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Racrac CHARLEY (SALE)
**« Gooday Master Dellegation
Condominium N-H »**
Un Vanuatais face à la colonisation



Volume 1

**Textes présentés, traduits et commentés par
Jean Louis RALLU**

PRESENTATION

English translation of the Presentation in French, Volume 1

Forewords

*The title of this book, "**Gooday Master Dellegation Condominium N - H**", is taken from the first words of the first text to reach us from Racrac Charley: a letter to the Delegate - as he usually calls the District Agent. We chose it because it is an integral part of the texts left by the author and reflects the central subject of his writings: the difficult dialogue between Melanesians and Europeans. The term dialogue must be understood in a broad sense, covering the various interactions of the natives with the administration, the missions and the colonists, and also between Melanesians whose daily life was profoundly modified at that time. He never uses the word 'Capman', refusing to be dominated and considered as an inferior human being. It is as a chief (actually a member of a chiefly line) that he is talking with an official of the colonial administration.*

Racrac Sale (transcribed Charley by Europeans) was born around 1910 and died in 1962. The writings that have come down to us cover the years from 1951 to 1960. They also relate much earlier events, from the end of the 19th century and even much earlier, and constitute a kind of history of North Malekula, mainly of the villages of Lenelvaklakh, chiefdom, and Botniar-Lebwet Mul and hamlets, which moved to the coast in front of Matanvat pass, the "big name" for the administration of the Condominium. But they also inform us of many events in the surrounding villages, mainly from Vovo to Malua Bay, the Big Nambas country, the North-east Islets and beyond.

The aim of this presentation is to summarise and resituate the writings of Racrac Charley on the basis of information provided by the people of North Malekula, the Archives and the literature on this region. The resulting insight will help to understand how he uses, reinterprets or modifies various elements of the tradition, fights the colonial system and uses it both to accuse his opponents and to try to gain advantages. In his texts, he concentrated on very focused points depending on the subjects he wanted to inform the Europeans about. These were mainly the French and British District Agents of the Condominium - to whom he wrote to give them information to make them act in a certain way, often to further his personal aims - the ethnologist Jean Guiart, or perhaps simply the potential readers of the North Malekula history he was writing about. But he hid his notebooks, written in the Matanvat language, and translated, in a clumsy English that borrowed a few expressions from

Bislama, only those he wanted to give to Europeans¹. These writings are therefore first and foremost committed writings and not a simple chronicle of North Malekula.

This political aspect of Racrac Charley's writings is further enhanced by the fact that Matanvat was, from 1939 to 1958, the setting for a Melanesian Cooperative Native Company for the production and marketing of copra. Better known as Malnatco after the war, it had, despite many difficulties, a certain economic success and acquired an important political role, to the point of preoccupying the Condominium. It was first equated with communism by the colonists, then with messianism by the missions and became a target of the colonial administration, which considered it a "cargo cult". Its leaders and some of its members were imprisoned on several occasions. In 1958, it was declared bankrupt by its European director, Donald Gubbay, and the members dispersed after its director, Paul Tamulum, died in prison. Nevertheless, it remained one of the first organisations of Melanesians to compete with the settlers and to organise independently on a large scale on the European economic model. It played a role in the development and dissemination of anti-colonial ideas and the demand for independence of the future Vanuatu, notably with an influence on Nagriamel².

Other anti-colonial social movements in Melanesia include the Rongofuro Prophecies in Santo, the John Frum Movement in Tanna, the Maasina Rule and Moro Movements in the Solomon Islands, the Christian Fellowship Church in New Georgia, the Yali Movement in the Madang region of Papua New Guinea, the Paliau Movement in Manus, etc. The Cooperative Native Company is distinguished by its modern economic base, which is non-existent or secondary in many of the other movements - except for the Yali and Paliau movements - some of whose factions, however, were waiting for the arrival of a 'cargo ship' sent by the ancestors or by the Americans. It is also an example of the 'misunderstanding' of Europeans accusing a Melanesian economic movement of messianic opposition to colonisation.

Thus, in addition to his opposition to the condominium administration in the management of indigenous affairs, the vicissitudes of the Cooperative made Racrac Charley doubly an independence activist. The leaders of the Cooperative tended to dismiss him because of his forwardlooking political positions: pro-independence and nationalist at the archipelago level and extending to the Loyalty Islands and New Caledonia. However, his writings provide an important and rare example of a Melanesian social and economic movement confronting the colonists and the colonial administration, and of the birth and development of pro-independence ideas.

¹ Apart from a notebook in Matanvat language found by Chief Gregoire containing mainly writings from 1958 and some notes from 1959 and 1960, all of Racrac Charley's texts that have come down to us are in broken English, except for those on tradition requested by J. Guiart in Matanvat language. The other originals of the notebooks prior to 1958 are lost. A comparison of the 1958 notebook with the texts we have shows that he only translated part of his writings. He sent the District Agents or gave J. Guiart 'reports', letters and extracts from his notes. The administration gave J. Guiart certain letters it had received from Racrac Charley for comment and advice.

² By the Aoba men who worked for the Cooperative in Vovo and later became members of Nagriamel (Abong 2008).

His writings are presented starting with a notebook in the Matanvat language written at the request of Jean Guiart in August 1951, as it contains information on the traditional society representing the living environment before contact; then his other texts, letters or reports, in chronological order. This introduction groups the contents under five themes, including a biographical essay on the man and the character, writer and activist.

1- Traditional society before contact. It is not possible to give a complete picture of the culture and traditional society of the North Malekula, its local variants and the *nanaki*³. The reader can refer to the existing literature for a more comprehensive view (Guiart 1951; 2013; Layard 1942; Deacon 1934). We will focus on the custom of the Matanvat villages of Lenelvaklakh and Botniar-Lebwet Mul, as described by Racrac Charley, adding the information collected in 1978, 1982 and 2012, in order to bring a local and concrete dimension that is most often missing from large syntheses.

2- Contact. The history of contact with Europeans: *blackbirders*, missions, settlers and the administration, and the events he recalls and their consequences for traditional society he attributes to them, show how Melanesians saw colonial society and their place in it.

3- The Cooperative. Much of the relationship between Melanesians and Europeans narrated in these texts took place within the framework of the Cooperative Native Company, a unique attempt, at that time and in its scale, at autonomous Melanesian economic development, and which was met with hostility from settlers, missions and the administration.

4- The character of Racrac Charley. His personality and his 'political' commitment make him a special case in the society of his time. He is also the first writer from Vanuatu⁴. A writer, beyond his unacademic English, not without talent.

5- Dreams. In Melanesia, the dream is a form of expression traditionally used to bring about cultural or social innovation, which is thus presented as emanating from the ancestors. He put political content into it, which informs us about the conceptual development of opposition to colonisation and neo-Hebrid nationalism - in which he gives an important role to the '*kastom*' - culminating in Vanuatu's demand for independence.

3 Matanvat language term for *namanggi*, large sacrifices of several hundred pigs. Racrac Charley uses *nanaki* or *namanggi* interchangeably. We have used his terms in the translation, but *nanaki* is always used in the commentary.

4 Before him, Clement Marau (1894), a New Hebrides deacon of the Melanesian Mission, wrote a book translated by R.H. Codrington recounting his stay and the conversions he made in the Solomon Islands (MacClancy 2007). But the subject is not Vanuatu.

The main body of this book consists of a selection of Racrac Charley's writings⁵ presented in the original text, followed by a translation and a commentary⁶. In the latter, we try to present elements of the context of the events reported but which he omitted because they were implicit for him or because he did not want to inform the recipients of his writings. We will therefore try to interpret these omissions and his sometimes personal or original presentation of events and situations - but we have not always been able to distinguish between what is right and what is tendentious, or more rarely, untrue. Finally, we will try to understand his intentions and how they fit into the framework of the colonial society of the time. We will mention, when they provide additional information, the reactions of our informants - his contemporaries, direct witnesses met in 1978 and 1982, and their children who became adults in 2012 - to the reading of these texts, almost all of which they discovered with us.

Six appendices provide ethnographic information, examples of Malnatco documents and extracts from British Archives :

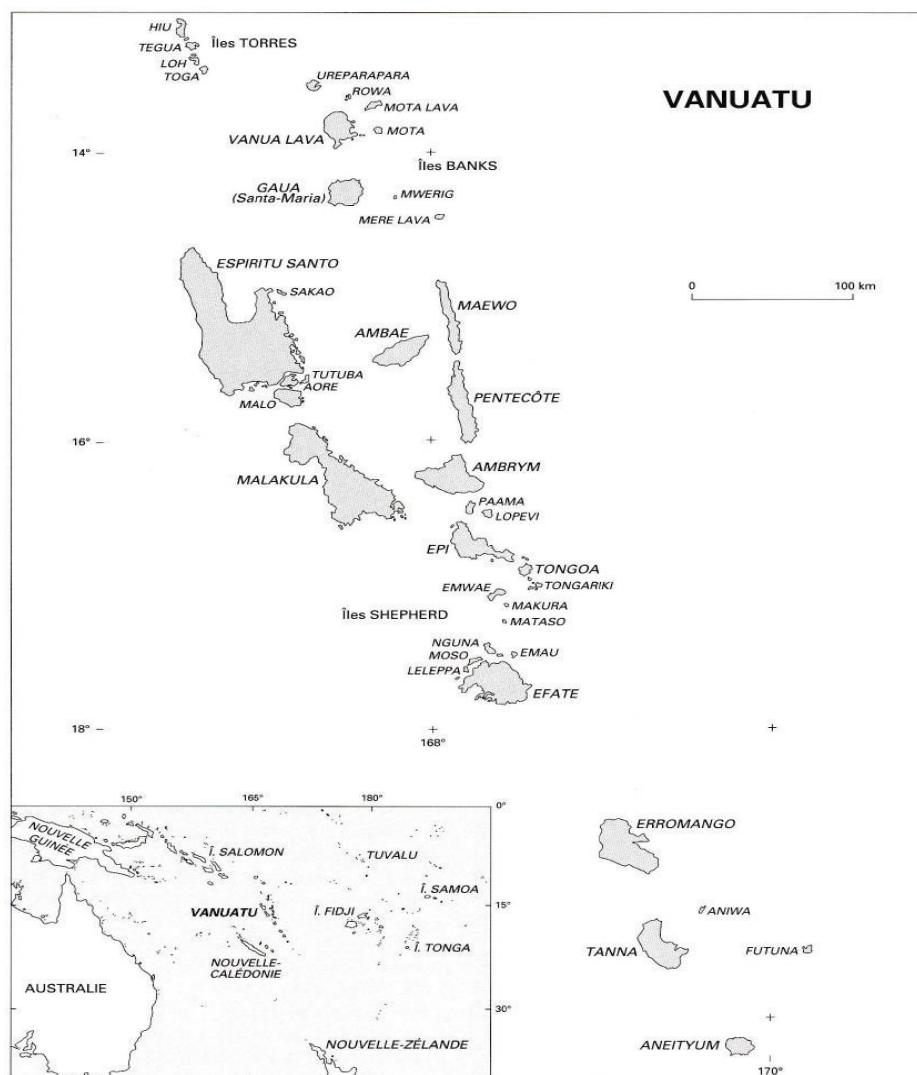
- Annex 1: Songs for a killed man, and a list of traditional items sent to IFO (Institut Français d'Océanie) Museum in Noumea;
- Annex 2: one of the Cooperative documents;
- Annex 3: extracts from a South Pacific Commission report by J. Guiart and H. E. Maude on the cooperatives in the New Hebrides;
- Annex 4: Racrac Charley's letters to J.W. Nakomaha, held in the British Archives in Auckland;
- Annex 5: two texts of chief Kaku to his children on wars in the late 19th century;
- Annex 6: a Vovo myth, given by Lorent Vovodal.

5 We have removed writings that are repetitive or do not provide new information.

6 The translation is below the text by Racrac Charley on the left page and the commentary on the right page. When the commentary starts below the translation, for reasons of space, it is separated from it by a short line. The text and commentary can be viewed on the same screen, like an open book, by displaying two pages of pdf.

The traditional society before contact, Settlement and traditional social organisation

Lapita pottery has been found at Vao and in the Northern Islands of Vanuatu. The Vao pottery is dated to between 2,800 and 3,000 BP (*before present*) (Bedford and Galipaud 2010). As elsewhere, over such a long period of time, it is not known what happened to the 'Lapita' populations. Numerous waves of settlement, sometimes of small numbers, followed.



Map 1. - Vanuatu

Currently, the North Malekula Peninsula comprises two cultural groups: the Small Nambas, in the east, North-east Islets, north and north-west⁷ and the Big Nambas in the south-west (Map 3). While the populations of the Big Nambas plateau are characterised by a community of culture and language⁸, the Small Nambas area, with its rugged landscape of hills and valleys, has about fifteen different languages or dialects, numerous cultural variants and populations of diverse origins, particularly at the level of chiefdoms.

The Small Nambas area includes native populations from Malekula and populations from other islands, notably those bordering the inland sea bounded by Aoba, Pentecost, Ambrym, South Santo, Malo and Aore. There was extensive trade in this area, including shells, money shell necklaces, money dyed mats, bark belts, pigs, various stones (Huffman 1996).

Little is known about the ancient migrations, often hidden by the original myths (*see* below). The Vovo region was in matrimonial relations with Aoba, as part of a matrilineal filiation, also attested at the mythical level. Commercial or cultural exchanges could give rise to migrations of a few individuals followed by marriages. Whenever the Ambrym volcanoes erupted, villages moved to Malekula, to the islets or elsewhere, and families sometimes settled permanently. A few cases of individual or family migrations, at short distance, to settle more or less permanently with maternals are known at the end of the 19th century and existed long before, being traditional in certain regions. Small groups of refugees settled well before the wars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which would attest to the existence of forced emigration alongside the more frequent war by ambush, aimed at returning an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, with losses limited to a few men, often just one, or even one wounded person, but which could be repeated periodically. Forced emigration also occurred as a result of asocial behaviour: usurpation - or attempted usurpation - of land, refusal to recognise the authority of the chief or certain cultural rights, for example: ownership of customs, sculptures or symbolic objects (*see* below); others may have been voluntary: to escape from a tyrannical chief or because of a refusal to comply with certain customs. Small groups of migrants blended into the population, but there may also have been arrivals of larger groups imposing themselves by force, particularly on the islets. About five centuries ago, a few migrants settled peacefully on open land in the hilltops of the far north of the peninsula, at Navhav. From there, they spread out to the north-west of the peninsula.

These various migrations resulted in a mosaic of populations and it is very difficult to know the origin of groups on a ten or even five generation scale.

7 Chief Gregoire spoke of groups in North Malekula wearing a woven penis sheath, while the Small Nambas wore a rolled leaf penis sheath. However, this would only cover a clothing practice in a very culturally fragmented part of the Small Nambas region. The Middle Nambas seem to be an invention of T. Harrisson (1937).

8 For the Big Nambas area, see Guiart (1952).

1.1. The North-west Small Nambas

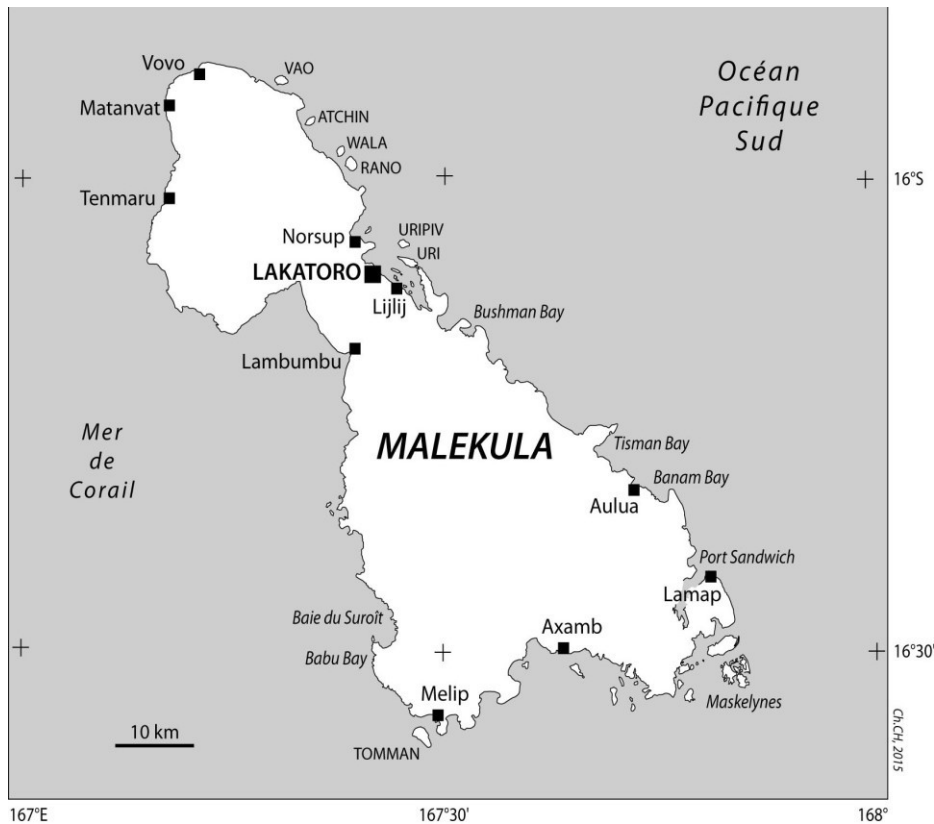
The Small Nambas region of North Malekula thus has populations that are very diverse in terms of their age and geographical origin, with differences in status superimposed. The oldest are the Teste⁹. They predate the chiefs and are hierarchically inferior to them. The chieftaincies are of local or immigrant origin; the latter are linked to various myths and number ten or more generations for the oldest. In addition to these two components, ancient migration from other regions of Malekula or from other islands (*see* above), brought people who have been integrated at various levels of society. But the recent migrants who arrived after contacts with Europeans intensified, from the late 19th century, especially from the Big Nambas country, South Malekula and Ambrym, are still poorly integrated into the traditional structures. This creates a great social complexity, which differs from village to village. Moreover, it is difficult to establish the relationships that the populations that arrived earlier had with each other due to the extinction of many *nakhamal*¹⁰, chiefdoms and villages since contact.

Little is known about the social organisation of the Teste, as they are the most depopulated groups, totally extinct in many villages. They have no myth of origin and do not count their generations; it is said of them: "They were just there" (in Bislama "*e stap, nomo*"). They lived in hamlets, and therefore in small groups, but there were also large villages: there is talk of the five hundred men of Botniar and the six hundred men of Lebwet Mul, but this sounds like a legend. Their social organisation was less hierarchical than that of the chiefs, perhaps a non-hereditary 'big man' system, but which may have become so in some cases, resulting in 'chiefdoms'.

The Teste of Matanvat spoke of a Meltekh Iat Botniar (Meltekh Resident of Botniar), a kind of chief, without being one. This can only be a recent phenomenon, as Meltekh is a *nanaki* title and their first *nanaki*, was in the second half of the 19th century (*see* below).

