



Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

State Society and Governance *in* Melanesia

MELANESIAN ÉLITES AND MODERN POLITICS IN NEW CALEDONIA AND VANUATU

**ERIC
WITTERSHEIM**

Much research has been conducted into the processes of 'invention of tradition' and 'construction of national identity' in Melanesia often focusing on the opposition between tradition and modernity. Oppositions like local versus national, rural versus urban, traditional versus westernised or authenticity versus inauthenticity have been emphasised; sometimes with reason, sometimes not. Even if many researchers no longer take for granted such analytical frameworks, lots of areas remain unexplored. The experience of the leaders who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Melanesia is one such neglected area. The 'tradition versus modernity' discourse usually describes a huge gap between these leaders, seen as westernised and alienated from their culture, and the people, who are 'simply living' this culture.¹ Following Hobsbawm in particular, many scholars have seen the discourses they developed as spurious traditions justifying political manipulations.

This was quite different from my own experience. During a trip in the South Pacific in 1991, I met some of the leaders of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS) in New Caledonia, and everything in their daily life and their discourses seemed to contradict this

idea of an ontological difference between tradition and modernity. These individuals all had a prominent role within the FLNKS, some being elected politicians at a kind of 'national' level. All played an important role in the customary life (or the everyday life) of their own village, or *tribu*. They also maintained strong ties with the Church.

Soon after I became involved in an editorial project with the anthropologist Alban Bensa aiming to gather and publish Jean-Marie Tjibaou's works, interviews and speeches (Tjibaou 1996). This work confirmed my feeling that these Melanesian leaders proceeded along very specific lifepaths, in which colonisation, Christianity and a Melanesian experience of the social world were totally melded. Thus, a sociology of these new élites might help to understand contemporary Melanesia. I am studying the matter from the experience of Vanuatu and here I formulate some general propositions, drawing on my first fieldwork in Vanuatu and my experience of New Caledonia.

There is an abundant literature on 'invention of tradition' in Melanesia. In it the different discourses developed by Melanesian leaders are often seen as the Machiavellian constructions of

westernised élites. This surprised me, although I cannot tell if my surprise came mostly from my knowledge of the Kanak leaders or from the respect I had for their struggle. One thing is sure: I could see that neither their relation to their 'tradition,' their manner of taking up western models, nor their ties to Christian religions were ever analysed in a non-polemical, impartial way. It would be more productive to analyse how these three sources act as mediators, both social and ideological. The study of the new Melanesian élites cannot be limited to the assessment of their action as political leaders. It is necessary to devote particular attention to their biographies and, when possible, to the syncretistic thinking some of them display.

In their thoughts and actions, these individuals were marked by the acceleration of history which saw them pass from their villages to the city, from their rural and tribal communities to institutions into which the European colonisers had gradually given them access. Their exposure to western institutions made them privileged witnesses to the profound changes that shook the Oceanian world for over half a century. Whatever their personal histories and origins, and whether or not they saw their countries achieve independence, throughout their careers they resorted to ideas, images, and strategies which were clearly comparable from one end of the Pacific to the other; to such an extent that today these leaders cannot be understood solely by looking at the specific people or culture to which they belonged.

ÉLITES AND LEADERS

The role of the first Melanesian leaders has been central to the cultural renaissance movements, and their continuation in the form of political struggles in the early seventies. But the cultural, religious and political movements which emerged were not promoted by organised élites, rooted in an ancient legitimacy and recognised by the colonial administrations. These movements were mostly led by individuals, often promoted by the colonial power but still close sociologically to the rest of the population.

The nationalist ideologies in fact have been forged by exalting values common to all Melanesians, rather than according to abstract designs for emancipation (Marxism, neo-liberalism, or liberation theology). And, in the early seventies, the members of the Melanesian élite were not high level public servants, businessmen, lawyers or established intellectuals. This kind of élite would appear later, long after the beginning of these political struggles. It remains to be demonstrated that one can directly apply to them a classic political science framework. Nevertheless, one usually speaks of the Melanesian élite as a whole, when one evokes the formation of a westernised *bourgeoisie* in postcolonial states (Hau'ofa 1987).

