of the body entails regarding it as a contested site in power relations. From a feminist position, to reconceptualize the corporeal means to recognize that a male body cannot be taken as the only way to inscribe corporeality into the social, but rather 'entails recognizing the existence of two kinds of body' (1987:9).

'Sexual difference' thinking does not advocate any 'intrinsic moral superiority of women' (Eisenstein 1984) or any idea of 'woman' being the opposite of 'male' in respect of attributes and values (e.g. irrational versus rational), but a world in which women can 'be in place' in the negotiation of things. 'Woman' and 'man' are culturally bounded but omnipresent categories. Sexual difference discourse moves beyond a critique of the definition of equality with its stress on the idea of a neutral individual: the citizen. This discourse does not oppose equality as such but rather the notion of equality inscribed in the paradigms of western thought and philosophy. Sexual difference discourse challenges the universal, neutral scheme of the western individual and addresses the 're-construction' of a new female subjectivity (Cavarero 1992).

Difference does not entail inequality. It is difficult to grasp differences apart from hierarchical difference, that is, to disentangle the effects of patriarchal power from the manifestations of sexual difference. I believe that gender relations need to be historicized, that 'strategies for change' must involve a radical transformation of society. As women we should thus engage in the real world to change it. But we will be able to acquire freedom, not by confining ourselves to a norm which in patriarchal discourse is male (Weedon 1987:2), but by a new project of practice that sees women as the negotiators: not an ungendered, neutral
universe of equal women or women with a common destiny of oppression, but rather a new symbolic order built by women for (not 'on behalf of') women living in a real society made up by women and by men.

Here I should introduce another difference in meaning, that of the use of 'homosexuality' in the Italian feminist debate and in the Anglo-American debate. In Italian feminism 'political homosexuality' entails separate spaces of production of knowledge and political action; it does not imply a withdrawal from the society at large or a refusal of relationships with men. *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* challenges the notion of equality and thus the system of representation predicated on one subject, and advocates the visibility of women in the social world as engendered subjects.\(^9\) I am interested in a new symbolic representation of ourselves where the measures of our being in the world are given not by men but by women; where women become the transactors between myself and society (Diotima 1990). The notion of *affidamento* [entrustment] (see Muraro 1991a [1985]; de Lauretis 1990b:8; Schor 1994:xv)\(^10\) has characterized the Italian debate, a debate in which the practice and theory of sexual difference are seen as part of the same process.

Entrusting oneself is not looking to another woman as in a mirror to find in her a confirmation of what one actually is, but it is offering and asking from female human experience the means of signifying its true and great existence in the world (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990 [1987]:149).

There is no ungendered social subject who will wish for and effect the end of all discrimination; if the social translation of the human value of being a woman is not done by women it will be done by men according to their criteria (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990 [1987]:146).

The risk of essentialism, a critique of which this thought has been accused, has been well addressed by de Lauretis in her introduction to the English translation of *Non credere di avere dei diritti*. She emphasises that *il pensiero della differenza* is predicated on:

the paradox of a woman, a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but of itself inaudible or inexpressible,

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\(^9\) But see the new book of Diotima (1995) and especially Muraro's article on the shift from focusing on the tension between sexual difference and equality to focusing on the tension between sexual difference and identity (Muraro 1995:125 and 126).

\(^10\) Nevertheless, taken out of the Italian context and out of a practice, the notion of 'affidamento' risks being misread.
displayed as spectacle and yet unrepresented; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled (de Lauretis 1990b:12).

She also acknowledges the specificity of the intellectual and historical context in which this thought developed, quite different from those of other European countries. Bock and James (1992) also acknowledge that this 'distinctive conception of sexual difference, as a condition not of gender equality but of women's liberty' compared to other feminist trajectories 'owes something to the differences of national culture' (1992:5). Italian feminism has developed mainly outside of the universities. There are no 'Women's Studies', although there are women whose feminist engagement informs their academic agendas. Theoretical research is carried out and circulates through a diversity of women's groups. Italian feminism had to confront a very strongly demarcated political establishment: a long-standing conservative Christian Democratic government and a strong traditional Communist Party, the largest in western Europe, along with a very lively, male-oriented, leftist movement. But even the most progressive socialist forces did not address the 'woman question' apart from class struggle. Equality, even in its more progressive form, therefore meant homologization (e.g. assimilation) with men and their agendas. Throughout the 1970s 'double militancy', an expression which designated the tensions of being engaged at the same time in a feminist group and in an organized party or political movement (see 'Introduction' in Bono and Kemp 1991, esp. p.11), was a crucial question. As Bock and James remark, in this socio-political context Italian feminists 'developed a sophisticated range of theoretical insights and political practices centred on their distinctive notion of female difference' (1992:6).

Another important element to understand the specificities of the Italian debate is the relation to psychoanalytic theory. Although the Italian movement was not confronted with a strong, dominant psychoanalytic school, as was the case in France, nevertheless the centrality of the 'symbolic' in Italian feminist thought owes something to the questioning of psychoanalytic theory. In fact the French group 'Psychanalyse et Politique', known as 'Psych et Po', has been very influential in Italy through the Libreria delle Donne di Milano [Milan Women's Bookstore Collective]. The women who advocate _il pensiero della differenza_

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11 Bono and Kemp indicate in the diversity of the composition of women's groups engaged in theoretical research another element which is distinct to the Italian scene. Diotima, one of the most influential groups in the Italian contemporary feminist debate, comprises 'six academics, two secondary schoolteachers, one primary schoolteacher, and one poet' (1991:7).
always recognize their debt towards Luce Irigaray. Nevertheless Italian feminist language draws also upon political theory and philosophy.

Subjectivity, however, is not monolithic but rather constituted by intersecting components, one of which is gender. I agree with Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) and Moore (1988) that gender, ethnicity, class and age have historically-produced organizational, experiential and representational forms which are subject to change. Furthermore, race, gender, class and age are embedded in concrete social relations and their intersections produce specific configurations. All these variables imply forms of power relations and discriminations. Mohanty has shown, for example, for the period of slavery in the United States, the construction of womanhood was different for white and black women. The construct of white women as chaste and domesticated was drawn in opposition to that of black slave women as promiscuous and wild (1991a:13). She thus argues that ideologies of womanhood are predicated on class, race and sex, although these systems of domination do not produce the same effects. Among these multiple and overlapping variables which differently inform our experience, I agree with the claim that there can be no subjectivity outside of sexuation (Braidotti 1992:185). Therefore the corporeal character of sexual difference is more profound in the embodiment of knowledge than are other differences. If women are not a social category, like the elderly or the young, or an 'interest group' (see Cavarero 1992:42), then to be a human being is both a symbolic and a historical matter, open to a plurality of 'plays' among which is that of signifying being-woman (l'essere donna) and being-man (l'essere uomo) (Muraro 1995:110).

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12 On the relationship between Irigaray and the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, see Bono and Kemp (1991:12). The most recent interest of Irigaray has been in analyzing the form of articulation that a meeting of the two sexes, a meeting between two autonomous gendered subjects, might take. Yet the fact that one of her latest books (1992) is dedicated to a man, Renzo Imbeni, the former Communist mayor of Bologna and now in the European Parliament, has come as a surprise. (But see Irigaray's recent interview where she explains her position, in the Italian daily newspaper Il Manifesto, 17 September 1993:11). Nevertheless, her project is not the same as Kristeva's, who advocates 'a dispersed process of sexual differentiation relevant to both sexes' (Grosz 1989:100). I specify this because in the Anglo-American world they are often quoted side by side. For a counterpoint between Irigaray's and Kristeva's positions, see Grosz (1989), while for a consideration of the western feminist debate within and between different cultural/national traditions, see Bock and James (1992).

To be aware of the risk of essentialism and to deal with it is important, but lately this critique has come to a standstill (see Schor and Weed, 1994). While I am attempting to clarify why this theory of social-symbolic practice should not be dismissed as an essentialist one, I am not asserting that it is immune to this critique. However, it is important to underline that within this view 'essence' is a force for change and is not fixed or static (rigidity is too often collapsed with essentialism, see Schor 1994). Further, this thought foregrounds a subjectivity (like essentialism, subjectivity is not one) in which, as Irigaray has stressed, 'to speak woman' [parler femme] is above all not 'to speak universal'.

Another important matter pertaining to difference is ethnicity. This has not had the same centrality in the Italian debate as it has had in other countries. Several factors explain why Italian feminism has not elaborated on the articulation of gender and ethnicity. The fact that until recently Italy was a country of emigrants (a trend which was reversed only in the middle to late 1980s as Italy received immigrants from non-western areas) can partially explain this absence. Thus, Italy has not been confronted with issues of ethnicity in the same way as France has or, even more so, Australia (see Tullio-Altan 1995: chapt.6). Yet the long history of fragmentation and division of what is today Italy has resulted in strong regional particularisms. Another important distinction is that Italy does not have a history of colonial settlement as is the case for Australia and New Caledonia. Further, Italian Marxist thought has strongly characterized the country's radical politics, but it has avoided the concept of ethnicity. Even one of the leading interpreters of Marxist thought, Antonio Gramsci, who was interested in questions of 'internal racism' within the Italian context (la questione

14 In this ongoing debate Spivak introduces a different perspective. Without endorsing essentialism, she argues for 'a strategic use of positivistic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' (quoted in Fuss 1994:107). This is echoed by Fuss, who believes that 'engaging in essentialism is therefore framed and determined by the subject-positions from which one speaks' (Fuss 1994:108). I propose this different approach because it re-problematises the issue without getting trapped in any kind of paralyzing 'demonization' (see Schor 1994).

15 I want to highlight the specificity of the composition of the Italian population and thus of the life experiences of Italian women and men. In the period between 1861 and 1940, 20 million people left Italy. When one considers that in 1901 the Italian population was around 33 million, this is a quite remarkable figure. However, due to a high rate of return migration, the net emigration during the period 1861-1940 was only around 7.7 million (Sori 1979:19). In the following thirty years (1940-70) over 7 million Italians migrated, though the net migration was once again lower (about 1.5 million) (Ascoli 1979:15). The migration trend started to slow down and then to reverse (return migration growing higher) after the world economic slump of the 1970s. As a result of worsening economic conditions and political turmoils in countries of the South, and of newly restrictive migration policies by other European governments, such as the French one, Italy by the middle to late 1980s had become a country of immigrants, not emigrants.
Nord-Sud), grounds his analysis more on economic, social and political issues (Gramsci 1977:110). This was explained by Valentino Gerratana, who in 1975 edited the first integral version of Quaderni dal Carcere (Prison Notebooks), as being due to the fact that one could not speak of ethnic groups in relation to women and men living in different geographical regions of Italy. Thus the term 'racism' in this context was used in a figurative sense (1975:2010-2034).

All of this might partially explain how in exploring power relations between women and men, and between women, Italian feminism has not elaborated theoretical insights into the articulation of gender and ethnicity. But although this is my feminist point of reference, as an anthropologist I feel the need for such an articulation. Like Russo (1991:304), I believe white women can engage in a dialogue with women of colour, not by adding the latter to a list of issues (which would only reinforce guilt and be politically myopic), but rather by making racism central to feminist agendas, an issue 'which affects all women, not just women of color' (1991:301). Racism, however, is not just a question which concerns women, but rather a problem which concerns women and men.

**SAMENESS/DIFFERENCE**

The metaphor used to draw a correspondence between the 'human' body and the 'political' body posited by social contract theorists assumes the body as neutral, whereas it is in actuality a male body. The 'woman' becomes 'part of the corporation not by pact, nor by covenant, but by incorporation' (Gatens 1991b:81). Preserving this unity in the representation of the social body through ingestion enables men to set aside difference. The question is thus whom this political body represents, for whom does it speak? Modern body politics is informed by the idea of oneness. But how do we articulate bodily difference in a study concerning a society different from one's own? To recognize two bodies does not imply marginalizing oneself, to retreat or to separate. It means recognizing two political bodies within society. This is the road I chose in working with Kanak women: to let our 'female' complicity manifest itself, but at the same time recognize that our agendas may be different, our voices may speak differently.

16 Although this should not be generalized as it is specific to the peculiar history of Italy, the dynamics of society understood in terms of class struggles and identities can be found in the tradition of other Communist Parties (cf. Rutherford 1990 for an overview within the British Communist Party).
This is not biological sexual difference that culture has imposed as gender, historically and culturally located and hence amenable to reformulation. Being born in a woman's body is a real difference rooted in one's own natality, but not inscribed in the dominant symbolic order; homologization seems the only answer but it reveals itself as a false reality, because it denies 'self' by denying one's birth, one's own condition of natality. In my use of categories such as 'world' and 'reality' I follow Arendt (1977). For Arendt that which is not included in the dominant symbolic order is not considered a mere absence, but a sign of ontological difference, a difference in reality. Arendt's category of natality and her concept of 'pariah' are very pertinent here. She espouses the 'pariah' as someone who does not deny or apologize for his or her condition, but rather turns separateness into a position of strength. From this stance, on the part of the 'pariah', political action and ultimately freedom spring. Within an emancipatory position, a place which is not provided in the dominant symbolic order is felt as discomfort or discrimination. From a non-assimilationist position, non-identification with the dominant symbolic order is taken as the lived reality. But for Arendt freedom is an outer manifestation; it is primarily political. Freedom is not individual freedom but relational freedom. Freedom needs the capacity to have 'interrelationship with the world' (1977:146).

For Arendt the primary concern of political action is not 'making claims' but rather 'sharing the world with others'. Her concept of solidarity does not imply 'uncritical acceptance or total identification' (Markus 1989:122). It is not 'fraternity' or even sorority, considered as a 'psychological substitute ... for the loss of the common, visible world'. Rather it 'makes political demands and preserves reference to the world' (Arendt quoted in Markus 1989:128). This thought has been a fertile ground for recent European feminist theories. I find Arendt's reconciliation of difference and universalism very inspiring, in particular her recognition of common humanity which is predicated on acknowledging

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17 One can accept a western philosophical notion of a universal and purportedly neutral subject but embodied in individuals of the two sexes, or one can challenge it. In the words of Cavarero, an Italian woman philosopher, '[d]iscourse carries in itself the sign of its subject, the speaking subject who in discourse speaks himself and speaks the world starting from himself ... in universalizing the finitude of his gendered being, man exceeds it and poses himself as an essence that of necessity belongs to the "objectivity" of discourse' (1987:49, quoted in de Lauretis 1990b:4).

18 She formulated the concept of 'pariah' in opposition to that of 'parvenu' in her work on the life of Rahel Varnhagen (Arendt 1974 [1957]).

one's own positionality. I rely on her thought because it allows me to bridge different forms of differences and different historically created subject positions. Arendt in fact argues that we can realise 'our "sameness"', our common humanity, by being faithful to "What" and "Who" we are, that is by upholding the plurality of our individual and collective identities (Markus 1989:126). This allows for a plurality of voices and of representation and at the same time brings to the fore our common humanity: 'l'essere umano è identità e differenza in circolo tra loro' [being human is identity and difference in circulation] (Sottosopra 1996:4). It allows for, indeed encourages, different political agendas between women.

**Encountering and representing 'others'**

I clarify what I mean by engendering knowledge in order to position myself in the field, to explain the partiality of my representation and the situational nature of my interpretation. Who is the thinking subject of my knowledge and how it colours my representations is a fundamental issue. The debate on engendering knowledge is lively and has taken many different turns. But I feel uneasy with some of the questions that researchers are asking in engaging in a dialogue with non-western women. It is often asked: who can talk of feminism in a non-white, non-western context? As Mohanty argues, western feminists tend to 'construct themselves as the normative referent in such a binary analytic' (1991b: 56). She states that any feminist analysis that represents 'third world women' 20 in terms that take 'western' as a point of reference and deals with 'women' as if they comprised a homogenous, monolithic group is predicated on the notion of an asymmetrical power relation between western and non-western worlds. It is in this very process of constructing and representing 'third world difference', Mohanty argues, that 'power is exercised in much of recent western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named' (1991b:54).

Mohanty does not just counterpose monolithic western feminism but rather critiques the strategies used to codify 'others' as non-western. We should acknowledge a diversity of positions, not only between western and non-western women's political agendas, but also within western and non-western theoretical thought. Failing to admit such internal diversities means we foreclose important

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20 'Third World' is a contested term. I use it following Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991:Preface).
questions (see Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991). My emphasis on the pensiero della differenza should be understood in these terms.

To talk about gender equality and to affirm sexual difference are quite different discourses and projects. Gender has become an abused and polyvalent term which risks losing its specificity. A focus on women per se does not necessarily imply a shift in symbolic representation. As Keesing admitted in a self-reflective account of his shifting theoretical orientation during his 30 years of research among the Kwaio (Solomon Islands), although he spoke with women and recorded their life histories, 'it was their [men's] rendering of the cultural tradition that I took to be canonical' (1993a:61).

But what did I take to be canonical? When I speak of my perspective as a feminist and how this has informed my fieldwork and my relations with Drueulu women (and thus with Drueulu men), my discourse and practice are interpreted by the academic milieu within a western frame of reference. The issue of power relations between men and women, and between women themselves, has also been central in the Italian debate.21 In the Italian context, authority within women's groups is considered compatible with women's mutual trust.

The practice of 'entrustment' thus emerges from the acknowledgment of disparities among women, a notion which has brought to the fore issues of power and of oppression of women by other women. Again the distinction lies between power and authority, between a frame of reference where values, aspirations and relationships are male-informed and a new emerging frame, called 'simbolico femminile' [female symbolic] (see de Lauretis 1990b and Diotima 1995). The accusation of being a bourgeois movement stems from the difficulty of acknowledging authority, without associating it with domination, hierarchy (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990 [1987]:133).

It is very hard to communicate this different perspective because it seems indifferent to the issues either of power (of which I am aware and concerned) or intellectual naïveté. Issues of power must always be kept in mind, but without a guilt syndrome, which is highly unproductive. If we want to avoid essentialization of otherness then we should also be avoiding the trap of essentializing being white and westerner instead of *misurarsi con quello che*

21 The objection of western thought 'that any "plus" [gain] emerging in human interactions would be destined to become the object of private appropriation for the purpose of dominating others' (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 1990 [1987]:121) is an a priori assumption which cannot be dismissed but, as this system was historically established not by women but against them, it can be reformulated.
l'essere occidentale ha prodotto' [to measure oneself with what being a westerner has produced] (Paini 1994b:22).

As Russo aptly argues, 'while we cannot change who we are racially, ethnically, or nationally, we can change to whom and what we remain loyal' (1991:309). Not every dialogue between a white woman and a non-white woman should be lumped together under the rubric of matronizing. Dualisms of 'us' and 'them' are a simplistic way to conceive ethnic and gender constructions in doing fieldwork and in writing ethnographies:

how can one re-create without re-circulating domination? (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1991:15)

Further, assuming a western/non-western dichotomy means considering both the western and the non-western as monolithic and framed around an Anglo-American notion of cultural identity and gender relations, with which I feel uneasy. Western feminist models of woman's emancipation cannot be exported all over the world; female freedom moves from different standpoints. This approach, which stresses partiality over 'homologization', leaves room for different representations of self and of 'woman'. It is a new way of being in the world but its content will be fulfilled by different women differently.

Braidotti writes that gendered subjectivity is engendered not in the anatomical body but through language (1992:187), and she avoids imposing her feminist agenda on other women. She states:

The desire to become and to speak as women does not entail the imposition of a specific propositional content of women's speech. What is being empowered is women's entitlement to speak, not the propositional content of their utterances (1992:188).

Thus we should be careful not to impose a 'genderized universality' in Braidotti's terms (1992). To advocate a gendered subjectivity, otherwise, could be as dangerous and as essentialist as the monolithic construction of the male subject that it challenges.

My use of the notion of 'boundaries of difference' should be read in this light, as the way people reformulate the status of identity/otherness in different historical contexts. But boundaries are negotiated between women and men,

22 Following de Lauretis I use 'female freedom' for 'liberïa femminile' in spite of the biological connotations (1990b:21). The Italian adjective femminile covers both English 'feminine' and 'female'.
between the community and the outsider. Where do I stand in this replottting of the borders?

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND FEMINISM

Dealing with Melanesian society, Marilyn Strathern has warned against assuming that 'at the heart of these cultures is an antinomy between "society" and "the individual"' (1988:12). And Ralston has warned us against colouring our interpretation of non-western societies with assumptions of a western, middle-class feminist discourse, especially 'those emphasizing personal self-determination' (1989:50). Arendt's thought offers insights into this critical question, namely the relation between individual and society. Arendt's focus on freedom, but a freedom which is political rather than an individual freedom, which asks for relationality, I think can prove very fertile in the endeavour of reshaping power relations to avoid the reimposition of western feminist agendas as the canonical ones.

The feminist project has moved from a critique of patriarchal rule to a more challenging assertion of reconstructing female subjectivity. In discussing a possible articulation between anthropology and feminism, Strathern has concluded that the relationship of the subject to the subject matter in feminist and anthropological practice does not allow for an easy coexistence (1987:284). Anthropology attempts to engage in a dialogue with the other; this in turn challenges 'the part of oneself embodied in the tradition to which one is heir' (1987:289). This is all unobjectionable, but let us see how feminism is characterized. Feminism 'emphasizes the conscious creation of the self by seeing its difference from the Other' (1987:290). Thus, Strathern concludes, anthropology and feminism are 'two very different radicalisms' (1987:289). Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen have challenged this conclusion on the ground that it 'seems to ignore differential power relations, failing to acknowledge that one term in each pair is historically marked by privilege' (1989:21). They assert that anthropology could greatly benefit from feminist practice, which Strathern characterized as an engagement between feminists as scholars and feminists as activists (1987:268). They further stress that the more recent thinking of feminism has been focused not so much on opposing the patriarchal sex but rather on reformulating relations between women, a range of positions that in Strathern's discussion are conflated in a homogenized representation of feminism.
I think that to assert the presence of two sexed subjectivities, avoiding 'genderized universality', and an assertion of a dialogue between us/other is part of the same political project. I find it useful here to turn to Irigaray. Her recent research suggests how a meeting between two gendered subjects might happen. Irigaray asks what a free female subject entails. This, she answers, requires a change in the language in order to have subjective rights equivalent to those of men, in order to be able to exchange language and objects with them (Irigaray 1990:89).

I found her views on maternity also very pertinent to the point I want to make: having a child without a man would represent for some the height of freedom. This amounts to defining oneself always with respect to the other sex (Irigaray 1990:159).

Thus, maternity is reappropriated by women, not denigrated as a patriarchal constraint, but freed from its biologism. I chose this quote also because the maternal was stressed by Kanak women (see Chapter Six) to express their way of making collectivity. Strathern's characterization of feminism's relation to anthropology (1987) does not allow for this kind of feminism. She seems to draw a line between political commitment and academic work. Closing the gap between the way we position ourselves as subjects in our society and the way we posit an encounter with the 'other' is a political perspective, which instead should influence our anthropology. I can share a context as a feminist anthropologist and engage in a dialogue with non-western women from this perspective.

I want now to consider my fieldwork experience in the light of my own particular historical and intellectual location and my engagement with Kanak women of Lifu. Taking into account the different interests and divergent powers that come into play in any study of a community, Strathern underlines that the partiality of the knowledge that we record must be acknowledged, 'the account must specify whose "view" is being described' (1988:37). I believe that the partiality of our representations comes from the interplay between what Strathern advocates and the historical, intellectual position we speak from.

I went into the field with this framework and I came out at the end of my stay convinced that I had shared a dialogue with a group of Kanak women and created a different kind of context with them. When I arrived in Drueulu, in a
socio-cultural setting where men claim that parole is their prerogative and Kanak social institutions are still working, I went to make the customary gestures to the high chief [grand chef] and then to the petty chief [petit chef] in order to be authorised to live and work in the village. But, as I started to work, I chose women as my interpreters between myself and Kanak society. The women taught me how one should behave in their society and the complexity of social interactions; they accepted sharing time and space with me; some of them shared their experiences with me as well as their knowledge; finally a woman was my Drehu language teacher. I was not interested in knowing how better or worse off than me they were, but rather in trying to share experiences. I never employed an 'index' to determine their 'object status' (see Mohanty's critique 1991b:57), nor was I interested in addressing the issue as to whether their lives and symbolic valuations had declined or been enhanced as a result of western colonialism. As Ralston (1992) has argued, the question itself is Eurocentric.23

Kanak women showed me that they, too, had engaged in a different kind of relation with me, that by sharing time and space we had created a new context by coming with me before the Conseil des Anciens [Council of Elders] the day before my departure. They agreed to come into a male space. Their presence was first objected to by the petit chef, who stressed that it was I who had been summoned, not the other two women. But the women stayed and their presence was accepted. (I should say that other men did not question their presence, and one of them felt obliged to apologize to one of the women once the meeting was over.) Some men were questioning my interest in social institutions and how it related to my research on women, for which I had originally received permission to stay in the village and do research.

I restated (in French) the objective of my research and then the women clarified it, speaking both in French and in Drehu to the men present at the meeting. Pohnimë and Sipo explained what I had been looking at, how I had questioned people and how my interests pertained to their being Kanak women. They challenged the assertion made by the petit chef that 'le clan c'est une affaire des hommes' [the clan is men's business] and made it clear that they had shared with me the public knowledge regarding the functioning of the social organization (they did stress as well that they had never told me anything pertaining to secret knowledge of their clan). As local women, they felt they also

23 If the question is posed by Pacific Islander women themselves, then it might be considered differently from when it is imposed by outsiders.
belonged to the public sphere. One of the women recounted how clan relations were crucial in deciding her marriage, in order to make the point that as a woman she was deeply affected by social relations. Not every woman could have done this. The two women who came with me into this male space were of a certain age, they belonged to the land owners' clan, they spoke both French and Drehu;24 but they were also the two women with whom I had spent most time.

As Fabian has asserted, 'For human communication to occur coevalness has to be created. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time' (1983:30), and thus creating and sharing a context. A 'denial of coevalness' is 'a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse' (1983:31). This prevents us from engaging in a dialogue with the women and/or men we are working among. Fabian suggests there is 'an aporetic split between recognition of coevalness in ethnographic research and denial of coevalness in most anthropological theorizing and writing' (1983:35).

At the end of my fieldwork I felt that sharing a context had made the difference. I am not saying that we are the same, merely that the sharing of context, sharing of time and space, made possible a dialogue without surrendering diversities, knowing that the two atopicita25 rooted in birth remain but within a discourse which allows a dialogue, without refusing to admit that we had and still have different agendas. Yet this is not to deny tensions and conflicts which emerged.

During a week-long workshop organized by the Women's Office of the South Pacific Commission in late 1991 for the Anglophone countries of Melanesia, in which they included Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Fiji, Kanak women were invited as observers. Some of the participants were accommodated at the Women's House in La Rivière Salée, where at that time my daughter and I were staying. I was given permission to attend as an observer.

One evening, during a culinary pause, I was sitting next to the medical doctor in charge of the AIDS program which was sponsoring the event. He had just recently arrived in New Caledonia from the United States and seemed very interested in knowing my point of view on many issues. As the conversation

24 I specify this because I am well aware of other ethnographic contexts where only men know the lingua franca, and until the anthropologist grasps the vernacular language, she (I use it advisedly) has to communicate with women through men.

25 Italian 'neologism' from atopico, meaning 'that for which a place is not provided', here used to refer to the 'unexpected subject' (see Cavarero 1990:93-121).
proceeded, I shared with him my perplexities concerning the way the workshop structure was set up (confining Kanak women to being observers at a conference on women taking place in Nouméa). The next day, one of the women of the Solomon Islanders' delegation, with whom I was sharing accommodation at the Women's House, approached me saying she had heard that the Anglophone representative of the Women's Office (whom I will refer to as B-) wanted me to leave. I was not welcome any more, being an anthropologist (something I had never kept secret). She wanted to inform me so that I would be prepared for the news. I appreciated her sensitivity, yet this did not prevent the terrible feelings I had when B- suggested that, being an anthropologist, I could have disclosed personal information shared by women during the workshop and that I had dared to criticize what they were doing. This move, she added, had been required by the women participants. Assuring her that I would have kept absolute confidence about the life histories I had listened to during the workshop was worthless. With a glacial tone, she questioned the loyalty of my words. I was mortified but, reflecting on the discourse of sharing and communication, I was able to consider the event from a different angle. It was impossible to believe that, just by situating myself as a woman and as an anthropologist, B- could have considered me differently.

I do not want to romanticize Kanak women, and I want to write about Kanak women without resorting to 'symbolic misery'. I do not want to subsume Lifuan women's experience within my own or assume that our 'truth' must be divergent. I simply wish to acknowledge that our agendas may have different priorities, all of them worthy of standing.

CULTURE AS A CONTESTED SITE

Having situated myself as a feminist, I should now clarify my use of central theoretical anthropological concepts such as culture, tradition, custom and identity. Culture, like anthropological knowledge, is constructed and rearticulated by people depending on the socio-political context. Linnekin (1992) aptly discusses the shift from the holistic notion of culture to that of cultural construct as implying that tradition is not values and elements handed down from one

26 See my letter (23.10.1991) to the Biblioteca della Donne, Parma.
27 I am here referring to a concept widely used in Italy (see Muraro 1981, 1991a [1985]; de Lauretis 1990b:1-21).
generation to the next, but is 'a selective representation of the past' (1992:251). Tradition is 'a representation of the customary past, to be valorized, emulated or in some cases rejected' (1992:251).

In the last 10 years the literature on concepts of custom and tradition in the Pacific has grown rapidly (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Linnekin 1983, Babadzan 1988). Two of the most recent contributions to the debate (Jolly and Thomas 1992 and Lindstrom and White 1993) raise interesting questions regarding the articulation of tradition and custom. Custom is still stressed as a polysemic concept, a way to articulate past and present relations, but, as Keesing argues, rhetorical discourses regarding the articulation of past and present 'are situated in the present and oriented toward the future' (1993b:588).

However, the meanings encoded by the terms used across the Pacific in articulating these relations are quite different. Discussing the meanings of kastom in Vanuatu and vakavanua in Fiji, Jolly stresses the contrast in meanings between a 'sense of rupture and revival' in the former case and a 'sense of continuity' in the articulation between past and present in the latter case (1992b:330). Hence Jolly argues that we should problematize commonality in the idea of 'tradition'.

I have attempted elsewhere (Paini 1994a) to suggest how the rhetoric concerning the non-antithetical relation between la coutume [custom] and Christian Church adherence is differently deployed by Catholics and Protestants in Lifu as they differently mobilize their arguments to relate the past to the present. Although Protestants acknowledge the differences of the past, their narratives show more continuity between the old and the new, the past and the present. Catholics instead conjugate past and present more in terms of disjunction (see also Chapter Three).

Otto (1993:8-13) has attempted to discuss the articulation between two broad meanings of tradition. One refers to ideas, elements, practices based on 'the accumulated experience and wisdom of generations of practitioners'. Otto mentions forms of subsistence agriculture and networks of social relations among the 'lived in' reality which he attributes to the first meaning of tradition. Tradition in this sense is closer to the notion of 'culture'; however, Otto stresses, it is not fossilized, and in opposition to 'modernity'. The second meaning relates to the process whereby an objectification of selected parts of a culture is produced and used to redraw boundaries of difference. In this sense tradition overlaps with custom.

Otto (1993) attempts to clarify some of the confusion between the use of the terms in question. Nevertheless, the term to adopt depends on the local context
and local usage varies. For example, a comparison between the use of the expression *la coutume* in New Caledonia, a French word which has been adopted by Kanak alongside their vernacular counterpart (*qene nöj* in Lifu), and in France is revealing. *Qene nöj* is spoken of by Lifuans as the way of life of the ancestors, rules passed down through the generations concerning social organization and its hierarchical order and integration. But in speaking about *la coutume* emphasis is also placed on reciprocity. *La coutume* is 'le respect des traditions basé sur la solidarité' [the respect of traditions based upon solidarity]. While mutual aid is still vital among Lifuans in town, it is criticized more and more by young people, who comply with it but view it as a constraint. The same man commented: 'encore à Lifou ça peut se faire, mais pas ici. Si je fais quelque chose personne viendra faire quelque chose à moi: personne à vu ce que j'ai fait' [in Lifu it can still be done, but not here. If I do something nobody will come and do it to me: nobody has seen what I have done] (Haijengo Haluatr, March 1992).

Custom is thus perceived as a series of rules and behaviours which allow Lifuans to ground their identity in the past, to link them to a place. Custom is however not perceived in opposition to modernity (see Lifuans' perceptions of change in Chapter Four).

In the metropolitan context the same French word - *la coutume* - takes on a different meaning in its use by French white metropolitans. It refers to behaviours and ways of interacting which were central to what used to be but which is no longer. It largely overlaps with the notion of tradition, whereas in the Lifuan context the two only partially overlap. In the two contexts *la coutume* also signifies a different way of perceiving links with places. I do not mean that only one meaning is found in one context but rather that in the two contexts reconceptualizations of *la coutume* have been different.28

28 Here Augé's notion of *surmodernité* (supermodernity) (1995a [1992] and 1995b), which he discusses primarily with reference to present day France, helps to clarify what I posit as a relative difference. Supermodernity is characterized by 'three figures of excess ... overabundance of events, spatial overabundance, the individualization of references' (1995a:40). Augé argues that if a place is 'defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity' then a place which cannot be defined as such will be a 'non-place' (1995a and 1995b). Thus he suggests 'supermodernity produces non-places' (1995a:78). Further, earlier places are not integrated by these non-places but rather 'listed, classified, promoted to the status of "places of memory"' (1995a:78). Although this distinction between places and non-places is a relative distinction (1995b:22) in as much as places still exist outside non-places or may even reconstitute themselves within non-places (e.g. homeless people living in an airport), supermodernity thus differentiates itself from modernity by being self-contained (1995a:75) and thus represents quite a different experience from that of Lifuans.
In this thesis I use *la coutume* [custom] and *qene nōj* [the way of the land] because these are the terms used by Lifuans (see Chapter Seven). Furthermore, custom as a flexible concept allows them 'to defend old ways or change them radically, to assert national or supranational unity or promote regional separatism, and so on' (Keesing 1982b:297), depending on the historical circumstances. In this sense *la coutume* appears to be a term, locally chosen, which allows for these different configurations.

I use the term 'identity' to mean how people differentiate themselves as persons or members of a given community. The level of inclusiveness may vary and people may find themselves 'likely to possess multiple, nested affiliations' (Linnekin and Poyer 1990:11). Identity is not made up of specific elements: rather, some elements - language, dress, customary expectations, residence - may acquire more prominence in a specific historical context. Exploring the notion of cultural identity in the Pacific, Linnekin and Poyer have questioned the way Pacific people and Westerners conceive of it, suggesting a contrast which they present more as 'a matter of emphasis rather than an either/or distinction' (1990:6). They maintain that the elements which are central in the construction of identity are quite distinct in the two contexts. They associate the Pacific construction of cultural identity with the Lamarckian notion of identity, that is 'where you live and how you behave are at least as important as biological parentage in determining who you are socially' (1990:8). This allows for elasticity of boundaries and for their constant redrawing. Conversely, they link the western concept of ethnicity with the Mendelian model, whereby individual identity is determined by descent and parentage and unchanging boundaries. In the latter case, identity becomes more fixed and does not allow for the latitude of configurations in the Lamarckian conception.

Drawing on this contrast Linnekin asserts that '...in both Fiji and New Caledonia the operant model of cultural identity, at least as promulgated by prominent political leaders, has more in common with classical Western ethnicity theory [descent and parentage] than with the Lamarckian affiliations...' (1990:171). In both countries the indigenous population has been outnumbered and in both the main island of New Caledonia and in Fiji, land alienation is a crucial issue. I do not agree with this characterization of the prevailing model of cultural identity in New Caledonia, an issue to which I return in Chapter Seven. I

29 The Lamarckian/Mendelian distinction derives from Watson (1990) and has been much criticized.
argue that identity is constructed in a more permeable way, and that only recent post-Matignon changes point to a more rigid definition of boundaries of difference. In this new context co-residence has become an element which more strongly identifies one's identity.

I employ the term 'ethnic identity' to refer to identities of people as members of a community vis-à-vis other, different communities only in a more politicized context. It is thus a term that I use only in a context of processes of identification and not to categorize people, otherwise its implications can be devastating (the former-Yugoslavia example docet).

To talk of tradition and identity, however, brings to the fore another contested term, namely that of 'invention'. The genesis of the notion, borrowed from Wagner's influential volume *The invention of culture* (1981 [1975]), within anthropology implies an idea of creativity (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Yet it can also convey a negative judgment on that act (Linnekin 1992). Recently the term has been contested, especially by Pacific Islanders, for the ambiguous meanings it denotes, even being equated with notions of fabrication and thus inauthenticity. Following Linnekin (1992) and Jolly (1992b), I prefer to use 'construction' to convey the idea that 'culture' is not a bounded and homogenous object of study but rather a symbolic construct subject to negotiation. This might expose the different interests and power relations at work within a society, thus enabling more diversified representations. The political and moral implications of this approach, however, are great. In a country like New Caledonia where the issue of political independence is at stake, to consider *la coutume* and identity as constructed may be negatively perceived. It may be considered as a device which privileges difference over commonality. The relationship between the local, provincial and national levels of 'identity' needs to be addressed. The temptation to espouse the position of the village versus the provincial government is strong in my work, yet I do not represent this relationship as ready-tailored but rather as subject to novel fashioning. To suggest that Lifuans' construction of identity is fluid does not mean imply inauthenticity. Although I use a constructionist

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30 For the genesis of the word 'ethnicity' from the Greek term *ethnos* to its modern use see Chapman, McDonald, Tonkin 1989. The word 'survives as a fairly common intellectual's word in modern French, *ethnie*, with the associated adjective *ethnique*. The possible noun expressing what it is you have to be *ethnique, ethnicité*, is still not common in modern French. The adjective exists in modern English as 'ethnic' ... with a suffix added to give "ethnicity".' (1989:11).

31 It may sound far removed from the context of this thesis, but this armed conflict, more than any other contemporary struggle, has marked Italian men and women of my generation.
approach to custom, this is not to deny the strength of Lifuans’ engagement with it.

In my experience, customary gestures for being received or excusing oneself allow for different kinds of words to be spoken. Thomas has argued the centrality of exchange in neotraditional representations in the region (1992b:326). This can probably help to explain the salience for Lifuans of faire la coutume [to make custom] (see Chapter Seven). In Lifu, European cash and goods have been incorporated in la coutume to the extent that on some occasions only money is used in these exchanges. The symbolic appropriation of money (which I discuss in Chapter Seven) bears on the question of change and persistence, a motif which runs throughout this thesis. I do not consider change as being modelled by a set of values imposed on local people by westerners or in terms of assimilation to such values but rather in terms of how ideas and commodities have been locally received following the indigenous patterns of thought and reassigned meanings in practice (Sahlins 1981). Yet in Thomas’s words, ‘differences in degree do entail types of transformations which are qualitatively distinct’ (1989:113). Power relations between indigenes and Europeans did change from the initial period of interactions to the period of the assertion of formal colonial rule, intrusive occupation or dispossession of land and labour (Thomas 1989:112-113).

This displacement of focus entails addressing other questions and breaking down the dichotomy between manifestations of authenticity embodied in refusal to engage with outsiders and manifestations of inauthenticity embodied in creolised ways of life. This discrimination implies that the choice open to non-western groups is only either assimilation or resistance to modernity. Recent studies have challenged modernity as a monolithic configuration and pointed to the many different shapes it can assume. To problematize the reification of tradition and of modernity ‘is indissociable from a history of encounters and from what is at issue in those particular encounters’ (Thomas 1992a:214). Thomas believes objectification was an inherent process in pre-colonial Pacific societies, but one that has been reshaped by the new interactions. As tradition is not given but is reformulated by different people at different times and according to context, the same applies to modernity and people’s involvement with change.

I realise that my focus on Lifu has the potential to be perceived as arguing against the idea of a common national Kanak identity. What I have attempted to do is to examine through time the changing construction of identity, highlighting differences with the main island because of different colonial pasts and different
pre-colonial histories. In observing the most recent transformations, I want to look at how meanings are negotiated in practice. In Jean-Maire Tjibaou's words:

The return to tradition, it is a myth. I try to make it clear and I repeat it. It is a myth. No group of people has ever experienced it. The search for identity, the pattern, lies ahead of us, never behind. It is a permanent negotiation. And I think that our present struggle consists in putting as many elements as possible belonging to our culture into the construction of the model of man [sic] and society that we wish to have for the edification of the city ... Our identity lies ahead of us (1985:1601).

This thesis is not aimed at representing the essence of being a Lifuan woman or man, but rather it attempts to examine how identity has been constructed in the past and reformulated in the face of changes brought about by modernization. In my view, there is no antagonism between the two terms (tradition/modernization) but rather they are fluid signs in the denotation of different historical subjectivities.

To discern the specificities of Lifu and its 150 years of colonial history (in the broad sense of history of the encounter with westerners and later intrusions by metropolitan foreigners) I have not attempted a reconstruction of the past (on dealing with sources, see below). Rather I have looked at the mechanisms at play at a specific time (Thomas 1989:114). I choose a few snapshots which expose broader issues of identity construction. I start with the early contact period (the 1840s to the early 1870s) when the foreign presence was represented by the establishment of the Christian missions - the French Catholic one and the British Protestant one (Chapter Two and Chapter Three). Then I move to a later period (the 1920s to the 1940s) when the Protestant mission, by then with a French congregation, had only two lay women missionaries in Lifu, one of whom was a very prolific writer32 and opened the first maternity ward on the island (Chapter Six). Finally I consider the years following the implementation of the Matignon

32 The unpublished correspondence of Eugénie Pêter-Contessee, a Swiss lay Protestant missionary whose experience in Lifu spans over 30 years (1921 to 1951), became available only in 1989 when the family gave copies of the letters to the PMB.
Accords (1989-1992) (Chapter Seven). These cases highlight differences in the way men and women have represented their identity and exemplify a novel articulation of change and persistence in the most recent period. However, these chapters do not offer a chronology of Lifuan history so much as offer vignettes of the colonial past as they relate to the present.
Plate 2: Hnalapa (dwelling site), Drueulu

Plate 3: La Mission (the church on the left, the school in the foreground), Drueulu
Part Two

Pasts and Presents
foreigners were integrated into local clans and thus within their relations and functions. Europeans have taken land but have refused to become integrated in the system of the others. It is not the fact of the stranger but of colonialism that we have rejected. The colonizer has assumed his own place rather than the [indigenous] system determining what his place was (Wapotro, October 1989).

This quote suggests the intricacies and paradoxes of Lifu constructs of foreigners and of colonialism. It suggests a fluid way of conceiving and dealing with foreignness, allowing some local integration but without completely forgetting their origins. In oral histories Kanak still emphasize fluid rather than rigid boundaries between foreign and indigenous. The integration of foreigners is stressed as part of the Kanak way of hospitality.

The Loyalty Islands were never a 'closed society'. Long before European invasion, interaction was taking place with islander groups from the east who had moved westward and with groups from the Grande Terre (Guiart 1963:643; Howe 1977:13). By 1841 the Loyalties were constantly visited by sandalwood and bêche-de-mer traders. They were later followed by missionaries, the French colonizers, and labour recruiters (Shineberg 1967:29). The nature of contacts with the outside world, the distinctive characteristics of social structure, the demographic pattern, and the environment in the Loyalties shaped the history of
the region differently from that of the Grande Terre. However the commonalities which evolved under French rule also played their part. In this chapter I explore the distinctive character of Lifu, the largest and most populous island of the Loyalty Islands archipelago, exploring the indigenous socio-political notions of authority and hierarchy and how they shaped Lifuans' early interactions with different categories of foreigners: mission and state agents (I will only briefly mention traders). In the next chapter I narrow my focus to Lifuans' involvement with Christianity, a fundamental aspect of their contemporary construction of identity. In Chapter Four I consider geographical mobility in the past and how it increased interaction with foreign people, ideas, and commodities. This brings to the fore the renegotiation of boundaries of difference. In discussing Lifu, I highlight differences with the main island of New Caledonia, although systematic comparison with the Grande Terre is not my primary concern.

Moreover, my analysis tries to avoid a resistance/collaborationist dichotomy whereby armed resistance struggles exemplify the Kanak of the main island in contrast to those Lifuans who never adopted the same forms of resistance to colonial/western forces.\(^1\) There is a commonly held view that the absence of colonial interests in the Loyalty Archipelago provided no focus for rebellion (Howe 1977:81). Such a view risks strengthening this binary opposition and rebounding on present-day representations. Perhaps the representations of early Europeans who depicted Kanak from the Loyalties in less hostile terms than Kanak of the Grande Terre are echoed in contemporary and present-day ideas about Loyalty Islanders, especially apropos their engagement in the political scene. Guiart (1992b:219) for example notes the seemingly low profile of the pro-independence movement in Lifu compared to Ouvéa [West Uvea] during the French presidential elections. He observes that in that same year the RPCR senator Dick Ukeiwé, from Lösi, was orchestrating a plot to replace Bula, the high chief of his district; Kanak of Lösi were too busy with 'domestic' politics to engage in a pro-independence mobilization.

Before tackling indigenous notions of authority and hierarchy, the ways I have integrated historical and anthropological sources deserve some explanation.

\(^1\) The concept of resistance, discussed in the previous chapter, has often been abused in the anthropological literature. Abu-Lughod (1990) has warned against the current 'romance of resistance' in anthropology. See also Jolly (1992a) and Keesing (1992). Without exploring this notion thoroughly, I deal with its application to the specific context of Lifu in Chapter Seven. See also ft. 47.
ON MOVING BETWEEN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

The sources I have used to delineate the particular responses of Lifuans to outsiders are both oral and written, and different in genre. I have relied both on ethnographic and historical sources, yet this thesis is a work within anthropology rather than ethnographic history. I believe there is a difference between combining ethnographic material with historical sources and doing ethnographic history, or anthropological history as Augé refers to it (1995a:9). The projects differ even as they deal with the same questions (Augé 1995a). The questioning of the production of knowledge applies equally to colonial narratives, indigenous narratives and ethnographic representations.2

I use colonial texts to offer vignettes of the past which bear on present-day efforts at renegotiating differences. I foreground ethnographic material but it would be impossible to understand, for example, the specificities of making Christianity local in Lifu without understanding past interactions.

In both oral and written narratives I look for clues and traces that could help to understand Kanak interactions with foreigners, their ideas, and commodities at specific points in time. I have not attempted any kind of reconstruction of the past, heeding Bronwen Douglas’ warning against ‘reinvent[ing] the past as cause of a later present, teleologically designated as effect’ (Douglas 1993:2). Douglas remarks that it can be ‘seductive’ for an ethnographer who has questioned the monolithic essentialistic, timeless representation of foreign societies to draw on historical sources as an island of safety. Written records are not neutral and ‘must be scrutinised critically for distortion in ethnocentric, strategic and rhetorical terms’ (Douglas 1994). However, they can give invaluable insights into the nature of the colonial world and its discourses and thus offer traces of Lifuans’ selective engagement with the outside world. I have approached them aware that they were informed by colonial agendas, that they represented the ‘natives’ as an homogeneous group and that my reading is constructed from a specific historical and intellectual location.

For colonial texts, I have relied more heavily on missionaries’ than on travellers’ accounts or administrative records. This is because in Lifu the state did not play the same pivotal role as it did in the main island; missions played a more

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2 But there is a further dimension, that of being ‘contemporary with both the narrative and the narrator’ (Augé 1995a:9); this dimension applies to the authors of oral and written texts as well. In fact there is a difference between primary witnesses and secondary accounts both in relation to past and present-day accounts.
critical role. These latter texts consist of the correspondence and accounts of Marists and London Missionary Society (hereinafter LMS) missionaries who lived and worked in Lifu as well as the correspondence between the missions and the state. The success of the Catholic and Protestant Missions, their relationship, and their interaction with the colonial state in Lifu are central to these narratives. Some of the Marist Fathers, whose correspondence from Lifu I have examined in Rome, were not prolific writers; while some were more 'missionary ethnographers' than others. Further the concern of the writing depends on the audience - family members, friends (e.g. Fabre 1870 in Chapter Three) or ecclesiastic superiors. Finally, the themes and processes I have been interested in analyzing do not emerge consistently from all the missionaries' texts. Gender is rarely discussed in male missionary texts whereas it becomes more explicit in published and unpublished accounts by women (e.g. Hadfield, 1920, and Péter-Contesse's unpublished correspondence spanning 1921 to 1951). This in part explains my uneven use of colonial narratives.

I consider these texts not in the événementielle tradition but rather look for traces of processes of change and continuity in renegotiating Lifuan identity, the focus of this thesis. Change is not due to hazard but rather entails the structured relation of external and internal processes. Marshall Sahlins (1985) has reconsidered the relation between event and structure, and suggested that exogenous events become significant only within a given social order. He thus connects diachronic and synchronic events and structures in a distinctive way. Yet his differentiation between prescriptive and performative social structures - in

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3 I consulted the Archivio dei Padri Maristi (hereinafter APM) in Rome on three occasions concentrating on the personal files of the Marist missionaries on Lifu, on the correspondence between Father Forestier and French authorities, and on other documents concerning the Marist Mission in Lifu. I have also consulted Chaulet 1985, the published correspondence of Father Goubin who spent twenty-five years in Drueulu and Alcan 1887. On the Protestant side I have drawn on: London Missionary Society Archives, SSO, box 1, 12, SSR, 1866-1870; MacFarlane 1873; Whitehouse (PMB 149) (not a first hand account, a history of the Protestant Mission in the Loyalties based on letters sent to the LMS headquarters by the missionaries); Ray 1917 (a reconstruction based on the correspondence between the author and Rev. Sleigh, LMS missionary in Lifu between 1862 and 1887); Hadfield 1920 and the correspondence of Eugénie Péter-Contesse, from 1923 to 1951.

4 In order to grasp the different interests at play and how they intersected in Lifu I have also relied on early interpretations of the social scene by traders (Cheyne 1971 [1842]; Thomas 1886), by naval and colonial officers (Jouan 1861: nos.117,118; Erskine 1853; Campbell 1873; Garnier 1875:ch.14; Fagot 1949), and by researchers (Sarasin 1915, 1917, 1929a and 1929b; Ray 1917). See also Guiart 1954, 1957, 1963, and 1992a; Howe 1977.

5 The devaluation of the notion of event by the French Annales school has led to an overvaluation of the notion of structure by Lévi-Strauss and structuralists in general.
the former case events are interpreted in conformity with tradition; in the latter there is a negotiation between structures and events - creates a dichotomy and seems to replicate the old distinction between open and closed societies. Thomas (1989a) has contested his perspective, arguing that Sahlins' notion of structure does not take into consideration changing power relations within the colonial context. The first informal encounters between Europeans and indigenes were differently configured from later interactions between colonial governments - with their policies of exploitation of labour and control of resources - and local societies. Thomas considers that regarding externalities as contingent events that an internal structure could select and accommodate is to minimize changing power relations. Further Douglas has argued that 'colonial impact ... was unavoidably discursive from both directions' (1994c:2) and that interactions were modulated by changing indigenous logics.

Indigenous interactions with foreigners followed a local logic, but that logic changed and Lifuans modified their strategies in relation to 'the new'. As socio-political contexts and circumstances changed, they modified interactions with the unfamiliar, the unexpected (see Chapters Three and Seven, particularly).

I highlight several themes and processes in these interactions between Lifuans and foreigners - the relation between indigenous religiosity and Christianity, the question of past mobility, and gender relations are all considered. But the indigenous logics of internal interaction, the prevailing socio-political structure, and indigenous authority and power are also necessary to contextualize past and later interactions. In considering indigenous social structure I draw mainly from European texts from the late 1850s to the late 1880s as well on people's oral accounts of the past and of the present time. Because of the use of heterogeneous sources, it is difficult to delimit more precisely the period of time considered although I will suggest the date of my several sources. My reading of these narratives perceives Kanak as active agents in this process, although agents differentiated by sex and social rank. For example,

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6 Given my emphasis on Kanak as agents of change, one might wonder why indigenous written texts do not prominently feature in these pages. Lifuans seem to have been prolific as linguists: Sam Drile, Weniko Ihage, Ernest Uné and Raymond Ujicas have all published and still research on language and education. Of the 14 Lifuan authors mentioned in the Bibliographie des auteurs Kanak, A.D.C.K., 1993, half of them have published material pertaining to these fields. Although I have relied on their texts for questions pertaining to Drehu, their material is not pertinent to the main arguments of this thesis. There are a few indigenous women writers: among them the well-known Dëwë Gorodé, a poet and novelist. The pre-eminence of the poetic genre as a means of expression by Pacific Islanders is a fertile ground to explore, but is beyond the purview of this thesis.
Christianization and colonial forces did not neutralize local religious and social practices, rather Lifuans have reworked foreign images and messages in local forms and contexts. By emphasizing the intentional role played by Kanak I do not speculate on ideas of free will or autonomy of individual choice (see Douglas 1993b). I also do not want to downplay the role of the missionaries in the establishment of the Code of Law in 1862 in Lifu, nor minimize the role of the French army in the initial establishment of the Catholic Mission on the island (see below).

SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURE, MASTERS OF THE SOIL AND MASTERS OF PEOPLE

In presenting the interaction of Kanak with foreigners I first explore how these engagements were historically and contextually situated in terms of the local social structure (cf. Thomas 1989, Jolly 1994a). I stress the complexity, fluidity and contestations in indigenous socio-political structure rather than record different versions of people's accounts of land tenure rights or of the legitimacy of descent in affirming people's rights in land tenure disputes or in clan succession controversies. (Because of this, I have omitted what people in Drueulu today consider highly sensitive and likely to be controversial.)

The structure allowed people to counterbalance chiefly power, to dissent and to move from one social role and position to another. Fluidity should be considered a kind of 'social mobility', thus as an important element of indigenous social dynamics in Lifu. Stressing the flexibility of the system can also become a rhetorical strategy employed by Kanak. I will thus consider flexibility both as an aspect of social dynamics as well as a rhetorical device (see Chapter Seven).

In describing the social organization of the Loyalties, Australian and New Zealand historians have suggested that 'given the high incidence of immigration and general mobility of the population in pre-European times, the political divisions of the islands were often in a state of flux' (Howe 1977:10). The three chiefdoms into which the island was and still is divided seemed to have been larger and more stable political entities when compared to the numerous smaller

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7 From MacFarlane's accounts (1873:ch.10) emerges his role in setting up the Code of Law in Lifu, but also the strategical ends of the anga joxu Bula to enhance his power.

8 This account of the social structure is a partial representation of a complex and fluid structure. It was not the focus of my research, as the Council of Elders of Drueulu reminded me just before I returned home.
chiefdoms of the other two Loyalty Islands at the time (Jouan 1861:n.118). Normally, hereditary chiefly positions and status were more ascribed than achieved, unlike big-man systems.9 The use of Miny, a respectful language,10 today known only by a few elderly people, used in addressing chiefs and high-ranking people, was considered a further sign of a highly stratified system (Howe 1977:6).11 Nevertheless Lifuans conceived hierarchy as fluid and contested. The clash of Kanak and French colonial values of authority emerges in how a hierarchical 'indigenous' organization was implemented by the colonial Administration all over New Caledonia regardless of the specificity of each area. Authority was vested in grands chefs [high chiefs], and petits chefs [literally 'small chiefs'], who were legally responsible for clear-cut territorial entities: districts and tribes in Lifu. The boundaries of the chefferies [chiefdoms] on Lifu do not overlap with the three administrative districts, the indigenous system being more complex and fluid (see Guiart 1992a: ch.3). However in Lifu, unlike the main island, the three administrative high chiefs were the customary chiefs [anga joxu] and they were invested with authority over territories that roughly corresponded with their nōj or baselaia [chiefdoms].12

Lifuans' different way of considering spatial boundaries and ownership is recounted by Leenhardt (1979 [1947]: 120). The anga joxu Bula, who had studied in Nouméa, decided to deal with the Administration's council of land registry and the question of unsurveyed land not by debating the boundaries of the fields with his people but by asking each one of them to whom they offered firstfruits. Those who were at the end of the chain, who were receiving but did not have to pay homage to anyone, were considered the original owners and thus registered as members of the council.

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9 Compare Sahlins 1963 with Howe 1977 and Douglas 1982. For a discussion of ascription and achievement viewed not as polar opposites but as a matter of emphasis in particular contexts see Douglas (1979:4). See also Bensa 1992b for the articulation of immigrant chief and master of the soil in the context of New Caledonia. For a more recent debate on meanings of hierarchy amongst Austronesian-speaking groups in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, see Jolly and Mosko 1994.


11 No respectful language was present on the main island (Howe 1977: 165, ft34).

12 Both words are nowadays used by Lifuans. Nōj depending upon the context can mean tribe, district or the whole island. Baselaia is mainly used to refer to a district area, as in baselaia e Gaica. Everyone is aware of its 'religious connotations', being a Greek word introduced by the LMS missionaries to refer to the Kingdom of God, but in customary speeches baselaia is widely used with an earthly connotation. Guiart (1992a:212) and Nekoeng (1990:25) prefer 'pays' to 'district' (see Chapter Three: fn.36).
The new colonial social order did not entail the same disruption of native social organization as happened on the main island (Howe 1977:81; Henningham 1992:12) but even in Lifu a rigid European notion of hierarchy contrasted with a flexible Kanak concept which focuses not on individuals but on relations. Furthermore this hierarchical organizational principle was not perceived as being in opposition to the notion of reciprocity (cf. Douglas 1994a). This still holds true.

Not only did representations of both the Loyalties and the Grande Terre inhabitants rest on European essentialism about 'races', but socio-political organization was interpreted by the early traders and missionaries through images of rule transplanted from Europe. The account of the trader Andrew Cheyne, who was one of the first Europeans to depict Lifu social organization, mirrors that of the medieval feudal system in Europe: 'The inhabitants of Lifu ... are classed into Kings, chiefs, land-holders and servants or slaves' (Shineberg (ed) 1971 [1842]:105). This understanding of the indigenous social organization, filtered through European notions of power and authority, persists in the narratives of Europeans not only in the period under consideration but well into the 20th century.13 During this period MacFarlane (1873) will refer to the chief as 'king' and Hadfield (Hadfield 1920) will make use of expressions such as 'royal household'. The hierarchical relationship will be portrayed in terms of an 'absolutely despotic chief ... who was practically deified by his subjects' (1920:31) resulting in an 'absolute subordination to [the] chiefs ... [which] precluded the idea of private property' (1920:23). Representations perpetuating images of a monarchical, feudal society were consistently used by Europeans in representing the different communities of New Caledonia and, as Douglas stresses, when Kanak did not respond the way they were expected to, the motives of individual actors were questioned rather than the model itself (1994a:7 and 1994b:363).

In Kanak society, the chief was not usually the first occupant of the land. In the past newcomers became anga joxu, 'high chief', receiving authority over the people, but not over the land. In fact the first inhabitants maintain the prominent role of trenadro, 'master of the soil' and the associated connections with spirits and the ancestors.14 Their historical memory 'est le réceptacle du détail des

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13 Early this century Sarasin spoke of 'caste' in describing the chiefs of Lifu (1917:276).
14 The non-native origins of the chief as well as the distinction between master of the people and master of the soil are features of both Loyalty Island and Grande Terre political organizations. Yet Howe in dealing with the question of counterpowers to chiefly despotism (1977:11) draws a
limits des terrains familiaux ou de clans et de leur justification traditionnelle' [is the repository of the details of the boundaries of family or clan land and of its traditional justification] (Guiart 1954:9). Thus social relations were based on a model of a social contract which encoded significant structural tension and which could be renegotiated (Douglas 1979; Bensa and Rivierre 1982; Bensa 1986).15 Leenhardt aptly represented this relationship in the Loyalties as evinced in the offering of firstfruit:

The soil does not belong to the chief but to the first occupants. These people do not have to offer firstfruits. Aren't they the ones who approved the foreign immigrant and suggested the chieftainship to him? Whereas the chief is sacred and no one may approach him, these men, the first occupants, may touch him and taste his food ... Their quality of landed property owners is thus recognised by all the chief's kinsmen who occupy their lands and offer the owners the firstfruits of their harvests. And they, the masters of the soil, who owe nothing to the chief, nevertheless lay aside a portion of what they receive and take it to him. This is not a tribute but an offering, a token of fidelity (Leenhardt 1979 [1947]:119, English version).

Today in Drueulu everyone acknowledges the first two inhabitants of the place just as everyone agrees on the fact that the anga joxu is an 'outsider'. Yet both men and women think that the non-native origin of the high chief should be 'not spoken of too loud'.16 But people's knowledge and accounts of how the trenadro have defined the position of newcomers and land use rights are vastly

distinction between the Loyalty Islands and the main island of New Caledonia. In the latter case, chiefs 'were quasi-divine men whose essential task was to orate and exalt tribal history' (Howe, 1977:165, ft.32). Further, in this context, the nobility did not have the prominent role that it had in the Loyalty Islands (Howe 1977:165, ft.34).

15 I find Arendt's (1963) distinction between two kinds of 'social contract' pertinent here. She argues that the natural law theorists assembled into a single social covenant two 'mutually exclusive' alternatives of contract. One is a horizontal version, the other a vertical version. She explains the former as:

[i]t the mutual contract by which people bind themselves together in order to form a community ... its result is indeed a 'society' or 'cosociation' in the old Roman sense of societas, which means alliance.

The latter, on the contrary:
the so-called social contract between a given society and its ruler ... deal[s] with a fictitious, aboriginal act on the side of each member, by virtue of which he gives up his isolated strength and power to constitute a government; far from gaining a new power ... he resigns his power as it is, and far from binding himself through promises, he merely expresses his 'consent' to be ruled by the government (1963:169).

She continues by saying that this kind of social contract needs to be legitimized by God, whereas the mutual contract is "by definition enacted "in the presence of one another" ' (1963:170). In Drehu trepen [foundation, base, bottom] is used in expressions such as trepen huliwa, trepen utin or kola nyi trepen meaning that in order to do work properly they must respect the principles at the basis of their society.

16 People says it is hmitrótr: a polysemic word that can mean sacred, dangerous, forbidden.
different. In Lifu, as Bensa and Rivierre have argued for the centre-north of the main island, Kanak still use 'stratégies complexes de changement de nom accompagnées de manipulation de généalogie et d'itinéraire' [complex strategies of changing names accompanied by manipulation of genealogy and itinerary] (1982:119). This genealogical flexibility is manifest not just in colonial history, but in recent controversies and dealings about land tenure on the island. Today such fluidity can serve to reinforce chiefly power, to renegotiate relations between indigenous and Christian domains and/or to reaffirm the language of identity (see Chapter Seven).

There are two trenadro in Drueulu. This fits Guiart's generalisation that in Lifu the lineages of the masters of the soil go 'toujours par deux' [always in pairs] (1992a:223). Their origin is enmeshed with that of the land:

Plate 4: Yam Feast
We were the first to emerge at the same time that land emerged. This is according to legend, but it continues to be recognized, that we are the masters of the soil. Land belongs to us because we emerged from this land and we were the first to occupy it. The legend, according to our grandfathers, was that in the past when the earth started to emerge nobody was there. They were far away, deep in the forest. As the earth progressively emerged, the ancestors followed the sea. Because as the earth emerged the sea lowered. The sea withdrew. The waves crashed on the sand and they were carried in by the waves. That is iwaaziluzilu (Hajjengo Haluatr, recorded interview, March 1992).

When Alaxutren, the apical ancestor from whom the actual high chief Zeula traces his descent, arrived from We at Drueulu, the master of the soil was Wacako. He accepted Alaxutren and handed over the chiefdom, retiring to Drosi, 'le lieu de son émergence' [the place from which he had emerged] (Hajjengo Haluatr, March 1992). Alaxutren is the term still used by the tixe ne lapa [clan chiefs] in addressing the anga joxu. At the time of early contacts with Europeans Zeula was the high chief of Gaica. Wacako is recognized as the master of the

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17 The narrator is explaining to me the origin of their name, Wazilutr. This name was changed in the 1950s when the French Administration obliged every Kanak to be registered under a family name.