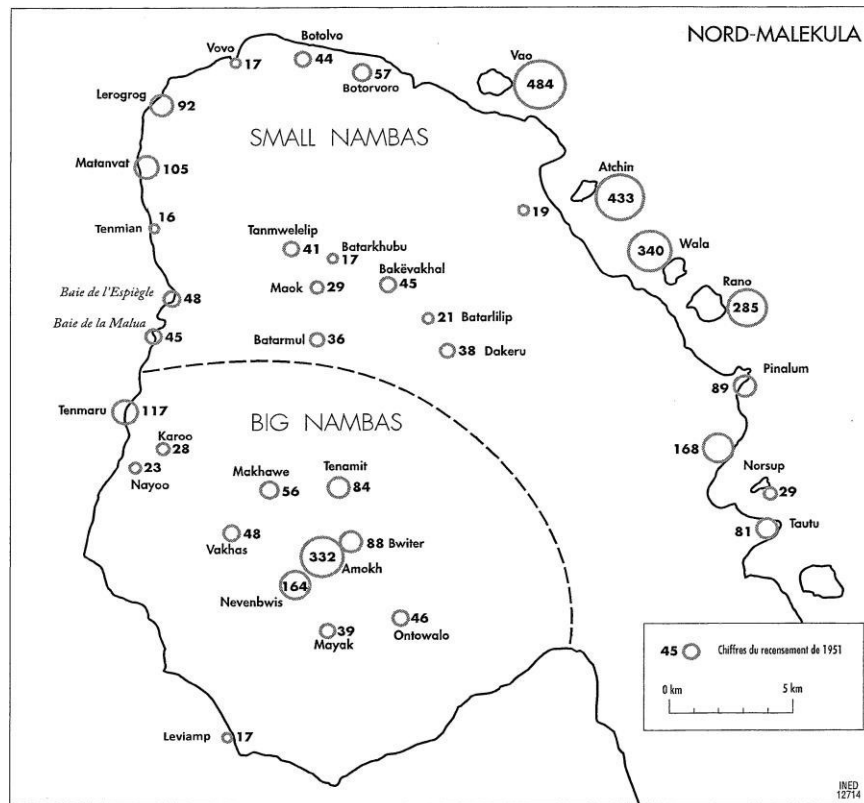
⁹ 'Teste' is a term from the Matanvat language, but is understood in the North Small Nambas. Its translation into Bislama is 'boy'. The names of the Teste were different from those of the chiefs and very recognisable.

¹⁰ Men's lodges, extended family or 'clan'.



Map 2. - Malekula Island (property of C. Chauviat).

The origins of most chiefdoms are not well known. They were formed or arrived at different times. Some hide their origin behind myths linking them to plants or rocks. According to Guiart (1952), this usually reflects a foreign origin. Others, considered as 'local', claim an origin by a woman who came from a more or less nearby village with her son who became chief. But these myths are sometimes contested. The chiefdom of Naure, Vovo, claims at least twenty generations; an imprecision that resembles the absence of a generation count by the Teste and would indicate a local origin. Nothing is known either about the origin of the now extinct chiefdom of Norukvat linked to myths with a matrilineal component and holding important magics (Annex 6).

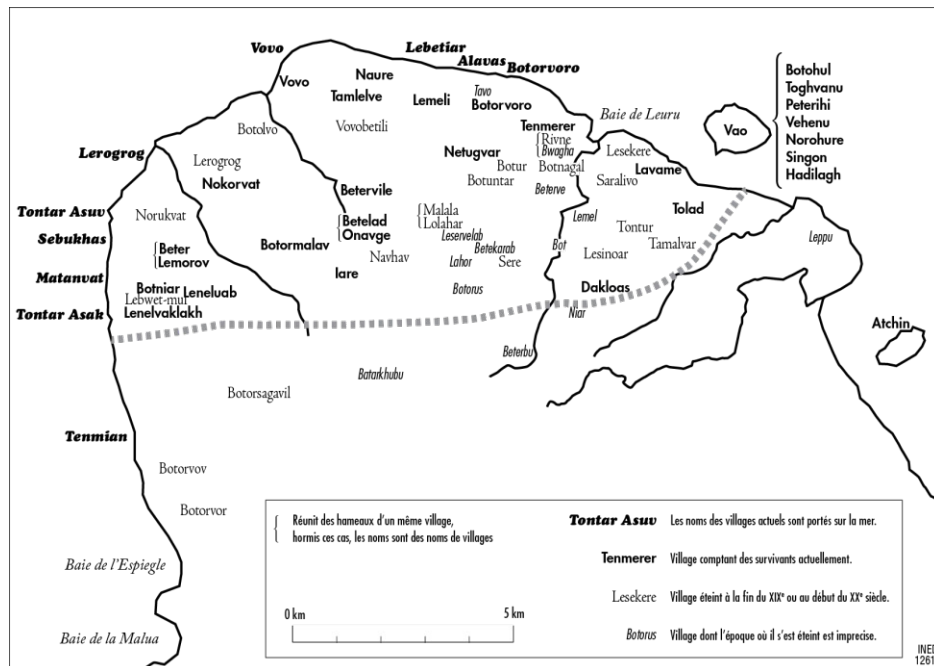


Map 3. - North Malekula, position and population of villages in the 1951 census

An important historical event occurred in the North Malekula with the arrival of group of migrants, whose origin is unknown, dating back sixteen generations to the beginning of the 20th century i.e., counting about thirty years per generation, around 1450. Its descendants say that the men of Navhav were light-skinned. After more than fifteen generations of intermarriage, there is no discernible difference in skin colour between the Chiefs and Teste. - Many groups claim light-skinned founding ancestors, which may reflect a supernatural mythical origin without necessarily implying a Polynesian origin. They could come from regions or islands more or less distant in the archipelago. - They were allowed to settle in the hills of the interior, at Navhav. According to their myth, they come from the *nevenel* vine (17.8.1951)¹¹. A *nevenel* fruit fell on a root of a *nakhatabol*¹² tree and broke in two, on one side it gave birth to a girl and on the other to a boy. At first they did not see each other, hidden by the tall roots of the tree (Figure 12). They grew up and eventually met. - Note that the villages of Botohul and Toghvanu in Vao claim the same myth, but are not descendants of Navhav.

11 Dates in brackets refer to date and time of Racrac Charley's texts.

12 For the pronunciation of Matanvat words, see the language note.



Map 4. - Far North Malekula, position of villages in the early 20th century

Further north, in the Vovo area, the villages from Norukvat to Botorvoro and beyond to opposite the Vao islet have Teste and, in some cases, chieftainships of various origins, some of them local and some of them predating Navhav. Some villages may also have elevated local 'big men' to the rank of 'chiefs' in order to copy the original chieftainships from outside and avoid having a descendant of these settle in their village in this position (*see below*). We cannot exclude, especially in the islets, cases where migrants, who are quite numerous, have imposed themselves as chiefs by force.

There was a 'hierarchy' between the chiefdoms which is not well known because of the extinctions of *nakhamal* and villages, but which was more chronological or symbolic than political, as the villages were independent. In North-west Malekula, the village, consisting of several Teste hamlets and possibly a chiefly hamlet, was the basic political unit. At a higher level, alliances did not group together chiefdoms of the same origin in a privileged way, but aimed to establish neighbourly relations: matrimonial, ceremonial - such as the *nanaki* - or assistance in case of war, without affecting the independence of the villages¹³. These relationships could include more distant villages, as part of encirclement strategies.

13 However, there are no known wars between the Yarre chiefdoms. Some of them had matrimonial and *nanaki* relationships with each other and they also had alliances, diverse and changing, with neighbouring or more distant chiefdoms.

The chiefs of Navhav settled near the villages of Teste through the process of individual migrations, which the myth usually attributes to disputes between brothers or between a father and his sons. Yarre (or Iare¹⁴) is the first village where chiefs from Navhav came to settle near Teste. The ten sons of a later generation of Yarre went to settle on land 'given' - or rather 'loaned' because ownership of the land is inalienable and only usufruct is granted - by the Teste in the interior opposite the passes of Tontar Asuv up to Espiegle Bay, and then in the villages closer to the coast¹⁵. They can be found in Onavge, Botnagal, Tenmian, Espiegle Bay, the Botormalav - Leneluab - Lenelvaklakh branch and Botorsagavil¹⁶. Their genealogical order is not well known and the names of four of these villages are unknown because they are extinct.

At the 'political' level, each new chieftaincy was independent of its village of origin, the migrant fleeing to end his relationship with his brothers or father. Chiefs from Yarre did not settle in villages that already had chiefs of other origins.

The expansion of the Navhav descendants in the form of chieftaincy splits allowed them to move out of their enclave in Yarre and extend their direct hold on the Teste villages, while moving closer to the coast. The Teste accepted the cultural and political superiority of the chiefs of Navhav origin because of the new customs they brought with them, notably the *nanaki* and the peace associated with it (*see* below). But they did not give up their rights to the land. There was another advantage to having chiefs in the village. The Teste of villages without chiefs had to carry the first fruits of the harvest to Yarre. They were used as warriors or human victims (*teneslomlom*), exchanged to end a war by equalising losses (18.8.1951), they were then integrated into the Teste of the chieftaincy that had received them or killed and eaten.

For the Teste, having chiefs in one's village improved one's status. The *kava* rite requires that the chief does not prepare his *kava* himself. Thus, when a chief 'immigrated' to a Teste village, a *nakhmal* was elevated to the rank of *lasmalo* (those who prepare the chiefs' *kava*). As they became more numerous, it was the chieftaincy cadets who prepared the *kava*. But these *nakhmal* always retained the title of *lasmalo*¹⁷. As owners of the land, the Teste retained some bargaining power with the chiefs. Only the lower *nakhmal* remained potential human victims.

Thus, the populations present in the villages whose chiefs are from Navhav are: the chiefs, the *Lasmalo*, the Teste and the *Teneslomlom*, the latter three groups being of Teste origin.

Between Chiefs and Teste, there is a fundamental difference translated as 'big fire' and 'small fire' (24.8.1951). They do not eat food cooked at the same fires, do not drink

14 Racrac Charley also writes Yarie (*see* linguistic note).

15 Before contact, the villages closest to the coast were several hundred metres away, often about a kilometre, to be less vulnerable to attack and for fear of tsunamis and typhoons devastating the seashore.

16 *Sagavil*: ten.

17 Information from Chef Grégoire.

kava together and do not make *nanaki* together. However, marriages between chiefs and Teste were possible and frequent, as membership of the group was transmitted patrilineally. But a line of chiefs had to avoid marrying too often with Teste, and seek wives among the chiefs of other villages, or risk having their blood 'diluted' and their rank lowered.

The Teste obeyed the decisions of the chiefs regarding dates for clearing brush (*nekabonian*), burning (*nesulsulian*), planting (*nehokonian*), etc., and then brought them food. At *Notulokhian*, they carried the first fruits to the chiefs before worshipping their own ancestors.

In the North-east islets where *kava* was not drunk, there are no *Lasmalo*, only chiefs and Teste human victims. This could reflect the arrival of chiefs - not from Navhav - to Teste populations who were reduced to human victims; or, alternatively, the arrival of chiefs to unoccupied lands, with subsequent arrivals either accepted as chiefs if they were chiefs in their island or region of origin, or reduced to human victims if they were Teste. The second hypothesis, assuming interruptions in the occupation of the islets, is less likely. Given the cultural fragmentation of the Small Nambas region and the millennia of migration, there is no reason to believe that the islets had the same social organisation as the Big Island, except perhaps at a very early period when the whole population was Teste. The islets have seen, for centuries, the arrival of migrants from other islands who settled with their previous status or integrated into the *nakhamal* that accepted them. Some of these families have kept a foreign name, others have translated their name, and both behaviours can be found in the different lineages of the same *nakhamal*¹⁸.

1.2. Matanvat: Lennelvaklakh and Botniar-Lebwet Mul

Matanvat is a European deformation of Natanvat - *natan (na)vat*: land of rocks, actually the ancient raised dead coral reef that outcrops everywhere. It is an administrative name used by Europeans. Before contact, the Melanesians distinguished three villages: Botniar, Lebwet Mul, the Teste villages, and Lennelvaklakh, the village of the chiefs, and a large number of hamlets, such as Beter, Lemorov, etc., whose inhabitants were Teste. There were also a very large number of place names, owned by various *nakhamal*, which were temporarily inhabited after contact, such as Lebaike, Lokhor or Sebukhas.

The origin of Lennelvaklakh is typical of the process of dissemination of Navhav chieftaincies by splintering. It is also the best known example because it was the one with the most survivors at the beginning of the 20th century and where the oral tradition has therefore been best preserved.

¹⁸ Thus, Batunvanu would be a 'translation' of Batik, a name originating from Ambrym that some lineages still bear. The same phenomenon can be found in other villages of Vao and the other islets (Clausen 1983; Layard 1942).

On *Notulokhian*, the festival of first fruits, the elder of Yarre asked a younger man, Tor, to fetch wood for the fire. The latter replied, 'We are all equal, since that is the way it is, you go, I'll go'. He went to found Tamalvar, near the Teste de Botormalav. In revenge against his brother, he is said to have decided to take all the villages of Teste that carried the first fruits to Yarre (*see* 1.5.1951). A dispute between him and his children, which he had probably provoked, made him leave Tamalvar to found Tamalvar II, among the Teste of Leneluab. The same strategy in Leneluab led him to found Lenelvaklakh, near the Teste villages of Botniar-Lebwet Mul, less than a kilometre from the coast (*see* 17.8.1951). He was then called Tor Tara (Tor the old). Lenelvaklakh had nine generations at the time of Grégoire's birth in 1953, which, counting an average of thirty years per generation, places its foundation a little before 1700.

Some, including Racrac Charley, dispute that one man made all three migrations. The Teste of Botniar-Lebwet Mul say that he did, but he was too old by then and his children would not be his. A calculation of ages shows that as the youngest (the ninth of ten brothers) he must have been young when he left Yarre, probably between twenty and twenty-five. As a chief, he was quickly given a wife. If he caused disputes with his teenage children in each village where he settled, we must add about two times eighteen years to know his age at the foundation of Lenelvaklakh. He would then have been around sixty years old and may well still have had children. The chiefs of Leneluab believe that two or even three men were at the origins of these migrations¹⁹, but they adhere to the Teste's position on Tor Tara's actual descent.

The version in which Tor Tara founded the three chieftaincies has the main result of placing Lenelvaklakh at a higher genealogical level than Tamalvar I²⁰ and Tamalvar II, since he left his children there. The *Notulokhian* calendar, which normally follows the hierarchical order of the chieftaincies, puts Botormalav and Leneluab before Lenelvaklakh, following the chronological order of their foundation: it could not be otherwise, since Leneluab and Lenelvaklakh did not yet exist when Botormalav was founded.

Could the version in which Tor Tara made three migrations be a version specific to Salior, from Nekhnel Batikh, the youngest branch of the chieftaincy, who wanted to supplant the chief and perhaps also put Lenelvaklakh before the neighbouring chieftaincies? The elder line of the chieftaincy, taken over by Grégoire, died out with Étienne in 1953 and we do not have his version. Racrac Charley is opposed to this, just as he is always opposed to Kaku, a descendant of Salior, but his demonstration is unconvincing (1.5.1951).

The Teste de Botniar and Lebwet Mul support it because it allows for a challenge to the lineage of the chieftaincy. However, Leneluab chiefs are secretive about the

19 This may be a 'strategic' position, as the only Leneluab survivors were children when they came to the coast and it is not known who passed on the oral tradition to them.

20 Botormalav's chieftaincy is extinct and we do not have his version of the myth.

number of their generations that would resolve the issue²¹. The question remains difficult to answer without the version of the extinct groups. One thing is theoretically certain: the successive migrations of a founder create a conflict between chronological order and genealogical order. The former prevails for the establishment of the ceremonial calendar, but it can be contested. It is also important to note that the first is "politically" different from the second.

Then, the descendants of Tor Tara separated into several *nakhmal*, according to the elder and younger branches. The first stage is linked to the twins born to Tor Tara who gave Malasuv and Malsakh, designated, after a reversal of their order, as the right and left sides of the chieftaincy (17.8.1951). Each side again split into several *nakhmal*. Thus, Malasuv, later called Lobol (*see* below), gave rise to Nebet Taram (elder branch), the dignitary chief who took decisions after discussion with the other *nakhmal*, and Nekhnel Batikh who was responsible for enforcing the chief's orders and traditional law and for waging wars. Malsakh was divided into three *nakhmal*: Nekhnel Nias, Ieli and Hayme. Nekhnel Nias, the elder *nakhmal*, was confined to minor symbolic functions, such as shouting '*lausa*' and holding up a *kava* root when the chief announced the *nanaki*²², and in a number of rituals, rather magics, of fertilisation and atmospheric weather, purchased from their owners in other villages. Hayme *nakhmal* later integrated emigrants from Tenmian and is now extinct; his function is not well known, he was probably a separate younger branch of Ieli.

1.3. Traditional society, culture and innovation

The main lines of force structuring traditional society were the kinship system and the rank system: *namanggi* (*nanaki*). The kinship system, of the very exogamous 'Oceanian' type, ensured numerous and distant relationships between the *nakhmal* and the villages (Rallu 1985). Women were married young, as children, and raised by their husband's female relatives. The marriage was consummated when they were post-pubescent. The choice of wife was decided between the *nakhmal*, with payment of a dowry in reverse (or bride price in bishlaman) (26.8.1951, 6 o'clock in the evening) and divorce was possible by paying back part of the dowry.

The *nanaki* was made with partners from several villages, between chiefdoms (or between Teste, as Teste were not allowed to preform *nanaki* with chiefs) with a

21 When I asked them how many generations their chiefdom has since its foundation, they replied, "The same number as Lenelvaklakh," appearing surprised or suspicious. This would show that the founders of Leneluab and Lenelvaklakh are the same person. They should have one more if the founder of Lenelvaklakh is the son of the founder of Leneluab, or one less if his son stayed in Leneluab and is considered the origin of their genealogy. But they quickly converted and married young, thus catching up on any delays. Mk Sob was about the same age as Kaku and his son Louis-Rose, born in 1941 or 1942, already had several children by 1978, while Kaku's eldest son, Grégoire, born in 1952, was not yet married. This generation count is not inconsistent with Salior's version of the lineage.

22 When it was just Malasuv and Malsakh, Malasuv would announce the date of the *nanaki* and Malsakh would shout '*lausa*' in brandishing a *kava* root. When Malasuv divided, it fell to Nekhnel Batikh to shout '*lausa*', and Malsakh only brandished a *kava* root.

common genealogical origin or not, in matrimonial relations or not (*see* below). This was the basis of local politics. But kinship relations also supported political and ceremonial relations, such as the duties of recipients of women to assist or not to harm their in-laws ("wife donors") and maternal uncles attending circumcised children during their seclusion (Annex 5).