Thus, we need a clearer definition of the so-called 'Melanesian élites.' Usually, political scientists differentiate 'élites' from 'leaders' (Lasswell 1965, Ysmal 1985). This distinction is scarcely made about Melanesia but it is particularly insightful for developing countries in general (one would not talk of China or India for instance, without distinguishing the ancient from the modern élites). Talking of 'leaders' and 'leadership' would be, in our case, more appropriate, because the concept of élite does not imply active involvement, but rather a class of people who inherit a high and influential status and struggle to keep it. Leaders, unlike élites, emerge mainly because of personal qualities, charisma and competence, where élites draw on a kind of dynastic social capital.

How to define these leaders? Can we isolate some of their particularities? Schooling is, for instance, a necessary condition to obtain the skills for a legitimate political leader. In Vanuatu, education existed in many different forms: secular and sectarian, and anglophone or francophone. These institutions often had their own curricula. Indeed, unlike other fields in Vanuatu, education was not part of the limited responsibilities given to the Joint Administration, but was a 'national service.' With the two colonial powers having very few precise expectations for the future of Vanuatu and its populations,



education was not seen as a key issue until the late 1950s.² This explains the importance of the educative policies of the Churches, whose goals and ideas on the future were much more definite. Within the Churches, different agendas were at stake as well. The relation to temporal power of the Catholic and the Presbyterian Churches, for instance, were far from equal. Thus, a comparative study of the systems of education and curricula, in Vanuatu as elsewhere in Melanesia, might help us to grasp the diversity of the new Melanesian leaders, too often described as homogeneous.

Some more contextual issues matter also. When the two administrations started their education systems, it is said that the French had a large egalitarian policy, where the British sought to educate a tiny élite. This idea accords with the received knowledge of education traditions in these two countries. However, the French had a larger number of their own citizens to educate, and eventually set up an élitist—not to say racist—education policy in the Lycée where native New-Hebrideans were almost non-existent. One can on the other hand explain the willingness of the British to train a native élite through a culturalistic framework; but this is undermined by another fact, that there were virtually no British children to educate in the New Hebrides. Unlike the French who keep their children with them and then tend to create separate education institutions for the indigenous people, the British usually leave their children in boarding schools in England.

Beyond these differences, a certain ambiguity appears from the fact that most leaders received a strong religious education and some even became pastors or priests. Christianity is often used as a scale to measure acculturation in Melanesia. This leads us to underestimate the importance of the indigenisation of Christianity. Christianity, through a liberal indigenous interpretation of its message rather than through the will of the Churches themselves, has played a major political role. The link of Melanesian leaders to religion is mainly interpreted as

institutional, not ideological. And belonging to the Church is often seen, from a western, liberal and lay point of view, as something negative. It would be more fruitful to look at the role of religion as a sociological and ideological mediator, which might have been preeminent in shaping Melanesian citizens.

The desire to create a Melanesian clergy, the best guarantee of a perennial presence of Christianity, certainly benefited from the expectations raised by a career within the Church. Mgr Michel Visi, Bishop of Port-Vila and first indigenous Catholic Bishop of Vanuatu, remembers that the first indigenous priests in the Catholic Church were above all seen as successful characters, as their economical status was enviable (interview, Port Vila, 28 August 1997).³

In colonial Melanesia, becoming a priest might have been the highest, if not the only possibility of social ascent. But here again, one has to distinguish the different Churches, as it is unlikely that becoming a Catholic priest was seen by Melanesians as the same as becoming an Anglican or a Presbyterian pastor. The celibacy imposed on Catholic priests certainly discouraged some vocations. Furthermore, the Catholic Church, before the Vatican council, was reluctant to interfere in temporal matters. Thus, it is possible that the difficulties encountered by the Catholic Church in forming an indigenous clergy in New Caledonia and Vanuatu were not only caused by the inadequacy of their curriculum or their conservatism, but also by the poor expectations it raised.⁴ By contrast, the Presbyterian Church, with the major social role it gives to pastors and elders, was more likely to push its valuable candidates in that direction.