18 In oral accounts people acknowledge the mediating role of Gaica in the tension and war between the larger and more populated Wetr to the North and Łosi to the South. Though some missionaries before 1860s in their correspondence refer to 'two tribes', the autonomous position of the chiefdom of Gaica not being apparent to them, Father Fabre speaks of 'three tribes' (Fabre to Poupinel 24 October 1859, APM/ONC 208) and Gaide in 1861, well before French annexation, writes that the island is divided 'en trois tribus, chacune à son grand chef indépendant' [in three tribes, each one has its own independent chief] (Gaide to Favre, 20 January 1861, APM/ONC 208). This contradicts the position that asserts that the chief of Gaica was appointed as an independent chief by the French authority in 1864 (Notes Historiques). The view of Gaica as having a 'subordinate chief' is espoused also by Ray (1917:290). The term Gaica for some people derives from gaithew where thewe means partager [to share]; for an informant it derives from xaca which means terre calcaire [limestone].
land who has 'accepted' Zeula, but who should assume this named position today is a highly sensitive and controversial matter. Many questions are at issue: interpreting the meaning contained in the name Wacako; the legitimation of its descendants and of adopted members; the status of previous people who had taken that named position: half man-half spirit from the Grande Terre who possessed stronger magical powers than the first inhabitants and came answering their call (Sipo, July 1990). When the latter moved from Drueulu to Drosi, he left 'tous les médicaments' [all his medicines] under the sine ta i Wacako, a short wooden stake driven into the ground in front of the umepö, the large hut within the chiefly compound used for gatherings. The former anga joxu decided to replace it with a flagpole. The same woman commented: 'Maintenant il faut que la France lui donne à manger. Avant la nourriture arrivait toute seule à la chefferie' [Now France needs to feed him. Before all the food came by itself to the chefferie]. She stressed that changes have taken place and people do not take offerings and gifts to Feneiwewe (the chiefly compound) as they used to. This strong critique of the removal of the sine ta i Wacako by the former anga joxu carries different messages; it recalls that the high chief is not a trenadro as Wacako is, and that the two have different relations vis-à-vis land and people. In fact by challenging Wacako's magical powers over the land the chief had to rely on the colonizers' help whereas in the past he could rely on indigenes supplying him. Further it is a comment on the former high chief's decision to replace the late chief of the Lapa i Ange Triji (clan of the land owners, see below), Sipo's father, without previous consultations with the other trenadro.

Today descent is traced in the male line and a pattern of patri-virilocal residence prevails but this is complicated by the fact that lineages are ranked according to their seniority of descent based on birth order. Each descent group has senior and junior branches. This pattern seems to have prevailed in the past as well (Howe 1977:9-10). The eldest male of the active senior generation is considered tixe of the lineage. He is the one who speaks on its behalf and organizes the customary 'work' performed by the lineage; when the lineage acts

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19 In narrating the arrival of Zeula, people always emphasized that Wacako 'accepted' him, thus Zeula's presence was not imposed on him.

20 Guiart refers to these positions as titres [titles] (1963:640), but I prefer to call them named positions. I consider it a less historically charged term.

21 This replacement was undertaken by the father of the present day anga joxu.

22 Huliwa cil is the term Kanak use to talk about activities that require communal involvement where people have specific obligations depending on their status, function or role in that context.
as a corporate group, the junior branches gather at the place of residence of the elder of the senior branch. In principle all members of the senior line are senior to all members of junior lineages; but many strategies work to make this system very flexible. Adoption is one of the strategies used to enhance this flexibility, as in the past were warfare, shifting allegiance, and migration. Ray explained that the relationship of the eldest vis-à-vis his younger siblings was framed in both social and kinship terms. The elder brother was called 'master (tixe) or father (kem)' (1917:200). This way of defining social relations through kinship idioms persists. Kanak translate tixe as 'chief; clan chief, lineage leader, plus grand [someone bigger]'; and jin as younger brother or sister or 'sujets, exécuteurs, main d'ouvre' [subjects, executors, labourers] (Haluatr). The use of these two terms is very interesting. In fact tixe always refers to men, except if interim leadership is necessary, when a widow can act as tixe. In the past there are accounts of women who have assumed such power during interregna. Speaking of the high chief of Gaica, Father Gaide writes that he 'est un enfant de 12 à 13 ans; c'est sa mère qui gouverne' [is a child of 12 or 13 years and it is his mother who rules] (Gaide to Favre, 20 January 1861, APM/ONC 208). Pastor MacFarlane refers to the same situation stressing that the young successor of the deceased high chief Zeula 'was only a boy about nine or ten years of age, so the lad's mother became regent' (1873:61). But this apparently clear-cut distinction that could result in a simplistic dualistic model of chief:elder:male (tixe) and subject:junior:the two sexes (jin), becomes more complex in context.

In conveying the vitality of their socio-political system, Kanak always emphasize that a principle of equilibrium smooths the structural tension of this very sophisticated and flexible organization. Authority and respect are stressed as well as reciprocity. Where authority resides depends on the context: generally speaking men have more authority, but in a meeting young unmarried men must respect the authority of elderly women. Within a lineage the eldest male member has authority, the right to speak, yet the youngest male is 'highly respected'. What is peculiar to this principle of seniority/juniority is the status of the youngest male member of a lineage: he is called qatr [elder]. This parallel between first and last

In French they speak of 'travail' [work], the notion of 'customary' being implied. Even in town people talk of 'travail' to refer to work with mutual obligations. Xatuva means 'donner la main' [to help] and refers instead to help provided by a relative, a friend. The implications of the two words are quite different.

23 But cf. Bensa and Rivierre (1982:74) where the relationship chief/subject is subverted in the kinship terminology of elder son/father. In Lifu the relationship between the anga joxu and the atresi is framed in kinship terms as the relationship of a son to his father.
born in the male line in terms of respect and privilege is not duplicated in kinship terminology where they are referred to by distinctive terms. The designation of qatr and the privilege it confers is acknowledged by both men and women, though it applies only to men. As a Drueulu man living in Nouméa told me: 'Ils doivent me considérer comme leur vieux. J'occupe une place importante'. [They should consider me as their elder. I occupy an important place] (Haijengo Haluutr, recorded interview, April 1992). People explain it in terms of balancing otherwise uneven relations and diminishing tension, though the same man on a previous occasion had told me:

In terms of customs this is tough, no doubt about it. It is the eldest who makes the decision. Generally there is no contention ... perhaps some discussion but not contention ... Now as I am telling you we are beginning to change ... Now everybody speaks, the eldest, the second, the third, the last one, everybody speaks; but in the past nobody could speak except for the eldest of the family (Haijengo Haluutr, recorded interview, March 1992).

This principle, which stresses equilibrium within a hierarchical social organization, still influences contemporary interaction and operates in daily life. I recall a raffle organized by the Protestant women's group of Lifou in 1990 in which the first and the 10th and last prize were both a hand-made straw mat of the same value. This tendency to counterbalance the power of the eldest with that of the youngest suggests that the notion of hierarchy and rank is not rigid and is always subject to qualification.

RESPECT, AUTHORITY OR POWER

In the Notes Historiques sur Lifou par le R.P. Fabre (hereinafter Notes Historiques) (APM/ONC 200) we are told that the imposition of French rule in Lifou under Commandant Trèves meant that the chiefs who had shown anti-French sentiments were jailed.24 But Sainou, the regent of Gaica, evaded capture

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and for several months was hidden by people in the interior of the island. Trèves had people searching everywhere, but to no avail:

They would beat the woods to obey the commandant, but never an indigène would have dared to lay hands on SAINOU. Everybody knew perfectly what he was up to, where he slept, who was feeding him (Notes Historiques:21).

In spite of this respect for the high chief, he was not the despot of early European representations. As we have seen, Lifu chieftainship implies counterbalances to the power of the anga joxu such that he has power over the people but not the land. In the past a check to despotism was represented by the council of elders. 'Aged men' acted as the chief's 'counsellors' (Ray 1917:290) as well as important priests, the 'nobility' according to Howe (1977:11). Today the two Atresi [Angatresi], Mexaanang and Waminya, are considered hmitrôtr [sacred men]. The former is considered atresi anga joxu (and is referred to as the father of the high chief) and the latter atresi ange Gaica (and is referred to as the father of the people of Gaica). To mark their status, both are addressed in the same way as the high chief with the suffix -ti added to their name, and during ceremonies which involve all the people of Gaica, Mexaanang addresses them on behalf of the high chief and Waminya responds on their behalf. The council of elders of the past is Hneumête, which should not be confused with the Council of Elders, a body created by the colonial Administration, though in Drueulu the latter is made up of the tixe ne lapa [clan chiefs]. Hneumète is an assembly composed of members of different clans as well as the youngest brother of the anga joxu. Neither the trenadro nor any other segments of the Triji clan take part in this assembly.²⁵ In explaining the origin of this political body, I was told:

²⁵ In Lifu the high chief never speaks for himself, so his spokesman takes the izez, a customary gift which always follows the same path as the project, to Hneumète. If the Assembly does not approve the project proposed by the high chief and his counsellors, it is the Atresi Waminya who will take the izez back to the chefferie. Otherwise Waminya will present the project to the small chief who then communicates it to the tixe ne lapa. People stress that izez and travail must always follow the same itinerary.
Once the high chief had two sons. They grew up and at home they constantly punched each other in the face. Then he [high chief] discussed the matter with the council [of elders]: 'What should we do. Those two cannot live together here'. The eldest remained at the chefferie and the youngest was taken here, amongst the elders. This is why he is here. And starting from then, whenever there are two or more, the youngest always comes here, to 'work' with us, to judge matters related to the chefferie (Paul Zöngö recorded interview, December 1989).

In the past as today there were dignitaries – sinelapa, hnalapa - that surrounded the high chief 'forming a vast administrative hierarchy of spokesmen, diplomats, war ministers, personal servants, guards, specialist labourers, priests and sorcerers' (Howe 1977:11). These named positions are still in place though, as I have said, some of their functions have changed. Furthermore the fact that group segments may play more than one role, e.g. being jin with respect to the clan chief, but sinelapa [advisers] with respect to the high chief, strengthens this balance of power and shapes the relation of power in a more complex way than genealogical status and seniority of residence alone would imply. If a named position is in a relationship of sinelapa to theanga joxu and to anatresi, this means that, in practice, that person will supply help when there is 'work' involving either one of the two. 'Travail' refers to different kinds of activities requiring communal participation, from thatching a hut to participation in a wedding. When 'work' is announced, what is expected from any given person or clan segment is known; it does not need to be articulated. Depending on the labour force available a clan segment will organize itself.

But social relations are not informed by just one hierarchical principle. They are ruled by several intersecting hierarchical principles based on ranking residential seniority and itinerary (first occupants/foreigners/refugees/integrated), on the above mentioned distinction of chiefs/subjects, and on kinship seniority (senior/junior). The relationship senior/junior is a pervasive metaphor for social relations in Lifu.

Apart from the first inhabitants of the area, all the other lineages have a non-local origin, their arrival spread over time. They have been accepted and integrated into different clan segments and named positions. The idea of a
refugee being integrated in the Gaica nöj was explained to me with the image of zine, which refers to something that does not belong to the tree, but has been grafted onto it. These groups of people coming from other parts of the island or from other areas of the Loyalty region were integrated within a system which parallels that described by Bensa and Rivierre for the Grande Terre (1982). Each named position has a specific status vis-à-vis the chief, vis-à-vis the masters of the land, and vis-à-vis the other segments, and thus a specific role and function. Hnēqa or götrane qa are used to speak of the work required by each named position, the latter term emphasizing that what is required is a part of a larger work. In principle these positions are inherited. This system of named positions today seems quasi-immutable but the role of each position has changed through time: for example those positions with a specific role in warfare, Drueuluans commented, have been reconceived. These named positions are very fluid: lineages or clan segments can use different strategies to attain these named positions. New people can fulfill these roles through adoption, through exile or through manipulation of genealogies. People accept this flexibility, but when someone in Gaica tried to 'invent a new role' vis-à-vis the high chief, other clan segments objected. People stressed that the strategies that can be put forward to enhance one's position are carefully monitored by others:

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26 This use of images recurs in people's formal speeches today. In this 'use of figurative language' (Hadfield 1920:30) there is a continuity from the past, although today the speaker may express himself (I use the masculine pronoun purposely) in the lingua franca or use European images of rule to stress the difference with the Lifuan's way. This figurative language seems to me more prominent among men (see Chapter Seven).

27 Götran means 'on the side'. For example götrane mi means left side.

28 Exile is a strategy still employed. To mention just two recent cases: a group of people from Lösi was exiled in Nouméa during the événements and allowed to return home only during the time of my fieldwork, and the former mayor of Lifu has been banned from entering his home village in Lösi.
For example people coming from the sea can claim a different **hnafetra** [root-place][29] to avoid keeping their status as foreigners; people accept it until it becomes harmful to the group’s cohesion (Wapotro, March 1992).[30]

This mutual ‘checking’ emerges also when a lineage **pêhé matran** [without patrilineal descendants] chooses a male successor — usually in the matriline, namely the son of a daughter - who will take the name and with it ‘*sa terre, ses fonctions, ses relations, ses histoires, son enracinement, ses droits, ses interdits*’ [its land, its functions, its histories, its roots, its rights, its interdictions] (Wapotro, March 1992). If the **tixe** decides to ensure the patrilineal line of descent by adopting a male successor, this must be recognized by the members of the family and of the lineage, that is by the people who will have to work with him. If his authority as first male is not recognized then the succession becomes a controversial issue. Again the **tixe** has authority but it is bound by people’s willingness to accept and legitimate it. Normally, if a male is adopted in the family his children will be considered of the same lineage, but the clan can always take a different stance. Acceptance must come from the people who have ‘to work’ [*travailler*] with him. Kanak consider adoption a common practice but not always a smooth process, especially in the case of a male individual poised to take up an important named position. In describing this ambiguous position they tend to stress not qualities inherent in the person chosen but rather the legitimation given by the people ‘behind’ the **tixe**. These strategies are a way to come to terms with the structural tension inherent in the socio-political organization and at the same time constitute a constant subversion of an all-encompassing hierarchical principle pointing instead to many intersecting ones (cf. Thomas 1989, Jolly 1994a).

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29 **Hnafetra** (literally hna [the place] and fetra [to appear]) is where the ancestors first appeared. Cf with the notion of **stamba**, used in central and southern Vanuatu (Bonnemaison 1985:41).

30 This interview is one of many I did not record on tape. The interviewee, when asked about tape-recording his words, replied that I could do as I pleased but I should be aware that his answers would not be the same if I had opted for recording. I chose to take notes.
A path not a pyramid

This notion of 'behind' [derrière], though expressed in French, refers to the image of the path which informs social relationships. In fact of any given segment B, jin to segment A, it is said that B is 'behind' A. This notion of power, contrary to the western notion, is not embedded in the image of a pyramid but rather in that of a path or a road, a widespread metaphor in the Austronesian world (e.g., keda [kula path] see Campbell 1983:201-227; eda [road or way] see Young 1971:30). This emerges very clearly from my interviews conducted in French. Words such as 'monter' [go up to] and 'là haut' [up there] are part of people's vocabulary when talking about directions and geographical locations. Thus Lifuan in Nouméa will speak of 'going up to' Lifu and will refer to the island as being 'up there'. But such idioms of higher/lower as such do not enter into the narratives about socio-political structure (cf. Toren 1990). This is crucial in understanding their concept of social relations. I am not implying a notion of equality, but rather a different way of conceiving authority or hierarchy. As Arendt reminds us (contrasting Roman to Greek politics): The word auctoritas derives from the verb augere, "augment", and what authority or those in authority constantly augment is the foundation ... Authority, in contradistinction to power (potestas), has its roots in the past, but this past was no less present in the actual life of the city than the power and strength of the living. The most conspicuous characteristic of those in authority is that they do not have power' (Arendt 1977:122).

To be jin means to be behind and not to be under or below. People do however make reference to the notion of 'en bas' [below] when speaking about the youngest male of a lineage segment, saying that he is 'sacré' [sacred] because he 'supportes tout le monde' [holds up every one].

Lineages nowadays are incorporated under four lapa, 'les grands clans' [great clans] as people call them in French to differentiate them from other lapa which are smaller units. The four clans comprise: Lapa i Ange Triji, divided

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31 I am referring here to Guiart's use of the notion of 'pyramidal' to contrast the organizational model of the Loyalties with that of Grande Terre (1963:639). He seems to have reformulated the dichotomy into a more bland opposition in the updated version of his book where he speaks of the 'chefferies apparentment pyramidales' [apparently pyramidal chiefdoms] (1992a:460).

32 In Drehu south is associated with up and north with down, so Lifuan in Nouméa when they speak Drehu say 'to go down to Lifu' (see Ozanne-Rivierre 1987). For an explanation of the use of tro pi [go away]; uti pi [go down]; lò pi [go outside]; tro jé [go]; èle jé [go up]; lò jé [go inside], see Moyse-Faurie (1983:78-79).
into Triji of the land (Wacako) and Triji of the sea (Qapitro),\textsuperscript{33} Ange Cipa, Ange Api Canyò and Ange Api Zeula. In reality lapa are not residential units and they function as corporate groups only on a few occasions such as iôlekeu, the yearly yam feast, or the thatching of the umepò. Hnepelapa are uneven segments of a clan. Within each big clan people fulfil different functions in terms of ritual and protocol according to their position and role. Segments of the four lapa co-reside in Drueulu. The ranking relations between and within lapa [clan] and hnepelapa [lineages, literally parts of a clan] are determined by the residential seniority in the area.

The itinerary followed by the different groups and the relationships established in this process of moving are not lost. Gojeny means path and at the same time the identifiable reference points along the path where one has stopped during a journey. Any given group of people has some members left to mark these 'stopovers'. People explain that members of the same hnafétra can live far apart and still refer to the same ancestor. All these segments and individuals in principle may claim the same rights to residence and to land. They might have changed their name but they always keep the knowledge of where they came from, though sometimes they prefer to conceal it. The change of name is considered a strategy to sever ties with one's own natal group and to be fully adopted into the new group, but 'au niveau de la mémoire ça reste' [at the level of the memory it remains] as Wapotro stressed. Seniority of residence is manifested during the hotr. The offering of firstfruits follows these ranking paths of kinship and residence seniority. The youngest brother offers his firstfruits to the one next in seniority to him; the eldest brother takes the firstfruits to the tixe, and from there to the anga joxu. [The trenadro do not have to offer him a hotr.) But this itinerary is better conceived of as a network of relations rather than parallel paths. Figure 2.1 represents the clan Cipa during iôlekeu that took place in Drueulu in 1990 involving all the different segments of the clan. This graphical representation should help to visualize the path people 'behind' have to follow.\textsuperscript{34}

The Kanak concept of authority is vastly different from the European notion. Each high chief has been accepted and installed by the trenadro, who refer to

\textsuperscript{33} Qapitro was in charge of the big annual fish ceremony, not performed for at least 40 or 50 years. He had taken up uxorilocal residence in Wetq, but though he has recently returned to Drueulu, the ceremony has not been restored. (Guiart still considers Qapitro as living outside of Gaica – 1992a:297). During customary speeches I have heard the names of each clan pronounced except for the Triji's. This lapa is referred to by the names of its clan segments (e.g. Wacako).

\textsuperscript{34} The reason I have chosen to represent the paths followed by the members of this lapa is that I took part in the ceremony at their side. In that year the leadership of other clans was contested.
this act as *acilë joxu*, meaning 'mettre debout' [to lift up the chief]. To convey the rich meaning of this metaphor they used another expression: *acilë inaatr*, which means to lift up the central post of the hut. The architectural expression of the social contract between the land owners and the *anga joxu* is in fact expressed in the *umepö* whose central pole *inaatr* represents the high chief, and the *jo* [lateral beams] represent the clans. (Illustration 2.1, drawn by Bah Nyikeine of Drueulu, represents the different parts of a hut.) The notion of *acilë joxu* could seem at odds with what is stated about the concept of 'path'. In reality, however, they both point to the tension and the fluidity of Lifuan social structure. In fact the high chief is 'lifted', meaning his position must be legitimized by the others: he has no authority without this. Thus, although the position is inherited, the significance of the installation of the chief is a reminder of the chiefly immigrants' non-local origin (cf. the installation of the chief of foreign origin by the native land owners in Fiji by Sahlins, 1985). During the construction of the chiefly hut the central post is lifted and installed by men from all the clans, whereas in the thatching of the walls and the roof of the hut each clan has a specific portion to complete. The *iweneminy* (or *he*), 'head' of the *umepö*, is collocated by the Triji, a *lapa* to which the *trenadro* belongs (Haluat, recorded interview, March 1992). *He* and *inaatr* are metaphors transferred into other dimensions of the social scene and used by Kanak to refer to the eldest male of a lineage or to the husband (the wife being *treng*, basket). So the same images are used to represent relationships between different segments that make up a socio-political body (see Chapter Seven).

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35 See Sahlins (1985) for the incorporation of the foreign chief in Fiji.

36 It is interesting to note that customary work is *huliwa* [work] *cil* (see fn. 17).

37 Compare with the transformation of the Palauan *bai*, the chiefly and community meetinghouse, as an icon in the articulation of tradition and modernity (Nero 1992).

38 For a more detailed description of the construction of a hut in Lifiu, see Boulay (1990a:125-137). Hadfield described these houses as being 'of an oblong shape' (1920:39), but Sarasin described the Lifuan hut as a 'Rundhaus'[round house] (1929a:138). See also photos in Sarasin (1929b: table 35).
Figure 2.1: Iolekeu, Yam Feast, Drueulu 1990

The letters stand for the initials of the four tribes of Gaica.
Illustration 2.1: Sketch drawn by Bah Nyikeine of Drueulu, representing the different parts in the construction of a hut, 1992
The *imulal* — intertwined lianas shaped in a funnel and gathered on the top internal portion of the central post — represents the ties between the clans and the *anga joxu*. It is interesting that in the thatching of the *umepō* the Triji are not differentiated from the other clans, but in being responsible for the hut’s terminal portion they reaffirm their role as master of the soil in a ceremony that sees the participation of all the named positions *vis-à-vis* the *hna nyijoxu*, or chefferie. Yet the 'head' is collocated not just to protect from the rain but — as Paul Zöngö explained — to protect from evil spirits as well. Thus it shows the ties of the *trenadro* with the spirits of the land. Each constructive act is accompanied by a customary gift which once again shows the relationship between each named position in terms of seniority of residence and in terms of named positions *vis-à-vis* the chefferie. But the *Atresi* Waminya must be present and symbolically remove a blade of the old straw before work can start. (Figure 2.2 offers an external view of the *umepō* and the seating arrangement inside it.)

Another event when the social contract is brought to the fore is on the death of a high chief. Normally it is the *maathin*, the mother’s brother, who plays a prominent role in the funeral ceremony. In the case of the high chief, his wife, his sons and his unmarried daughters, the master of the land will perform the ceremony.

In all this the determining factor is the social identity of the male individual. For example, access to *halawi*, the small hut beside the *umepō* inside the wooden fence of the high chief’s compound, is open to the high chief and the *sinelapa*, both men and women (wives, but not sisters if they are married). The same holds true for access to the *umepō*: a *sinelapa* woman married to a *jin* enters through the right door, whereas a *jin* woman married into a *sinelapa* family goes in from the left door, as does the high chief. So women are strongly identified with the position, role and function of their husband’s lineage.

In the representations that Kanak, and particularly men, give of their society, the focus is on men as social agents. Kanak men stress that ‘*la femme [mariée] est adoptée dans le clan du mari*’ [a (married) woman is adopted by her husband’s clan]. This implies that she cannot be considered a separate subject. But a closer inspection suggests that she is not adopted in the Kanak sense of the term, as a child is adopted; she is integrated in a more permeable way. She never severs her ties with her maternal kindred (see Chapter Five). And indeed if one pays close attention to what men say, one can perceive the fluidity of women's

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39 'Subject' should not be confused with 'individual' (Arendt 1991 [1958]:128, Italian version).
position. When men speak of a woman of chiefly descent they stress that she should marry within a high-ranking lineage. But if she marries into an aminatr, any low-ranking clan vis-à-vis the chefferie,40 'elle garde toujours le prestige de fille du chef et les enfants de ce mariage ne sont plus aminatr, mais sont élevés au niveau de la chefferie' [she always retains the prestige of being daughter of a chief and the children issued of this marriage are not considered aminatr but rather they are elevated to chiefly rank] (Haluatr, April 1992).

Drueuluans stress that in its skeletal form this structure has not changed much since before the arrival of Europeans, although they emphasize that the strategies used have changed: from an emphasis on warfare to an accommodation of and allegiance with outsiders. This brings us back to the question I pose at the beginning, namely how indigenous notions of authority and hierarchy have shaped Lifuans' early interactions with outsiders. Let us examine the case of Gaica. Without anticipating the material I present in the following pages, the modern explanation given by Drueuluans concerning conversion to one of the two Churches present in Lifu in the second part of last century is interesting. They all stress customary paths of allegiance as being central in determining which religion Drueuluans had embraced. But the idea of equilibrium is also stressed. In recounting how Mexaanang [atresi anga joxu) and Waminya [atresi ange Gaica) embraced Christianity, it is stressed that the former became Protestant, while the latter Catholic. Further, it is highlighted that Mexaanag (who addresses the people of Gaica on behalf of the high chief) aligned himself with the opposite denomination. This does not so much challenge the importance of chiefly choice in conversion but rather suggests the crucial concept of balance in indigenous notions of hierarchy and reciprocity.

40 Today most people attach negative connotations to this term and do not like to use it. Hadfield translated 'aminates' as 'the common people' (1920:31). Sam (1980:19) defines it as a term that connotes 'ceux qui appartiennent à la catégorie sociale la plus humble' [those belonging to the most humble social category].
SELECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

If they did not drive us back violently it is because they were intimidated by the presence of a warship (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208)41

Si on ne nous repoussait pas violemment, c'est que l'on était intimidé par la présence d'un navire de guerre

Father Palazy quite clearly expressed his view on the collaboration between the Marist Fathers and the French state agents in starting the French Catholic mission in Lifu. Yet we must separate Christian discourses from those of the colonial state. Both discourses embraced a set of beliefs, values and norms that attempted to construct a hegemonic symbolic order. Imposing a colonial order and converting people to Christianity were overlapping projects of claiming exclusivity for one's Truth. Montrouzier, who with Father Palazy and Father Bernard reached Lifu on board the French warship Styx,42 on 11 April 1858, to establish the first Catholic mission in the island, was quite blatant about this. Five months after his arrival, he wrote back to Lyon:

We have ... six catechists who every Sunday after instruction go to different stations and communicate the truth to almost three hundred and fifty persons whom they have already won [for Christ] and whose number augment every day. (Montrouzier to Yardin, 8 September 1858, APM/ONC208, emphasis is mine).

Nous avons ... six catéchistes qui tous les dimanches après l'instruction vont en différentes stations et communiquent la vérité à près de trois cent cinquante personnes qu'ils ont déjà gagnées et dont le nombre s'augmente tous les jours.

But the 'adversaires' [adversaries], namely the Protestants, had a quite different idea about the truth spread by Catholics: 'where British power or British enterprise have opened a path, there comes the missionary of Rome, to plant his spiritual and mental tyranny' (MacFarlane 1873:116).

41 When I began this archival research (1991) the correspondence from New Caledonia was mainly catalogued by year. When I returned to Rome in 1992, Father Kok had reorganized this material following a different criterion: by author and not by year. Thus in my references I comply with the new cataloguing conventions. A question-mark is used every time the date in the original is incomplete. ONC stands for Oceania Nova Caledonia, dossiers marked 200 Historia, 208 General Correspondence (missionaries files). VM refers to the documents previously held at Villa Maria in Sydney, now in Rome.

42 Major Testard, the then Commandant of New Caledonia, who advocated the need for a Catholic mission on Lifu, sailed on the Styx (Montrouzier to Yardin, 8 September 1858, APM/ONC 208).
Church and State projects were validated by the shared dogma of ontological differences between European and other human beings. They originated from the conviction that conformity with western civilisation and Christianity had to be achieved so as to domesticate the exotic and to normalize it in an European order of things. (cf. Said 1979[1978]:60). Emma Hadfield, who shared with her husband the responsibilities of the Protestant Mission in Lifu, commented that many of the islanders, 'given the same opportunities as an average white man ... would prove his equal, even if they did not surpass him' (1920:29). This same point of view on the consequences of foreign presence for indigenes was well synthesized in the following passage of the official weekly paper of the colony: 'Ne désespérons pas de nos cannibales. Ils sont forts, intelligents, peu travailleurs, c'est vrai, mais à notre contact, ils deviendront des auxiliaires puissants de la colonisation' [We should not despair of our cannibals. They are strong, intelligent, not hard working, it is true, but in contact with us, they will become powerful agents of colonisation] (Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 29 January 1865, anon.).

And yet missionaries and state agents did differ in the way they activated their projects and accomplished their ends. The missionaries lived with the people, in some cases achieving a vernacular competence, and sometimes developed an ethnographic understanding of the indigenous society.

By dealing with Church and State separately I emphasize that the convergence of their interests was not always evident. But moreover the association of French state and French Catholic interests was not always secure. At the beginning of the establishment of the Catholic mission, Marist Fathers considered the presence of the French colony and Administration as a good deterrent against what they considered the arrogance of their opponents, and the French on their side supported the settlement of Catholic missionaries in Lifu to counter English influence over the island. A few months after arriving in Lifu, Father Palazy wrote:

43 The date of publication of Hadfield's book (1920) should not mislead; in fact she draws upon her experience of 30 years as a missionary's wife in Lifu from the mid-1880s onwards.

44 Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie was the official weekly paper of the colony from 1862 (formerly Moniteur Impérial de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et Dépendances, 1859-61).

45 Although LMS missionaries were more interested in learning the vernacular, early Marist Fathers' correspondence often mentions the necessity of learning the local language and the progress made on it (Fabre to Poupin, 4 May 1860, APM/ONC 208; Bertrand to Poupin, 1 June 1860, APM/VM 227; Fabre to Révérend Père, 31 October 1861, APM/ONC 208; Palazy to Yardin, 27 December 1862, APM/ONC 208).
The fear inspired by warships and the nearby presence of the colony made our adversaries more moderate and more circumspect; (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208).

But the situation subsequently became more complex than this text would suggest: alliances were not so clear-cut and the commonalities of interest due to French nationality were often eclipsed by other allegiances. The Protestant Church was in the 19th century British and not French and some of the French governors were anti-clerical and thus hostile to Catholic missionaries, as to religious orders in general.

In Lifu the French Marists were and remained a minority. In 1860, out of a population of 6000 the Marists had only 750 followers, the rest being Protestants (Howe 1977:45), whereas on the main island the Catholic Church had the monopoly. The Catholics explained the LMS missionaries' numerical advantage in terms of their having started contacts earlier through the settlement of Polynesian teachers on Lifu (Fabre to Yardin, ? May 1860, APM/ONC 208) yet Marist Fathers considered the scales could turn in their favour: La vérité se fera jour, mais il faut du temps; [The Truth will break out, but it needs time] (Fabre to Révérend Père, 31 October 1861, APM/ONC 208, emphasis is mine). Thus in Lifu, in their claim to define reality and control access to God, the two missions assiduously competed one against the other.

These colonial factors intersected in critical ways with indigenous patterns: the indigenous socio-political structure, a soil which made Lifu unsuited for white settlers, the use of the same vernacular language throughout the island and the demographic distribution. All these facets should be taken into account in a more nuanced representation of this engagement. As Keesing stresses:

We are as prone to reify and oversimplify and essentialize about the other, dominant 'side' in struggles for power as to romanticize and spuriously collectivize the subordinate 'side' (1992:6).

By the time France annexed the Loyalties in 1864 Protestant and English influence was strong. The first missionaries to set foot on the Loyalties belonged to the LMS.46 They reached Lifu in 1842, a year before the Catholic Marists

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46 The LMS, founded in 1795, began work in Tahiti in 1797 and then moved westward. It arrived in Maré (Loyalty Islands) in 1841 and in Lifu a year later. The organization remained in the Loyalties for more than 50 years, before being replaced at the end of the 19th century by the
arrived on the Grande Terre. In contrast to the main island, the program of Christianization was not strongly opposed by indigenes in Lifu from the outset. In fact, while in other parts of New Caledonia (Balade and Isle of Pines) islanders became hostile to missionaries who failed to meet their expectations of balanced reciprocity, in Lifu people generally maintained interest in the missionaries.

Besides missionaries, traders and labour recruiters also played a role, though again their interests intersected differently in the Grande Terre and in Lifu. The brilliant article by Shineberg and Kohler (1990) on the correspondence between André Ballande, head of the eponymous firm for over 50 years, and the bishop in Nouméa, clearly reveals the cooperation between the Catholic Church and capitalism. And yet it also highlights divergent positions, though often cast in terms of 'means rather than ends' (1990:10). Bishop Fraysse's views on land alienation diverged from those of Governor Feillet, but it was more a controversy brought about by the issue of where colonial authority resided than a stance for the indigenes. The outcome was that Governor Feillet approved of the spread of Protestant evangelization on the main island; within three years 25 teachers from the Loyalties came to preach on the Grande Terre (Chronologie de la Mission de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (herinafter Chronologie), APM/ONC 200).

These animosities and rivalries were differently configured in Lifu because of the absence of white settlers and the presence of a Protestant mission often accused of spreading anti-French and anti-Catholic rumours (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208; Montrouzier to Favre, 1 January 1859, APM/ONC 208). Even before the British Protestant missionaries arrived in Lifu (1859), the

47 As Abu-Lughod (1990) has stressed, the growing number of studies focusing on different forms of local resistance to colonial power are more concerned with examining resistance as a way in which subordinate people oppose the dominant ideology than in understanding forms of power. These forms of resistance were marginalized and neglected in academic studies in the past, attention being drawn only to movements that had attained more visibility. Within anthropology the focus on indigenes' resistance to western ideas, commodities and presence has often led researchers to 'romanticize it', in Abu-Lughod's view (1990). She contends that the use of 'resistance' has been inflated and warns against the current 'romance of resistance' in the discipline. Too often, she argues, forms of resistance are lumped together as expressions of autonomy opposing existing forms of power. She proposes confronting it by shifting the focus of these studies to a 'diagnostic of power' (1990:42), that is, forms of resistance should be considered in terms of what they say about forms of power.

48 The Marists' complaints about the British influence predated the settlement of LMS missionaries on the island (1859). The latter had already visited the Lifu Protestant Mission, which was run by Polynesian teachers. Also in the 1850s, the Melanesian Mission based in New Zealand had had interactions with Lifuans.
Catholic Fathers complained about the anti-French sentiments spread by Protestant teachers. In spite of French annexation one cannot assume that, because the Catholic religion was the established one in France, the Catholic mission would always be supported by colonial authorities. The Marists often complained that their endeavours were jeopardized by the policy of the colonial authorities. The anti-clerical policy of Governor Guillain, for example, was deliberately subversive of religion.

COMMERCIAL, CHURCH AND STATE AGENTS

Australian sandalwood traders started to visit Lifou in the 1840s. In spite of animosities between chiefdoms, 'Lifou and Ouvea gained an excellent name among them [sandalwooders] for peace and hospitality, a reputation which they were not to lose throughout this period.' (Shineberg 1967:55). Though the island quickly became depleted of the precious wood, commercial interest was not exhausted. The trade continued in the 1850s but it was supplemented by other products as well: cotton and copra. During the first period of trade, islanders always asked for a limited range of items: tobacco, clothes and tools. Tobacco was in fact a highly desired commodity, whereas alcohol did not become widespread until well into the 20th century (Shineberg 1967:154-155; Péter-Contesse, 27 July 1945). Emma Hadfield, whose experience in the Loyalties covered a period of over 30 years, commented that 'very few Lifuans drink; perhaps not one half per cent of the population of 6,000 or 7,000' (1920:217). Ten years later she was echoed by Péter-Contesse, a Swiss lay woman missionary who spent almost 30 years in Lifou, who remarked that 'il y a deux choses que tous les hommes de Lifou (et quelques femmes) aiment beaucoup; c'est fumer et boire du café très fort' [there are two things that all the men of Lifou (and some women) like very much: smoking and drinking very strong coffee] (2 January 1933).49

49 Eugénie Péter-Contesse's letters are all addressed to her family in Switzerland. The material was made available by the family. Now that it is held at the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (hereinafter PMB), I will use the PMB catalogue number (1011) as reference in the bibliography. I do not repeat this after each quotation (as I have in the case of the Marist correspondence), because Péter's letters belong to the same PMB file. In the following pages I abbreviate her last name as Péter, as people speak of her in Lifu.
Plate 5: Chiefly compound. The Umepö (meeting house) on the right

Figure 2.2: Umepö, seating arrangement in the chiefly hut

Seating arrangement in the umepö
1. Angu Joxu
2. Mexaanang
3, 4. Ange hnalapa(hnalapa, sinelapa)
5. Ange Cipa
6. Ange Zeula
7. Ange Triji
8. Ange Api Canyö
9. Waminya (behind entrance post)
But by the 1880s both missionaries and traders noted that the islanders preferred money to goods (Howe 1977:106).

Interactions with foreigners were taking place not only in Lifu, but away from home as well. Lifuans and other Loyalty Islanders were hired as crew on vessels, mainly British. As Howe stated: '[they] played a major role in maritime commerce in New Caledonian waters and beyond'. (1977:15). They were also recruited to work in Queensland sugar cane plantations, an experience which I discuss in Chapter Four.

European travellers to the Loyalties in the second part of the 19th century remarked upon the readiness of the islanders to adopt western technology and material culture. The chiefs had concrete houses to show to their European visitors, wells of fresh water, roads cut through woods and coral and horses and carts to transport commodities for exports. Strangers were amazed by these achievements and added a few more brush strokes to the emerging portraits of Loyalty Islanders. These opinions were based on a dichotomy that saw the people of the main island and Kanak in general as dirty, unintelligent and lazy while those of the Loyalties allegedly had the opposite qualities of physical attraction, intelligence and willingness to work. Sarasin suggested that the practice of anthropophagy was an ecological adaptation to population pressure in Lifu, thus avoiding the value-loaded descriptions of other travellers. In dealing with the people themselves, however, he followed the other observers who perpetuated this dichotomy. He wrote that physically 'leurs traits de visage sont plus nobles' [their features are more pleasing] (1915:9) and that 'les Loyaltiens sont plus intelligents que les Calédoniens' [Loyalty Islanders are more intelligent than Caledonians] (1915:12).50 And Hadfield adjudged that '[t]he Loyalty Islanders are a laughter-loving people, whilst the New Caledonians are of a sour or sullen temper' (1920:7).51 These Europeans thus created and perpetuated a stereotyped distinction between the main island and the Loyalties. It cannot be denied, however, that Lifuans were more responsive to Europeans and did select some of the imported material commodities to use as a display of prestige and power. Nevertheless concrete houses were used to receive foreigners, chiefs still slept in their huts (Howe 1977:111). What the visitors perceived as an emblem of adaptation to western civilisation belonged only to a restricted number of people

50 I have used the published French translation of Sarasin when available.
51 For a compelling representation of women and men islanders in colonial narratives, see Jolly (1993).
chiefs, missionaries, teachers and traders. The use of these European commodities thus assumed a different meaning in the Lifu context. So a more complex relation to foreigners and foreign goods prevailed rather than that of the 'open adoption', a view which saturates the colonial narratives.

The church and the state

As Kohler reminds us, until recently a plaque at the front of Nouméa's Roman Catholic cathedral claimed that the country was given 'to God and to France' (Kohler 1988:145). Yet, as I have previously intimated, the relationship between the French Administration and the Missions was not always harmonious throughout the second part of the 19th century. The relationship between the Administration and the Marist missionaries deteriorated during the sojourn of Governor Guillain (1862-1870). Even the intervention in Lifu in 1864 was aimed more at imposing French power than at protecting the Catholic Mission (Douglas 1972; Howe 1977:ch.6). This was clear in the prohibition imposed by Guillain on both LMS and Marist missionaries, on teaching, preaching and distributing religious literature (Rivierre 1985). This replicated the dispute between State and Church that was taking place in France at the time. The Marists felt so threatened by Guillain's policy that Father Forestier was sent back to Paris in September 1864 to support the interests of the Mission 'persécutée' [persecuted] by Governor Guillain (Notes Historiques:25).

This controversy was echoed in the correspondence of Forestier with the French Minister of the Marine and the Colonies. Forestier wanted to ensure the French Government's support against Guillain, accused of operating with the intention of 'détruire' [destroying] the mission (Forestier to the Minister of Colonies, 20 February 1865, APM/ONC 208). Guillain, and his political convictions are the subject of a letter written by the Marists in 1865 (not signed) where he is quoted as having said:

Christianity is the main obstacle to progress and Catholicism is its most dangerous form. The presence of the priest among the natives will delay their civilization by 50 years (? July/August 1865/ APM/ONC 208).

In the following years, the relationship was still charged with tension, though in the eyes of the white settlers it was often perceived as a convergence of interests
and was contested. The articles in the *La Revue Illustrée de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* during 1878, the year of Kanak insurrection on the main island, adopt strongly anti-clerical positions.

From this larger perspective of State/Church relations I will now narrow my focus to how this relation was constructed in the Loyalties and look especially at how Christian ideology was embodied in the specific context of Lifu. Catholic and Protestant Churches actively helped in the process of colonization, because bringing civilization and evangelization was considered by them to be part of the same project. As the people from Lifu were considered 'bien supérieur aux N. Calédoniens' [superior to the people of the main island] (Montrouzier to Yardin, 8 September 1858, APM/ONC 208) this project was believed to be easier to accomplish on Lifu. In 1865 Napoleon III, answering the petition addressed to him by several English Protestant Mission Societies (who were denouncing the arbitrary ways used against the Protestant Mission on Lifu by the French Governor in New Caledonia), stressed that neither Church should stand in the way of the colonial Administration, but rather *l'aidera à répandre chez les indigènes de l'archipel les bienfaits du christianisme et de la civilisation* [will help to diffuse among the natives of the archipelago the benefits of Christianity and civilization].

The Catholics' project was no different in its aims from the Protestants' – to erase old beliefs and to impose a new symbolic order – a different way of being-in-the-world, but its techniques differed. Pastor MacFarlane, one of the leading figures in the history of the LMS in the Loyalties, in his book *The Story of the Lifu Mission* clearly states his position on the duty of a Christian missionary:

> why, even if a missionary did act as a kind of king over the natives, is it, I ask, a very great calamity for these poor ignorant natives to be governed by an intelligent, Christian gentleman? ... To be 'king of the cannibal islands' is a kind of honour which a missionary does not covet; but he does feel it to be his duty to seek in every way to elevate the natives amongst whom he labours; he not only preaches the gospel to them, but tries to improve their laws, their houses, their roads, their canoes, and everything connected with their temporal and spiritual welfare (1873:23).

Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries shared the common belief that they were entitled to define the destiny of the indigenous people, though their methods varied. Even though the French Administration backed the Catholics in

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52 Napoleon's III's letter is reprinted in *Notes Historiques* (Anonymous, s.d., p.28 APM/ONC 200) and quoted with a translation that I have used in MacFarlane 1873:198.
Lifu (see the events of 1864 discussed below and the different interpretations given by Catholics and Protestants),\(^{53}\) and in spite of Napoleon's statement, in reality rivalry for influence among people was always present between the French governors in the colony and the Catholic Mission in Lifu. This was aggravated by tension between the Governor of New Caledonia, Guillain, and the French representative in Lifu. Such tensions at times were expressed by supporting one denomination against the other and at times by imposing a strict colonial order on the Kanak to assert state power, as for example the imposition of *corvées* in Lifu from 1864 to 1870.

The ambiguities of the State/Mission relationships marked the years following French annexation (1864-1870). Father Fabre, a pre-eminent figure in the Marist mission in Lifu, wrote to Poupinel that Governor Guillain had informed him that *'les achats directs de terres faits par le réverend Fabre sont nuls'* [purchases of land made directly by Father Fabre are void] because legitimating the transactions made between the Catholic Mission and the Lifuans would contradict the declaration of 20 January 1855 which prohibited purchasing land inhabited by natives or receiving it as a gift (Fabre to Poupinel, 1 December 1864, APM/ONC 208). Early the same year Guillain had sent a letter to MacFarlane stressing that 'the religious is entirely distinct from the political' (translated in MacFarlane 1873:200) and that the Mission should not interfere with the colonial order.

But the position of the Mission vis-à-vis the colonial state varied. The very same Fathers who approved the French expedition of 1864 had words of condemnation for the *corvées* imposed by the Administration. The former in fact was perceived as an intervention aimed at undermining Protestant influence. Marist correspondence from Lifu is full of references to the negative influences of Protestants upon Lifuans. Heathens were considered easier to 'convert' than the Protestants *'empoisonnés par l'hérésie'* [poisoned by heresy]. Being a religious minority, a characteristic that has never changed, put the Catholics in a different position from their counterparts in the Grande Terre. They were a minority in Lifu though two of the three high chiefs were Catholics. The situation was different in the other two main islands of the group. In Ouvéa the Catholic Mission was in a stronger position than the Protestant one, while in Maré the two

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\(^{53}\) Compare the Protestant version given by MacFarlane (1873) with the Catholic accounts found in Gaide to Rougeyron, 17 August 1864, APM/ONC 208; in Fabre to Poupinel, 3 December 1964, APM/ONC 208, and in *Notes Historiques*, APM/ONC 200.
Catholic missionaries, under the threat of the chief Naisiline Nidoish, who had aligned himself with the LMS, decided to transfer 1000 followers to the Isle of Pines towards the end of 1870. From there they moved to Lifu, before returning home in 1875 (Gaide to Mulsant, 9 March 1877, APM/ONC 208; Howe 1977:ch.8). Furthermore the Protestant missionaries (who were all married couples in the 19th century) were more affluent. The Fathers often complained about their difficult material conditions in terms of housing, food and transportation.

When Lifu was declared a 'military district' following French intervention, all missionary activity was suspended with the excuse that missionaries were teaching in Drehu rather than in French, and from June to November 1864 a state of siege and martial law remained in force. But the Protestants were able to bypass this imposition and kept teaching in English and Drehu. Lifu became the only area in the Loyalty group where corvées were imposed until 1870. Father Fabre complained bitterly about this imposition, claiming that though the Administration had demanded three days of work every four months for a total of nine days a year for each adult:

\[
\text{La vérité est bien loin de là ... Ainsi en deux mois, huit journées de corvées ont été imposées à la petite population de Nathalo.}
\]

This strong opposition against the Administration's imposition of forced labour upon the islanders was mainly due to competition for indigenous labour: the missionaries had to rely on islanders' help for the physical establishment of the Mission's compound and often for their own physical survival (e.g. in obtaining food). As I will explore further in the next chapter, such comments blame the unpaid labour impositions for the departure of young men, most of them going to Australia, an Anglophone and Protestant country. Thus not only was labour becoming scarce in Lifu but the young men would return and disseminate

54 In the Marist's correspondence Naisiline Nidoish was called the 'Bismarck of Maré' (e.g. Gaide to Mulsant, 9 March 1877, APM/ONC 208).

55 Gaide notes that 1000 Catholics were embarked in Maré and 1001 disembarked in Isle of Pines (Gaide to Mulsant, 9 March 1877).

56 See 'Observations pour les Révérends Pères de LIFOU, 16 October 1870, in which Father Rougeyron explains what he considers should be the proper involvement of Fathers in commerce and in dealing with indigenes and with the Protestant mission (PMB/OMPA 234/AAN 51.1).
'heretical' ideas. Nevertheless the Marists took a strong stance against the 'military despotism' of Commandant Guillauton, the French representative in Lifu. On the Protestant side MacFarlane commented that the LMS presence was offensive to the government not because of the missionaries or their principles but because of their nationality. In fact he did not view his endeavour as being at odds with colonization or the colonial state. He clearly stated that the missionaries' principles did not hamper the colonial state designs but rather that they were 'eminently calculated to facilitate their accomplishment' (1873:220).

To stress his point on the convergence of interests between the Protestant mission and the French state he ironically remarked that '[n]ative dances were revived by the commandant' (1873:223). He continued, stressing that the government's mistake had consisted in 'regarding Lifu as Anglicised instead of Christianised' (1873:224 emphasis in original). But these contradictory attitudes of the Administration continued even after the British Protestant Church was replaced by the French Society of Evangelical Missions at the end of the century. As late as 1927 Father Levavasseur castigated the governor's decision to concentrate the three leper colonies in Lifu into one at Cila (Wetr), bitterly remarking that the governor had assigned it to the Protestant Mission (Levavasseur to ?, 25 February 1927, APM/ONC 208).

But French interest in the island was marginal. By 1870 Lifu became an 'arrondissement' and the Administration reduced its presence (Gaide to Poupinel, 9 February 1872, APM/ONC 208) as they saw no economic return from investing in this region. As in the rest of the Loyalties, the environment was another feature which shaped the colonial history of Lifu, (Henningham 1992: 13). A coral atoll with approaches by sea but difficult access to the shores, and lacking rivers or streams, Lifu was of no use for European settlement. 'Colonisation is out of the question, as there is not an acre of land on the island upon which a plough can be used', wrote MacFarlane (1873:4). This meant that the French Government's program of a white settler and penal colony implemented on the main island and on the Isle of Pines was not applied here or in other parts of the Loyalties region. Moreover Lifu offered no prospect for nickel and other mining as the Grande Terre did.

Furthermore the policy of cantonnement [confinement] which began in 1876 on the main island was never implemented in this region. Thus the struggles for land that marked the history of colonial confrontation on the main island (1878 and 1917) were absent here. Tribes were not removed and confined to small reservations, as happened on the Grande Terre. In 1899 the Loyalty Islands were
declared 'Native Reserves', a status they still retain: no large-scale European settlement was undertaken and no land was alienated. In contrast the main island was converted into a penal colony from 1864 to 1897, the year the 'robinet d'eau sale' [tap of dirty water] was shut, and the rivalry between groups supporting free colonization and those with interests in maintaining a penal colony became a key issue shaping the subsequent history of the main island. At the same time free white settlers were encouraged to come to the main island and free ex-convicts were given concessions of land. This policy was exacerbated by Governor Feillet, who arrived in 1894 and implemented a program of free colonization through the policy of cantonnement and the closure of the penal colony. He continued to support free settlers to come and grow coffee and promoted a policy of sustaining public works.

Land was taken away from the indigenous people by European immigrants, creating a situation whereby most of the land outside the Loyalty Archipelago is now in the hands of white settlers. In 1978, 100 of them 'owned' 370 000 ha whereas the 25 000 Kanak owned less than half (165 000 ha) (Saussol 1985). Land was the principal source of livelihood for Kanak. British reports from the 1920s indicate that the population of the country was still relying on its agricultural crops to sustain itself (AA/FO/A981/1). But for Kanak, land translated into much more. It linked them to the world of the ancestors and of the spirits; it embodied continuity with the past. In the words of Tjibaou, land is 'a living archive' (Tjibaou 1976:285 quoted in Connell 1987a:43). Not only was land taken away, but within the colonial creation and demarcation of 'tribes', land became collectively owned by this new body, the so-called tribe, engendering long-lasting conflicts. In fact people were removed to new areas, severing ties

57 After June 1864, France transferred its prisoners from Cayenne in South America to the main island; the Isle of Pines was used from 1872 as a prison for deportees from the Paris Commune and later for habitual criminals.

58 Since Saussol's work has appeared, land claims have been made by Kanak and some land has been returned. Nevertheless the asymmetrical relation between land and people still holds true. It is very important to keep in mind this difference in the land tenure confrontation in the two areas. Even local agencies for development play a different role in the two situations. For example ADRAF which has as its main role in Grande Terre to return land to original owners, in the Loyalties, where land still belongs to Kanak, it is mainly the agency for approving and financing development projects in agriculture, fisheries, and animal husbandry. For a more up-to-date study of the government policy on land tenure issues, see Mapou (forthcoming) De la réforme foncière de 1978 aux Accords de Matignon. Dix années de réforme foncière, in a volume edited by F. Sotier, Nouméa, ORSTOM. See also by Mapou La question foncière chez les Kanak en Nouvelle-Caledonie, paper presented at the Round Table 'Etudes des sociétés Kanak: systèmes sociaux en devenir', Paris 11-12 Octobre, 1995.
with their homeland and gaining access to 'unknown' lands. Neither colonial codifications of land tenure nor this forced uprooting of people occurred in the Loyalty Islands. Exile and internal migrations did occur as an indigenous strategy to break allegiances, but it was not an imposed colonial policy as it was on the main island.

The *Régime de l'Indigénat* [Native Regulations], promulgated in 1887 for 10 years and then renewed until 1923, which brought many hardships for the Kanak people, applied to the whole of New Caledonia, including the Loyalties. These regulations fixed the 'legal' status of Kanak by imposing a special legal code on them, restricting their mobility, imposing a head tax and forced labour. Although the *Régime de l'Indigénat* was later modified, some of the provisions remained until 1946.

But differences in the colonial history of the Loyalties and of the Grande Terre concerning land alienation and the struggles engaged in by Kanak still remained. They echo in the Grande Terre and in Lifu narratives of the past and their contemporary accounts of difference.

**Hmi Samoa and Hmi Oui-Oui**

The rivalries between the colonial and the religious order were amplified in Lifu in the dispute between the Catholic and the Protestant Missions. The British Protestant LMS had established Polynesian teachers 15 years before the arrival of the Marists and before the Loyalties were annexed by France. A parallel reading of Catholic and Protestant texts yields contrasting accounts, though they converge in stressing indigenous social hierarchies in the motives for people's religious choice and alignments. Given the profoundly hierarchical system in Lifu, conversion was more a chiefly choice rather than a personal one of ordinary individuals. And as in Polynesia and Fiji, missionaries and traders gained security by winning the support of a chief (Shineberg 1967:26; Shineberg (ed) 1971 [1842]:112):

At the introduction of Christianity this [chiefly rule] was of immense service; for having secured the favour of the king, you were not only safe, but the gospel became popular, and multitudes attended the services who would not have dared to be present, if the king had expressed his disapprobation (MacFarlane:1873:22).
Because the first LMS 'teachers' were from Polynesia, in the Marist texts Samoa or hmi Samoa [praying à la Samoa] became synonymous with Protestant Lifuans, whereas hmi oui-oui [praying the French way] came to be used by Lifuans as synonymous with Catholicism (Gaide to Favre, ? Mars 1864, APM/ONC 208).59

While the high chief Bula from the southern chiefdom of Lösi had aligned himself with the Protestant teachers, a more complex situation was present in the northern chiefdom. As the Catholic missionary Montrouzier wrote in 1858:

A chief had called us to the island; but it was a chief whose authority had been undermined by the Protestants and who had turned to us in the hope of recovering it (Montrouzier to Yardin, 8 September 1858, APM/ONC 208).

In fact the high chief of Wetr, Ukeinesö, was challenged by the chief of Xepenehe, Waehnya, who had aligned himself with the Protestant Church. The political confrontation in which the two chiefs were engaged has been interpreted as the motives for Ukeinesö calling on the Marist missionaries.60 In the same vein MacFarlane interpreted the 'conversion' of Lifuans (1873:59).

Indigenous oral narratives give greater emphasis to the respect for the customary network of paths as the motive for the religious choice of the high chief, for example, in the accounts pertaining to Gaica, where the high chief chose Catholicism after Protestantism had spread among the people living within the chiefdom. Though 'conversion' was as much an instrumental as a religious choice, Kanak selectively chose Christianity by following indigenous paths of social relationships. This emerges both in people's accounts and from the writings of Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Even a 'conversion' like that of Cesar, who in the Marist writing and contemporary narratives of elderly Catholic Kanak is considered 'a saint', is recounted in terms of deference to his chief (Levavasseur, APM/ONC 200):

59 Here I follow the Marists' orthography 'oui-oui' or 'ui ui' (Palazy to le Supérieur Général, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208) instead of the Drehu wiwi (Tryon 1967a, 1967b).

60 This mutually advantageous relation – the missionaries seeking places where authority was vested in powerful chiefs, and the chiefs accepting them in order to enhance their political and military prestige – should not overshadow other cases such as that of the war leader Gondou from the centre-north of Grande Terre who, independently of European influence or initiative, carried out a political expansion in the 1850s and 1860s (Douglas 1980:47-49).
In the past many had taken up heresy only because their chief had become Samoa; religion in Lifu is more an affair of chiefly loyalty than one of faith. I know entire villages where people gathered and said: we cannot stay pagan, let us take a religion, and in order to please everyone an elder divided the people and said: You are going to be a Catholic with the chief, you, Samoa with another chief, and so on, and this is the only reason for their choice. (Gaide to Favre, March 1864, APM/ONC 208).

Choosing religion became a strategy in the political arena, a novel strategy in reinforcing or breaking from an allegiance. Christianity was accepted by Kanak as a way of renegotiating or gaining both political and economic advantages. Missionary texts are very explicit about it:

Since the beginning of the mission in Lifu, I don't believe that even one serious conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism has taken place, nor a real defection from Catholicism to Protestantism. The practical interests of divisions and of grudges, of contracting or avoiding marriages: this is at the base of the changing of beliefs which we had witnessed (Fabre to Poupinel, 8 January 1873, APM/ONC 208).

In contrast to the main island, the programme of Christianization was very successful in Lifu from the outset. In fact while in other parts of New Caledonia (Balade, Isle of Pines) people resisted missionaries, in Lifu, except for the period of civil war in which Fao had to leave the island, people did not put up resistance to the new foreigners. Nevertheless, a change in the local political chessboard with shifts of allegiances could have strong repercussions for relations with newcomers. When Bula — chief of Lösi — died, the instability caused by the succession made it unsafe for Fao, the first Protestant teacher, to stay; he left for
Maré and did not return to Lifu until the son of Bula assumed the chieftainship and decided to restore his father’s policy vis-à-vis the Protestant Church.61

But this readiness to receive foreigners was not something new to the interactions with Europeans. Immigrants and strangers had been previously accepted and integrated into the local community in the Loyalty Islands, even to the extent of sharing authority in Lifu (Howe 1977:35). In 1858, the same year the Marists had arrived in Lifu, Father Palazy was surprised to find ‘quelques naturels que j’avais jadis connus à Futuna’ [some indigenes whom I had already met in Futuna] (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208), and MacFarlane mentions ‘a party of Tongans, the fathers of whom, a few generations ago, drifted thither in a canoë’ (1873:31). Furthermore the first teachers who came to Lifu were not Europeans but Polynesians; in fact Fao, the first teacher, was from Rarotonga. His Polynesian origin, the fact that he was selected by the chief Bula as his enemu or special friend (MacFarlane 1873:27) and used the vernacular language in spreading the Gospel, were all conducive to facilitating the spread of Protestantism over the island. Protestant evangelization came through other Pacific Islanders, and it was not backed by an army as was the case with Catholic missionaries, although the convergence of interests between the Catholic Mission and the French Army, as I have already pointed out, has not been a constant of the French presence in New Caledonia.

In the past this flexible way of conceiving foreignness meant the acceptance of the few white people, usually English traders, who had decided to stay in Lifu and had become integrated into the community by marrying local women from chiefly families (Howe 1977:106). During his 1912 voyage to the Loyalties Sarasin met an Englishman, James Wright, about whom he wrote:

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61 MacFarlane wrote: ‘a few months after the teachers left Lifu, messengers arrived at Maré, earnestly begging them to return’ (1873:37). But Dauphiné, in reconstructing the years preceding the French annexation of 1864, speaks of a civil war which broke out in 1847 forcing Fao to leave Lifu for Maré until 1849 (1990:8). And Ray wrote of an epidemic which caused the deaths of many people and a few chiefs in 1849, and which led to ‘the temporary abandonment of the mission’ (1917: 243). Howe too writes of the death of Bula ‘in an epidemic shortly after the mission vessel departed and all evangelising and trading in Lōsi ceased during the ensuing civil war ... Fighting dragged on for three years ... before rival clans were reconciled and ... the young Bula invited back those who had earlier fled’ (1977:38).
He had been in Lifu for more than 35 years and was living there surrounded by his 13 children. He had become the patriarch of the island and found himself related through his children's marriages to several indigenous chiefs (Sarasin 1917: 269).

Today both men and women in Lifu acknowledge that some of their kin are descended from these English traders, and even the descendants themselves speak of it with pride. Yet they never identify themselves and are never represented as of 'mixed ancestry'.

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Arrivé à Lifou plus de 35 ans auparavant, il vivait là entouré de ses 13 enfants.... il était devenu comme le patriarche de l'île et se trouvait apparenté, par les mariages de ses enfants à plusieurs chefs indigènes.

62 I will explore the notion of *métissage* in Chapter Five.
Yam feast, 1990

Plate 6: Seating arrangements within chiefly compound, Hnathalo

Plate 7: Yam arrangements within chiefly compound, Drueulu
Chapter Three

MAKING CHRISTIANITY LOCAL

It is not their [missionaries'] religion that they want so much as their fish-hooks, knives, tomahawks, &c.; and the enemies of the tribe with whom the teacher lives will often ... receive the teacher of a different persuasion, and the greater the difference the better (MacFarlane 1873: 59).

The strategic political context in which conversion took place has been presented in Chapter Two; now I turn to analyze the local transformations not just at the theological level but in daily life. Lifuan women and men have reworked Christian ideas and messages into local, community-generated practices. Although Christianization eradicated some local religious and social practices, it did not entail the suppression of the symbolic indigenous order or establish hegemony. Lifuans in the past did not have any primordial being or cultural hero1 with whom Christianity had to contend (Hadfield 1920:154). Thus the Christian god did not displace any indigenous primordial being, but was accommodated rather as The Ancestor [caaa haze] (see below). As Burt (1994) argues for the Kwara'ae people of Kwai (Malaita), Lifuans' reinterpretation of Christianity has played a major part in the construction and reconstruction of images of contemporary Drehu identity. Today women and men from Drueulu ground their identity both in qene noji [la coutume] and Christianity. The opening quotation of this chapter should be understood in context. Though I stress that in the past Lifuans aligned themselves with missionaries mainly for pragmatic material reasons, I do not imply that today their Christianity should be interpreted as a mere façade. Nowadays all Lifuans consider

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1 When questioned, people from Drueulu pointed to Wet as the area where the first Lifuans emerged. The name Wet can also be used instead of Lifu for the whole island.
themselves Catholics or Protestants, with a few having become members of the more recently arrived religious denominations, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons and the Adventist Church. Being Catholic or Protestant and simultaneously professing *la coutume* is not perceived as contradictory or antithetical (Tonkinson 1982; Douglas 1985:62), but rather as following two paths which converge. As Forman suggests, if a people see themselves as Christians we should accept it and not doubt their conviction by considering it 'only a thin veneer' or by trying to 'deny that it can be called Christianity at all' (1990:27). I do not seek to minimize the role of the Church in colonisation, nor do I disagree with Kohler's analysis (1988) of the complicity of missions and colonial state interests in the New Caledonian context. Yet, by addressing conversion only in this way, Christianity continues to be considered in terms of a hegemonic western/colonial religious discourse. As Barker argues regarding the crucial role played by the western sources of Christianity in Oceania past and present, 'this reality ... tells us little about Christianity within popular religion: as part of the general orientation towards problems of morality and practice in daily life. It also tells us little about why islanders chose to be Christian or what their Christianity means to them' (1990a:5).

In the following pages, I first present an ethnographic account of modern Lifuan spirit beliefs and practice. These are domains in which customary and introduced religion intersect, allowing us thus to better contextualize how islanders have selectively appropriated and reinterpreted new religious concepts and rituals. I regard this as a long-term process framed by indigenous motivations and assumptions (Douglas 1989). The process of choosing religion by Lifuans and the differences and similarities between Catholic and Protestant rhetorics of conversion are then considered. The different modalities of evangelization of the Catholic and Protestant missions, primarily in relation to the language of evangelization, a key element in shaping Drehu identity today, are at the heart of this analysis. Further, past and present village-mission relations are examined. This section also deals more fully with the Catholic community of Drueulu, my specific location. In the past the village mission was run by the Catholic Marist

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2 In 1958 the Eglise Evangélique Libre (Free Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands) was born out of a split within the Eglise Evangélique en Nouvelle-Calédonie et aux Iles Loyauté (Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands), which was to adopt this name in 1960 after becoming autonomous from the Society of Evangelical Missions in Paris. Membership in both Churches, respectively 5000 and 25 000, is made up almost exclusively of Kanak (Wapotro, October 1989).
Fathers, and Drueuluans still form a mainly Catholic enclave in a Protestant island.

Present-day practices are perceived by Lifuans not in terms of displacement of one system by another but as the mutual accommodation or coexistence of indigenous and Christian elements. Yet I feel uncomfortable in speaking either of syncretism or of compartmentalization of autonomous religious systems. Clark (1989) finds the notion of 'syncretism' inappropriate and proposes that of 'synthesism'. He presents the latter as concerning 'the process by which the cult "present" is constituted through a dialectical relationship with the past, and gives a sense of the possibilities emergent out of a structural transformation' (1989:186). Shaw and Stewart (1994) have rather challenged the connotation 'syncretism' has taken in the discipline and propose a more dynamic reconsideration of it. The authors in fact distance themselves from the way syncretism has been used as a category and shift their interests to 'processes of religious synthesis and [...] discourses of syncretism' (1994:7; emphasis in orig.). Considering the etymology of the term and its changing historical contextualization, they emphasize the prejudice attached to the term within anthropology, too often considered as opposed to anything which is 'pure' or 'authentic'. Shaw and Stewart are perplexed by the fact that the alternative 'creolization' has recently gained favour among anthropologists, while ironically the same term in linguistics has had a very troubled history with a negative connotation.

My choice of examining the articulation between Christian and indigenous elements without resorting to the term 'syncretism' underscores the objection to a perspective which conveys the idea of two static categories (the old and the new belief system) in conjunction. I rather want to stress their dynamic articulation and recombination in new forms, keeping in mind the risks of sliding into an overvaluation of dynamism and novelty.