The society was very hierarchical, between chiefs and Teste, and the traditional code of law was very strict. Violence was often extreme. For example, a Teste killed his son because he had stolen from a chief's garden, for fear of being accused. A minor offence had to be repaired by a fine set by the chief, otherwise it was death by strangulation for women, or clubbing for men.

Domestic violence could be extreme, with a man sometimes killing his wife. Women sometimes committed suicide, climbing a coconut tree or a cliff and throwing themselves off. Adultery was punishable by death for both the man and the woman. However, it was usually settled with a fine (19.6.1952). Given the lengthy negotiations and the cost of marriages, one did not kill one's wife without thinking. This implied an interruption of the matrimonial exchange because his original group lost the advantages associated with his position as 'wife giver' and a symbolic reconciliation had to take place (18.7.1954). However, for second and other wives, and also for women of Teste origin, the strict rule was more easily applied. Moreover, the woman's fate could be decided before the man's, which was more difficult to take. He could defend himself or move to another village, implying a war and therefore a decision at the *nakhamal* of the chiefs, possibly with their allies²³. But between chiefs and Teste, there was little leniency to be expected: a Teste committing adultery with a chief's wife was put to death.

Because of their need for men to expand and dominate outnumbered Teste groups, chieftaincy lines occasionally practised infanticide of daughters by burying them alive. But daughters were kept for marriage to other chiefs and Teste, as the matrimonial exchanges must be equal over two or three generations (Rallu 1985).

The society was not totally segregated. Teste could be elevated to certain privileges, such as *lasmalo* (*see* above). They could also be given certain rights by the chiefs, through the process of *um levlap* (elevation), such as drinking *kava* and doing *nanaki* with the chiefs - privileges that Salior conferred on Nebet Datav, the *nakhamal* of his wounded bodyguard, by saving his life (*see* 18.8.1951, noon). As his warrior's survival appeared to be in jeopardy, Salior thought he would take the opportunity to end the war, which is usually done after suffering a loss. But the man was recovering. He gave him food containing a curse. He died and peace was made by exchanging human victims. As a reward, or 'to save face', he gave some privileges to Nebet Datav, but this did not make them chiefs. During the depopulation in the decades around the turn of the 20th century, *kum khunu*²⁴ was more frequently practised, a rite whereby a Teste was elevated to the rank of chief by asking - and paying - the chief to perform a

23 Chiefs have been known to die for adultery within a chiefdom, but this was the result of aggressive behaviour towards the offender (*see* Annex 5).

24 This rite is not an adoption, which is impossible between the chiefs and Teste.

rite of chewing sugar cane and giving it, mouth to mouth, to the baby before its first feeding. However, this man did not really become a chief, especially if he did not have knowledge of the tradition and the ability to lead.

If the chieftaincy was extinguished, the village became an independent Teste hamlet or was taken over by other chiefs. The chief could also, if not depose, at least reprimand a 'chief' of a next-born line of his chieftaincy. For example, Salior mocked Vetmanu for always arriving late for communal meals in the *nakhamal*: 'You are more concerned with your wives than with our business'; he had many wives and wanted to make sure that all the men had gone to eat before going himself. Not accepting this remark, Vetmanu went to live with the Teste of Nebet Datav, making his gardens on land that this *nakhamal* granted him. He did not lose his status as chief, heredity remaining the rule²⁵.

The person of the chief (Nebet Tarab) was sacred; he was the one who made decisions. However, the transmission of authority was not always in the elder line, as Tor Tara's inversion of Malsakh and Malasuv shows. In *nakhamal* divisions, the prerogatives of chieftaincy, including ceremonial functions, were shared (*see above*).

The decisions were made in meetings of the various *nakhamal* of the village, including Teste, but the chief had the final say and the younger lineage on the right side of the chiefdom (Nekhnel Batikh) had the role of enforcing them. The chief was a kind of sacred person who could not go to war, nor kill a perpetrator or victim himself. This was the responsibility of Nekhnel Batikh, who was also in charge of the war.

It was possible to gain influence and there were avenues for individual advancement, but these were limited. Wealth depended on the number of women, as it was they who raised the pigs, preparing their food to enable their husbands to buy cultural goods and to innovate, as an innovation had to be consecrated by a sacrifice of valuable pigs (Figure 1).

Salior²⁶, Nekhnel Batikh, bought the right to make a copy of a large *nakhamal* of ten poles from his maternal uncles in Lemeli. He instituted a heap of food for his wives on the *nejar*, the place where *nanaki* were performed. He distinguished himself by waging wars against the Big Nambas and by giving aid to Norukvat when it was attacked by its neighbours to the North. Thus, during conflicts, the war chief gained importance and Salior practically supplanted Nebet Tarab. The latter initiated a great *nanaki* of a thousand pigs with a younger branch of Nekhnel Batikh to put him in his place. - All of Nekhnel Batikh took part, including Salior: they did not exclude each other, but he had not initiated it. - It is not certain that he succeeded. The fact that Chief Sale signed up to go to Queensland in the late 19th century would prove

25 In his "sociological inventory", Guiart places the assessor, Mk Taivar, Vetmanu's grand'son, in Nebet Datav, as does Racrac Charley (20.2.1954) - who was probably one of the ethnologist's informants, but also recognises him as a member of Nekhnel Batikh (1.5.1951).

26 Salior, Kaku's great-grandfather, would have been born around 1820 and probably made these innovations in the 1860-1880s.

otherwise. The chief sends men to be recruited, but he does not go himself. He could not leave the country or convert, let alone become a *teacher* or *elder*, which would be to deny the custom. In the early days of contact, it was the secondary chiefs (on the left side) who engaged in these ways. Confined to honorary functions, Nebet Taran had lost the power of decision, as is also shown by the effaced role of Etienne, reproducing vis-à-vis Kaku the situation that existed in Salior's time. Salior acquired a 'supernatural' status *post-mortem*. It is said that on the seventh day after his death, when the skull was detached from the body and carried on the *natab*, it resisted and then went by itself into the large sheet used to carry it. They then said "*bol*" (this is the end) and Malasuv was called Lobol (17.8.1951). This story shows the mysticism of the Melanesians, which led to a kind of 'deification' in the context of ancestor worship - later to be found in certain messianisms.

The possibility of social and cultural change was also embedded in the tradition through the purchase of cultural or intellectual goods (Huffman 1996). A particular dance could be purchased, a particular type of sculpture attached to the roof of the *nakhamal* or the front of the dugout canoe, the right to make a *nakhamal* of a given size (measured by the number of poles), etc., by sacrificing and giving one or more valuable pigs to the inventor. There were thus three *nakhamal* of ten poles: in Lemeli, Lenelvaklakh and Naure, these were chiefdom *nakhamal* and the ten poles symbolised the ten *nakhamal* of the village. These rights were then permanent; they could be passed on to descendants and resold. The same was true of techniques, such as putting a sail on one's dugout canoe or pulling it on wooden rollers so that it would dry on the beach and rot less quickly. Thus, intellectual property was recognised (31.8.1951 10 o'clock at night).

1.4. The *nanaki*

The *nanaki* is the sacrifice of several hundred pigs, some of great value, according to the curvature of their tusks, as part of rank or title ceremonies. It was a central element of the Small Nambas culture (Guiart 1952; Layard 1942; Deacon 1934). It involves a total ban on hostilities from the very beginning of its preparation (28.8.1951). It was therefore necessary first to put an end to the conflicts and make peace. In this sense, it had the effect of instituting truces of one or more years to the formerly endless reprisals and vengeance that followed a murder. It was valued as a factor of peace (Layard 1942) and, together with matrimonial alliances, formed the basis of relations between chiefdoms. Lenelvaklakh was a *nanaki* partner of Botormalav, Leneluab, Tenmian (chieftainships of Navhav origin), and among others, of Lerogrog, Nokorvat, Naure and Betervile. These neighbourly relations reduced the risk of war.

The *nanaki* established a cycle of debt: gifts of tusked pigs had to be returned at subsequent partners' *nanaki*. If one did not have enough, one could buy or borrow more. This had to be repaid with pigs with longer tusks, corresponding to the growth that would have taken place in the meantime, a kind of loan with interest. The *nanaki* incorporated the customs of innovation and ceremonial purchase, which gave rise to

many local variants. However, it had not attained the large number of titles in North Malekula that are found in the south of the island. A man took the title of Mal on his first *nanaki* and Meltekh on subsequent ones.

After removal of the upper canines, the lower canines grow in a circle. The more complete the circle, possibly starting a second circle, the higher the value of the pig (Figure 1).

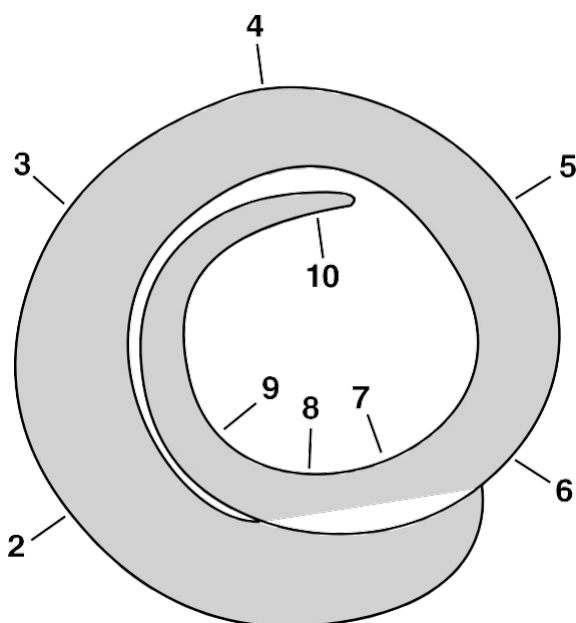


Figure 1: Growth stages of tusks and value terms of pigs

Names of different values of pigs in the Matanvat language, information from Racrac Charley (Guiart 2013).

- 1- *Livaatep*: defence not yet released
- 2- *Rangi*: it comes out and the upper canine is removed
- 3- *Mbakas*: the defence is well out
- 4- *Narux* (*naruk* in Racrac Charley's spelling): it starts to turn downwards
- 5- *Niènkol*: it starts to penetrate the cheek
- 6- *Vosonias*: it starts to penetrate the lower jaw bone
- 7- *Nawaar tara* (*navar* in Racrac Charley's spelling): it penetrates the lower jaw
- 8- *Ixaraap*: it penetrated the lower jaw bone well
- 9- *Iitap*: it's out again
- 10- *Nererdacias*: it will turn a second time downwards.

Its spread in north-west Malekula, where it is said to have been introduced by Navhav chiefs, was not yet complete when the Europeans arrived. By the end of the 19th century, some groups had not yet made *nanaki*. For example, Norukvat never made a *nanaki* on its *nejar*, which was called Lejar Khaive (Blind *Lejar*). An older chiefdom did not have to adopt an imported custom, which would have been an acknowledgement of inferiority. But when it became widespread, it could join the

general trend. He had begun to erect large stones on his *nejar* when it was attacked. The war lasted more than ten years and there were too few survivors to finish it.

The Teste made *nanaki* later than the chiefs. It was Salior who allowed Botniar, the village where his wife came from, to carry his first *nanaki*. The number of large stones and the piles where the small stones²⁷ are stored are much smaller on the *nejar* of the Teste than on those of the chiefs, showing that they made fewer and smaller sacrifices, usually killing only a hundred or two hundred pigs, whereas the chiefs made *nanaki* of more than five hundred pigs and even a thousand pigs at Lenelvaklakh, Naure and Tenmian. Behind the *nejar* of these villages one sees very imposing piles of small stones, especially in Lenelvaklakh and Naure, nearly ten metres long, three metres wide and higher than a man (Illustration 34).

The *nanaki* was done in alternating generations, with fathers or sons taking turns as initiators, and thus maintained the respect of the fathers while promoting the status of the sons: it was a link between the living generations and with the ancestors. The distinction of hereditary status applied to the *nanaki*: chiefs and Teste could not do it together and it was the chief who announced the date of the Teste *nanaki*. It created a second level of fire separation, with people of different ranks, Mal or Meltekh, eating at different fires.

A system of debts, the *nanaki* was an area of competition between chiefdoms. Greater and greater sacrifices were made and innovations were made in the conduct or type of ceremony. Lenelvaklakh made a *nanaki* 1,000 '*iat vanasi*' ('stay in the country', i.e. without partners from other villages) which required ten years of preparation. Verlili innovated with the sacrifice of a natural child and took the title of Mal Tanas²⁸. This event marks the transition from *nanaki* to human sacrifice, which was previously limited to prisoners and victims exchanged to end wars.

Naure then made a similar *nanaki*²⁹. He added an innovation: the sons sacrificing one row of pigs and the fathers another, this type of sacrifice was called *nanaki 'kere nded netne'* (the yellow dogfish gives birth to its young). Tenmian made a *nanaki* 1000 with partners from other villages, without human sacrifice. One side of the Lerogrog chieftaincy reportedly prepared a *nanaki* of thirty human victims, teenage Teste, whose left ear had been cut off. Their partners, obliged to respond, thought to make a *nanaki* of thirty emasculated men. But, embarrassed by the prospect of having to make such sacrifices, they would have asked a magician to make the future victims die. If this was not a case of poisoning, as claimed, it casts doubt, if not on the project, at least on its progress.

27 Less valuable pigs are tied to them and they are used only once, unlike the tall coral standing stones that remain on the *nejar* and where valuable pigs are sacrificed from generation to generation.

28 In reference to the spirit or 'demon' (*tanas*) of the sacrificial victim.

29 The chiefs of Lenelvaklakh and Naure together acknowledged that Lenelvaklakh was the first to make a *nanaki* with human sacrifice.

The population density was becoming important: at the end of the 19th century, the genealogies of Lobol had about 30 adult men³⁰. Nothing is known about the evolution of the population of the Teste of Botniar and Lebwet Mul. The myth says that there would have been more than a thousand of them at the arrival of Tor Tara, which is certainly an exaggeration (*see* above), but it is certain that their numbers decreased because of wars and exchanges of human victims, especially after contact. Large-scale human sacrifices, if they had taken place, would have been reminiscent of those ceremonially perpetrated in Tahiti or Hawai'i and would have rapidly reduced the Teste population. - Small *nanaki* sacrifices of a few pigs including one tusked-pig, were performed at the completion of a new big drum, canoe, before building a house or a *nakhamal*, etc.

1.5. Religion

Religion consisted solely of ancestor worship, with the main ceremony being the *Notulokhian* (first fruits of the harvest), where one symbolically shared food with one's fathers, whose skulls were lined up on a *natab* altar in the *nakhamal* (*see* 12.9.1956). A ripe *levoc* banana, then the head of a roasted yam on stones, was brought close to the jawbone of one's ancestor with a prayer. This was a time of peace; one had to settle one's differences with one's brothers beforehand. This rite was purely individual or family, in the sense of a nuclear family. One could not perform the *Notulokhian* in front of the skulls of other people than one's real ancestors: one's father and one's biological ancestors. Ancestor worship was omnipresent. The main pig was sacrificed and a new title of *nanaki* was taken before the stones of one's ancestors. Almost daily, libations were made to the ancestors by drinking *kava* and spitting the last sip in a fine *spray* in the direction of the *natab*, asking for their help in war, harvesting or whatever. Ancestor worship was limited to the patrilineal lineage. The maternals had a very important social role: as 'wife givers' they were in a position of superiority over the 'wife receivers'. At birth, at the circumcision of a boy, on the thirtieth day after death, gifts were made to the *nakhamal* of the maternals who had provided the 'flesh' of that man. But they remained outside the ancestor worship that was practiced at the family level and only in the patrilineal line.

As a religion without a god, ancestor worship was a religion without a priest. While the people of Malsakh and, in general, the lower sides of the chieftaincy, often became *teachers*, *elders* or catechists, their traditional ceremonial roles did not include any priesthood-like function, a function that ensured communication between the common man and the deities. This communication took place at the individual level. In some areas there is a minimal mythological pantheon, with a few deities or only a couple of 'gods'. In South Malekula, the main god is called Ambat (Guiart 2019). - When I mentioned this, I was immediately cut off, before I could give any

30 Malsakh genealogies are very incomplete due to extinct *nakhamal*. There have been cases of rapid population growth in the Pacific, especially following the arrival of new groups, as in Pitcairn (Rallu, 2007).

details. For the Teste and also for Kaku, these were foreign beliefs, not of the North Malekula Small Nambas. Here, only the ancestors were subjects of worship³¹. - Ambat ensured the permanence of the material world by keeping the islands out of the sea; a theme also found in Polynesian mythology, and also had other powers, more like magic, ensuring abundant harvests, fishing, successful war expeditions, etc., but also their opposite, which was directed against one's enemies. Ambat's wife also had extensive supernatural powers, which is a trace of matrilineage.

In the North Malekula Small Nambas, all magical power is ambivalent and it is the ancestors who ensure its beneficial outcomes: so they are prayed to while performing these magics. The men of Malsakh had some symbolic functions in relation to agricultural work, but after the chief (Nebet Taram) had announced the dates. Some younger branches of the chieftaincies had various magical powers, such as the power over the weather to increase the harvest or to unleash a cyclone against enemies. But this was part of the realm of magic, not worship. Like all cultural goods, magic was passed on by purchase. However, they were linked to the spirits of the place from which they originated (15.1.1956) and, like spirits other than those of one's own *nakhamal's* ancestors, they were potentially dangerous. These were two independent things: magic could turn against you; on the other hand, the ancestors would only send you good, provided you honoured them properly. There was also another kind of magic. To harm close enemies, one called upon the Teste who prepared a curse, a poison. These were not the same magics or the same magicians who did the atmospheric weather, these were the chiefs.

There were caves of the dead, but it was not a 'land of the dead'.³² The Yalo cave at Tenmian (Figure 16) was supposed to be the place where the spirits of the men, chiefs and Teste, of part of North-west Malekula resided (*see* 20.2.1954). But some villages in the Vovo area said that their dead went to the crater lake of the volcano of Aoba, an island with matrilineal societies and with which they had maintained matrimonial relations. Like the culture and society, but less so, the places of the dead were fragmented. The Vialo (or Abeialau) cave in Lekan was the Big Nambas' equivalent of the Yalo cave a few kilometres to the north. These were not places where people came to worship. They were negative places, populated by *Tanas* 'devils', potentially dangerous spirits, as dead people from enemy villages were gathered there. Before entering, two by two, it was necessary to blow into a hole in the wall of the cave, making a sound similar to that of a sea conch, so that the spirits would leave and avoid suffering the bad effects of their contact. This was done by a local landowner.

However, the Melanesians of North-west Malekula did not lack mysticism. The link to the ancestors was constant, not only through the *kava*, but also in the great

31 Layard (1942) cites names of gods that are similar to Polynesian gods. Christianisation, by forbidding the use of pagan words and names, could have concealed their existence, especially in groups claiming Polynesian origins. However, they did not follow their original religion at all, practising only ancestor worship. The names of gods cited by Layard may have been 'taught' to the local population by Polynesians, Samoans and others who served on the recruiting ships, or even by Polynesian *teachers* seeking to eradicate ancient cults.