One might also ask whether local forms of power and hierarchies contributed to shaping these new religious status levels. Becoming a religious leader in the northern islands of Vanuatu, where one inherits what might be described as a 'leadership soul'⁵ rather than a definite status, and becoming one in Southern Vanuatu and New Caledonia (where one is born a chief or a commoner), might not be the same

thing. The close relations of some Melanesian families with missionaries certainly played a major role in the recruitment of children for schools and later for clergy. This serves to reinforce the idea of a Machiavellian élite, using all sorts of tricks and influence to foster their power. But does this not underestimate the importance of the Christian message within Melanesian societies? Many examples could illustrate the role played by Christianity in shaping political and liberation ideas (cf. Leymang 1969, Lini 1980, Narakobi 1983, Tijabou 1996). Interpreting political involvement as a breaking with religion implies that secularisation is a non-religious notion; this is far from obvious if one considers the increasing will of the Churches to play a social role worldwide. Many Melanesians did not resign from their religious responsibilities to enter politics, and those who did, like Tjibaou in New Caledonia, were more seeking autonomy from rigid and reactionary religious institutions than despising the Christian faith itself.

The ties between Melanesian political leaders and *kastom* are not so easy to consider, and it is probably why one often tends to underestimate, or even to raise suspicions about them (Babadzan 1988). Unlike western education or religion, one cannot use objective criteria to evaluate them. Facing the impossibility of doing fieldwork in dozens of different areas, one has to refer largely to their writings and speeches to see how these leaders define themselves. First, most of them grew up in villages, in a so-called 'traditional' environment. Their parents were often poorly or not educated at all, living primarily in a subsistence economy. Thus, virtually all Melanesian leaders spoke the language of their parents as a native tongue. Moreover, most of them learned to read and write in this language, sometimes with an indigenous teacher. Language is not just one indicator among others: it is the main carrier of cultural transmission, and if school is obviously a strong factor of cultural and social change, one must recognise that most Melanesian children were not completely cut

from their familial environment. Primary school was thus a very minor factor of acculturation, unlike secondary school which often implied living in a remote boarding school with people from different origins.

Next, most contemporary Melanesian leaders are still involved in traditional networks and obligations. The advantages brought now by their political or economical status reinforce, more than they minimise their position in these traditional fields. And some leaders even acquired prominent chiefly status as mediators or assessors for the colonial administration or the new independent state (White and Lindstrom 1997). In some cases, the Church itself introduced new forms of so-called traditional leadership which caused problems for no one except, perhaps, those whose traditional power was challenged (White 1992). Afterwards, these leaders needed to maintain strong local support in order to be seen as representative of their community. This is especially true in Vanuatu, where the Constitution demands that one should first be elected as a parliamentary member before claiming a minister's role. These leaders need to keep in mind the rules of the local political 'game.'

The fast changes of status which led these leaders to accept responsibilities and to lead a different lifestyle from the majority, are fairly recent. Most often, these leaders are exceptions within their families. This confirms the inadequacy of the term élite to define them, and the need to study their particular lifepaths. The study of contemporary Melanesian leaders necessitates in-depth research on their integration in local and traditional customary networks, on their role and responsibilities within these networks and beyond, and a comparative study of the different leadership types in Melanesia today. But the biographical studies raise some particular problems.

One tends to reconstruct, afterwards, individual lifepaths as logical and meaningful totalities. The study of Melanesian leaders is particularly subject to teleology. Melanesian



leaders themselves reinforce this 'biographical illusion' as Bourdieu (1986) named it, insisting on the calling which they once heard and which led them to devote themselves to others. The idea of 'vocation' is brought in here for two reasons: first in the sense of religious vocation, then as an ultimate explanation of their future political involvement. Such extrapolations show how important it is to rely on several types of sources.