This chapter should help to complete the task I began in Chapter Two of exploring Lifuans' selective engagements with outsiders and highlighting the elements which today are perceived by Lifuans as more prominent in constituting their identity. Here women come more fully into the picture, both as authors of the narratives and as collective constituencies within the community.

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ON DEALING WITH ENTITIES OF ANOTHER WORLD

[W]e have no special word for people or land. We use the same word nod [noj in Drehu]. So the culture pene nod is not only the affairs of human beings but also of the land and all the beliefs around it (Cawidrone 1991:1).

With these words Cawidrone introduces us to his thesis, submitted to the Fijian Pacific Theological College, on a new practice of worship in the Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalties. The author is from Maré but its cultural resonance — focused on the relation of people and land — holds true on Lifu as well. In fact the land is ‘ka goee’. Wapotro commented on this expression by saying: ‘la terre regarde, la terre écoute’ [the land is watching, the land is listening]. The relation with the land is the ‘relation entre le monde visible et le monde invisible’ [relation between the visible and the invisible world]. The two worlds are separated by a ‘ligne hypothétique’ [hypothetical line] (Wapotro, March 1992). Hence, people believe that the world of living beings is in constant communication with the world of the spirits of the deceased, of the ancestors.

In dealing with the relations with these entities I find myself more perplexed than when dealing with political structure and social networks. There is an initial problem because of the differential visibility of these agencies. Whereas political relations are bound up with practices of public ceremonial exchanges and speeches, spiritual relations with the world of the ancestors are not. And whereas Christian commitment is bound up with practices of Sunday gatherings and other collective performances, the relationship with the world of the spirits is today carried out on a personal basis. Eliciting responses concerning spirits is complicated by the fact that today people refer to most spiritual beings by using the word tepolo, which can be glossed as devil or Satan, with a clear Christian connotation (see Jolly 1996). This word is one of those expressions, such as hmitrötr [taboo, forbidden, sacred] that, though widely used, has different, even contesting, meanings. Trying to disentangle these different meanings is challenging because there are no clear-cut differentiations between them. Though a few Lifuans have warned me that the use of the word tepolo had Christian

4 Cawidrone in 1982, upon completing the Theological School in Xepenehe, became pastor in Druelu. His successor was pastor Ukan from Tiga, who retired during my fieldwork.

5 See Keesing (1985a) and MacClancy (1986) for a critique of the mistranslations of mana-notions by anthropologists.
connotations, most people from Drueulu use it without any negative connotation attached to it.6

A further problem arises from the vast semantic domain covered by the French word *esprit*: it embraces 'ghost' and 'spirit' conceived as different stages towards ancestorhood, but it also embraces the notion of 'spirit' and/or 'mind', without being the semantic equivalent of either of them. An example from Leenhardt's *Do Kamo* will help to clarify my point. 'Sans doute le ko, l'esprit affirmé ici, correspond à l'influx ancestral mythique et magique' (1971 [1947]:263) becomes in the English translation 'True, the ko, the mind or spirit affirmed here, is the mythic and magical ancestral ebb and flow' (1979 [1947]:164, emphasis is mine). And as Anna Wierzbicka argues, 'English categories are often mistaken for "Western" categories and constructs' (1989:46, emphasis in orig.); for example the 'lack' of a lexicalized folk concept of the 'mind' is found in both non-western and western languages (rather than English) (1989:56). Although English provides words such as 'heart', 'conscience', 'character', and so on, to speak of the human being as an emotional, communicative, moral and spiritual being, she argues:

the basic dualistic model embodied in the English lexicon (body vs. mind) ignores those aspects of the human person and focuses on the intellectual and rational aspect. By contrast, the basic dualist model embodied in the Russian lexicon [*telo/dusa*] focuses on the emotional, the spontaneous, and the moral, not on the intellectual and the rational (1989:54).

The shift from a notion of divide between western/non-western language prisms to a more dynamic one that Wierzbicka is advocating is pertinent here.

**SPIRITS, ANCESTORS AND HUMAN MORALITY**

Lifuans deploy a very Melanesian contrast (Lawrence and Meggitt 1965) between the spirits of recent and long dead. Yet they do not distinguish terminologically between them: in Drehu they are both *u*. Thus, without violating Anglo-Saxon linguistic convention, I will use 'spirits' to refer to the *u* or *esprit* of both remote ancestors and recent dead.7

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6 Cf. White (1985) and the contemporary use of the Pijin term *devol* [devil] - denoting spirits of all kind, including ancestral ones - among the people of the Maringe area of Santa Isabel.

7 The word *u* is still used as the term for the Holy Spirit: *uati hmitrôtr*. (Uati is Miny.)
Death does not bring an end to the relationship with the world of the living. When someone dies his or her body draws away from the ngöneitrei [body]: the latter remains but an empty shell or envelope, with no life. The u of recent dead communicate with men and women. This communication is constant, but it takes place only at night. The u can manifest themselves to the living in dreams, puj; or they can return to visit those left behind, in a vision, iamamany. A woman who lost her husband while I was in the field recounted during the days following the event hearing the deceased spirit coming back. At around ten o'clock each night she heard the noise of the saucepan lids coming from the kitchen. She explained that her husband, when he was alive, used to come back at the same hour from hunting or fishing and go into the kitchen looking for food. She told me it was iamamany. During my first fieldwork period in Drueulu a sick man died. His wife died unexpectedly a few months later. In the following months their children, all unmarried and living in the same household, were often sick. People explained that it was the u of the parents who tried to come back to take them. The latter had to be 'protégé' [protected] or ' cachés' [hidden] from the spirits, and this could be done through an appropriate healing treatment.

The u cannot only interfere with the living by bringing sickness; they are also deemed to bring death. When a mother dies and leaves behind a newborn baby, she will try to reunite herself with the child. Precautions must be taken to stop the spirit from causing injury or from killing. A coconut should be put in the woman's hands to make her believe that her baby is with her, and leaves should be put on the child. But nowadays birth takes place in the hospital and premature infants are placed in an incubator, so the ritual cannot be carried out. One premature newborn's death in the hospital, a week after his mother's death, was explained in these terms: the tie between mother and child had not been severed. Several women in Lifu dreamed of the deceased woman searching for her surviving husband. 'N'importe qui peut rêver de ça' [Anybody can dream about that] (Wapotro, 1992). In this case one is supposed to inform the members of the family quickly so that they can take precautions to prevent the deceased woman's u from interfering with her husband's life. Though the spirits are considered dangerous, their behaviour is not explained in terms of retaliation and no distinctions are made between female and male spirits.

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8 See Sarasin 1929a:301 on the souls of women who have died soon after childbirth.
9 See Bulmer for the special precautions taken by Kyaka of the New Guinea Highlands against female ghosts. He believes this reflects the 'ambiguous social status of women who are members by birth of one group and by marriage and procreation of another' (1965:141).
Map 4: Lifu (1860) [APM/ONC 208]
Spirits are not always malignant. They can communicate in dreams and instruct a relative on matters concerning social behaviour. They can advise the living to undertake an action or to postpone it to avert misfortune. A middle-aged Protestant woman, explaining her exchange with her deceased grandfather, said that 'il a guidé mes pensées' [he guided my thoughts]. The same woman, the last surviving member of her family, had received her grandfather's medicine while dreaming. She referred to it as puj. The grandfather communicated to her his medicine and thus his potency. He had wanted to do it while he was alive but she was too young and not interested. On another occasion an elderly Catholic woman from the chiefly family, who had recently lost her husband, remarked that he was not 'pressé' [in a hurry] to get to Zilixu, the place off the north-west coast of Lifu (Map 4)10 sur la route pour Ouvéa' [on the road to Ouvéa] where all the deceased go:

Spirits reach Zilixu a year after death when a second mortuary ceremony takes place. This mortuary ceremony does not involve as many people as the one held following the death; usually only the closest kin attend. The lifting of the mourning does not halt the communication between the spirits and the living: it continues but takes on a different quality. The spirits do not seem to interfere with the life of their living kin in the same way as before.

The distance from death or degree of ancestorhood is of great significance in framing relations with the deceased. The u of recent dead relate differently to the living compared with the u of the long dead. Before the second mortuary ceremony is held the u are more feared than loved. Young and old people in the village explain their unwillingness to walk alone at night and their preference for walking close to each other for the fear of meeting the u of a dead person. The first evening I went out alone to the older part of the village to attend a women's meeting, both young and old people were very concerned about my wandering. They knew I had walked past the cemetery. As time went by and they got used to my 'evenings-out' and my safe return home, they commented that the powerful

stone in the potato field in front of the cemetery was protecting me. (I should admit that sometimes at night, walking alone, I found myself thinking in their terms.)

People do not fear death *per se*. Everyone attends burial ceremonies. Young children are not excluded, and during the Christian funeral in the cemetery they sit on the edge of the dug-out grave. In the past Lifuans used different methods of burial. 'Sometimes they buried their dead, wrapped in mats and securely tied up, inside their own houses, in which they continue to live' (Hadfield 1920:216). At other times they dug a grave in the ground. Ray (1917:288) explains the practice of bending the body with the knees up to the chest to prevent the deceased from wandering about. Corpses of high-ranking people were placed in canoes, often in inaccessible caves. Some of these bones are still in place and remind people of old burial practices as well as of the continuing interaction between the living and the dead. Today villagers bury their dead in a cemetery which is located within the limits of the village. The first communal cemetery was in an area not far away from the living compounds, though located in a marginal position. The new cemetery is on the main road that connects the village to the administrative centre of We (see Map 3). It is also a road from where the paths which are used to reach the gardens, begin. Today, because of sanitary regulations everybody must be buried in the cemetery, but this was not always the case. Some families, with permission granted from the high chief, have buried their elders in their yard. The grave and the space surrounding it are not off-limits. Family members use that space for all the activities carried out in the yard: women prepare food near the grave, children play around it, and in the evenings girls sit near it to talk. The members of the family do not feel threatened by the burial ground. On the contrary, they feel protected, stressing that since the burial everything has gone well, though they admit that other people are sometimes afraid. In the old cemetery, people were separated by religion. Today Catholics and Protestants lie side by side, though still according to clan affiliation. Two elements distinguish their religious commitment and their social allegiance: the presence or absence of the cross and the clan-designated area within the cemetery. People are buried in their own clan plots. A fifth plot near the entrance is reserved for young children. High chiefs and their wives are buried within the chiefly compound.

As time goes by, the dead come to be spoken of as *haze* [ancestors], though the lines between different degrees of remoteness are blurred. Moreover, *haze* can also be embodied by a kind of animal, bird, fish, plant or rock. Food taboos are usually related to one's own *haze*. Because of this association, *haze* has been
translated in French as 'totem'. People sometimes refer to the shark, the lizard or the butterfly as their 'totem', at other times as their haze. A man explained to me that to have a shark as totem means that 'c'est un grand-père [qatr] qui a sauvé la vie. On doit toujours le respecter. Si je ne le respecte pas, je vais à la mer et c'est lui qui va me manger' [it is a grandfather who saved (our) life. We must always respect him. If I don't respect him and I go to the sea, he will eat me] (Louis Case, January 1992). Thus, if one behaves correctly towards one's haze, the haze will be benevolent and help. One man, aware of the misleading connotation of 'totem', preferred to call it qatr ne lapa [the elder of the clan] (Wapotro, March 1992). Another explained that it was 'un esprit, un gardien, un protecteur de la famille' [a spirit, a guardian, a protector of the family] (Haijengo Haluatr, April 1992). The narratives I gathered about totem and haze support the view that the two are 'manifestations d'une seule entité: l'esprit ancestral' [manifestations of one single entity: the ancestral spirit] as discussed for the centre-north of the main island by Bensa (1990a:138). Some haze are more powerful than others, their men (potency, efficacy) being stronger. But a strong men is also associated with people who have powerful haze. A woman, the last offspring of an important lineage, explained that her clan chief acknowledged that men was with her (Sipo, March 1990).

Haze play a regulatory role in human morality. If something is ka hmitrötr [taboo, sacred] and people disregard it, if they do not troa metröten [behave with respect, meaning 'following custom'], their conduct makes the ancestors angry. In revenge they curse the offenders; 'la vengeance des ancêtres c'est pêhê matran' [the revenge of the ancestors is the extinction of a family; literally 'no descendants'] (Sipo). Though people may not do it on purpose, the infringement of this moral code can also bring death. Lately several deaths in the village have been interpreted in this way. Some of these deaths occurred in town but their

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11 Leenhardt (1937:ch.IX) differentiated between the two, attributing the ancestor to the paternal side and the totem to the maternal side. But see Bensa (1990a:138) for a different interpretation.

12 Keesing argues that the mistranslation of tapu as 'sacred' and 'forbidden' neglects the relational nature implied by the term, whereby 'a perspective is always implied. Something that is off limits, tapu, is always off limits to someone' (1985a:205, emphasis in orig.). Drehu has wathebo [forbidden] which nowadays means also 'laws'.

13 The intervention of the haze in human affairs parallels that of the ancestral spirits of chiefs (natmas) in Aneityum, described by Douglas (1989:16-17). Yet Lifuan aetiology emphasizes sorcery to explain diseases and in doing so seems similar to Tannese aetiology (Douglas 1989:13).
explanations have been framed in the same way. The regulatory role of the ancestors works in both the rural and the urban context.

Early accounts relate haze to objects, usually stones, which had been made haze or endowed with supernatural power by the ite tene haze,14 usually an elderly person who controlled a particular power (Ray 1917:295). Each object had a specific power and would answer only to his master. Some caused rain, some wind; others would make yams grow (MacFarlane 1873: 17). Today people speak of haze when they refer to powerful visible stones, such as those protecting Gaica. Tixenőj, embodied by a stone behind the point of Drueulu, is considered by some to be a protector of the area, by others it is represented as their clan's haze. People used to make an offering to him of a ‘caillou enveloppé dans une feuille’ [pebble wrapped in a leaf] (Mariqatr, March 1990), before going fishing or if one was going to the sea accompanied by a foreigner. The ‘grandfather’ would reciprocate and fishing would be plentiful. Mariqatr stressed that today one does not have to follow this ritual but that, if one complies, he or she will be rewarded. Or as another woman said: ‘C'est l'esprit qui voit. C'est l'esprit qui juge’ [It is the spirit who sees. It is the spirit who judges] (Sipo, December 1989). Something can be hidden from other fellow human beings but not from the spirits. They can distinguish between 'huliwa thoi' [false work] and 'huliwa nyipici' [honest work] (Sipo). They can intervene by making people sick or bringing any kind of misfortune into a household. According to early sources (e.g. Hadfield 1920), families owned artefacts or stones which were used for clan fertility rituals. Today, when asked, most people replied that they had no knowledge of these stones; some commented that all magic stones had disappeared because of Christianity. References to their removal appear in both Catholic and Protestant narratives. The Marist Fathers remarked that the work done by the 'parti infidèle' [infidel party], namely the LMS teachers, during their fifteen years of residence in Lifu, put an end to war and to anthropophagy, but:

the most difficult obstacles to overcome were polygamy, nudity – of the most revolting kinds – superstitions, even idolatry, for in Lifu there were idols, real household Gods, dwelling within a stone, a nail, a ball of hair (Montrouzier to Favre, 1 January 1859, APM/ONC 208). la polygamie, les nudités les plus révoltantes, les superstitions, l'idolâtrie même, car il y avait à Lifou des idoles, de vrais Dieux pénates, résidant dans une pierre, un ongle, une boule de cheveux[,1] étaient de grands obstacles à surmonter.

14 Tene (today spelled trene) means 'master'.
Yet in the following year the Marists' correspondence from Lifu makes only a few references to the practice involving these stones:

Towards the end of November during a large gathering I wrenched a parcel of new yams from the hand of a priest of the demon. He was going to use them to make a public sacrifice to the false Gods (Fabre to Poupinel, 4 May 1860, APM/ONC 208).

Hadfield reported that 'the fetishes are being sought out and burnt throughout the island, with such zeal as affords ample proof of the importance attached to them in the native mind' (Hadfield 1920:145). But today people relate ambiguously to these stones. Most of them have no knowledge of stones that could be magically manipulated for fertility rituals, others speak of them as something belonging to the past. They tend to view them as one of those aspects of their past order of things, such as anthropophagy or polygamy, that have been replaced by a new moral order, an order which has incorporated new elements but which is still portrayed in terms of persistence, not of a break away from traditions and thus not at odds with la coutume.

The cultivation of yams is still of great significance for Lifuans. Though the different stages of cultivation are no longer preceded by magic and today wooden sticks have been replaced by a crowbar, yams [koko] are still considered hmitrötr [sacred]. People refer to them in human terms and are very careful in digging up the tubers lest they damage them. If one scratches a yam, it is laid aside and cannot be stored or utilized for exchange ceremonies. Such a yam is said to be ka eatr [wounded], whereas a rotten yam is ka mec [dead]. In both cases the expression used is the same as when speaking about human beings. The same care should be taken in handling the yams. Xepe la koko [to carry the yam] employs the same term as is used in the expression xepe la nekönatr [to carry a baby]. Once I was reproached by an elderly woman for carelessly handling a bag full of yams. All yams require attention but particularly so the nyipi koko [true yams] used in ceremonial exchange. Yet yams do not have

15 Other food crops, such as taro, are not humanized. In 1992 the attempt, sponsored by the provincial government, to grow yams for the market failed. People resisted this program which would have required the use of a tractor and thus a mechanical manipulation of the tuber.

16 These yams are all dioscorea alata (see Atlas: plate 17). Walei [dioscorea esculenta] are not considered koko. For a discussion of agricultural practice in the Loyalties, see Doumenge (1983).
A few taboos still surround the yam garden: menstruating women should not go into the garden because their "smell" would be detrimental to the growth of the plants. In practice this taboo is not strictly observed, especially by younger women. In spite of the ceremonial and social significance of yams, magical manipulation connected with their cultivation is not practised anymore and people have no recollection of such practices.

The only narrative I was able to collect regarding specific stones for fertility rituals referred to fishing. An elderly Protestant man told me of the old practice of making use of a magical stone [etêen wanacin] for catching mackerel. The stone belonged to a specific clan, but in the thirties or forties a priest 'a entendu dire que qu'il y avait une pierre magique. Il a demandé au clan. Il a pris la pierre' [heard of a magical stone. He asked the clan. He took the stone] (Melq, recorded interview, April 1992). In the past the fish were plentiful, but now fishing was poor. It is interesting to note that, though the village is located on the sea coast, today fishing is not a central activity of ritual and social significance.

Yet both this narrative and the one concerning Tixenöj are associated with fishing and in the past stronger ritual observance gravitated around this activity. In the district of Gaica the yam feast [jôlekeu] has been revived since the end of the 1980s. As an event involving the participation of all the clans and thus as a ceremony reinforcing chiefly authority, it has aroused contradictory responses. Both men and women are still contesting the authenticity of the ritual, explaining that this ceremony belonged to the southern district of Lösi. Gaica, on the contrary, has always been the land of the fish, although the big annual fish ceremony has not been performed for several decades (see Chapter Seven). Early missionary narratives support the centrality of fishing in the past (MacFarlane 1873:54). Formerly the land/sea symbolism seems to have been stronger in terms of social relations and ritual life. Today the only ritual connected with the sea is the purge, usually done once a year. 'Cleaning out oneself' was explained as a good health therapy. Young girls and boys gather under the direction of elderly people, who make them drink sea-water for the whole day. Fasting lasts until the evening, when the end of a successful purge is marked by a good meal. A woman who had reached puberty would go through such a ritual, although nowadays the

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18 On the use of magical stones for hunting and fishing, see Sarasin (1929a:301 and 1929b:plate 72).
purge as a marker of 'womanhood' is less frequently practised. I have seen it performed in the nearby island of Maré but never in Lifu.¹⁹

Drueulu people believe in other kinds of spirits which can interfere in human life. Drehu doesn't have a generic term to embrace these agencies, which I will refer to as nature spirits. Some of these spirits are represented as human-like in terms of size and skin colour; others are not. But a shared feature is that, unlike the ancestors, they have never been human beings and they interact differently with the living.²⁰ Thus the spirits of indigenous cosmology can be regarded as of two kinds: those that used to be human beings and after death have become endowed with power as one's deceased ancestors, and those that have never been human (see Bensa 1990a:131).

Plate 8: Velinaqatr performing a healing treatment on Sasa

The neköi tepolo are elf-like beings with large bellies who appear in dreams or visions. They dwell in the fields, not necessarily outside the present-day limits of the village and they are usually associated with a heap of stones. These spirits are malicious; they play tricks on the living, for example by making them

¹⁹ Les médicaments [medicines] for girls of the chiefly family were prepared by chosen members of the families who had a sinelapa named position.

²⁰ Although the female forest spirits are said by some to have been atr.
disappear from sight. Through an omen one identifies and subsequently approaches the atrekē tepolo [master of the tepolo] who has the power to wesitrēn [scold] them (Sam, March 1992). Usually after the atrekē tepolo takes the appropriate action, the missing person is found. Awaqatr and Bateqatr recalled that when they were young and everybody was searching for two missing children they were found in a field of sweet potatoes. They looked fine but as soon as they returned home they felt sick. 'Ils mangent avec les tepolo' [They eat with the tepolo] (Awaqatr). This notion of the danger of sharing food with the nature spirits is conveyed by several narratives. For example, people shouldn't work in their gardens at night to avoid being helped by the W-, the female forest spirits. Being helped by the W- is considered dangerous because they eat a different kind of food. They are believed to have long necks, long breasts used to seize people, and to be always carrying a female child on their shoulders who will follow in her mother's footsteps. They repeat what people say or do. They are said to be less numerous than they were 'au temps des vieux' [in the time of our ancestors] (Mariqatr, 1990). They are afraid of human beings because in the past people burnt down their shelters. The few surviving W- have moved away from areas where the forest has been cleared to build roads. Allegedly they do not dwell in Drueulu anymore. The tension between the past order of things and the new emerges from the narratives centred on these nature spirits. W- are still around but their numbers are fewer than in the past. They have confined themselves to untouched areas of forest but they are still perceived as dangerous and ill-disposed towards humans.

Other female spirits are associated with water, and specific behaviours should be avoided lest one is punished by them. The female pair of water spirits dwell in Drueulu but move around the shores of the island. They can also be found inland, but always near waterholes. A transgression, such as going naked on the beach (which on other occasions people spoke of as being part of a Christian codification of female modesty) can be punished by these water spirits by bringing sickness. If this happens, the family who possesses the antidote herbs should be approached. Their remedy is efficient not because of the herbs per se but because it is prepared by someone who has strong links with the land inhabited by the female water spirits.

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21 I omit the full name of these female forest spirits because I was asked to do so by the women and men who told me about them.
The people who have specific power over these agencies, such as the master of the nekōi tepolo, can intervene to normalize the situation but they can also summon the 'stones' to play tricks and cause some harm, though I have never heard of these nature spirits causing death. A woman from Drueulu, who had married into a family from a different village, during a visit back home was teasing her brother's wife, a woman originally not from Lifu. Jokingly she addressed the stones [nekōi tepolo], located in her natal household's yard, telling them to annoy her sister-in-law. The woman suddenly started to feel a pain in her eyes. Other women tried unsuccessfully to relieve her with herbs. Eventually the father went behind the house to 'talk' with the stones. After a while his daughter-in-law started to feel better, 'her eyes were still red but the pain was gone'. The old man scolded his daughter. She justified herself by saying that, being married, she thought she had lost power over the 'cailloux' [pebbles] (Waxōma, September 1991).

One can speculate on which spiritual aspects were erased or suppressed by Christianity. The lack of knowledge about magic stones as against the centrality of healing practices in people's lives today is revealing of which aspects of ancestral religion persist.

Aetiology of disorder

Lifuans acknowledge the intervention of ancestors in people's lives, but the causes behind unexpected events are many. I have already spoken of the moral role played by ancestral intervention in daily life. I now turn to sorcery, as providing another set of explanations given by people for unexpected events. The trene iöni, literally 'masters of the fetish', [sorcerers] are distinguished from trene drōsīnöe, women and men who possess the potency to perform cures in order to restore someone's health. When an individual loses his or her memory, it means that the u has left his or her body, the u being considered the seat of mental activity. The only person who can help find the spirit is the master of the land where the spirit dwells (Sipo, 1990). Patre la u, translated to me as 'perdre la mémoire' or 'to lose memory', is said of people who start to behave in unexpected, strange ways. The body remains, but the spirit leaves it and roams around. A woman recounted an episode when her mother's husband got up in the

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22 La in Drehu is the article used when something is near the speaker and is visible. For the use of the articles in Drehu see Moyse-Faurie (1983: 82-83).
middle of the night, preparing himself as if he had to go dancing, putting a garland of flowers on his neck. On leaving the hut he said 'easê tro', [let's go], as if he were speaking to several people.  

23 My friend explained that the man was from Lôsi and 'il a été appelé par l'esprit de son totem' [he was called by the spirit of his totem]. To recall the spirit, hên matra la u, one must perform the appropriate cure. The owner of the land where the spirit dwells must be approached and asked to intervene. He or she can see the spirits and talk to them. People did not elaborate on what kind of magic spell should be used. They rather stressed the idea that the master can communicate. This potency and the knowledge of specific herbs to cure are stressed more than the actual spell.  

24 What validates someone's knowledge is its efficacy, but the efficacy of one's medical or esoteric knowledge is tied to its legitimacy. A knowledge not legitimately owned would not be effective. Thus they stand in a reciprocal relation.

Sickness is explained in different ways. As already mentioned, the spirit of a recently deceased kinsperson can be held responsible. Precautions must be taken; these are aimed more at 'hiding' the surviving kin than placating the u. Some illnesses are believed to be caused by the spirit of the living detaching itself from the body. The u of the sick person is believed to go to the residence of the keeper of the gejeny nyip [route of the souls], located in the northern district of Lifu. The keeper would sit inside a hut, on the left side of the fireplace; the spirit would come in on the opposite side. (Paul Zöngö, who gave me this account, also told me that his father-in-law had shown him the central post of the hut in the forest; this hut belonged to his wife's grandfather.) If the guardian is unsuccessful in persuading the u 'to go back', the latter has to resume its journey and cannot return. The custodian dispatches an elderly woman or a man to the household of the person in question. Unfailingly the messenger finds the family mourning. But sometimes an omen can inform people, who can then take precautions to prevent the u from departing the body. An elderly woman, while in Nouméa, dreamed that one of her grandchildren in Drueulu was dead. She informed the household where the child lived and soon a healing ceremony was organized with an elderly woman performing it: drösînöe ne xötre pu [literally 'medicine to break the dream']. The communication between the world of the spirits and that of the

23 Easê is the inclusive first person plural.

24 The use of certain herbs is common knowledge whereas the use of other herbs rests with specific healers. When a child is itching or has a sore, a ritual is performed by the child's mother both in Drueulu and in Nouméa when the leaves are available.
living is not bounded to a particular place nor the efficacy of the healing practice. In the past, as Hadfield explained, the powers of those who could manipulate sacred stones [tene haze] was not confined to a specific locality (1920:143). The efficacy of supernatural powers is still considered not to be bound to a specific place: magic works in the village as well as in town; even in France. In Nouméa nowadays, recourse to indigenous healers is mushrooming.

A spirit can sometimes be held responsible for causing disease, but sickness is more likely to be attributed to the intervention of a human agent: trene iōni [literally master of the boucan]. Poisoning food or manipulating special magical (sacred) artefacts can cause sickness. People do talk about boucan but though they have suspicions they do not display them. A different attitude is taken toward these artefacts or stones from that toward fertility cult stones. A few acknowledged that some people still possess magic stones which they use to harm other people because of 'jalousie' [jealousy], but their identity was not revealed. I have heard about but never seen the paraphernalia involved, though I once witnessed a healing performance. In order to counteract the sorcerer's intervention, a trene drōsinöe [healer] must be called upon. The herbal remedies and the ritual knowledge that accompanies them belong to a particular individual, of either sex, and are transmitted from one generation to the next, generally to the eldest offspring of the same sex of the parent who has the healing knowledge. This knowledge cannot be independently acquired, although it can be passed on to an outsider of one's patrilineage. Awa, a woman today in her mid-twenties, when she was a young girl was cured by a woman trene drōsinöe, who had no offspring and decided to leave her the knowledge and the 'pouvoir' [potency] to perform the cure. She was too young to remember, so her mother received all the knowledge and passed it on to her when she grew up. Now she is performing the cure. Another woman, who had adopted a little boy, received the medicine from the child's maternal grandmother.

People always speak in terms of women and men who possess the knowledge of the herbs in explaining the efficacy of the cure, but never was I told that people should use specific words or a magic spell to make the cure effective. In some cases people ask for a cash payment, in others the choice is

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25 *Boucan* comes from the Tupi language of the Carib for smoked meat; then in the Creole it became 'poison'. In New Caledonia it has become synonymous with fetish or sorcery practice. From this noun comes *emboucanner* [to do sorcery] (Fédération des Oeuvres Laiques 1983:25).

26 Herbs and saliva are essential to healing rituals. On the use of saliva by Lifu healers and its efficacy for healing practices, see Lenormand (1950:51).
left to the patient. People also turn to the healer for minor illnesses, such as a stomach ache. Sometimes people go and see the doctor and at the same time follow indigenous healing practices. When sickness recurs, especially during childhood, a special ritual, *qeje menu*, [formal apology consisting of a gift and words] is required towards the mother's brother (Wapotro, March 1992). In fact blood and life are believed to be derived from the mother and thus the maternal lineage,²⁷ whereas one's name and social status are derived from the paternal lineage. Today this practice is acknowledged but not always performed. Magic done by human beings can manifest itself not just through sickness but through misfortune. Evil is viewed as 'the ability to effect harm rather than a metaphysical abstraction' (Clark 1989:175). A woman friend dreamed that 'something' was hidden in her hut. Her family took precautions and used medicines to cast away the spell. In the meantime they could use that space during the day but not at night, when they had to sleep in a different hut (Sipo, January 1990). Yet the same woman on another occasion remarked: *'Mais dans la Bible c'est pas dit ça; ça c'est les diables'* [But in the Bible it is not said so; it's the devils] (Sipo, July 1990).

²⁷ See Lenormand (1950:45) for a discussion of the cognates of thi [breast]: thin [mother] and maathin [mother's brother].
In everyday life people use indigenous categories, and their way of explaining events is rooted in local beliefs. Towards the end of my first year I had a misunderstanding with a woman, a good friend, and a few days later when I went to present her my *qeje menu* [formal apology] she told me about the dream she had had. Someone had hidden a 'boucan' (in this case a burnt-down log) near the place we had been sitting. This explained what had happened and why every time she has a conversation in that particular spot something happens. Her explanation was conceived within an indigenous framework, and its being told in this context made it possible for us to resume our friendship.

Lifuans might have marginalized or jettisoned some practices (as the ambiguities about fertility stones or the negative attitude towards nudity suggest) but they still hold on to an indigenous view of human and spiritual agencies. I found a strong attachment to these explanations on my second trip to Lifu in a period when the arrival of many French white-collar workers employed by the newly-decentralized administrative services was perceived by people as a threat. Discussions I had with some French teachers working in Lifu supported my observations. Several deaths occurred in the village in a short period of time, mainly among the Catholics. Both young and old were searching for an explanation. Some found the cause in the destruction of the old church building, the work of their forefathers, which was replaced in the early 1980s by a new one, built with the money collected by the people of the village through the sponsoring of fêtes and other events. The old church was said to be very dark: people entered it timorously. The new church is full of natural light and people do not feel intimidated anymore. They lack respect for this sacred space: they talk, dogs enter during mass, and so on. This argument was rejected during a Sunday homily by the local catechist. At the end of the service some Catholics commented that he was brave to make such a strong public statement, though a woman ironically retorted that something would probably happen to him.

**LOCAL RECASTING OF CHRISTIANITY**

Just as not all the changes brought about by colonization led to westernization, so too missionary discourse did not lead to European Christianity replicating itself in Lifu but to something different.28 For a long time denominational differences

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28 See Burt's study of how the Kwara'ae people in the Solomon Islands (1994) have appropriated Christianity.
were inherent in European missionaries' work with Lifuans and were entangled with national rivalries. Drueulu is today the second largest village of Lifu. In contrast with the Protestant Mu and the Catholic Hnathalo, the other two seats of chiefly residence, Drueulu is bi-denominational.

In 1860 Father Gaide wrote to Poupinel that he was installed 'à la tribu Ngagia ou Ngaxa' [in the tribe of Ngagia or Ngaxa (today Gaica)] remarking that unlike the people from Ngala [Wetr]:

As Barker points out, to focus on conversion 'is deceptively simple. It may imply no more than a change in religious affiliation' (1990a:10). It seems that even missionaries were aware of this, and their narratives are saturated with the evaluations of the pragmatism of these early conversions. Early Marist texts focus more on baptism than conversion: the Fathers were eager to let their superiors know that the number of people baptized was increasing year by year though most of them died immediately afterwards (e.g. Fabre to Poupinel, 4 May 1860, APM/ONC 208). In Lifu, unlike the Isle of Pines or Balade where missionaries were blamed for an epidemic and the sick were hidden from them (Douglas 1989:29 and 1994b:356-357, respectively), people confronted baptism differently. Often the baptism was requested by people who were dying; polygynists would give up all their wives but one and ask to be baptized (Fabre to Poupinel, 4 May 1860, APM/ONC 208). The same position was restated the following year:

Even the colonial administration seemed to believe that early conversions were just a feint. In 1913 the annual report relating to the tribe of Drueulu and to
Chagneux, its petit chef, a 32-year-old married man, still asked 'Est-il fétichiste ou dans la négative à quelle religion appartient-il?' [Is he still fetishist, or in case of a negative reply, to which religion does he belong?] This question was to remain unchanged and was still to be asked in the 1955 form.29

The rhetoric of conversion provides a key to interpreting how Lifuans have managed to reconcile apparently contrasting value systems. My consideration of this relies mainly on people's contemporary accounts of various times in the past, and thus it cannot be firmly anchored in a specific epoch. It is about such pasts in the present, rather than an attempt to reconstruct such pasts.

People are well aware that islanders have always been divided by different allegiances; they do not recall a peaceful past abruptly interrupted by the arrival of the missionaries, but they do cast the disputes of the past and those that were imposed by the missionaries in a different idiom. Again Catholics emphasised this much more than Protestants:

The elders made war, but it was an official war between the two great powers. But between Catholics and Protestants it was because of religion (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

People's present-day accounts of how they embraced one Christian Church or the other are cast in an idiom that does not speak of the abuse of colonial power, although such abuse emerges in other narratives. Rather they deploy indigenous categories of thought, and in all stress customary allegiances and chiefly powers in taking the side of one or the other mission. Yet Catholic and Protestant versions differ:

29 Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, Service Territorial des Archives, Nouméa.
The chief of Wetr was warned from Ouvéa to reject the religion that was spreading in Lifu. They should wait for two missionaries dressed with a gown. He [high chief of Wetr] quickly sent a message to Drueulu, to the high chief Zeula, not to espouse the religion preached by Fao. The high chief accepted even though the subjects were all Protestants. He accepted out of respect. The high chief of Wetr did not send just anybody, he sent Isamatro [Atresi] (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

Although the Protestant versions ascribe conversion to customary allegiances, they are always framed as a prophecy. This, I argue, reflects the different kind of indigenization process that occurred in the two Churches.

The old Walewen (Wetr) before his death called his children: when the thing will come from the back of the hut you must take it because it is a small turtle. If it [the thing] comes from in front of the door you must be careful: it is a moray eel (which in some versions becomes a serpent) (Wapotro, October 1989).

Although Lifuans usually do not speak of the orientation of the hut in normative terms, this narrative implies that the entrance should face west.30 The Catholic missionaries in fact arrived at Eacho, on the west coast of Lifu (the moray eel entering the hut in the above narrative), whereas the first Protestant teachers landed at Mu, on the east coast (the small turtle coming from the back of the hut).

These oral accounts have many levels of interpretation. I will concentrate on two of them. The first concerns how Lifuans, and Drueuluans in particular, present themselves to the outside world. They do so by stressing similarities and minimizing internal differences. People reconcile biblical teachings with indigenous customs by framing their religious choice in terms of indigenous rules. Allegiance to each was fortuitous. As a Protestant put it:

30 Navajos, conversely, always build their hogan facing east, and when questioned they elaborate at length on this and on the importance of the four cardinal points in their cosmology. Four is considered a sacred number, for example there are four sacred mountains that delimit their homeland.
We became Catholics and Protestants by historical accident, but we all belong to the same clan (Wapotro, October 1989).

Nous sommes devenus catholiques et protestants par accident de l'histoire, mais nous faisons partie du même clan.

Even the tensions which emerge between the two groups when people relate accounts of the past are today mitigated by giving, for example, a 'reconciliatory' interpretation of the arrival of the missionaries. The interpretation given to me by a young Kanak pastor did not oppose Protestantism, which landed on the southeast of the island, to Catholicism, which arrived from Ouvea to the west, but:

What comes from the west is the serpent and if you take it one day it will eat you up. But the serpent that eats us up is not Catholicism: it is the state. The two religions came with two different symbols: Fao brought the Bible, the Catholics the flag which was also the symbol of the state. Catholicism is ensnared in this whole thing because of the state. (Cawidrone, May 1992).

Cawidrone's reading of the prophecy is not cast in terms of opposing denominations. His meta-narrative is quite consciously trying to reconcile indigenous Christianity and custom so that indigenous Protestant and indigenous Catholic discourses become compatible (a practice I deal with in Chapter Seven). It is not Catholicism per se that is contested or considered 'foreign' but the means used by missionaries to spread their religion among Lifuans. In fact they selected the French flag as a symbol and not a sacred book, as the Protestants had done.

This tendency to reconcile local customs with Christianity emerges also in Catholic accounts. Paul Zöngö's interpretation, however, differentiates between indigenous engagement and imported values:

Dancing and other practices were forbidden. Everything connected with custom was considered pagan. I enormously regret that we lost so much. We were in times of colonization. It is difficult to say, but even the missionaries, we all lived under the system. It must be said. (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).
I do not want to downplay the broader changes in mainstream Christian discourse upon local church practices and attitudes (Barker 1990b). So in Lifu, in the aftermath of Vatican II, the new ecumenical attitude strongly affected people's daily practices. Drueuluan women and men acknowledge that there has been a change in the religious discourses of both Churches and that now they are invited to work together in religious matters but they also state that this was not the case in the past:

Now it is okay; it is not as in the past.
Before it was too rigid (Kamaqat, recorded interview French/Drehu, April 1992).

An elderly Kanak catechist explained to me how the animosity of the past and the collaboration of the present were equally endorsed by Lifuans, well aware that the behaviour implied by belonging to a particular church was determined by the presence of missionaries; from the minute details about cutting hair to the deepest hostilities between churches:

Before we considered each other as enemies. Since the opening-up of John XXIII mentality has changed among the Catholics as well among the Protestants. Because they taught us that we shouldn't mix with them. It was forbidden to help the Protestants when they were holding a religious event (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

Both men and women agree that these differences were not relevant in customary work. It is as if there were two spheres of action — religious and customary — clearly separated, in terms of both physical space and social systems, one revolving around the mission and the other around the chieftainship:

It was all right for the customary works, but for prayer it was not good, one did not have the right to marry a Protestant (Kamaqat, recorded interview French/Drehu, April 1992).

This brings us to the second level of interpretation: the different ways of relating the present to the past among Catholic and Protestant women and men. If their narratives reconcile Christian and indigenous thought, when it comes to
commentaries related to past daily practice and morality, different attitudes obtain.

In the past Lifuan Catholic women distinguished themselves from Protestant women by cutting their hair short. A friend told me she remembered when at Wanaham (the landing area in Lifu) women would identify other women as coming from Hnathalo, a nearby Catholic village, by their hairstyle. And an elderly woman very clearly stated the reasons behind strict missionary impositions on behaviour:

Rules were strong for the Catholics, especially in Drueulu where there were two religions and one always had to mark the difference (Awaqatr, January 1992).

This difference between Catholic and Protestant women is today rarely acknowledged by younger women. I became aware of it by speaking with elderly women, and I observed the puzzlement of some of the youngest ones when I was eliciting further details from older female relatives. The written word omits the intonation of the voice, but I will try to convey all the intensity of Kamaqatr's commentaries. When I asked her to recall this experience, I phrased my question in a way that implied girls had to cut their hair at a certain age or once they reached the status of womanhood. Kamaqatr did not understand my question. When I reformulated it, she replied with a tone in her voice that implied I had simply not understood, that it was something imposed on all Catholic women, and as such there was no age difference. It was paradoxical that I was phrasing a question in local terms (differentiating between filles and femmes, see Chapter Five) while her answer was in terms of an alien, externally imposed category of Catholic converts. Kamaqatr explained that women have stopped cutting their hair since the priest residing in Hnathalo allowed them to do so. She could not remember his name, so she turned to a younger woman for help. The ironic comment the suggestion brought was: wanahmatra, kalo hilo ka cetrehnin xötrei he lai [come on, he was the one that strongly imposed hair cutting]. It is interesting to note that nowadays women who cut their hair short are thought to be following a western style. Protestant missionary descriptions of indigenous hairstyles portrayed Lifuan women as having short hair and, contrary to the men, devoting little time to hairdressing (Hadfield 1920:138).31

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31 Cf Gailey (1980). Protestant Methodist missionaries on Tonga insisted that all women wear long hair. This was done to stop the local custom of cutting hair to non-chiefly girls at the age of
As Martha Macintyre stresses, the indigenous categories and the imported ones were not just two different sets of ideas; they entailed 'oppositional conceptualizations of morality, of mental and physical health, and explanatory models of human action' (1990:88). Missionaries strongly objected to certain cultural practices. Doing away with nakedness, polygamy, cannibalism and idolatry were amongst the goals of the mission, as was the destruction of the hmelôm, the bachelors' house. Missionaries also tried to impose their ideas of sanitation, clothing, health, family values and motherhood (to which I return in Chapter Six). Education was central to their work. The Marists and the Protestants established boarding schools. Education was considered at the core of civilization and thus of true conversion:

Without sisters we will never have Christian mothers; and without Christian mothers, we are building on kanakism, that is on the sand. We will never have Christians worthy of this name if they do not first become men. Now, they will become men only through maternal education (Gaidé to Poupinel, 9 February 1872, APM/ONC 208, emphasis in orig.).

In the view of a Protestant from Lifu, the Protestant boarding school for boys instituted in Lifu was a substitute for the hmelôm, where all the young men but the sons of the high chief stayed until they reached the age of marriage, and were taught to fight, to dance and to become full members of their society. Protestants mobilize their arguments differently to close the distance between their traditions and the foreignness of Christianity. Though they acknowledge the differences of the past, there is more continuity in their narratives between the old and the new, the past and the present (see Paini 1994b).

20, which they thought 'was unbecoming a proper woman' (1980:313). The missionaries lack of knowledge of this custom - short hair was, for girls, an inducement to marry soon for fear of being teased by one's age-mates - resulted in introducing a new practice which had the contrary effect from the one sought. It allowed girls to protract the period of free sexual mores, thus reinforcing indigenous ideas of free female sexuality instead of banning it. (1980:313).

32 Hadfield portrayed this building also as the locus of public life. The hmelôm and the houses of the chiefs stood out against the other dwellings (Hadfield 1920:40-41).
Reconfiguring Protestantism and Catholicism

Today Lifuans consider the Catholic and the Protestant Churches as the 'real religions' and do not perceive them as opposed to their heritage. 'Sects' are perceived as dangerous, however, and in Drueulu Jehovah's Witnesses have been forbidden to preach on the grounds that they disrupt community life. Since 1960 the Evangelical Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands has been independent of Paris, and in 1966 the Catholic Church in New Caledonia ceased to be a mission and became an Archdiocese within the Roman Catholic Church. But unlike the two Evangelical Churches, in which the clergy is fully indigenized, the Catholic Church in 1989 had only one Kanak priest in the whole country. An elderly catechist from Drueulu whom I had asked to comment on this stated that the seminary in New Caledonia is not operating anymore, whereas the Protestant Ecole Pastorale [Theological School] established in Xepenehe (Lifu) in 1862 is still functioning as an ecclesiastic training school for the whole country. Further, the same man stressed celibacy as the problèmefondamental [key problem], which explains the lack of an indigenous Catholic clergy:

Celibacy is the key problem. How many priests are giving up for one reason or another, but in general it is because of that (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

Il y a le problème fondamental là-dedans du célibat. Combien de prêtres qui abandonnent pour une raison ou pour une autre, mais en général c'est pour cela.

The celibacy required by the Catholic Church is not advocated by the Protestant Church, which on the contrary requires that students entering the Theological School be married. This is a very important difference in a society that places great emphasis on being married and having offspring. The catechist's statement indicates a tension between the Catholic requirement of celibacy and Kanak cultural assumptions but also hints at differences in how Catholics and Protestants relate to indigenous life. However, other structural details need to be highlighted to understand better how Kanak integrate indigenous and Christian commitments. Here I will explore the differences in church organisation in the two Christian communities of Drueulu. I will return to how commonalities work vis-à-vis la coutume in Chapter Seven.

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33 The arrival of new religions or 'sects', regarded as 'heretical religions' (as most Lifuans call them), is a recent phenomenon which, as one man commented, coincided with the Kanak demand for independence.
Today no Catholic nun or priest resides in Lifu; the priest is based in Nouméa and comes on average once a month, says the mass and then leaves. In contrast the Protestant minister, a Kanak from the nearby island of Tiga, was living in Drueulu with his wife until he retired in July 1990. He thus had daily interaction with the Protestant community and provided feedback on community morality. It is important to understand the specificities of the Catholic Church in Drueulu. The fact that it is linked to the national and international Roman Catholic Church structure too often eclipses its own character as a 'continuing development of a distinctively Melanesian Christianity' (Burt 1994:13).

In the absence of a priest, the Catholic service is conducted by catechists from Drueulu: the homily is in Drehu whereas the Bible reading and singing are in French. The gospel is never read in Drehu because the only translation available is in Old Drehu, which very few Catholics know. During the Sunday mass organised by the local Catholic elementary school at the end of the 1991 school year, which all the community attended, the teachers – all of them from Drueulu – chose to deliver the Lord's Prayer in Drehu, but instead of using the available translation they made their own translation from French into present-day Drehu. They explained to me that it would otherwise have been unintelligible to the majority of people. When a young priest from France came to Drueulu for a wedding, knowing everybody in the village spoke the vernacular, he assumed that people would use it in church as well. During the mass he asked them to say the Lord's Prayer in Drehu, but only a few elderly people in the church went along. This is not the case in the Protestant Church, where the entire service is in Drehu, the language used by the Protestant missionaries to spread the gospel. Protestants, both women and men, refer to this written language as 'le vrai drehu' [the real Drehu]. Also the hymnody of the two Churches is quite distinct. Catholics have adopted a western style not only in language and images but in the music as well. By contrast, Protestant hymns and taperas [songs in Drehu with a moral connotation which in the past were not for church purposes] are constructed around local images and use indigenous melodies as well as pitch. In town the Catholic youth from Drueulu join with their Protestant peers to learn taperas, which in that context becomes an element of Drehu identity. But the focus on the use of Drehu in the Protestant Church must be examined to

34 This pattern changes during Easter and Christmas, when the priest spends several days on the island.
35 I thank Marco Capra of the Conservatorio di Musica 'A. Boito' di Parma for having listened to a tape of taperas, providing useful technical comments.
understand better the difference between the two denominations and what value Lifuans attach to its use in Protestant service and ritual.

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL AND AS AN ELEMENT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

In Lifu, unlike Grande Terre, people spoke one language throughout the island and Protestant missionaries always made use of Drehu in their work. By 1871 most of the Bible had been translated and printed in the vernacular.

The importance of Drehu as both an oral and a written language seemed to have been acknowledged even by the French. The colony's official newspaper, *Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, on 3 July 1864 (see Illustration 3.1) published Governor Guillain's order declaring martial law in Lifu both in French and in Drehu. This bilingual official document is even more revealing if one considers that it was published after the order dated October 1863 by the colonial government banning native languages from schools and demanding that all teaching be done in French.36 In Lifu this order was implemented in May 1864 when the island was annexed, forcing the closure of the missionaries' schools and of the Theological School, which had opened in 1863 in Xepenehe (Whitehouse PMB 149:33).

Protestants were largely responsible for translating the scriptures. A deputation visiting Lifu in June 1857, two years before the arrival of the LMS missionaries, remarked that teachers preached in the native language and made a pledge to send 'a missionary and a printer' (MacFarlane 1873:53-56).37 The emphasis on language emerges from MacFarlane's own account as well. Reflecting on his experience as an LMS missionary on Lifu, he remarked that though a few young men spoke 'broken English' he felt that 'especially amongst a people like this, language is power,' (1873:73). He started to acquire Drehu. Catholic priests instead did little in this field, sometimes because of lack of support from their General House. The interest shown by the LMS deputation is not paralleled in the Catholic correspondence. In 1858, the year the Marists settled on the island, Palazy observed that it was highly valued to have a book,

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36 This meant the imposition of French as the lingua franca everywhere in New Caledonia. Since then French has become the medium of instruction.

37 The account speaks of people from 'eight different nations' assembled there and of addresses being delivered in English, Samoan and Aneiteumese (MacFarlane 1873:54).
Illustration 3.1: Bilingual official document published in the colonial official newspaper, 3 July 1864
'quel qu'il soit, imprimö ou manuscrit; mais nous avons remarqué que presque personne n'y sait lire' [it does not matter of what kind, printed or handwritten; but we have noticed that almost no-one can read] (Palazy to Favre, ? July 1858, APM/ONC 208).

But this critical attitude towards Protestant evangelization focusing on Drehu was soon to change. In the following years letters of the Catholic missionaries often made reference to their need for 'printed material' in Drehu. Generally speaking Catholic evangelization in New Caledonia did not stress the use of the vernacular, yet from the correspondence of the Marists based on Lifu a more diversified picture emerges. Father Gaide in 1868 noted:

Almost two years have gone by since we sent our Lifu translation of the catechism to be printed in France, but we still haven't received any news; (Gaide to his family, 30 July 1868, APM/ONC 208).

And in 1870 Father Fabre wrote to a fellow-member in Toulon drawing attention to his superiors' lack of interest in the issue. He complained that:

the Catholic mission in New Caledonia has been open for more than twenty-five years and not even one printed line in the vernacular (Fabre to a 'fellow-member and friend', 18 August 1870, APM/ONC 208).

In the same letter he remarked that already three years had gone by since he had sent his Lifu translation of the catechism to be printed, but the importance of such a tool to facilitate catechizing had been neglected by his superiors:

it is humiliating for us to see all the Protestant tribes knowing more or less how to read and write while those of our flock who can do both are the exception (Fabre to a 'fellow-member and friend', 18 August 1870, APM/ONC 208).

It is interesting to note that both Gaide's and Fabre's comments are found in letters addressed to family members or friends and not to ecclesiastic superiors. By 1894, according to the LMS census, 2453 out of 5659 Lifuan Protestants could read. But if the concern for learning the local language is present in the
correspondence of the Catholic Fathers, their eagerness to show that their followers had become acquainted with the French language also emerges, and in the following years all the Catholic teaching would be carried out in French. This had a twofold effect: men and women who had become Catholic became familiar with written French but were less skilled in written Drehu; the contrary was true for Protestant men and women. People in Lifu are very aware of these differences. They explain the lack of French of some elderly women or their unwillingness to speak it as being 'because they are Protestant' or 'because they have married into a Catholic family but they came from a Protestant village'. These same women, however, not only speak Drehu confidently but read and write it as well.

Furthermore the influence of the LMS meant that English was then the dominant European language; French did not become predominant until well into the 20th century (Howe 1977:128). Today many English loan words are found in Drehu and people proudly display their Anglophilia, expressing the view that their language is closer to English and that the elders spoke it. In effect Drehu has accepted a number of English voiced consonants; numbers, names of months and other lexemes have also been borrowed from English (Moyse-Faurie 1983:7 and 20). These religious/national rivalries were used by opposing tribal groups throughout the Loyalties, exacerbating divisions between English Protestant and French Catholic areas. Protestants have always prevailed in Lifu — out of a population of 6000, the Marists had fewer than 1000 followers (Gaide to Favre, ? March 1864, APM/ONC 208; Howe 1977:45) — whereas on the main island the Catholic Marists were predominant. The use of Drehu in teaching and preaching meant that important distinctions in the Christian theology, such as the concepts of a monotheist religion, were translated into indigenous categories through which people believed in ancestors and in spiritual powers.

38 Protestant men have had more opportunities to leave their village than Protestant women, and therefore to learn French or Bislama.

39 This familiarity with English was due to the influence of LMS missionaries and also to the opportunities for travelling and working in nearby countries where English was spoken. In 1859 Father Montrouzier wrote that several indigenes, including the chief Bula, had spent time in New Zealand with an Anglican minister where they were taught English and instructed in the Christian doctrine. They were asked to reciprocate by teaching Drehu to the local missionaries (Montrouzier to Favre 1 January 1958 APM/ONC 208).

40 Between 1897 and 1900, 25 indigenous Protestant teachers from the Loyalties were sent to the main island to spread the gospel (R. Leenhardt 1980).

41 On the relevance of the process of translation in the conversion process in the colonial context of Vanuatu, see Jolly 1996. See also White 1992 and Burt 1994.
Christian god became caa haze [The Ancestor]; soul was presented as u [spirit]; faith as lapau [which means also ‘to trust’] and miracle as iamamayikeu, used as well as to refer to the spirit of the dead returning among the living. This difference in the use of the written language in the Church is reflected in the religious words used in speeches on ceremonial occasions. Protestants make use of words introduced by the missionaries in translating the Bible into Drehu – faipoipo for marriage, baselaia for chiefdom, for example – whereas Catholics tend to use the French equivalent more, though the tendency to slip French words into Drehu is present in both groups.

The importance for the Protestants of being able to express themselves in their own language was stressed by an elderly man of Drueulu much involved in the local Catholic Church:

I believe that the Protestants have made an effort. They started to translate the Bible immediately. [The] language today is too old: it is difficult. Only the Protestants can speak Drehu. It is their way of evangelizing. Protestants learn the language immediately, whereas for us [Catholics] there are some priests who translate but it is not the rule. They [Protestants] are proud of having their own religion, because of the language. We speak French, we speak a foreign language. For them it is not a foreign religion, it is their own religion. It is rooted in the language (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

Je crois qu'il y a eu un effort chez les Protestants. Tout de suite ils se mettent à traduire la Bible. Le langage aujourd'hui c'est trop vieux; c'est difficile. Il n'y a que les Protestants qui savent parler le Drehu. C'est la manière d'évangéliser. Chez les Protestants tout de suite ils apprennent la langue. Tandis que nous, il y a quelques pères qui traduisent, mais c'est pas général. Ils [les Protestants] ont une fierté d'avoir une religion à eux, à cause de la langue. Nous parlons français, nous parlons un langage étranger. Pour eux c'est pas une religion étrangère c'est la religion à eux. C'est bien plantée dans la langue.

The use of Drehu, a clergy composed of Kanak pastors, the fact that Fao, though not European, was constantly mentioned in the big church gatherings - these are factors which combine to make people feel that their religion is something that

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42 This religious vocabulary is taken from a list written by P. Dumas, pastor at the Theological School of Bethania, Lifu from 1980 to 1983.

43 It is interesting to note that in Lifu and in Maré the LMS teachers and missionaries have not used the indigenous word for 'territory' but have introduced the Greek word 'baselaia'. In the A'jïë translation of the Bible by Leenhardt – based on a previous translation done by Loyalty Islanders teachers – mwâciri, the indigenous term for 'territory', has been incorporated into the religious domain. Today it is used in both religious and customary contexts (Michel Naepels, pers comm. September 1993). However, as Marie-Adèle Nchého-Jorôdi point out, the use of foreign and indigenous terms were both colonial strategies (2 November 1993, Canberra).
belongs to them, and was not something imposed from outside. The use of the vernacular is not just considered an element of difference between the two denominations in the past, but is rendered as an essential element of Drehu identity today. It should also be pointed out that teaching in the Theological School in Xepenehe is in Drehu, which has become the language of Protestantism on the main island as well. The Catholic perception that church standards were set outside the village’s domain, though narrated as something belonging to the past, is not found in Protestant narratives, where the perspective taken is aimed at reducing the foreignness of the imported religion. Christianity does not represent the outside world.

CHRISTIANITY IN MEN’S AND WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICES

The notion of God is not considered foreign, brought by outsiders, but rather is viewed as part of local heritage. In the words of a Lifuan intellectual, whom I had asked to explain how he reconciled being Kanak and being Protestant:

le concept, la notion de Dieu ... les Kanak n’ont pas eu besoin de l’arrivée des Européens pour savoir de quoi il s’agit. Les Kanak c’est un peuple religieux, écologiquement religieux. La nature est aussi lui, pas quelque chose en dehors de lui. Il y a un dialogue constant entre la nature et l’homme. ... Cueillir des médicaments ... on va parler à l’arbre. Ça se fait de moins en moins aujourd’hui.

Precolonia indigenous religious beliefs are not perceived as having been supplanted, but rather as anticipating Christianity. Even the egalitarian ethic within Christianity is considered not foreign to Lifuan social order.

THE CHANGING BORDERS OF VILLAGE AND MISSION

Today both Catholic and Protestant churches are present in the village. Whereas Protestants refer to the pastor’s house and nearby terrain as Eika, a Greek word meaning ‘people living in the same house’, Catholics still refer to the former mission as ‘la mission’, even though the physical space of the mission and of the
village do not operate as two distinct spaces (cf. Maisin society analyzed by Barker 1990b and 1993). In the middle of the 1920s the last missionary based in the village moved to Hnathalo, marking the end of the Marist mission of Drueulu. Today, in the absence of Catholic clergy, the catechists are people who have important roles and functions in the social structure, and they are married.

The Catholic school has kept operating, although since the 1950s it has been functioning only as a preschool and for the first years of elementary school. Older children had to move to the Catholic school in Hnathalo. This is still the case. Nowadays the Catholic primary school is run by local lay teachers, one man and three women in 1992. In the last few years more children from Protestant families have been attending this school whereas when I started fieldwork in 1989 the line between attending one or the other primary school was more rigidly defined. In the absence of a Protestant school in the village, Protestant children went to the public elementary school, which has Kanak and white teachers.44

Prior to World War II the school and the church were part of the mission, though within village boundaries they formed a distinct environment. Both girls and boys separately attended this school. While the boys school was a daily school, the girls attended a boarding school. Elderly women today have very bitter memories of that period. Culpability and sin, and are still, considered by people in their own terms. Someone who behaves individualistically is not conforming to the indigenous moral code. Nuns were usually considered selfish:

The sisters never gave us anything. In the past the good sisters were not nice to us. They were there eating, eating, all by themselves. Their leftovers were given to the pigs, not shared with us. Indeed, it is true. It is good now. (Kamaqatr, recorded interview Drehu/French, April 1992).

Y a pas donner à [nous] quelque chose par les soeurs. C'est pas bon, longtemps, bonnes soeurs ont fait à nous. Sont là qui mangeaient comme ça, mangeaient toutes seules; quand y a les restes de manger on va jeter aux cochons mais pas donner à nous. C'est vrai. C'est bon maintenant.

44 I chose to put my daughter into this school partly because I did not want to be strongly identified with the Catholic community, coming from a Catholic background and living with a Catholic family in the village, but mainly because of my personal views vis-à-vis denominational and state-run school systems. As I got to know better how the school was run I realised that I had brought to the field ideas about western Christianity that had not been replicated in Drueulu. The Catholic school was more dynamic than the state one, which was very rigid and conservative. This is also one of the main reasons given by the teachers to explain why more parents from the village are sending their children to the Catholic school. The school, though part of a larger institution – DEC (Direction de l'Enseignement Catholique) – has become an indigenous institution.
The representation of the Catholic mission as a space ruled by self-interest is present in most of the Catholic narratives relating to that period. The bitterness of past experience made even a man who is deeply involved in the Church express strong feelings of disapproval:

when they sent me to school I was fifteen; we didn't know a word of French, but it was forbidden to speak our language by the old nuns (Paul Zöngö, recorded interview, December 1989).

Not only was the mission school a place where only French could be spoken, although young people had a very shallow knowledge of it, but it was ruled by the sisters following their own logic. Kamaqatr's recounting of that period is ironic but bitter. One Wednesday afternoon (the only afternoon during the week when girls were allowed to return to their family's household) she was asked by the nuns to make 'beignets' [sweets] for four o'clock but knowing little French she understood this to mean 'baigner' [take a bath] until four o'clock. She diligently went to the sea and did not emerge from the water until the time she had been told, at which point her lips were blue with cold!

In 1992 during the annual General Assembly of women's groups belonging to the mouvement 'Souriant Village Mélanesien' (Smiling Melanesian Village) 200 women gathered in Drueulu (see Chapter Seven). In the evening each group was asked to perform - a dance, a song or a sketch - for entertainment. The women of Drueulu decided to enact their experience at the mission boarding school focusing on Kamaqatr's linguistic misunderstanding (see above). The choice of the theme and the whole portrayal of daily routine in the mission school was in the hands of elderly women. But because at the time of the narrative the nuns in Drueulu were two - one Kanak and one white - I was requested to play that role. Reluctantly I accepted. Women prepared the material to dress up, explained the sequence (the early getting up in the dormitory, the prayer in the Church and so on), but did not say a word about how to act out the different roles, nor envisaged a rehearsal. On the 'stage' I was stopped while guiding the students to church and, in a low but firm voice, I was told by another performer that I was not acting properly. I should have been in the back waiting for all the girls to enter the church and not leading them to the church. This anecdote shows how elderly women have internalized the experience of the missionary school. (It also says something about my own perception of white European nuns'
authoritarianism.) I was the only one who had not lived through this experience: even Kamaqatr's elderly mother who was in the audience became involved in the sketch and immediately placed herself in the situation. The episode of Kamaqatr is well known in Drueulu, but there is a great difference between listening to it recalled by her or her sister and by young women in the village: sarcasm, irony and bitterness on the part of primary witnesses shift into humour and ribaldry in the retold accounts of young women.

These accounts of the selfish and authoritarian behaviour of the nuns, in contrast to the sharing and reciprocity stressed as part of past and present Kanak identity, should be considered not so much as a recounting of the facts but as a rhetorical device to evidence 'a behavioural ethic which exists in the absence of actual equity and redistribution' (Thomas 1989:113). People no longer experience life in the mission and in the village as they did in the past, when the constant physical presence of nuns and a priest made the boundaries between the two environments so rigid and where different moral codes prevailed. The mission was the place where French had to be spoken, where sharing did not take place; it was a place ruled by different moral tenets. Today this difference is perceived differently. The mission is a space that can be used for community purposes: people gather for worship as well for more social occasions. People's attendance at the Sunday gatherings varies in both churches. In the Catholic Church women's attendance is higher, due also to the attendance of younger children and infants, whereas among the Protestants only older children go to the Sunday service.

What the practices and commentaries presented in this chapter tell us is that there has been, not a displacement of one system by another, but rather the mutual accommodation of local and Christian elements. Boundaries exists but are changing. The dynamics of the articulation between the indigenous and the imported is shown in other daily contexts. During the year the liturgical calendar is followed. When the chefferie plans the year's social activities it is taken into consideration. For example, weddings are scheduled between May and September so they will not interfere with the yam season, with the beginning of school, with Christmas or Easter or the Protestant Convention (a formal yearly gathering of Lifuan Protestants), all periods when the community is busy with other events. The chefferie tries to schedule the weddings in order to avoid overlap: this is more easily done in the small district where I did fieldwork than in the two other districts, which are larger and more populous. While some degree of overlap and synthesis of Christian and customary elements occurs, a degree of separateness is still maintained. 'Making custom', a customary gesture
consisting of a length of cloth, food and money, accompanies all customary 'work'. Nothing is started and ended without this customary gesture, be it building a traditional house, convening a meeting, going to visit someone or participating in the yam feast. The parent-teacher meeting I attended in Drueulu was one such occasion. The meeting on family planning was preceded by 'making custom'. In Lifu, unlike Grande Terre, it may consist of only money (see Chapter Seven). Every important religious ceremony is followed by 'making custom', usually a banknote of medium denomination. In Lifu, Christianity has become so widely accepted that Protestant groups working in public health and nutrition projects refer to Biblical verses to put the message across (e.g. Genesis 3:19). Asked the reason for this, the organisers replied that it helped them in introducing their argument for the need to improve personal hygiene and public health.

Both Catholics and Protestants organize feasts to raise funds for Church projects but, as they point out, it is they who manage the money and decide how the money should be used. The Catholics, for example, have built the local church, a large hall for meetings, and have recently restored one of the buildings that used to be the mission school for the community. The whole community takes part at these fêtes [kermesses]. Even people with very little money will buy food in order to contribute to the fund-raising. These fund-raising activities might be seen as exploitative, for the money used to build brick churches or halls is collected from people who live in small, unhealthy corrugated-iron houses. But one should bear in mind that the committee, composed entirely of men and women of the village, independently initiates activities, sets its own goals and directly manages the money raised. The goods thereby purchased, from sports equipment to kitchenware, are for the use of the whole community, though kept in either the Catholic or the Protestant Church. But usually money goes to fund a big project, such as the church hall, or to pay back debts incurred to accomplish it. In May 1990 the Drueulu Catholics raised CFP 1 168 000 (FF 64 240) during a three-day kermesse. These fêtes are also occasions that bring the members of the community together and give young people, especially girls, an opportunity to spend longer hours outside the household with others of their own age.