32 The term has no translation in the languages of the region. In response to my question, '*nevenu tanas*' (land of demons) was suggested, but the expression was never used.

moments of life: consecrations of *nakhamal*, house, dugout drum or canoe, during the *nanaki*, etc. Many prohibitions existed in daily life, in addition to those specific to ceremonial periods, seclusion and food prohibitions after circumcision, *nanaki*, death, etc. This orientation of mystical thought prepared the acceptance of the rules of Christian religions. But even now, the religious domain is a family matter and the attachment to the ancestors remains very strong. The bodies of emigrated men are still often brought back to the village to be buried, older men are buried close to the house and younger ones a little further away. Women were traditionally buried in the bush. The concept of a cemetery has not really been adopted in the villages.

The Contact

2.1. Contact history

After Bougainville's non-landing passage between Malekula and Santo in 1768 and Cook's 1774 short stop in South Malekula, at Port Sandwich, contacts in Vanuatu started with whalers from about 1800, and were more sustained with traders of sandalwood and beche-de-mer, starting in the late 1830s in Southern Vanuatu, occasionally resulting in the introduction of diseases and epidemics, and most probably later in Northern Vanuatu. According to Bedford (2022), contacts with Europeans in Malekula were limited until the 1860s, though they increased swiftly with recruitment (*blackbirding*) of labour for Queensland (31.8.1951), from 1863 (Rallu, forthcoming). Many men who went to Queensland can be found in genealogies, including Sale, the chief of Lenelvaklakh, Mk Hanarbo and Vovodal, of Naure³³.

Recruitment, weapons, alcohol and wars

Less scrupulous recruiters who abducted men, and also women, by deception (31.8.195110 a.m.), and traders and planters who sold goods to the Melanesians at

33 The first and third returned Christianised: Adventist and Presbyterian. But there was no missionary or even *teacher* in North Malekula at that time.

very inflated prices and entered even higher sums in their debt registers, demanding that they be paid in land, fell victim to attacks, often fatal (Guiart 1952; 2019).

These attacks were followed by reprisals by English or French, and also German, naval forces before the establishment of the Joint Naval Commission in 1887 (Bedford 2017). They were often limited to firing cannons and burning the village of the supposed culprits, but they nevertheless cost the lives of several Melanesians, surprised by these actions. These operations were most frequent on the East coast, affecting in particular the islets Uri and Uripiv, the Tautu peninsula and, further south, Port Stanley. They sometimes sought to catch the murderers in the inland villages. But, illprepared and led by guides from more or less remote villages, with limited knowledge of the terrain or who directed them to an enemy village, they usually ended in fiascos. The Malekulans gained a reputation for great ferocity, fleeing the villages in advance and preparing ambushes that sometimes caused several deaths and injuries among the soldiers. This was the case with the punitive expedition against Batarnar, following the murder of the Bridges family and the son Corlette at Bushman Bay in 1916. Its failure and the losses among the expeditionary force put an end to this type of operation.

On the West coast, Malua Bay was the victim in 1884, following the murder of the captain and some sailors of the John Hunt, a vessel engaged in labour trafficking (Bedford 2017). These operations took place several months after the events. There was no investigation into the causes of the attacks, and any European, even a brigand, was defended. These reprisals were considered unjust by the Melanesians and resulted in strong resistance to colonisation.

Recruitment increased at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century to the plantations of the Central Islands, especially Epi, and then to Malo, Aore and Santo. It was then a little more "controlled" due to the progressive installation of a colonial administration from 1906. But exactions by unscrupulous traders and settlers, followed by murder and reprisals continued until the 1910s and ended with Mazoyer in 1934.

Recruitment was mainly paid for in guns and alcohol. All chiefs wanted guns and sent men to be recruited when a ship passed by. All villages armed themselves. Traditional warfare involved the killing of one man by ambush to compensate for some inter-village exaction. This was followed by equal retaliation, and often, after a few deaths on each side, peace was made by exchanging human victims to equalise the losses. Attacks became much more deadly with the introduction of firearms, especially Sniders from 1877. This did not stop the Presbyterian Mission Synod in 1890 from recommending that settlers be allowed to sell them in order to increase the British population of the archipelago (Thompson 1981). They even insisted that guns were now part of the New Hebridean way of life and had not caused any increase in mortality. As a result of alliances, warfare rapidly spread to many villages, human victims were traded and cannibalism became much more common, sometimes as an end in itself. Fearing being killed to the last man, villages moved, but the land was not taken. The land was ancestral property and a potentially dangerous place for those

who were not descendants of the local ancestors, who they considered to be *tanas* (devil). Land vacated by emigrants began to be encroached upon as the plantation economy developed from the 1930s onwards and especially after World War II.

In the Small Nambas area of the North peninsula, wars raged mainly in the late 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century (Miller 1989). One only has to stand on the beach of one of the East coast islets and look at the far north Malekula to understand how the long coastal strip of low-lying land (Figure 2) could attract the greed of European settlers and traders, and thus the intense trade in arms and alcohol that they engaged in. However, in 1883, an Australian journalist, Julian Thomas, wrote: "It is a mistake to think that much liquor is sold to the natives; they are not civilised enough for that." The Presbyterian Mission Synod was silent on the subject (Thompson 1981). These lies and unspoken words are typical of the ways in which colonisation avoided acknowledging its wrongdoings. Had there been a consensus to decline the Melanesian population and free up land for settlers, it would have been no different. The missionaries were in despair over the immorality of the Melanesians, including their *teachers*, whom they only assigned to a station if they were married, but this precaution was not even sufficient (22.8.1951, 9 p.m.). More fundamentally, missionaries, recruiters and settlers (who became recruiters themselves when this activity was, theoretically at least, controlled by the Joint Naval Commission) were in 'silent solidarity' (Guiart 2013) to bring about the crumbling of the chiefdoms and traditional society that facilitated Christianisation and colonisation.

The wars were almost over by the end of the 1920s and the survivors from most of the inland villages had moved to the coast. There were still some casualties in the 1920s, but in small numbers. In contrast, the islets were little involved in the conflicts. On their plateau, the Big Nambas were protected from attacks by other groups. However, from the late 19th century, internal wars there caused the Netenawe, Vakhas, Nevenbwis and Makhawe, some of them threatened with extinction, to move to the coast or as far as the Small Nambas villages in the north. Until the 1950s, the reception of bushwives at the mission, resulted in attacks of coastal Christian villages by pagan Big Nambas, as far as Tenmian in Small Nambas country, sometimes resulting in deaths (13.6.1953).



Figure 2. - The North Malekula coastline seen from Vao islet

The arrival of the missions

The first missionary contacts in North Malekula were made in the late 1880s in the North-east Islets by Presbyterians at Wala, Rano and Atchin, by Catholics at Vao in 1892, and from 1907 by Adventists at Atchin and on the west coast. However, after some progress with the Presbyterian hospital at Wala, which operated from 1902 to 1912 and reopened a few years later, the wars kept Melanesians away from the missions (Miller 1989). Until the 1920s, the situation remained precarious, with frequent attacks on mission stations, including at Atchin and Naure, Vovo, the home of Vovodal who had been warned and fled, sometimes resulting in the deaths of *elders* and *teachers* and the few indigenous people who were there. Many stations had to be abandoned.

The north-western part of the main island was contacted from the islets, by periodic visits of missionaries and their *elders* or *teachers*. The Presbyterians bought land at Matanvat and built a house in 1905, and then a church (a slightly larger traditional building) in 1906, but without much success. A sick chief, referred to only as 'Meltek' in Presbyterian writings (Miller1989), asked to be treated at Wala hospital, where he died. The missionary then took eight children to school in Wala for a month. At the inauguration of the church, which was attended by Christians from Wala and Rano, about twenty men from Lenelvaklakh, Botniar and Lebwet Mul came in curiosity, without showing any further interest.

The Adventists were called to Matanvat in the mid-1910s by Sale who had been taught by them in Queensland. He asked them to come and care for young Kaku who had infected sores, and gave them a plot of land at Tontar Asak, as the Presbyterians

had already settled in Matanvat (31.8.1951 10 o'clock in the evening). In 1916, the Adventist minister Norman Wiles and his wife moved there. No one came to see him, so he went to Tenmaru where he later died.

It was not until the early 1920s that the Presbyterians gained a few followers in Matanvat. By then, wars and epidemics, including the terrible 1918 Spanish flu, had reduced the villages to a few survivors who had abandoned their hilltop homes to get out of the conflicts and settled on the coast near the passes, where the missions had established small stations. Traditional society could no longer function. Many lineages were extinct, especially among the Teste. There was no *nakhamal* for circumcision, an essential rite because one must be circumcised to drink *kava*, to be married and participate in *nanaki*. Sometimes there were no relatives left to pay for it, nor anyone who knew how to do the operation. Thus, it was the visiting Adventist minister who circumcised Racrac Charley and the future chief Matan Sale on his boat, in front of the Tontar Asak pass. Later, a visiting Presbyterian minister took Timothy Kaskavie, of Malsakh, to school in Vila; he returned in 1927.

The Catholics came to the north-west even later, in 1939, when the Cooperative Native Company was founded, Paul Tamulum having made it a condition of his acceptance to become its director that he could practice his faith (*see* 7.8.1951). After the company was registered, the Catholics kept two of the founding chiefs, Simon Mk Sak and Matan Sale, who was baptised Etienne and thus changed his denomination, at the Montmartre School in Vila. Later, a Big Nambas immigrant joined them to become a catechist, a position neither chief could accept without losing his status.

Thus, interest in the mission was at first limited to health care and the few iron tools it brought, eliciting only brief visits from Melanesians. It was only when the survivors of the villages were reduced to a few dozen people and regrouped near the passes that the missions gained followers, initially among those on the fringes (left side of the chieftaincy) or far away (Teste) from traditional power.

Depopulation

From the 1860s onwards³⁴ - mostly from the mid 1870s in Malekula -, labour recruitment had an impact on the demographics of the New Hebrides, due to deaths during travel and on the plantations. After a 3-year contract, only about a quarter of the recruits to Queensland and Fiji, and less than a third of those to New Caledonia, returned alive to their island (Rallu, forthcoming). Although only about 5 per cent of young adult men were recruited each year, with three years contracts, about 12 per cent were permanently absent in a steady state of the labour trade. Nevertheless, the cumulative effects were significant. Over a period of 30 years, the impact of recruitment may have caused a decline between 12 per cent and 15 per cent in the male population. The impact of recruitment on the birth rate was limited as only about 5 per cent of women were recruited and because of the late age at marriage of men

³⁴ Sections on recruitment and population decline have been updated with recent data (Rallu, forthcoming).

related with polygamy; moreover, the absence of young men resulted in higher polygamy and even births of adulterine children (19.06.1952).

However, the recruitment had a much greater impact on the local populations through the new diseases it introduced to the islands, affecting men, women and children. At that time, Europeans passing through, whether recruiters or traders, and missionaries reported epidemics of smallpox, measles, influenza³⁵ and dysentery, causing high mortality in certain regions of the Northern Islands, as was the case from the 1830s in the Southern Islands. New endemic diseases, especially tuberculosis, were also introduced by sailors and men returning from the plantations. A high mortality rate then set in, like in Polynesia (Rallu 2022), due to the new endemic diseases and the excessive consumption of alcohol, which caused ethylic deaths and a lasting weakening of the organisms. With the importation of firearms, wars increased in the last decades of the 19th century until the mid-1920s, reducing the male population, especially the Teste, who provided warriors and human victims - these groups are extinct in most North Malekula villages. However, the lineages of chiefs, responsible for waging war, such as Nekhnel Batikh, were also targeted for attack and suffered losses.

Epidemics and diseases were probably the main factors of depopulation, with relatively few war casualties, 10 per cent, recorded in the genealogies of North-west Malekula around Matanvat. By the early 20th century, numerous remnants of abandoned and survivorless villages around the large bays, in the Maskelynes and in the North Malekula Peninsula (Caillard 2016) attest to a rapid demographic decline. In the 1920s, missionaries also noted a very rapid decline in population in Santo (Deliry-Antheaume and Garnier-Waddell 1998).

According to genealogies, the population of non-extinct (with survivors) *nakhamal* in North-west Malekula around Matanvat, declined by 44 per cent between the turn of the century and 1930, but depopulation was already intense in the 1880s and 1890s. By the time the population stabilised in the 1950s, many *nakhamal* and hamlets, sometimes entire villages, had no survivors and the Teste had disappeared or been reduced to a few families in many villages with remaining chiefs. Thus, the population and number of *nakhamal* and hamlets in most of the villages in North Malekula are unknown; the very names of four of the ten chiefdoms that originated from Yarre and the associated Teste villages have been forgotten, and two others have died out, leaving four out of ten Yarre chiefdoms with survivors. About 6 per cent of North Malekula mainland Small Nambas and 20 per cent of Big Nambas populations 'at contact' (circa 1860) remained around 1940 (Rallu, forthcoming). North Malekula and much of South Malekula, as well as Anatom, Epi, Maewo, parts of Santo, Banks and other Northern Islands, are among the most dramatic cases of population decline in the Pacific Islands (Kirch and Rallu, 2007).

The Big Nambas plateau, more isolated and culturally united, experienced less depopulation than the Small Nambas area, with fewer epidemics and less frequent

35 The Spanish flu of 1918-1919 strongly affected Malekula, except North-east islets (Rallu, forthcoming).

wars. However, Netenawe, Nevenbwis, Vakhas and Makhawe were attacked by their neighbours and some *nakhamal* migrated to Lerogrog and Matanvat. The density there was originally lower, perhaps around 40 persons per sq/km because of the poor land.

The North-east Islets, relatively protected from epidemics by their isolation and little involved in the wars on mainland, experienced only a slight population decline. The genealogies of Vao show a stable population of the islet villages in 1900-1910 and all *nakhamal* had survivors. The average population density in Vao and Atchin was then about 250 persons per sq/km, but their gardens were mainly on mainland Malekula; it reached respectively about 600 and 720 persons per sq/km in 1951.

Thus, the population of North Malekula, including North-east Islets, before contact may have been about 23,000 people.

Depopulation was accompanied by an imbalance in the sex ratio. Women were immune during traditional wars, as they carried the messages of peace. This was still the case after contact, but there were deaths in village attacks. Furthermore, it is usually observed that women are more affected by epidemics than men, as they are the ones who care for the sick. Traditionally, they did not cook for the men, who did not eat the food prepared at the women's fire, and they could not enter the *nakhamal*, but the contagion took place before the final phase when the man did not go out. In addition, there were several other causes, such as maternal mortality, which alone can cause excess female mortality, and secondarily deaths from domestic violence. Although limited, female infanticide in the chiefdoms, which are the groups that have survived best, also plays a role in the imbalance in the sex ratio observed in the early decades of the 20th century, up to the 1950s. However, the main cause of the high female mortality was death from disease, as for men.

Village relocations

Traditionally, wars sometimes caused villages to move, often temporarily, to escape attacks. After contact, regrouping villages were created around the mission stations, with people coming from several villages in the interior.

The moves of Lenelvaklakh, originally about one kilometre inland from Matanvat pass, illustrates these temporary migrations and final resettlement. At the end of the 19th century, Lenelvaklakh gave aid to its neighbour Norukvat, which was at war with villages to the north, and was in turn the target of attacks. Its warlord, Salior, decided to temporarily move the village, including the Teste, under a large banyan tree, later named '*Leterial jin Sali*'³⁶, and then to settle in the extreme south of their territory, at Botin, on the border of Tenmian. When the war was over, they returned to Lenelvaklakh with some survivors from Naure, Botolvo (Vovo region) and Norukvat who came to live with them in Botin. - It was around this time that some Big Nambas from Netenawe came to Lenelvaklakh as refugees. - They performed a ceremony of

36 "He carries the sun of Salior".

removing the incisors of women, following the Big Nambas model, at the Tontar Asak pass. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Lenelvaklakh chiefs moved for some time to Lebaike, about 100 metres from the coast, a little to the north of the Matanvat pass, no doubt to gain easier access to recruiting boats and weapons. When the conflicts intensified, they returned to Lenelvaklakh, inland and less exposed. There they were joined by the four survivors of Leneluab chiefdom after the 1918 flu, two women and two small children.

After contacting the Adventists and giving them land at Tontar Asak in the mid-1910s, Sale wanted to set up the village in front of this pass. But he was the only one in favour of abandoning the tradition, as the men of Nekhnel Batikh wanted to keep the custom and stay in the interior during this period of general insecurity. A few years later, he managed to persuade them to move to Tontar Asak. After his death in the early 1920s, the men of Malsakh challenged Lobol's authority, saying that there was no longer a chief because religion had replaced him. Lobol's men moved to Lokhor, south of the Matanvat Pass, around which the Teste of Botniar and Lebwet Mul had already resided for some years. For the first time, the right and left sides of the Lenelvaklakh chieftaincy no longer lived in the same village. - At that time, Big Nambas from Nevenbwis and later from Makhawe came to Lerogrog and Matanvat to escape the wars in their region.

On his return from the Presbyterian school in Port Vila in 1927, where he had been married³⁷, Timothy Kaskavie (Malsakh) settled near Lokhor where the chiefs were, in a place he called Vorvor 'place of prayer'. He soon criticised the drinking of the Lobol youth, saying in a sermon, 'The young chiefs are too noisy'. Attendance at services and prayers was a condition of residence in the mission stations that were the coastal villages. The mission was hegemonic and T. Kaskavie was known to be particularly intransigent by the Teste of Matanvat. He only became friendly and conciliatory when people complied with his religious orders. In relation to the Lobol chiefs, he probably also wanted, as a man of Malsakh, to take over the position of elder that Tor Tara had given to Malasuv (17.8.1951). The chiefs could not accept being treated in this way. At a mass, during the consecration where eyes are to be closed, Kaku patted his brothers on the shoulder and motioned for them to leave in silence. They went back to repairing the houses in Lebaike. There they were joined by the few survivors, two chiefs and three Teste, some with wives and children, from Botormalav-Tamalvar I and remained there until after the war. This is also where the last survivors of Naure and Norukvat died.

They organised two *nanaki* in their coastal settlements, in 1934 – requested and filmed by Tom Harrisson – and in 1937. All the chiefs of Malsakh (except of course the *elder* Thimoty Kaskavie), Botormalav and Leneluab residing in Matanvat, the Presbyterian village, or in Tontar Asak, the Adventist village, took part in these *nanaki*, although they could not be considered as neo-pagans because this return to the custom was only temporary. The participants in these *nanaki*, whom we met in 1978, still felt the joy of a traditional festival and an outlet for the pressure of

³⁷ July 25, 1927, according to the inscription on his grave. The missions married their *elders* and *teachers* before sending them to a village, to avoid the risk of adultery (Thompson 1981).

missionary prohibitions that reigned daily in the village³⁸. Thus, Lobol remained attached to tradition and refused Christianisation, but the 'Christians' were also keen to return to the custom occasionally.