Nevertheless I proceed to a more precise attempt to show the value of such a study. Drawing on the case of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, I suggest a few propositions, knowing however that New Caledonia is a very particular example, being the only Melanesian territory to remain under colonial influence. Thus, if many Melanesian leaders developed original thoughts about governance and cultural change, Tjibaou had the paradoxical 'privilege' of not becoming a chief of state, allowing him to remain in people's minds a thinker as much as a politician.⁶ Even so, one can find correlations with other Melanesian examples. Our goal is not to idealise or to justify Tjibaou or any other leader, but to determine what these individuals can teach us about contemporary Melanesia (Otto 1997).

THE 'MELANESIAN WAY' ACCORDING TO TJIBAOU

The biography of Jean-Marie Tjibaou is similar to those of his major Oceanian contemporaries. Indeed his vision of the Pacific constantly reminds us of the diverse modern influences upon the indigenous peoples of Oceania. Born in 1936 in the Hienghène valley, on the East coast of the Grande Terre, Tjibaou—one of the many children of a village chief and school teacher—left his small reserve in 1945 to study at Catholic schools and seminaries, which distanced him from his tribe for over twenty years, and led ultimately to the priesthood in 1965. But then Tjibaou had the feeling that the evangelical message was far from being put into practice in any fair way to help the Kanak people. Searching for analytical tools with which to understand the drastic cultural alienation of the Kanaks, Tjibaou

turned towards the human sciences and left for France in 1968.

At the time, discussion of Kanak society was dominated by anthropology, which focused on 'traditional structures' and did not address the effects of colonisation. Tjibaou drew positive references to Kanak culture from the work of the missionary Maurice Leenhardt. Anthropology, which places a proper value on each society, provided him with arguments to use throughout his career to respond, in the domain of cultural dignity, to the supposed superiority of the western world. In the wake of this attention to the recent evolution of societies, Tjibaou reconsidered the traditional Melanesian heritage from which the church had distanced him. Despite this return to his sources and his voluntary return to the secular state in 1971, the former priest remained strongly attached to his Christian roots. Tjibaou in fact relied on a progressive conception of Christianity to free the Kanaks from the heavy, stilted image of the 'primitive' developed in classical anthropology.

Beyond criticising a certain ethnology, Jean-Marie Tjibaou intended to give new value to the Kanak identity today. To help this 'renaissance' he organised Melanesia 2000, a great festival of Melanesian art in Nouméa in 1975. By means of this festival, Tjibaou took up the idea which was blossoming at that moment throughout the Oceanian world, that of the 'Pacific way of life,' or the 'Melanesian way.' The evocation of common references paints the portrait of an Oceanic civilization which goes beyond specific characteristics, and embodies a philosophical, moral, and ecological message. If the 'Pacific way' ideology allowed certain leaders to promote the idea of a pre-colonial Oceania which was egalitarian and free of conflicts, it also played a role in the attempted cultural revalorisation, indispensable in any liberation struggle. In 1977, soon after the festival, Tjibaou, who had been a cultural and social organiser for the territorial government since his resignation from the priesthood, entered politics along with a new generation of Kanak leaders including Yeiwene Yeiwene and Eloi Machoro. Tjibaou was already

40 years old.

Kanak cultural heritage, ethnology, the day-to-day life in a colonial society, and Christianity are strong influences which were deeply melded in Tjibaou's formation, and became pillars of his political discourse. His political ideas were mostly drawn from his experience as a Kanak in a French colony, but raised larger issues about governance and citizenship in Melanesia.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou anticipated the painful problems appearing at the end of this century due to the relationship between community membership (traditional, ethnic, national) and respect for individual rights. It is as if Tjibaou hesitated between a formula rooted in the Kanak identity, which would run the risk of inciting racism or exclusion, and a more balanced hypothesis which would advance cultural specificity without endangering democratic expression. However, by deepening the syncretic approach, he contrasts this logic with the reminder of the rule of rights, thus turning against the coloniser the moral and legal arms forged by the French Revolution: the people's right to self-determination, the rights of citizens, human rights, and respect for the State's word. His relationship with France was never entirely negative; he sought to recapture a part of the coloniser's heritage, therefore rejecting the idea of an eternal and immutable 'Kanakitude.' Tjibaou took note of a certain number of western civilisation's contributions; techniques, Christian values, reference to the state. To his mind, no fixed conception of culture was acceptable, and therefore, any reference to Kanak identity could only be relative to the history of Oceania over the last two centuries. This resolutely modern dimension to his thought lead him to vigorously criticise all traditionalisms

One always speaks of traditional culture. But what is traditional? I believe we always have an overly archaeological conception of culture (Tjibaou 1996:296).