These feasts are seen in some ways as 'work'. This autonomy of local church activities and practices is stressed all the time. It was the reason given by the Catholic community of Drueulu living in Nouméa for refusing to enter into the 'Conseil Pastoral du Diocèse' [Pastoral Council of the Diocese] in 1990. A member of the group commented that, because the aims of the two organizations (i.e. their Committee and the Pastoral Council) were the same, they would not
gain anything by joining the new structure, rather they were afraid of losing 'le pouvoir de gérer nos choses' [the power to manage our things].

Thus, on the one hand people's accounts emphasize a shift in the perception of strong boundaries in the past between the village and the mission. On the other hand some kinds of separation still exist. As new issues are brought to the fore by changing social and political conditions, in line with the Matignon Accords, not only have men resorted to custom as a language of resistance but the boundaries between religion and custom are being differently drawn (see the yam feast in Chapter Seven). In the face of such changes the boundaries are being redrawn by some high-ranking men who see their power and authority under threat. The encounter of the imported and the local religion must be seen in context. As long as white presence was minimal in Lifu, the new religious discourse was shaped according to indigenous rules; as the social and political conditions are changing a new accommodation between custom and religion as well as political authority must be negotiated.

The liturgy of Catholic Church services appears to stress the continuity of styles and rituals with past missionary practices. But church attendance and ritual have not displaced traditional beliefs in the intervention of spirits and human agencies in the world. The Christian cosmology has been informed by local cultural assumptions. Death, as I have pointed out, is still perceived primarily as something brought about by human intervention. Lifuans' religion should be considered as an indigenous strategy for thinking about the world and for defining oneself within that world. As Barker (1992) suggests for Oceania and Mbembe (1988) for Africa, the indigenous symbolic sphere has not been supplanted, but rather it has readjusted. What Mbembe calls the 'génie du paganisme' (borrowing the term from Marc Augé) is alive and well, and is not regarded as being in opposition to monotheistic religions, but rather as one of the many forms religion has taken. The Gospel was accepted by local agents as a strategic way (subject to renegotiation) of gaining economic or political advantages.

There was a notable lack of questioning of liturgy and theology even by the students of Bethania, the Protestant Theological School in Lifu where I spent a

45 And in Drehu meec (or wezipo) covers both sickness and death. When I asked a friend how people distinguish between the two usages she pointed out that it is the context and the way of expressing them that clarify the meaning. But as Augé has suggested, when the explication of sickness is located in disorders that have affected the social life of the patient, the leap is really not from common sense to magic, but rather from common sense to theoretical thought (1982: 138).
week. It was interesting to note the tension between the metropolitan view of Christianity of a young French minister teaching theology and his wife and that of the Kanak teachers and students. The couple criticized Kanak for accepting obsolete religious customs and not trying to challenge them. They were looking for the same kind of change which swept through much of western Protestant and Catholic Churches after Vatican II; instead they were confronted with what they perceived as complacent, old-style practices. To their disappointment, even pro-independence Kanak did not even contemplate a new theological dynamic such as liberation theology. Similarly, in the Catholic Church in Lifu continuity seems to be the rule. The young pastor's viewpoint, however, does not take into account the admonishment of Mbembe (1988). According to Mbembe, liberation theologists stress the bias of Eurocentric interpretations of the Gospel which, they argue, must be read from the people's viewpoint. Liberation theologists, however, do so without questioning the universality of the message.

Although the customary gift-exchange is often carried out following a Sunday mass, it never takes place within the church building, but only after people leave the physical space of the church. This practice underscores the fact that some kind of demarcation between the church building and the rest of the village exists, although it is not a matter of separation between Christian and secular activities. I recall that during the month of May, when people would gather for a week to pray, each evening at a different compound, that once they had entered the hut, just before praying, people would carry out customary gift-giving. In this case the two activities were not physically separated. The difference was in the physical place chosen: a hut and not the church. This is why I refrain from using the term 'syncretism' to refer to Lifuan reworking of Christianity - its symbols and icons. What these practices and commentaries tell us is that there has been, not a displacement of one system by another, but rather the mutual accommodation or coexistence of local, Christian, and newly synthetized elements. Boundaries remain, but their borders and intersections shift in time.

It is not a case of Christianity replacing traditional beliefs, nor is it a case of a compartmentalization of discrete religious systems (see Keesing 1992). Nor is it a case of Sunday Christians, Monday Sorcerers (Kahn 1983). Religion unites people, yet it does so not in terms of a celestial ideal and not in opposition to custom. Thus a more accurate way to represent the religion practised by people in Drueulu is as a complex of 'constellations' of indigenous, Christian and synthetic elements in constant flux (see Barker 1990a:11). Although it may seem ironic,
having just employed a celestial metaphor, Christianity is a commitment rooted in daily communal practice.
Women and girls were afraid of Whites. Now it is good, you see we are together. But before they hid themselves. Men from here spoke with the Americans. It is good if there are some who speak *bislama*. My old man [husband] worked in Vanuatu and spoke *bislama* and spoke with the others (i.e. Americans) (Awaqatr, 2 October 1991).

Les femmes et les filles d’ici avaient peur des blancs. C’est bon maintenant, tu vois on est ensemble. Mais avant elles se cachent. Les hommes d’ici parlaient avec les Américains. C’est bon s’il y a ceux qui parlent le bichelamar. Le vieux pour moi travaillait à Vanuatu et parlait le bichelamar et parlait avec les autres [les Américains]

The people of Lifu, primarily the men, have been involved with a cash economy for over 150 years, reworking and appropriating foreign goods, wealth and ideas (Thomas 1991). Interactions with foreigners were taking place not only on Lifu, with the islanders receiving people, but away from home as well. Before the period of recruitment of Pacific Islanders for plantation work in Queensland, Lifuans had established regular contacts with European traders and missionaries. As Howe (1978) has shown for the whole Loyalty group, the beginning of these maritime movements can be traced back to the 1840s. They were primarily oriented toward Australia and the New Hebrides. This pattern continued in the first two decades after French colonization of New Caledonia. The islanders seemed less keen to go and work on the main island of New Caledonia.

This mobility was an important aspect of Lifuan social life in the second part of the 19th century and it can be considered as comprising the first of the migratory tides involving Lifuans.
Illustration 4.1: Sketch of Lifuan boy on board the Marian-Watson by Léopold Verguet, 1845 [APM/ONC 200]
Although maritime travels intensified and amplified in distance, they were not a novelty for the islanders, who had had a long-standing practice of inter-island trading with the main island, the nearby islands, and also with islands to the north (Guiart 1953).

The accounts relating to Lifuan mobility from the last century make only scant reference to women absentees. Did they represent a tiny proportion of absentees which was not worth mentioning, or were they forgotten? Oral narratives too speak of past mobility in terms of men's engagement with the outside world. This same kind of complicity of male accounts – by missionaries and by indigenes – which rendered the colonial experience a male prerogative, also informed many of the later works on the topic of labour trade. As Jolly (1987) has argued, much of the debate concerning labour recruitment in the South Pacific has been focused on supporting or refuting the argument of 'blackbirding', albeit from a male perspective. The studies have marginalized women who had overseas experience and, when they do make reference to female mobility, they portray women as differently motivated from men. Women have not been credited with the wide range of personal and material motives attributed to men. The most common reason given for women's recruitment was to escape an unwanted marriage and/or to follow a man of their choice (e.g. Scarr 1973 [1970]: 243). And yet there is evidence which supports a more differentiated portrait of women's motivations. An English captain in the 1860s returned two Lifu women who had been working for Europeans: they had loaded his boat with goods which 'in variety as well as quantity would have enabled these coloured ladies to set up a small store if so inclined' (J.M. [MacGillivray] quoted in Howe 1977:97). Furthermore, these studies have failed to consider how migration patterns affected life in the communities of origin, where the majority of women remained.

In this chapter I want to explore how Lifuan men and women were differently affected by the experience of the labour trade. In doing so I also address some contested issues related to population mobility in the New Caledonian context, and more generally in the South Pacific: 'blackbirding', depopulation, and resettlement. Then I consider how geographical mobility has shaped Lifuans' notions of modernity.

1 In addition to this, some of the most relevant contributions to this debate are: Scarr 1967; Corris 1970, 1973; Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975; Howe 1978; Saunders 1980; Mercer 1981; Moore 1985.
This chapter draws again on written and oral sources but I use them differently from in the previous chapters. I do not concentrate on a specific period in time, but rather I consider what past and modern sources can tell about mobility and historical demographic pattern of Lifuans and from what point of view.

TRAVELLING ABROAD

Loyalty Islanders were portrayed in the literature of last century as very skilful traders (Cheyne 1971 [1842]). Campbell described the Loyalty Islanders' interactions in trading and compared them with neighbouring islanders' attitudes, justifying what he perceived as differences on the grounds that 'the climate of the Loyalties is very much superior to that of the New Hebrides.' (1873:136). The islanders' reputation as experienced sailors and as travellers also looms large in the colonial literature. Garnier described the 'qualités' [qualities] of Loyalty Islanders, advancing this as the reason why they were more often visited by traders compared to the people of the main island (1875:288). A few years later Lemire (1884:215) expressed the same view. He was echoed by Thomas, who portrayed the Loyalty Islanders as resembling the Tongans, and as: 'Brave, intelligent, trustworthy, there are no natives of the South Sea whom I so much respect' (1886:165). These accounts concentrated upon the islanders' navigation skills as well as upon their physical features and appearance. Although Commandant Guillanton, the French authority's agent in Lifu, in a letter addressed to the local Marist missionary on some controversial issue between civil and religious authorities considered Lifuans 'même superieurs aux Tahitiens' [even superior to the Tahitians] (Guillanton to Fabre, 14 May 1868, PMB/OMPA 234/AAN 50.7), in most accounts Lifuans were portrayed as resembling east Pacific Islanders (see Illustration 4.1). These ranked representations, which connected the physical characteristics of a people to appreciation of their skills and abilities, were an expression of a discourse stemming from European Enlightenment theorizing on racial hierarchy to legitimize a new social and economic order (cf. Bloch and Bloch 1980). By the middle of the 19th century, the period the early narratives on the Loyalties referred to, such ideas were developed in part as social Darwinism² (Smith 1985). Yet these perceptions were

² It is true that Vico's, Comte's and Condorcet's thought already presented the fundamental schema of evolutionism. However the two leading figures of social evolutionism, Spencer and
not gender neutral (see Jolly 1992a:341). The early representations of Lifuan women in terms of their physical features and in terms of their social situation were quite different from those of the men, both in English and French writings. Erskine spoke of 'hideous women, both young and old ... lounging about, attending their children' (1853:365). Jouan left a similar portrait: *leur physionomie hébétéée, leurs allures bestiales, en font quelque chose de hideux.* [their bewildered appearance, their bestial gait, make them hideous] (1861: no.117). Most of the early commentators represented relations between men and women as being very asymmetrical asserting that the indigenous woman was treated as *bête de somme* [beast of burden] (Jouan 1861: no.118).

Before the beginning of labour recruitment for Queensland, a substantial number of Lifuan men had already had experience of working for Europeans. Early labour engagements involved working for sandalwood traders to cut and carry wood, on board vessels as sailors, and as migrant labour for station work. Howe has described, as a typical sandalwood crew vessel of those years, 'Captain Streeter's *New Forest* with three Englishmen, one American, four Tahitians, two Maoris, and thirty-two Lifuans' (Howe 1977:87). In spite of the sandalwood trade's decline in the 1860s, people were still recruited as crew members for British vessels, to such an extent that at the beginning of the 1860s Jouan could comment on the large number of Lifuans engaged on board Australian vessels, and thus *'le nombre de ceux qui parlent anglais d'une manière à peu près intelligible est assez grand'* [the number of those who can speak English in a more or less understandable way is quite large] (1861: no.118).

Another event which increased travel opportunities for Lifuans was the gold rush that swept Australia in the 1850s. European labour in the Pacific region became scarce, thereby creating a large demand for islander sailors. From the mid-fifties onwards a crew with a majority of Pacific Islanders was to become the norm (Shineberg 1967:191). Thus the recruitment of contract labour was a familiar practice for Lifuans well before the Queensland 'labour trade' began in August 1863 when the first contingent of 67 indentured labourers from the new Hebrides and Loyalty Islands arrived on Australian shores (Saunders 1975:149).

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3 Later on Loyalty Islanders were recruited for the mines of the main island of New Caledonia but they were never recruited for Fiji (Howe 1977:90).
The question whether they had chosen to come or had been kidnapped became a controversial issue in Britain and in Australia, a question which is still debated by scholars dealing with the Pacific labour trade, and which has also engaged the descendants of the Pacific Islanders who remained in Australia.

There is a substantial literature on this, most of it dealing with the Solomons and New Hebrides rather than New Caledonia. The issue of 'blackbirding' – the seizing of recruits by force or trickery – looms large in the earlier works. Later writers have taken a different stance. They do not dismiss kidnapping completely but stress that islanders, especially those with a long-standing practice of interactions with Europeans, were willing to go (Scarr 1967). This position has been asserted by Howe (1977 and 1978) apropos Loyalty Islanders. He has challenged the view that they were kidnapped, arguing that young men were leaving with great eagerness. The title of his article, 'Tourists, sailors, and labourers' (1978), clearly conveys his point of view regarding the kind of travelling the islanders engaged in. Notwithstanding that less has been written about Loyalty Islanders in relation to the labour trade, in the first years they constituted a fair proportion of the recruits:

There is limited information on the number of Loyalty Islanders who worked in Queensland ... even to accept the official total of 998 would mean that at least 8 per cent of all Loyalty islanders (and at least 16 per cent of all males) at some time during an eight-year period worked in Queensland (Howe 1977:90).

In her doctoral dissertation Patricia Mercer (1981) assessed that, for the period from 1863 to 1904, the total figure of Loyalty Islanders recruited was 1123. This figure is more significant if one breaks it down by period: from 1863 to 1872 Loyalty Islanders represented 19.4 per cent of the total recruits; but during the following 15 years, when Solomon Islanders provided most of the labour force for the plantations, Lifuans' presence became scarce (Mercer 1981:9). Mercer states that few women came to Queensland and those who did were mainly from the New Hebrides. The recruits were mostly men in their late teens or early twenties (1981:12). She contends that 'the majority went willingly' and examines the different motives behind islanders' decisions to leave their communities to work as indentured labourers. Material, political, and social factors contributed to the men's decisions. For some, recruitment represented an opportunity to travel; for others, it was a means to escape endemic feuding or customary burdens; but the main reason was a 'desire for cash and wealth' (1981:12).
Early narratives make reference to Lifuans' willingness to engage in bargaining and their firm stance in the face of European demands. As Cheyne reported during his 1842 voyage to the Loyalties seeking sandalwood:

all natives generally are civil (through fear) on their first Intercourse with Europeans – but as they get enlightened, and find we are not Gods, as they at first supposed, they become more daring and familiar – and treat us with as much contempt, as they formerly did with respect (1971 [1842]:112).

Cheyne's account referred to the interactions of islanders towards trading vessels and the propensity of Lifuans for 'getting the best deal' out of a transaction. He wrote of having found in Ouvéa about 100 Lifuans whom he called 'great Scoundrels' (1971 [1842]:117). He was quite annoyed by their presence because they interfered with his trading by persuading Ouvéans to ask for a higher price for their sandalwood. This propensity for trading and bargaining was remarked on by other Europeans. MacFarlane wrote of his first exchanges with Lifuans in the same terms:

the natives knew that I was a 'new hand', and inexperienced, and took advantage. I bought, and bought, but finding that some of the things were moving in a circle, and having no inclination to pay half-a-dozen times for the same article, I was obliged to close the market, at the expense of my popularity (1873:73).

Another aspect which characterized the intense interactions of Lifuans with European traders emerges from these narratives, namely their willingness to explore new places and seek new experiences. During his stopover in Lifu, Erskine encountered returned labourers from New South Wales and remarked that, although they complained about the hard work and little food they had received while abroad, '[t]heir experience had apparently excited the curiosity of their countrymen' (1853:366).

The fact that several observers reported that Lifuans could speak a fair amount of English meant that they would have had some understanding of transactions they entered into. The fact, too, that they had long-standing experience of engagement and trading with Europeans meant that they knew something of what to expect from working abroad. But other factors must be considered in dealing with these accounts. The narratives must be situated within the broader context of French colonization of Lifu and of mission and state confrontation on the island.
The missionaries' correspondence is replete with comments on men's willingness to leave, yet it does not blame the traders and recruiters as much as the system of corvées imposed by the French Government on Lifu. Marists blamed the labour impositions by the French Administration for the departure of young men, most of them going to Australia. At issue was the scarcity of the labour force upon which missionaries relied.

I still have more than 30 Catholics in Brisbane and surrounding areas: they are always eager to leave for Sydney, Australia. Lifuans are the true Savoyards of [New] Caledonia (Gaide to Poupinel, 22 January 1873 APM/ONC 208).

But the bitterness which emerges in their correspondence appeared to have been caused also by the fact that islanders were going to Australia, an Anglophone and largely Protestant country. Thus not only was the labour force becoming scarce in Lifu but the young men would return and disseminate 'heretical' ideas. Young men wanted to remove themselves from these imposed administration duties but it did not seem that they went to escape the obligations of customary life. It has sometimes been assumed that high chiefs had a stake in the recruitment of labour and that they acted as brokers. However, there are instances in which high chiefs resisted recruitment. Goubin, who arrived in New Caledonia in 1876 and spent most of his 40 years of missionary life in Drueulu (from 1878 onwards), remarked that a French colonial agent had come to Gaica unsuccefully seeking labour for the mines of Thio. In retaliation for his failure he threatened to split Gaica in two, and allot each part to one of the two other high chiefs and thus 'de faire disparaître' [have removed] the high chief of Gaica (Goubin to Monsignore, 11 January 1899, in Chaulet 1985:210). This threat seems to have been carried out. At the end of 1903 Goubin commented that for the last two years Gaica had not had a chief and 'nous sommes soumis au chef protestant de Loessi' [we are subject to the Protestant chief of Lösi] (Goubin to ?, 23 December 1903, in Chaulet 1985:82). Two years later the same Father speaks of Zeula 'rétabli chef' [reinstated as chief] (Goubin to ?, 25 December 1905, in Chaulet 1985:82).

The Protestant missionaries in Lifu were also critical of this longing and eagerness to leave but in addition they saw a positive side to it, in as much as Lifuans were going to Australia where they could be exposed to 'civilization' with beneficial feedback to the communities upon their return. Furthermore the trade
vessels were mainly English. In a climate of high tension between French colonial and religious authorities, the British missionaries in Lifu never took an official stand against the labour recruitment as did the Presbyterian missionaries in the New Hebrides. As a result of missionaries' complaints, in March 1869 Captain Palmer of the Royal Navy received instructions to sail from Sydney to New Caledonia to inquire into 'the kidnapping of natives alleged to be carried on by vessels flying the British flag' (1871:1).

In his account of 'blackbirders' practice in the South Seas, Palmer wrote that '[n]o less than thirteen English vessels have been engaged in taking away natives from Lifu and Maré since 1865 – nearly all from Sydney' (1871:19). Being well aware of the official complaints made by some Protestant missionaries, he was puzzled to learn that the French governor Guillain claimed that the missionaries in the Loyalty Islands 'connived at this traffic' (1871:11). Palmer tried to persuade Guillain of the groundlessness of his claims: 'I showed him the memorial from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in which they complain of what has been going on, and ask for an investigation' (1871:11). He then commented on the idea that the LMS's involvement in the traffic had been fostered by the French commandant in Lifu, and viewed it as French retaliation against British policy in the Pacific. Howe has argued that the strong opposition to the labour trade by some Protestant missionaries who considered it 'slave trading' has been uncritically generalized to the whole region (Howe 1977:96).

In the years in which the greatest number of Loyalty Islanders were working in Queensland the Marist Fathers invariably commented that men were forced to leave to escape the corvées required by the Administration. These complaints permeated the Catholic correspondence of those years. They were ambiguous in their attitudes to French colonial rule. It could help to buttress Catholicism, but it was also viewed as a competing force in influence and for the supply of labour. In his letters Fabre denounced the system of forced labour imposed by the colonial Administration on Lifuans (Fabre to Rougeyron, 13 December 1867, APM/ONC 208):
The people at large are exasperated. This year more than a hundred young men have left on different vessels which called in, preferring exile to the dreadful conditions imposed on them here. If somebody tries to stop them, they plunge into the water and start swimming towards the liberating vessels. Protestants are no better treated than Catholics (Fabre to Rougeyron, 13 December 1867, APM/ONC 208).

Unlike Clive Moore (1985), who has articulated the debate on 'blackbirding' by rejecting the idea of kidnapping altogether yet has stressed the elements of exploitation involved in the labour trade, Howe's argument is that in the case of the Loyalty Islands it is inappropriate to speak of kidnapping and deception, because young men were leaving with great eagerness and had some knowledge of what to expect. But Howe does not give enough credence to the fact that the islanders were exploited as passengers on board the recruiting ships and as labourers on the plantations. Although some islanders preferred to remain in Australia (and the missionaries' correspondence seems to substantiate Howe's claim concerning Lifuan's willingness to leave) these accounts are not neutral. The Marists' complaints dated from the mid-1860s, which corresponded with the beginning of the labour trade to Queensland and also with French annexation of Lifu (1864), while the LMS responded to the recruitment following their own political agenda. Their complaints were dictated more by self-interest than by idealism.

Howe also ascribes to this mobility the fluctuation of the 'apparent numerical decline in population' in the Loyalties. But again, by taking this stance he neglects the high mortality during the crossing and on the plantations, and the possibility of diseases being introduced by returned islanders. Corris, in dealing with the question of sickness and mortality rate during the labour trade, claimed that from the late 1880s onwards they 'declined steadily' (1970:48), which means that at the time of greatest Lifuan presence in Queensland sanitary conditions

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4 In a properly nuanced use of French, *jeunes gens* designates young men and not simply young people in general.

5 The work of Moore (1985) offers a new perspective on the history of the labour trade by shifting the focus from men as individual agents, which is central in Howe's analysis, to communal strategies adopted by islanders in their engagements with recruiters.
were at their worst. This leads to a contested issue, as controversial as 'blackbirding', namely depopulation.

THE DEPOPULATION DEBATE AND IMMIGRATION POLICY

As elsewhere in the South Pacific, interpretations of the engagement of New Caledonian islanders with Europeans have remarked on the detrimental consequences that these interactions had on the indigenous demographic profile. Massive depopulation in the 19th century Pacific due to several interacting factors has been argued; Métais (1953) has presented it as a case of massive population decline. He established that until the 1920s there had been a 'diminution sensible' [notable decrease] of the population followed by a 'faible diminution' [slight decline] until 1926. From then onwards a 'lente remontée' [slow recovery] took place (1953:101). Several reasons are given to account for this trend, such as warfare, abortion, the practice of abandoning the elderly, famine, imported diseases, low fertility, and the widespread use of alcohol. This view has been reformulated by later writers. In her work on the 1878 revolt, Dousset saw the colonial policy of land alienation as detrimental to the survival of the indigenous population which, she argued, was doomed 'spirituellement et matériellement à une mort lente et irrémédiable' [spiritually and materially to a slow and inevitable death] (1970:76). This dramatic decline is presented also by Dornoy (1984). Between 1887 and 1901 the population of New Caledonia decreased by 32 per cent and by 1927 it was down to half of the estimated population of 1853 (1984:41).

Many of the studies dealing with historical demography have been undertaken with the assumptions of the 'fatal impact' theory, which was rooted in the Spencerian principle of the 'survival of the fittest': the indigenous population, as a consequence of the European colonial presence, was doomed to be extinguished by imported diseases, and by land alienation. Figures were analyzed in this light and depopulation was generalized to the whole region without questioning the accuracy of the available data. Recent studies by historians and demographers have challenged this taken-for-granted framework. Examining the

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6 See Shlomowitz (1981) on the islanders' capacity to resist when recruited in Queensland.

7 But see McArthur (1967) who has challenged the uncritical assumption of general depopulation. When great loss of population occurred she considered epidemics and imported contagious diseases to be the major cause.
issue of depopulation for the French Overseas Territories in the Pacific, Rallu emphasizes that each single case must be considered in its own right and that 'the most famous cases of depopulation must not be extended to the whole south Pacific region' (1991a:177). His reconstruction of the past population trends in the Marquesas and Tahiti shows for both countries a heavily decreasing population, yet the overall depopulation ratios for the two areas have been quite different. Rallu argues that the Marquesas may represent the most dramatic case of depopulation in the Pacific, but he warns against extrapolating this trend to the whole region (1991a:177).

In reconsidering historical demography for single Pacific islands, researchers argue for divergent positions.8 Stannard (1989) has compared the later trend in the works of researchers dealing with historic demography of the Americas and those dealing with the Pacific. He contends that in the former case the conventional opinion of a small population at the time of initial contacts with Europeans has been challenged. For example the indigenous population of North America is today considered to be 18 million compared to previous estimates of that population between one and 10 million people (1989:xv). In the Pacific an opposite trend has become conventional conviction. Stannard challenges this position with regard to Hawaii. He contends that the estimates taken at the time of early European contacts were conservative. He rejects the conventional estimates that in 1778 between 200 000 and 300 000 people lived in the archipelago on the grounds that the estimates made by James King of Cook's voyages were biased due to the fact that the population was unevenly distributed on the windward/leeward side of the islands (1989:22) and ships could not approach shore on the windward coast, the most inhabited (1989:18). King also believed that the island contained no inland population. Pointing out all the shortcomings of previous estimates, Stannard argues for a population of at least 800 000, a figure closer to the present-day population of the archipelago (1989:59).

A different position has been argued by Shineberg (1983) in relation to historical demography on New Caledonia. She has considered earlier estimates inflated and has challenged the use which has been made of 19th century official census figures regarding New Caledonia by supporters of the depopulation

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8 These divergent views are often based on benchmarks set by Captain Cook in his late 18th century voyages. These population estimates vary in accuracy and often were based on mere impressions. In some cases they are considered underestimations (see Stannard 1989), in other cases as overestimations (see McArthur 1967).
hypothesis, an hypothesis which, she argued, was uncritically shared by both sides of the political spectrum. In fact this perspective was adopted by people with different and divergent political agendas: on the one hand to justify the introduction of foreign indentured labour which was considered more easy to control; on the other hand to justify the creation of reserves as a measure against the rapid depopulation of the indigenous population. To corroborate her claim Shineberg analyzed the available data for the 19th century and showed that the census of 1887, which has often been selected as the starting point for many of the above-mentioned evaluations, was based on inaccurate figures. She argued that the decrease in population from 1887 to 1891 (the figures for which she considered to be closer to those of the 1880 Survey) was due to an inaccurate estimate of the indigenous population in 1887. To substantiate her claim she presented figures for the five areas into which New Caledonia was arbitrarily divided at the time, and compared them to the 1880 Survey. The data from the Loyalty Islands especially were highly inflated in the 1887 Census. Marists and LMS missionaries had kept records of islanders since the middle of the 1860s, and they had always indicated a much lower figure. Shineberg identified the different interests behind these two surveys which could have distorted the results. Thus, in the aftermath of the 1878 insurrection, white settlers wanted to quantify the number of islanders and were pleased to find that they were fewer than expected (1983:36). In 1887 there was a different concern, when the issue was the imposition of a head tax on each male aged between 21 and 55.

Howe (1977:ch.14) has already re-examined the question of depopulation for the Loyalty Islands, questioning pre-existing assumptions. He analyzed the different factors which are usually considered to have been the major contributing causes of the decline, such as the introduction of firearms, new diets, clothing, and imported diseases. He assessed each one of these factors and drew the conclusion that they did not drastically affect the demography of Loyalty Islanders in the 19th century. Howe contended that if there was a decline in the population this was due to a decrease in fertility rather than to an increase in mortality rates, as well as to the absences of young men contracted to work in the sugar cane plantations in Queensland. He contrasted this with the situation on the Grande Terre, where 'epidemics, alcoholism, brutal suppressions of revolt by the French soldiers ... loss of land, fragmentation and isolation ... [resulted in] a high

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9 The 1887 Census gives 16 520 inhabitants in the Loyalty Islands whereas the missionaries in their estimates for the second part of the century gave figures which varied slightly, but were always between 11 500 and 12 000.
death rate and an extremely low birth rate because of abortions and sterility': from 27 000/30 000 in 1887 to 16 290 in 1906 (Howe 1977: 158).

A closer examination of the available figures and the accounts left by early writers shows a divergent range of opinions. Early estimates made by travellers, colonial officials, and missionaries, were mere speculations. Jouan presented the Protestant estimates for the Loyalty group (15 400), with Lifu having 7000 inhabitants, but noted that the Catholic estimates were lower (1861:no.117). The following year Rochas estimated 12 000 inhabitants in the whole group, 5000 of whom resided in Lifu (1862:98). However, by the mid-1860s more accurate surveys were conducted by missionaries.

In 1863 the Catholic Mission estimated the total population to be under 6000, comprising 5000 Protestants and 800 Catholics (Fabre to Favre, 20 November 1863, APM/ONC 208). In 1866, following an instruction from the French authorities, the first comprehensive census of the population of the island was undertaken. Lifuans, according to the LMS, numbered 5898 (Whitehouse:PMB 149:40-41). The Catholic and Protestant missionaries' estimates were probably more accurate than those given by different writers of the time, having being taken after the missions were well established throughout the island. These same sources also made reference to the high mortality rate of the population. In the same year as this survey, Fabre wrote of 'deux épidémies qui ont visité notre île successivement, en 1865 et en 1866 et qui ont emporté une partie de la population' [two epidemics which have ravaged our island one after the other, in 1865 and 1866, and have carried off a part of the population] (Fabre to Rougeyron, 27 July 1866, APM/ONC 208). But these were not the first of such episodes. Father Gaide's account, 'Quelques notes sur l'ouvrage de M.McFarlane' (PMB/AAN 50.3), referred to an earlier epidemic in 1860/1861, the death toll of which he estimated to be as high as 'le quart et même le tiers de la population' [a quarter and even one third of the population].

Other clues to demographic trends can be extrapolated from the accounts relating to baptisms in articulo mortis. As Rallu has remarked in questioning the accuracy of early baptism and death registrations in Oceania, deaths were often registered as baptisms until the whole population was converted (1991a:169, 1991b:407). This is evident in the earlier Marist correspondence, where the number of baptisms often equals that of deaths, a fact explicated by the missionaries themselves. The message conveyed from Paris to the Mission in New Caledonia emphasized baptism. The Superior General Favre, commenting on the possibility of the indigenous population being supplanted by whites, said:
'Si ces pauvres naturels sont condamnés à disparaître, nous tâcherons d'en sauver le plus possible pour l'éternité' [If these poor natives are condemned to vanish, we will try to save as many as we can for Eternity] (Favre to Goujon, 12 June 1872, APM/ONC 208).

In several reports to his superiors Fabre stressed that the number of people being baptized was increasing, but added that soon afterwards 'Tous à peu près sont morts' [Almost all have died] (Fabre to Poupinel, 4 May 1860, APM/ONC 208). The following year he made the same remark (Fabre to Rougeyron, 31 October 1861, APM/ONC 208). In 1864 Father Gaide, again weighing the achievements of missionary activity, felt compelled to underline the fact that the majority of those baptized had died, 'et un bon nombre étaient des enfants' [and a good number were children] (Gaide to Favre, ? March 1864, APM/ONC 208).

On the Protestant side, MacFarlane, whose period of residence in Lifu coincided with those of Fabre and Gaide, wrote that the indigenous population was 'like that of nearly all the islands in the Pacific, on the decrease' (1873:4). Fabre reformulated this statement a few years later. In 1873 he expressed concern for the lack of natural growth; despite the increasing number of births, the population 'reste stationnaire ou diminue par la mortalité des enfants' [is stable or declining, because of infant mortality] (Fabre to Poupinel, 8 January 1873, APM/ONC 208).

The interpretation of the available data is beset with difficulties of various kinds. This perception of a rapid population decline emerges from the letters of the missionaries as well as from other colonial texts. But was a high incidence of infant death a fact within indigenous demographic patterns or was it the result of interactions with Europeans? From consideration of the scanty figures available it seems that if any decline took place it happened in the last decades of the 19th century. In fact the LMS estimated the population of Lifu at 6249 in 1875 and 6576 in 1880; but at the turn of the century (1901) it had declined to 5488, to rise again to 5859 in 1906 and to 6220 in 1910 (Howe 1977:155). Yet both Marists and LMS missionaries stressed in their accounts a loss of young children in the early 1860s.

Emma Hadfield, speaking about her experience in the Loyalties remarked:

in spite of their neglect of all hygienic laws of cleanliness, these dirty, lazy, good-tempered people seem, by all accounts, to have enjoyed splendid health ... But now ... foreign diseases ... are carrying off the people in great numbers;

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10 Sarasin, however, gives the figure of 5592 inhabitants in 1911 (1929a:24).
so much so that the population has fallen off considerably – at present it is almost stationary (1920:191).

She also noted the 'fall in the birth-rate in native families of every class' (1920:182). Her observations seem to give credit to the idea of a decreasing population in the 1860s.

But others have written stressing the opposite point of view. Lemire assessed the population of Lifu at 8500, of which 1670 were Catholics and 6830 Protestants, and concluded that in contrast to the main island, where the population was dying off, that of the Loyalties 's’accroît de jour en jour' [increases day by day] (1884:215). Where these figures came from, he does not say. Sarasin in 1915 wrote along the same lines, marking the difference between the Loyalties and the main island: 'Depuis 1885 le chiffre des habitants n’a en effet baissé que de quelques centaines, contre 9000 en Calédonie' [Since 1885 the number of inhabitants has decreased only by a few hundreds, as against 9000 in [New] Caledonia] (1915:9). In his later work he made some very interesting comments on the new available data of the 1926 Census. The census of 1926 showed 9812 inhabitants in the Loyalty Islands, a decrease of 1094 from 1921, which was higher than the decrease of 1053 for the whole period 1885-1921. But Sarasin considered this 'nicht ... eine wirkliche Abnahme, sondern ... eine Verschiebung' [not a real decrease but rather a transfer] (1929a:23). He described the willingness of Lifuan men to work on ships, in mines and ports, and also mentioned women's mobility. He commented thus on the 1926 Census:

We believe we are right in assuming that a good proportion of these persons missing on the Loyalty Islands have been included in the Caledonian Census, because the 1926 result there indicates 17 103 natives, i.e. an increase of 909 persons since 1921. In my opinion, this is, however, not an increase of the Caledonian native – though it would be welcome – but is actually an immigration of Loyalty people (Sarasin, 1929a:23).

He then enumerated the various reasons for the decline in the main island: imported diseases, new clothing, excessive drinking, and the lost interest in living and procreating (1929a:24). The Loyalty Islands’ estimates indicated a smaller
population decline and also a more favourable sex ratio than in the main island. In fact Sarasin attributed lower fertility to this unbalanced sex ratio. In 1911 the adult population of the main island was made up of 4822 women and 6467 men, and among the children 2526 females compared to 3087 males. Yet the data for 1926 show that the gap was getting smaller. This sex ratio had replaced a previous pattern, reported by early writers, of more females than males (1929a:23). Although Sarasin ascribed the trend on the Loyalties to a different colonial history to that of the Grande Terre, he also attributed these demographic differences to the fact that Loyalty Islanders 'bereitwilliger der europäischen Zivilisation und Christianisierung entgeengekommen sind' [have willingly accepted European civilization and Christianization] thanks to their 'höheren Intelligenz' [higher intelligence] (Sarasin 1929a:25).

Although these sources present divergent statements regarding demographic trends, they do agree on the marginality of some causes which elsewhere had been given prominence in the depopulation debate. Colonial and mission narratives all dismissed warfare and alcohol as having much effect on the death toll. In fact, though warfare in Lifu was frequent it was ritualized. Present-day accounts concur with past interpretations. Unlike other aspects of Lifuan social life, the memory of this past has been retained and passed on in oral accounts: people can still indicate the beach on Chateaubriand Bay where the southern and northern districts would meet to do battle. The death toll was very low. MacFarlane, who had observed such a confrontation, remarked that 'few lives are lost' (1873:7). And fighting does not seem to have altered much even after the introduction of firearms (Howe 1977:ch.12).\footnote{Stannard also finds no support for the idea that 'pre-1778 warfare acted as a population growth check in Hawai‘i ... there is no evidence at all of a high mortality rate from whatever wars did occur' (1989:62).} In other areas of the South Pacific, conversely, the introduction of firearms resulted in a redrawing of the relationships between and within groups, in increased fighting and in higher mortality. Scarr cites the case of a local community who had prevented an enemy party from being recruited to cut them off from accessing modern rifles, and that of a group of bushmen which had received modern firearms thus upsetting the balance of power with their enemies in their favour (1967: 22). But Shineberg (1971) has argued against the uncritical assumption that the introduction of guns in the Pacific had devastating effects. Comparing the nature of European firearms with that of indigenous weapons, she maintained that early confrontations were not necessarily determined by European technological superiority. To assume this
means disregarding the limitations of these arms as well as the effectiveness of indigenous warfare strategies.

Another contributing factor discussed in the depopulation debate is the effect of the introduction of alcohol. Again, in the case of Lifu, missionaries' correspondence substantiated that alcohol was rare in Lifu until well into the 20th century (e.g. Hadfield 1920:217; Péter 27 July 1945). The yearly accounts of the Catholic Mission of Drueaulu from 1911 through 1915 dismissed drunkenness as a problem; this was affirmed by Father Noble in charge of the Mission of Eacho.12 Howe (1977: 152) has stressed this line of argument for the whole Loyalty group and Shineberg (1967: 154-155) for the main island. All accounts, however, refer to the addiction to tobacco. Erskine wrote of 'importunate beggers for tobacco' (1853:363); a few years later Jouan expressed a similar view: 'Le tabac est un des objets de commerce qui ont le plus de cours' [Tobacco is one of the most traded commodities] (1861: no.118). The same remark would be made by Péter some 60 years later (2 January 1933).

Some of the narratives seem to lend weight to the depopulation hypothesis. A close investigation of the data available for Lifu, however, suggests a decrease but not on the massive scale which brought about depopulation in other Pacific islands (e.g. Marquesas, Tasmania, Erromanga, Aneityum, Epi). Thus missionaries, who were in constant daily contact with the local people and had a better first-hand knowledge of them, seem to share the perspective regarding the decline of the population during the first period of the establishment of the mission and on its cause being mainly connected with introduced diseases.

Unfortunately, mortality records for the early years of the missions are lacking, so it is hard to assess from the population figures what kind of changes were taking place, and whether there was a decrease in fertility, as Howe argued (1977), or an increase in mortality, or both. Because we don't know the age pattern of mortality, we can only speculate on age-selective diseases and epidemics which had immediate repercussions on mortality but long-term effects on fertility (cf. McArthur 1967: 351). In fact the cohorts born in the post-epidemic periods, as was the case in the 1860s in Lifu, would be small with rebounding effects when they entered the reproductive age. When Erskine visited Lifu he assessed the legacy left on the island by the wrecked crews of two British

12 The yearly reports from Drueulu (1911 to 1915) and Eacho (1911 to 1922) are in folder Lifou/Gaica (CRS 13) and folder Lifou/Nathalo/Eacho (CRS 12, no.2), Oceania Marist Province Archives, AAN.
Table 4.1: *De jure* Drueulu population*

<table>
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<th>Children (under 15)</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>124</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>156</td>
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<tr>
<td>June, 1945</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>386</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, 1952</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>421**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The question asked 'Quel est le nombre d'indigènes dépendants de sa tribu' [How many dependants from his tribe]; thus I have considered these figures to include also Drueulu people not residing in the tribe (for a discussion of the notion of *de jure* population, see Chapter Five).

**Both cards are signed by the same person and carry the same date, 20 May 1952.

Source: Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, Service Territorial des Archives, Nouméa.

Table 4.2: Wedrumel population

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<td>1937</td>
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<td>72</td>
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<td>1945</td>
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<td>1946</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>101</td>
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Source: Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, Service Territorial des Archives, Nouméa.
Table 4.3: Qanono population

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<td>1948</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, *Service Territorial des Archives*, Nouméa.

Table 4.4: Hapetra population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Children (under 15)</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>242*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>252*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As for Drueulu in 1952 two surveys were carried out.*

*Source:* Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, *Service Territorial des Archives*, Nouméa.

vessels, who had spent from six to eight months in the bay in 1848, in terms of 'the foulest English oaths ...[and] disease' (1853:363). Jouan (1861:no.118) as well ascribed the short life span of Lifuans to asthmatic and syphilitic diseases.

The *compte rendu spirituel* [religious report] of the parish of Drueulu for the period July 1881 to July 1882 gives 295 Catholics and 200 heretics, nine births, and 10 deaths. These data seem fairly accurate, in the sense that the baptisms are
registered differentiating children and adults, and give some idea of the number of deaths compared to the number of births.\textsuperscript{13} Table 4.1 reports the data available for Drueulu from 1913 to the early 1950s.

A comparison with the figures available for the other three tribal settlements of Gaica (see Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) shows a tendency to increase from the beginning of the century. When disaggregated figures are available, however, it seems that there is no correlation between the increase in the total population and higher fertility. For example, in 1932 Wedrumel had 52 children under 15 compared to 68 in 1924, yet the total population had not increased because of the rebounding fertility effect of children reaching reproductive age. Again, between 1921 and 1932 Qanono saw an increase in the total population although the age group under 15 had diminished. Since the adult population had increased one could presume that life expectancy was longer or that some adult migrants had returned home.\textsuperscript{14}

As I have mentioned above, we are obliged to rely on those assessments of population made by missionaries such as Péter, the Swiss lay woman who spent 30 years in Lifu from 1923 to 1951, and Marguerite Anker, another woman missionary, who operated the first maternity clinic (Moria) within the pastoral school in Bethanie. The missionaries provided health care to islanders long before the Administration took charge of it.

The number of our women expecting a child is incredible! I believe at least ten in the next two months! It is clear proof of the vitality of this race when it is not ravaged by bad sicknesses (Péter, 22 July 1927).

Le nombre de nos femmes attendant des enfants est incroyable! Je crois bien qu'il y en aura une dizaine dans les deux prochains mois! C'est une preuve manifeste de la vitalité de cette race quand les mauvaises maladies ne la ravagent pas.

The reference to disease and sickness once more informs missionary statements. Although it was not the purpose of these texts to consider population issues, today they nevertheless can provide important clues to the history of the indigenous population demography. In spite of the fact that causes of sickness are usually not mentioned, it is quite plausible that the mobility of Lifuans resulted in

\textsuperscript{13} In January 1880, after months of drought and shortage of food, a storm ravaged Lifu with disastrous consequences for the gardens, but the following year the harvest was good. (Fabre to ?, 28 January 1880, APM/ONC 208; Goubin in Chaulet 1985: 54-69).

\textsuperscript{14} The registration of the population \textit{de jure} was in this period the duty of the Gendarmerie. It was probably based on place of residence more than on residence rights (see Chapter Five for the present-day definition of population \textit{de jure} by the \textit{Etat Civil}).
the introduction of diseases acquired while working in the plantations or on board European vessels. So a further reason contributed to a decrease in population, although on a reduced scale compared with other Pacific islands.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{HUNAHHMI}

Another contested issue related to population mobility is that of resettlement. Again the question is how to situate Lifu in the Pacific context where the missionaries' intervention in the relocation of villages was widespread and has been acknowledged. Howe states that such population movements common elsewhere in the Pacific did not occur in the Loyalty Islands. He challenged the missionaries' claim of 'have changed settlement patterns by grouping people in villages near the sea instead of their living inland as in pre-European times' (1977:112). Howe argued that by 1840, before the arrival of missionaries, the coastal villages were already established and subsequently the major inland villages were not abandoned (1977:112). However, the oral accounts I gathered from some elderly men and women from Gaica substantiate the missionaries' writings. The most recent of such displacements occurred in the 1920s when, ironically, the coastal village of Peng was moved inland to a site people used to cultivate their gardens. The new settlement became Bethela,\textsuperscript{16} and later on Hapetra, the name by which the settlement is still known. Old people from Hapetra who had experienced the relocation are still alive; they describe it as a measure taken by Dr Tivollier, who justified it on health grounds – an interpretation which villagers still challenge. They believed they were removed because it was convenient, for a narrow road linked We to Drueulu and the new site was along the same road. At that time people resisted the move and for a while the community broke up in two parties, one accepting relocation, the other remaining behind. At the end of 1930 Péter commented that for the first time Gaica could be reached by land:

\textsuperscript{15} Leprosy, for example, was an imported disease. Writers have suggested that it had been introduced to New Caledonia by Protestant teachers returning from abroad. In 1909, 75 cases were registered in Lifu (Howe 1977:148) (see also Péter, 7 October 1935, PMB).

\textsuperscript{16} A man from Hapetra explained that the toponym Bethela [Bethel] was given by Pastor Bergeret in remembrance of a biblical journey undertaken by Jacob.
There are three villages, one of which has been relocated from the seaboard on the cliff a few months ago, for reasons of convenience, because of the gardens and for health reasons (Péter, 7 December 1930).

Although Guiart agrees with the interpretation that village settlement patterns were imposed by missionaries, he gives a different account of Peng's resettlement. This he ascribes to the high chief of the time, Cope Zeula, the reason being 'pour s'établir le long de la route carrossable' [to settle along the carriage road] (1992a:299). Before the relocation process was under way, Peng was already considered a hunahmi, a word translated today as 'tribal settlement', but literally meaning 'the place at which to pray' (the ruins of the temple prove it). People speak of the tribe as the place where they gathered in order to be close to the mission. This pattern of resettling people from the coast inland, along a road, seemed to have been the case in other parts of Lifu, probably due to the difficult access by sea to the island (Péter, 27 July 1931). Wapotro gave a slightly different interpretation of the location of hunahmi, stressing that the choice of moving sometimes was undertaken in order to 'différencier le nouveau culte du vieux culte' [distinguish the new from the old worship].

The settlements of the past, hunapo, were more dispersed and were situated near the helep, cultivated gardens. The location of a lineage's hunapo, although the dispersed settlement does not physically exist anymore, is still known and constitutes an element of identity. People explained that they used to disperse for safety 'par crainte des guerres' [for fear of wars]. Oral commentaries maintain that the site where the present village of Drueuelu is located was already occupied by people before the arrival of the missionaries, but it was a hunapo composed of related families and not a hunahmi, a settlement in which groups of different kinship loyalties co-reside. Other hunapo were situated in areas that are today used for gardening. Father Goubin remarked:

17 I was told by people from Hapetra that the high chief of the time, Puiono, father of Cope Zeula, did not oppose relocation.
18 In the formal speeches at a wedding ceremony people make reference to the hunapo.
19 It should not be confused with hnafetra, which I have translated as 'root-place', following the French translation people gave me. This is not a settlement like hunapo, but rather a place which is associated with a lineage's ancestors.
Good Christians usually attend the mass, especially on Monday the church is full. Then they go to the gardens which are far away from the seacoast and do not return until Saturday (Goubin to ?, 18 May 1879, in Chaulet 1985:37).

Les bons chrétiens assistent généralement à la messe, surtout le lundi l'église est pleine, puis ils vont dans leurs plantations qui sont très loin du bord de la mer et n'en reviennent que le samedi.

MacFarlane viewed the fact that the gardens were at a distance from the roads as an indigenous strategy to avoid the high chief's appropriation of crops (1873:4). He also noted that the island was divided into 55 villages, and a few chapters later he remarked that people live in 'about one hundred and fifty hamlets, assembling for public worship at different centres where teachers were located.' (1873:79). This is one of the few instances where Catholic and Protestant narratives expressed the same view.

I am well aware of situations where the historical and ethnographic evidence counter the oral narratives which account for a specific practice in terms of missionary actions. Kahn argued that Wamirans of Papua New Guinea 'unanimously claim that it was the missionaries who first taught them to domesticate and eat pigs' (1983:108), though evidence indicates that they did so before interactions with Europeans took place. In the case of Lifu, without archeological evidence to support or counter, I tend to privilege the interpretation expressed in oral accounts.

WOMEN WHO STAYED BEHIND

Mobility in the 19th and early 20th centuries was mainly a male prerogative among Lifuans, although there are a few references in the literature to women. Most of the men in one way or another, for shorter or longer periods, did partake in this mobility. Writing about a student of the Protestant school, Péter remarked that he was one of the few men of Lifu 'qui n'ait pas été en contact avec la vie grossière des bateaux, des mines et des chantiers' [who has not been in contact with the coarse life of boats, mines, and building sites] (Péter, Lifu, 15 May 1931).

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20 Today Lifu has 36 tribes (37 including the settlement in the nearby island of Tiga, which administratively is part of Lifu).
Péter did not complain when the absences of men were of short duration; on the contrary, she thought it could be beneficial to them and to their families who were back in the village. She is quite explicit about it:

This boat that has not been coming to Lifu for years has again begun to come for men to unload ships in the New Hebrides, and they are brought back a week or ten days later ... This allows some of our people to earn some money without having to stay away too long from their families and from their cultivations (Péter, Lifu, 8 September 1935).

Ce bateau [le Lapérouse] qui depuis bien des années ne touchait plus Lifou a recommencé à venir prendre des hommes ici pour les déchargements à faire aux Hébrides et il les ramène une semaine ou dix jours après ... Cela permet à quelques-uns de nos gens de gagner un peu d’argent sans s’éloigner longtemps de leur famille et de leur cultures.

These absences had repercussions on the communities of origin, both at the domestic and at the tribal level. Those who left during the period of the labour trade were young unmarried men, but afterwards the age structure of the men taking part in this mobility had changed. (Gaide in 1873 indicated that boys when they reached the age of 12 to 15 years wanted to leave.) Despite the lack of reference to the age of absentees, from the missionaries’ texts one can infer that mobility had become an experience involving married men too. The sex ratio was skewed, and the division of labour along gender lines had to be modified. It is highly likely that this long involvement as migrants had repercussions on the sexual division of labour, which today is quite flexible. Moreover, in several narratives I gathered from men, the idea was conveyed that in the past men used to get married at an older age than they do today, though this is an idea which my data on Drueulu seem to contradict. This too could have been influenced by accounts of long male absences from the village.

Long absences had far-reaching consequences for communal life. In 1945 Péter described a community made up mainly of old and young, and expressed her concern:

We are frightened by the large number of men requisitioned to work on the Grande Terre. Only old people and children are left ... How will the gardens be prepared this year? Maintaining them, that is women’s work but preparing the ground, it is men who do it (Péter, Lifu, 27 July 1945).

Nous sommes effrayées par la quantité d’hommes réquisitionnés pour travailler sur la Grande Terre. Il ne reste presque plus que les vieux et les enfants ... Comment se feront les plantations cette année? Pour entretenir, c’est bien le travail des femmes, mais pour préparer la terre, ce sont les hommes qui le font.
The situation had not changed the following year, although social activities went on in the village. Women who stayed behind had to assume responsibilities for work previously considered to be men's tasks, such as the construction of a new temple. Their participation in the work made it possible to complete the building: 'Ce sont elles qui cherchaient l'eau, la chaux, qui remuaient le mortier' [It is they who went looking for water, for lime, who mixed the lime mortar] (Péter, Lifu, 5 May 1946).

It can be argued that women became engaged in activities that were traditionally male-oriented, and that the missionaries, in times of scarcity of labour, seemed to comply with this. But another change that was brought about by missionaries in this new social context of families headed by females strengthened the position newly acquired by women. Paul Zöngö explained the role in the past of the bachelors' house: there were large houses [hmelôm]. I saw only the posts of these houses; they have told us that they were to accommodate boys. It is there that they learn history. They eat the word. The old man is the book. Now everything is christianized. Today one does not know too much of our past. These schools have been replaced by missionaries' schools and later on by government schools. At that time there was the war at We between the two powers [Wetr and Lösi]. The hmelôm was also used to learn how to make weapons and to learn war dances (Zöngö, December 1989).

As a result of the dissolution of these schools and of the frequent absences of men, women became involved in the oral transmission of knowledge: oral narratives, clan histories, and the networks of exchanges and alliances. In a patrilineal society, with patrilocal residence, men stress that knowledge is their prerogative, but in a society with a long-standing practice of male mobility changes have also occurred in this sexual division of domains of knowledge. I am not implying that this knowledge constitutes a static set of elements, for it is transitional, and reformulated anew by each generation. What I am arguing is that in a period when islanders, especially the Catholics, were forbidden by missionaries to relate stories of the past to their children, the evening gatherings within each hut still provided a way to keep alive some of their past experiences,
and women now played a more active part in this transmission. No mention is made in missionary texts of how women took charge of this. Yet in oral accounts this does emerge albeit in a somewhat disguised manner. Men who claim exclusive rights to 'true knowledge' when they narrate episodes concerning the history of their families often acknowledge that what they know was told to them by a female member of the family. During the frequent absences of men it was women who passed on the 'knowledge' that was, and still is, considered a male prerogative. A master of the soil of Drueulu, unable to recount specific events belonging to his family's history, told me to go and see his sister married in a different tribe: 'Elle connaît la légende mieux que moi' [She knows the legend better than I do]. He explained this by saying that his father was interned in Cila (leper colony situated near Nang in the northern part of Lifu, see Map 2) when he was very young, and therefore he did not interact with him as much as his elder sister had done. Women were not just 'une courroie de transmission pour la socialité des hommes' [a relay for men's sociality] (Mathieu 1991:12); in genealogical transmission they were active agents. As such, they informed their narratives with elements which belonged to their own places of origin and not to those of their husbands. The contribution of different sources in men's formal speeches comes clearly to the fore when they use metaphors and images which are often connected with the hnafeira [root-place] of their mother, an issue I will return to in Chapter Seven.

RETURNED LABOURERS AND WESTERN COMMODITIES

My account so far has shown a mobile population, one that has been in touch with European ideas, cash and goods for a long time. Now I want to examine how this new wealth was incorporated into the indigenous social system and how it has shaped Lifuans' notions of modernity. Historians have examined the impact on community life of new commodities taken home by returned labourers. Did they cause disruption or were they incorporated into the 'traditional' indigenous system? Douglas argued that in post European contact differential appropriation of goods did occur, potentially enhancing chiefly power and creating chiefly monopolies (Douglas 1982:402-408). Yet in Lifu where the social structure was informed by several intersecting hierarchical principles, albeit that leadership was more ascribed than achieved, new wealth as such did not challenge chiefly power as it had in other parts of Melanesia (Howe 1977: 115). Rather, it seems to have
been affiliation with missionaries that threatened chiefly power or enhanced it, as both the Protestant and the Catholic texts point to (Montrouzier to Yardin, 8 September 1858, APM/ONC 208). In fact, although Lifuan had access to European goods and cash very early, the customary system of sharing and reciprocity meant that these goods and cash were spread among the clans; accumulation was inhibited, therefore, and a 'class system' did not emerge (Howe 1977:115). But other elements of the indigenous social structure constrained the elaboration of a class system. In pre-contact societies consensus and consultation were very important and people used the threat of desertion as a customary sanction against chiefly abuse of power (Douglas 1982:406). This seems to have been the case even during the period of early contact with Europeans. Howe in fact remarks that 'Loyalty Islands society, largely because of the nature and strength of its socio-political organisation, proved remarkably resilient and able to accommodate and control many of the developments stimulated by commercial dealing with Europeans' (1977:116). Thus these new goods did not create a new élite or a new system of wealth.

This accommodation of goods and money offers a clue to understanding why Loyalty Islanders never developed cargo cults, as neighbouring South Pacific Islanders had frequently done. Steinbauer, in his volume on cargo cults, devoted a page to Lifu, expressing his view that during World War II a cargo cult appeared among the islanders. This author states that '[m]any of the ideals of the followers of John Frum ... were transmitted southwards to Lifu.' (1971:93) They were blended in a synthesis of 'the magical world of John Frum and the politics of a communist party' (:93). While in Lifu I was unable to elicit any suggestion that such a movement ever existed. People speak of all the goods that were available in Lifu during the time US troops were based in New Caledonia. They speak in terms of large quantities of food available and in terms of new commodities hitherto unknown to them.

The letters written during World War II by Péter convey the changes and the abundance brought about by the arrival of the US troops. Her letters of 1943 sharply contrasted with those of 1941 and 1942 when she remarked on the desperate situation in which everyone was in Lifu. The situation had vastly

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21 Further, chiefly societies usually constrain the development of cargo cult (Shineberg, pers. comm. November 1993).
22 Cf. with the account Nero (1989) gives of Palauan narratives on World War II which are informed by images of famine and privation.
23 Péter, 21 January 1942; 4 October 1942, 17 November 1942.
improved by 1943, and Péter noted that cash had never before been available to Lifuans in such a quantity:

Many are working for the army of occupation in Nouméa. They come back at the end of three months with good savings. The 'May' [yearly Protestant feast to collect money for the local mission] has more than tripled this year. And yet the hard times are not far away (Péter, 29 August 1943).

But this situation had to change with the departure of the US troops.²⁴ In 1946 Péter remarked that Lifuans no longer had at their disposal the same quantity of cash, and that as a result the 'mai' had greatly decreased (Péter, 13 September 1946). At the same time she mentioned the widespread diffusion of communist ideas (Péter, 27 October 1946). However, she made no reference in those years to the islanders' experience of plenty during the war period, nor to the paucity of the post-war period precipitating a cargo cult. Although abundance was soon over, oral narratives emphasize a positive perception of the war period when a US troop ship anchored in the waters off Lifu. The ensuing interaction between the soldiers and Lifuans over a short period has had enduring consequences (Henningham 1993)²⁵.

From Awaqtat's account, which opens this chapter, it seems that interactions with these new foreigners were a male prerogative. In her words there is no mention of women kept away from the Americans but rather her stress is on the language barrier which made Drueuluan women unwilling to approach the new foreigners. If this was the case, then today interactions of women and men with new foreigners (see Chapter Seven) are even more striking.

Another aspect that is worth exploring is how this accommodation of commodities and money has taken place in the social life of Lifuans. Although historians have stressed that new wealth as such did not displace traditional authority, it is interesting to consider how new ideas were incorporated into important social events, for example the wedding ceremony. It is one of the areas

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²⁴ For a comparison with the World War II experience elsewhere in the Pacific, see White and Lindstrom (1989).

²⁵ 'Une haine farouche à l'encontre de leurs Alliées': Attitudes to the American presence in New Caledonia 1943-45, Seminar Department of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 23 November 1993.
of social engagement which has become more creolized. First of all, a large amount of money is required in order to fulfil all the different obligations the bridegroom's family incurs at a marriage. This aspect is acknowledged by everyone, and today is considered one of the most singular features of a Lifuan marriage compared to the rest of New Caledonia. What is less well known is the importance that is given in the arrangement of a wedding ceremony to the preparation of *la valise*, a suitcase containing clothes and money which is prepared by the women of the bridegroom's side to give to the family of the bride after the ceremony is over. Another valise is prepared by the women of the bride's family for the prospective in-laws and for the bride, though the clothes prepared by the bride for her mother-in-law are put in an ordinary bag (see Chapter Eight). Although there is no rigid division of labour, in practice women say that to prepare *la valise* is mainly women's concern. When I took part in such activities, only women were present. To my knowledge nothing has been written about this practice, but it is interesting to note that it is in use also in parts of Vanuatu (e.g. Epi Island, Paama), with their own long-standing experience of mobility (Michael Young, personal comm., September 1993). Does *la valise* represent a symbol of plantation life that was taken back by returned labourers and integrated into the wedding ritual? A friend told me that when she married in 1966 a 'suitcase' was used, as it had been at her mother's wedding, and that the suitcase had replaced the *maano* [piece of cloth]. No-one commented on the fact that the piece of cloth was an imported good as well. Today, even when a wedding takes place in town *la valise* is always present and is prepared following the same procedure as in the village.

Howe concludes his chapter on 'Trade' drawing attention to an element which should not be minimized. Because of its importance for my argument of new kinds of changes taking place in the post-Matignon period (see Chapter Seven) I quote him directly:

> It is perhaps important to mention again, in this context of economic impact, that although Loyalty Islanders traded extensively with Europeans, their islands never supported a large resident European population; the Islanders were able to live their lives as they wished, spared the almost inevitable

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26 In British society of the period, young unmarried women would collect *trousseaux* in a box. Could *la valise* be attributed to English Protestant missionaries' influence? (Shineberg, pers. comm., November 1993).

27 I am not positing a genuine/spurious dichotomy, but rather I am interested in how Lifuans have assigned meanings to past practices (cf. Handler and Linnekin 1984).
implications of a frontier society in their midst (Howe 1977:116, emphasis is mine).

THE 20TH CENTURY

In this final section I am not pretending to compact into a few pages one century of external Lifuan mobility. I highlight some differences between Lifu and the main island regarding the question of mobility which I perceive central to my argument of how Lifuan men and women interact with foreigners. This brings us to the question of how they perceive changes and modernity.

In the late 19th century Lifuans began to be recruited for the main island of New Caledonia. In 1874 the nickel mining industry was established on the Grande Terre, with its major centres in Thio and Houailou. This labour-intensive activity required a large labour force and Loyalty Islanders were sought as labourers. Later they became the first Melanesians to migrate to Nouméa. In fact in 1893 the French ban on Melanesians was lifted for Loyalty Islanders wishing to work in the capital (Connell 1987a:88). Concerning this rural-urban mobility Hadfield remarked that 'with very few exceptions, all the natives go [to Nouméa] to work for a longer or shorter period of time' (1920:218). Nevertheless Lifuans still went overseas:

On the Laperouse I have seen the first young men from Lifu who are sailors and they recognised me (Péter, Sydney, 17 July 1933)

Au Lapérouse j'ai vu les premiers garçons Lifous qui sont matelots et ils m'ont bien reconnue.

It should be recalled that the capitation [head tax] was still required from each able-bodied man and this seems to have been a contributing factor to the departure of Lifuans. The missionary complained about the amount of work that the Administration was requiring from Lifuans. In a year when Lifu was struck by a cyclone, she remarked: 'cette année de misère ... la capitation est augmentée. C'est formidable.' [this year of misery ... head tax has increased. That is just wonderful] (Péter, 26 November 1933)

What seems to be novel is this missionary's reference to young women's willingness to leave for Nouméa. But although Péter wrote about the short absences of men in a positive light, she speaks in different terms when confronted with women's mobility. She denies women the complex repertoire of individual and collective motives that she is willing to ascribe to men. She assumes they were leaving simply because they wanted to subvert collective norms: they were trespassing. She positions herself quite differently when, a few months later, she
writes about men’s mobility (Péter, Lifu, 8 September 1935) and does not hesitate to state her opposition to women’s mobility:

One must say that those [women] who go there, who are willing to be recruited, generally do it because they have tired of being good and want to live a freer life. Never will we accept to find a girl for someone in Nouméa, not even for our best friends. It is too dangerous[!] (Péter, 1st June 1935).

Péter does not spell out what the dangers are, but her representation of urban life as a place of general female immorality emerges from her writing: generally speaking a young woman in town ‘finit par se mal conduire’ [ends up misbehaving]. In the same pages she recounted the story of a young woman, very much appreciated by the missionaries, who ended up working in town for a family. She, who was ‘le bras droit des missionnaires’ [the right arm of missionaries], is now portrayed as a ‘pauvre fille tombée’ [poor wayward girl]. We can imply that the danger in town is represented by ‘ses loisirs’ [her leisure activities] which the family she works for does not monitor as missionaries used to (Péter, 1 June 1935). Sometimes the family itself was the hazard.

Lifuans’ long-standing practice of mobility reached a peak after World War II, by which time women had become full participants in these movements. New Caledonia is one of the few areas in Melanesia characterized in the 20th century both by internal rural-urban migration and by overseas immigration. The presumption of a declining population was used by the French to introduce an open-door immigration policy. Although, as we have seen, scholars have questioned the depopulation hypothesis (more so in the Loyalties than in the Grande Terre), I am inclined to agree with Ward (1982) who argues that, in any case, the assumption that the indigènes were doomed to die out was instrumental in what followed. The French authorities encouraged massive immigration from France and from French-speaking countries (Wallis, Tahiti) (Connell 1987a). European migrants were attracted by well-paid jobs in the Administration and in the nickel industry.28 The indigenous people became outnumbered. Today New Caledonia has a population of 164 173 (1989 census) of whom 73 598 are Mélanésiens, who in the 1950s were a majority, but in 1983 comprised only 42.7

28 In the 1960s New Caledonia was the third largest exporter of nickel in the world.
per cent of the total and in 1989, 44.8 per cent. However in Lifu and the rest of the Loyalties, the indigenous population still represents 98.1 per cent of the total of 17,912.