The village of Nokorvat and the hamlet of Lemorov (Nebet Datav), neighbouring Botniar in the interior, were among the last to descend to the coast, probably in the late 1920s.

Around 1950, Kaku went to plant opposite the tiny Sonkha pass, on the Norukvat land that had become his due to the extinction of that village (19.6.1952). A little later he built his house near the large Norukvat pass at Tontar Asuv and was joined by Chief Etienne and later by Racrac Charley. The Teste of Botniar and Lebwet Mul then took over the lands granted to Tor Tara, the founder of Lenelvaklakh. At the same time, Nebet Datav moved from Matanvat to Sebukhas, breaking away from the Presbyterian mission before being contacted by the French Protestants Charlemagne. Mk Taivar followed them in these moves, replicating their mode of residence in the interior. This move facilitated Varvaras' polygamy and that of the assessor.

Thus, the movement of villages took place in relation to wars, to the reception or establishment of missions, and also to their detachments. These 'strategic' migrations between the coast and the interior or between places on the seashore, according to the passage of missionaries, and the conversions that followed, show that Christianisation was not yet conceived as a religious faith and, prior to ecumenism, the missions hastened to welcome the faithful in a spirit of competition³⁹. The movement of villages first followed traditional relationships. Thus, the survivors of Leneluab moved to Lenelvaklakh with Lobol and followed him to Tontar Asak, where they remained because it was the end of their salt road, and they later became Adventists. Survivors of Botormalav joined Lobol while it was in Lebaike. - Similarly, when the Amokh, the last to leave the Big Nambas plateau, moved to the coast in the 1970s, they appealed to the Catholic mission, avoiding the Adventist and Presbyterian missions, where they would have been seen as 'cadets' compared to the older converted chiefdoms.

The installation of the Condominium

The New Hebrides was an uncontrolled area until the last decade of the 19th century. Sandalwood traders and recruiters ruled the area. From the 1830s onwards, English and French settlers moved to Efate and the Southern Islands, and in the following

38 In 1978, Mk Sob of the Adventist village of Tontar Asak took me to the bush to record traditional songs because the *teacher* would not allow any element of paganism in the village.

39 Now there is relative stability in mission membership, but departures to American or Filipino minority churches, which are gradually being established in the Pacific, show that the process of conversion under local 'policies' has not disappeared.

decades to the Northern Islands (Ballard, Bedford and Thieberger, forthcoming). Planters settled on land they thought they had permanently 'bought' and committed various abuses; many were killed (Thompson 1981). France and Britain watched and supported each other's settlers, and then decided to give protection to everyone, whatever their nationality. A Joint Naval Commission was created in 1887 and based in Port Vila, but it did not change things much because of the lack of a common plan for this shared and coveted space.

The subsequent Condominium from 1906 onwards suffered for a long time from the same problem of lack of unity of decision to administer the colony effectively. Until the 1910s, there was no administrative presence outside Efate other than the passage of the Residency ship or military vessels conducting reprisals. The English and French settlers were a priori responsible to their own jurisdiction, but they had the option of choosing the other power's. The Condominium was in fact tripartite, with an administration dedicated to the Melanesians, represented by the 'Lawyer of the Indigenous'. But this remained embryonic and ineffective due to a lack of resources. This situation affected the Northern Islands and North Malekula until the beginning of the 20th century; sandalwood and beche-de-mer traders and recruiters could practically do whatever they wanted without being bothered.

The Condominium presence in Malekula began in 1912 with the French delegation at Lamap, Port Sandwich⁴⁰ and the British in Port Stanley, Bushman Bay, in the mid-1920s. Prior to this, the British managed North Malekula from their delegation at Hog Harbour, Santo. In their early years, the French and British administrations were much too far away from North Malekula to be able to control the situation and they had neither the means nor the interest to solve the problem of the tribal wars that raged until the 1920s. There were attempts to retaliate for attacks on Europeans and missions, but there was little concern for inter-village warfare, as depopulation facilitated colonists' settlement. The interior and, at times, also the coast of North Malekula were beyond the control of the Condominium and simply declared 'no-go areas'. Nevertheless, Europeans took advantage of the Condominium's limited resources to come and sell arms, ammunition and alcohol. It was only in the 1920s, when wars became less frequent, mainly due to a 'lack of fighters', that the administration began to have some power in the region. However, until the 1950s, the only response to attacks of North-west Malekula coastal villages was to declare a 'no go zone' of the Big Nambas country.

In 1925 (20.2.1954), the English delegation, in the person of District Agent Adam, appointed an assessor to Matanvat: Mk Taivar, the chieftaincy heirs before him being absent: Kaku was working on a plantation in Epi, Matan Sale (Etienne) and Racrac were at the Adventist school in Aore. Thus, even more than the missions, the administrative presence was remote and applied the principle of indirect government by assessors. This was nevertheless an improvement on the previous situation where the exercise of justice was only applied to attacks on Europeans, who were always considered in their rights, and was based on the collective responsibility of the

40 The French had established a small garrison there in the late 1880s.

natives, a general practice in all the colonies which had disastrous effects on the relations between the colonised and the colonisers.

Settlers

The settlement of merchants and settlers began in the 1860s, at South-west Bay and Port Sandwich, and then moved up the coastal plain on the East coast. In the 1880s, before the installation of a mixed administration, an Anglophobic Irishman from New Caledonia, Higginson, sent emissaries to buy land in the name of the French, making illiterate Melanesians sign (with a cross) papers listing the names of land they did not always own, without precise boundaries or area, in exchange for a few metres of calico, tobacco sticks, at best a few iron tools, and at worst, alcohol, arms and ammunition. Settlers were then sent to claim control of the archipelago by France. Some settlers who came to the New Hebrides settled on land 'bought' in this way. This land grabbing and dishonest trading practices were often the cause of murders of settlers and traders in the south and on the eastern side of Malekula (Guiart, 2013).

In North Malekula, settlers had moved to Norsup by 1920, then to Leuru, opposite Vao. It was not until the wars were completely over in the early 1930s that settlers moved to the far north-west of the peninsula. Inkost made a plantation on land he had not paid for, north of the Tontar Asuv pass (31.8.1951). He later put a manager, Ronnie Kabar, an Arab from Aden, who was called Malabar because of confusion with the Indians. One day in September 1940, G. Foucher landed at Vovo and tried to settle on land owned by Mk Kaon, which had recently been cleared and planted with coconut trees by members of the Cooperative. Racrac Charley and Paul Tamlulum wrote to the British District Agent⁴¹ and he had to leave, a rare occurrence in those days.

Thus, wars, depopulation and the subsequent displacement of villages disrupted traditional society, preventing it from functioning and allowing missions to be established. Administration came next and settlers did not arrive in north-west Malekula until well after the establishment of the Condominium. The reason for this was the permanent state of war with fire arms provided by recruiters in the region until the 1920s.

2.2. The effects of colonisation on traditional society

Power, presence and decision making

The traditional society was disorganised but the chiefs sought to retain their power. However, they had to reckon with the new authorities: the missions and the administration, and also with the other Melanesians who wanted to enjoy power in the new society of the coastal villages.

41 Archives British District Agent, Northern District, file 25/15 'Paul of Aoba1941', letter of 13 September 1940.

The traditional equilibrium that had been established for centuries between the chiefs and the Teste was being challenged. Plans for *nanaki* with human sacrifices of several dozen men were made after the first contacts. These did not take place, but they could have been aimed at reducing the Teste population. Wars and exchanges of human victims had the same effect. The rivalry was open: before he died, the Leneluab chief asked Kaku to take his wife and son under his protection, lest the Teste try to kill them.

The administration was looking for men to become its legitimate representatives of the population, excluding traditional chiefs to undermine their power. The appointment of assessors was based on various criteria: the oldest man, a person already known to the administration, a Bishlaman speaker, a member of a distant branch of the chieftaincy or even a complete stranger to it (18.9.1954). Nevertheless, his power was far superior to that of the chief because the administration considered him as such: Mk Taivar was usually referred to as 'chief' in the correspondence of the District Agents who were unaware of his real position; he was the 'administrative' chief, granted with almost unconditional support of the District Agent. He enjoyed almost unlimited and unquestionable personal power, whereas before, the chief ruled in meetings of the village *nakhamal* and had to respect the traditional laws.

Before contact, the traditional power could experience 'internal' changes: inversion of the birth ranks of the sons of Tor Tara, the rise of Salior. But now it was confronted with external forces brought by the Europeans: the Presbyterian *elder*, Timothy Kaskavie (Maksakh) and the Adventist *teacher*, supported by their missions, and the assessor, Mk Taivar, a trusted man of the administration. The struggle was intense, with the chief being challenged by the younger branches and other followers of missionary teaching, and sidelined by the assessor. When Mk Taivar died, it appeared that his son believed he was the chief, following in his father's footsteps. His father had never informed him of his position as assessor and of the exact genealogy of the chieftom.

Missions and tradition

The Christian religion could not coexist with a tradition that included cannibalism and polygamy, which the missions awkwardly called '*darkness*'. They thought they were coming to bring light and to 'cleanse' the souls of the pagans of their faults (14.7.1956). Intransigent, they demanded a complete break with custom, which had to disappear in the face of a faith totally in line with the Scriptures. This meant banning all areas of life that might refer to ancestor worship: traditional calendar ceremonies, *nanaki*, birth and death rites, *kava*, and even customary dances and songs. Polygamy and traditional marriage, with the payment of a dowry in reverse, were also seen as inspirations of the devil and equated with sin and ignorance. It was compulsory to wear European clothes and attend daily prayers to live in the coastal villages, which were authoritatively dominated by the missionary and his *teachers* or *elders*. These

constraints and the new prohibitions were felt to be a disregard for the local culture which many, not just Racrac Charley, did not accept.

In a region where the chiefs remained the guarantors of tradition, there was practically no conversion of a chief who brought an entire village with him. The missions had to proselytise among the next-born branches of the chiefdoms, the *Teste*⁴² and the women, and they participated actively in reducing the traditional power of chiefs and erasing tradition, starting with ancestors' cult.

The pagans in the interior continued to live according to customary law, while the Christians who arrived on the coast switched suddenly, or gradually in spirit, to Christian rules - for example, the seventh day after death, when the head of the dead was detached and moved to the *natab*, where ancestors' skulls were laid to stay, was still remembered (13.5.1958). In the area of traditional justice, 'traditional outlaws' took refuge at the mission and became the cause of attacks by pagans, in order to take them back and because they felt their social system was threatened. The missions thus supported thieves and murderers, because they ignored or did not recognise the crimes that had taken place under paganism. Conversion represented a break with the past. However, when problems arose between pagans and Christians, they continued, like the administration, to apply collective responsibility towards the pagans who had remained in the bush and were a-priori suspicious of the newcomers, preferring to support their more ancient followers. They thus perpetrated injustices and imprisoned innocent people (14.7.1956).

Sexual morality was a priority area of action for the missions, which called for the inclusion of adultery (punishable by nine months' imprisonment), incitement to adultery, seduction, incest and sexual violence⁴³ in the Code de l'Indigénat⁴⁴. The Condominium accepted this because it was sometimes the cause of murders. However, they wanted to apply the canon law which allows marriages to the 'third degree of kinship' (the fifth degree in civil law), which represented traditional incest⁴⁵. In a still recent context of polygamy and relatively accepted extramarital relationships and libertinism on European plantations, the consequences of these changes became difficult to control. There was little understanding of what was allowed and what was forbidden: a classificatory 'sister' (forbidden to have sex) was called *jokhos*, but there was no word for a third cousin. Seeing traditionally incestuous unions allowed at the mission, some men did the same outside marriage. When the women refused, in view of the traditional horror of such relationships, they were often raped and, if the

42 Chiefs and *Teste* sometimes adopted different religions.

43 Adultery, aiding and abetting adultery, seduction, incest and indecent assault (Great Britain Colonial Office 1948, p. 25-26).

44 Renamed the Native Criminal Code in the early 1960s.

45 The rule of the return of the granddaughter (Rallu 1985) was that a woman given in marriage to another *nakhmal* was returned by one of her granddaughters. But she could not marry a grandson of her real grandmother, because the sixth degree of kinship was too close. She was only marriageable to another line of the *nakhmal*, which was at least an eighth degree marriage. - The missions were unaware that the Oceanian kinship system was designed to increase socio-political relations and also to avoid inbreeding in the small populations that were originally settled, and with depopulation some villages had fewer than twenty adults.

assessor reported the facts to the District Agent, but this was rarely the case unless he found it to his advantage, the man was imprisoned (26.4.1951).

The missions sought to abolish the custom of reverse dowry (bride price) and initially tried, unsuccessfully, to minimise it by freezing the amount. This also had the advantage of weakening the role of the extended family, which contributed to the payment, and lowering the status of the maternal and wife-giver lines, reducing the cohesion of traditional society and making individuals more manageable. But the price of the dowry continued to rise as Melanesians signed more frequently on European plantations and *nakhamal* demanded more and more money to let a girl go.

However, it was also necessary to provide wives for the men who came to live in the coastal villages, which was difficult in a context of a very unbalanced sex ratio to the disadvantage of men. The reception at the mission of female bushwomen complaining of marital violence was justified, but difficult for their husbands to accept, especially in the case of adultery - which also took place at the mission, sometimes even on the part of *teachers* or *elders* (22.8.1951) – or simply of women fleeing to coastal villages by interest in a different way of life. The missions that did not recognise traditional marriages, were always ready to welcome a woman to (re)marry her to one of their flock, often in another of their stations⁴⁶. Men who lost their wives felt this was an injustice and, in the traditional context of a bride price that had to be compensated in case of separation, a 'theft'⁴⁷. They then organized attacks against the mission stations (22.8.1951; 23.8.1951; 13.6.1953; 14.7.1956).

Despite their efforts, the missions did not succeed in cleaning up morals: adultery increased as a result of temporary moves to work on European plantations, and there were still some old polygamists in the early 1980s. People left the mission to marry a new woman, without necessarily breaking up with the previous one, occasionally returning to their former wives. The assessors used their position extensively, taking adulterous women as concubines. The missionaries ignored or pretended to ignore the polygamy of the assessors in order to keep them at the mission with their families and let them reside a little away from the village, like Mk Taivar - they could not oppose the administration anyway.

For the Melanesians, the marriages 'arranged' by the missions were not very different from adultery (theft of women), except that they were legalised by a religious service which they did not really understand. For them, there was a discrepancy between the Christian rules, the practices of the missions and the decisions of the administration, and the Europeans lost their credibility. Justice seemed to be absent at all levels of colonial society as Racrac Charley expressed it on many occasions. People stayed at the mission for the few material benefits it brought, to get a wife and to have the support of the missionary and the administration against the pagans, but they were ready to convert to another mission or to create a new hamlet, as Varvaras and Mk Taivar did in Sebukhas.

46 A married gentile couple coming to the mission who remained together were not separated, but in case of adultery, the wife was often removed from her spouse and remarried.

47 Thus, adultery was translated into Bislama as '*steal*'.

The missionaries gave an inaccurate picture of the situation of women. The litany of terms for the low status of women used by missionaries: 'degraded', 'pitiful', 'dishonoured', both 'victims' and 'brutes', 'slaves', 'trampled', or in another register: 'unloving', 'concubines', 'unfaithful', 'licentious', 'libertine' and 'depraved' (Douglas, 2004)¹⁸ contains obvious contradictions. The last four adjectives, in particular, are difficult to reconcile with the position of 'degraded' women who were 'slaves' to their husbands. These judgements, together with their role as entertainer for Europeans (Guiart, 2013), were part of the colonial and settler 'discourse' (ideology would be too big a word) of bringing civilisation. It is remarkable to find this same vision of the women in traditional society among both missionaries and settlers, despite the latter's almost general distancing from religious practice and morality. This was a way of justifying the reception of married bush women at the mission and their (re)marriage, and for the settlers, the recruitment of women without their husband's consent (Caillard 2016).

The condition of women was inferior to that of men, but not as much as the Europeans claimed. Women did much of the work in the gardens, but it was the men who cleared the brush and built fences ; women lit the fires and planted. Men also worked in the maintenance of the gardens. The role of the maternals in the kinship system ensured a certain status for women, and patrilineage and patrilocality were not absolute (Annexes 5 and 6). They had rights to land that the patriarchal Christian missions eroded and attempted to erase (McDougall 2016; Naupa 2009). Far from being sad, they were laughing, mocking (Guiart 2013), going to visit their families (19.6.1952) and sometimes joking at the expense of men (Annex 1).

The administration, by punishing sexual violence - if the assessor, the missionary or his *teachers* and *elders* brought it to his attention - reduced the frequency of the most severe cases. However, Christian religions, which were more patriarchal than most island societies, posited the superiority of man on the basis of the creation myth of Adam and Eve and affirmed his position as head of the family, resulting in a lowering of the social status of women, with the further consequence of justifying domestic violence, on the basis that the wife must obey her husband and has no right to refuse him sex (Rallu 2018)⁴⁸. The status of women in colonial society, white or otherwise, was far from egalitarian and could be seen as degraded compared to the situation and its evolution in Europe.

In the socio-economic sphere, the missions were mainly concerned with making good Christians, which for them meant men who were disinterested in the material world and prayed daily under the guidance of clergy. But the Melanesians could see that most settlers did not go to church or temple. They were familiar with the European way of life from working on the plantations and, like the Europeans, they put material well-being first. So the missions opposed the Cooperative from its inception. They

48 Currently, the Pacific Island countries are among those with the highest incidence of such violence and the lowest share of women in politics and decision-making positions. This situation is a major concern of International Organisations and the application of religious principles delays and hinders programmes to achieve gender equality (Rallu 2018).

had felt the risk of being left behind by the arrival of another source of improved living standards.

Despite the intrigues of the assessors and the prohibitions of the missions, the Melanesians remained in the mission villages (13.8.1951), because economic life was now centred on the plantations along the coast and the passage of ships, and also because to return to the interior would have meant a return to paganism and a rejection of European power, leading to mistrust of the administration, and even imprisonment. In the inland villages, there was also the risk of revenge following the still recent conflicts.

Racrac Charley's judgement of the missions is particularly negative because of the injustices in the treatment of adulterers and the ensuing attacks and, above all, because of their unanimous opposition to the Cooperative. He blames the Adventist mission in particular, but all were doing the same. His position seems exaggerated, but it is because he wants a return to the customs that were prevented by the permanent presence of the missions, in the person of the missionary himself in the large villages or of his *teachers* and *elders* in the others, regulating daily life in its smallest details. Christian first names had to be used in the coastal villages, but he still uses *nanaki* titles for those who have one and always adds the traditional name and sometimes the village of origin to the Christian first name. In the past, ancestors were honoured almost daily by drinking *kava*, but this lacked the regularity of collective prayers at fixed times in the morning and evening. The replacement of tradition with new prohibitions that were not consistently applied - the assessor escaped and allowed family members and friends to do the same - took the form of a clearly and harshly felt double discrimination.