He said in 1988, recalling a famous statement made in 1985 in *Les Temps Modernes*

The return to tradition, it's a myth. No people ever experienced it. Our identity lies

in front of us (Tjibaou 1996:185).

His untimely death robbed him of the possibility of clarifying his ideas on the political system. If the constitutional plan for Kanaky is really that of a democratic State, its reference to tradition remains ambiguous. Likewise, if he believed in the individual, Tjibaou was not convinced by the form of individualism taken in the West. In this he even saw a danger for the maintenance of both political and clan solidarity which play an essential role in Kanak social life. He liked to point to the fact that the principle of universal suffrage, of which the West is so proud, is also the reason why the Kanaks can never hope to achieve independence as a result of elections. We must remember that the Kanaks have become a minority in New Caledonia as a result of the deliberate importation of other populations. Since the end of the 1960s, successive French governments used this demographic reality to justify, through the ballot box, maintaining the territory within the Republic. On the other hand, where its nationals are in the minority, as in Algeria or Vietnam, France was careful not to promote the principle of 'one man, one vote.' Tjibaou always rose against this variable use of formal democracy.

To the internal problems raised by the building of a Kanak or Caledonian State, were added those due to the territorial dispersal of the Pacific. None of these micro-states is capable of providing for all its needs, certainly in the economic sphere but also in defence, without external help. Contemplating a future removed from French tutelage, those seeking independence feel more deeply the constraints of insularity; relative isolation, the necessity for integration into the region, the search for new sources of aid. Faced with these requirements, the 'Pacific way of life' is unable to take the place of an economic program, just as independence raises as many questions as it resolves.

The centrifugal forces pushing small independent states to multiply and reinforce their ties to larger states could not but accentuate the economic, social, and political transformations. Are not these small island societies, always reliant



on the outside world, also those which could be most profoundly upset by the rapid introduction of new techniques and new values? This dilemma pervaded the entire thinking of Tjibaou. Between pragmatism and utopianism, he imagined a Kanak modernity which would be neither a forceful return to tradition, nor an unbridled cult of goods and technology. His thought was marked by the search, at times pathetic, for an original form of development and sociability which recalls the 'third way' envisaged by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and at one time by Walter Lini in Vanuatu. He therefore allowed himself to criticise the most destabilising aspects of modernity, while at the same time searching to adapt the Kanak reality to urbanisation, industrialisation, and globalisation.

This effort was quite distinctive, and the Kanak struggle gained strong international legitimacy through Tjibaou's political style. He always managed, in his relations with French politicians in particular, to establish a kind of mutual respect, trying to introduce a cultural exchange in any political discussion. By bringing a relational conception to the practice of politics, Tjibaou seemed to employ a particularly Melanesian way of placing oneself within relationships of power. He applied to the diplomacy between states manners which, among Kanaks, first prevail between people. This leads one to examine the place of the representation and rules of politics common to the Kanaks—in so far as they express cultural specificity—in the contemporary history of the independence movement. Is there a uniquely Kanak way, or Melanesian way, of practicing politics today? Concerning Tjibaou's political style, one can argue that this was mostly a personal attitude, hardly transposable in general terms. He was never loquacious on the subject. Like all Kanaks, he was content to advance the rule of consensus which aims to achieve perfect agreement among all participants in a debate, without voting or delegating speech.