Ward has examined the migration policies implemented by French authorities in New Caledonia. Drawing on the correspondence between New Caledonia, France, Australia, and the US Administration, he explores the patterns of labour migration to New Caledonia in the years 1945 to 1955 and the different and diverging interests that shaped this historical process. The interplay between external and internal factors is carefully examined: on the one hand, Indonesian independence forced the issue of repatriation of indentured labour forces (over 8600 Javanese were in New Caledonia by 1946) and Australia's objections brought an end to the proposal regarding the recruitment of Japanese indentured workers, thus encouraging the waves of migrants from Wallis and Tahiti.

On the other hand, pressure by the ruling French group in New Caledonia, opposing French immigration for fear that their own social and economic interests could be challenged by working class or peasant immigrants' demands for better working conditions, contributed to these trends. Ward dismisses the widespread opinion that French migration waves during the nickel boom of 1969 to 1974 caused the Kanak population to be outnumbered: in fact he affirms that the influx of these new migrants only added to the demographic trend already established by 1955 (Ward 1988:100). But Lifu never became a settlement colony; Drueulu never had any white settlers. So the effects of French immigration policy were not the same as on the main island.

This long past of mobility as well as the representations of Lifuans in colonial literature are both factors which impinged on Lifuans' ways of 29 Both the 1983 and the 1989 Censuses were under-reported. Rallu estimates that in 1989 Kanak were 45.6 per cent rather than 44.8 per cent of the total population (Rallu, 'Recent Population Trends in the French Overseas Territories in the Pacific', seminar, Demography Department, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 18 March 1993).

30 Although it is not within the scope of this chapter, I want to mention briefly the similarities during the 1950s between Australian, New Caledonia, and Italian authorities regarding the recruitment of Italian migrants to work in New Caledonia (FO/AA4556/1). Claiming scarcity of labour in New Caledonia, employers were looking for new sources of overseas labour. A memorandum of 30 January 1953 clearly stated that political reasons 'have compelled at least the temporary abandonment of employers' plans to import Japanese labour', resorting instead to Italian migrants coming from Italy and from Australia: 'The Italian migrants in Australia who are currently unemployed came to the notice of New Caledonia interests in late 1952...' (Department of External Affairs, Canberra, to the Australian Legation, Rome, AA/FO/4556/1).

31 Uncatalogued dossier 'We/Lifou' containing four folders, one for each tribe of Gaica, Service Territorial des Archives, Nouméa.
perceiving themselves. Referring to themselves making use of the word 'évolués/es' [developed] is today quite common for Lifuan men and women. Change is not considered bad per se. For example, I have never heard anyone in Lifu complaining about the introduction of new tools or automobiles which could facilitate someone's work and mobility.32 I found it quite revealing to follow the experience of the island of Tubai, designated as the administrative centre of the Austral Island Subdivision in the 1980s (Lockwood 1993). Similarities between rural Tahitians, specifically Tubuaians, and Lifuans are found in the access they have to 'virtually every consumer and luxury good available in the industrialized nations, including state-of-art electronics and late-model automobiles and trucks' (Lockwood 1993:5), as well as in the rhetoric of representation for islanders. In 1991 Tubuai was described by other Tahitians as more 'évolue' [developed], in the sense that 'Tubuaians are well integrated into the regional capitalist economy and that their material lifestyle is significantly Westernized' (Lockwood 1993:6).

Both Lifuan men and women are aware that their lives are vastly different from that of their fathers and mothers. Although mobility has increased more for women, the new means of transport (car and plane) represent a novelty for both. Elderly people also stress food as a big change, both in terms of kind (wider variety) and in terms of quantity. Lifuan narratives point also to women's wider access to the job market and to a cash economy. Today girls are more educated, with some women having a higher education level than their husband (this was the case, for example, with our hosts). And yet évolués/es Lifuans perceive their modernity distinctly from the Kamadra. Qene nōj, 'the way of land', is opposed to qene wi wi, 'the way of the French' (see Chapter Seven). Lifuans, in their eyes, as well as in the eyes of most Kanak,33 preserve a strong and stable identity compared with people from the main island. During the Women's Yearly General Assembly in 1992, which I have mentioned in Chapter Two, a male guest who had come with a delegation from the main island commented positively on being served by the younger first (protocols of serving and eating are important in

32 Even women's complaints about men's driving while drunk (I will return to this question in Part Two) are framed not in terms of getting rid of cars and going back to a pedestrian past but rather in terms of getting rid of alcohol.

33 Not all Kanak from the main island would agree. I remember a Kanak woman, a political activist from Canala, sarcastically telling me while we were having dinner together that I was twice a colonizer, in the sense of being white and working with Lifuans, themselves colonizers vis-à-vis Kanak from the main island. This rhetoric of representation is owed to the different colonial past of the two areas - Lifuans have not been dispossessed of their land as Kanak of the main island have, and have not been relocated - and to Lifuans' higher level of schooling and wider access to jobs in the public service, as substantiated by national statistics (INSEE 1989).
Lifu). In recollecting this episode women stressed that, while talking, the old man was almost crying because he was touched by seeing the young people respecting the elderly, a practice which had disappeared in his area.
Plates 10 and 11: Nuptial preparation: *la valise*
Young women from Drueulu in a café in We

Women (Anne Marie Alosio, centre) at the General Assembly, Drueulu. In the background are Family Planning posters from the Provincial Health Department. These are in the languages of the Loyalty Islands: the middle one is in Drehu and the others are in Nengone and Iaai.
Ordination of the first Kanak woman pastor, Traput, Lifou, 16 February 1992

Customary gift presentation, in an urban setting (a Protestant household, Nouméa)
Part Three

Women's Moving Places: A Cultural Journey
Chapter Five

WOMEN'S MOBILITY AND PRESENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

And when Father intervened, it was to defend her. And when he was absolutely determined that she should go to school, that she know how to read and write like a boy, in other respects he was constantly declaring that the role of girls was confined to the uterine clan, which it was their duty to enlarge. She was his favourite [daughter] and he allowed her all her whims. (Dévé Gorodé, 1994:8).

In Part One, I have situated Drueulu women and men in Lifu, by focusing on how the foreign/autochthonous relation and the fluidity of the indigenous socio-political hierarchy impinged on Lifuans' engagement with foreigners in the present and the past, and past migration. I now turn to explore this same relation from the perspective of contemporary mobility. Although this chapter is more demographically informed than the others, I hope its connections with the body of my thesis will be apparent. The statistical data are considered in relation to some dimensions of Lifuan notions of persons and how Lifuans conceive of social relations as embodied. The internal differentiations of persons by sex, age, marital status and rank, which are rooted in indigenous cultural assumptions (and which I will address in this chapter), intersect with differences resulting from the

1 The literature concerning women's migration in the South-West Pacific is scanty (Bonnemaison 1974, Strathern 1975, Connell 1984, 1987b, 1990, 1992; Morauta 1985, Haberkorn 1989), reference to New Caledonia is even more so, although there is a large body of literature on Polynesia and Micronesia migration, some of which focuses on women.
interplay of the indigenous constructs with the values and ideas promoted by Catholic and Protestant missionaries (which I examine in the next chapter).

Here the notion of consocial personhood (Lieber 1990; see also Lutz 1985, White 1985) is clearly pertinent.2 Guiart argued something similar when he stated (1986:67) that the emphasis on dual relationships is pervasive in Lifuan sociality. The person is not conceived as individuated but is defined by a web of relationships. I have considered some of these dimensions of personhood in Part Two: seniority (eldest/youngest), ranking (chief/subject). Here I consider three dual relationships: the sister-brother relationship, the wife-husband and the mother-child.3

CENSUSES AND PERSONS

The use of statistical data on population raises some problems specific to this case study, which I would like to highlight. The definition of population de jure followed by the Etat Civil [Civil Registration] of We is based on residence rights. Newborn children are registered under the tribe to which they belong (e.g. Drueulu), regardless of their birthplace (e.g. Drueulu, We, Nouméa) or place of residence (e.g. village or town). This means that children who were born in town and are still living there are included in the Drueulu population. Even those who do not return to Drueulu for many years still enjoy residence rights. Whereas a married man enjoys this right indefinitely, a woman who marries into a different tribe is no longer considered a Drueulu woman and so her children are registered as part of her husband's community. Nevertheless, an in-marrying woman is not counted in the census she remains part of her community rather than of her husband's 'tribe'.

Children born within a marriage belong to their father's lineage and tribe; children born outside of wedlock belong to their mother's lineage and tribe. Because of the de jure definition followed by the Civil Registration of We, the few married couples and their children who are living uxorilocaly in Drueulu are registered under the tribe in which the husband has residence rights. Likewise other long- or short-term visitors are not included in the yearly count of the Drueulu population. I had considered adding them to my data, but this would

2 See also the volume by White and Kirkpatrick 1985.

3 This does not claim to be an exhaustive presentation of the range of constructs of Lifuan personhood.
have made comparison with other tribes impossible. I decided to use the data of the Registry Office in We to be able to make comparisons over time. Where the data are available I use the 1989 civil registration data as a watershed because it is the year of the census, the year of the implementation of the Matignon Accords, and – by chance – the year that I began fieldwork.

Another related question that needs to be addressed in order to clarify the way in which the civil registering works, concerns the two legal systems currently applied in New Caledonia. The 'Statut de Droit Commun' (hereinafter DC), which applies to French citizens, and the 'Statut Particulier' (hereinafter SP) which concerns only Kanak, exist side by side. This distinction, acknowledged by the French Constitution of 1958 and in force in the other French Overseas Territories, bears on the definition of a de jure population. Kanak have been French citizens since 1946, yet in 1991, 79,832 were registered under the SP. This statute applies in all the domains – such as marriage, adoption and divorce – which are excluded from the French penal code. The latter applies to every French citizen, although sometimes in a tribal community a wrongdoing is punished by following 'customary procedures'. In these cases generally, a moral judgement and some form of corporal punishment are inflicted by the Council of Elders. For example, in Drueulu a young woman was sexually abused during an all-night feast. This was reported to the Council of Elders, who decided to punish all the young men and young women of the village, although the identity of the perpetrator was known. This notion of sharing punishment is still very strongly rooted in Kanak's perception of wrongdoing, as shown by the following anecdote told by a French woman who was teaching in one of the secondary schools in Lifu. A student from her school was given a three-day suspension for

4 Cf. Connell who states that 'in contrast to the independent states of Melanesia there has been no "localization" policy in New Caledonia since no statutes differentiate Melanesians from other races, all being French citizens' (1992:71, emphasis is mine). For a clear explanation of how the two systems work, see the interview with Fote Trolue, from Lifu, Juge d'instruction, De la coutume au droit officiel, in Pourquois pas? mars 1990:12-27.

5 This shows once more that the last census, taken in 1989, was under-reported: 73,598 Melanésiens. Rallu estimates this figure should be increased to 76,000 (Rallu, 'Recent population trends in the French overseas territories in the Pacific', seminar, Demography Department, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 18 March 1993).

6 As a young woman told me, the case was solved through customary path, meaning the two involved got married. The other occurrence, of which I became aware during my second field trip, was instead resolved by denouncing the sexual abuser to the French authorities. The man was sent to Camp Est, the French prison located at Nouville (see Map 7).

7 The corporal punishment was administered by a man, who according to his role and function vis-à-vis the high chief could not take action against girls of the chiefly family.
misbehaviour, but two of his classmates asked the teacher if they could divide the disciplinary punishment, with the clear intention of 'sharing it' by allowing each one of them to receive a one-day suspension.

A man or a woman who is SP can decide to become DC, but the law does not provide for the reverse. In the case of a mixed couple, their children are always DC, with no rights of appeal against it. Although the Registry Office in We records Kanak children DC in a separate list, they are considered as de jure Drueulu population. The French Constitution of 1958 makes a clear-cut distinction between the two statutes but in Kanak practice different criteria intersect. Again the fluidity of the notion of boundaries of difference is at work. When questioned on this matter, some replied that a Kanak DC is out of 'customary laws', but if one takes part in community life his or her statute is never questioned, whereas their hnafeatra [root-place] might be. In fact when someone considered to be a relative newcomer behaves in a way which is viewed as disruptive of the well-being of the community, people remind him (I advisedly use the masculine pronoun because in this more structured political context men are invariably involved): eka la hnei eö hnafeatra [where is your root-place?].

In contrast to what has happened in Hawaii and Australia, where the number of people identifying themselves as 'indigenes' has increased in the last decade, this has not occurred in New Caledonia. The 1989 Census asked the 'tribu' and the 'statut' of French citizens 'de souche mélanesienne' [of Melanesian descent]. The same question was already present in the 1976 Census, but the principle of 'self-identification' was only introduced in the last census. The census asked which ethnic group 'la personne estime-t-elle appartenir?' [the person identifies with]. This way of presenting the question based on self-ascribed identity has not produced, for the time being, any relevant change in the percentage of individuals declaring themselves as Kanak. Ancestry is a factor in self-ascribed identity, yet the notion of 'pure Kanak' is never considered. In Drueulu as in the

8 Though in the last couple of years the provincial government was starting to consider specific cases, such as that of a Kanak woman of Lifu who was DC only because she was born in Vanuatu. Some Kanak, questioned why the issue of asymmetrical relations between the two statutes had not been taken up by the independence movement, commented that once the country is independent the question will become redundant.

9 In Hawaii the 1970 federal census based ethnic classification on 'self-identification or race of father'; 10 years later it was modified to 'self-identification or race of mother' (Linnekin 1990: 153).

10 The new climate resulting as a consequence of the Matignon Accords has generally opened up this debate; for instance caldoches [white settlers] are more openly addressing issues which in the past were considered 'forbidden', such as the acknowledgement of descent from a mixed family.
rest of Lifu there are families that admit to having a mixed ancestry, and yet they will never qualify themselves or be qualified as of 'mixed blood'. Women tell of children born out of wedlock whose father is white but the child is not designated as 'part-Kanak'. The absence of a social category such as 'demis', which has emerged and played an important role in the local socio-political scene in Tahiti (Henningham 1992:16; Aldrich 1990:192-193), has to do with the particularities of indigenous social relations as much as with different metropolitan and local colonial interests and representations.\footnote{For the difference in the French colonial policies in the two countries, see Pillon and Söder (1991). Tahitians were granted French citizenship in 1880, Kanak only in 1946. This different policy was informed by the distinction drawn by Europeans between islanders of the Eastern and those of the Western Pacific, whereby the former were considered to have social institutions comparable to those Europeans were acquainted with, and thus could be dealt with in more equalitarian terms. But the selective engagement of Tahitians with foreigners, which was informed by their cultural assumptions, did contribute to this outcome. The specificity of the indigenous forms of land tenure was central to the rules set up by the indigenous legislators: on the one hand they forbade mixed marriage (1835) to avoid the threat of European men (100 recorded living in Tahiti in 1835) taking control of land; on the other, if a Tahitian woman was expecting a child from a European, they required the couple to marry (1838).} Intermixing has always taken place in the past in New Caledonia, but few of these unions were legalized. Sarasin commented on the high number of 'der Mischlinge' [mixed bloods] (1929a:24). The children born from such unions were assimilated into the Kanak or the French community (Henningham 1992:14). The indigenous notion of flexible boundaries of difference, which allowed for children born out of marriage to be absorbed into their mother's patrilineage, confronted a French colonial policy aimed at the establishment of a strong numerical presence of white settlers in New Caledonia. Caldoches [white settlers], who made up 41 per cent of the population in 1969 (though it decreased to 33.6 per cent in 1989 [INSEE]),\footnote{INSEE 1969; INSEE 1989.} played and still play a leading economic and political role in the country, and as a social group they are set aside from the French metropolitans who live and work in the country.\footnote{The Loyalites were not a settlement colony, but to understand the absence of a 'demis' social category the French colonial policy in New Caledonia must be taken into consideration.} Furthermore, I surmise that the assumption that Kanak were dying out probably contributed to this representation of the notion of cultural identity. Even the French census surveyed the population of the country following this criterion in attributing people to different social groups.\footnote{Census 1956, Introduction (INSEE 1956).} During the second part of the 19th century when the country was a penal colony, the colonial authorities were more interested in the distinction between free white...
settlers and convicts than in assessing the number of people of mixed descent. Hence for census purposes the population was divided in three categories: population libre [free population], population pénale [convicts], and population autochtone and immigrants réglementés [indigenous population and indentured migrants].

The geographer Doumenge, in his volume *l'Homme dans le Pacifique Sud* presenting the different ethnic populations of the Pacific, dwells upon the specificity of the 'groupe européen' and its 'assimilés' [assimilated] in New Caledonia (1966:189-192). He points to the different components which have assimilated into the European group, which comprises people with diverse ethnic backgrounds, from Italians to Malagasy, and Javanese to Japanese (1966:190), but his analysis of the relations between Europeans and the indigenous population in New Caledonia is striking for its racism and inaccuracy. He states:

There has not been here a real racial clash because a natural segregation was gradually set up as a matter of fact ... From this has resulted a remarkable absence of secondary racial and social prejudices ... But, little by little, one had to bow to the fact that ... he [the European] was after all dependent upon an antagonistic reaction vis-à-vis the Melanesian indigenes with whom he had intermixed very little (1966:192, emphasis added).

**Il n'y a pas eu ici un véritable affrontement racial, car une ségrégation naturelle s'est peu à peu organisée dans les faits ... Il en est résulté une remarquable absence de préjugés raciaux et sociaux secondaires ... Mais, petit à petit, il a fallu tout de même se rendre à l'évidence que ... il [Européen] restait malgré tout tributaire d'une réaction antagoniste vis-à-vis des autochtones mélanésiens avec lesquels il s'était fort peu mélangé.**

Doumenge's reading of the New Caledonian situation as a kind of self-imposed apartheid rather than the result of colonial policy needs no further comment. But I cannot avoid refuting his statement that no intermixing had taken place, a commentary that the geographer applies to both the main island and the Loyalty Islands ('le métissage est resté très marginal' [intermixing was marginal] 1966:187). Although French presence was minimal in the Loyalties, in the 19th century European and American traders nevertheless resided in the islands, and at least half of the 27 recorded traders married daughters of chiefs (Howe 1977:16), leaving numerous descendants who have been assimilated into the local population. I have already referred to some of these cases in Chapter Two, and I
can add the one mentioned by Péter of a student son of an American man and a Lifu woman (15 July 1928, PMB).15

Doumenge’s statement complies with the conduct of the European settlers who kept themselves separate from indigenous people as much as from released convicts. The latter did intermix with the indigenous population and their children were assimilated on either side (Bensa 1990b:59). Colonists accepted this practice and yet drew the line between the acceptance of ‘mixed blood’ as Europeans and their eligibility as spouses (Merle 1991:243).

If the notion of ‘mixed blood’ (miscegenation) is not used by Kanak in their social dealings, a concept which Lifuans do utilize is that of ‘illegitimate’, nekôn no gojeny [child from the road]. It has a clear negative connotation and I found it was used mainly by men referring to a child born out of marriage. This insinuation will accompany children, mainly males, throughout their life, and in tense political and social situations others will openly refer to their illegitimate birth in order to minimize or devalue their claims. A woman’s origins can probably be ‘forgotten’ more easily because, as I argue, she is never completely assimilated either into her natal group or into her husband’s family. Should this notion of ‘illegitimacy’ be considered as a Kanak cultural assumption or should it be viewed as the product of colonial history? I suspect that the missionaries’ discourse on motherhood within marriage and family values reinforced an indigenous cultural precedent, a point which I will address in the next chapter.

GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

Kanak make up only 21.6 per cent of the urban population of ‘Grand Nouméa’, the capital and its outskirts (1989 Census), yet according to the same census 49.5 per cent of the Drueulu population were living in town.16 In defining the size of the Drueulu population at the time of my fieldwork I have been confronted with different sets of data: my own, those of the Etat Civil [Civil Registration] of We,17 and those of the French census of 4 April 1989. These three sets of data

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15 Children of mixed descent were also born from out of wedlock unions between Kanak women and United States soldiers based in New Caledonia during War World II (Gorodé 1994:27).

16 In 1969 the urban population in New Caledonia represented 50 per cent of the total population. By 1989 it had increased to 59.4 per cent (Baudchon and Rallu, 1993).

17 Lifu has three Registry Offices, one for each district, which are located in Xepenehe, Mou, and We. The population of Gaica is registered in We. From 1935 onwards birth and death records were kept by the Gendarmerie [police station]; from 1968 this task has lain within the province of
overlap in time but are not consistent in terms of criteria followed. (For example, 549 people from Drueulu are declared as living out of Lifu at the end of 1989, whereas the 4 April 1989 Census gives only 390 persons from Drueulu not residing in a tribal settlement.)

Table 5.1: Natural increase of the de jure population growth rate, 1978-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Natural increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Register of births and Register of deaths, We. Between the registration of births which take place in Nouméa and the registration in We a delay occurs; thus births falling towards the end of the year are included in the Drueulu population of the following year, although they are registered under the exact year of birth.

The de jure Drueulu population in the 10 years from 1979 to 1989 has increased by 2.3 per cent (see Table 5.1). Comparing these data with those available for the whole island (Figure 5.1) over the same period one sees that this is slightly lower than the comparable growth rate for the whole island (except for 1985 and 1988). There is an apparent increase in the rate of natural increase over the period considered: the average rate over the first half of the period was 2.2 per cent compared to 2.6 per cent over the second half.

the municipality. Earlier civil registration in Lifu covered births and deaths only of Europeans (e.g. missionaries, traders).

18 I have calculated these data using the civil registration birth and death records.
19 ITSEE (1990: no.58, PT2).
A look at the profile of the *de jure* population (which is by definition unaffected by migration) shows that the largest groups were those aged 0-21, which made up more than half of the population: 588 out of a total of 1009 in 1989 (Figure 5.2 and Table 5.2). Women outnumber men at age 50+ over almost the entire period. This is at least partially due to the higher life expectancy of women (for Kanak, female life expectancy was 66.6 years compared to 60.8 years for males in the period 1981-1983 [Baudchon and Rallu 1993:895]). Females also outnumber males in the age group 22-49 except for the two most recent years. It is impossible to assess the extent to which this is due to differential mortality and differential registration coverage. For the youngest age group there is a trend from a surplus of males in the earlier years to a surplus of females in the later years. It is possible that this lack of young males is related to an increasing mortality among teenage males due to accidents.
Figure 5.2: Total population by sex, 1970-1989

Source: Civil Registration, We
Table 5.2: Drueulu population, by sex and age group, 1970-1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0-21 Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>22-49 Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>50+ Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>229</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>257</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>152</td>
<td>129</td>
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<td>273</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Civil Registration, We.

A look at the contemporary Drueulu population in terms of residence shows that it is almost equally divided between the village of Drueulu and Nouméa (see Table 5.3). The proportion living in the urban area has increased since 1975 and this increase has been at a faster rate than for the population of the rest of Gaica (Civil Registration). In 1975, 36 per cent of the total population of Gaica was living in town compared to 35 per cent of the Drueulu population. But in 1980 the percentages point to a shift: the urban rate increased for both populations but Gaica climbed to 40 per cent, Drueulu to 43 per cent.
The five following years resulted in a slight increase of both urban populations, but the data for 1989 show the Drueulu population in town had reached almost 50 per cent, compared with 44 per cent from Gaica. In that same year the total Drueulu population represented 37 per cent of the total population of Gaica, but the urban Drueulu population made up 41 per cent of the urban population of Gaica. Comparisons between Drueulu civil registration data and the 1983 and 1989 Censuses show that the urban proportion of the Drueulu population is higher than the average for the total Kanak population. In 1983, 20 per cent of the total Kanak population was living in town (at the same time Kanak represented also 20 per cent of the urban population); six years later, in 1989, urbanized Kanak had
increased numerically but not in percentage terms (although Kanak in the same year made up 22 per cent of the urban population). During the same period the number of Drueulu people in town increased in both absolute and percentage terms: from 423 or 44 per cent of the 965 *de jure* population, to 549 or 50 per cent of the *de jure* population of 1109. During the inter-censal period the data for the population of Gaica in Nourméra increased numerically but not in percentage terms: from 1048 (40 per cent of the total population of 2600) to 1326 (40 per cent of the total population of 3023). Thus Nourméra's attraction for Gaica people, especially for Drueulu people, is well above the Kanak average.

A look at the other three populations of Gaica yields an interesting comparison (Table 5.3). In 1989, the Qanono population (Qanono village is under Gaica though some of its territory has been set aside for the construction of the administrative centre of We) accounted for one quarter of the rural population of the district and slightly less than one fifth of the urban population. The Hapetra population (Hapetra is situated on the road from Drueulu to We) accounted for one fifth of the urban population, whilst the population of Wedrumel accounts for 18 per cent, despite its small overall size. Comparing the data of 1989 with those of the previous year it emerges that the urban Qanono and Hapetra populations have decreased numerically and in percentage terms. The increased availability of jobs in We probably accounts for this decrease. Further decreases in the urban population ought to be expected from the fact that the Matignon Accords, though in force from 1989, were implemented on a large scale from 1990, opening up new opportunities of employment in the tertiary sector (administration, commerce) in Lifu, especially in We.

**Table 5.3: Rural/urban population of Gaica by tribe, 1988-1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qanono</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hapetra</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedrumel</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drueulu</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Civil Registration, We.*
Drehu does not distinguish between short-term and long-term mobility. People are kalapa e Nouméa [live in Nouméa] or kalapa e Drueulu [live in Drueulu]. These expressions do not convey any reference to the length of absence. In discussing this matter with men and women of the village, they stress how different the question is for a Kanak and for a white. For them 'migration' does not entail the lost of residential rights, of named positions or of access to land. The teachers of the Primary School of Drueulu with whom I discussed this matter preferred the expression 'long séjour' [long-term stay] to migration. They also emphasized that in Drehu people differentiate on the basis of the reason for the journey rather than its length: kalapa e Nouméa/tro agó e Nouméa. If a villager goes to Nouméa for medical treatment, regardless of how long he or she stays, one speaks of tro agó e Nouméa [strolling to Nouméa].

In the past, men and women from Drueulu had different rates of internal migration. Present-day data show greater female mobility compared to the past, although the number of women in town is still lower than in the village (268 in Nouméa and 292 in Drueulu). The number of men in town is instead slightly higher than in the village (281 compared to 268 living in Drueulu). Until 1989 migration was urban oriented, and rural-to-rural mobility was negligible. To investigate the relevance of contemporary urban mobility for Drueulu women and how it affects household strategies, I examine the profile of the female Drueulu population. Although this population is almost equally represented in the rural and the urban sector, disaggregating the data into three age groups (following the criteria of the Registry Office in We) reveals differentiation in the age structure of the two sections of the population (Table 5.4). Thus 45 per cent of the Drueulu women living in town belong to the age group 22-49, whereas women aged 0-21 are mostly (60 per cent) represented in the rural population (Figure 5.4). Women over 50 are equally distributed in both Nouméa and Drueulu. This indicates a fairly young rural population and shows that the ageing of the rural population as a result of mobility is not a problem.

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20 It will be interesting at the end of the 10-year plan of the Matignon Accords to see how it has affected rural-urban mobility, notably female mobility.

21 Although household [lapa] composition changes, usually it consists of a married couple, their children, and one or two older relatives around which other relatives gravitate. They share the same living space [hnalapa]. The number of households in Drueulu in 1989 was 82.

22 This more recent participation of women in these movements seems to apply to the whole South Pacific region, with the exception of the Cook Islands and the Polynesian Tokelau (Graves (1984:366) and Connell (1985:966)).
However, this distinction in three age cohorts (young, adult, elderly) follows criteria which contrast with the perceived difference in Lifu between girls and women. In fact the distinguishing element is not age but the conjugal state of the individual in question. Unmarried women, with or without children, are always considered as 'girls' in customary work and generally speaking in tribal communal life. The same applies to an unmarried man; he will not be considered as a full adult until he is married. What this means is that contributions are required for communal activities, and only those considered as having attained adult status through marriage can responsibly provide them. Nevertheless, when a man or a woman reaches the status of qatr or qatreföe [elderly], they are no longer asked to contribute to communal life on the ground that they have already done so in the past.

Another important criterion influencing internal relations is seniority. Junior/senior relations inform everyday interactions, and in the articulation of
elements of cultural identity this component defines sociality in a distinctly Lifuan way. One becomes qatr, as Zanesi pointed out, not because of age but on the basis of ‘le travail que l’on a fait’ [the work that one has done].

Table 5.4: Female Drueulu population by age, 31 December 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-21</th>
<th>22-49</th>
<th>50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Civil Registration, We.

A final consideration of the Drueuluan population living in the rural area and in the urban area is shown in the age/sex pyramids drawn below. Here, instead of following the three age cohorts utilized in the statistics by the Civil Registration, I reckoned females and males on a 10-year basis (except for the elderly group: 60 and above), considering the year of birth of all the de jure population of Drueulu registered in We. The breakdown of the age cohort 0-21 allows us to consider separately the age group 9 and under and that of 10-19. This reveals a trend that could not be noticed from Figure 5.4. In fact pyramids in Figure 5.5 show that females in the rural area are more represented in the first age group and then they decrease remarkably in the second age group (10-19). In Nouméa, females are less represented in the first step. However, in town the second age group (10-19) shows an increase in the number of female individuals, an opposite trend to that of the rural female population of the same age.

On the men's side, in the rural area the youngest population is the most represented, whereas in town the age group 20-29 is the predominant one. These pyramids show that women have a longer life expectancy than males, and this applies both in the village and in town.

HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES

Until 1945 Kanak were subject to the Indigénat system, rules set up by the administration to restrict their movements and confine them in reserves. These interdictions were removed only in 1946 although, as I noted in Chapter Two, this ban had been lifted for Loyalty Islanders wishing to work in Nouméa. But in
Figure 5.5 Rural/urban Drueuluan population by age and sex (in numbers), 1989

RURAL POPULATION

URBAN POPULATION
the past it was mainly men who contributed to this mobility with consequences for the sex ratio of the urban and rural populations. In the words of the wife of the former high chief of Gaica:

Now everybody goes to Nouméa, the husband, the wife, the children; but in the past only the husband would go and before leaving he would have to seek the permission of the high chief (Aliceqatr, recorded interview in Drehu/French, November 1991).

A study carried out between October 1948 and February 1949 by Madeleine Feugnet, a social worker, on behalf of the Société des Missions Evangéliques of Paris, surveyed 600 indigenes living in Nouméa, of whom 338 were from Lifou.23 The surveyed population24 consisted of 373 units: 104 households, 91 women living alone (14 of whom were married, and presumably were in town without their husbands, the rest comprising 56 unmarried women and 21 widows) and 178 men living by themselves (including 24 married men and three widowers). Due to the lack of other studies concerned with male and female mobility,25 I rely on this study to make a comparison between the reasons for this mobility given by Feugnet and those given to me by Kanak of Drueulu. At the end of the 1940s Kanak came to town 'pour travailler; pour se promener; comme engagés dans l'Armée; à l'insu de leur famille; pour des raisons de santé; pour faire du commerce' [to work; for the fun of it; as recruits into the army; unbeknown to their families; for health reasons; and for trading] (1949:6). Today the explanations given to me by Kanak women concerning their movements to and

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23 See reports on statistics for urban population in New Caledonia in ministerial correspondence, 23 August 1952, 27 October 1952 (AA/FO/A1838/264).

24 Feugnet admits that her study was biased towards Lifuans because she had lived in Lifu and was thus better known by the islanders and because 'c'est une enquête de la Mission Protestante et ... les Lifous sont en majorité protestants' [it is a survey of the Protestant Mission and ... the majority of Lifuans are Protestants] (1949:1). Her study also gave more weight 'au milieu de célibataires' [to bachelors] because the accommodations of the industry and administration workers were easy to locate and they mainly employed bachelors (1949:2). I thank Christine Salomon-Nékiria for making this survey available to me.

25 For an overview on the problem of migration in New Caledonia, see Atlas (1981: plate 26). The project 'Pacific 2010' sponsored by the National Centre for Development Studies at the Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, does not include New Caledonia in the regional survey. It is a difficult point to sustain that the survey is a 'sample' of South Pacific countries when all the countries of 'Melanesia' are represented except New Caledonia. One should ponder this omission, which is probably dictated by a national political agenda rather than by 'academic' interest.
from Nouméa do not seem to have changed much. What women emphasize is the
difference between the movements of women with different marital status. A
'fille' [unmarried woman] can go to town 'pour chercher du travail, pour donner
la main s'il y a une naissance dans la famille et la mère travaille, pour continuer
les études' [to look for a job, to give a hand if there is a birth in the family and the
mother is working, to pursue her studies]. No negative connotation is attached to
the idea of a working unmarried woman; on the contrary it is approved. In fact
women always refer to the work of young women in town as 'travail pour les
parents' [work for the parents], meaning that when a girl marries she will not
contribute to the income of her natal household and her remittance cannot be
counted upon (although in some customary ceremonies, such as weddings, her
contribution as ifaaxa [married sister] is one of the largest along with that of
maathin [mother's brother]).

A woman who has been working in Nouméa since 1985 remarked that,
although she is divorced, she is asked to contribute to communal events because
she has employment: 'avant avec mon mari ils n'osaient pas trop demander, mais
maintenant que je vit seule [before with my husband they did not dare to ask too
strongly, but now that I live by myself ... ] (Fago Zeula, 14 January 1991).
Unmarried and divorced women are not considered ifaaxa, so they are not
expected to contribute to weddings as such, though they are expected to
contribute to the preparation of la valise. This commitment is of a different kind:
her contribution consists of western commodities (e.g. clothing) purchased with
her salary. Thus as an unmarried or divorced woman she occupies a newly
established place in the wedding ceremony and provides a gift which does not
include the customary yams.

Explanations given by the same women concerning an unmarried son's work
are differently framed. He works to contribute to his wedding expenses. In fact
today a marriage in Lifu requires a large monetary contribution by the
bridegroom's kin group, and, without the financial and moral support of one's
family, a marriage cannot occur.26 To meet the expenses a man must have the
consent and the active support of his family - and this in a society that puts such
emphasis on marriage and that one becomes an adult, with full responsibility vis-
da-vis the community, only after marriage. Marriage confers adult status upon

26 The approval of the senior generation is essential to sanction a wedding. The implications are
such that the family of a man from Lifu, who, to overcome the strong resistance from his family,
had arranged with his partner to have a civil marriage in We unbeknown to anyone, was able to
have it annulled.
members of both sexes. But marriage is not a personal choice. It does not simply link a woman and a man. A marriage is first and foremost a bond between two segments of the society. So an unmarried man may contribute to his family income but he is not expected to do so in the same way as a young woman is. I should add that none of the young Drueulu women working in town are sending a fixed amount of money back home every month. More often than not goods are sent back home instead.

Married women go to Nouméa 'pour suivre leur mari, pour suivre un malade ou encore pour la scolarité de leurs enfants' [to accompany their husband, or a sick person or for their children's schooling]. Lifu provides primary schooling as well as the first years of secondary schooling. But in 1989 Nouméa was the only place in the whole country where one could complete a secondary course of study. Thus women, especially at the beginning of the school year (February), go to town to help the children find accommodation. Usually students spend week days at the boarding school and weekends with a family from the village living in town who has agreed to be their host family. Kinship ties are usually invoked when asking a family for this kind of assistance. These moves are usually of short duration, as are those for taking part in a wedding or a religious or women's group meeting. Women frequently take the opportunity afforded by such visits to spend some extra days in town, unless they are due back at work, which is the case for a few teachers and health workers from Drueulu. When in town women usually live with their husband's family, although they also visit any members of their natal family who are living in Nouméa. Widows are more free to choose with whom to stay, and my observations show that, other things being equal, they prefer to stay close to the town centre or where public transport is easily available.

Concerning the presence of women in the labour force and the occupations women take up in town, the situation in 1991 reveals that although women are still predominantly employed in the domestic private sector, as was the case in the past, they are now entering new sectors. At the end of the 1940s women worked mainly as housemaids or laundresses; others worked at home as dressmakers or childminders; a few were employed in small businesses as coffee-bean sorters and in the public sector as nurses and midwives.

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27 Since then an extra year has been added in the public secondary school in We. The same policy of decentralization is being implemented in the Northern Province.

28 It may seem discrepant to refer to 1991 when most of my data refer to 1989/1990 but my first year was spent in Lifu. When I returned in 1991-1992 I did most of my fieldwork in Nouméa.
Today the majority of women from Drueulu living in town have jobs: in some cases new employment opportunities have opened up (Table 5.5). Out of the 76 Drueulu married and unmarried women I surveyed, 68 were aged 22-49. These accounted for 56.6 per cent of the Drueulu female urban population of that age. Twenty were unemployed or engaged in home-duties, and six, five of whom were widows, were elderly women. Of the seven women, separated or divorced, one had no children and of the six with children, five had their school-aged children living with them.

In contrast, the number of urban married absentees whose spouses and children stay in Drueulu is diminishing and was quite small in 1991: four married men and two women, one of whom did not have a paid job but was taking care of her children, high school students. This contributes to a more balanced urban sex ratio.

Twelve of the women considered worked in the domestic service sector and were lowly paid (in 1989, 500 CFP per hour, or 27.5 FF). They might be asked to work for a couple of days each week, and generally for a few hours at a time. The

Table 5.5: Drueulu women in Nouméa, 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shop assistant</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other jobs in education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical sector</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking (hospital)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional jobs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total employed</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/Home-duties</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fieldwork data.

29 These data were collected with the help of Zanesi Ausu; I was then able to interview most of the women.
women who had been in town for a long period usually worked for two or three different families. This meant that sometimes the money spent on transport greatly depleted the money earned. A young woman arriving in town is usually helped by a female relative to find this kind of job. Although it does not give them any security, it provides them with sufficient flexibility for family and community responsibilities. Another opportunity open to unmarried women without skills is employment as shop assistants: 5 unmarried women in my sample had this job.

Although employment opportunities for women seem mainly confined to the traditional jobs mentioned by Feugnet (1949), one nevertheless finds a new sector in which women from Drueulu are well represented. This is education. Of the 50 women surveyed, 12 worked in this sector, at the 'école maternelle' [pre-school] and primary school level. The majority were teachers or teaching assistants, seven of whom were employed by the Catholic School. The Catholic 'école maternelle' of the Vallée du Tir is a good example, the director and staff being women from Drueulu. However, women are not represented at the secondary school level. The public medical sector is another area where women have found jobs with a wide range of responsibilities from cooking to clerical work, nursing and management.

In those employment categories, such as health, in which Kanak women have a historically longer experience of employment, one notes some mobility. Following provincialization, the health department has been decentralized. In the Loyalty Provinces the new structure's sanitary education section is headed by two Kanak women of Lifu, trained nurses, who returned to the island after years spent working in town. This sector, like education, is one of those that has always been associated with 'care' or nurturance, and has thus been perceived as a 'woman's activity'. Nevertheless, as I discuss in the next chapter, having women in responsible positions in this sphere has heightened the visibility of women's groups in Lifu. The average household income of families from Drueulu reflects the greater presence in the urban labour force of both men and women, and

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30 To give an idea of the cost of living in Nouméa, a bus fare is 100 CFP, rising to 120 CFP on Sunday. If a women needs to take a bus to go to work, at least 200 CFP must be allowed for transportation, sometimes even 400 CFP if two buses are needed (no transfer ticket is given). Often they prefer to walk or find other transport arrangements.
explains the large amount of money circulating on communal occasions, such as
weddings.31

The school-age population moving to Nouméa is increasing rapidly. Today
sex is not a primary factor in the choice of letting a child go to town to finish his
or her studies. In the past girls generally did not go beyond primary school.
Nowadays girls who 'do well at school' are urged to continue their studies in
Nouméa. Sipo, during my fieldwork, had a daughter who was spending her year
in town following classes at Do Kamo, the Protestant Lycée. It was more the
school results and the behaviour of the girl which decided that she 'let her go' and
stay in town. Also increasing is the number of school-children who have attained
a higher level of formal education. In Drueulu today there are a few households
in which the level of formal education of the wife is higher than that of the
husband, and she has a better paid job. But, if there is some need at home, it is
always the woman who drops her studies or gives up her job.

Studies can also be interrupted when a young woman accepts an engagement
proposal [ihujë] from a young man with whom she does not have a prior
relationship. The family of the future bridegroom sets the date of the wedding;
today the young man can choose his spouse, but the last word is with the women
of his family, usually his mother. If a woman does not belong to her husband's
tribal community she will prefer her son to marry someone from her own natal
community because she will have to share household duties with his bride. This
is especially true in the case of the firstborn son who, once married, will continue
to live in the parents' house. Belonging to the same tribal community is a bond
which comes to the fore on stressful occasions when misunderstandings arise
between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Whenever such situations arose in
Drueulu the daughter-in-law would seek support from a woman from the same
tribe. Women commented that on such occasions a woman would prefer to go to
her natal family for comfort. Being far away from it, they rely instead on a
woman from the same community, even if they usually do not spend too much
time together. Today in the village more marriages are taking place with both
spouses coming from the same tribe. Questioned about this trend, women
explained to me that young men and women of the tribe interact more frequently
today and take part in community events more often than was the case in the past.
Some men, conversely, stressed a different aspect. A wedding requires a lot of

31 Official data show that the proportion of people from Lifu and the other Loyalty Islands
employed in the public sector is higher compared to the average of the total Kanak population
(INSEE 1989).
cash and it is better if money circulates within the same community because its members will benefit from it. The men's comments not only emphasize different aspects of sociality, but have, I suggest, a double meaning. First, one can interpret these statements as relating indigenous to European ways. Money is not considered alien *per se* but it is what use it fulfills that distinguishes an appropriate way from a foreign way. Considering the social sphere their prerogative, men lay more stress than women on redistribution as a distinct form of sociality. The other interpretation is that men, by focusing on redistribution, which is an indigenous element of collectivity, mainly dominated by elderly men, are making a statement about male prerogatives in terms of gender and seniority.

My data (Figure 5.6) also show that today the age difference between spouses is less than in the past. This is because women today marry later compared to women who are now in their sixties. My sample of 50 marriages in which both spouses come from Drueulu, with at least one surviving member of each couple in 1989 (from a total of 90 married couples living in the village), yields a decreasing difference in the average age at first marriage with an increasing age of girls at marriage (Table 5.6). The average age for women in the 1930s and 1940s was 17.8 years; in the 1970s it was 20. The trend has not changed, and in the last 10 years the average age at first marriage for the female population has increased to 21.8.

This does not mean that marriages of very young brides do not take place anymore. Kanak men state that in the past men married older than they do today, but my data seem to show an opposite trend for the male population (from 25.3 to 27.0). The age difference of spouses at first marriage has decreased from seven years to five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of marriage</th>
<th>Age of husband</th>
<th>Age of wife</th>
<th>Age difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930/1949</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950/1969</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/1979</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/1989</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sample of 50 couples.

**Source:** Fieldwork data and Civil Registration, We.
At this point one should ask if marriage rules had an impact on this new trend. I was not able to elicit any clear answer regarding prescriptive or preferential marriages. When questioned, people would say that one should not marry one's close kin. Asked about the possibility of marrying someone from one's own hnafetra, some Drueuluans replied that a wife should come from a different hnafetra, otherwise it would be viewed like a marriage between siblings. Louis Case explained however that if a woman is from the same but 'eloignée' [distant] hnafetra, meaning that while the ties are known very few interactions take place between the two families, she can be considered a suitable partner to 'rapprocher' [draw closer] the two groups. This contrasts with some preferential marriage systems on the main island involving cross-cousins (Bensa 1990b:34). In Drehu parallel and cross-cousins are all referred to by the same term xa, with distinctions being made by ego between same-sex/opposite-sex, and older/younger siblings. As to how much the prohibition against cousin-marriage was the result of a French and British way of reckoning kinship imposed by missionaries or whether it is based on indigenous rule of exogamy, I can only speculate, although I have heard women making comments regarding a marriage that had broken up because, they said, of the proximity of the lineages of the spouses.

Whilst the age gap between married couples has decreased, life expectancy has not. My sample of 50 couples (see Table 5.6) includes 14 widows (28 per cent of the total) and six widowers (12 per cent). Whilst lower male life expectancy is the norm, the magnitude of the difference can be related to the relative frequency of male deaths, due to death in car accidents and alcohol-related diseases. Life expectancy at birth for the whole province in 1989 was 68.9 years for women against 63.2 for men (ITSEE, 1990: no.58, PD4).

Another issue which has important demographic and social implications, and one that concerns Drueuluans as a problem, is the number of births to unmarried women. Compared to the annual number of births in the Drueulu population, the percentage of births out of marriage is striking (see Figure 5.7). In 1982, 40 per cent of all births were to unmarried women, and in 1985, 47.8 per cent. In 1987 almost 50 per cent of all births were out of wedlock.

32 Ray reported that in Lifu people were not divided into moiety groups for marriage purposes and 'there were no restrictions as to whom a man might marry, except near kinship' (1917:286).
Yet these births are unevenly distributed between the two communities, being higher among the Catholics. Waxôma and I, using the data of the civil registration as a guideline, enumerated the number of children born to Drueulu women. Waxôma's knowledge of the Catholic and Protestant community of Drueulu living in the village and in Nouméa allowed us to cover the past 10 years. Table 5.7 shows that births among Catholic unmarried women are higher than among Protestant women. This phenomenon was acknowledged by the Catholic community in general, and in 1990 the parish committee, made up of men and women from the village, held a meeting to discuss the issue.

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33 Waxôma knew the women living in the village who had gone to the hospital in Nouméa only to give birth, thus we considered such births as involving women living in the village.
For example, in 1979, over 40 per cent of Catholic women who gave birth (n=16) were unmarried; the same in 1985 and 1987. There were fewer unmarried women giving birth among the Protestants in the period considered: only in 1982 did their number reach one third or more of the total number of women from the same denomination giving birth. (It should be noted that approximately 40 per cent of the people from Drueulu are Protestant).34 During fieldwork I observed strong parental control exercised by Protestant families in Drueulu. Moreover, Protestant women who are expecting a child generally have their families organize their marriage within a short time. This does not mean that a pregnancy out of marriage is welcomed in a Catholic family; on the contrary.

34 For a comparison with the number of births out of marriage in the Loyalty province over the last decade, see ITSEE (1990: no.58, PNS)
Table 5.7: Drueulu births inside and outside marriage, 1978-1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Protestants</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

* There is a slight discrepancy between the yearly totals of these data and those of Table 5.1 due to the fact that the data of Table 5.7 refer to the status of the child at birth and do not consider children of Drueuluan men legally recognized after their birth. If the mother was unmarried and not from Drueulu she was not included.

Source: Waxóma and Civil Registration, We.

Reasons given by young women who had a child despite their knowledge about contraception vary. They hoped to get married, or to speed up the marriage. If a young man is not the eldest of the family, birth rank will be followed in arranging the marriage, and a couple may have to wait a long time before their turn comes. A family cannot sponsor more than one wedding each year, and because the help of members of one's lineage and clan is required, rarely will the same family sponsor a wedding feast twice in succession. Other young men of the group must have priority, so the group should reciprocate before it can hold another feast. At other times, when the girl knows that her family is against her having a relationship with the particular young man she likes, she hopes that a child will dispel the family's disapproval. Although the high chief of Gaica has set up regulations regarding the acknowledgement of paternity, these are often disregarded. Marriages are still arranged by families, and often factors other than the presence of a child, who furthermore bears his maternal lineage's name, are more influential in these decisions.
Girls often say that they feel 'trompées par le garçon' [taken in by the young man], meaning that he has committed himself to an engagement but, when the girl reveals she is pregnant, shows no interest in marriage. But it can also happen that a young woman has a child but refuses to marry the biological father. One young woman of 22, in order to avoid an unwanted marriage, followed her grandmother's advice and went to Nouméa, had her baby and stayed there for four years without once returning to the village. She finally returned to Drueulu at the request of her grandmother, who was sick and needed her help. Since then she has become reconciled with her own father and now works in Nouméa while her young daughter stays with her family in the village, to which she returns for important social events.

Another woman had a child and accepted a marriage proposal from a man who was not the father. The biological father was working in Nouméa but when he heard that the woman had accepted the ihuje [a marriage proposal] he went back to the village to tell her that, although for the time being they could not get married, he wanted her to reject the marriage proposal. She returned the ihuje, and now her child bears his father's family name. Eventually they got married.

INDIGENOUS CONSTRUCTS OF WOMANHOOD

Infants and children are not differentiated by sex. Girls and boys under the age of two are medreng; from 2 to 10/12 years of age they are nekönatr. At that stage sex comes into play to determine the term to be used in speaking about a person. An unmarried young man is nekötrahmany. As he becomes older (20 to 40 years of age), he is considered thupêtresij, where the emphasis lies on his having reached the years of maturity rather than on his conjugal status; women instead only when they are married cease to be called nekōjajiny (or simply jajiny) and become föe.35 In this case age is not a criterion; but rather the rupture is represented by her marital status. Also the terms used for elderly men and women are separated along sex lines: the formers are qatr; the latter are qatreföe.36 But in the case of an elderly unmarried woman she is jajiny qea. Again the emphasis is not just on age but on her conjugal status.

Nevertheless the role of mother is very important. Once a married woman becomes a mother, her husband calls her ifēneköng [literally, 'the carrier of my

35 Föe can also mean spouse, as in the expression föe ne la föe [woman's husband].
36 But as a suffix qatr is used for both elderly men and women.
children']. The importance of woman as a mother for Lifuans was stressed also by Hadfield (1920:189). A woman is often called the mother of so-and-so. The notion of motherhood was and is still pivotal in the indigenous construct of womanhood in the main island. In Lifu, I argue, legitimate conjugal status is today central in constructing womanhood. On the Grande Terre a de facto marriage is well accepted, but this is not the case in Drueulu, although in 1992 three young men from Drueulu were living together with their partners who were pregnant or had just had a baby. In two cases the men had a salaried job. In one instance the de facto wife was from the main island, in another the woman came from another village and had a job in We (and the residence of the couple was matri-local). The third case involved a young woman from Drueulu, who had left home. Villagers did not support the young woman's family, who were against the union, in as much as her father and mother had left the Protestant Church to become Jehovah's Witnesses. These three cases might signal a beginning of a new trend, but it is too early to say. The case where both members of the couple were from the village in fact was rather unique.

A 'woman' is thus a married person who is also a mother. An infertile married woman is under social and familial pressure to adopt a child (see 'Adoption', next chapter). The importance of maternity, however, is such, that an unmarried woman in her late thirties in Drueulu adopted a child. Yet in customary work she is considered 'unmarried'. This holds true for a man as well. Only a married man can take up certain responsibilities. When the chief of one of the four lapa had to be replaced, following the death of the former tixe, it was ruled out that his eldest son could become the new tixe because he was not married. Marital status thus plays an important role in social dealings for both men and women but for the former it does not seem to assume the same significance in the nomenclature of life stages. This could point to a stronger emphasis on the conjugal bond and perhaps on conjugal status as a post-colonial development, although, as Hadfield noted (1920:189), in the past a woman would always be married, if not to a young man, to a widower.

Another way of considering women is as sisters. In the literature there seems to have been more and more interest in focusing on women as sisters, and not just as mothers or as wives. Weiner's work (1980 and 1989) among women in

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37 This point was stressed at the Round Table 'Etudes des sociétés Kanak: systèmes sociaux en devenir', Paris 11-12 Octobre, 1995 by Salomon-Nékirria (1995a)

38 Dureau (in press) stresses the same point for Simbu people, among whom '[p]arenthood today is unambiguously regarded as a necessary concomitant of adulthood'.

Kiriwina (Trobriand Islands) stresses the importance of women as sisters in the maintenance of the stability of the traditional exchange system. Her focus on women's wealth \([\text{doba}]\) and its distribution at a mortuary feast \([\text{sagali}]\) highlights the importance of woman as sister. In fact the display of wealth is a statement about the woman's wealth as well as about 'the status of her brother and of her husband' (1989:287), (a perspective completely ignored by Malinowski).

Women as sisters is also the focus of Gailey's work (1980). She considers chiefly and non-chiefly women in pre-colonial and colonial Tonga, focusing on the cross-sibling relationships and the \(fahu\) relationship (rights or privileges that a sister had \(\text{vis-\-à-\-vis}\) her brother, his household and his descendants). She argues that with western contact and colonization the importance of sisterhood decreased, both for chiefly and non-chiefly women, and was replaced by a stronger emphasis on the conjugal bond, but with the asymmetrical relationship reversed: in this case women were dependent on their husbands. This argument has been challenged by James (1988). Dureau (in press) examines the centrality of \(\text{luluna}\) relationships involving opposite-sex siblings on Simbo (Western Solomon Islands) and contrasts it with the present-day importance of conjugal relationships. This shift, Dureau argues, has not resulted in a transformation from an adult gender relation of equality to one of inequality, but rather a shift of emphasis from one asymmetrical relationship (cross-sex siblings) to another (spouses).

In Lifu as well the conjugal bond has been reinforced as a result of missionary discourse. I accept that there has been a shift in the adult gender relationship, which today is centred around the marital relationship, but I cannot say that as a consequence women have lost power, as the thesis suggested by Gailey and others would assert. In fact the brother-sister relationship, even in the past, implied an asymmetrical relationship of power in favour of men. The husband or brother still retains power in the relationship even if, in the case of the conjugal pair, tensions arise because of a wider Church espousal of an ideal of equality.

The relationship between siblings of opposite sex entails a number of avoidance behaviors. For example, sisters and brothers should not eat together; a woman should never use a sexual term in front of her brother (and vice versa). The conjugal bond is not perceived in the same terms. Today wife and husband have a more relaxed relationship. Opposite-sex sibling avoidance is respected even by younger people in Drueulu. It may have weakened in respect of some domestic behaviours (such as eating at the same table at home), but it is still
strongly felt with respect to other social contexts.\textsuperscript{39} Waxõma, recounting to me a
time in which Catholic men of the village were always drunk, stressed the
opposite-sex sibling relationship. Men would gather to feast and not to do the
scheduled work. She disapproved of this behaviour and became very upset at
seeing that this drinking behaviour would not stop. One day she left the house
and went to look for the men's group. She approached it and began to condemn
her husband's behaviour as well as that of the other men. One of her brothers was
present, and he got very angry at her because she had dared to do and say what
she did in front of a group of men in his presence.

A similar episode occurred during the women's gathering in Drueulu in
February 1992. When women were asked to take part in an open group
discussion on sexuality, family planning and other related issues, some women
later complained that it should not have happened because 'you do not talk of
sexual matters in the presence of your brothers'. It was not the male presence \textit{per
se} but the kinship relation to some men that made some of them uneasy in that
situation.

Another situation in which women play an important role as sisters is during
the wedding ceremony. In Lifu one of the largest contributions, in terms of cash
and goods, is expected by \textit{ifaaxa}, any real and classificatory married sisters;\textsuperscript{40} if
a man has many married sisters this 'coutume' will be large. Again in this case
emphasis is on a woman's conjugal bond. She is not just a sister; she has to be a
married sister.

If we consider the term of address for chiefly women [isola], this applies to
the wife or the mother of a high chief (or in some cases of a petty chief). One of
the named positions within the \textit{chefferie} literally translates as the wife of the
chief (\textit{vis-à-vis} the high chief) and the mother of the \textit{chefferie} (\textit{vis-à-vis Gaica}).

\textsuperscript{39} One of the worst insults in Drehu is \textit{fõixa} [sibling's spouse]
\textsuperscript{40} When questioned about the prominence of \textit{ifaaxa} in a wedding ceremony people stressed that
this practice was different from Maré and from the main island where the mother's brother
occupies the central stage. 'A Maré et sur la Grande Terre on travail pour l'oncle maternel, a
Lifou on travail pour la famille de la fille' [On Maré and on the main island one works for the
mother's brother. On Lifu one works for the girl's family] (Pastor Passa, \textit{Ecole Pastorale},
Bethanie, June 1990). For a description of a wedding ceremony, see Chapter Eight.
To conclude I want to relate this overview of demography and mobility of the female Drueulu population to indigenous notions not just of persons but of collectivities: I want to highlight women's position within and between social groups. On marriage Lifuan women move into a local group composed of related men, their unmarried sisters and in-marrying wives. So 'Drueulu women' includes in-marrying wives but excludes Drueulu women who have married out. Women were thus strongly identified by marriage with their husband's lineages and tribes (to the extent that in my census and interviews women told me to include in-marrying wives but to exclude women from Drueulu married into other villages). However, a woman is never completely assimilated into her husband's group: she can be reabsorbed into her paternal lineage if widowed, not having changed her hnafe\text{tra} [root-place]. (In the past she would have changed hunapo, the place of residence of a patrilineal kinship group, as today she leaves her hunahmi [tribal settlement] and moves into the husband's community.) This can take place also in the case of separation or divorce. A woman has the right to return to her community to reside there and cultivate land. But her children will always remain in her husband's lineage, though they may go and reside with her.

A woman may thus be seen as suspending her membership in her lineage while she takes up patri-virilocal residence and assumes her husband's kin's group status; she is considered as a member of her husband's lineage and tribal community. Notwithstanding the way men emphasize that married women change clan affiliation, in reality a more flexible system is at work. Women are not bound to one collectivity. I have observed widows taking part in customary exchanges and work decisions on behalf of both their deceased husband's group and their own. Moreover, a married woman observes her paternal lineage food taboo for the rest of her life, whereas her children will follow their father's food restrictions. As an elderly widow explained to me concerning her daughters: 'Elles ne mangent pas le requin, elles respectent toujours leur temoni, leur haze' [They can't eat sharks, they always respect their demon, their haze (ancestor)]

\footnote{41} Cf. Haberkorn's study of ni-Vanuatu mobility. In Liro (in the island of Paama), women acquire residence rights in their husbands' communities and never lose them even after their husbands' deaths (1989:35).

\footnote{42} This juxtaposition of the two terms is worth noting. Temoni is a word introduced by missionaries and stands for demon; haze is Drehu for ancestor. However people use temoni [demon], tepolo [devil] and haze [ancestor but also divine] interchangeably.
(Maneqatr, April 1992). (Asked for explanation about the use of the term temoni, Maneqatr added haze). For example, the mother of the high chief Sihaze (she is originally from Drueulu), during a visit to her village to attend a large women's gathering in February 1992, refused to eat at the high chief Zeula's residence (her daughter's husband). As women explained to me, 'elle sort d'un clan qui n'a pas le droit de manger avec le grand chef' [she is born of a clan that does not have the right to eat with the high chief]. Women went in search of special china, because she was isola, the widow of a high chief, and, although she shared the table with the other women, the women felt that she should eat from the porcelain dishes used only by members of chiefly families.43

Plate 12: In the yam garden, Liziqatr, her grandson Matroigue, and Waxôma harvesting

Plate 13: Alicia, Cinene and Sasa

43 This practice is so firmly adhered to that during a wedding in Nouméa the high chief Zeula had to wait to sit at 'the second table' because people had not been notified of his arrival and they had to go and look for the special crockery.
Chapter Six

WOMAN AS MOTHER

Women work more than men ... the man is proud of his family. The woman has more responsibilities. The man is just the name. If a woman leaves her family, there is nothing to eat. It is the woman who gives life, who does everything ... Custom [done] for women is very important.1 If a woman leaves her husband, he wanders about like a young man (Sipo, May 1990).

Les femmes travaillent plus que les hommes ... l'homme est fier de sa famille. La femme a plus de responsabilité. L'homme c'est juste le nom. Si une femme quitte la famille, il n'y a rien à manger. C'est la femme qui donne la vie, qui fait tout ... La coutume pour les femmes c'est très important. Si une femme quitte son mari il traîne comme un garçon.

In this chapter I want to open a new window on indigenous construction of identity by considering women's sense of identity in relation to indigenous and exogenous ways of living collectively. To be part of a larger collectivity is crucial in defining Lifuan identity. This is stressed by men and women as inherent in the indigenous way of life, which they contrast with the selfishness and individualism of whites. I will start by looking at gendered representations of social life and how they are deployed in social relations. I will juxtapose these constructions of gender with missionary discourse on motherhood and the feminine body. While collectivity is primarily male dominated and male defined, women have their own ways of engaging in it. I will finally consider how women 'negotiate' constructions of feminine identity to engage in new ways of creating collectivity.

1 She refers to kuie june hmaala (see Chapter Eight, section on marriage).
In Drehu there are several metaphors that are used by both men and women to produce gendered representations of social life. The most common one used to speak of a woman is *ka xet*, the young banana leaf which is undamaged and used for wrapping the *itra*, the indigenous earth oven dish. This consists of several layers of slices of yams, sweet potatoes, on top of which is laid a chicken or a fish (sometimes a flying fox or a coconut palm crab), the whole generously sprinkled with coconut juice. A bed of banana leaves is placed on the ground, with the old, harder ones placed underneath and the young, tender ones on the top. The ingredients are then arranged in a circle. Upon completion, the young leaves are carefully wrapped around themselves, while the external leaves are used for the final wrapping, which is completed by using some lianas to firmly tie the parcel. The purpose of the outside leaves is to protect the food from heat and dirt during cooking, whilst that of the young leaves is to prevent any coconut juice from leaking. A well-done *itra* is one which comes out of the earth oven with the hearth leaves still intact, with no coconut juice leaking. Thus women are conceived through the image of a banana leaf which should keep all the ingredients together.\(^2\)

*Ame la föe ka xet ne hnalapa* means 'the woman is the one who keeps the household together' and it is a frequent expression used to define women's relation to a collectivity. But women are also spoken of as *trengen la mel* [the basket of life], an analogy between human procreation and agricultural harvest. During wedding ceremonies women are referred to as *atre qatreng la mel*, the person who encompasses life. *Qatreng la nekönatr* [literally, to put a baby in a bag, meaning the woman carrying a baby] is another image which focuses on a woman's reproductive role. The idea of woman being a container rather than its contents\(^3\) is stressed again and again during collective social moments. Although this image emphasizes women's nurturing role, it is an image of stability, of


strength rather than weakness. In a very mobile population, women's embodiment of strength and continuity is even more salient.4

The image of a basket containing something is very salient in Drehu. Trenge eweké, literally 'container-speak' [contenant-parler], is glossed in French as parole (see Moyse-Faurie 1983:119; Clifford: 1992 [1982]:212; for my discussion of this notion, see Chapter Seven). This idea of a wrapped parcel which looms so large in Lifuan cultural constructs has been interpreted by Roger Boulay in relation to statuettes which he believes had 'fonctions propitiatoires et magiques' [propitiatory and magical functions] (1990b: 166). Relying on early European witnesses and drawing on Leenhardt (1932:496), he explains the apparent contradiction between the magical function of these objects and the willingness of indigenes to give them away,5 as follows:

These figurines are therefore no doubt associated with magical practices, but they are in all likelihood no more than a vector, momentarily invested with potency that must be activated at the appropriate time. Once removed from the practice, decontextualized, and deprived of their protective wrapping ... these objects no longer have any efficacy; they can be abandoned without regret (1990b:166).

Thus, if in the indigenous society the efficacy of an object relied not so much on the object per se but on the relation between, say, a magic stone and its protective wrapping, then the representation of women as ka xet can be viewed as an image of strength, not of weakness. This strength was acknowledged by the high chiefs of Gaica and Wetr during a large women's gathering that took place in Drueulu in February 1992. When the women's delegation went to see the high chief Zeula, he welcomed them saying: 'vous êtes la moitié du pays' [you are half of the country]. A few days later, addressing the larger audience, both Zeula and

4 Cf. Bonnemaison (1985) where he presents the metaphors used in Tanna to speak of men and women. The former are compared to banyans and their domain is considered as 'the hearth of rootedness'; the latter are compared to a birth and thus the feminine domain is considered 'linked with movement' (1985:37). This, he explains, is due to the practice of women marrying-out.

5 The disposal of these statuettes was also as a result of missionaries' disapproval of them (see Chapter Three). Boulay here refers to commentators, such as Cheyne, who preceded or were contemporaneous with the arrival of the missionaries (1990b:164). Thus this early giving away should not be viewed as disposal in the sense it was observed later on (cf. Hadfield 1920:145).
the high chief Sihaze, spoke of the importance of women in present-day Kanak society by using the simile of a kite (the man) and a rope (the woman). Zeula opened his speech by clarifying that, according to custom, the high chief does not address an audience, but rather a spokesman mediates. Then he went on to say:

You [women] are the basket ... who carry the child ... who carry the kite; if the rope breaks the kite flies away ... the spring of life is always you, girls and women. We can't work without you, otherwise it is half the work (Pierre Zeula, 8 February 1992).

This representation of woman through indigenous metaphor contrasts with the representation of man as inatr, the centre post of a hut, which is akin to the representation of the high chief (see Chapter Two). Other representations of men are as he [the head] or trahmany la mus [man making decision], where mus means 'to decide' but is also a noun meaning the Administration, the authorities. Although they draw on indigenous images, these idioms probably derive more from colonial representations of gender relations within Lifuan society. Missionary discourse put a lot of emphasis on the conjugal bond, which strengthened this image of man as the head. Pohnimè explained, however, that it is the man and not the husband who is 'he', as previously discussed with regard to adult gender relations. But men did not make this same distinction. The equality of conjugal relations, which they stress within more Christian contexts, becomes more ambiguous in other contexts. Men, especially Protestant men, questioned about gender relations within the conjugal pair, emphasized the image of men as the head.