These attitudes and practices were due to the fact that most missionaries, and even more so their wives, were poorly educated, except for the Adventists and Anglicans. Moreover, they were not trained to work in a non-Western context where they would be confronted with traditional practices that were unknown to them. It is true that little or nothing was known about Pacific cultures at the time, except for cannibalism and polygamy⁴⁹. The missionaries' task was simply to eradicate these barbaric customs and bring these peoples to full Christian faith, 'from darkness to light'.

They had been taught to implement Christianity in its strictest form and on the ground they applied the Christian rules harshly. This required the complete disappearance of almost all traditions, which were considered to be related to ancestor worship. Some missionaries dreamed of creating the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God on earth, on these islands. Their lack of diplomacy and intransigence were unheard of in societies where decisions were taken jointly by the various *nakhamal* of the chiefdom. This cost the lives of several of them through simple blunders: for example, relying on a village or hamlet and then abandoning it to go to another

49 However, Codrington (1891), a minister of the Melanesian Mission, had published *The Melanesians*, a book based mainly on information from Banks Island students at his school in Norfolk. But this mission was the only one to consider that certain aspects of the customs could be retained as long as they did not conflict with Christianity.

apparently more receptive one, which appeared to be a betrayal in favour of former or potential enemies. Converting by inspiring fear of the curse of the Christian god against the heathens could also, in the event of an epidemic, only lead to attempts to eliminate this new supernatural power that competed with local magics and killed them (Douglas 1989). As the positions of Racrac Charley show, people were not prepared to recognise themselves as inferior and to submit to outsiders. A better preparation to work in a non-European context would have avoided some unfortunate acts.

The work of the missions had positive aspects that Racrac Charley hardly ever mentions, rejecting their work in the same way that they had rejected his culture and his desire for development through the Cooperative. The mission stations on the coast ensured the survival of war-torn villages by taking in their last survivors and providing some medical care, but he mainly remembers the conflicts they generated. They were the closest European presence to the Melanesian populations, while the Condominium administration remained distant from them, even after the installation of delegations in the islands. As a result, they sometimes prevented the exactions of unscrupulous recruiters and settlers. They also prepared for westernisation and the change in lifestyle. If the teaching of the missionary schools, the only piece of the colonial education system, centred on reading and writing from the Bible and a little arithmetic, was insufficient to participate in a modern economy, some Melanesians, including Racrac Charley himself, learnt to read, write and some basic arithmetic, even if he regularly made mistakes (26.4.1951, 2.11.1953). It should be noted that, contrary to what Europeans in Europe were taught, in the then New Hebrides as anywhere else, social life implied some skill in numeracy, for economic or ceremonial exchanges, for bride price when wife receivers became wife givers – or vice et versa (2.11.1953), funeral contributions, etc., and also *nanaki* sacrifices of hundreds of pigs of various grades. They used cycas leaves, breaking 9 pinnates and leaving the 10th, 20th, etc. unbroken. All Melanesian languages have words for numbers up to 1,000.

The colonial administration

The colonial system of indirect government was based on assessors bringing before the District Agents the cases they wanted and presenting the charges as they wanted⁵⁰. The assessor was the only person who was listened to by the administration, as the contradictory positions of two interlocutors could not be disentangled. He decided on the freedom or imprisonment of anyone in his area and could indulge in all sorts of abuses without the risk of being denounced, because the District Agents dealt only with him. In any case, he had the full support of the latter, whose main concern was that there should be no uprising in his region. He thus enjoyed an authority unknown until then. Examples of this state of affairs are numerous in the writings of Racrac Charley: the assessors incited adultery, gang-rape of Teste women and divorces, arranged "marriages", took adulterous women for themselves or left them with friends while waiting to hand them over to the courts, were polygamists, ordered murders,

⁵⁰ When the assessor did not speak Bislama, such as Mk Taivar, a villager served as interpreter.

despoiled immigrants, sold land they did not own, had innocent people put in prison, etc. (26.4.1951). (see 26.4.1951; 20.2.1954; 18.9.1954; 31.3.1955). In Big Nambas country, these exactions were the cause of wars between Christians on the coast and pagans from the interior, which often extended to Small Nambas Christian villages (1.11.1953).

In the relationship between Melanesians and Europeans, the administration supported the settlers by not intervening, or as late as possible, in claims for usurped land. The administrative system was based on discrimination at all levels, with the Code de l'Indigénat. Melanesians were the only ones imprisoned for drunkenness or adultery, whereas this was commonly the case for the settlers. Sexual relations with white women were forbidden to them, punishable by imprisonment, whereas the Europeans did not hesitate to have occasional or permanent Melanesian concubines⁵¹ some were even polygamous (Caillard 2016). And finally, all the Europeans, settlers, missions and administration joined together in opposition to the Cooperative, imprisoning its leaders and some of its members on multiple occasions. In this, it appeared to deny the natives equality with the Europeans, despite the rhetoric and Christian principles of equality for all. The Melanesians clearly understood the aim of the Europeans to keep them in a state of cheap and servile labour.

Land conflicts

While chiefs (immigrants in the case of Navhav chieftaincies, among others) and Teste (landowners) had found a modus vivendi for several centuries, land became the basis of wealth and a source of conflict in a plantation economy. The chiefs wanted to take the land of their Teste and the settlers wanted to build huge plantations on the land of extinct villages. The quasi-inalienable right to the land bothered the administration, which did not understand that the chief did not own all the land and wanted more fluidity to allow the settlers' plantations to develop, to facilitate the installation of missions and refugees from wars or natural disasters.

Depopulation has greatly increased conflicts over land ownership. In traditional society, land followed descent in the paternal line, including recognised adulterine and adopted children, and some land was owned by women. In case of *nakhamal* extinction, matrilineal descendants could inherit land. With the extinction of *nakhamal*, chiefdoms and even whole villages, less usual and therefore more easily contestable ways to claim land had to be considered. Some people claimed land of extinct *nakhamal*, pretending to descend from adulterous children - a filiation that was sometimes difficult to prove and even more difficult to disprove - or adopted children (including by '*khum runu*'), provided that it had been traditionally paid for. One can also inherit land because the last survivor of a village has been integrated, or simply allowed to reside, in a *nakhamal* or village and donated it. But all possible reasons have also been sought for taking land, including unreturned *nanaki*, which never happened before contact - however, in this case the areas that can be claimed

51 Racrac Charley lists 41 settlers, married to European women or single, who had sexual relations with Melanesian women (Guiart 2013).

are relatively small. When no rights could be proven, encroachments and usurpations of land occurred, especially when villages had moved, even temporarily, as a result of wars, when families had migrated and between chiefs and Teste. The assessors did not hesitate to grab land for themselves or to sell it to others (31.8.1951, noon; 18.9.1954).

It is important to note that the extinction of Teste villages resulted in land being provided to chiefs who had none. Land from extinct villages, chiefs and Teste, passed to people claiming distant and sometimes dubious matrimonial alliances.

Immigrants

From the late 1920s, inland Small Nambas villages were all abandoned – except in the central hills inland of Espiegle and Malua Bays. People from some villages sometimes had moved to different coastal villages, according to former alliances and recent conflicts – also, it was not infrequent, traditionally, to stay temporarily, or even settle permanently, with wife givers.

Thus, the villages, or mission stations, on the coast were very mixed. In the case of Matanvat, there were :

- 1- survivors from the villages of Lenelvaklakh and Botniar-Lebwet Mul, the "natives",
 - 2- survivors from neighbouring or related villages (Botormalav and Leneluab),
 - 3- survivors from villages with more distant connections (Naure, Norukvat, Nokorvat, etc.),
- and refugees from other regions, called 'foreigners' or 'strangers':
- 4- Big Nambas, who settled in the villages of Tontar Asak, Matanvat and Lerogrog in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,
 - 5- war refugees from South-west Bay, who came around the turn of the 20th century,
 - 6- refugees from Ambrym, following the eruption of the volcano in 1951,
 - 7- migrants from Pentecost or Aoba who came because of various links that had been created on the plantations in Epi or Santo, or more recently in the framework of the Cooperative.

This mosaic of populations meant that Bislaman was used as the common language and the Matanvat language was lost⁵². In these cluster villages, traditional relations were disrupted and custom was difficult to apply, but this did not justify the use of an assessor appointed by the administration and responsible for an area extending far beyond the boundaries of the chiefdom he originates, the villages and chiefdoms being traditionally independent. This also complicated the problem of land. While immigrants from nearby villages continued to garden and plant on their land in the interior, land was lent to remote refugees, called 'strangers'. But with the plantation economy, compensation was sought, and they could not pay rent arrears for twenty or thirty years. This led to the exploitation of the refugees by the natives, which led to the imprisonment of the leaders of the Cooperative (*see* 26.4.1951; 20.2.1954). Some

52 It is now reduced to a few elderly speakers and a few families in Matanvat and Tontar Asak.

immigrants bought land paid for in pigs and money, sometimes sold by people, including the assessor, who were not the owners (31.8.1951, noon). They were also involved in adultery and accused of witchcraft (poisonings⁵³). Many of the Big Nambas and South Malekula immigrants in North-west Small Nambas villages left in the 1950s, returning to their villages or to other places. A few remain to this day, especially those who 'bought' land.

In short, the upheavals of contact: wars, depopulation and the displacement of villages were accompanied by the prohibition of custom and its rules: hierarchical (or presence), matrimonial, social, economic and 'political' (or strategical). Traditional power was challenged and sidelined, the influence of the extended family (*nakhamal*), maternal relatives, wife-givers combated⁵⁴. This was not replaced by a comprehensive and fair judicial system free of discrimination. On the contrary, there was double discrimination: between Europeans and Melanesians and, among the latter, between ordinary people and those serving the colonial administrations, the assessors, or the missions, the *elders* and *teachers*. The Melanesians had lost their bearings in society and in the justice system. Access to power and the improvement of their way of life depended on relations with the administration and the missions, which they also tried to bypass as much as possible.

The Melanesians made attempts to play the two administrations, English and French, against each other, the missions against each other or against the administration (30.11.1953; 4.5.1958), but with little success. Racrac Charley, in a very pragmatic political vision, wanted to bring together all the authorities of the colonial society: the indigenous customs, the missions, the French and English administrations, the Cooperative and the immigrants to allow everyone to express themselves and to reach a concerted decision (1.5.1951; 13.6.1952). This was in contrast to the place given to them by the Condominium administration in the society and the colonial economy where they were subjects without any decision-making power and a labour force at the service of the colonists, represented only by the 'Lawyer of the Indigenous', without any real power.

While social position was traditionally linked to origin, kinship and rank in *nanaki* society, this was a time of 'every man for himself'. Everyone tried to make the best of the situation, which meant playing along with the Europeans, as Racrac Charley himself did.

53 Tropical plants, in various preparations, crushed, grated or decocted, provide many poisons, some of which are fastacting, others which cause cancer or affect the brain and nervous system.

54 In the 1970s, when Christianisation was almost universal, missions re-emphasised traditional patrilineal lineages, following a practice common to all religions of using the family as a means of pressure on individuals. Pro- or anti-independence blocks were thus constructed according to denomination, which also covered language (French or English), and led to the unfortunate events that disrupted the path to independence.

The Cooperative Native Company

In the 1920s, many young men from North-west Malekula worked on plantations in Bushman Bay, on the south-east coast, in Malo, Aore or Epi. Kaku had worked at Epi, then at Malo and Aore where, in 1939, he was captain of a settler's boat, Willy Charpentier, sailing around to collect copra. The Melanesians exploited the natural coconut plantations or small plantations they had built. In the 1930s, some of them had already bought motorboats (17.7.1954) to transport their production to the settlers' boat landing points. It was time to move up a gear. Kaku was one of those most familiar with the colonial plantation economy, buying copra on the islands and selling it at a higher price in Santo. He wanted to do the same, which meant forming a group large enough to buy a boat that could deliver large quantities to Santo. R. Charley, Kaku's classificatory brother, was a strong supporter of this project, but Kaku played the role of chief, with Nebet Taram having been in the background for three generations.

3.1. Foundation and history of the Cooperative

Kaku contacted some chiefs in North Malekula to form a company along the lines of the Europeans. To manage it, he needed a man who had been to school. Paul Tammlum, an orphan had been taken in and sent to school by the Gubbay family in Vila, who later employed him as a servant, but he could barely write (Guiart 2013). The founders of the cooperative went to Aoba and asked him to join them. Several meetings were held and everyone agreed to embark on this experiment. However, the missions were reluctant, feeling the risk of being left behind and losing control of the villages (7.8.1951). The company was 'registered' in Vila with the 'Lawyer of Indigenous'⁵⁵, Mr Ballard, under the name "Company Cooperative Paul Tammlum - Matan Charlie, Matanvat, Malekula, New Hebrides".

In fact, there was no text to register a Melanesian company, as the company code could only register French or English companies, and this document has never been found (Guiart 2013). As the company could not be registered, it was not allowed to buy, sell or recruit: these economic activities were exclusively for Europeans.

55

In French, 'Avocat des Indigènes', he was in charge of representing indigenous people in the Joint Court, but this position did not attract high profile people as it had little power and resources.

Moreover, Melanesians were not qualified to manage a business of such size. Mr Ballard advised the founders to take on Dal Gubbay, who had taken in Paul Tamlulum, as European manager. They agreed, but had the implications of this dual management been properly explained to them? It was, in fact, a trusteeship of the Cooperative which became, in a way, the company of the European. The Melanesians thought that this situation would only be transitory, or so it was presented to them. The members each contributed 5 sh. and the sum would have been deposited in a bank, also never identified, as the company, unregistered, could not have a bank account.

The administration was interested in this project and asked the members to build a hut in Matanvat for the District Agent and a road around North Malekula, taking up a project from 1935 which had only been very partially completed. The people of the North-east Islets had refused to work on it because its route gave priority to the plantations of the Europeans and they feared that it would attract new settlers; they did so again in 1939 (8.8.1951, 8 p.m.). The Cooperative was a copra production and marketing enterprise, but it also envisaged other products: cotton, of which there were already a few plantations, corn and cocoa. These products did not develop, due to the lack of interest of the Santo settlers in marketing them. The monoculture of copra was thus a legacy of colonisation⁵⁶.

The enterprise included a 'consumption' component with village shops buying at wholesale prices from Santo. It was planned to distribute free food to members (Guiart 1951); this idea was soon abandoned, but Donald (Dal's son) Gubbay took it up later (*see* below). In fact, the Cooperative's shops were open to all, but people often paid on credit.

Initially, the association was based on groups in the far North Malekula in traditional relationships, and it quickly tried to expand. The people of Tenmian and Espiegle Bay (original Navhav chiefdoms, south of Matanvat) and their refugees in Malo and Aore were approached (23.8.1951). Efforts were made to use the immigrants in Matanvat to establish relations with their villages of origin in Big Nambas country (8.8.1951), Suroit Bay and Ambrym, but without success as far as the former were concerned.

The members embarked on a fever of clearing to make large plantations, just like the Europeans; men from Aoba came to help in Vovo. In 1978, people were still talking about it with astonishment and admiration. They never expected the arrival of goods by miracle, sent by the ancestors, some mythical character like John Frum - whom Racrac Charley avoided naming in his writings - or, after the war, the Americans.

In its early days, the Cooperative collected copra and cotton. Paul Tamlulum toured Malekula with Racrac Charley, urging Melanesian growers to become members to sell their produce at a better price and to get higher wages by signing on as workers in the Cooperative: 5 sh. per day compared to £1 per month for the settlers. They predicted that it would overtake the settlers' businesses. In 1941, settlers in South

⁵⁶ In the 1970s, cocoa cultivation was developed to counteract the fall in copra prices.

Malekula complained to the administration. They accused them of asking Melanesians to work only for the company and spoke of '*communism*' and '*dangerous agitator and disturber of the peace*'⁵⁷. Guiart (2013) speaks of many false accusations made by the planters to put an end to this enterprise which threatened their existence. The British Residence considered removing Paul Tamlulum, but was reluctant to imprison him because he had not broken any law. - The Labour Code only concerned contracts with Europeans and was intended to stop their abusive practices, with part of the salary being paid in bonuses which were revised at the colonist's whim. - He was nevertheless detained for six months, for a reason which echoed the colonists' words '*to prevent a disturbance of the peace*'. Bule Sarinose John, Kaku and Racrac Charley were sent with him. These were not convictions as such because '*they have broken no law*' and this decision was not the result of a court judgement, but a simple '*administrative detention of natives*', a procedure which was not yet legal and which the British Residency was seeking to legalise by a '*Police Regulation*' including '*banishment*'⁵⁸.

These imprisonments made the Melanesians aware that the Europeans were denying them equality, even though they had agreed to work within the legal framework of the Condominium and under the direction of an English settler. Nothing was done to change the legislation to allow Melanesians to set up businesses⁵⁹.

The war interlude

Recruitment for the New Hebrides Defence Force (NHDF)⁶⁰ organised by the Australians in early 1941, and from 1942 onwards, the very well-paid work on the American bases in Vila (from March) and in Santo (from May) put the Cooperative on hold for a few years. The Melanesians made friends there, especially among the Blacks, who no doubt made them dream by talking about the riches of America and making independence propaganda. Was this necessary? In their eyes, blacks wore uniforms like whites and enjoyed the same rights⁶¹. People began to prefer Americans to Europeans. Racrac Charley planted a flagpole in front of his house and attached an American pennant, and Kaku attached a traditional red mat to the roof of his house. The pennant had been given to him by a departing soldier to remember him in case he was killed, and he had told him to put it on his Cooperative's boat so he would not be mistaken for a Japanese spy. The administration handed down prison sentences to Racrac Charley, Paul Tamlulum and John Bule Sarinose, who were considered the most active in the organisation. In 1943, Racrac Charley went around in *nabas* (penis sheath) in Santo (31.8.1951 10 o'clock in the evening). This was a demand for cultural

57 File 25/15 'Paul of Aoba1941', letter of 1 March 1941, registered on 7 March.

58 File 25/15 'Paul of Aoba1941' letter of 17/4/41, registered on 8/5/1941.

59 The Melanesians were not given identity papers until the 1970s, when preparations for independence began. They used to go to work in New Caledonia as subjects of the French colonies.

60 As the International Agreements forbid the stationing of armed forces in the New Hebrides, a militia was created to oppose a possible landing by the Japanese.

61 In fact, Blacks were not allowed to fight; they were steward's or medical auxiliaries.

equality as the American presence challenged European colonial administration. The meaning of this breach of the Condominium laws - one had to dress in European style in the coastal villages - was well understood and his bravado earned him a particularly violent beating and two years' imprisonment in Lamap (24.3.1955)⁶².