This notion of consensus, of which the roots and contexts of application should be retraced, does not seem to have always worked perfectly if one judges from the diversity of speech and action

among the components of the independence movement. Neither is it certain that consensus operates in the internal decision-making procedures in the chiefdoms, elders' councils, or any of the other political structures that the Kanaks claim to be strong points of their custom. Beneath the surface, behind these practical and ideological problems, the entire question of the relationship between Kanak social organisations (clans, chiefdoms, masters of the soil, etc.) and the life of political parties was raised when Jean-Marie Tjibaou speculated on preserving Kanak specificity at the heart of an independent state.

THE NATION STATE IN MELANESIA

The prospect of a Kanak State stresses the nationalists' claim that the principle of a Kanak people overrides all linguistic, territorial, and social differences. Yet this diversity remains a living reality and, in the practice of the chiefdoms and clans, resists the unitary model which those seeking independence promote. Of course, all plans for state control necessarily come up against local powers; each group sees things its own way, and accepts with difficulty the decisions made in the general interest which lead to the emergence of a solid public and national framework. These tensions become particularly intense during land disputes. FLNKS-elected officials have often encountered great difficulty in convincing clan authorities to transfer land for the construction of hospitals, ports, or schools. The private logic of traditional social units resents injunctions handed down by those responsible for a growing policy of State control.

The government of Vanuatu also confronts problems of adjusting to different jurisdictions. It brings into play, more fundamentally, possibly irreconcilable conceptions of personal rights and communal rights. It is citizenship within the post-colonial Oceanian states which is the source of the principal arguments over legitimacy: in the end, should control over the land, but also over goods, and even perhaps over persons, remain in the hands of local authorities who fiercely defend their autonomy, or should it pass to state

institutions which favour the national perspective over regional particularities? In fact, Kanaks and ni-Vanuatu define individual rights based on their statutory position within the kinship system and within the political organisation; whereas a state necessarily bases its room for manoeuvre on the enfranchisement of people and respect for individual property. However, it would be an exaggeration to think that no resolution exists between these systems. In practice, Melanesians play on the confusion of possibilities offered in situations for which the rules of behaviour are never defined beforehand (Foster 1995, Van Trease 1995).

This illustrates how the problems faced by Melanesian states today are not as much the result of an inability to adapt themselves to western democracy, as of internal and logical difficulties within these new states. This is well demonstrated by the problems encountered by the Ombudsman, in Vanuatu, when trying to establish legal barriers to the abuse of power. One should not accuse Melanesian politicians of being unable to be good politicians. Rather, they just keep using all the possibilities they are offered. Can we seriously assert that Melanesian politicians do not understand what the state, citizenship and commonwealth mean? A strong state is perhaps not only established through the spread of citizenship and civic sense. It might also be a matter of force and respect. The eventual nomination of an Ombudsman in Vanuatu in 1994 must not be seen as the consequence of a previous failure of the state, but as an imperative decision which should have been taken, according to the Constitution, in the first year of independence. Even in France, in a 'strong' state, a large and rapid decentralisation policy in the 1980s permitted hundreds of national politicians, suddenly freed of any kind of control, to reach unprecedented records of corruption.

Nevertheless, one should not give up the attempt to imagine locally adapted forms of governance. The problems faced by Melanesian states are too often and too rapidly interpreted through a culturalist framework: analogies and metaphors drawing on anthropological

vocabulary are confusing. However they do not rule out the hope of creating intermediary forms of power, of policing agents relevant to these countries. The universal model of the state is above all western, and, as in many other domains, Melanesians must live with the fact that this so-called universality is unable to include any of their values. Tjibaou once said

The colonial system has rendered the Kanaks anonymous. If today I can share what I possess of French culture with a non-Kanak from my country, it is impossible for him to share with me that universal part inherent in my culture (Tjibaou 1996:159).