The idea of something being wrapped pervades many indigenous constructs. In particular, it characterizes the key concepts of knowledge and parole (see Chapter Seven). Knowledge [atre] is attributed to men [atr], and thus evokes the gendered asymmetry of the Drehu world of knowing and speaking. This is more complex than simply stating that we are confronted by a society where power is in the hands of men. In Lifiu people distinguish between two broad kinds of social knowledge. One is connected with behaviour, which emphasizes respect for the elderly, for communal work and for the local social hierarchy. This is called qene nöj, which literally means 'the way of the land' but is translated in French as la coutume. I will discuss the meanings of qene nöj in the next chapter, but here I am interested in looking at representations of knowledge which are public, and
thus available to everyone. Although men assert their prominent role in public activities, this kind of knowledge is not considered sex-segregated. The ceremonial exchanges and the speeches made on these occasions are all public and are a reminder of people's networks of kinship and customary relations and alliances. Women often explained that they had learnt a great deal about social relations during wedding or mortuary feasts. There is another kind of knowledge, however, which is specific to each clan and is called trenge hna atuth, which refers to a basket made of coconut leaves containing a wrapped parcel.\(^6\) This knowledge is secret. Not only should it not be disclosed to outsiders, but it should stay within the boundaries of one's clan, and primarily among men. Women may have some access to this knowledge, especially in the case of an only daughter, but in general their specific knowledge is considered to be more shallow. This ideology of a male prerogative of knowledge works differently in practice, as I have shown (see Chapter Four).

Men's privileged access to collective activities and wider social spheres is thus juxtaposed with a stress on women's anchoring and stability. Men's and women's engagements are distinct, yet representations of women stress their reproductive role through powerful tropes. Women's active engagement is necessary if men are to organize collectively without losing direction. This representation of woman as a rope in the sky suggests both connection to the ground but also a link to openness and the unbounded limits of public, collective space. Women are thus not portrayed as occupying an enclosed space.

The imagery bespeaks a different articulation between public and domestic domains from those characteristic of the west. I am not suggesting that these discourses should be taken at face value. On the contrary, my point is to stress that such representations of the feminine body should be politicized and historicized (Jacobus et al. 1990:8). I am not looking for the essence of being as indigenous women and men, but rather I am interested in exploring the way these ideas are extant in Lifuan society today. I am concerned to understand how representations of indigenous gender relations are woven together with exogenous influences through time. I now turn to how women's embodiment of 'womanhood' results from an articulation of indigenous and imported values of the feminine body, reproduction and motherhood.

\(^6\) In the past yams were never put on the ground but were always laid down wrapped in leaves. Today baskeests woven with coconut leaves are used to carry the yams.
DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

Although we can only speculate about the status of women in the past, the assumptions and claims that women's status had improved with missionary contact and interventions should be questioned. Women's voices and concerns went unrecorded or were recorded through male informants (Ralston 1989). Lifuan women, as I have already stressed, were often marginalized in early European narratives; when they did appear they were portrayed as submissive in a society where authority and power were considered male prerogatives. Cheyne commented: 'The Women appear to be kept under much subjection' (Cheyne 1971[1842]:104). Speaking about feasts, he described them as a male prerogative, adding that women 'sometimes get a portion from their Husbands in private' (1971[1842]:106). Jouan portrayed the indigenous woman as being exploited and characterized her as a 'bête de somme' [beast of burden] (Jouan 1861:no.118). Erskine, who described women in very denigratory terms (see Chapter Three), nevertheless described his encounter with Lifuans not just as a male prerogative: 'the natives ..., both men and women, were swimming off to the ship' (1853:363). Eight years later, commenting on the spread of syphilis among the population, Jouan portrayed Loyalties women, especially in Ouvéa, as 'ni débauchées, ni faciles, comme dans les iles de la Polynésie' [not debauched nor of easy virtue as in the islands of Polynesia], and spoke of them as living 'ordinairement dans une habitation à part' [generally in a different dwelling] (1861:no.118). At the same time Rochas, however, commented that in the Loyalties 'la femme vivait moins isolée du mari, était un peu moins déconsidérée' [a woman lives less isolated from her husband, being a little less badly disregarded] (1862:239). Hadfield commented that '[a]lthough women were held in such low esteem by the men ... their opinions were sometimes deferred to on ... house-building occasions' (1920:41). She mentions two other occasions connected with food sharing in which 'deference was shown to women'; when eating fish, women were given the 'choice cuts' and in the case of unwholesome fish only men were expected to eat it (1920:58). Thus, although it is difficult to assess gender relations in the past, it seems that in precolonial times Lifuan society was sex-segregated, and, although broader socio-political domains were more male-dominated, women's agency and power in diverse contexts were greater than most commentators acknowledged.

7 Probably he was contrasting the bachelors' house with the other dwellings.
Kanak women of Drueulu acknowledge the missionary discourse and what has become accepted as local practice. Their narratives clearly distinguish what is forbidden by the Church and what is forbidden by customary practice. The missionaries' presence in Lifu elaborated a discourse on gender relations, unlike the French state's colonial policy in New Caledonia, which hardly dealt with relations between the sexes. As the collection of articles on domestic life in the Pacific edited by Jolly and Macintyre suggests, 'it was missionaries who articulated the need to reform the family and who actively intervened to promote such changes' (1989:7). When asked if any particular behaviour was expected of a menstruating or lactating woman, Awaqatr commented:

It is forbidden to stay with your husband: it is custom.  
*It is forbidden de rester avec ton mari: c’est la coutume.*

But well aware that Christian morality had different assumptions from local values and that the mission sisters were concerned with raising 'good wives' by separating girls and boys from the rest of the community in a sex-segregated boarding school until suitable marriages could be arranged, she added:

It is forbidden to refuse your husband  
*It is forbidden de se refuser au mari ... c’est l’église qui a dit ça.*

They also tried to impose a way of life that would improve women's conditions relying on what they considered an appropriate, albeit imported, notion of gender relations. Pohnime, who had also experienced the Mission girls school, stressed the same point about not refusing the husband within marriage:

In the past they told us that if we refuse we are committing a sin  
*Autrefois à l’école on nous disait que si on refuse on fait [un] péché.*

Missionaries often spoke of the loose relations between husbands and wives, and of the instability of their partnership. The missionaries tried to stabilize marriage and inhibit gerontocratic control of marriages by taking it over themselves. Women emphasize that both girls and boys left school to get married and that this was arranged by the missionaries. Father Levavasseur was very explicit about it:

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8 For a compelling account of European colonization and consequential forms of gender relations in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies in the early 1900s, see Ann Stoler (1991).

I fought and battled to keep the boys in school until their marriage. Thus, I have already married 7 of them, all of whom now have children (Levavasseur, 28 December 1937, APM/ONC 200).

The emphasis was on sexual relations within marriage but the partnership was asymmetrical: women had to comply with their husband's sexual demands. Yet today premarital intercourse is acknowledged by women as the normal practice of the younger generation (though some suggested that it has always happened). Hadfield wrote that there were few illegitimate children and ... they were looked upon as possessing ... evil propensities' (1920:180). Today women's engagement in family planning, which I will explore in the next chapter, does not morally condemn young women's behaviour, but rather the concern is to address a real problem and to attempt to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

The 'prohibition' against refusing conjugal intercourse was viewed by missionaries as a necessary measure to eliminate adultery, which they considered to be fostered by the local practices of segregation and continence. They tried to restrain sexuality within a monogamous marriage. Their ideals contradicted a very important practice, which is still strongly endorsed by women: the postpartum sex taboo, which women say should be prolonged during lactation. There are several taboos connected with pregnancy and lactation, and these are among the restrictions both women and men still acknowledge. Women explain that in the past this was another device for spacing children, thus reducing fecundity. Historical evidence (e.g. Rochas 1862) supports this postpartum taboo, as does ethnographic evidence in much of Melanesia (Marshall 1985; Dureau 1993). Women today agree that during the period a woman is breast-feeding she should not have sexual relations; though she could sleep by her husband's side. Women's attitudes relating to their own beliefs and practices are more diversified. During a family planning session with a French woman doctor in June 1990, women raised questions relating to this taboo. Discussing the issue of

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10 While breast-feeding a woman should also not touch cold water to avoid her child from becoming sick. This means she is exempted from those domestic duties which require the use of cold water. In Drehu to have fever is looth hnei hñotr meaning 'cold has entered your bones'. On those occasions, sick children are well covered. I speculate that the Drehu expression codified a practice imposed by missionaries (in precolonial times children went naked). In my own society, albeit changes are taking place, until recently the medical practice was to cover feverish children whereas for example in the US it was the opposite: the place where the child was recovering had to be warm but not her/his body.
contraception, a woman asked if a breast-feeding woman could take the pill. Another woman intervened to say that during breast-feeding one should not have sexual intercourse to protect the child from becoming sick or handicapped. When the issue was discussed during the Women's General Assembly in February 1992 (see Chapter Seven), all the Kanak women present stressed once more the particular reason for this practice. One of the medical doctors suggested that spacing children in this way was done in order to 'culpabiliser les femmes ... pour résoudre le problème des grossesses trop rapprochées' [make women feel guilty ... solving the problem of pregnancies too close together], but women retorted that it was a natural birth control method for spacing children.

Today abortion is not socially approved, yet sometimes young women mention herbs used to stop an unwanted pregnancy, although they do not elaborate about them. There is evidence from historical records and from contemporary oral accounts that it was thought women should have control of their reproductive power by making using of indigenous contraceptives and abortifacients (see Hadfield who wrote of them being used in the case of illegitimate pregnancy (1920:180)). This was intrinsic to indigenous forms of birth control, which was in the hands of women. Missionaries tried to discourage this way of thinking (cf. Ralston (1989:62)).

Unlike older men who still remember the bachelors' house [hmelôm], elderly women do not recall any place where women had to stay during menstruation. The onset of menstruation was marked by a purge. The use of seawater to purge is a long-standing practice described by missionaries, and Hadfield wrote that it 'was considered to be a panacea for the majority of ailments' (1920:194). Awaqatr, the daughter of a former high chief, made clear that, unlike the other girls, for the 'filles de la chefferie' [chiefly girls] it was prepared by a family with a specific customary role.

Missionaries believed that the best way to reform Lifuans was through education. This view, as I have already discussed in Chapter Three, was even

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11 Today this is hardly done in Drueulu. While I was in Maré in May 1992, the woman in charge of the Women's Rights Bureau, Charlotte Wadrawane, pointed to a group of girls walking along a road. They were going to have a purge marking the onset of menstruation. Today, she explained, the purge is often delayed because of school commitments. For men today as well as in the past their eligibility to marry is marked by shaving of the beard.

12 It is still practised in Lifu, about once a year by most people. Students do it during the holiday break. It lasts a whole day, during which time one should drink only seawater. From personal experience I can say that the number of cupfuls one needs to drink before one sees any effect can vary greatly.
voiced by the Marists in their request for sisters to join them in the missions. In this chapter I rely more on the correspondence of the 20th century because it is more commensurate with the oral accounts I gathered from women. Missionaries did in fact put a lot of energy into education. From Bethanie, Péter wrote:

Their women [students' wives] have a great need to be looked after, especially to teach them how to sew and how to keep their children clean (Péter, 5 August 1923).

Leurs femmes ont aussi grand besoin qu'on s'occupe d'elles, surtout pour leur apprendre à coudre et à tenir leurs enfants propre.

The need for a girls school looms large in Péter's correspondence. Commenting on the imminent opening of the girls school, she explained its importance, stressing that it was 'plus pour qu'elles soient gardées du mal qu'instruites qu'on nous les confie' [more to be kept from harm than for their education that they are put into our care] (Péter, 7 May 1926). Recounting events of those years Kamaqatr made the same point. When recalling their years at the Mission girls school, women always asserted that it was tougher than the boys school. Pohnimé remembered:

They used to beat us all the time. A small silliness and they would beat us or make us kneel down. The father used his belt, the nun a liana, cegöl (July 1991).

On nous astiquait tout le temps. Une petite bêtise et on nous astiquait ou on nous faisait mettre à genoux. Le père usait [de] la ceinture, la soeur [d'] une liane, cegöl.

I have already related in Chapter Three women's accounts regarding the stinginess of the sisters. Drueulu had a Catholic school for girls which was run by the nuns, Sister Eulalie and Sister Agathe, and one for boys run by the priest. The Catholic Mission school in Drueulu was within the village but, unlike the boys who would leave the school compound every evening, girls were not allowed to go home to sleep. Girls could go home only on Wednesday afternoon. There were no holidays as Pohnimé recalled: 'On reste toujours à l'école. La fille sort de l'école pour se marier' [One had to stay in school all the time. A girl leaves school to get married]. Kamaqatr made the same point: 'Ame eahun ka

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13 I do not want to deny that she thought she was engaged in an altruistic mission.

14 All the quotes from Kamaqatr in this chapter are taken from a recorded Drehu/French interview, 26 April 1992. The interview took place, by chance, at the Mission, which explains why she refers to 'here' in recalling the years in the Mission school.

15 In New Caledonian French 'astiquer' means to beat.

16 Sister Agathe was from Maré. The Petites Filles de Marie was a Catholic order open to Kanak, but the sister in charge of it was always a French woman.
lapa palabe hi e celë' [We used to stay here all the time]. The idea was to raise good wives and good mothers. Pohnimé explained: 'On nous gardait même si on ne continuait pas les études pour que les filles ne courent pas partout' [They kept us even if one was not going on with studies, so that the girls could not wander about ....]. Kamaqatr commented that their school was not nypi ini kò [the real school], there was no inamacan [academic curriculum] in the school: 'Ame ekō pēkō ca hnei eahun hna atre, caas i hi la hnei eahun hna atre a Joxu' [Before we didn't know a single thing, the only thing that we knew was God]. Mariqatr entered the Catholic school in Drueulu at the age of seven and left in 1948 when she was 18. She recounted that during the war the students always had to pray 'pour vous autres en France et pour les Italiens, pour le Pape: Pie XI, Pie XII' [for you over there in France and for Italians, for the Pope: Pius XI, Pius XII] and commented: 'On a prié pour la France pour éviter la guerre et maintenant vous venez ici avec vos fusils' [We prayed for France to avoid the war and now you are coming here with your guns] (February 1990). She was referring to the events of 1988 and thus, again shifting from a critique of past missionary practice to a strong commentary on indigenous/colonial state relations. From 1952 only the younger children attended school in Drueulu; the eldest were sent to Hnathalo (Wetr). The Protestants had no school in Drueulu, however, and boys and girls were sent to Hnaizianu (Wetr).17

The missionary sisters tried to 'rescue' women from their indigenous life by imposing European patterns of relations between the sexes. The teachings of European missionaries seemingly confronted Lifuans with an egalitarian ethic. Péter, for example, was pleased to recount in one of her letters (2 September 1923) that men were helping their wives in carrying their burdens back from the field, something that, she emphasized, was not indigenous practice. But underscoring this ethic was the view that authority was gender-biased. This discourse has strengthened the way people, particularly men, perceive gender relations through the images of male hierarchy, presented earlier in this chapter. It became associated with a distinction between public and domestic domains. Motherhood came to be connected with the domestic role of women and dissociated from their public role in society. Indigenous and missionary emphasis on the maternal role of women underlay different assumptions. Women's attitudes to motherhood, however, still do not conform to missionary teachings.

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17 The Protestant school for girls was opened in Hnaizianu towards the end of 1926 (Péter, 8 October 1926).
This provides an illustration of the fact that the missionary discourse on motherhood, family values and domestication was imposed while the missionaries were a daily presence in people's lives but was later dispensed with. It was only superficially accepted by women.

Another area of missionary imposition related to covering the body. Many narratives refers to indigenes' nakedness, but both men and women seem to have willingly adopted new ways of covering themselves. Men were given western-style clothes whereas women adopted a loose-fitting, calf-length dress. Today these 'traditional' women's dresses are used to portray local identity. The following statement by Péter points to interesting complexities in missionary views. In 1923 Péter remarked that Lifuan women were all dressed in the same way - a style she disliked and believed had been worn since the days of Emma Hadfield. She commented that kimonos would have been 'plus jolis, plus économiques et plus vite faits' [nicer, cheaper, more easily made], but added that 'il n'y a rien à faire' [nothing can be done]: women did not seem interested at all in changing their dress style (Péter, 2 August 1923). Even today Drueulu women (and Lifuan women in general) consider the 'robe popinée' or 'robe mission' [Mother Hubbard dress] as the correct kind of dress for specific ceremonies. If one looks more closely, however, one notes changes in fashion. Every year there are subtle changes of details: new designs, new ways of embroidering, which distinguish new styles from old-fashioned dress. One day my daughter went to a wedding wearing a dress borrowed for the occasion, which was too long. She wore a belt to shorten it. A couple of women later told me that they had seen my daughter and thought she was improperly dressed. They had wanted to give her one of their daughters' dresses but realised they did not have the right size. Wearing this type of dress is perceived as an element of distinction and a valorization of local identity. When one goes to the garden, however, any kind of dress will do. On these occasions the dress is usually worn back-to-front, which makes for ease of movement. The same applies when a woman is breast-feeding.

Women's sense of the body is quite similar for both Catholic and Protestant women. Women feel ashamed to expose the lower parts of their bodies, though they do not feel the same about their breasts, even though they are normally covered. To sit in a proper position means to sit with the bottom part of the dress

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18 See Neumann discussing Tolai women's use of meriblaus and laplap in Papua New Guinea as 'the emblem of Tolai women's identity' (1992:306).

19 Popinée in the past was a word used in New Caledonia to designate an indigenous woman; today Lifuan women still use it to refer to their dress.
turned upward, and not with the top part turned downward, as it is the conventional code in Southern European contexts. This is because men and women often do not all sit at the same level. The part that needs to be covered is not the legs but specifically the genital area, as was effected in the past by the girdle worn by women. An elderly woman recounted that when she arrived from her inland tribe for her wedding she was wearing only a skirt, and everyone in Drueulu was surprised. Today nakedness is differently perceived. Women should always wear their clothes even when bathing in the sea. Modesty is strictly observed in public by young and elderly women. However, in private situations involving only women (for example, in one's own household or in a hospital room), elderly women show a different attitude. Women acknowledge that this sense of the body is the result of missionization, but they also stress that it has become their sense of their bodies. A Protestant friend told me of an elderly woman of the village who at home sometimes leaves her breasts uncovered. The younger woman feels very uncomfortable on these occasions.

But breasts also pertain to maternity. The missionaries' different perceptions of motherhood, the feminine body and morality influenced the relationship between mother and child as well. The strong corporeal relation of mother and child went against the code of maternal contact advocated by missionary women. Writing about a baby girl in the missionaries' care, Péter observed:

For our indigenous women who always carry their children everywhere it is a mystery that this little one can spend hours by herself in her cradle and eats only at fixed hours (Péter, 7 March 1924).

Physicality between women and their children was not encouraged. A nurturing mother had to concentrate on taking care of her child without having too much physical contact with the child. Intensity of physical relations is still present, however. Children continue to be handled in a very direct and affectionate way, and lactation is still practised although the period has shrunk, compared with the

20 It is not easy to learn to sit in this way. At the beginning I would try to cover my legs pulling my dress downward, but this worked only when I sat in certain positions. Unlike in Italy where this practice works because everybody sits at the same level, in Lifou it does not. One should always note how people are sitting (higher/lower) in relation to oneself. In contrast, Kanak women's way works all the time. But it also made me realize that I was behaving according to a particular construct of 'female' modesty, whereby a woman should cover herself from the waist downwards whereas in Lifou a woman should cover the genital area, as was the case with fringe skirts women wore in the past (see Jouan 1861, no.118).
past, when women such as Mariqatir breast-fed for as long as two years. Today
the length of lactation varies: from several months to a year. A few of the
women interviewed who had small children had started to shift from mother's
milk to formula, either convinced it was a more complete infant diet or because
of work commitments. Waxôma suggested to her husband's young unmarried
sister that she rely on milk formula. Yet two years later, when another sister-in-
law had her first baby, she gave the opposite advice. The Provincial Health
Department, however, is pushing for breast-feeding.

Problems in constructing the feminine body, however, were reciprocal.
Indigenous men as well had to construct the feminine body of the missionary
sisters, as we can gather from Péter's amusing comment referring to the period
when the Protestant Mission in the Loyalties was run only by female lay
missionaries:

This overturns all their ideas ... The old hnamiat who was preaching
wanted in his prayer to mention the [two] female missionaries and he did
not know how to get out of it. (I think he could not remember our names
exactly). Briefly, he referred to us as those two servants of God who do not
have a body like the other servants (Péter, 19 November 1933).

CHILD BIRTH PRACTICES

If schooling was an important context promoting indigenous welfare through the
creation of good mothers, another area of contestation between indigenous and
missionary discourse about women's bodies and their procreativity was childbirth
practice. Lifuan women claim that, in the past, this was an exclusively women's
sphere. Changes in child-bearing practices do not appear in missionaries'

21 Cf. Dureau (1993) for the experience of maternity by Simbo women (Western Solomon
Islands). Simbo women convey their grievances for the burden imposed on them by child
minding which prevents them from participation in communal events, in a way quite different
from that of Drueuluan women. Waxôma expressed her disappointment recounting that her sister
Gazane had seven children and had stayed at home to take care of them, while her husband went
gardening. Now Gazane's eldest son, Waxôma stressed, stays at home child minding whilst his
wife does most of the gardening. To substantiate the changes taking place, Waxôma complained
that men were becoming fat, whereas women of her age were all slim.

22 Drehu term referring to an indigenous man in charge of the community's religious affairs.
correspondence but are well documented in elderly women's oral accounts. Indigenous forms of child-bearing experience are still fresh in the older women's memories although they are not remembered by younger women. I was able to elicit accounts of women who gave birth 'at home' and of women who used to be healers and midwives. They explained how the old way of giving birth had been replaced when the first maternity ward opened in the 1930s in the Protestant missionary compound of Bethanie, in Lifu. Marguerite Anker was the lay missionary in charge of this project, helped by Péter, with whom we are familiar by now. Wives of the students at Bethanie, who were studying to become pastors, learnt the new birthing method. When they left the school to be assigned with their husbands to parishes, they started to assist women during labour. Little by little the new birthing method replaced the old one.23

Awaqatr recounted her own birth: 'Je suis née pendant la guerre. Il y avait pas des dispensaires' [I was born during the war (World War I);24 there was no dispensary]. She explained that in the past hna ho [delivery] took place in the hnexöt [rear part of the hut],25 on a pandanus mat, which was used for the occasion and then disposed of either in the sea or in a natural sink-hole.26 Then the mother and the child sat together on a small mat expressly prepared for the two. The mother could not bathe herself in the sea for a few days. The child was breast-fed. The eng [umbilical cord] was cut and tied with a string. After having done this, the child was given a bath. After a few days a part of the umbilical cord would fall off and this was kept in a suitcase or carried either by the mother or the father, or a relative, while gardening or going fishing (the woman would attach it inside her skirt; the man would put it inside a packet of cigarettes or in any another suitable place). This part of the umbilical cord is still kept by most women who had given birth in the hospital in We. The idea underlying this practice was that, if the adult was successful in whatever activity he or she would

23 For an account of missionaries' intervention in birthing among Anganen women (Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea) during the 1970s, see Merrett-Balkos (in press).
24 All the quotes by Awaqatr in this section are from a long interview, 2 October 1991.
25 In Lifu the rear of a hut is opposite to what is considered the main entrance (qëhnelö). The interior of the house is also classified in two lateral sides: sehné maca (right side) and sehné mi (left side).
26 Hadfield, however, presented the event as taking place 'in the bush' while 'the husband and his male friends took up their position at a discreet distance so as to be within call' (1920:175). She described how men reacted to the news that the birth was over. In the case of a girl a 'sullen, frigid silence' followed, in the case of a boy men showed 'the utmost satisfaction and joy' (1920:176).
entertain, the child once grown-up would show the same propensities towards those activities. Elderly women stress that a man had to carry his son's eng whereas a woman carried her daughter's eng, but in comments of young women this distinction is lost.

Awaqatr commented that at that time there were no white nurses, and older Kanak women helped during the labour. Awaqatr was one of them. She observed that birthing was a practice that required women's participation and excluded men: 'chez nous la coutume c'est pas les hommes, c'est les femmes, toutes seules' [it is customary for us, it is not the men, it is the women, only the women]. She also suggested that the changes took place as a result of missionaries' intervention. Whereas most Protestant women learnt at Moria, Awaqatr was taught, by the nuns in Xepenehe, a way of giving birth different from the indigenous one. In the past, two women helped the pregnant woman during labour. One was the itra pathé, who would sit back-to-back to help the parturient woman maintain a sitting position. When the contractions started, the parturient woman would attach herself to a cord hanging from the roof of the hut. Another woman acted as ka ixep and would position herself in front of the parturient woman to receive the child. Most of the older women recall this distinction of tasks and roles. It is unknown to the younger women, who are familiar only with the more generic term die [midwife]. Women stated that whereas the woman who was situated in the back, if tired, could well have been replaced by another, this was not the case for ka ixep, who was said to have 'plus de connaissance sur l'accouchement' [more knowledge about giving birth]. Sipoqatr, a Protestant woman born in 1926, and her mother, Kanqatr, who had both helped women with birthing, commented that 'tru la metror eni la kola die' [I was very respected as a midwife]. Kaneqatr also explained that, as soon as a woman would realize that her hands were trembling and her sight was worsening, she would stop practising, and would be replaced by a younger woman. When the birth was over, the itra pathé would massage the mother to help the iwenemele [placenta] to come out. The ka ixep would always recommend that the itra pathé should hurry to remove the placenta. Hadfield and later Péter were very critical of the

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27 Is this sympathetic magic? Today Mariqatr told me that you can give it to someone who has a job such as a bus driver in order that the child might grow up to have this job skill, but the underlying assumption has not changed.

28 Cf. Dureau (in press) on clinic births in the Western Solomons and the impact of biomedically trained nurses.

29 She uses die as a synonymous with ka ixep.
intervention of these elderly women. Hadfield commented that '[m]uch unnecessary cruelty was inflicted for the supposed good of the patient and the unborn child' (1920:176), but that nonetheless 'child-bearing has never been unpopular; quite the contrary' (1920:179).

Mariqatr explained that from 1970 onwards women were required to go and give birth in the hospital.30 She commented:

It is for this reason that the hospital is free; they cannot charge us because it is they who have forbidden us to give birth in the tribe (Mariqatr, April 1992).

In this commentary, as in most of the others, 'they' refers to the colonial state, although women explain that it was the missionaries who first changed the practice. Mariqatr in fact recalled the two demoiselles31 in Moria who taught women a new practice of giving birth. Women were not giving birth in a sitting position anymore. A round wooden pillow was put under the woman's neck, and she would lie on one side or on her back with one woman acting as midwife. The role of the itra pathê thus became obsolete.

Today the policies and practices of the Loyalty Provincial Health Department (operating since the beginning of 1990)32 enforce the medicalization of the health of mother and children. Pre- and post-natal visits are encouraged and a premium has been set up for women who have given birth in a hospital centre, thereby discouraging home births, which in Lifu happen very rarely nowadays. In 1991, 104 births took place in the hospital in We, and only one in the tribe. In 1992, 180 hospital births were expected.33 The provincial health program has been criticized for medicalization (see Salomon-Nekiriaï 1991:44). I think, however, that one should consider the context of power in which these decisions are made. The Health Department's Sanitary Education Section is run by two Lifuan nurses. If one points to the risks of medicalizing maternity, one

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30 This is very different from the main island where some tribes in the mountains were still giving birth at home in the late 1980s. See Salomon-Nekiriaï 1995b

31 This is interesting because in everyday usage I have never heard anyone refer to an unmarried woman in this way. Everyone says fille, but cf. Pétier, 19 November 1933.

32 In 1992 La Santé et le Social [Health and Community Welfare] took up 38 per cent of the Provincial budget, whereas the biggest slice (40 per cent) went to Education.

33 Interview with the midwife, hospital of We, 23 April 1992. She described the hospital childbirth policies and practices as 'pas hypermedicalisation, mais medicalisation' [not hyper-medicalization but medicalization].
should also examine local women's perception of the new way of giving birth. Exploring the meaning of childbirth in US discourses, Treichler cogently presents the issues at stake concerning childbirth policies and practices. She states that for women the question of childbirth:

is rooted not in 'medicalization' *per se* but in monopoly: monopoly of professional authority, of material resources, and of what may be called linguistic capital - the power to establish and enforce a particular definition of childbirth (1990:116).\(^{34}\)

She warns against the dangers of defining childbirth in a formulaic way and considers the process by which different meanings of childbirth (as pathological event, as natural experience, and as a commodity) can become codified in an official definition of childbirth.\(^{35}\) I find useful her distinction between meanings and definitions (1990:123) and between medicalization and monopoly of health to understand the way Drueulu women today engage with western and indigenous medical practices (see Chapter Seven).\(^{36}\)

As Vegetti Finzi writes, however:

maternity may be a potentially rich aspect of women's body and mind, a complex of energies, figures, affects and attitudes which are possessed by one sex and constitute its difference. These dispositions need not necessarily be expressed by bringing a child into the world. They may be employed in other projects of social, cultural, ethical or aesthetic life without, however, losing their distinctiveness (1992:137).

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\(^{34}\) She defines medicalization in this context as follows: 'standard surgical preparation ..., fetal monitoring, ultrasound, analgesic and analstetic medications, induced labour, forceps delivery, episiotomy, and cesarean section' (Treichler 1990:ft.4). At We, episiotomy is not often practised, labour is induced only if the life of the mother or child is at risk. If a woman needs a caesarean section she is sent to Nouméa. 90 per cent of the women breast-feed. The hospital does not provide food for the parturient woman; relatives are responsible for feeding and they can visit the woman in labour at any time (in the new hospital the rooms open directly to the outside).

\(^{35}\) For a different perspective on maternity, from the point of view of the modern law oriented towards 'protecting the rights of the unborn or the new-born' rather than the female subject, see Cavarero (1992). See also Duden 1994 [1991].

\(^{36}\) For a political reconceptualization of motherhood and its reappropriation by women, see Irigaray (1992). For an excursus into the two aspects of the reified body: the erotic and the maternal, see Vegetti Finzi (1992). See also the contributions to the volume by Ram and Jolly (in press).
Plates 14 and 15: Kaneqatr and her daughter Sipoqatr demonstrating traditional birthing methods
ADOPTION

In Lifuan society giving birth was not the only way to become a mother. Adoption was and still is a frequent social practice and just as crucial as marriage alliances in enabling people to move from one family to another, to make new ties, or to strengthen existing ones. Adoption has many facets. This practice was contrasted by missionaries and other westerners in general. Rochas stated: 'La funeste coutume de l'adoption concourt encore à l'instabilité de la famille' [the dreadful custom of adoption still contributes to the instability of the family] (1862:233). Péter noted the influence of the women, aunts and grandmothers, in the extended family and juxtaposed these roles and those of the European nuclear family, a bounded unit, where parenthood is the prerogative of the father and the mother:

The family for us is the father, the mother and the children. The family in Lifou comprises all the relatives, and the parents are in the middle there but they have no more authority over their children than the uncles, aunts and grandmothers. They all live together; in addition the customs of hospitality of the country open the door to anyone passing through (Péter, 1 June 1935).

Her statement carries an implicit condemnation of the indigenous notion of parenthood, which becomes very explicit in another letter she wrote. Describing a woman with a child who married and then became pregnant, Péter lamented that she had 'complètement négligé son premier enfant' [completely neglected her first child] (2 February 1937). This practice, whereby a child of an unmarried woman is not incorporated into the family if she marries someone who is not the father, is still alive, and I consider it under the rubric 'adoption', although today Lifuans make a distinction between donner [give] following customary law and adopter [adopt] following French law. I do not consider the latter here.

Adoption represents continuity for lineages with no descendants; but it also allows a childless married woman to experience motherhood. A married woman is always referred to by her husband as ifénékong [the bearer of my child] and by her in-laws as ifaaping [the bearer of my grandchild]. Pressure is very strong on women to bear children. Within a childless couple, the woman is always blamed for infertility. Women were very explicit about acknowledging that either spouse
could be responsible but that in practice women are always blamed by their in-laws' family. Adoption thus can represent a way to fulfil one's maternal role while lightening the strong pressure put on the infertile woman or the woman whose husband is infertile.

But for every woman receiving a child, another is giving her child away. Tensions emerged between these two subject positions in the conversations I had with women on this issue. Adoption must thus be considered from these divergent, even opposed, perspectives. What does adoption represent in terms of identity and what does it mean for women, the one who gives and the one who receives the child?

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the children of an unmarried woman are considered to belong to Drueulu and are registered under the mother's name at birth. This means that the child is given a Drehu name at birth by the mother's family, whereas a child born to a married couple is named by his or her paternal relatives. Unlike the French first name, the choice of a name in Drehu is not left to chance (nowadays a newborn is generally registered with a Drehu and a French first name). Name giving is a statement about one's own position within society. Names identify people: a name should remain within a kinship group but the widespread practice of allowing the maternal kin group to name a child means that the name will circulate beyond the lineage. Nevertheless, people can identify where a name comes from by reference to a given lineage and a given territory.

Naming a female or a male newborn entails different kinds of commitments. For example, to bear a name from a chiefly lineage is to be recognized whenever the name is pronounced as being descended from high rank. Villagers stress that, by bearing someone's name, one embodies some of the characteristics of the person one is named after. A male child from the chiefly lineage named after a former high chief will be referred to as if he was the forefather. Ils le taquinent comme s'il était le grand chef [They tease him as if he was the high chief], Waxöma told me when referring to one of her sons. Adults make evaluative references to the individual one is named after, to his 'good and bad habits'. Without lessening the importance of naming for the deployment of social relations, there is a light-hearted side to the matter. A child who has been

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38 See Lutz (1985) on naming practices. She considers that name giving 'provides insight into a people's ethnopsychology' (1985:59). Although I have not considered naming practices from this perspective, I want to point it out as a different approach.
bestowed with his deceased grandfather's name is addressed jokingly as 'grandmother's husband'. Likewise a child named after his mother's brother can be referred to by the same term as the spouse of his mother's brother's wife: 'hane hi la föi W-' [here is the spouse of W-], even though the latter may still be alive. When a maternal kin group is chosen as name-giver but the mother's father is dead there are two possibilities: the widowed grandmother is left to choose if she has not returned to her community; if she has, the eldest maternal uncle must decide. Although the choice of the name-givers is left to the patrilineage to which the child belongs, nevertheless, the maternal side has some rightful expectations. A woman friend told me that her natal lineage was displeased when, at the birth of her third consecutive male child, her husband's family did not ask her natal group to name the child. Thus, much importance is attached to naming. It should be recalled, however, that any French first name can be given at birth because, unlike the Drehu first name, the French one does not define a person's place in society.39

A female newborn is often hamën [literally 'given', meaning adopted], usually to her mother's kin group to sanai föe [replace the mother].40 Naming in this case will establish an enduring relation between the child and the name-giving group. This bond entails specific reciprocal exchanges during the course of the life of the child. Zanesi explained to me that her third daughter had been 'donnée' [given] to her own kin group in Luengöni (district of Lösi) although she had brought her up herself. Zanesi said that her daughter was considered a 'Drueulu girl', but when she marries the fact that she is a 'Luengöni girl' will be stressed. If the girl marries and has a female child, and her husband's family decides to 'give' this child to 'replace the mother', it will then be the Luengöni kin group who will name the child. Bearing the name of a member of the maternal kin group does not always result in the shift of interrelations described above. Zanesi specified that, if her mother's name had been given to her youngest daughter, this would merely have been a mark of respect, not entailing the same outcome.

So far I have presented it as a practice involving a couple and the wife's relatives, and what it entails when a marriage is agreed upon. But adoption can

39 To make me understand the difference, a woman told me that her daughter bears the French first name of a woman working at the Registrar’s Office, and added that, if a stranger suggests a name to her, she can accept it, since after all it has no meaning.

40 Cf. Goodale for the concern of the Kaulong of New Britain for the replacement of a woman as connected to her marriage, not to her death (1980:126).
also involve a child moving from the family of birth to a married male relative of
the patrilineage. In both cases adoption is not always a smooth process. Although
women accept this practice of naming and adoption saying that 'c’est la coutume'
[it is custom] or 'c’est la famille qui a décidé' [it is the family who has decided],
they resist it also in a different way. Some mothers request that the child stays in
their household to be raised by them. Or in the case of a child already 'given',
they might oppose their husband's proposal to 'give' another child to a relative.
While women show similar concerns regarding adoption, depending on their age
and personality they may take different public positions on the issue. A woman
recounted the events of the evening preceding the day her child had to be taken to
her adopted family. The daughter, her fifth child, was given to her family at the
age of two. The night before:

I was up all night crying as if she was dead. My husband told me: 'She is going
to stay with your parents'. We took her there at night. When we went back
three weeks later, she was fine. This was because they were always holding
her. When we go to visit her [she is seven] she is happy, she does not cry. It is
this that makes me feel fine. My brother and his wife live with my parents.
They do not have any children.41

The woman had also received a female child, who is now 13. She commented
that the girl knows her parents and goes to see them, but she is pleased to be with
her adopted family. Children in fact sooner or later are told of their situation and
become aware of their natal family.

Although there are differences among women, in general those who have
been married for a long period, and whom I perceived as having strong
personalities, seemed to have been able to impose their will and raise their own
children. They know that their daughter’s wedding will be organized by the
adoptive family, but this does not seem to concern them. Again, how much this
concern is an indigenous expression of the mother/child bond or is the result of
introduced external values of domesticity acquired through exposure to
Christianity, western education and television, and appropriated by Kanak
women, is difficult to assess.

But adoption is not always a smooth process for the child either. An adopted
male child has a different status in his new family from that of an adopted female
child. If he has been adopted because the family did not have a son, and later on a

41 The conversation was in French, but I wrote it down in Italian, to avoid its being understood by
anyone in the village browsing through my notebook.
male child is born to the family, the elder's status [haetra] will be questioned. If he is adopted by the senior branch of a lineage which has no male offspring, he will be able to attain a leading role only if the lineage accepts him as tixe. The same procedure happens at the clan level, as I have explained in Chapter Two. To underline women's perspectives on adoption, I will examine some of the questions involving adoption and the different options available by referring to the genealogy of Atresi [adviser] Waminya, which was recounted to me by a woman of the family. The dates of birth were checked with the civil registration data in We (Figure 6.1). This genealogy is very rich; in fact it shows that although descent is patrilineal, when a lineage has no male offspring, descent can be traced through a female link. In the case in question, a female child was adopted into a different branch of the shallow lineage, to whom a daughter was later born. Both women had a son, and, although the child of the elder daughter was senior in age, he was not designated as the haetra. This shows the structural tension present in the practice of adoption, which creates conflictual situations. Furthermore, the son of the younger daughter had the choice of relating to his sibling by giving priority to generation over descent criteria. Addressing E as mother's sister's son implied emphasizing a generational criterion, whereby F's mother is of a different generation to the other woman, thus considering the son of the elder woman of the same generation as his mother. Adoption of a child born to a married couple is always initiated by the husband's family; in the case of a child born to an unmarried woman it is her family who will decide, regardless of her wishes. This might mean that the child can be adopted by a male kinsman at the time of birth. Young women are anxious about this practice over which they have so little control. But the family of a young unmarried woman who has recently given birth can decide to allow the newborn's acknowledged father's group to choose a name from the stock of names belonging to its lineage. Usually this is done in the first few days following the birth. The man and his family go to visit the woman's kin group to 'ate la ejen la nekönatr' [give a name to the child]. In this case the young man and his family make a commitment vis-à-vis the other lineage, promising that marriage will soon

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42 Maathin is the term of reference, the term of address being hmihm.  
43 Cf. Howard on adoption practices on Rotuma (Fiji). He states that 'although an adopted child is called ma'piga "grandchild", he is apt to call the genealogical children of his adopters by sibling terms rather than terms which designate members of the parental generation, particularly if they are near his age' (1970:351).
follow. But this does not always happen. A young woman with a child explained to me that her mother, a widow, refused to let her child's father's family name him, because the mother was afraid he would choose the name without fulfilling his commitment as had happened in the case of her eldest daughter. An unmarried man and his family can also go and visit a young woman who has just given birth in order to amē [reserve] the newborn. It is a way of acknowledging paternity. Everyone knows who is the father of the child, but to acknowledge paternity in this manner means that the man's kin group formalizes the request with customary exchange. In the case of paternity acknowledged years later by the man's family, the child's name can be changed. This is known as ujen la ejen, though in everyday conversation in French, Kanak gloss all these practices as 'faire la coutume' [customary exchanges]. If the husband-to-be and his family do not acknowledge the birth of the newborn, the child will be assimilated into the maternal kin group and lineage. If the mother subsequently marries a man who is not the father of the child, the latter will be adopted by a couple belonging to the mother's group, generally the parents or a married brother. The child and the mother will separate, but the child will not change the household he or she has been brought up in and will not have to establish a new network of relations with strange adults. In any case, sooner or later, an adopted child will become aware of her or his situation. Naming and adoption thus reveal nuances that are lost when people gloss them as 'making custom'.

44 These practices also pose problems for investigators who wish to use civil registration data. Sometimes children are adopted or recognised by their father's lineage many years after birth, in which case the child is struck from the de jure population of one tribe and registered with the de jure population of another. By doing this, numbers are added to a population the size of which has already been calculated and which has been used for further estimates. It also has consequences for the annual population growth of each community, which cannot be ascribed entirely to natural growth nor to migration.
A: oldest male
B: daughter of anga joxu Wazetra and of isola Wamewa -
C: adopted by A
D: younger than C, but considered haetra
E: addresses F as hmiihmi, mother's brother because he belongs to a different generation -
* died in 1991 (participated in WWI, from Hnaeu Inagoj) -

1. from Easo
2. from Kejëeny
3. from Hnathalo
4. from Hnaeu (Inagoj)

Source: recounted by a woman of the family in 1992; for the date of birth: Civil Registration, We
WOMEN'S USE OF MATERNAL METAPHORS IN CREATING NEW COLLECTIVITIES

So far I have stressed the use of images of the maternal female body in cross-sex sociality which is primarily male-dominated. Now I consider how women deploy the maternal in their creation of new forms of collectivities, which are exclusively female.45

In examining women's creation of new collectivities the metaphor of woman as mother emerges as pervasive, although I perceived a difference in the way Protestant and Catholic women made use of this image of the woman as a mother. Among the Protestant women, a woman's maternal role in the expanded social context is viewed as an expansion of her role as a mother, but in a way that emphasizes the conjugal bonds.46 Among Catholic women instead the maternal is central in their engagement in the social arena, linking individual and political transformations through this relationship. The maternal in this case highlights more the singularity of a woman than the conjugal bond. In both cases, however, the boundaries between enclosed domesticity and a broader social context are blurred, thus woman as mother is not confined to the private space but becomes a powerful trope used by women to engage in a broader social context, challenging conventional conceptions which view private/political spaces as bounded and differentiated units (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

Women in Drueulu are organized on different levels. At the household level women help each other with the different tasks concerning housekeeping, child minding and gardening. As elsewhere in Melanesia, men participate in gardening and child care, performing different labour tasks, though the sexual division of labour is not too strict. The division of labour is not necessarily based on gender, but on marital status and age as well, as I discuss in the wedding ceremony in Chapter Seven. Cooperation in gardening between a wife and a husband is highly valued. Usually those who achieve a good production are praised for their complementary relationship.

45 On the image of women as mothers in nationalist discourses, see Jolly (1994b). She argues that the rhetoric of motherhood, differently conceived within different nationalisms, should not be considered solely as 'a site for masculinist constructions' (1994b:57) but should be interpreted also from the point of view of women's lived experience and their creative agency.

46 This difference is posited more in terms of emphasis than of contrasting representations of womanhood.
But women organize themselves individually and collectively in more structured ways. Women are able to mobilize their informal networks in times of stress. For example, when a husband is drunk, women in the village use female networks in order to take shelter and receive comfort. Domestic violence is explained by married women as being derived from their husband's heavy drinking. On such occasions, if a woman does not live near her natal family, she will rely on this network. Women activated their informal networks in other critical situations. A very young unmarried woman, mother of two children, was living with her mother, a Catholic widow. Her relatives became tired of feeding her and her children, took the three of them to the garden and left them in a shelter. Lilié (Thérèse's daughter), a married Catholic woman, went gardening and discovered the three. She decided to intervene and took them to her place. The news spread and the family of the unmarried woman made known that that same evening they were going to pick her up at Lilié's place. At that point Catholic women mobilized their informal network. Waxöma and her husband, as well as other couples, went to Lilié's place. They wanted to make sure that the family would not mistreat the young woman and her children anymore. Although they disapproved of the young woman's conduct (two children out of marriage), they emphasized they were very concerned about the two children, who were not to blame for their mother's behaviour. In situations of tension such as this, women mobilize their networks following denominational lines. Although women acknowledge that they are all from Drueulu, they are well aware of the presence of the two denominations within the larger tribe.

By focusing on different constructs of motherhood, I do not imply that women in Kanak society of Lifu are symbolized just as mothers. Although in a man's relation to both his wife and his sister her status as a 'mother' is crucial, he must still behave quite differently vis-à-vis the two. The more relaxed relationship he has with his wife is not reciprocated in the relationship with his opposite-sex sibling. But motherhood, although defined by a language which has pervasive gender asymmetry, is not just a dyadic mode of attachment to men, as the other kin categories - wife and sister - must be. 'Motherhood' denotes women's collective existence. Everyone is generated by a woman. Thus women can represent themselves through the maternal in an empowered way, not

stressing closed domesticity and stasis but greater mobility and visibility in the broader social world.

In Drueulu in 1989 women participated in communal activities as part of both mixed and same-sex groups. There was an informal group of Catholic women who gathered together on a weekly basis to pray; the Catholic parish committee had women members; other women were active in Secours Catholique. Younger women, regardless of their religious affiliation, were members of a youth cultural group, Drui, which started its activities in December 1989. They also participated in sports activities, cricket and volleyball being the most popular. The engagement and activities I discuss here, however, concern the two organized groups of women of the village. Each one was connected to one of the two denominations, yet their programs and their way of engaging in activities varied.

One group was part of the Evangelical Church. Eleven married women were members, but, unlike the other group, no unmarried woman was taking part in the activities during the period of my fieldwork. This exclusion was explained by Wapea Ele-Hmaea, president of the group in 1989, in terms of the activities of the Protestant community, which were differentiated following an age criterion (adult/young). Women gathered together on Sunday afternoon at Eika, at the same time as the other members of the Protestant Church met to discuss and to organize their work. They stressed that, although they met separately, they did so during the day and not at night so that their husbands present at Eika at the same time could mind the children.\(^{48}\) The group did not have a statute, and many activities were 'à caractère religieux' [of a religious character], as Wapea put it, although alcohol was an important social issue on their agenda. Usually meetings were opened by a prayer. The group was organized in a work party usually doing gardening, and involved in fund-raising activities; the money generally was used to allow members of the group to participate in meetings taking place in other parts of the island. The structure of the group was very formal, replicating the Protestant Church hierarchical structure. A committee with a president is chosen every three years at the tribe level, at the \textit{consistoire} level,\(^{49}\) and at the regional level (Lifu). This means any kind of information is sent to local groups by the central committee based in Nouméa going through the different levels of the

\(^{48}\) During my fieldwork they only met once at night to prepare the \textit{itra} for a meeting involving all the Protestant women of Lifu which took place in Wedrumel in March 1990.

\(^{49}\) The boundaries of the \textit{consistoires} in Lifu, unlike in Maré, do more or less coincide with the administrative districts.
organization. Because of this, the group lacks the freedom of movement and autonomy of action of the other women's group. Their participation in wider activities needs to be authorized by Nouméa; as a result their involvement in social activities is somewhat atrophied. This structure also affects the turnover of women participating in meetings outside of Lifu: only women members of the elected committee participate.

During the meeting that took place in Wedrumel (Gaica) on 2 March 1990 for the Protestant International Day of Prayer, involving all Protestant women of Lifu, each group arrived accompanied either by the pastor of their tribe or by the deacon. The women leaders sat on a bench, the others on the ground. This differentiation following status is stronger among the Protestant community in general than among the Catholic community. During the opening customary gestures the men present monopolized the ceremony, but, when women gathered among themselves to evaluate the Assembly of Protestant women which had taken place in Drueulu in October 1989, some women voiced their disagreement regarding its organization. The meeting became very lively. Women discussed how the regional president had allocated the 16 places for JSD (Jeunes Stagiaires pour le Développement) that the Protestant women's organisation had had from the Administration. The president had distributed the places among young women and men, without consultation, and thus was highly criticized. The issue was how single individuals and tribes would benefit from the money. A woman was ashamed that her son had been chosen and that her tribe had three JSD when some tribes had none. The president explained that the places were distributed among the three concistoires: four places to Gaica, six to Wetr, and six to Lösi. But women were still very upset. The president had to formally apologize.

Gender relations were more strongly asymmetrical in the Protestant community. It seems paradoxical, but the indigenization of the Protestant Church

50 It happened just shortly before my arrival in the village.
51 The policy of JSD was a big issue in 1989. It was part of a state strategy to allow young people out of a job to earn some money and to receive some training at the same time. In reality it became a way to employ young people in a range of works for three to six months, but hardly any training was provided. It was highly criticized by some villagers as a welfare policy which did not confront the problems connected with youth: unemployment, training, and so on. Moreover, women commented that this higher disposability of cash by young people had worsened the abuse of alcohol in the tribe.
52 Some Kanak, critical of the initiative, have renamed it 'Jeunes Sous-Développés' [Under-Developed Youth].
means that local men are responsible in both in customary and religious domains, which as I stressed are crucial to defining their identity. The choice of the first Kanak woman, who had entered the Theological School of Lifu as the wife of a student, to become a student herself was opposed by part of the clergy. When she was ordained pastor in Lifu in April 1992 - the first Kanak woman pastor - it was kept a low-key ceremony. During the annual Convention, a formal gathering of Lifuan Protestants, which in 1990 took place in Kumo, a woman from Drueulu spoke in front of more than 2000 people, representing delegations from all the Protestant tribes of the island, but it was again a highly formal context mobilized by men.

Instead, in the Catholic community, the absence of any religious authority has meant that local catechists are taking care of the community, but within a national level structure which is white-dominated and highly hierarchical. Thus authority within the community is more diffused, less centralized. During meetings of the parish committee women take part in the decision process, though customary rules are never forgotten. Although it is a structure where people are elected, when a member of the Church committee died in 1989, he was replaced by his eldest son: the criterion followed was more in line with succession rules of local social structure.

Catholic women commented that morality was more rigid among Protestant families and that even in the past chastity was enforced more among Protestant families. This does not mean that all Protestant women conform to this rigid model. Some Protestant women are very active in different social contexts and they engage in local women’s issues, regardless of religious or political affiliations.

The other group I want to present is formed by some of the Catholic women of the village. The group is open only to Kanak women, by statute, and its activities date back to 1971 (for its genesis, see Chapter Seven). This group is autonomous from the Church. Although it belongs to a larger women’s organization with branches in various areas of New Caledonia, the mouvement féminin vers un Souriant Village Mélanésien [Association of Women for a Smiling Melanesian Village], the group has its own statute, independent of the

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53 Although my account could seem biased towards Catholic women, I should say I was deeply touched when during the Wedrumel meeting I was presented with a irra and 1000 CFP accompanied by: kowe la ketre treejlin [to our sister].

54 The women of the central committee insisted that the initials of their association should be written as mfSVM, so I follow their convention.
larger organization. This allows them to engage directly in activities without having to pass through the central committee. Theirs is an elected committee which sometimes meets to discuss budget issues. Otherwise all the meetings are open to all the members. Although women are Catholic, this affiliation is not a strong element of identification, and religious commitment is more a private matter than the group's concern. Their agenda differs from that of the Protestant women. Whereas the Protestant group always meets during the day, this group often meets in the evening (except for gardening). This fact is often criticized by men, as well as some women, in the community who consider women's evening meetings as recreational because bingo is often played before the meeting (while waiting for other members to arrive) or at the end of the evening. Another difference from the Protestant group is that when women go to attend meetings involving other women's groups they always go by themselves. Men do not go along. It is they who make the speeches in presenting the customary gestures to their host.

When I first started to attend their meetings in 1989, the group from Drueulu included over 30 women, all Catholic and of different ages. The strength of the group resides in the authority of some of its members, who include the high chief's wife and quite a few elderly women, some of whom married into trenadro [master of the soil] families. The youngest members were between 20 and 25, though in 1992 very few of them were participating in the group's activities, partly because they questioned the way elderly women ran the group but also because of recent commitments as mothers. On Drueulu younger women seem to have a large workload, especially if they have their first child and are not married. They are expected to take care of the child but also to give a substantial contribution to the household chores. As women grow older they are always very busy but they can split their chores with their younger sisters, elder daughters and daughters-in-law. A Protestant woman in her late thirties, who was not taking any contraception, had her eighth baby in 1991. She had a child on average every three years. She explained such a large family size by saying that every time the child grows up she feels like having another one but that this time she realized she was getting older and tired of child minding. Thus her older children are minding the baby, unless the child is sick, when she takes over. Another Catholic woman in her thirties, who was taking the pill, decided to have her third and last baby. She thought it was impossible to work and have a larger family. This contrasts with the situation of Simbo women of the Western Solomon Islands where young women with their first child can rely on a lot of assistance but this is
not the case for older women who denounce the increase in their workload and the decrease in kin assistance as family increases in size, preventing them from participating in communal events (Dureau 1993). Women meet in the *Maison des Femmes* [Women's House], next to the Church and the Church Hall, but outside of the Mission's area. This, as I will discuss in Chapter Seven, is highly criticized by a segment of the community. Here I am more concerned to explore how they made use of maternal tropes in their engagement with new communal projects. When they expressed concerns about the present situation of heavy drinking in the tribe, when they make statements about the problem of pregnancy of unmarried women, they always validated it through making use of the maternal. In the way they organize themselves and engage in this new collectivity a central feature is predicated on their maternal relations as embodying relationships with the community at large. Women always voice what they are doing, from the protest against alcohol abuse to family planning meetings (both discussed in Chapter Seven), as activities addressing broader communal issues, their focus being on how their well-being relates to the well-being of the entire community. They connect their role of stable mothers within the household and within the larger community. They thus engage in this new collectivity, which has no precedence in local terms, not by making statements which would seem to subvert their maternal role but rather by reaffirming it. By making their engagement in the social predicated on the maternal trope they have been able to create a new collectivity and to acquire wider autonomy in terms of access to money and in terms of geographical mobility.

I want to end this chapter by making reference to the opening words of Sipo, who is quite explicit in her view of gender relations in Lifuan society, a view predicated on women as anchor but implying a different articulation between domestic and public than that of western ideals.
Plate 16: Hatreqatr (centre) and Pohnimē (right) in the women's anti-alcohol march, Drueulu, July 1990

Plate 17: Making pandanus mats inside the Women's House, Drueulu
Chapter Seven

POST-MATIGNON ON LIFU: WOMEN NEGOTIATE MODERNITY, MEN RESIST THROUGH LA COUTUME

the question is, in what specific ways does experience of colonial domination bring about change in the way communities identify themselves and one another? (Lieber 1990:93).

I have already considered Drueulu people's constructions of identity in the context of their interactions with others in the region and with Europeans. I have also illustrated the articulation of values and motivations embodied in the indigenous construction of identity by highlighting Lifuans' notions of authority, hierarchy and adoption, as well as women's place within social relations. I now turn to exploring how the changes brought about by the recent Matignon Accords have been addressed at the community level in notions of identity construction. My title refers to how men and women in their construction of identity mobilize different elements and symbols depending on historical circumstances. Considering boundaries of difference entails considering which components of identity become most evident.

The Pacific region is all too often neglected by European historians and sociologists in their comparative works (see Hobsbawn 1991 [1990], Smith 1991), but they point to the complexities of the notion of national and ethnic identity within the western world.¹ There is no easy western/non-western

¹ Anthony Smith (1991) stresses the multi-dimensionality of national identity. He differentiates between national and cultural/ethnic identities and also distinguishes national identity from the notion of the state (1991:14). National identity implies a bounded territory and draws upon common institutions and a code of rights and duties which applies to all members. Smith distinguishes what he calls a 'civic-territorial model' of the nation prevalent in Western Europe
dichotomy, just as there is no easy distinction of traditionmodernity, ruralurban or coincidence of meaning between them.

Tensions between the emergence of a national identity versus the persistence and strengthening of local ethnic identity are a salient feature of post-Matignon New Caledonia. The implementation of the Accords has had a twofold effect: the creation of a new territorial entity (the Province) on the one hand, and of a new political body on the other, (the provincial government). The establishment of the new provincial government opened up new employment opportunities for islanders and made the provincial and territorial bureaucracy the major local employer. Parallels with the situation of France's contemporary policies on Tahiti are interesting. Victoria Lockwood (1993) exploring the concept of 'welfare state colonialism' provides a consummate account of the way these policies have generated an artificial economy which raised the standard of living of Tahitians but at the same time augmented dependency on the state through several mechanisms: subsidized projects, government employment, elderly and retirement pensions, and child welfare payments. The island of Tubai, designated as the administrative centre of the Austral Island Subdivision in the 1960s (Lockwood 1993), has experienced the elephantine expansion of the public sector such that the 'government salaries are by far the major source of income on the island' (1993 :59). This situation echoes that on Lifu.

Unlike the provincial borders on the main island, the new territorial boundaries of the Loyalty Province are unchanged, coinciding with the old regional ones. The novelty of this decentralization process therefore is not so much in the creation of a new territorial entity but rather in that political power is now in the hands of indigenous politicians. This has reinforced Kanak's sense of empowerment and has given a stronger sense of self-determination. On the other hand, by creating a new, alien level of administration, and one which is intruding more on village life in pursuit of development objectives, the relationship of the village to the state has been reshaped, bringing this tension into sharp focus: a

from an 'ethnic-genealogical model', which has developed in Asia and Eastern Europe. The main features of the former are '[h]istoric territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology' (1991:11) The focus in the latter model has shifted from territory to common descent: to be a member of the community one needs to be born into it, and one never loses membership in the community of origin even if one emigrates. The representation of the community in this latter conception is drawn from language and images borrowed from the family repertoire, according to which common ancestry can be claimed. This alternative model originated in the different process of nation-formation followed by those communities. Smith, however, considers that collective identities based on class, gender, race and religion 'may overlap or combine with national identity but rarely succeed in undermining its hold, though they may influence its direction' (1991:143).
stronger localism has emerged. I want to look at this process, being well aware that the notion of homeland can play an important part in anticolonial sentiments. The importance of place in mobilizing collective endeavours has been discussed by Gupta and Ferguson, who argue that the link between identity and place must be problematized (1992:7). Part of this problem is that attachment to place works at both local and national levels and moreover a politics of place can be part of either a conservative or a progressive agenda.

As I anticipate in Chapter One, I disagree with Linnekin’s analysis (1990: 170-171) apropos the operant model of identity among Kanak. For example, the importance of adoption and its contemporary widespread practice among Lifuans, and Kanak in general, points to a less rigid way of constructing identity compared to the model Linnekin attributes to Kanak. However, the post-Matignon period seems to point to a rigidification of the conceptualization of outside/inside, replacing the more permeable one of the past when flexibility in the indigenous structure and fluidity in dealing with foreigners prevailed and boundaries were more open. As I argue, the Accords had an impact on Lifu which has no precedent in post-World War II French colonial policies (e.g. in forming the Regions). I stress that my discussion here mainly focuses on the first years of the implementation of the Accords, although I make some reference to subsequent developments.

In the following pages I consider how women and men have addressed the new post-Matignon conjuncture in divergent ways. Their responses have been quite distinct: in general Drueuluan men have resorted to la coutume [custom] as a language of resistance; yet this has not immobilized women as in some parts of Melanesia. Women, on the other hand, are engaging with these changes by making use of traditional and modern networks to explore new possibilities in community health, nutrition and family planning though without rejecting la

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2 For example, the choice of a national language once the country is independent is a very sensitive issue. Drehu (Lifu) and A’jië (Grande Terre) are the languages which are more often spoken, yet non-native speakers would not accept either as the official language.


4 This analysis applies to Lifu and should not be generalized to the main island.

5 The changes that have taken place in Lifu in early 1993 (including the resignation of the municipal council and subsequent elections which gave rise to a new elected majority) are not considered in the following pages.

6 See Jolly (1992b) on the different meanings encoded by kastom in Vanuatu and vakavanua in Fiji.
As Keesing has argued, custom used 'as symbol disguises and mediates contradictions', thus it can be used as a discourse which informs different levels of identity, which in turn 'can be invoked to proclaim unity (at whatever level), or separation' (1982b:299). Custom becomes 'an apt and powerful symbol precisely because it can mean (almost) all things to all people' (1982b:297). Hence multiple meanings coexist. The changes that have taken place in Lifu have impelled an intensification of *la coutume*, used as a language of resistance to strangers and as a way of idealizing the past. Men speak of the modern (meaning western) way of life, decrying it, saying it is the cause of the loss of respect of the younger generation vis-à-vis the elderly. This critique of the modern way of life conveys more an unfavourable opinion of moral behaviour than a criticism of technology and material culture. Significantly though, *la coutume* has not been widely appealed to in mounting a critique of the Christian religion. Today people from Drueulu ground their Kanak identity both in *qene nöj* [*la coutume*] and Christianity. *La coutume* is invoked with a clear ideological commitment and direction. It entails a more precise definition and strengthening of men's function and position in the social structure. Moreover the rhetoric of custom has been deployed not only by indigenous people but by the French colonial administration as well, for example in regard to the chiefly system and chief's authority (cf. White 1992). In the post-Matignon period in Lifu these different interests within indigenous structure have been sharpened and reinforced while serving a quite different colonial political agenda.

As Thomas has suggested, the question is not 'How are traditions invented?', but instead 'Against what are traditions invented?' (1992a:216). I prefer to consider the various ways men and women have expressed their concerns as different ways of using boundaries of difference. This analytical category should be understood as a way of mapping one's construction of identity, of seeing which elements are put in the foreground, allowing for a redrawing of how men

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7 Jean Guiart has criticized my use of the term *la coutume* (Paini 1992). He rightly argued that the term today is widely used by white settlers in New Caledonia with derogatory connotations (see also Guiart 1992b). In fact it is perceived by them as an obstacle to economic development and to change. But I use the term because Lifuans have adopted it (alongside *qene nöj* which is widely used) and also because it is the term Kanak use everywhere in the country, side by side with the vernacular term of each area. The term 'tradition', as Guiart suggested, would still leave us with a polysemic concept. Further the two notions overlap but do not coincide.

8 I am not considering here the young Kanak involved in politics who have taken a critical stance vis-à-vis the Church *apparatus*, especially the Catholic Church (whose clergy is still all white, with one exception), in contrast with the two Protestant Churches, which have Kanak ministers. The Catholics are accused of being in favour of maintaining the status quo.
and women represent themselves in different contexts and to outsiders, myself included. I perceive boundaries in a flexible way, meaning that they are informed by intersecting elements and that people consciously redraw them. Thus boundaries of difference should not be seen as a way of juxtaposing Lifuans and outsiders in order to essentialize them. Boundaries are ragged, they can be unsettled and they can be redrawn. The constructions of boundaries of difference are historically changing and thus persistence, innovation and resistance are contextual (see Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Linnekin and Poyer 1990). Recent socio-political changes suggest that boundaries are becoming more rigid. It is against the background of this long engagement with the outside world that I explore Kanak men’s recent deployment of *la coutume* as a language of resistance (Keesing 1992; Keesing and Jolly 1992; Jolly 1992b; Thomas 1992b) in order to respond to what they perceive as external threats and challenges.

THE IDEOLOGY OF CUSTOM AND CULTURAL INCORPORATION

Tradition is a highly contested and fluid concept in the Kanak society of Lifu. To speak of the fluidity of the concept of tradition and to stress its dynamism do not necessarily yield an historical analysis.\(^9\) I want to consider tradition as a *changing* rhetorical device and at the same time to acknowledge how in different historical periods different interests have emerged and tradition has assumed different meanings and codifications (see Jolly and Thomas 1992; White and Lindstrom 1993). If this goes unrecognized then the flexibility, plasticity and elasticity of the construct of tradition *per se* becomes a void, and we fall back into dehistoricized representations.

Tradition is a rhetorical discourse about past/present relations and people constantly recast their interpretations stressing continuity or discontinuity.\(^10\) Catholics and Protestants, for example, while both stress custom and Christianity, relate past/present relations differently. Lifuan Protestants’ narratives, unlike Catholics’ stories, are informed by continuity and persistence between the old and the new, and are not framed in a language of disruption and displacement. I do

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\(^9\) A point made during the workshop ""Traditional"” and ""Modern"” in contemporary Pacific Island politics' (Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 21-22 October 1993).