After the war

In 1945-1946, the Melanesians eagerly resumed work on the plantations. The company was reorganised, with some members being elevated locally to managerial positions (11.8.1951). It was clear that the wealth was not expected to arrive from America on its own. Moreover, the Americans had left after throwing jeeps, trucks and anything else they could not take into the sea, at Million Dollar Point, which made the Melanesians feel disgusted and angry (Kolig 1987), leaving the Melanesians with the Europeans, as before (14.10.1955, dream of 6.01). They therefore looked for ways to obtain as high an income as during the war. Some of them may have fallen into cargo ideas, like Rorin Mal from Atchin (13.10.1955).

According to information given to Guiart (1951) three or four years after the fact, Racrac Charley spread out after the war with typical 'cargo' prophecies - which earned him, Paul Tamulum, Kaku and Bule Sarinose John prison sentences in 1947 - including the staking out of a field at Tontar which he later showed to the ethnologist on mission as a future airfield for the American planes promised by Captain Otto. In 1978 no one knew this story and Kaku, Joe and Ati, meeting separately, were surprised that he could have said such things because it was impossible to land planes on such rugged ground and, having worked at the US bases in Vila and Santo, Racrac Charley could not be wrong on this point. It certainly was not part of his 'prophecies' either, for if the administration had known about it, they would have had this picket line removed, just as they had the red pennant and mat at Matanvat in 1942, and Guiart would not have seen it. It was a fabrication for his interlocutor. Joe explained to me that Racrac Charley was then in dispute with Kaku over a land that had just been given to Nekhnel Batikh (19.6.1952; 15.1.1956) and had delimited the area he claimed against Kaku. Thus, while the ethnologist was investigating possible messianic aspects of the Cooperative but was primarily interested in promoting its economic activities, Racrac Charley would have sought to worry him, waiting for him to advise him to set up a plantation there, and would then have told him his problem. But Guiart would not have reacted - he would never have interfered in a land dispute between Melanesians anyway - and Racrac Charley's airfield became part of the cargo

⁶²Lindstrom and Gwero (1998 pp. 272-273) give an account by Jimmy Sare (Jimmy Kaku Mk Rori) that Racrac Charley hoisted this flag (pennant) on his pirogue. J. Guiart gave very limited credence to the stories of Jimmy Kaku who was easily boastful and wanted to take over land in Norukvat and Vovo on his own. According to Joe, Betnasal, Matanvat, who worked at the U.S. base in Santo, nothing of the sort happened because, like many Malekula men, Racrac Charley had come by boat and had no outrigger canoe in Santo. Traffic in the Canal du Segond was highly regulated. He later, as Jimmy says, hoisted this pennant on a mast near his home in Lebaike. But, contrary to Jimmy's account, this was not the cause of Racrac Charley's mistreatment and imprisonment for two (not seven) years at Lamap. Nevertheless, this account conveys very well the atmosphere that prevailed between the Condominium administration, the Americans and the Melanesians.

literature. Kaku simply denied the airfield story, avoiding going back to an internal land dispute in his *nakhamal*, while Jimmy was still in Santo where he had dismissed him for his individualistic behaviour (19.6.1952). Any newly arrived European was tested, to see how he could be used afterwards. It was part of the Melanesian strategy, and Racrac Charley's in particular, to worry the Europeans into doing what they wanted.

In 1978, it was recognised that Racrac Charley was talking about 'cargo' at the time, but it was in the sense of consumer goods that would become available with the money earned through the Cooperative. In this way he sought to attract as many people as possible to the organisation, which, with a Melanesian population far greater than that of the Europeans, could exceed the output of the settlers' plantations. In fact, he was only repeating and amplifying the themes he propagated with Paul Tamlumlum in 1940 and 1941: the Cooperative was to eventually supplant the settlers by enlisting all Melanesians and extend to the other islands. It was necessary to outbid each other in order to attract mass membership, while people were reluctant to join because of past imprisonments, and many villages were planning to create their own cooperatives. This was enough for the administration to label the movement as a "cargo cult". They were also able to recognise independence and nationalist ideas, but messianism was a ready-made accusation. The missions took a very dim view of this feverish activity, which competed with their Christianisation efforts to bring their followers to the 'light' and ensure their entry into heaven. Racrac Charley would not have used a supernatural argument without being immediately dismissed, for everyone understood that money is earned through work, not magic, and everyone worked - or made the immigrants work (*see below*).

The demand for rent from the Big Nambas and South West Bay immigrants for the land they had been granted was one of the means envisaged by the natives to increase their income. According to the traditional right of inalienability of the land, the immigrants could not own the land that had been granted to them for gardening, but with the economic value that the land was now taking on, the natives wanted to take it back. They enlisted the immigrants more or less by force and the latter had to work for them since they did not pay rent; they did not receive the money corresponding to their production. In 1949, they complained to the French District Agent Chadeau, who was visiting Matanvat and decided to imprison Paul Tamlumlum, Kaku, Racrac Charley, John Bule Sarinose and also Joe and some other natives of Matanvat for infringement of the labour law, although the Labour Code still only concerned European employers. Guiart then reassured District Agent Chadeau of the purely economic aims of the organisation who agreed to release the prisoners⁶³.

Nevertheless, this was a considerable shock for the natives. The administration, which had opposed their efforts to improve their condition, was now preventing them from applying traditional land law. Since some of the refugees had been displaced by the administration, especially the Big Nambas of Makhawe, this decision was a new form of dispossession. They were left without a solution to their development needs and

63 J. Guiart. pers. comm.

were put in prison where they had to work for the administration and settlers for nothing⁶⁴. To prevent this from happening again, when he addressed the administration about running the village (26.4.1951; 1.5.1951; 13.6.1952), developing the Cooperative or extending it to immigrants (14.8.1951; 20.2.1954; 28.2.1958), Racrac Charley never failed to give the assurance that they would be considered as villagers. He also reminds the District Agents on several occasions that the assessor uses the same practices (26.4.1951; 20.2.1954). However, he sometimes demands, together with the people of Atchin, that the immigrants pay rents (5.8.1954) or, when it is a question of his own land, only the rents for the gardens and the building materials obtained there and without arrears (2.4.1955).

Contents of the Imprisonment Archive

The Condominium Archives are very incomplete with regard to the prison sentences pronounced against leaders and members of the Cooperative. It only records the two imprisonments of Paul Tamlumlum in 1941 and 1957, the first and last, but he was never the only one imprisoned. There is no record of the wartime imprisonments of Racrac Charley and Kaku in 1942 for hoisting an American flag and a mat. In 1943-1944, Racrac Charley was charged with walking around in *nabas* in Santo; and in the postwar period in 1947, when the Cooperative was considered a 'cargo cult' and its leaders imprisoned, and in 1949, when the leaders and several Matanvat natives, including Joe, Betnasal, the storekeeper, and Teste (the landowner) were charged with violating the Labour Code with regard to immigrants. - Some members were also reportedly worried about enforcing 'military' discipline in post-war recruitments, though there were apparently no prison sentences. - In 1950, Guiart reassured the administration that the Cooperative's aims were purely economic, obtaining the release of members imprisoned in 1949 and avoiding hasty imprisonments later. But the administration ignored his recommendations several times, notably in 1957, when the imprisonments took place that triggered the end of the Cooperative, culminating in Paul Tamlumlum's death in prison. - Bule Sarinose John, from Pentecost, who was considered a dangerous activist, was virtually a part of all the imprisonments.

Dal Gubbay retired and was succeeded by his son, Donald (Don), who moved to Santo in 1949. He formed a partnership with Georg Wing and recruited members as labourers for his own business or for hire to other settlers. According to Guiart (1951), he withheld up to two-thirds of the salaries of the recruits and the amount of copra deliveries to repay his advances on boats, petrol and crew salaries. These sums were supposed to be credited to the Cooperative, but record keeping was very patchy and there was no bank account for the Cooperative. In fact, he confused his cash with that of the Cooperative (Guiart 2013: 457).

Among the settlers, there were rumours of huge profits and deals to recruit through the Cooperative. Access to labour after the war had become difficult and was a major concern for the planters, and recruitment was an important activity for Don Gubbay within the Cooperative. As a result, he was harassed by the administrator J. Maxwell

64 This explains part of his accusations that the District Agents are stealing (28.4.1954, 8 o'clock in the evening).

for doing this without a licence⁶⁵. In disputes with other settlers, workers were arrested and Don Gubbay asked the English District Agent to intervene with the court to prevent them from being imprisoned. The case was to be handled by the French administration. The condominium law was complicated by the fact that the natives might not be under the same jurisdiction as their employer: Don Gubbay was under English law, while the natives were under the jurisdiction of the District Agent, French or English, in charge of the part of the island where they lived.

Another file in the British archives⁶⁶ contains information on a contract between Don Gubbay and the members for the repair of the Manahine⁶⁷. Accounts, dated 12 November 1949, show that they contributed £209-12-6 from their wages. The repairs, carried out by a Tonkinese, amounted to £244-5-6, but did not include the engine which was on order. The contract, subsequent to the invoices, consisted of two separate documents, signed on 8 December 1949, one by Ati for the Cooperative and the other by Don Gubbay. The first mentioned the voluntary commitment of the members to work for the repairs of the boat:

"We pay back to Mr Gubbay out of our wages each month any sum that we wish to contribute. We are not asked to pay back any fixed amount.

For his part, Don Gubbay only committed himself to the repairs of the boat. Underneath the great freedom of the members to contribute what they wanted, there is an obvious ambiguity in the fact that no sum was agreed, which left the way open for Don Gubbay to charge for the repairs and to keep the system going. The engine was not yet available, but it was on order and the price should be known. The invoice of 12 November only stated:

"The engine for the boat has been ordered and it should be some time before the company will have it repaid.

These practices show how the Condominium administration supported the settlers against the Melanesians. This affair was very damaging to Don Gubbay's relationship with the members, especially in Wala⁶⁸.

In March 1950, the British Resident asked about the activities of Don Gubbay, who⁶⁹:

- would recruit natives under a Union, Cooperative or Employment Agency (a reference to Traders Union, the name of Don Gubbay's company), and place them in various jobs with some settlers who are not planters;
- would withhold one third of the wages, out of which a percentage would accrue to him and to the chiefs of the enlisted men;

65 File Donald Gubbay. Personal. 1949-1953 149/11/49, letter of 8/8/49; 176/11/49, letter of 31/11/49, registered under MP 26/50 and 185/11/49, letter of 27/9/49 registered on 13 October. In September 1950 (211/5/50), the administration had to ask D. Gubbay to renew his expired recruitment licence.

66 Northern Malekula Native Company's statement of expenditures to the 12th Nov. 1949 MP 22/31, letters of 1^{er} and 23 December 1949. The only statements of account in this file relate to repairs to the vessel in question.

67 The Melanesians called this boat the "Hamainaou".

68 In 1978, men from Wala said that they had promised to kill Donald Gubbay if he returned to Malekula.

69 File Northern Malekula Native Company's statement of expenditures to the 12th Nov. 1949 MP 22/31, British Resident Commissioner, letter of 28 March 1950. Our translation.

- would have the exclusive right to recruit members who, for this reason, would have refused to engage with other settlers;
 - began to expand its activities in Pentecost island.
- The residence seemed to be aware only of rumours.

The responses from the Santo Delegation in the person of J. Maxwell were favourable to Don Gubbay⁷⁰, stating that he was not involved in the Cooperative as much as rumours suggested; his business required him to be in Santo at all times; he had rarely visited North Malekula and had no boat of his own in condition⁷¹ and most importantly, the members managed their company themselves. This was not true, as the management had been entrusted to his father, Dal Gubbay, whom he had taken over. Concerning Pentecost, Don Gubbay was allegedly approached by indigenous strangers to the organisation to provide them with a boat in exchange for their work.

It was incorrect that Don Gubbay's relationship with the Cooperative was limited to boat repairs and District Agent Crozier was able to verify this. Following his investigation in Malekula, he noted⁷² that members are spread out from Vao to Bangalor (South West Bay). He learned that, in addition to repairing the boat, Don Gubbay was responsible for taking care of the copra shipment to Santo for the members:

"handle the shipment of copra in Santo [...] for them.

And Crozier adds:

"If this is so Mr Gubbay will stand to make a very considerable profit."

For the Melanesians, the use of a European was initially only temporary, until they had the necessary knowledge to manage their business themselves. But the administration, which intervened on several occasions to put them in prison, did nothing to provide training for the Cooperative's managers, a need which was recognised by a report of the South Pacific Commission (SPC)⁷³ in 1953 (Annex 3). The two young leaders – and chiefs –, Simon Mk Sak and Etienne, who remained at the Catholic school in Vila in 1939 received only a religious education and a minimum knowledge of writing and arithmetic. This was not enough to check the accounts or even just the weight and price of the copra delivered against the amounts 'supposedly' credited to the Cooperative by the colonist. The complaint against Don Gubbay and the two separate contracts of 1949 had not changed anything. The Melanesian directors had lost confidence in the administration. It was Guiart who tried to make the relationship between the managing settlers and the members clearer and fairer, but he was unable to change the administration's practices (*see below*).

Growing opposition of the missions to the Cooperative caused members to turn away. The local leaders of the Cooperative, Kaku and Racrac Charley, had stayed away from the Catholic mission, which is understandable because the Vao Fathers were

70 Ibid, D.A. Northern District, Maxwell, letter of 25 April 1950. Our translation.

71 In fact, according to a report by the South Pacific Commission (Annex 3), G. Wing and Donald Gubbay used at least one of the Cooperative's boats for their own business.

72 Ibid., D.A. Central District, Crozier, letter of 27 May 1950.

73 Current "Pacific Community".

among the first to oppose it. In addition, the missions had begun to levy a sort of capitation tax. The Melanesians now looked to the Cooperative rather than the mission to improve their standard of living. In 1950 and 1951, the Cooperative⁷⁴ was again subject to complaints from the missionaries that it was a messianic movement similar to the John Frum movement, as Racrac Charley once again made grand claims about the strength the Cooperative would achieve, surpassing and supplanting the settlers' enterprises and providing similar wealth to its members. To overcome European opposition, he advocated a large organisation, including remote islands, capable of resisting the administration and becoming, in effect, a political force. His plans seemed dangerous to the other leaders who wanted to build up a local productive force first, as advised by Guiart (1951), which he saw as a dead end because of European hostility. He was sidelined. However, he continued to participate in the meetings, but without influence on the decisions. Risking being denounced by the assessor, he left for Nouméa in March 1951.

In the early 1950s, on the advice of the administration, Don Gubbay divided the company into three groups: Malnatco (Malekula), Ambnatco (Ambrym) and Pennatco (Pentecost), as the Aoba section had already separated from Don Gubbay. He handed out small round metal sheets, numbered and inscribed 'Malnatco'⁷⁵, which would have entitled the members to distributions of free goods. For some members, these plates became a token of wealth, but this feeling was soon dispelled. In fact, Donald Gubbay paid copra on barter trade on several occasions and Guiart (1951) was able to calculate that the food distributed was at best one third of the value of the deliveries, which was less than the share supposed to go to the members. His deductions from deliveries and salaries were not one third as the Residency thought. A copra delivery shows that they were 40 per cent for operations, including boats, and 20 per cent for the shop. The second deduction was calculated after the first and thus amounted to 12 per cent of the total: 48 per cent should therefore have been returned to the members. The statements of copra deliveries that have come down to us are not from Donald Gubbay, but figures (bag weights or just the total per member) copied by Ati and signed by Paul Tamlum's. Only one of these notes⁷⁶ bears an estimate of the amount in money. The amount was only known at the time of the sale to traders in Santo. The accounting records were held by Don Gubbay and his associate and some deliveries were credited late (*see* below). He could also pay the copra on delivery, minus the deductions, and these would go, or not, to the Cooperative's account – just a file in Donald Gubbay's Company, as a Melanesian enterprise could not have a bank account –, moreover, none of the members was able to verify these amounts, nor the costs claimed for the transport.

Some Melanesians lost confidence in Don Gubbay. Aoba members had already abandoned him to work with his brother Roy. At the beginning of 1952, Racrac Charley was in favour of Malnatco doing the same, but he could not make his case (16.1.1952).

74 There were then 207 members in Malekula¹²⁹ in Pentecost and 31 in Ambrym (Guiart 1951).

75 To our knowledge, there were no Pennatco or Ambnatco plates, which are smaller sections.

76 Out of four that came to us.

In June 1952, Don Gubbay countered by accusing Kaku, and through him the Cooperative, of being bankrupt (13.6.1952). Kaku had allegedly ordered too many goods from Burns Philip for the shops and used too much petrol for the boats - but Don Gubbay and Georg Wing were using them for their own businesses. Donald Gubbay did not follow on this accusation. The Cooperative continued to operate in this way, sometimes outside its framework, with some members occasionally delivering copra at a better price (without deductions) to other Europeans.

3.2. Difficulties in the management of the Cooperative

A report by the South Pacific Commission (SPC) dated 27 March 1953, signed by J. Guiart and H. E. Maude, shows that the operation of the Cooperative left some grey areas in the management and bookkeeping by the settlers (Annex 3).

At the request of Mr. Freegard, British Delegate [District Agent] in Santo, Don Gubbay had, at least in theory, decentralised his organisation into three groups: Malnatco (Malekula), Ambnatco (Ambrym) and Pennatco (Pentecost). However, from the invoices examined, it would appear that each local group was considered an independent unit, composed of a store and a company, which necessitates a double series of invoices, made out in the name of each of these. The relationship between the local groups and the headquarters in Santo seemed theoretically the responsibility of two Societies, 'Traders Union' for the commercial side, and "Transpordom" which deals with the transport of goods and copra. These two names presumably cover the D. Gubbay - George Wing association. In actual fact, however, we only occasionally found the name 'Transpordom', the name 'Traders Union' (or 'Traders Limited'), apparently dealing with everything, including repairs to the motorboat Venudel, the hull of which was bought from Mr Klein several years earlier. As an example of this accountancy system, we would cite Vao, where sales of copra to Traders Union are credited to both to the shop and the company. The fact that the balance is always a debit one is explained by the cost of the repairs to the Venudel and the natives' present shortage of money. [...] The Manahine is still sailing for D. Gubbay and G. Wing. The small boat Lano is still working collecting copra from the neighbourhood of Matanvat and for short trips between Malekula and the Segond Canal.

Vao: As far as we could ascertain, the store, almost empty, which is situated in a well-equipped Nissen Hut, is not seriously indebted to Traders Limited (£A. 162.17. 4d), but the local company appears to owe £A. 478.16. 11d for repairs to the Venudel, after taking into account two deliveries of copra and two payments in cash. Two further payments in cash and one delivery of copra are understood to be credited to the store and added to the proceeds of commercial sales, that is the money in hand, which is collected by G. Wing.

[...]

Were this scheme to continue without hindrance, it would seem probable that the local cooperative would remain indefinitely in the debt to Traders Limited through debits for repairs to boats and the gradual taking over of its available cash.