In the case of Vanuatu, the possibilities of an institution like the Malvatumauri, the National Council of Chiefs, are greatly undermined. If the chiefs might not be of great help as experts for the government on technical problems, it remains true that in most places people respect them more than anything coming from the government. As Vincent Boulekone, former lawyer for indigenous affairs and long-time Member of Parliament in Vanuatu pointed out

If we enact a law concerned with the environment, to outlaw fishing in a particular area, or collecting a particular kind of seashell, well, it is not respected. People from the Islands do not really care about that law. I think it is the same in France, everywhere, when one outlaws to shoot pigeons, ducks or hares! You need a gamekeeper, and he must do his job properly. But on the other hand, here in Vanuatu, if the ban is imposed by a chief, it is order, the custom, and nobody will question this authority (Interview, Port Vila, 29 August 1997).

The riots that occurred in Port-Vila in January 1998 following the release of the Ombudsman's report on the misuse of the Vanuatu National Provident Fund, could not be stopped by the Vanuatu Mobile Force without the help of the chiefs, as acknowledged by the Commissioner of Police himself

Developments in recent days have proved that the traditional way of maintaining our



society and people is still very much alive (Bong 1998).

All the same, the role and place of the Churches needs to be clarified; relations between Church and State in Melanesia may have to be different to those of western countries. A constant economic and political pressure in which external powers play an important role greatly restrains Melanesian politicians from trying to imagine new and more adapted forms of governance.

On the other hand, radical constitutional changes seldom happen elsewhere. The need for these changes, and perhaps the answers, are likely to be raised by non-politicians, that is by people who do not actually live from politics. The emergence of a so-called *élite* might therefore be a condition for such changes. One must pay particular attention to the question of citizenship, and broadly to the evolution of individual status in Melanesian countries. State-building cannot be reduced to a formal and evolutionary process. First of all, in a former colony, it implies that people evolve from the status of natives to that of citizens. The nationalist rhetoric has to magnify the general rejection of colonisation in order to enable the firm assertion of identity, symbolised by belonging to the new nation. Cultural renaissance movements thus tried to kill two birds with one stone: to create homogeneous entities able to stand in front of the colonial powers, and to develop a heightened awareness amongst individuals. The so-called 'natives' were to 'imagine' themselves, more than 'invent' themselves as members of a single community which will eventually become a nation.

Nation-building relies strongly on individual awareness, and this awareness is largely fostered and spread by the leaders. The assertion, defended by a certain kind of ethnology, that the notion of individual is absent in traditional societies and particularly in Melanesia, is thus refuted by the analysis made by some of these leaders of the effects of the colonial trauma on individuals.

I suggest that the emergent *élites* have been in fact, since the beginning of independence

struggles, amongst the principal vectors of the liberalisation of society. And the more there is such a thing as an '*élite*,' outside the political arena, the more pressure there will be to foster democracy and citizenship. It might be mostly driven by liberal ideas, and be seen as attempts to protect and increase unshared privileges. But this is only logical. One knows too that the French revolution was a bourgeois revolution, and that the first meaning of the word '*liberty*' is actually free enterprise.

NOTES

¹The best advocate of this somewhat marxist point of view was the late Roger Keesing. The tradition vs modernity discourse is largely commented on and criticised in Jolly (1992).

²The Bay report in 1957 can be seen as the starting point of the British educational policy, which was soon to be followed by the French.

³In Vanuatu, the last Chief Minister before independence in 1980, Gérard Leymang, was a Catholic Priest. Walter Lini, who became the first Prime minister of the independent Vanuatu, was an Anglican priest. Almost half of the members of his government were pastors.

⁴The first two Kanak Catholic priests, Luc Amoura and Michel Matouda, were ordained in New Caledonia in 1946. In Vanuatu, Cyriaque Adeng was ordained in 1955, after having trained at the Païta seminar in New Caledonia. By contrast the various Protestant Churches had already trained numerous indigenous pastors all over Melanesia by the end of the 19th Century.

⁵Expression used by Jacques Sese, director of the education department in Vanuatu and himself native of Ambae in the north of the archipelago (interview, Port-Vila, 18 August 1997. Since then he was elected Member of Paliament in the March 1998 elections).

⁶Most of the ideas concerning Tjibaou expressed here were

elaborated in common with Alban Bensa. They are developed more extensively in Bensa and Wittersheim 1998.

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