\(^10\) As Handler and Linnekin have argued, “the relationship of prior to present representations is symbolically mediated, not naturally given’ (1984:287).
not mean that outsiders were never seen as agents of disruption, but rather I want to stress the crucial significance of colonial pasts in the symbolic constitution of tradition in the present (Jolly 1992b). Custom thus becomes a reading of the past which is at the same time 'situated in the present and oriented toward the future' (Keesing 1993b:588).

Ethnographic and historical accounts examined so far suggest a very mobile indigenous population that has a long history of contact with 'foreign' presence, ideas and wealth, though in the past women were more marginal in these exchanges. The flexibility of the system enabled Lifuans to accommodate novelty within their social system. Thus kinship and ethnicity in the Kanak society of Lifu seemed to have emphasized 'inclusion' rather than 'exclusion' (Linnekin 1990:156). Even today men stress that 'Kanak' identity is not considered fixed. Yet they also comment that the strategies that can be put forward to enhance one's position are carefully monitored by others. Origins are never completely forgotten, though they are played down. Even the wide-spread practice of customary adoption can be viewed within this framework. Adoption enables someone to take up a new name and the role, function and social status that go with it. Naming is as important as blood11 in defining ascription to the community. Thus, crucial in assessing one's own identity is 'one's current set of committed relationships' (Howard 1990: 266) more than those into which one was born. This fluid way of conceiving and dealing with foreignness allowed in the past a recasting of a person's identity without requiring them to forget their origins. In oral histories Kanak still emphasize this fluid accommodation of foreignness. The integration of foreigners is stressed as crucial to hospitality, so long as the stranger accepts indigenous protocol.

These commentaries must not be considered at face value, yet the analysis I have presented of the indigenous social structure shows both internal mobility and the flexibility of relations which prevailed across all ranks of society. It allowed people within the hierarchical system to dissent, to split from a previous allegiance, to move away and to become integrated within another chiefdom, assuming a new role and named position. These strategies were and are still used to counterbalance chiefly authority and to minimize inherent structural tension. In the past therefore 'foreign' presence and alien goods were not perceived as

11 'Le sang' [meaning blood's links] is used by Lifuans to stress genealogical descent. For example participation at a wedding requires the guests to choose to 'enter' the hosts' compound following either a 'chemin du sang' (a man's lineage's affiliation) or a 'chemin coutumier' (a man's spouse's group affiliation).
disruptive of the social fabric, although as I have shown this has undergone considerable changes. Today people do not see any contradiction in the use of western commodities and money as part of *la coutume*, the 'customary transactions'. In fact European cash and goods have been incorporated in *la coutume*, especially in Lifu, where nowadays the contribution to a wedding amounts to a very large amount of money. A qêmek, the gift one presents on visiting someone, can today consist of just money (depending on the occasion it may consist of a bank-note of 500 or 1000 CFP or of a few 100 CFP coins). What is important, Drueulans told me, is that *le geste* [the gesture] is made.

I remember going to visit Paul Zöngö in Nouméa where he was recovering after having been hospitalized. Although it was my second fieldwork period I was still not always comfortable in using money in 'making custom' while going by myself to see people. I remember walking into Paulqatr's bedroom wondering if and when I should take the bank-note out of my bag. We started to talk and I felt more and more embarrassed in getting my money out. Before leaving the room I forced myself to do *le geste*. So I presented the bank-note saying it was a iahny [the gift one presents in taking leave from someone]. Paulqatr accepted it but corrected me by saying it was a qêmek. He was pleased, he added, that I had done it and would have showed *le geste* to his hosts (he and his wife were staying at La Riviere Salée [see Map 7], guests of one of their sons). My uneasiness, especially in the urban context, in using the western commodity par excellence (money) as a token of gift exchange was partly due to my difficulties in experiencing a way of doing which challenged the scheme 'that commerce and gift are two separate kinds of activity, the first based on exact recompense, the second spontaneous, pure of ulterior motive' (M. Douglas 1990:vii). But it was also because a Lifuan friend whom I had met as a student in Paris, upon our arrival in Nouméa, invited me and my daughter over to his parents' place and when I questioned him about how to make custom he replied that I should disregard it (I had in my bag one of the Italian pieces of cloth brought from home to use as gifts). Parry and Bloch (1989) make this point when they stress that different strands of western thought share the assumption that: '[t]he idea of the

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12 Here I do not consider the qêmek which opens customary exchanges during a wedding. In this context the amount is usually higher, again depending on variables such as who are the guests vis-à-vis the hosts.

13 Once, during my second long stay in Drueuelu, Sipo, whom I was not visiting as frequently as before due to additions to her family (a school-age niece and nephew she had to take care of), gave me the money back, saying that I should not 'make custom' everytime I went to see her.
purely altruistic gift is the other side of the coin from the idea of the purely interested utilitarian exchange' (1989:9). I found myself ensnared in this antithesis (for critiques of which see Thomas 1991).

What was easier for me was the speech that always accompanies the gift. This could be more or less formal depending on the occasion but it allowed for words to be spoken within a different frame from everyday talk. I have heard women and men challenging other's behaviour. Their words acquire a different weight when spoken while 'making custom'. Within this framework I found myself on some occasions able to spell out more clearly my point of view (see Paini 1995) or to excuse myself and resume good relations.

As I have already noted, no negative connotations are attached to 'making money'; rather it is how money is used, how it is shared within the community, that may occasion a negative comment about a woman or a man. This contradicts Babadzan's argument that, in the ideology of custom, consumption becomes 'in itself the very symbol of acculturation' (1988:206). He contends that today money is 'the mediator of all kinds of exchange ... Today, everything is becoming, or liable to become, a commodity' (1988:203). Rather the use of money is very different from that which pertains outside the domain of qene nőj, namely commerce. This is equated with economic gain and the selfish behaviour which characterize the Kamadra [white] way of sociality.

This is manifest not just in colonial history, but in recent dealings about land tenure on the island. People have become disenchanted with the new provincial decentralized policies, which they perceive as a new power, a system based on imported rules even if administered by Kanak. It is not within the scope of this work to analyse the government strategies involved in moving from a model of French society to the multi-ethnic polity adopted over a long period of time by the various French Administrations vis-à-vis the Kanak population. But I would

14 I had conversations with several Kanak from the main island who stressed that on the Grande Terre the inclusion of money into customary exchange is not so pervasive as is in Lifu where every single customary gesture is accompanied by money.

15 I am not implying that Lifuans oppose 'making money'; for example during kermesse they do 'make money' but the proceeds are for a communal purpose. In May 1992 in Hapetra a big meeting was organized by the provincial government to discuss the articulation between custom and development. Cf. Foster (1992) on bisnis, and on the articulation between custom/church/modern government by Baluan people (Manus), see Otto (1992).

16 I do not want to dismiss the changes brought by the Regions, but anyone familiar with Lifu will agree that never before have there been such radical changes in the island. The U.S. troops came with plenty of new goods, but they were stationed on ships, so to engage with a large number of foreigners who have come to live in the island has no precedent.
like to briefly outline the latter. This is necessary to substantiate my claim that the Matignon Accords are different not just in degree but also in kind from previous colonial policies.

The implementation of the Regions has been seen by some commentators as the precursor to the present Provinces, a view with which I disagree. The Fabius Plan of August 1985 called for a transition period before holding a referendum on sovereignty at the end of 1987. Four regions were designated (see Map 5), each headed by a regional council responsible for economic development, primary education, health, housing, and land reform. As FLNKS (the umbrella pro-independence organization formed in 1984) gained control of three regional councils, Kanak began to be involved in the economic development of their land (Fraser 1988, Henningham 1988-89). But the Regions were never substantially implemented. As in 1986 the political balance of power changed in France and Chirac became Prime Minister and Pons became Minister for the Overseas Territories, the power of regional councils was transferred to the French High Commissioner residing in Nouméa. A referendum held in September 1987 was boycotted by FLNKS and had a rather low turn-out: only 58 per cent of those eligible voted, of whom 98 per cent were in favour of remaining under French control. A new shift in the French political scene made it possible for a socialist government under Premier Rocard to produce the Matignon Accords of June 1988. This Ten-year Plan was aimed at rebalancing the huge economic and social gap between Nouméa, the 'white' centre, and its hinterland, and the rest of the country, mainly populated by Kanak. Three provinces were envisaged: the Loyalty, the Northern and the Southern Provinces. The agreement was signed by Rocard, the late Tjibaou (then leader of UC, the main pro-independence group, and president of FLNKS) for the Kanak and Lafleur for the Caldoches (the French-speaking white settlers of New Caledonia, strongly anti-independence). It was then submitted to a referendum held at the end of 1988. The outcome of the vote was favourable to its implementation, but it was the result of participation by only a small portion of the electorate: 37 per cent of voters in France and 63 per cent in New Caledonia, of whom 57 per cent voted in favour of the Accords. At the end of the 1990s another referendum [scrutin d'auto-détermination] will be held on the political future of the country. New Caledonia had been on the edge of a civil war, and both sides were 'forced' to sign: the Kanak to avoid direct

Map 5: The Regions

New Caledonia

Northern Region

Central Region

Southern Region

Loyalty Islands Region

Isle of Pines

Regional boundaries
armed confrontation with France and the *Caldoches* to avoid losing French support. In order to counterbalance the huge gap between the development of Nouméa and the Southern region and the rest of the country, 75 per cent of the funds would go to the North and the Loyalty group: it was also agreed that only those eligible to vote in 1988, and their descendants, would be eligible in 1998. However, who exactly will constitute the electorate for the 1998 referendum is unclear and is still a matter of controversy.

The social and cultural circumstances that prevailed in Lifu have shifted significantly from 1989-90, the year of the implementation of the Matignon Accords.\(^\text{18}\) The Matignon Accords brought a decentralization of power from Nouméa to the local governments of the three newly-established provinces. In the last two years Lifuans have therefore had to accommodate the settlement of French public servants who work for the local administration and who have moved from Nouméa to Lifu. In an island almost wholly populated by indigenes (in 1989 they constituted 98.1 per cent of the total population of the Loyalty Province while they constituted only 25.8 per cent in the Southern Province),\(^\text{19}\) the arrival of a 'colony' of white people has been perceived as a permanent settlement and thus an intrusion which has put indigenous social institutions under severe stress. The most recent statistics give tangible proof of this perception: 2745 people have moved to the Loyalty Province between 1989-90 and mid-1993.\(^\text{20}\) Although this figure may appear inflated, and a number of them represent Kanak transferred to Lifu, nevertheless a fairly large number are whites. This has meant the arrival of white civil servants in Lifu, where We has been chosen as the 'capital' of the newly-created Province, and rapid changes in the external appearance of this once tiny administrative centre. Since the decentralization of the administration in the three newly-formed provincial governments, more French white-collar workers have moved to Lifu. The majority live in two lots where houses have been constructed for them. This is a completely new situation. Between my two fieldtrips, the administrative centre of We\(^\text{21}\) had changed: from a rural village with a few essential services such as a

\(^{18}\) Although officially the Accords came into force in 1989, in reality the process of decentralization began in 1990.

\(^{19}\) Institut Territorial de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques 1989 [I.T.S.E.E.].

\(^{20}\) President Kaloi's speech reported in *Construire les Loyautés*, editorial, Juillet 1993.

\(^{21}\) We was chosen as the administrative centre not so much for its location, but because, as Ele-Hmaea explained, the former chief of Gaica was the only one to allow the construction of administrative buildings in his chiefdom.
post office, a small hospital and a bank, to an administrative centre with larger and more diversified services exemplified by the new administrative buildings of the Province, a new post office, a new and enlarged hospital, a supermarket and even a beauty shop. We is coming to be seen by villagers as a small town, thus the distinction between rural/urban perceived in relation to Nouméa is shifting to represent the relation between the tribe and the administrative centre of We.

By creating a new territorial entity and a new political body - the Province - and decentralizing power, the Matignon Accords have created a new social and political situation, raising the question of where authority now lies: in the high chief, in the new provincial government or in the French Government’s representatives. This tension between different authorities and political powers was locally addressed by men by emphasizing la coutume to promote resistance. It is important to stress that the new boundaries did affect the main island but not the Loyalties (see Map 6), so the Province is not perceived as a new territorial entity, requiring a change of local identity. In the face of these recent changes boundaries are being readdressed in terms of practices by some high-ranking men who see their power and authority under threat. As the social and political conditions are changing a new balance between custom and religion as well as political authority must be negotiated.

LA COUTUME AND CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Even though I am a Director, when I go back home, I am one of them. My relationships are not based on my being a Director, but on other criteria. This is the same for all other Kanak ... With the renewed cultural awareness we realized that we belonged to the same clan ... It is culture that unites people; culture and the Churches as well (Billy Wapotro, October 1989).22

This narrative by the Director of the Alliance Scolaire (the organism which groups all the schools belonging to the Evangelical Church),23 a native of Lifu

22 'Churches' stands for the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

23 In 1989, the Alliance Scolaire grouped 2400 students with a higher female presence compared to the male presence (data referred to the whole New Caledonia) and employed 270 people. Of
(Lösi), who lives in Nouméa, is quite explicit about what defines one's identity and about the relation between custom and Christianity. It is not his role as Director which counts in his interactions back home: 'ma carte d'identité à la tribu est toute une autre' [my ID back home is a completely different one]. Yet Kanak culture and Christianity are not seen in opposition. Wapotro used advisedly the word 'culture', explaining that he disagreed with those that wanted to reduce culture to custom. 'Culture' is an 'art de vivre'; 'cultures', for him, change as new elements are incorporated, 'ma culture n'est pas la culture de mes enfants' [my culture is not that of my children]. Yet in his final sentence, he presents 'culture', although within a dynamic framework, and Church as the unifying elements of a Kanak identity.

Qene nöj, 'the way of land', glossed in French as la coutume, is opposed by Lifuans to qene wi wi, 'the way of the French'.

Faire la coutume [making custom] refers to the rituals underlying daily social relations in which people exchange goods, marking these transactions of gifts and counter-gifts with speeches, more or less elaborate depending on the occasion. In such ceremonial exchanges men dominate transactions and discourses, though elderly women may play a role both in addressing the gathering and/or in being recipients of portions of the gifts. Other younger women actively participate in less formal exchanges.

If there has been resolution of two contradictory discourses - qene nöj and Christianity - this does seem to entail some degree of separation, though the boundaries are flexible. The unity of la coutume and Christianity is usually stressed, but in other contexts their separation is acknowledged (see below). In Lifu the Christian message is accepted and Bible teaching legitimized to the point where the Protestant groups working at the community level relate to biblical verses in order to get their message across: 'People sometimes do not realize why they should have a clean house or WC, so the biblical references can help us to introduce our argument', one of the organizers explained to me. The articulation between custom and Christianity is differently deployed by the Catholic women's group of Drueulu, to which I shall return later. As Keesing has argued, custom

the 25 primary schools, 12 were established in Lifu, which housed also two colleges [junior high schools] (Wapotro, 1989).

24 Qene wi wi means also to speak French (wi wi stands for the French oui oui, see Chapter Four). In Vanuatu too Man franis is sometimes called Man wi wi (Michael Young, pers. comm., November 1993). In speeches made in the presence of non-Lifuans, the distinction is expressed by the expression qene drehu [the way of Lifu, but also to speak Drehu] vs. qene kamadra [the way of the whites]. The latter is also used in expression such as eo a qene kamadra [you behave like a white] addressed in a derogatory tone to a Lifuan whose behaviour is not in conformity with custom.
draws 'its force and its content oppositionally' (1993b:589) but what opposes it differs.

This eagerness to reconcile custom and religion pervades all the narratives. Although I have already remarked on the differences between the Catholic and the Protestant communities in Drueulu, there is also a rhetorical stress on commonalities over differences. Not only did people emphasize their belonging to the same clan regardless of their religious affiliation, but in expressing their denomination they deployed a genealogical discourse to articulate the relation of both Catholicism and Protestantism. For example, of the two atresi of Gaica, one is symbolically considered the father of the high chief and the other the father of Gaica; yet one is Catholic and the other Protestant, and each one is represented as having introduced one of the two religions into Drueulu. This shows once more that the characteristic features of the indigenous system of hierarchy, where complex mechanisms of power and countervailing powers are at work, shaped their articulation of Christianity. Custom and religion are thus not in simple antithesis, and Christianity becomes validated in terms of tradition. Most narrators view custom as the basis onto which religion has been grafted. As Sipo put it:

If *la coutume* is not strong even *religion* does not work.

*La coutume* is thus still considered as constituting the core of life and identity. Elderly women's and men's commentaries on tribal life point to the lack of 'respect' of the new generation as the main difference from the time of their youth and blame this attitude on a different style of life. But custom works beyond the physical space of the village and island: custom works even in town.

In the Council of Elders of Gaica both customary and religious authorities (pastors and catechists) are included. But some tensions have arisen between what belongs to the religion and what belongs to custom. This is more so with respect to the Catholic Church, which in times of tension emerges as more akin to colonial power. The implementation of a rule, set up by the high chief of Gaica, which forbids working and making money on Sunday (clearly the result of Christian influence) was often disregarded during the time of my fieldwork. During a highly criticized *kermesse* [fête], where people from Gaica had, in part reluctantly, gathered for a sale in order to raise money for the new house for the high chief in January 1992, respect for this rule was used by the people from
Map 6: Provinces under the Matignon Accords

- Belep Is.
- Loyalty Islands Province
- Northern Province
- Ouvéa
- Loyalty Islands
- Southern Province
- Nouméa
- Isle of Pines

Provincial boundary
Provincial capital
Hapetra to voice disagreement concerning what they perceived as an abuse of chiefly power.

Many Kanak men have responded to the changes by sharpening the distinction between 'insider'/outsider' and by reinforcing cultural and spatial boundaries. Foreigners should not be allowed to enter the village without permission. This interdiction has been taken to the point where the petit chef of Drueulu challenged a Kanak widow living in Nouméa who had received a white man as a guest in the village. Occasionally tourists have been refused permission to enter the village because they had failed to make the customary exchanges. This opposition is not completely new, but today it seems paradoxical when tourism is one of the key sectors in the development scheme of the Loyalty provincial government, which in contrast to the other two provincial governments is constituted entirely of Kanak.

The editorial of the first issue of *Mwà Vée* (1993) by Octave Togna, the director of the *Agence de Développment de la Culture Kanak* (ADCKA) is revealing about present-day engagement of Kanak with questions of identity in more politicized contexts. He opens by explaining the meaning of the name chosen for the magazine in the language Drùbëa (southern main island): it means 'la maison de la Parole' [the house of la Parole] or 'l'enveloppe de la Parole' [the envelop of la Parole]. The function of the magazine is of 'fixer' [fixing] la Parole for the future generations and at the same time safeguarding 'ce qui peut l'être de notre culture' [that which can be of our culture]. Togna continues by stating that 'Il n'y a qu'une seule culture Kanak' [There is only one Kanak culture], a culture which stems out of its 'référence traditionelle' [traditional reference] but which questions its own place in the modern world, which is more and more present 'dans notre société' [in our society]. This statement is not a neutral one. By emphasizing what unites all Kanak, Togna sets clearly a boundary between 'us'/them', making both a cultural and a political comment on identity in a time when the future political and institutional order of the country is at issue, although not all independentists share the same view on the means or agree on the timetable towards independence (Henningham 1992). He is reinforcing the idea of a common Kanak identity, yet he is not completely removing the symbolic construction from social processes by reifying the notion of 'a communal identity'. He leaves some room for changes when he considers the presence of the modern world in Kanak society.
To whom do the yams belong?

The contestation of power was locally addressed by men by emphasizing la coutume to promote resistance. The intensity of this discourse became evident in 1990, when, for the first time, the Catholics of Drueulu did not have the ceremony of the blessing of the yams performed, as it had been for many years, by the priest who came from Nouméa for the occasion. The high chief argued that the religious blessing of the yams should not precede the yam feast and that the catechists - men from the village, one of them with a very important customary role - should have consulted him before making the yearly announcement at the end of the Sunday gathering. It is not only the encounter of the imported and the local religion that must be considered, but also the context of that encounter. As Billy Wapotro commented:

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the real question is to whom yams belong: to the Kanak tradition or to the Catholic religion (Wapotro, March 1990).
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What was at issue was not just a question of Catholicism versus la coutume, but of custom as an ideological discourse. When the yam feast approaches, the priest, during one of his monthly visits to Drueulu, would bless the yams. I have never witnessed such a ceremony, because in my first year of fieldwork it was decided by the chefferie that this blessing could not precede the yam feast. The reason given was that the yam belonged to la coutume and not to the Church.

In the district of Gaica the yam feast [iöleku], as an event involving the participation of all the clans and hence as a ritual reinforcing chiefly authority, has been held since the end of the 1980s. This 'revival' aroused a lot of contradictory responses: some people argued that the ritual had previously taken place at a lineage or a family level, not at the chiefdom level, and that as such it

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25 No one in Drueulu relies solely on subsistence activities. Although yams have maintained social and ritual significance, and people are always pleased when the new yam season opens, rice and chicken are the most sold and cooked common staples. Although I have heard people commenting on the fact that some people do not cultivate yams anymore, and elderly contrasting the old and the new diet, I have never heard anyone criticizing the fact that people eat new staples.

26 Today no Catholic nun or priest resides on the island.

27 Cf. the way Christianity has been incorporated in the Fijian 'way of the land' (Jolly 1992b, Thomas 1992b:323)
belonged to the southern district of Lösi. Gaica, to the contrary, has always been the land of fish, in spite of the fact that the big annual fish ceremony has not been performed for several decades. Both men and women were and are still contesting the authenticity of the ritual. 'Avant on faisait pas iölekeu à Gaica. C'est pas l'endroit pour cultiver les koko' [Before we didn't do iölekeu at Gaica. It is not the place to cultivate koko (yams)] (Pohnimé, April 1992). But the high chief's counter-argument was that 'c'est l'arrivée de la religion qui a bouleversé notre vie coutumière' [it is the arrival of religion that has upset our customary life] (Pierre Zeula, April 1990). Representations of the past thus depend on the perspective taken and the interests at stake. Responsibility for fixing the period for the yam feast was discussed at the feast I attended in Drueulu in 1990. The vexed question was again where authority now resides in matters related to the land. So the high chief's counter-argument was that the arrival of religion, although bringing peace to the people, had upset customary life which needed to be restored in its authentic forms.

The *anga joxu* commented on the iölekeu:

The old advisers of the district said it always existed, but with the arrival of the missionaries especially here and in the district of Wetir it was they who made it disappear. The proof ... in the time of my father the blessing of the yams meant that they could be eaten, while in the district of Lösi they preserved the tradition because there it is the Protestantism, whereas here it is the Catholicism. The pastors have always kept the tradition. ... They [Catholics] do not control the customary yam ceremony. It is not their role. Their interference has stopped the *iölekeu* in the district. It was the arrival of the religion that messed up our custom. (Pierre Zeula, recorded interview, April 1990)

Les vieux notables du district ont dit que ça a toujours existé, mais c'est l'arrivée des missionnaires surtout chez nous et puis dans le Wetir; c'est les missionnaires qui ont fait disparaître ça. La preuve ...il y a un moment au temps de mon père c'était la bénédiction des ignames qui permettait de pouvoir manger les ignames, alors que dans le Lösi ils ont toujours maintenu la tradition parce que là-bas c'est le protestantisme tandis que ici c'est le catholicisme. Les pasteurs ils ont toujours maintenu la tradition. ... C'est pas eux [Catholiques] qui commandent la cérémonie coutumière des ignames. C'est pas leur rôle; c'est leur intervention qui a fait arrêter le iölekeu dans le district. C'est l'arrivée de la religion qui a bouleversée notre vie coutumière.

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28 Values are not tied to different activities *per se* but to the consequences that these activities have: the yam can be in Jolly's terms 'the great equalizer or the great stratifier' (pers. comm., May 1992).
Chiefs are reaffirming their authority as vested in the 'tradition' \( [\text{la coutume}] \) over other authorities, religious or political. But in doing so they also reaffirm two separate domains, the religious, which is exogenous, and the indigenous. The \text{anga joxu} concluded his interpretation of the yam feast with reference to other changes from past to present. He remarked that there are many evil things that have been stopped, for example wars, polygamy, and cannibalism; they [missionaries] brought peace and stopped witchcraft. But this does not mean that nowadays there are no evils (Pierre Zeula, recorded interview, April 1990).

What I have said so far does not mean that the 'codification' and content of \text{la coutume} have not changed over time, but that men, especially elderly men, were the primary agents of such modifications. When political and economic processes threaten established structures and interests, and lead to contestations of power and meaning, cultural symbols become more politically charged and consciously manipulated. Although women and men both redraw boundaries, a more rigid notion of identity is being deployed by men. To substantiate this claim I look briefly at how the notion of \text{parole} [word/speech] has become rigidified as a symbol of culture/ethnicity.

\textit{LA PAROLE}

\textit{Parole} refers to the customary speeches that accompany exchanges that follow established pathways of alliances and obligations. Reinforcing custom has brought a new approach to this issue. Men often say 'women don't have the right to \text{la parole}'. This has been amplified and distorted by claiming that women do not have the right to publicly address an audience. Practice shows, however, that this is not the case: age, status and personality play a role among both men and women. The capacity to make a good speech is an individual skill, but depending on the audience, on the context and on the aim, the rhetoric of the speech changes. Within a lineage only the eldest male member has the authority and right to speak. Thus control over speech-making seems to have been in the hands of elderly men, not all men. Today instead the rigidification of custom constructs
la parole along a rigid gender division: men have access to la parole whereas women are excluded.

In examining Leenhardt's interpretation of the notion of the Drehu ewekê and its A'jiê cognate, Clifford highlights what has informed the Kanak choice of translating it by the French parole. He considers that these indigenous notions 'do not distinguish thought from expression and concrete action, an idea is already a parole, and saying is doing.' (1992 [1982]: 212). The depth captured in the indigenous choice of parole which Leenhardt (1979:127-152) saw and which Clifford (1992 [1982]) restated is analysed by them within a frame contrasting the richness of the Melanesian way of combining speech/word with the weakness of the French language which lacks a unitary term (Leenhardt 1979:138). This reading, which contrasts two different cultural conceptualizations, remains in my view a male one. I will attempt to present the implications of their interpretation from a different perspective. Clifford states:

In New Caledonian gift exchange, for example, parole does not reside primarily in the words spoken, though these are important. It exists in the actual food given or in the body and fibres of the bark cloth used to wrap the offerings. Speech has substance in the act and in its objects. Making and doing are parole. (1992 [1982]: 212-213).

Thus indigenes also use parole to imply 'thing' as well as something 'inseparable from thinking'. Clifford quotes Leenhardt who, referring to Lifuans, wrote:

Everything belonging to man is ewekê: his eloquence, the object he shapes, what he creates, what he possesses of his own, the products of his labor, his remarks, his goods, his garden, his wife, his psychic wealth, and his sex organ. (Leenhardt 1979:133).

I quote at length because I find these two extracts revealing. On the one hand we are told ewekê is an all-encompassing term which denotes every aspect of social

29 While this is clearly a very complex ethnographic/philosophical/epistemological issue, I do not wish to be read as 'simplifying it into a gender issue' (as one critical reader of an earlier draft commented). I do not believe I have misrepresented Leenhardt. Clifford presents Leenhardt's work as 'a productive, collective work of translation which, because of its specific form, could not easily be dominated by a privileged interpretation (1980:256). My aim here is to show that both Leenhardt's reading and Clifford's are not neutral, they are selective representations, informed by a specific perspective.


31 Clifford's translation is slightly different from the published English version of Leenhardt's (1979).
life. On the other hand, we are presented with a representation of society in which women are included only as 'objects' ('his wife') and where the speaking subject is male. Thus parole, this salient symbol of Kanak social life, is a densely-coded male symbol. If we follow Leenhardt and Clifford in their analysis of parole, we might conclude that Lifuan women are excluded from indigenous speech-making and efficacious activities. I now re-situate Leenhardt’s and Clifford’s analysis of parole by considering the explanations of parole given by Lifuan men and women and how this is seen to inform 'doing'.

The complexity of the notion of parole was conveyed differently by Billy Wapotro. In explaining the meaning of speech/word, he specified that when he 'prend la parole' [speaks] it is:

... not just me, but my clan that speaks behind me ... not only the living but also those who have departed. Words from the visible world, but heritage from the invisible world ... another frame of communication (Wapotro, October 1989).

This interpretation, which emerges in other conversations I had with Wapotro, is constructed around the notion of extended communication. It does not privilege gender but rather the relations between the living and the dead, the visible and the invisible, which Wapotro considers as essential to Lifuan and Kanak identity in general. Notably his conceptualization does not see communication as a male prerogative nor does it even suggest men’s privileged access to such communication. But this contrasts with another view, that of the high chief:

When there is a reunion, normally it is the men who speak. It is rare that a woman or an older woman speaks. If she does she must apologize before speaking because of her being a woman (Pierre Zeula, recorded interview, April 1990).

Quand on est en réunion normalement ce sont les hommes qui prennent la parole; c'est exceptionnel qu'une femme ou qu'une vieille prend la parole. D’abord elle doit s’excuser puis ensuite prendre la parole, parce qu’elle est femme.

This statement by the high chief presents public speeches as pertaining to collective occasions and as male accomplishments. He describes the public occasions as ones in which women are marginalized, yet he does not claim they are excluded. I have observed this during the women’s large gathering in Drueulu (see below). Two of the Kanak women invited as guest speakers by the organizing committee to address the assembly on specific issues about
community service took the microphone and opened their speeches by apologizing for speaking. When questioned about this apology, women in the audience told me that it was because elder women were present. So, in this context age is relevant as well as sex. But what these statements on parole tell us is that they are deployed on the basis of specific interests in a specific context. This is even clearer if we compare the statement made by the high chief above with the one made by him I quoted in Chapter Six, where he rather stressed women's engagement in collectivity and where he considered women as subjects with as great a potential as men for empowerment as full political agents.

REDRAWING BOUNDARIES

Thus the tension resulting from recent circumstances in Lifu has brought about not only an intensification of la coutume vis-à-vis foreigners but also a rigidification of custom internally. Yet internal contexts differ. I remember the old Melenaqatr delivering two very different speeches during the same event: one was addressed to the local community who had, in part reluctantly, gathered in January 1992 for a sale in order to raise money for the new house for the high chief. The old man, standing up in front of everybody, began his speech in Drehu talking of the Bastille and drew a parallel between the former French kings and the anga joxu. The latter, he said, wanted to build a new big house and everyone had to help him, and not look to the French who in the past eliminated their king:

French people have a democratic system, they want to introduce it here, but we have the Anga Joxu (Melenaqatr, 31 January 1992)

Les Français ont un système démocratique, ils veulent le faire rentrer ici. Mais nous on a un Anga Joxu (original in Drehu but transcribed in French in my fieldnotes).

His speech then switched to metaphorical language, using the image of an octopus with one head and eight tentacles: Tha tro kō atui utr etra thupa la he kegenyi hē lo itre waumen’ [don't be like the octopus: when one cuts the head, the limbs weaken]. But as soon as the 'outsiders' came (a group of people from another district with the eldest son of their high chief) the old man's discourse changed. This time he addressed the people by referring to the hulipomē, a dangerous mythical serpent that can eat people, alluding to the rumours going around about the participation of the future high chief in the torching of huts and houses. The message was 'the serpent can eat the high chief if he doesn't behave...
as he should, but this would bring calamity to the people as well'. Two different speeches addressed two different audiences, although both aimed at reinforcing internal cohesion and at reasserting the role of *la coutume* and its retention *vis-à-vis* 'outsiders'. Sometimes even Lifuans who do not behave in a proper manner, having taken up 'French' ways, are highly criticized. Yet they are not considered outcasts: usually they do speak Drehu and if they go back to Lifu they are careful to make observances according to *la coutume*.

Recent land disputes are causing problems in a way parallel to Hawaii, as discussed by Linnekin (1990). Linnekin states: 'the Hawaiian theory of familial affiliation has historically been extremely flexible. Households easily incorporated new members through adoption, marriage, and land tenure. Only after the introduction of private land titles did families begin to debate whether kinship was demonstrable or stipulated, close or distant' (1990:155). Nowadays in Lifu the talk is of the writing down of custom and the cadastral survey; the renting of collectively owned land to private business or to the provincial government to build houses for French public servants; the choice of sites for the construction of small hotels financed by private and public funds. These are all the basis of several acrimonious land disputes. Such debates focus on assessing the 'real' owners as well as the issue of land use. Custom is becoming rigid and losing the flexibility of the past in response to foreign intrusion. The 'outsiders' are the French public servants who have come to work and live on Lifu. Drueulu people are suspicious of them: 'They have come to live here; now they rent, but later they will take our land'. This concern is a common theme in the commentaries of Kanak men (and some women as well) reflecting on the recent changes taking place on the island.

Local politicians and bureaucrats are considered the representatives of a new political body, which in the village is perceived as an intrusion of a colonial state, that in the past was not so pervasive. Lifuans were engaged in the events that shook the rest of New Caledonia in 1984 and 1988, when relationships with the colonial state were at stake. Today the difference is that the provincial government is setting up policies in each domain, and locals, pre-eminently the men, feel that the state is intruding at every level of community life, contesting their power. The new political body is perceived as upsetting the balance between the different authorities, bringing to the fore inherent tensions in the local system. The local council of Lifu was re-elected in February 1993. The mayor in office is from a new political formation called *Liste Drehu Avenir* [List Drehu Future],
locally known as the 'coutumiers' [traditionalists]; this change may again reshape future relationships.

**WHO IS A FOREIGNER?**

People draw boundaries, but their perception of those boundaries changes with transformed socio-economic and political circumstances. Different levels of affiliation, at the family, clan, tribe level, and so on, become operative, depending on context (Morauta 1985:227-228). There are thus different levels of 'insiderness'/outsiderness': sometimes the term trenyiwa [foreigner] is used to refer to members of a sports team who live in the nearby tribe and have come to play against the local team. It is also used of people from another tribe who have come to participate in a kermesse. Trenyiwa ne Mēek means someone from the main island whereas a white man or woman from We will be referred to as Kamadra ne We. Although tribes [tribu] are administrative units today they have taken on a different meaning for those living within tribal boundaries. A stronger sense of co-residence has emerged. Custom is mobilized to reclaim the link between place and identity (Bonnemaison 1985).

During the building of a hut, communal work which requires the help of many men and women, young and old, I was instructed by women to follow the men into the forest to pick up the poles that had already been cut. The truck had been hired by the clan chief, who accepted my presence, but the driver of the truck, who has an important customary role, refused to allow me to go, saying it was too dangerous for a woman. I got off the truck and explained to the women why I was not permitted to go. The next day a couple of young people asked me (with a touch of irony) if I had been angry the previous afternoon. I did not hide my disappointment. Then they told me that the truck had had two flat tyres, a very unusual occurrence, and that the men had to come back to the village empty handed; later on I was told the comments of the driver to another man: *'La femme italienne, elle a beaucoup de pouvoir magique!'* [The Italian woman, she has plenty of magic power!] (Needless to say, after that day my relations with this man were not too smooth.)

And sometimes boundaries change in unexpected ways. A couple of examples will illustrate how commonality can move along the continuum from 'us' to 'alien'. People in the village were eager to host the Fifth Musical Festival in October 1991, a 13-hour marathon concert with groups from different parts of the
country and from other South Pacific islands sponsored by several parties, among them the Loyalty Province. The group which everybody wanted to hear was Djaambi, an Aboriginal group from Melbourne. They were considered 'real' black brothers and sisters, though nobody had contemplated the language barrier. In this context I played a new role. For the first time I found myself translating between two indigenous people relating to each others as 'brothers' and 'sisters' from the same Pacific region, yet lacking a lingua franca. It was a role strikingly different from that which prevailed throughout most of my fieldwork. I was in a position to listen and understand, but it was not me who was formulating the questions. I translated as faithfully as I could, yet I knew how difficult it was to get the message across: for example, how to explain the Dreamtime in French to people whose mother tongue is Drehu.

I was seen as someone bridging cultural and linguistic differences, and for the first time the people with whom I was living treated me as a full member of the family: I was not an 'outsider' anymore. On the last night of the festival the customary exchanges took place and I was invited by Waxôma, the woman of the extended family I was living with, to return the gift to Djaambi with her, her husband and her mother-in-law. Never before had I been included in such a transaction.

But the same people who hosted the different musical bands, several months later, refused an exchange with ni-Vanuatu teachers under the aegis of the Province des îles. The Drueulu teachers' response marked their disagreement with the educational policy of the provincial government. The Melanesian construction of common cultural identity did not prevail over being Drueuluan.

WOMEN NEGOTIATING MODERNITY

At the same time that men in the village perceive an intrusion of the state into their lives and are reshaping their relationship with the 'outsiders', women, conversely, have deployed a different set of concerns. Here I will consider and discuss women's engagement in an organized collectivity: the Drueulu women's group that belongs to 'Souriant Village Mélanésien' [Smiling Melanesian Village].

The group's activities date back to 1971 when Scolastique Pidjot came to Drueulu.32 Women explained this visit to me in terms of customary allegiances

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32 The group became an official organization in 1973.
and religious ties. Although Scolastique Pidjot's father, Justin Togna, was from La Conception (Grande Terre), her mother was from Drueulu, and therefore, women stressed, her maternal uncles were still in Drueulu. The other factor they mentioned about the visit was that Scolastique's husband, Rock Pidjot, attended the School for Catechists in Canala at the same time as Paul Zöngö and Poten Taua (Awaqatr's husband). The narratives of Dreuelu women pointed to Scolastique Pidjot as the key figure in the development of the group in Lifu. The pamphlet distributed by the association for the celebration of its 20th anniversary acknowledged both her role and that of the late independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou as promoters, but she features as the principal protagonist of the women's movement. Following this visit to Drueulu, the group started to organize itself and Awaqatr became the first president and Pohnimé the secretary of the newly-formed association. Pohnimé, at that time in her early thirties, explained that in the past elderly women were illiterate and thus young women were chosen as secretary and treasurer. The wife of the high chief was present at the first meeting but did not join the group: 'Elle venait de se marier, elle était encore jeune' [She had just got married, she was still young] (Pohnimé). The women then went to Hnathalo, a Catholic village, because, they explained, the association was primarily for Catholic women. Hunètè was the last village they contacted and a group was later formed though its activities were interrupted during the événements of 1984.

In 1989 all three groups were functioning and still belonged to mfSVM, although women remarked that the group of Hunètè also took part in the parish committee. Some of the first women involved in the Drueulu group are still active, others do not invariably participate in weekly activities but do so when the group is involved in some communal activities. Women who belong to the Drueulu group have different political convictions and affiliations; these were exacerbated during the events of 1984 and 1988. In spite of this, women work together, and this happens beyond the tribal level. In 1992 the Provincial Women's Rights Office was able to employ two women. The Lifuan woman responsible for the Office and for selecting the women is an activist and her pro-independence political stance is well known. She made clear that she wanted to employ two women who had longstanding experience with women's groups rather than two women whose political affiliation was in line with that of the

33 Those familiar with the history of the country will easily situate the two families (Togna and Pidjot). Both have a longstanding involvement with the pro-independence movement.
provincial government. The two women who were chosen did fit her criteria, although she knew that they had divergent political affiliations.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1992, 200 women gathered in Drueulu from all over the country for the annual General Assembly and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the group. At each level the group works together: a central committee is re-elected each year and a common theme is chosen. For 1992, it was 'Mother and child'. Marie-Claire Beboko-Beccalossi introduced the new theme during the Assembly: \textit{Nous avons fait joli l'extérieur de nos maisons, maintenant il faut faire joli l'intérieur} [We have tidied up the exterior of our houses, now we must do the same with the interior]. She was referring to the emphasis in the first years of the group's activities on promoting the material cleaning up of houses and their surrounding gardens. In 1992 the emphasis was on health, schooling, and more generally on the well-being of the children living within the household, the future of the country.

Although the national goals are the same, the component local groups are autonomous and each differentiates itself. This came out clearly during the local annual reports made at the General Assembly. For example, the group from Drueulu, in order to remain autonomous in terms of money and activities, has its own statute, independent of the larger organization which allows it to have direct membership in the \textit{'Conseil des Femmes Mélanésiennes de Nouvelle-Calédonie'} [Council of Melanesian Women of New Caledonia], an NGO to which Kanak women's groups are affiliated.\textsuperscript{35} In contrast to the groups affiliated with the Council of Melanesian Women, those members of 'Smiling Melanesian Village' have a declared Catholic bond, though a few Protestant women take part in the activities of local groups. But again the articulation of women's concerns and religious affiliation informs the component local groups quite differently. When each group gave its annual report at the General Assembly, some of the Drueulu women commented to me that they hoped to hear something more interesting than usual. They explained that some groups do not have projects and all they do is clean the church and work in the priest's yam garden. The presentations varied:

\textsuperscript{34} Even the choice of the woman responsible for the Provincial Women's Rights Office in Lifu made by the province was controversial. Women did not accept it because they saw the candidate as a political representative and not as a women's representative. Her mandate was revoked and Lifuan women chose their representative in an open assembly among three women candidates (one for each district) who had previously been chosen by women among several nominees.

\textsuperscript{35} Some groups belonging to the Council of Melanesian Women include men, but they must have women-only boards in order to become members of the Council, as Marie-Claire Beboko-Beccalossi explained to me.
from groups which reported these kinds of activities to groups which were able to get big projects under way, such as building a women's house, or organizing and running a school cafeteria for the children of the tribe. Just a couple of examples to exemplify the wide range of interests of each group: women from the islands of Belep prepared a monthly report concerning their 1991 group schedule, which included projects such as making soaps (April), but also activities tied to church engagements, such as the preparation of each tribe 'pour recevoir la Sainte Vierge' [to receive the Blessed Virgin] (May); the clearing of the priest's yam garden (June) and the gathering of wood for Secours Catholique (July-August). Nakety (east coast of Grande Terre) reported on the group's achievement of a 'cantine scolaire' [school cafeteria].

The aim of the Drueulu group set out in Article 2 of their Charter (23 April 1989)\(^{36}\) is 'to promote Melanesian Art and Culture', a scope that sometimes seems at odds with the activities the group is engaged in. However this broad way of defining their interests is not to camouflage their activities vis-à-vis men, but to enable them to engage freely in a wide range of activities. I never heard any women question whether a planned activity was within the charter or competence of the group. It must also be said that the members see their actions as pursuing the well-being of the whole community, and this commitment allows them to keep religious and political loyalties in the background: in fact the group is made up of women who support political parties with very divergent views. It would be unthinkable for a men's group (except for a Church group) to mobilize on these grounds.

The Drueulu women's group had their own publicly organized space, the 'Maison des Femmes',\(^{37}\) where they gathered according to a schedule that changed throughout the year and adapted to other communal events occurring in the tribe. For example, during weddings, when a large group of men and women take part in different tasks, women's activities slow down. The rest of the Catholic community of Drueulu, especially the men,\(^{38}\) do not approve of the fact that women gather in a space which is apart from the Mission (a large new hall has been built next to the church), nor do they approve of the fact that they have access to public funds for social and cultural activities and that they manage to

\(^{36}\) Every year half of the board is re-elected; decisions however are taken by the whole group.

\(^{37}\) This house was built with money made available by a German NGO, and it was the first 'women's house' in Lifu.

\(^{38}\) Some women do participate in the Church activities but belong to the women's group as well.
follow their own agenda. Women are perceived as subverting not so much custom but male authority within the two religious denominations. So a lot of criticism has arisen especially within the parish committee: the comments I heard were that women spend too much time in the 'Women's House' and neglect the care of the household and their children. They were also criticized for their willingness to go to We and ask for money. It is not money *per se* that rankles but the fact that they use it in an autonomous way.

On the other hand, the attempt to create a Catholic Church women's group called 'Maman Missionnaire' [Missionary Mum] in 1990 was unsuccessful. Women gathered only a few times at the church hall but had no specific agenda (the woman in charge was also away from Drueulu most of the week working in Hnathalo). The fact that most of the older Catholic women belonged to 'Smiling Melanesian Village' compromised the composition of the other group. Male opposition, however, does not jeopardize attendance at the group's meetings because the majority of the middle-aged women are widows and the younger women are unmarried. But among the married women there were wives of two catechists of Drueulu, one in her late twenties and the other in her mid-thirties. This suggests that, although a lot of criticism has been made by the parish committee, elderly women or women with important customary roles are the promoters of these initiatives, and they have legitimacy, even if it is contested.

Having their own building enables them to organize activities to raise money without having to ask permission of other collective bodies, such as the parish committee. The Women's House becomes a physical and symbolic space. It is a space where collectivity is created by female agency.

In 1990, the group met once a week, on Sundays, to plan the weekly activities. The first two days of the week members did gardening, helping each other. Sometimes they did this without recompense, at other times members paid them, and the money went into the women's bank account. On Saturdays they organized a small market where they sold their produce. Twice a week in the evenings they gathered for discussion and to play bingo. Although old and young women were part of the group, a gap was created by the virtual absence of women in their thirties. Members always complained that the young married women who had had more educational opportunities were not members of the group, though they were pleased that some of them *sont venues nous donner la*

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39 This opposition is not connected to the political genesis of the group, in fact members of the church committee are pro-independence.
main pendant l'Assemblée Générale' [came to give a hand during the General Assembly] (Thérèse and Naomi, February 1992).

Today, women move freely out of the village and have learnt through experience how to deal with the bureaucracy of the administration. 'Au début c'était pas facile de faire des demarches, mais maintenant je n'ai plus de problèmes' [at the beginning it was not easy to go and ask, but now I don't have any problems] (Pohnimé, July 1989). Today, too, they know how to apply for public funds. At the General Assembly they astonished the rest of the women by saying they had finally received the substantial cheque that LePensec, a former French Government Minister, had promised them when he visited Lifu. The other women were eager to know how they got this money. Pohnimé, the President of the Drueulu group, confidently took the microphone and replied that the Minister was on the island and they simply went up to him with a request. They are also eager to participate in meetings taking place in Nouméa or in other tribes. Usually the group pays travel expenses and chooses the participants in such a way as to give different women the chance of going. Their organizational energies and skills are remarkable, though, as I have already pointed out, they are not consistent throughout the year. But once they elect to get involved in a specific project they put all their energies into bringing it to a successful conclusion. This means that they can host a delegation of 200 women, lodging and feeding them for over a week (getting produce from the gardens as well as purchasing frozen meat, rice, bread, butter, tea and coffee), by using traditional networks and organizational skills. But when it came to using the sewing machine the group bought to make clothes, the project was less successful.

When during a meeting at the Women's House, toward the end of my first year, my request to interview the group and record the session was accepted, the young unmarried women left the room and went outside. When it comes to la parole age is an important criterion, as I have already stressed. Most of the women who stayed behind took part in the discussion, shifting from French into Drehu. Questioned about what participation in the group meant to them, the women commented that getting together as an organized group was very important for them: being able to share their experiences, to visit other groups, to listen to new ideas, and to bring them back into their homes. Some of them have seen an improvement in their family lives.

The group has been involved in different kinds of activities. It promoted a project that enabled the boys and girls of the village, organized in a Youth Cultural Association, to get public funds for purchasing musical instruments.
This project was part of the women's larger fight against men's heavy drinking. In July 1990 the women of the village decided to organize a protest against alcohol abuse by men. In Drueulu the Catholic women acknowledged what the Protestants had maintained: that alcohol is a problem that mainly concerns the Catholic community. To paraphrase Waxöma: 'If we Catholics have to deal with the problem of alcohol, they (the Protestants) have to deal with the more important question of families that break away from their Church and go to the Jehovah's Witnesses.' Although the women's group was the organizing body, this was an event which unified Catholic women regardless of their membership of the women's group. Elderly and younger women gathered in a middle-aged woman's house to discuss the organization of the march. Some of the women who had shown confidence the previous day expressed doubts about men's reactions once the actual preparations began. Some women were not sure about taking part in the protest. Thérèse, who had provided her house for the women to meet, commented that just because one is a widow does not mean that one can ignore the problem: if it is not a drunk husband, then it is sons who are drunk. In the end all of the women present agreed to participate. Coconut leaves were used to make sticks to which placards were attached. 'L'Indépendence sera proclamée par les femmes. Tous les hommes seront morts tués par l'alcool' [Independence will be declared by women. All the men will be dead, killed by alcohol], read one of them. Others had written Drehu messages: Trijepi la kahairt ke hna mecin angeice, ka helén la tingeting [throw away alcohol because it kills and banishes peace]. When the women arrived at the Mission, the destination of the march, a fight broke out between a man and his wife who had marched. Women surrounded her to keep the husband away. The young woman refused to follow her husband and defended her position by saying that Harteqatr (Paul Zöngö's

40 A hunger strike or a strike during the wedding preparation were two alternatives voiced by some women during the meeting. It was decided to act on Sunday morning when a small fund-raising sale was scheduled by the local Catholic school and hence people would be gathered at the Mission.

41 Pohnimé disagreed with this view saying that to stress denominational differences was the wrong way to address the issue.

42 This statement can be viewed from different angles: as an admission of the problem the Catholic community has with alcohol and as an acknowledgment of the tensions present between both denominations, although they both identify themselves as belonging to the same tribe.

43 I participated in the women's meeting and followed but did not take part in the protest march.

44 Generally people are formally or informally aware of events taking place in the village. This time all the men were taken by surprise.
wife) was speaking and that out of respect everybody should be listening to her (later on the man publicly apologized for his behaviour). The same woman emphasized another point by telling the husband 'd'avoir respect pour le lieu, la Mission' [to have respect for the place, the Mission]. This young woman used aspects of la coutume (to be respectful of elderly, to be respectful of the place) to her advantage. Thus without subverting the codified social norms she was able to affirm her actions.

At this meeting another man said that he did not recognize the women's group. Babette, the local nurse and a member of the women's group, flashed back that all the women were involved and not just the women's group. Hatreqar spoke to the men saying that they should moderate their drinking, otherwise 1998 will mark 'the independence for women but men will not be there, they will be dead, all because of alcohol', repeating one of the slogans of the placards. This was echoed by another woman, who stressed that the tribe was largely made up by women and children, referring to the number of widows living in Drueulu.

This protest against alcohol was an event organized by the group itself; it was not articulated on the basis of an external calendar. But lately women have been involved in activities that have required more outside intervention, such as family planning activities, working with a French woman doctor and with the two Kanak women responsible to the local government for sanitary education. But Catholic women, who viewed these activities as community oriented, were able to include Protestant women too in these meetings. Women were also able to arrange for a weekly visit by a gynaecologist to their dispensary to be consulted, especially by young women in order to prevent early pregnancy. When women reported this to the General Assembly, the other women were eager to know how they were able to achieve it. In fact in some areas of the Grande Terre not even general practitioners go to visit patients in their tribes. They stay in the white settlement and sick people have to make the long and expensive journey down from their mountain settlements to the white villages by 'taxi'. Being able to facilitate free and easier access for everybody in the tribe to a medical service was considered a big achievement.

45 I am referring here to other activities where women have been involved but were part of larger projects set up by 'Smiling Melanesian Village' or by the Provincial Women's Rights Office.

46 In the Loyalty Islands public medical service is free, as it is in the main island outside of Nouméa.
In choosing to promote this action the women's group has not made any public comments critical of the medicalization of health, though most members of the group make use of both western and Kanak medicines. Women do not perceive the coming of a western doctor as a way of imposing conformity on patterns of western medical consumption. For the moment they appreciate the positive and practical aspects of being able to go for a consultation once a week. It means that women with children can easily see the doctor, without having to catch a bus to the administrative centre of We; it also allows the young women to go and seek advice more freely than if they had to make a trip to We, not only in terms of time and money, but also in terms of being less publicly exposed. In fact everybody acknowledges the problem of pregnancy of unmarried girls, despite the protocols of *la coutume*, which forbids sexual intercourse out of wedlock. This interest in family planning and health-oriented activities is the result of a combination of factors: the arrival of a French woman doctor interested in working with the group; the choice of two Kanak women from Lifu, trained nurses, to head the Provincial Sanitary Education Section; the controversial establishment of a Provincial Women's Rights Office; and the visibility that the group has gained in recent years.

Thus women are keeping boundaries more open in the interests of the well-being of the community. Women are carrying over elements from the past, there is persistence in their engagement, but their concerns differ from men's. What is interesting is that the concern, publicly expressed, for the need for family planning comes from a group of Catholic women, a fact at odds with mainstream Catholic discourse on women's role in reproduction. But women always stressed to me that 'nos grand mères, elles avaient des méthodes pour espacer les enfants' [our grandmothers had methods for spacing children]. So using birth control methods is not novel to their way of thinking, and family planning is not perceived as a demographic policy formulated around the child. Their discussions

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47 I mention this because it was raised in response to a paper dealing with these issues which I presented in Montreal at the Pacific Island Group Seminar, 13 November 1992.

48 Cf. Vanessa Griffen's critique (1994) of the Port Vila Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development (September 1993), which represented the official position of the Pacific region for the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994. She criticizes the declaration's focus for being too narrow in as much as it concentrated on family planning as 'control of fertility'. She argues, for a point of view which would encompass 'the empowerment of women, would identify control of women's reproduction by women, as personally empowering and enabling' (1994:67).

49 It should be pointed out that in the main island a high proportion of medical doctors are French military officers, which also implies that they are men.
of procreation are informed by the well-being of the mother, yet they do differ from western feminist agendas.

Pohnimé and Thérèse had no difficulty agreeing to participate in a short documentary film on sexuality that will be translated into the different languages of New Caledonia and used for family planning. But they controlled the limits of the narrative. One interviewer asked them about contraception and they answered that some of the young married women are having one child after another and this is not good for their health, and that in the past Kanak women knew how to space children. However, when one of the two interviewers elicited the women's comments on the use of contraception as a choice a woman might make for having a life of her own without children, the two women did not agree. Their answer was not understood by the medical experts. For local women contraception was not viewed as a negation of their reproductive power but rather as a method to avoid continual childbearing by spacing children.

Thus, at the same time that men of the village were perceiving external presence as a threat, women were able to carry on their projects and to involve women external to the group, without challenging customary authorities. The family planning meetings took place in their own Maison des Femmes but the customary authorities were informed; women, who have a very deep knowledge of customary relations, do not try to bypass the hierarchical structure, rather they make a point of making their project known to the rest of the community through the intermediary of the petit chef, the man in charge of bringing news from the chefferie to the people. Thus women are able to introduce their projects and give them visibility without an open challenge to la coutume.

I would now like to conclude the discussion of this movement by drawing a parallel with Wok Meri [women's work], an organization of 'enterprising women' in Highland Papua New Guinea, discussed among others by Sexton (1982 and 1986) and Warry (1987). Sexton (1982) considers Wok Meri as a response to rapid socioeconomic changes triggered by Europeans' arrival into the Highlands. The focus of this organization is thus the production of new wealth (money) and its allocation by women, who complain that 'men both control and waste modern wealth' (Warry 1987:179). Women relying on traditional structures have been able to incorporate some elements of western banking practice in their movement and by doing so they have been able to engage themselves in a 'large-scale collective action ... [which] is unparalleled in the literature on Highland New Guinea' (Sexton 1982:167). Warry (1987) describes it as a syncretic movement which blends both traditional and modern ideologies (1987:149). The trend
toward integrating tradition and modern elements echoes the ways Drueuluan women negotiate the two. Women's attitudes to male behaviours also show similarities. In both cases women deprecate men's behaviour and their spending on gambling or alcohol. However, differences emerge when comparing the two groups, their organizations, their aims, and so on. Some of these contrasts probably reflect differences between the two socio-cultural indigenous structures. I suggest a few examples. Leadership in both groups is very important in keeping the association alive. Yet the leadership of *Wok Meri* is in the hands of one or two 'big women' (Sexton 1986), or *bosmeri* (Warry 1987), a title which parallels the 'big man' position and which is used by women only within this organization. This is quite different from the board elected by the Drueuluan group, although the election is just a way to ratify the names that have been agreed upon. Unlike 'big women', the members of the Drueulu board are chosen on the basis of several criteria, among which are lineage status (their husband's or their own, if widows) and age. Further, the women's board is not patterned on a male hierarchical structure.

Each *Wok Meri* group relies on two male figures: a book-keeper - this is due to the women's lack of schooling and thus difficulty in handling large sums of money - and a 'chairman', who attends the intergroup meetings speaking on behalf of the women he accompanies and acting as well as the group's adviser. The men who hold this office are usually younger than the 'big women' and it is up to them to follow the chairman's advice. Yet from this office a man can gain prestige. Sexton views it as one among other new paths to leadership (1986:136), and Warry as 'one alternative to elected office' (1987:163). Because of a higher literacy rate, women in Drueulu have no problems in keeping up with these tasks, although usually it is still the case that the treasurer position is held by a young woman, who feels more confident with accounting and keeping the records of the group. Men do not play any role within the Drueulu women's group or take part in any meetings or inter-group visits. Women are in charge of all the activities involving the group, from the decision-making process to the actual sponsoring of an event.

The inter-group relationship between the longer-established *Wok Meri* group, known as the 'mothers', and new groups' members known as their 'daughters' are not developed at random, but rather are generally based on agnatic or uterine kin links between women in the two groups' (Sexton 1982:173). The genesis of the women's groups in Lifu shows that kinship links were important in establishing the group in Drueulu. However, women interact outside of kinship
networks to carry out some of their projects, as the example of the family planning project has illustrated. Unlike Wok Meri, in Drueulu, during the time of my fieldwork, there was a complete absence of Christian prayers, ritual and symbolism accompanying the women's activities, although the women belonging to the group were all Catholic. A compartmentalization of Christian and women's spheres is here at work. This contrasts with Highland Papua New Guinea where Lutheran women's groups in the late 1950s 'became the catalyst for Wok Meri's development' (Sexton 1986:133).

Sexton's analysis focuses on the economic involvement of Wok Meri groups; women's production of wealth and its allocation. In fact she considers the movement 'an effort by women to improve their deteriorating economic status' (1982:167). Here I think lies the difference with the Drueuluan women's group. Sexton's analysis has been criticized for being too 'capitalist' in its stress on business versus maternal symbolism (see Myott 1995). Women in Drueulu are able to raise funds, to seek provincial contributions, and to manage money. They are also proficient in sponsoring events such as a kermesse, a general assembly, or other kinds of activities. Yet they stress their being together as women and their sharing of ideas and new experiences as playing a large part in pulling their efforts together. Although Drueuluan women are very active, their involvement is not considered by them or by other Drueuluans in terms of 'entrepreneur's skills.

CONTEXTUALIZING DIFFERENCE

Before concluding, I want to stress that my emphasis on sexual difference rather than equality has marked the way I approached questions that on the surface could be glossed as issues of development and/or of women's emancipation. As I explained in Chapter One, engendering knowledge for me implies positioning myself in the field, explaining the partiality of my representation and the situational context of my interpretation. Rather than accepting a western philosophical notion of a universal, purportedly neutral subject, which is in fact male, I believe that subjects exist as two sexes. Beyond the debate about differentiating biological sex from cultural/historical gender, I believe that, despite the varieties of historical/cultural configurations, women and men are always embodied differently as sexed subjects and therefore as knowing and speaking subjects.
Plate 18: Custom graffiti at the new Provincial Government compound, We, 24 September 1991

Plate 19: Slogans of a strike, We, 1991
Plate 20: Yearly General Assembly of the Association of Women for a Smiling Melanesian Village, Drueulu, 5-8 February 1992

Plate 21: Women's anti-alcohol march, Drueulu, July 1990
My own role in the community, as a woman researcher, is relevant here to the degree that it illuminates the negotiation of gender politics in relation to *la coutume* and the negotiated and contingent nature of that identity. I was accepted into the community as a woman doing research on women. Upon my arrival, I was introduced to the high chief, who gave his permission for residence in the village to carry out my research. But some of the men reminded me that I had been accepted but not *incorporated* into their society because I did not have any land. Women, on the other hand, on my second long visit to the island, started to draw the boundaries differently. I was not considered an 'outsider' anymore. When precedence in eating, which is associated with rank and status, was at issue I was treated differently. When meals were served in the Women's House I was served after women who had priority because of their rank and/or status (the chief's wife, the elderly women, the pregnant women); and when Kanak women from other parts of the country gathered in Drueulu for the General Assembly, I was asked to share some duties as a member of the host community.

Kanak women and men stress certain conduct as being more Kanak than European: gift giving, generosity, respect. Apparently in the past such behaviour was more easily assimilated by foreigners accepting indigenous rules. But in the contemporary context men emphasize *la coutume* as the good old way of life and as a way to live that is in opposition to 'the white way'. Boundaries of difference have for them become more rigid and exclusive. Yet this has not entailed a stricter control over women's lives. Women still move freely: beyond households and village boundaries. Thus women retain the freedom of movement they have acquired through time, even with the reiteration and reinforcement of *la coutume* I have described. Women do not perceive their behaviour as transgression, though they acknowledge that their mother's lives were more confined than their own.

Not only has a strengthening of *la coutume* been achieved without restriction on women's mobility, but I would go as far as to argue that Kanak women in Drueulu as an organized group are less bound than men by customary obligations. Pressure on individual women and men to conform to certain rules and standards is still very high. Individual women and men can step outside the domain where custom prevails, but only by leaving the community and the

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50 Contrast to Vanuatu and PNG where mobility of women in modernity at issue seeks to sexualize women (Jolly 1987, Clarck in press).
network of obligations that binds them there. And it is not enough to move to town to step out of this network of obligations.

However, at the level of groups, the pressure of tradition is of a different kind. Women do make customary exchange transactions and they adhere strictly to traditional protocols in mixed or public domains. But when they are among themselves, especially when they are in the gardens away from the village, they show a more relaxed, diversified and less hierarchical behaviour by unrestrained body language, sexual jokes and modes of addressing each other.51

As an organized group they are less bound by the pressure of customary rules, so they can become involved in new public activities without its being viewed as threatening. Women's assertions are not necessarily outside the domain of custom. As my analysis has pointed out, some of their concerns, such as family planning and concern with male drinking, show continuity with the past. This emerges even in their voiced concern for the responsibility of the group, for the well-being of the community. But this community includes everybody: women and men. The women's group serves as an arena for women's new assertions and negotiations precisely because, as an organized collective entity, it has no precedent in traditional culture. Men cannot do that: too many interests, obligations and concerns stop them from acting as a group in the same way.52

Thus, Drueulu women and men have engaged quite differently in the transformations of modernity and contemporary politics, in both cases drawing continuity from the past, but differently redrawing boundaries of difference.

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51 I only went once with an all-male party. Waxôma's husband and other men gathered to go in the forest to cut down a tree they had already chosen, bring it back to the village to make a dug-out canoe. I had been given permission to go. On another occasion my request to accompany the men's party was refused (see above).

52 Even organizing an event in order to raise money is always done within expected communal activities, e.g. church group, political party, parents/teachers committee.
Chapter Eight

URBANIZATION AND WOMEN: THE HOUSE AS A PUBLIC SPACE, THE WHITE TOWN AS LIFUAN PLACE

One of the least documented areas of Women and Development in the Pacific are women's lives and work in towns and cities (Dickerson-Putman and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1994:8).

In his study of rural-urban mobility of ni-Vanuatu, Haberkorn (1989) has argued that migrations to town are becoming more permanent; urban centres such as Port Vila are becoming areas of permanent residence for Melanesians. Nouméa, as I have already noted, has a population of 80,000 people, which is 60 per cent of the total population of the country. Although Kanak make up only 21.6 per cent of this urban population, the population of Drueulu in 1989 was split almost equally between the village and the town. A higher presence compared to the average for Kanak is common for all Lifu (around 40 per cent)\(^1\) although each village in the island contributes to rural-urban mobility at a different rate. This indicates a trend similar to nearby Vanuatu, where the urban population is made up by ni-Vanuatu from the different areas of the country but 'only a few islands dominate rural-urban mobility' (Haberkorn 1989:14). The other noteworthy demographic change that Haberkorn refers to, that is a greater increase in female movement towards Port Vila and Santo (1989:13), applies to Nouméa as well. In New Caledonia there are other small urban centres in the Grande Terre besides the capital, but for Drueulans and Lifuans 'going to town' means going to Nouméa. Thus the long-term movement that Haberkorn identifies applies to the population in Lifu in

\(^1\) 'Recensement de la population de la commune de Lifou par tribu et par district', Etat Civil, We, January 1990.
1989, but this trend does not seem to be irreversible, as the reverse itinerary trend, among other changes brought by the Matignon Accords, indicates.2

But the urban experience of Lifuans in New Caledonia is to be understood in the context of the islanders' long-standing practice of mobility. The expectations of rural dwellers towards the urban milieu are formed: the urban milieu is not an unknown place. Almost every Drueuluan above the age of 15 has been to Nouméa for one reason or another (studying, personal health, visiting a sick relative, attending a religious or a political meeting, participating in a women's gathering, preparing or going to a wedding, or for work). Thus Nouméa is a different but not a strange place. People who move to Nouméa do it in the hope of finding jobs. Yet most of them do not perceive it as a permanent move. Some middle-aged couples have built houses in Drueulu, where they return during the school summer break and where they intend to retire. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the notion of migration is conveyed by Drueulans through the notion of long-term stay. This implies that people going back to the village are not perceived as 'returning migrants'. The rhetoric of return is, for the present adult generation, part of their experience. The 'admission of failure' which Connell (1990:19) considers as a mark accompanying many returning migrants' experience is not considered salient by Drueulans of their experience in town. People are expected to return back home. People who have returned to Lifu to work for the newly-established provincial government and those who have returned to the village with no job prospects are not a source of shame (cf. Boyd 1990). Only once I heard a young married woman, who was employed as a teacher in the local primary school, commenting on the return of a young married man who had lost his urban employment in terms of 'failure'. I am not denying that tensions between the urban and the rural Drueulan community exist, or that generational conflicts occur within the urban community, but I want to explore these tensions on their own terms, rather than positing a simple village/town opposition.

The interpretations of urbanization that are commonly offered in Nouméa by the white population have been gradually acquired by most people in the absence of knowledge based on dedicated studies. Generalized and stereotyped ideas of

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2 I am referring to Lifuans who have returned to live on the island because of the availability of jobs. Statistics at the present time are not available. Newspapers have reported quite distorted figures. Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes wrote of 6425 people who have moved to the Loyalty Province (17 June 1993, p.3). But Construire les Loyauté reported President Kaloï's speech in the editorial, giving for the same period a figure of 2745 people (July 1993).
urbanization are even more pertinent when dealing with women’s experiences in town. These views are predicated on the idea that urbanization enhances the standard of living of people, especially of women, and also frees women from the constraint of custom. As Mohanty argues, the contrast between a representation of 'Third World woman' victimized, constrained by custom and bound by domesticity, and a representation of 'Western women' as autonomous individuals, having control of their bodies, and as agents of their decisions takes the latter as the privileged norm to which all women should conform (1991b:55). In an urban setting like Nouméa, a white town, this assumption underlies the colonial discourses on women and urbanization. I find it a more productive stance to see women’s and men’s life in town³ in terms of creolization.⁴

A further assumption is that urban life breaks down the force of collectivity and enhances the sense of individualism. Again this is a presumption which does not pertain to Nouméa.⁵ It appears, however, that even among urbanized people of the Grande Terre, such as the inhabitants of Houailou, fluid and permeable notions of identity pertain similar to those that I have discussed for Lifu (Michel Naepels, personal comm., September 1992).

Studies on women's migration in Melanesia are scanty (Strathem 1975, Morauta 1985, Connell 1984, 1990). From Connell's (1984) survey of the literature on women's lives in town, it seems that only two alternatives are available to them: either they have 'no personal meaning in staying in town hence the village continues to remain the point of reference' (1984:970), or 'over time, women do participate more fully in urban life, establish new urban ties and relinquish traditional ties' (1984:970). Drueuluan women do not fit either of these two alternatives. They retain strong ties with the village and yet they do not experience 'disenchantment' with urban life. Women from the village welcome any opportunity they have to go to town; women living in town are pleased to return to the village, although they like life in town.

The postulated options open to women – either alienation in the urban context because of a nostalgic relationship with the home village or assimilation

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³ As well as in the village, see Chapter Three for example.
⁴ For the concept of creolization in the urban context of Honiara, see Jourdan (1994).
⁵ I am referring here mainly to people from Drueulu and more generally to Lifuans, and not making a general statement for the rural population who have moved to town. Cf. the notion of fa'alavelave [mutual support] by urbanized Samoan migrants (Franco 1990) and the expectations of gifts from returnees on the part of non-migrants among the Irakia Awa people of Eastern Highlands Province (PNG), described by Boyd (1990).
to the urban context — betray an underlying assumption. First of all it implies an antithesis between village and town. Rural and urban are opposed: one represents the traditional ways, the other the modern ways. As I have stated in the prologue, I consider the two settings not as separate bounded spaces but as permeable sites, spaces women and men move between, carrying with them values and elements from one to the other. A more useful way of considering the life of Drueuluans and Lifuan in town is to perceive it in terms of a new articulation of tradition and modernity, not as opposed, or as tradition assimilated into modernity, but rather in new configurations. To assume that the town triggers off unidirectional changes towards modernity without considering how the urban experience is shaped by indigenous assumptions, the colonial past, and the present socio-cultural context, is very ethnocentric. It implies a western view of urbanization. I am not saying that indigenous urban dwellers in the Pacific must have different agendas from their western counterparts, but that their similarity should not be taken for granted. The specificities of colonial pasts and socio-political presents generate a diversity of urban contexts in the Pacific region (see Jourdan and Philibert 1994).

People's urban networks are very strong and are activated constantly. Many Drueuluan women in town have jobs and thus have daily contacts outside the household; those who are not employed do not perceive themselves as housewives. They have formal and informal networks of relations, just as in the village, and the space within their houses becomes a public mixed space. This challenges another conventional contrast, that of opposing private and public domains, another dichotomy which emerges in Connell's analysis (1984). Drueuluans in town perceive themselves as part of the wider community of Drueuluans, although the Catholic and the Protestant communities differentiate themselves within it. In the following pages I explore how these networks are conceived, how women still rely on pre-established networks, and how they interact between the urban and the rural milieu. My presentation will distinguish when necessary between the two denominations. As an example of how sociality is redeployed in town and how connections work between Drueuluans in town and village, I analyse a marriage ceremony. This is a customary ceremony in which religious denominations are not pivotal and which I use to highlight involvement at the community level in both rural and urban settings.

To situate my discussion, it is crucial to keep in mind that in other decolonized contexts in the Pacific the capital, although an administrative centre, has become a 'Melanesian place'. But this is not the case for Nouméa, which
remains a white town. This partially explains the specificities of Kanak urbanization in Nouméa compared to other Western Pacific countries. For Honiara, Jourdan (1994) stresses that people moving from the rural to the urban context articulate modernity and tradition in their construction of identity within a frame of reference different from that of the village. They perceive themselves as urban dwellers of Honiara which, albeit only recently, has become a 'Melanesian town' rather than a 'colonial town'. This is in contrast to Nouméa, which is still perceived as a non-Kanak space. Yet Kanak succeed in rendering the urban space as their place.

URBAN SPACE AS PLACE

In the 1970s Drueuluans in Nouméa tended to live near one another (Montravel, see Map 7). Recently they have started to move into new areas such as Koutio (Map 7). One can generally detect a difference between Drueuluan families that have been in Nouméa for many years (and where at least one member of the household is employed) and younger couples who have recently established their independent households. The former often own their house, whereas the latter tend to share accommodation with their families until they can afford to move into a rented flat. Among the Protestants, newly married couples tend to live with relatives longer. A Protestant woman whose recently married son moved to town to join his working wife underlined the fact that the young couple would be sharing the house with an older couple so that they would benefit from the couple's longer experience of conjugal life.

In Nouméa in 1989 there were 66 households from Drueulu. Their composition varied. La Rivière Salée (see Map 7) was the neighbourhood with the highest concentration of Drueuluan households (16). Other extended families

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6 Although outside the province of this chapter, another characteristic of the population of Nouméa worth mentioning is the presence of a white proletariat, the petits blancs. This is a unique situation in the South Pacific, 'virtually non-existent outside New Caledonia' (Connell 1987a:159).

7 Although none of the family from Drueulu were living in a cabane [shack], I want to point to the problem of squatting in town which in the last few years has becoming critical. For an overview of the consequences of the Matignon Accords on the squatter situation, see Emberson-Bain (1994). On the squatter problem for Pacific Islanders at home and as migrants cf. Institute of Pacific Studies, In Search of a Home, 1987.

8 I do not consider three elderly women who had chosen to live at an old people's house in Sainte-Marie.
Map 7: Nouméa
lived in the recently built residential area of Koutio, where they owned their houses. But Pierre-Lenquête in Montravel and Saint-Quentin also accommodated a good number of Drueuluan migrants. These two areas are in sharp contrast to the open space of Koutio. Pierre-Lenquête is situated not far from the centre of the town, whereas Saint-Quentin is a dormitory suburb. These dwellings were built as part of a social housing program. Montravel consists of a series of buildings comprising a total of 348 units (Pierre-Lenquête) and 93 independent houses; the towers of Saint-Quentin, as they are locally known, comprise 610 units (see *Atlas* 1981:plate 49). Other sections of town are predominantly non-Kanak (mainly 'white') residential areas. One has a strong feeling of this contrast when boarding a bus. Few whites use this means of transport; nevertheless, to take a bus to go to Anse Vata one is surrounded by tourists and non-Kanak people, whereas to take the bus to go to Rivière Salée or Saint-Quentin one finds oneself among non-white passengers.

Franco (1990:173) reports a similar high residential concentration for Samoan migrants living in the Honolulu urban area in the 1980s. The high residential concentration of Samoans contrasts with the more scattered residential pattern of other groups of Pacific Islanders, such as Tongans, who have migrated to Hawaii. This residential pattern, Franco remarks, has permitted the islander migrants to 'live in a virtual Samoan world' (Ablon quoted in Franco 1990:174).

Generally the Drueuluan population living in these large apartment buildings consists of young couples or single women (and a few single men) who are renting small flats. When one leaves Nouméa from the north, the view is dominated by these tall buildings, a blot on the landscape. These apartments usually house a nuclear family, but many relatives and friends coming from Drueulu to town stay for a longer or shorter period, so the composition of each household changes frequently. During the week-end couples who have been married for a long time usually host boarding students from the village who are studying in town. Younger couples usually host their relatives or other young men visiting town. The comings and goings of Drueuluan migrants in town are constant.

Daily life for Drueuluan migrants living in big apartment buildings is patently different from life in the village or in urban areas where they have their independent houses and a plot of land for gardening. Being confined to a small living space has its problems. Yet houses are still meeting places. What at night is a sleeping area, during the day becomes a meeting place. In the afternoons
usually, as in Drueulu, people lie down to rest. For women these occasions are often moments for sharing experiences and advice.

Another contrasting difference between town and the village is, as I indicated, the lack of green space around the large apartment buildings; there are a few playing grounds for children, but no gardens. However, women find the means to do some gardening in unoccupied fallow plots of land, planting vegetables. Women do not usually grow yams because that would require men, who do not do any gardening in town. Women savour fresh produce from the garden but they do not appreciate it as much as the produce that is brought by relatives coming to visit from Drueulu. Again the choice of gardening and the choice of where to plant is made with respect to other female members of one's network who have been living in town longer.

In Drueulu the household is a space comprising several units: a traditional house used for sleeping and receiving guests, a kitchen, and a third unit used as a wardrobe and sometimes for sleeping. In town the living space is architecturally different yet the way women organize this space is similar to that in the village. Newly-wed couples tend to have a house with mats on the floor and very little furniture in both settings. Elderly couples with jobs tend to have more furnished houses. A mattress, a table and chairs for dining are considered essential pieces of furniture for them. The sense of alienation that one perceives from the outside of the towers of Saint-Quentin and that remains while one walks up the stairs (or in taking the lift) gives way to a distinct sense of being at home once one enters an apartment of Drueuluans. The protocol of receiving guests is very similar to that of the village. People who come to visit make their qëmek [customary gesture]; the same gesture is used by people going to visit a relative in the hospital. Although young people do not make the customary gesture as frequently as older people do, they have not abandoned it.

Inside the urban space one notes other similarities to and differences from the rural space. Although in town more varieties of food are available (new food staples have become part of the rural diet as well), women nevertheless tend to cook more or less the same kind of food, following the same procedures as in the village. Rice, bread and frozen chicken are the main staples both in Nouméa and

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9 This clearly changes in households in which both spouses are working and children are at school.

10 Especially when the children are grown up, this arrangement allows brothers and sisters to sleep separately.
in Lifu. Probably in town the consumption of meat (apart from chicken) is higher compared to in Lifu. The eating protocol, however, has not changed. Elderly men and women, pregnant women and guests are served first. And to underline important occasions the itra is always welcomed. Sometimes nowadays, instead of engaging in the heavy work of preparing the earth oven, the dish is cooked in a pot. If no banana leaves are available the ingredients are wrapped in aluminium paper. But when people engage in fund-raising, the itra is prepared along more traditional lines. Young men and women look for banana leaves and young men go and collect wood and stones to prepare the earth oven.

In town dress codes have changed. They are more relaxed, especially for young women. Young women often wear trousers both at home and outside. Older women instead still wear the 'robe popinée' to go to work or to go out to places such as bingo or to the casino (see below). They wear the same style of dress (with the variations I presented in Chapter Seven) regardless of the public space they move in. For important events, such as a wedding, however, even a Drueuluan girl in Nouméa would dress in a 'robe popinée'.

ETHNIC SOLIDARITY

For both men and women, to settle in town is not to break away from kin networks. The values of reciprocity are embedded in a network of relations which are activated almost daily in Nouméa. In town the strong numerical presence of Drueuluans, more generally speaking of Lifuans, makes the web of support networks very tight and allows people to recreate their own community (see Franco 1990). People consider themselves an extension of the village and do not represent themselves as a separate community. They accept their new urban situation but do not sever ties with the village. As I mentioned in the last chapter, co-residence produces a strong bond. Place is used again to mobilize collective endeavours (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).12

Looking at Pacific Islander female migrants to New Zealand, Graves differentiates three 'adaptive strategies' to which people turn in an urban context: kin, peers, or self (1984:370). Depending on the contexts and the purpose

11 I found more differences in households where the man was from Lifu but the wife from another area. She had kept the ways of cooking of her home area.

12 As Morauta stresses, for urbanized Kukipi the importance of the village as point of reference 'may even have been enhanced by the incidence of movement' (1985:227).
everyone relies on each of these three strategies; nevertheless one of them is generally preferred. Graves maintains that Pacific Islander migrant women tend to prefer to rely on their kin. One factor that does not favour peer group networks is the 'insufficient opportunity for casual meeting' (1984:373): whereas Pacific Islander men meet at the pub, this is rarely the case for the women. The migration experience of Lifuan women in Nouméa contrasts with what Graves discussed. Drueuluan women, like their counterparts in Auckland, do not frequent public bars. However, they have other recreational opportunities such as playing sports, going to play bingo or going to the casino. Notwithstanding these wider opportunities for casual meetings in Nouméa, women go out with other relatives or with women from the same tribe or linguistic area. Hence a wider sociality tends to reinforce kin and ethnic cohesion rather than creating new relationships outside one's pre-existing network or facilitating the establishment of peer cohesion.

In the large complex buildings of Saint-Quentin, Kanak live side-by-side with other ethnic groups but the relationships between tenants are very weak. People of the same ethnic background, and, in the case of Kanak, people from the same linguistic areas, tend to congregate. Looking for a couple of friends from Lifu and not knowing exactly on which floor their apartment was situated, I asked other tenants. They responded by asking me for information regarding what brand of car my friends had (I did not know!) and what jobs they did. Although one may find such questions normal in an urban situation, I was puzzled to discover this anonymity. Luckily I found someone from Lifu, and I was readily able to locate my friends by making reference to their kin connections. Kanak in Nouméa interact with non-Kanak at work, but their network of relations is mainly formed by people from the same linguistic area. Everytime I went to visit Drueulians, I always found other people visiting from the village or from the island. The urban space thus tends to reinforce rather than weaken the ties with one's own natal group.

Although Drueulians dwell in different parts of the town, this is no obstacle to visiting each other frequently. Women who work always find the time to visit their relatives, either in the evenings or during the week-end. These visits are mainly family outings, but the fact that several Drueuluan women drive cars allows them to visit each other even when their husbands are busy at work.

13 A study of public bars in Auckland found that, 'over half of Maori drinking groups included women; few Pacific Islands women were seen. Pakeha [European] women mainly attended the exclusive lounge bar' (Graves et al. 1979 quoted in Graves 1984:373).
attending meetings or watching soccer matches. But women do not go out only to visit relatives and friends or to take care of sick relatives who have been hospitalized. Women also get together to go to the centre of town to play bingo or go to the casino in Anse Vata (see Map 7). This willingness of women to go out and gamble should not be considered as something pertaining to the urban context alone. There was not a single kermesse I attended in Drueulu during my fieldwork where bingo was not included as part of the recreational activities. The difference is that in Nouméa women hope to make larger wins. Pohnimé once won 16 000 CFP and used the money to buy food for her relatives who were hosting her in Rivière Salée. Winning is thus not loaded with negative values as long as one is not alone in benefiting from it.

Thus we cannot generalize a view of urban life as a space which enables women to make autonomous choices, as the kind of life that induces them to sever ties with their community of origin and establish new urban ties. Nor is it a place which lacks a space of reference for the younger generation. In presenting reflections gathered at meetings with Kanak to discuss the future Cultural Centre Tjibaou, Bensa (1992) remarks that Nouméa is considered by Kanak as an enlargement of their universe rather than as a contrast between urban and rural space. Kanak still consider the home tribe as their 'espace de référence' [space of reference] (see Bensa 1992:11). He also adds: 'Quant aux jeunes de Nouméa, il est frappant que leur espace de référence pour penser le futur Centre soit aussi la "tribu"' [It is somewhat striking that even for Noumean young people the space of reference for the future Centre is the 'tribe'] (1992:10).

As Morauta stresses for Kukipi, Drueuluans 'desire the best of both worlds' (1985:236). But 'tastes for modern goods' by Drueuluans, both rural and urban-based, has not led to a consideration of 'the urban life-style as normal and the village as sub-standard', as Morauta reports for Kukipi villagers (1985:238). Drueuluans appreciate the chance of going to town and welcome the wide range of commodities available there. Yet when it comes to speak about ways of interacting, they stress the specificities of their ways vis-à-vis that of the kamadra.

Communal events link Drueuluans, young and old, together. The organization of a marriage, fund-raising activities, Church meetings, sports events, singing and dancing are all occasions that bring people together. People in

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14 The cultural centre 'Jean-Marie Tjibaou' is going to be built in Nouméa. It is classified as one of the 'grands chantiers' of the French President of the Republic (Bensa 1992:8).
town often say they are busy with 'travail' [work]. As we have seen, in the rural context this expression refers to people's engagement in communal activities, from fund-raising to wedding organization. The same is true of town. The sense of belonging to a community is very strong. This is not to deny their sense of commonality as indigenous people of the country or a sense of national identity, but simply to observe communal continuities in both town and village.

In November 1991 a two-day kermesse was held in Vallée du Tir (see Map 7) to conclude the cricket season. People from Gaica living in Nouméa decided to perform Drui, a dance from their district. Men and women, both Catholic and Protestant, were involved in the preparation of the dance. In the evenings preceding the dance, people met in a field in Rivière Salée, near the main road, to rehearse. The tane fia [head of the dance]15 instructed the participants on which part of the sequence they would rehearse. Although the composition of the group changed every evening, the participants knew the gestures (nevertheless some are considered good and some poor dancers). The dance belongs to a specific family, which must be approached (either in Drueulu or in Nouméa) to receive permission to perform it. This applies to each dance or song.16 Both men and women, mainly unmarried, rehearsed together (although other dances such as Fehoa are danced only by men). During the week-end many more people from Gaica participated and those who had not come in the evenings preceding the event took part in the dance. The feast was very successful and the dance from Gaica went well. Of the people I spoke with, several suggested that the presence of the sister of the high chief Zeula in the cricket team of Gaica made team members, and more generally people from Drueulu, feel more committed to participating. This was another context in which people operated following indigenous assumptions, relying on local networks and thus rendering an anonymous urban space their place.

Yet Nouméa has also meant a new linguistic environment. Learning the vernacular language in town for the new generation may pose some problems. Women were very aware of this. Anecdotes about the past told of many linguistic misunderstandings involving Lifuan protagonists, mainly women. Today the same kind of irony is used in describing the way, for example, a young boy brought up in town speaks Drehu when he returns to the village. This

15 Always a man.
16 The women's group in Drueulu went to see a family to ask permission to perform a certain song during the General Assembly of February 1992.
permeability between languages and places emerges clearly from the anecdotes referring to past linguistic interactions between women and French speakers. Those I gathered all referred to the period between the 1960s and 1970s. People represented the difficulty in communicating with outsiders not in terms of lack, of ignorance, but rather characterized their protagonist as transferring Drehu semantic protocols into French or because of life in town making an inappropriate use of French expressions. Such stories of linguistic confusion, when narrated to me, aroused the mirth of those present. I recount one of them:

In Drueulu four women (one Protestant and three Catholics) are climbing the hill to go to the gardens. The gardens are near the soccer field ... A car stops to give them a lift. It is a kamadra [white man] who drives. He indicates to them that he is going towards We. The women climb into the utility. Once inside the car they start to discuss: 'How are we going to tell the man where to stop?' They do not know how to speak French. One among them remembers: 'Ah, but when we board the bus in Nouméa we say: 'Stop'!'. The women are pleased to have found the word and together they say aloud: 'Stop!'. The man stops the car right away. The women do not know how to tell him to keep going anymore. They got out and continued on foot. They stayed on the road for an hour laughing. They said 'Oleti' (thanks) to the man but he left without understanding (Zanesi Ausu, April 1992).

Nowadays every adult speaks French, regardless of where they live. Drehu, on the contrary, is spoken by everyone in Lifu, but in Nouméa the situation is different. Although women use the same kind of ironic story in speaking about the way some young speak Drehu, they also show concern for the loss of Drehu among urbanized children. The loss of local language-speaking ability has been addressed by the Protestant community in town. As Zanesi, who has been living in Nouméa for years, explained:

Drueulu quatre femmes (une protestante et trois catholiques) sont en train de monter la côte pour aller aux champs; les champs sont à côté du terrain de football ... Une voiture s'arrête pour les prendre. C'est un kamadra qui conduit; il leur fait signe qu'il va vers We. Les femmes montent dans la camionette. Une fois en voiture elles se mettent à discuter: 'Mais comment on va dire au monsieur où s'arrêter.' Elles ne savent pas parler oui oui. Une parmi elles se souvient: 'Ah, mais quand on monte dans le car à Nouméa on dit 'A l'arrêt!' '. Les femmes sont contentes d'avoir trouvé le mot et ensemble elles ont dit fort: 'A l'arrêt. Le monsieur tout de suite arrête la voiture. Les femmes ne savent plus comment lui dire de continuer. Elles sont descendues et ont continué à pied. Elles sont restées une heure sur la route à éclater de rire. Elles ont dit "Oleti" (merci), mais le monsieur est reparti sans comprendre.

17 It refers to the practice of passengers on board the bus telling the driver to stop at the next bus stop.
We favoured French at home to deal with the children. Before, we received papers from the teacher so that one would speak French at home. From then we chose to do it like that. What was annoying was that they lost Drehu. When they are little, one needs to speak French to them so that they will not have any problems in school where they need to learn written and oral French. But now one tries to speak to the little ones in Drehu as well so that they do not forget the language (Zanesi Ausu, April 1992).

This same question of how to articulate the learning of the mother tongue with the mastery of French both at school and at home is the focus of the work of the teachers of the Catholic school in Drueulu.

**Domestic and public sociality**

The dichotomy of public/private domains has been challenged from different perspectives in anthropology. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) edited the first collection of essays that addressed the issue, yet it did not question the nature of domestic sociality; rather it assumed it to be universal. Later work (e.g. MacCormack and Strathern 1980) has challenged the opposition of a private, domestic space to a public, social place as a western one which does not operate in the same way in non-western contexts. Another assumption underlines the conceptualization of a private and a public domain, namely that the domestic sphere pertains to women and the public one to men. Drueuluans in the village and in town live in domestic and public spaces in a way which challenges the juxtaposition of a domestic sphere as the privileged female space and a public sphere as the prerogative of men. I am not implying that women and men share household duties or that women, especially young women, have the same mobility as men in going out or going to a feast.

The household represents a point of reference for anyone coming to town, but especially for younger students coming to study or single women looking for

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18 Strathern (1981) for example deals with this question by posing a difference between Hagener men and women's ways of articulating social and personal goals.
work. Having a support network in town is a crucial factor in the decision to allow a young woman to go to Nouméa. For young boys the concern is not so strong, and young women often voiced complaints that their parents were using a double standard with regard to themselves and their brothers. Questioned on this point, young unmarried girls voiced the risk of pregnancy as the main reason for their parents' stricter control, especially about evening outings. Parents or other relatives feel a strong kin pressure to act as moral guardians and protectors of family values. When a girl becomes pregnant the parents will be made to feel guilty for not having raised their daughters well.

The allocation of time in town changes in relation to the village and also to women's marital status and age. Young women in town are less involved in communal activities because of childcare commitments but if they work they still rely on a network of female relatives. Child-minding in town, as in the village, is usually based upon a network of female relatives. Although child-minding is shared by men (young men especially take care of children if necessary) women are more involved in child-rearing. For example, the link between home and school is always assumed by the mother as her responsibility. Generally the woman returns to the village with her children during holidays, but, if a wedding or a mortuary ceremony is scheduled, she may go to fulfil her customary duty while a sister or an older daughter takes care of the children in town. In fact participation in customary community activities is a condition for claiming one's own birthrights. Women thus move between domains which are not perceived along the conventional western distinction of private and public. Often a private space in fact becomes a public place. I spent several week-ends in Saint-Quentin with friends, and the turnover of people coming to visit, bringing news or looking for someone was extraordinary. Women in town who are not employed experience the domestic space not as the bounded private space of urban life, but as public space. For example, in Rivière Salée the house of the Ausu family is the meeting point for Protestant Drueuluans and for the youth of Druelu.

The broader network of solidarity among women is experienced as part of daily domesticity. A recently married woman recounted one occasion when her husband came home drunk and beat her. She explained to me that in town a woman does not have the same kind of mobility that she has in Drueulu, meaning that she cannot leave home, especially at night, as easily as she can in the village. Other relatives may live far away and one cannot leave the children at home. Questioned as to whether she revealed her experience of domestic violence to
other women, she replied that she had spoken of it with female relatives, and she preferred to do so with women of her own age. Women may not go and look for each other purposely, but, when women cook together or when they rest in the afternoon, they whisper their problems to one another. Asked if the husband returning home drunk had been violent with the children, she stressed that *on ne touche pas aux enfants* [one does not touch the children].

Drueuluan women have no problems moving around in town. Women and girls, though they seek permission from kin, once in the public space they use it quite freely. The main town square is a common rendez-vous point for Kanak. The mobility of widows is very great. They are women who are constrained neither by gerontocratic control nor by their in-laws, as is the case for young women. Women in town are not engaged in a women's group, as in the village. They are, nevertheless, very active in fund-raising activities, church activities and other social events. Women did not elaborate on the lack of a women's group in town, giving as the reason time constraints and involvement in Church activities. Even the Council of Melanesian Women of New Caledonia does not have any member groups in town. Women, especially among the Protestants, rather take part in Church events. They organize themselves making use of their skills and their experience of household duties. Women who do not work and those without small children are most active in communal life. In any case, the domestic space becomes an open meeting place. Drueulu women, and I would say Lifuan women in general, are not isolated in Nouméa.

Women in town are also engaged in sports activities, cricket being the most popular. In contrast to other areas of Melanesia, cricket in New Caledonia is mainly a woman's sport. It was introduced among the men by the British Protestants, but little by little it was replaced by soccer and women took it up as their 'national' sport. They play it in the same way in town and in the village, wearing a *robe popinée* and tennis shoes. Each team has its own colour code. Usually a team groups women from the same area living in Nouméa. Gaica, for example, has its team (red and blue colour code). Although cricket is

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19 The only exception is the group of *animateurs de quartier* which groups young men and women.

20 Although in the last few years men's cricket is regaining importance, soccer is still the most popular sport among them.

21 A colour code applies also to women's dresses worn during weddings. A woman can choose any kind of colour or patterns she likes, but often female kin or friends of the bride will tend to wear the same pattern and colour code: either the colour code of the tribe (e.g. blue and white for Drueulu) or another one chosen for the occasion.
considered a sport, it is more than simply recreational, and team members are deeply committed.

CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT AND RURAL AND URBAN TENSIONS

There are some differences between Catholics and Protestants in the urban as well as the rural setting. The Protestant Drueuluans always meet in the private house of a family residing at Rivière Salée, in contrast to the Catholics who meet in a public space, rented for the occasion. Neither group meets in premises that belong to the Churches. A Catholic woman explained this, stressing that there are no Catholic Drueuluan women as energetic as some of the Protestant women. Further, those among them who have a house where these meetings could take place work. But the more rigid control within the Protestant community means that the Protestant community from Drueulu living in Nouméa is more structured and is a more cohesive force than the Catholic one.

The fact that Catholics are a minority in Lifu, a mainly Protestant island, is a crucial factor in determining the characteristics of the local Catholic community. The presence of two denominations in Drueulu, the only village in Lifu where both communities are quite large and very active, is another important element in understanding the relations between the two sides. Competition between the two often fuels their engagements in specific projects. Young people nevertheless tend to stress their identity as Drueuluan over that of belonging to one of the two denominations.

Morauta (1985) in dealing with urban movement and rural identity of the people from the Kukipi area (Gulf province of Papua New Guinea) explains how people now stress more genealogical descent and less birthplace. Thus, regardless of where one is born, one considers oneself as Kukipi. These are the people who are mostly trusted and who are considered preferable marriage partners. Yet 'in other contexts being village Kukipi is a separate, contrasting identity to that of urban Kukipi.' (1985:227)

This consideration seems to apply to Drueuluans as well, although another difference must be taken into account: denominational membership. Each denomination worked with its respective group in the village yet, whereas the rural-urban Protestants co-operated harmoniously together and some of the urban-based members stressed that decisions were taken by the rural group, the urban Catholics voiced dissent. In March 1992, during a meeting of the urban
Catholic Drueulans to re-elect the local central committee (12 members, six of which had positions), the first item on the agenda was the report regarding the meeting which had taken place in Drueulu between the committee members of the rural and urban groups. The project that had involved both groups in the last few years was the restoration of an old building of the Mission to use for communal purposes. Despite 1 500 000 CFP still needed to accomplish the project, it was decided that no more kermesse would be held because they required too much work. Nevertheless the aim of giving the chance to the rural and urban groups to meet would have been maintained by scheduling activities towards the end of December coinciding with school holidays and Christmas. To raise the money it was decided that each group would be responsible for raising half of the money and thus schedule separate fund-raising activities.22 In Drueulu, during a Sunday meeting I attended, the achievements of the kermesse were discussed in very different terms. Elderly women complained that the people from town had come to rest. They had not worked too much and they had asked to be repaid for all the expenses for buying the food. In Drueulu every family contributed, as they had always done, to buying the food or giving the produce which was prepared and sold during the kermesse but these were not considered initial costs and thus never detracted from the final budget. All the money raised, women said, should go towards sponsoring the project. Furthermore, the contribution by Drueulans from Nouméa was low. Most of them had their meals at relatives’ houses and had not spent money at the kermesse.23

The second item on the agenda during the meeting of the group in town also related to rural/urban relations. The discussion concerned the use of the church hall in Drueulu. The local teachers had asked the local church committee to use the premises for the school library (no space being available in the school premises). The proposal was accepted by the rural group but it needed to be approved by the urban group as well. During the meeting in town, a man was not pleased with the idea, stressing that the agreement then would have become permanent and when Drueulans from Nouméa go back to the village they would have no place to meet. The same member noted that 32 tickets were bought by the group to allow members to participate in the Catholic kermesse in Drueulu. Yet the attendance for the renewal of the central committee the previous Sunday

22 Morauta (1985: 227) on contributions by town Kukipi and village Kukipi which are kept separate.

23 Even people working all day at the kermesse buy their own food and drink.
had been too low and the meeting had to be rescheduled. That Sunday again the turnout was low (25 members). His suggestion was that those who were absent should reimburse the tickets. At the end of the meeting the committee was renewed: the elected president was a man and the vice president a young woman. This brings to the fore another distinction between the two denominations: the degree of gerontocratic control. Respect for the elderly is felt quite strongly by everyone, but with a difference. In the Protestant community matters are handed by middle-aged people, especially men, whereas in the Catholic Church young people have more of a say. Although the Protestant Church has debated about women's access to the religious hierarchy, and more in general about women's role within the Church, this debate has been framed by the male hierarchy.24

Other differences concern familial or conjugal choices. Catholic women in town and in the village make use of contraception and family planning differently. Although this is at odds with conventional ideas that the town should allow for more autonomy of choice in these matters, one should remember that Nouméa has the strong and powerful presence of the Catholic hierarchy, the headquarters of the Catholic School (DEC). This means that Catholic ideology concerning motherhood is more strongly imposed in town compared to the village (see Table 5.7 in Chapter Five on the number of births out of wedlock among Catholic women in the village). Whereas Catholic women in Drueulu never questioned their actions in terms of the Catholic Church's canonical position on contraception, this is not always the case in town. And even among Catholic men in town the official positions of the Church on family planning are more regarded.

Children from Catholic families tend to go to Catholic pre-schools and primary schools, whereas children from Protestant families often go to public schools near home (it should be kept in mind that, in Nouméa, Protestants are a minority). At the secondary level the distinction is again strong. In general, Protestants go to 'Do Kamo' and Catholics to 'Blaise Pascal', both boarding high schools. Families feel that their children are better cared for and more controlled in this environment than in a public school.

Although the young may mix more, tribal and clan ties remain very strong. In Rivière Salée, for example, there are many youth groups, but young people

24 See the document of the Evangelical Church 'Réflexion sur le ministère de la femme' distributed in preparation for the Synode of Ouvéa, 1990.
from Drueulu do not enter into these groups. The young women and men from Drueulu are organized in a cultural group, Drui, which as I noted earlier was first established in the village. This is interesting because it was not imported from the urban to the rural context, but the other way round. This suggests that the rural milieu can be a locus of creation which can affect the life of the young in town. In 1991 the group produced a successful tape, a blend of indigenous and imported rhythms, and a video clip. Most of the young men involved in these two events were at that time living in the village, but the two young women singers were living in town (the young woman who featured in the video clip was the sister of one of the two singers, both at school the day of the shooting). Unmarried Protestant women are also organized in a Church youth group, but their being young is stressed over their being women. When Drueuluan girls living in Nouméa return to Drueulu they maintain that ‘la première semaine, on reste avec les filles de Nouméa, après on va avec les autres’ [the first week we stay with the girls from Nouméa, after with the others] (Nathalie, 17-year-old, October 1991). Among young people, even in town some behavioural rules are still strictly followed. For example, questions related to AIDS or to sexual matters are not brought up in mixed contexts, because of avoidance rules with one’s own xa [opposite-sex generation].

Now I will consider the organization of marriage, a very important social event for Lifuans, both on the island and in town, and one of those occasions on which people interact, maintaining and developing social and kinship ties. A marriage is often arranged by the family and, as several young women explained, it often does not work; sometimes the decision is left to the woman who wants to be assured it is the man’s autonomous choice and not one imposed by his parents: ‘des fois, le garçon a une fille qui est pas acceptée par sa famille, qui cherche ailleurs. Alors la fille choisie demande au garçon si c’est vraiment par amour’ [sometimes the young man has a young woman who is not accepted by his family. The family looks elsewhere. The chosen young woman asks the young man if it really is for love] (Nathalie, 17-year-old, October 1991). After the man’s family have presented their customary gesture, the woman asks to ithanada

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25 A study of the names chosen by these groups would be very interesting: Guettos, Yanki, Guevariste (GVRST). (The practice of abbreviating names by using only the consonants is very widespread.) This was the only one in 1991 to have a girl as president. She was from Maré.

26 Drui is the name of a war dance. The group has since then changed its name, since every time it scored a success (a tape released, a musical competition won) a sorrowful event affected the community of Drueulu.
[discuss] with the man alone. Her answer follows. On other occasions the girl has no say: 'On demande toujours. Mais des fois, on la force à dire oui' [one asks all the time, but sometimes she has to say yes].

A WEDDING BETWEEN THE VILLAGE AND TOWN

Ducos is the only place in Nouméa where Kanak are permitted to hold their marriage ceremonies. It is a barren area on the outskirts of town, in the industrialized area. On one side is a thoroughfare and next to it is the refuse dump of the town. Water is available but not electricity, hence the family who sponsors the event must rent a generator. The area in Ducos is a disheartening sight. Because of its location and the constraints I mentioned, the families who can afford it rent a different place for the occasion, often the Foyer Wallissien (Wallis Club). The constructions made on the spot make use of materials available in town: wood, corrugated iron and some coconut leaves. The iadradrahe, the shelter where all the different parts of the customary ceremony take place, is protected on the side by cardboard, whereas on Lifu coconut leaves are woven together and used as walls for the shelter. Instead rush replaces coconut leaves as walls for the shelter, under which the table for the guests is prepared. Yet once one is under the roof the ceremony is quite similar to a wedding ceremony in Lifu. The process that renders this space a place is what I am interested in highlighting through the interactions within the urban space and between the village and the town.

Before the wedding the young man and his family make a visit to the family of the bride-to-be to make kuié june hmala [thanks for acceptance of a marriage proposal], a gift consisting of money. Catholic and Protestant families still do kuié june hmala both in the village and in town. The only exception, known to everyone in the village, was the family of Paul Zöngö, who had refused to have kuié june hmala for his daughters. Another Catholic woman living in Drueulu recounted that her father did not want it to be done, but the father-in-law

27 See Uté Mûrûnû, petite fleur de cocotier by Dévé Gorodé (1994). Dealing with gender relations on the main island the author, through her female characters, stresses a female genealogy of transmitting memory from which strength is obtained by the youngest woman who can make a different choice from the one made by her female predecessors.

28 This custom is done when the couple knows each other and the wedding is welcomed by both parties. When the wedding is arranged by the family, this customary gesture is preceded by another gesture, always done by the man's family towards the woman's family: ihuujé (to present a marriage proposal).
had a contrasting view. He believed that they should do it as it had always been
done. So **kuië june hmaalaa** was done, although it was kept a low-key exchange.
This gift is taken by the man's family to the woman's family in private. Often the
woman's family are not aware until the last minute that the other party is coming
to visit them. The amount involved varies, depending on the financial
responsibilities of the family. In May 1990 I was able to assist in such a
ceremony in Drueulu, which took place in the evening and lasted half-an-hour.
Often the woman's family knows at the very last minute that someone is coming
to do **kuië june hmaalaa**. On this occasion both partners involved were from the
village. When the man's family entered the hut they gave 3000 CFP **qêmek**
[monetary gift given by the guests to the host, the amount of which depends on
the importance of the occasion] and 100 000 CFP for **kuië june hmaalaa**. In this
case, the unmarried couple had a child, and 50 000 CFP (a gesture called **otren
hne la nekônatr**, literally bond with the child) was given by the man's family to
legitimize his paternity: **hnôoth la nekônatr** [literally to tie the child]. The
woman's family accepted and presented her monetary counter-gift (20 000 CFP).
The exchanges over, the date of the marriage (12 July) was communicated to the
bride's family, though unofficially it was already known.

This gift was not viewed by the women I interviewed as a compensation but
rather as thanks to the family which had brought her up. In fact, if a woman has
been adopted, the new family will replace her natural family in all the ceremonial
exchanges connected with a marriage. When a girl has been named by her
mother's relatives, her wedding becomes an engagement between the
bridegroom's group and her adopted group, although the man's lineage is
responsible for the wedding feast.²⁹ People say the bridegroom's family should be
responsible for raising the money and organizing the ceremony. The bride's group
will be viewed as guests: they will just 'come and eat'. It will be up to them to
determine the number of **peleitr** [plate], that is, the number of invited guests. To
be included in the guest list does not simply mean that one can eat or be given
precedence in eating. If the bride's lineage (in the case of an adopted girl, her
adopted family) decides to distribute 60 'plates', it means that the **pua** will be
divided into 60 parts. **Pua** consists of money, food, clothes and fabrics contained
in the 'suitcase'.³⁰

²⁹ My interest here is not so much in differentiating men's and women's participation in wealth
transactions (cf. M. Strathern 1987) but rather in how men and women participate in collectivity
and construct social relations.

³⁰ All the clothes and materials given are put in a suitcase.
family at the end of the wedding ceremony. Thus, to be given a 'caa peleitr' [one plate] means to be formally invited, to have eating precedence on the day of the wedding - 'manger à la première table' [eating at the first table] – and to receive a part of the pua.31 These guests will be referred to as lapa i föe [the bride's party] during the preparations and the conduct of the wedding. If a girl has been 'given' to her mother's kinship group, it will be up to these people to make all the arrangements for choosing those who will come as part of lapa i föe.

Going to a marriage on the bridegroom's side, lapa i trahmany, entails 'work'. The members of one's own kin group living in the village, unless they have work or school commitments, are expected to help with different tasks, from organizing the food, to cooking, setting the table, washing dishes, and so on. These tasks are sex and age specific. Hence, preparing and cooking meat is considered a 'male activity', cooking rice a 'female' one. Boys should scrape coconut, which will then be used by women in preparing the food.32 Setting the tables, serving and clearing them is done by teenage girls and boys, whereas washing and rinsing is a 'female activity'. Everything is very carefully organized and everyone knows what is expected of them. The work of the punajo, as the working party is called, is monitored by a male clan member appointed to the task (Table 8.1).33 This is one of the occasions when age and sex differentiation is rigidly defined.

31 Guests are required to give a fixed contribution which is established by the family of the bride. The same group of people will participate in the iahny me jajinyi [farewell to the bride].

32 Hadfield describes this operation at length, explaining that only 'certain individuals were eligible for this work. Young men and boys and very young girls only were allowed to render this service' (1920:52). She stresses that this rule was strictly observed and elder girls or married women could only perform this task when the food was for the family's consumption. This is still the case today.

33 These people will come and give a small contribution consisting of food and some cash, which is not fixed as it is in the case of the guests on the bride's side. These gifts can be presented either as iwai [meaning one has come to watch and not to eat] or xewe [excusing oneself for the small gift one has taken]. However, regardless of one's participation, everybody stays to work.
**Table 8.1: Itregötraneqa [Duties], Drueulu, 1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Itregötraneqa</th>
<th>Duties</th>
<th>Sex/Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>trepel</td>
<td>setting the tables, serving</td>
<td>teenagers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cambuse</td>
<td>store-room</td>
<td>elderly men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wasi peleitr</td>
<td>washing and rinsing</td>
<td>teenage girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>öle xen</td>
<td>preparing and cooking yams</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>öle laes</td>
<td>preparing and cooking rice</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mitr</td>
<td>preparing and cooking meat</td>
<td>young married men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dreuti</td>
<td>making tea, coffee</td>
<td>teenage girls and boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanekönatr</td>
<td>making food for the children</td>
<td>a family*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humili öni</td>
<td>killing pig</td>
<td>young unmarried men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itra koko</td>
<td><em>bougna</em> (earth oven dish)</td>
<td>elderly women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xu ono</td>
<td>scraping coconuts</td>
<td>boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The name changes according to who is staging the wedding.

The work done by the bridegroom's party for the bride's party was explained by Sipo as showing the importance of women within custom. Marriages are planned a year ahead of time to allow members of the kin group to plant yams and other crops for exchange purposes and to feed the guests. The actual wedding preparations last almost two weeks. Women weave *behno* [coconut mats] (Plate 4), organize crockery and kitchen utensils, and bring the food together; men build the *iadradrahe*, the shelter where people will 'exchange customs', and another shelter where people will eat. For the two-week period of preparation, a large group of people will eat together every day, the women being responsible for organizing the food. Both men and women of the kin group are engaged in other tasks, such as setting up the monetary contributions of each branch of the group and preparing the contents of the 'valise'.

34 Several days before the bride is accompanied by her family to the bridegroom's place, people arrive to take their...

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34 Women on the bride's side prepare two suitcases, one for the mother of the bridegroom and one for the bride. (They also prepare a third heap of clothes that the bride and some female friends will wear the day she is accompanied by her family to the bridegroom's place.) The suitcase for the bride contains her trousseau: dresses, underskirts, bra and so on, and part of the money collected from the guests. Women explained that this money is used by a bride during the first days of her life as a married woman, especially in the case of an arranged marriage: 'La femme a peur de demander à son mari tout de suite de l'argent' [The woman is afraid to ask her husband for money right away] (Zanesi, November 1991).
tro [customary marriage gifts], consisting of money, cloth, yams and other staple foods. Groups are welcomed under the iadradrahe, one at a time, so if several groups arrive at the same time they have to wait their turn. After these gifts and counter-gifts have been made (accompanied by formal speeches from both parties), the group is invited to eat. These contributions, together with those of maathin [mother's brother] and ifaaxa [real and classificatory married sisters], are assembled, and at the end of the ceremony they will be divided into three portions: pua, for the bride's family to be divided among the guests; wenehleng, for the parents of the bride (or, as some women say, for the mother of the bride),35 and hna hetrenyin, which goes to the newly-wed couple. Everyone agrees that in the past this portion was the smallest one, whereas nowadays there is a tendency to increase it, enabling the newly-wed couple to set up an independent household.36 Ihehe, the gifts (usually western goods for the household) and the money that accompanies them that is given by guests of both sides go to the couple as well. They are considered separately, however, and not included in the hna hetrenyin. When people comment on how much money has been raised and how the bridegroom's family has decided to divide it, they will not include the ihehe. I attended a wedding where people were asked not to include money with their presents. Generally, my data show that this contribution increases the couple's portion by 30,000 to 60,000 CFP. Table 8.2 presents the cash distribution at seven weddings involving people from Lifu,37 two of which took place in town.38 From this table one can note the variation in the percentage

35 In the past zanethi [literally mother's milk] was a part set aside for the mother of the bride. Today it is included in the wenehleng.

36 This trend has been encouraged by the local Church (Pastor Passa, Ecole Pastorale, Bethanie, June 1990).

37 One of the marriages involved a man from another Loyalty Island, Tiga or Tixa, and a woman from Drueulu. Although people from Tiga speak Drehu as well as Nengone, the language of Maré, they do not identify themselves with Lifuans. But the fact that they have strong customary relations with the southern chiefdom of Lifu (administratively Tiga is considered part of the district of Lōsi) meant that a fair number of the people involved in the wedding were from Lifu, which is one of the points I make in the table.

38 I have not recorded as many of these contributions as I should have done, the main reason being that I had to decide to follow the ceremony from the men's side (sitting under the shelter, waiting for people to arrive with their contributions, listening to speeches) or 'beside the main stage' from the women's side (organizing the food, preparing the kitchen, taking care of the children). Choosing the latter enabled me to find out about other forms of social exchange occurring in a less formal setting, such as lōth and kola elen punajo tro a xen. Lōth is a gift consisting of cash, given by the guests to kitchen workers of the same-sex group; kola elen punajo tro a xen is the invitation to eat for the kitchen workers. Also, participating in a wedding
of cash given to the newly-weds (also the relatively large amount of money involved in a wedding in Lifu).

The weddings that took place on the same day give some idea of the staggering amount of money circulating on the island on such occasions. A large number of people would have contributed to both feasts, sometimes leaving their households deprived of cash and yams. Lifuans have questioned the use of this kind of wealth and criticized the size of the donations that are expected; although some stress that the 'true' meaning of these exchanges has not changed, everybody admits that the amount of money circulating is increasing and that contributions to weddings are becoming too competitive. In some areas

Table 8.2: Cash distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Pua*</th>
<th>Zanethi + Wenehleng**</th>
<th>Hna hetrenyin***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.11.89</td>
<td>Drueulu</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1.90</td>
<td>Xodre</td>
<td>1,100.00</td>
<td>800,000 (29.6%)</td>
<td>800,000 (29.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.90</td>
<td>Wanaham</td>
<td>600.00</td>
<td>1,000,000 (38.4%)</td>
<td>1,000,000 (38.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7.90</td>
<td>Drueulu</td>
<td>700,000 (33.3%)</td>
<td>700,000 (33.3%)</td>
<td>700,000 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7.90</td>
<td>Wc</td>
<td>1,000,000 (47.6%)</td>
<td>700,000 (31.8%)</td>
<td>500,000 (22.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.10.91</td>
<td>Ducos</td>
<td>1,000,000 (47.6%)</td>
<td>700,000 (33.3%)</td>
<td>400,000 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.10.91</td>
<td>Magenta</td>
<td>2,100,000 (39.6%)</td>
<td>2,100,000 (39.6%)</td>
<td>1,100,000 (20.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.a. not available
* food and clothes are also given
** food is also given
*** ihehe not included
(1) divided in 68 parts
(2) divided in 50 parts

on the bride's or the bridegroom's side made a difference regarding which activities I became involved in.
the customary authorities have spoken about setting a limit to the amount that should be contributed during the wedding ceremony. However, it should also be pointed out that these feasts are occasions for young unmarried men or families with very little income or cash remittance to eat a more varied diet for the two-week period of the preparation.

Kin groups or lineages need to identify a particular pathway to follow when they take their contribution to a wedding. Usually the group gathers to decide which gojeny [path] to follow in order to 'rentrer' [enter]. Men and women say that one cannot go directly to a wedding, unless one is part of the working party. During these discussions at the household or at the lineage level both men and women have a say. 'Customary' [qene nôj] or 'blood' [ne madra] ties can be privileged; in this latter case, in the words of Ele Hmaea: 'on passe par la femme qui fait ne madra, la liaison entre les deux familles' [One goes through the woman who bridges the two families]. To account for the latter, people may take into account links which were established and entrenched through marriage alliances going back a few generations. For example, if in the past there has been an in-marrying wife from the lineage that is staging the wedding, this path can be chosen. On the other hand, priority can be given to 'customary paths', referring to those links that were established through the integration of refugees or those connecting the latter to their original 'homeland' (see Chapter Two). This choice will be made known in the opening speech made on the arrival at the feast.

Today a Kanak wedding in Lifu is a customary ceremony which also includes a civil wedding and a religious ceremony. A simple civil marriage will not be acknowledged as such in the community. The customary ceremony takes place on the eve of the civil and Church wedding, when the bride's party arrives, troa thei fôe [to accompany the bride]. A big feast, traqa sai fôe, with dancing and singing, welcomes the other party. This includes also a large and elaborate meal, which is replicated the next day, the day of the faipopo.39 This last meal is preceded and concluded by other customary gestures that are unique to weddings, respectively called iaelè [welcoming] and iauting [farewelling], that the lapa i trahmany [bridegroom's party] presents to the lapa i föe [bride's party].

Due to work commitments, nowadays most of these exchanges take place in the late evening, sometimes well into the night. In order to allow people to make the customary exchanges but enable them to go to work the next day, the Council

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39 Although faipopo is one of the terms introduced by LMS missionaries, referring to the final day of the wedding when the civil and religious ceremonies take place, in customary speeches it is used to refer to 'marriage' in general.
of Elders of Drueulu decided that, during the days preceding the arrival of the bride, people should not take their tro after 10 p.m. If people do come later, they will probably be accepted but at the risk of not being properly fed, the 'kitchen' having closed down at 10 p.m.

Other regulations concerning weddings have been set up in the nój of Gaica. In 1987 the customary authorities established a fixed period for weddings (May to November, excluding September). The reason for this is that when a marriage takes place the involvement of people is such that they cannot take part in other community projects or events, such as the yam harvesting and Christmas celebrations. Moreover, by fixing the period and the day of the week (weddings should only take place on Thursdays), one could avoid having two marriages in Gaica during the same week. At the beginning of each year the petit chef asks the names of the young men in the village who are expected to get married during the year and he then establishes a schedule for the weddings. The same procedure is followed in the other tribes of Gaica. These regulations apply also to Kanak of Gaica living in town. A young man in Nouméa who had decided to get married during the month of January and went ahead with the plans was not considered to be from Drueulu anymore. In fact to get married one needs to have the high chief's permission, even in cases of mixed marriages. Challenging his decision is viewed as subverting the hierarchy of social control and puts the challenger outside the community. These rules were enforced in 1989.

The following year the Council of Elders took new measures concerning the regulation of 'work' done during marriages. It was agreed upon that the poles used to build the shelters for a wedding would be considered communal, intending that they would be used for more than one marriage. This measure addressed both a monetary and an ecological concern. Reducing the time young men spent in the bush looking for appropriate timber to be cut and then transported to the village for the shelters helped to keep down the expenses that the bridegroom's family had to meet to feed people over a two-week period. But the main reason was that too much timber had been cut in recent years and this measure would make the same shelters available to different families throughout the year. In 1992 the petit chef announced that the designated period for weddings had been changed to allow for other calendar changes that had taken place in the meantime (e.g. the

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40 The high chief signs the documents after the Council of Elders has given its approval. These documents must be shown to the municipality to start the civil procedures required by French law. The young man, who did not want to wait five months, had to change his 'statutory identity', thus losing his land rights.
feast for the high chief on 24 September, the day of French annexation of New Caledonia.\footnote{The former high chief had chosen this date for the yearly feast.} had been moved to 11 November). Furthermore, the underlying idea of structuring wedding feasts as any other calendar community events remains, and although these measures were taken in Drueulu, they also equally affect the urban Drueuluans.

The ceremony of a Lifuan marriage taking place in Nouméa replicates the rural ceremony. What is different is the place where the ceremony takes place. In Lifu the wedding is celebrated by the whole village, as a communal event; in town it is celebrated in a small, marginalized place, yet within it one finds the same dynamics which operate in the village. Distance, however, makes a difference. The bride's relatives are often housed quite far from Ducos and the bridegroom's family has to take care of them in the same way as it is done in the village. For example, the evening before the actual wedding takes place the bridegroom's family takes food and hot drinks to the bride's family. In Drueulu the person in charge of it walks a few hundred metres, even less. In town this 'service' requires a car. The town, with its space differently structured, requires adjustments. However, that does not prevent Lifuans from recreating their own spatial community. This way of recreating a wedding ceremony in town, with all the constraints mentioned - confined to the only space available to Kanak for marriage, but moving around town in order to reach the bride's family - could be considered as a strategy of resistance to anonymity and marginalization represented by the urban milieu.

Thus the notion that urbanization obliterates the strong ties with the home village and Kanak assimilate their identity into a neutral (here in the sense of French and urban) idea of citizen is false. Difference still persists in town. Women's interpersonal networks are not disrupted. Networks in town are activated on behalf of a sick person. When someone from Drueulu is hospitalized in Nouméa the news spreads rapidly. Hatre explained that they usually have fresh news from Drueulu from people coming to town and sometimes through a telephone call. 'Radio-cocotier' [coconut-Radio] is an expression used in New Caledonia to refer to the rapid transmission of news, frequently rumours. News dealing with general events and news dealing with personal facts are given equal weight, regardless of their veracity. Although this expression is sometimes used among Lifuans, what I am referring to here is gossip which is crucial to ongoing relations between Drueuluans in the village and those in town.
A spatially bounded world, the village, has enlarged itself. Custom is very strong even in town, from customary gestures done while visiting a sick relative to marriage rites. The authority of chiefs is still strong. Nevertheless there are changes, but these vary from family to family. In some households etiquette rules are respected and one never stands in front of an elderly person. When the young people go back to Drueulu and do not behave in this way, villagers complain and blame it on 'the white ways' to which children have become accustomed. To move to the urban scene does not allow for loosening the constraints and demands of one's kin. Young women often complain of the double standards their parents use in allowing their brothers a freedom of movement which they do not have. But both complain about gerontocratic control of marriage. It is often said that women are more constrained by *la coutume* than their male counterparts. But it can be the contrary. It does not matter if an unmarried man works, if he has a position of responsibility in the job force: he is a bachelor, and thus has no full adult status. A friend told me of his problems in having the old men from his village listen to him when he was with them, despite his capacity as the person in charge of a provincial office, because he was not a full adult. The pressure to marry is thus intense. The pressure on young working adults to participate in communal work through labour and money is also very strong both in rural and in urban contexts (see Nero and Rehuher 1993:251). Nevertheless this complaint is more often voiced by young married couples, whereas young unmarried people complain more about gerontocratic control of marriage.

The experience of urbanization discussed here is the latest in a series of historical transformations which has involved the redrawing of boundaries of difference: pertaining both to insiders and outsiders, and men and women. As is clear here despite some commonalities between men and women they experience and interpret the changes differently. Finally, I want to turn to the question of how distinctive are Lifuan women in this process.
Epilogue

When a group of men work they do it mainly for themselves, for their concerns; when the women work they do not work just for themselves, the women, but for the whole community. And it is the whole community that profits (Marie-Claire Beboko-Beccalossi, recorded interview, March 1992).

Considering how Lifuans, and particularly women, have redeployed boundaries of 'insider'/outsider' in rural and urban contexts has been the central theme of this thesis. The focus on boundaries of difference and on local identity constructs does not obliterate or deny a sense of common Kanak identity but rather suggests that in different contexts and for different purposes people identify themselves differently, giving more weight to their sense of belonging and loyalty to one community over another (see Morauta 1985). Further, the idea of a flexible notion of boundaries is invoked by all Kanak. To move beyond a timeless representation of Lifuan men and women means bringing to the fore changing identities in different times and places. It does not entail privileging localism over national commonalities.¹

Instead of recapitulating my argument, I will conclude this work by considering how much my discussion of Drueuluan women can be generalized to the rest of Lifu or the country. I will rely on visits I made to other tribes in Lifu, on a trip to Maré and Ouvéa, and for the Grande Terre on the project of the Melanesian Women's Council at Kouergoa, as well as on the discussions I had with women of different areas of the country during the General Assembly of 'Smiling Melanesian Village' in February 1992 (see Chapter Seven). This does

¹ I have dedicated very little space to political loyalties for several reasons. Women downplay their political cleavages. They highlight other elements of their identity. I have not exercised self-censorship here but rather attempted to give the same weight to the components of communal life that Drueuluan women, and generally men, stress.
not set out to be an exhaustive comparison of women's groups but rather attempts to outline some distinctions as well as commonalities between them to point out grounds for further research.

In Lifu in 1989 two other women's groups belonging to 'Smiling Melanesian Village' and women's groups of the Protestant Evangelical Church were operating. These two groups were differently composed to the one in Drueulu. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the involvement of elderly women, women with important status and the chief's wife is an important element that characterized the Drueulu group. In the Catholic village of Hunêtê the group is made up of younger women also active at the Church level. During a meeting in Lifu in preparation for the General Assembly of February 1992, women complained about the lack of participation of elderly women. The importance of the women 'à la tête' [in charge], however, is maintained not just by women in Lifu but by women all over the country as one of the most important elements for the success of a group's activities. The strength of a group relies primarily on the efficacy of the women in charge of it. Women remarked that very active groups almost disappeared once the women in charge left the group (cf Sexton 1982). In 1992 the Loyalty Province Women's Rights Office (Lifu, Maré and Ouvéa each has a woman delegate) had started organizing a series of meetings in the tribes of the islands where women's groups were active. Each group relied on the capacities and skills of its members. In Maré, Charlotte Wadrawane, a Protestant woman, in the past very active in the Evangelical Church, visited groups to teach them techniques of weaving. These all-day gatherings of women at the tribal level became moments for discussion. Their objective was to open a weaving and sewing workshop. The products would be sold directly in Maré or sent to Nouméa.

In Ouvéa, Adèle Laoumana had to overcome the difficult years after the political events which divided the islanders. Women of Ouvéa during the General Assembly in Drueulu (see Chapter Seven) stressed the fact that outsiders' attitudes towards Ouvéans have fuelled their marginalization on the national scene and overloaded the internal situation on the island. It was the first time they were invited to and had participated in a national event since 1984. The same women in March 1992 organized a very successful 'woman's day' (other women invited from Lifu and Maré could not take part in the feast because of an airline strike and a cyclone warning). In Lifu the fact that Denise Kacatr is in charge of the Office as well as of the Provincial Health Department's Education Section allowed the team to combine health related issues with women's concerns on
family planning, diet, and so on. Each week two days were dedicated to visiting a different tribe. Drueulu was the first chosen, Hapetra (Gaica) and Thuahaik (Lösi) followed. The idea of opening up and interacting with the Women's Rights team was underlined by several women of both Hapetra and Thuahaik (both Protestant villages) during the speech to thank the women guests for the qémek given to the women hosts. The women were also pleased to see a team from an administrative service coming to their village and presenting a qémek. The program of the Office was focused on the use of traditional produce to make new kinds of dishes. A dietary and a health approach were combined. These occasions on which women gathered and spent the whole morning - preparing the food, then having lunch together, and continuing with discussion in the afternoon - were important contexts for exchange.

Many women were unsure about the role of the Women's Rights Office, however. In Lifu, unlike the Southern and Northern Provinces, the women's representative had been elected by a women's assembly to which all the women's groups of Lifu were invited. At the first meeting names were proposed; women from each district were asked to vote, and in a later assembly from the three most popular women the representative was chosen. Very few Protestant women participated in the first assembly. This for many groups was the first time they had dealt directly with the Office. Denise Kacatr is Protestant but has insisted that a Catholic woman with strong commitment and long involvement in the women's groups should be hired as her assistant. She had to negotiate that with the provincial government, more inclined to favour a woman of a different political tendency.

The difference between Catholic and Protestant women is pervasive in the Loyalties. Protestant women do tend to give more weight to religious matters in their agendas, yet the woman in charge of the Office in each island has made it a priority to work across religious and political boundaries. On the main island political affiliations seemed to represent a somewhat stronger cleavage. Some women from the main island, however, pointed to the spread of the 'sects' as an even more divisive factor. Other differences are there, differences that reflect the colonial past as well as the present situation. The women's bureau in the

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2 In April 1992 a women's group, which grouped women of the tribe, was created in Hapetra. This means that although all the members were Protestants (only one denomination was present in the village) it is not a Church women's group. The name of the group is Tezor, from the name (Rozet) of an elderly woman of Hapetra. The group is open to 'filles, femmes, vieilles' [girls, women, elderly women], as the President, a woman aged 29, told me. The men of the tribe were not opposing the creation of the group, on the contrary, they tried to facilitate it.
provincial government is made up of Kanak women, unlike the provincial representations on the main island. Being a state office, all ethnic groups are represented, but in Lifu it has been indigenized. So the contrasts that the election of the women's representative has brought to the fore in the two other provinces have not emerged in Lifu, although as I have mentioned in Chapter Seven women opposed the choice of the woman proposed by the Province as head of the Office. The Province withdrew it.

Women are well aware of the specificities of each indigenous group and the distinct articulations of colonial pasts and presents. But at the General Assembly they always stressed commonalities over distinctions. They did so without erasing differences. They emphasized it not from a narrow localist point of view but rather by highlighting the sense of belonging to a place. Women were interested in learning other women's techniques of weaving or recipes; the march which concluded the General Assembly saw women of each group wearing a 'robe mission' with a chosen colour code and pattern; all this points to the importance of the sense of belonging to a place. Throughout the works of the Assembly, however, the identity of Kanak woman was stressed over tribal identity. The need to work together at the tribal level was emphasized, regardless of religious or political affiliations, and, in doing this, the bond of co-residence was given priority. The gathering had acknowledged age difference as a constraint to the full participation of younger women in the Association and thus proposed that, where possible, groups activated youth groups. Considered from this perspective, marching with the same dress might have been considered an imposition from the central committee and not a sign stressing similarities. The message underlying autonomy at the grass roots level was a dual stress on both local and national identity. The two levels of identity were not considered antithetical. Although women had different projects, the first priority on every woman's agenda was to further women's engagement in the social scene, to enhance their well-being and the well-being of the community in which they live.

In Kouergoa on the Grande Terre, the local women's group with the Council of Melanesian Women, sponsored by an Australian NGO, in 1992 started a project at the tribal level. The community (approximately 100 people) is 4 kilometres off the main road between Bouloupari and Thio, and in 1992 still had no running water, no health service, no primary school, a situation quite different from that of Drueulu. The Bouloupari municipality, controlled by the anti-independence right-wing RPCR (Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République) - a New Caledonian variant of the metropolitan Gaullist party, the
Plate 22: Charlotte Wadrawane, Maré, May 1992

Plate 23: Women's group, Konergoa (Grande Terre), May 1992

RPR (Rassemblement du peuple républicain) - had recently sponsored an expensive project to bring water to cattle owned by settlers, but had never done anything to supply water to households in the tribe. The aim of the group, formed
in September 1990, was the development and the improvement of living conditions in the tribe. In 1992, 19 women were members of the group *Pûrê Buê Kê Widje*. The majority of the women were in their twenties, although a few older women were part of the group as well. Women gathered every Tuesday at their small Women's House to plan the daily activity. They were involved in building septic tanks and cement ovens for each household of the village. They also built a small one-room building to start a collectively-managed store. Further, they were engaged in making soap and in dyeing cloth to sell in Bouloupari to raise money for the group. Women in Kouergoa were engaged in different kinds of activities compared to women's groups in the Loyalties, yet their engagements in the social scene were predicated on the same assumption, the well-being of the local community.

There are important differences due to distinct colonial pasts between the Loyalties and the Grande Terre, some of which I have considered. There are at present differences of language (many languages are spoken on the main island compared to the linguistic homogeneity of Lifu). But for all these differences and specificities of indigenous organization there is a common thread which emerges when confronting women's groups' activities and agendas: they are all engaged in the social arena as agents of change. They negotiate differently their engagement in that wider social arena; nevertheless they are engaged in social change to improve women's and communal well-being. It is for this end that they mobilize the sense of belonging to a place — not to further localism but rather to intensify common endeavours.

Plate 24: Drueulu women at the first women's gathering in Paita, 1970s. Photograph given to author by Pohnimê Haluatr, Drueulu. Pohnimê (on the left), Anne Marie Alosio, Ouvéa (holding the sign)
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