This report reflects the vagueness of the status of Don Gubbay's and G. Wing's businesses, their relationship with the Cooperative and the Cooperative's accounting, including amounts awaiting credit. It was easy for Don Gubbay to keep the

Cooperative in debt through the costs charged for boat repayments and repairs⁷⁷. However, Don Gubbay told Guiart (1951; 1954) that '*the boats were owned by the natives, but they were not finished paying*' - this was probably why he continued to use at least one of the Cooperative's boats for his business.

The general mood is best captured by another part of this report. In an interview (Guiart 1954), Don Gubbay stated that he had '*now a relative lack of interest in the matter*'. Interviewed a few days later, his associate G. Wing insinuated that Don Gubbay, '*by his rapacity*', had put him in a difficult position. As for the British administration, they believed that Don Gubbay was really withdrawing from the business (he would remain in it for another five years) and was still involved mainly to help the Melanesians (Annex 3). On another occasion, to Guiart's requests for sanctions, the British District Agent replied that he was their only 'businessman'. Finally, it cannot be ruled out that some local company managers or storekeepers found their way into these accounting blurs.

The report concluded that the current situation represented a potential danger for the colony. The administration had not defined an administrative framework for the many, mostly very small, cooperatives that were springing up all over the archipelago:

But the administering authority has done nothing officially to guide and assist those efforts, other than to enact a Joint Regulation of a predominantly restrictive character, and the only help the natives have so far received has thus been from a few Delegates or missionaries, who lack the necessary technical knowledge, or from European traders, whose motives have not always been above suspicion.

3.3. Extension attempts and the end of the Cooperative

From 1955 onwards, the Cooperative tried to expand to new villages in Aoba, Ambrym and Pentecost, and also to the Big Nambas, this time aiming at the interior villages. They had been contacted and tried to assess their financial means, including the amount spent on traditional ceremonies, as evidenced by some of Paul Tamulum's notes (17.2.1956). There was little result. Apart from a few deliveries of copra and, above all, the recruitment of workers, the Big Nambas did not really get involved, knowing of the past exploitation of their fellow immigrants in Matanvat.

External circumstances were soon to take things in a different direction. Recruitment of labour by the settlers became increasingly difficult as Melanesians preferred to work on their own plantations, except for Don Gubbay who could mobilise members

⁷⁷ Don Gubbay had also had a run-in with the French hospital in Norsup before the British Delegation over an overpriced supply of firewood. File Donald Gubbay. Personal. 1949-1953, letter of 23 May 1950. The case was dismissed because the Vila Price Commission's decision on the price of firewood applied only to Port Vila. D. Gubbay also argued that the demolition of the building from which the wood came was more difficult than expected.

when needed. Oscar Newman, a planter in Tisman Bay⁷⁸ opened stores in Wala, where the Cooperative was implanted for long, and in Rano. But Wala and Rano people refused to work with him. On the contrary, some men from Rano joined the Cooperative. On 16 July 1957, they informed the other centres that he wanted to imprison the three most prominent leaders and, according to him, also Racrac Charley (5.8.1957).

Racrac Charley quickly realised that this new repression could put an end to the Cooperative and was an opportunity to unite against the Europeans. He wrote to John William Nakomaha to urge him to participate in an uprising to counter the emerging threat, claiming that Tanna was also being targeted as a result of Guiart's (1956) book published a year earlier, which he considered an Indigenous Bible (Annex 4, 26.7.1957). J. W. Nakomaha did not react; his father was in trouble with the administration at the time (MacClancy 2007) and was certainly sticking to his 1956 position of sharing influence, taking the southern islands for him and leaving the northern islands to the Cooperative (14.7.1956).

On 10 August 1957, Paul Tamlulum was imprisoned in Lamap (22.10.1957) for one year on the grounds of '*sedition activities*'⁷⁹. He died in prison, kept in inhuman conditions (Abong 2008; 2013), on July 30 1958. The Cooperative was again seen as obstructing the activities of the settlers. However, it had never given the order not to work for the whites, as the opposition movements in Tanna and the Solomon Islands had done. It was only in principle that members should be recruited by Don Gubbay, which he did first.

In 1958, when the director and two Pentecost leaders were imprisoned, Don Gubbay declared the Cooperative bankrupt, presumably with the approval of the English Delegation in Santo, but there is no record of this in the archives and the exact date is unknown. The organisation was effectively dissolved. However, he was reluctant to cut ties with the members and abandon such a lucrative business, offering to buy a new boat through his father Dal (9.2. 1958); he also continued to recruit ex-members on a personal basis. Ati, from Wala, originally from Naure in Vovo, called the "Big Boss" because he recorded, for the Melanesians, Cooperative activities that he could attend, tried to keep it alive, but could not avoid the break-up. Many members were discouraged by the practices of the settler. Racrac Charley organised meetings in Tontar and also in Santo (9.2.1958), where there were still ex-members recruited by Don Gubbay; people outside the Cooperative attended. After the imprisonments and the surveillance exercised by the administration, these meetings, even if they were rather informal, shorter than he claims, and numbered only a few dozen people, represented a certain risk, as they demanded Paul Tamlulum's return.

78 Guiart (1951) notes that after the war the Melanesian directors claimed to have contacted O. Newman to manage the Cooperative, before Don Gubbay took over from his father, but the former categorically denied these facts to the ethnologist.

79 File F537/13/1 Re-Interment of the Body of Paul Tamlulum 1962, letter of 12 March 1962; 45/62.

The meetings dealt with topics that went far beyond the Cooperative, considering the demographic problem, health and education (9 and 17.2.1958). His first reaction to the announcement of the imprisonments was to take up his cherished idea of extending the Cooperative to practically all the islands (22.10.1957). The actions envisaged by the meetings seemed excessive: to buy a boat the size of the Rocinante⁸⁰, a boat of the central administration in Vila. But this was indeed the size required to collect copra from the distant islands and export it to Nouméa, bypassing the local Europeans, settlers and administration, who were again trying to destroy their enterprise. Reaffirming the desire for social development, the construction of schools and health centres was envisaged: achievements which had been planned at the origin of the Cooperative but which had not been given the means to implement. Demographic measures were put forward: bringing in black women from America⁸¹, no doubt an idea of Racrac Charley, to facilitate marriages and increase the population: the unbalanced sex ratio meant that many men remained single well into old age. Polygamy was one of the solutions to the problem of a small population. To increase the labour force more quickly, he rightly envisaged bringing in migrants from other islands and even from New Caledonia where the poverty of the Melanesians had shocked him (9.5.1956). The return of some of the migrants to their regions of origin left the people of North-west Malekula with large tracts of land to develop, which they could not do on their own. He was again over-enthusiastic about giving land to thousands of migrants.

The end that the Europeans had just put to the existence of the Cooperative provoked in him a frenzy of extension and illusory achievements: impossible and dangerous, because they could be used as an accusation of messianism, nationalism or sedition. The idea of a return to polygamy triggered the wrath of the missions. These meetings show a certain radicalisation of the movement, which wanted to extend to the whole archipelago, thus becoming the precursor of a nationalism (5.8.1957), and detached itself from westernisation by rejecting the doctrine of the missions. The original aims of the Cooperative were not abandoned, substituting for the deficiencies of the Condominium in health and education and thus setting out on the road to independence.

3.4. The Cooperative and the Melanesian messianic movements

Was the Malekula Native Company, as Guiart (1951) puts it, a movement 'on the fringe of the Cargo Cult'? We will first consider the economic rationality of the company and then look at its difficulties and why it did not succeed.

80 According to Ati, Donald Gubbay proposed to the members at that time to buy a new boat, in order to keep in touch. It was certainly R. Charley who modified this project according to his views (9.2.1958).

81 Sexual relations between black men and white women were condemned by the Condominium Code of Indigenous Law.

The Melanesians realised that the wealth of the colonists was based on the large number of poorly paid workers they recruited. They sought to create a business similar to that of the colonists, working and selling their produce themselves to make the same profit as the Europeans, and dreaming of matching their standard of living. The weakness of this reasoning was that they could not have the same ratio of workers to entrepreneurs as the Europeans. Sure, they would have higher incomes than the wages they were paid, but this would not be enough to provide them with an equal lifestyle. In addition, they were faced with the costs of production, especially the transportation of copra. They formed cooperatives to buy boats and share their operating costs. However, their lack of management knowledge greatly reduced their chances of success.

Table: Economic rationale of the Cooperative.

Sectors	Settlers	'Malekula Native Cooperative'
Production		
Contractors	Planter settlers	members of the cooperative
Work force	Recruits	members of the cooperative
Production costs		
Salaries	Low wages for recruits	income from individual production
Boats	Personal investment	repairs: 'according' to Donald Gubbay (<i>see above</i>)
Transport	Low wages for seafarers	withheld: boats/transport 40 per cent; shop 12 per cent.
Management		
Financing	Personal investment	Pooling of resources
Bank loans	Possible	Impossible due to company law
Qualification	Highly variable level	Most illiterate, especially in accounting
Profit		
	High - low labour costs ⁸² -high ratio of recruits to planters	Low - wholesalers' purchase prices less withhelds - ratio 1/1: members = workers
Political fallout		
Economy	dependence on recruitment	autonomous plantation economy,
Development	gross inequalities	more 'egalitarian',
Power	favourable legislation	awareness of the opposition from the administration and the rise of a political force

Socio-politically, they could not match the settlers' standard of living, but they could deprive them of labour and reduce their income. They could even destroy the plantation economy and eventually drive out the Europeans, which remained an

⁸² Donald Gubbay also recruited members for his own business or to let them to other colonists, withholding the same share .

important motivation. This was forgetting that they had no decision-making power and that the colonial administration would never let them supplant the colonists: the laws did not provide for Melanesians to set up businesses. The difficulties linked to the opposition of the colonists and the support they received from the administration soon slowed down their efforts and prevented the cooperative from achieving its full potential. The events that affected the Cooperative fit quite well into this theoretical framework.

In the early days of the Cooperative, Paul Tamulum and Racrac Charley promised wealth to the Melanesians, but it was through a higher purchase price for their production and through higher recruitment wages within the organisation of which they were to become members, which is the principle of any cooperative. Neither he nor Paul Tamulum promised the magical coming of a freighter or "cargo" and the term is not found in any of his writings, except in his letters to J.W. Nakomaha (Annex 4). The initial idea of distributing free goods from the shop to members in exchange for their production was soon abandoned and it was Donald Gubbay who took it up, to his advantage (Guiart 1951) in the early 1950s. Above all, there is no ambiguity about work and '*knowledge about attempts to reappropriate the ultimate source of goods*' mentioned by Ton Otto (2004) as characteristic of messianisms.

The first accusations, made by the colonists, spoke of "communism". This was the impression made by this association of Melanesian workers who marketed their own production. But this hid the deeper reason: it was competing with them. It is true that the most enthusiastic ones, such as Racrac Charley and Paul Tamulum, were trying to oust them and they risked losing the local workforce, the basis of the plantation system⁸³. The administration found no reason to convict Paul Tamulum, who had not broken any laws, and imprisoned him as an agitator. We were in a political logic to counter an economic initiative that threatened colonisation.

During the war, the members, like almost all Melanesians, preferred the Americans to the Europeans. Racrac Charley raised an American pennant, and Kaku a mat in Matanvat (*see above*)⁸⁴. The opposition to the Europeans was obvious, but it was the consequence of their past attitude towards the company and the discriminatory policy of the Condominium: people started to reject colonisation on ideological and political grounds.

83 The same fear was the origin of the term 'cargo cult' in 1945, in an article by a New Guinea settler in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, N.M. Bird (Hermann 2013).

84 Some of the facts might make the Cooperative appear messianic (MacClancy 2002 pp. 136-137), but the reality was different. It was D. Gubbay who distributed 'Malnatco' membership plates in the early 1950s. The construction of a road in North Malekula was not an initiative of the Cooperative when it was founded in 1939, but a request from the administration dating from 1935 and which was again opposed by the inhabitants of the islets (8.8.1951). The Cooperative did not send Jimmy Kaku to learn to drive a truck in Santo. Jimmy was already living in Santo and only occasionally returned to Matanvat (19.6.1952); in 1978 he said that this was a personal initiative. The imprisonments during the war and in 1949 were not related to prophecies of a 'cargo ship', but to demonstrations of opposition to the Europeans (*see above*) and to conflicts between natives and immigrants. Those of 1947 were due to Racrac Charley's propaganda for the Cooperative being interpreted as "cargoist" by the administration.

After the war and the departure of the Americans, nothing more was expected on this side. The clearing of the coastal bush and the work on the plantations were resumed, with the "immigrants" being more or less forcibly recruited. The administration could have worked out an agreement between the different parties, defining an amount of rent to be withheld from their copra deliveries. Instead, it followed the accusations of the settlers and the missions that the company was a 'cargo cult' and proceeded to imprison them. For the administration, this was a way to quickly and unanalytically put it under a chapter that had already justified repression, which served the interests of all Europeans.

For Racrac Charley, it was a stalemate, as the Europeans could continually oppose their enterprise. - He was right, that is how it ended. - He wanted to extend it to the whole archipelago to increase its capacity for resistance, making it a nationalist movement. When he returned from his last trip to Noumea in 1956, he contacted Chief Yanyam of Anatom, Nakomaha of Tanna and Mol Valiv of Santo to get them involved in the Cooperative, without much success. This was too fast, ideologically and materially: the boats were too small, and the local units were unable to manage, let alone have a centralised leadership on such a scale. It was also without counting on the ambitions of other islands.

After Paul Tamblum's imprisonment, he did not believe in any form of magic. Nevertheless, he claimed, as a kind of bravado in the face of the end of his enterprise programmed by the administration, that more than a thousand new members, in islands all over the archipelago, had joined the Cooperative: at most, they had shown interest in meetings in Vila, Santo or elsewhere. More concretely, he organised meetings to find solutions, remote and practically impossible at the time, to the setbacks of the Melanesians' first attempts at autonomous development. These solutions were rational in that they dealt with the fundamental demographic and economic constraints that affected the archipelago and still affect it today: low population density, geographical fragmentation, isolation, infrastructure problems, particularly transport, lack of skills, and insufficient education and health services. - These themes are still the basis of the development programmes of the International Organisations for the Pacific region. - He was simply pursuing the economic logic elaborated at the founding of the Cooperative: to do as the Europeans did to make up for the shortcomings of the Condominium and to free himself from them and, for this, he sought concrete support from SPC (9.4.1956; 4.5.1958) or, less well targeted, from the publisher of the Cooperative management manual, Longman Green (1.5.1958).

On a personal level too, Racrac Charley does not appear as a messianic figure, but rather as a propagandist for the Cooperative, clearly anti-European, without questioning Westernisation in its economic aspects: he believed - or rather had believed - in the possibility of a partnership, of collaboration. However, a few isolated members, who were not taken seriously, sometimes expressed 'cargo' beliefs, especially in the islets. A man from Atchin, Rorin Mal, told of dreams in which he saw the land of South Santo and North Malekula coming together and trucks

travelling between the two islands - probably, he had been told about the Bay Bridge in San Francisco by the Americans.

Some people placed exaggerated hopes in the Malnatco plaques distributed by Don Gubbay. In Wala, when the Cooperative disappeared, some hoped to recover the money overpaid for the repairs to the Venudrel in 1949 and to find the bank where the members' contributions had been deposited at the time of the foundation⁸⁵. Melanesians were not immune to the myth of easy money, of spontaneous wealth, and myths refer to it⁸⁶. But the leaders of the Cooperative and most of the members, struggling with the settlers, knew that there was nothing to be expected from this: they worked on their plantations and tried to expand the organisation, but more gradually than Racrac Charley, to increase production and profits.

A quick observer, unaware of Racrac Charley's underlying intentions, would find many of the cargo themes in his writings, but he never uses the term itself, except in his letters to J. W. Nakomaha:

- the hope placed in the Americans – but there is also a disappointment (14.10.1955);
- the airfield project – he was in fact seeking support from Guiart for a land claim;
- the return to custom – this was in reaction to Condominium justice;
- the changes in Lenelvaklakh tradition and history – this was in order to grab land and claim the position of chief;
- the role of the ancestors – this is traditional;
- his charismatic aspects including reciting prayers and claiming to be Jesus Christ – these were manipulations of the District Agents, showing himself to be Christianised and westernised so that they would support him against the assessor and Kaku, he never played this game in front of his peers;
- his plans for wealth through the Cooperative – this was always economically;
- his seemingly "unrealistic" solutions – these were in order to make the Cooperative exist against its programmed disappearance by the Europeans, and they were rational in that he understood that it was necessary to do without the colonists and the Condominium who would always oppose the development of the Melanesians.

We are fortunate to have his writings which give us the context and causes of his opposition to the Europeans and allow us to understand his strategy for bypassing or manipulating them, ending injustices and improving the social and economic condition of the Melanesians. According to Guiart, he did not think about cargo, but about concrete benefits, about goods.

The Cooperative was fundamentally an economically driven enterprise seeking to bring Melanesians together on a large scale to increase their development, with the political implications that this inevitably entailed. It was therefore one, if not the first, economically based social movement in opposition to colonisation. There was no other. In the 1970s, political parties were formed claiming independence by religious

85 Former members in Wala hope to find this money, but they do little research. A politician from Pentecost island is said to have claimed that during a visit to Paris he knew of a Malnatco account in a French bank. This was just an electoral manoeuvre to attract the votes of the people of Malekula.

86 For instance, the myth of the Tavo snake (Annex 5).

denomination overlaying the English-French separation. The Cooperative included members of all religions, languages and social backgrounds. It had made the mistake of putting the search for economic success before that of political power, which in the conditions of colonisation was doomed to failure. The colonial economy was supposed to be European; raw materials and labour were provided by the land and the natives. The proindependence political parties learned their lesson, staying out of economic activities until they had gained power. The result was an unpreparedness to define an economic policy which led the International Organisations to suspend development aid shortly after independence.

It is surprising that members were interested in staying in this organisation when the profits were significantly reduced by the deductions. Most of the members were almost illiterate and could not judge the validity of these amounts. Some had doubts, but the other, smaller cooperatives with less resources also had difficulties and most of them were in decline or disappeared. If they accepted this condition, it was because of the stability of their organisation, the economic and political strength it represented and the status it gave them vis-à-vis the Europeans. Guiart understood this situation: "People were talking about the Cooperative and that annoyed the Europeans: they were happy". This is a clear indication of the opposition to colonisation and the political and independence symbol that it was for its members.

The origin of the term 'cargo cult', coined by a colonist in New Guinea and quickly taken up by the Lutheran mission, and its use as the preferred object of study by 'government anthropologists' (Belshaw 1954; Worsley 1957) - auxiliaries of the colonial administrations who, at best, saw in it interesting phenomena of reaction to colonisation, but advocated (or had to advocate) their eradication - clearly show its role as a central instrument in the struggle of the Europeans against Melanesian movements demanding, at the grassroots, greater social justice. It was an easy accusation for the administration to justify the repression of movements which, as a result of economic development, would lead to the demand for independence.

In the case of the Cooperative, the cult aspect was non-existent for the leaders and most members did not change their attitude towards the missions, despite their hostility. The economic aspects took precedence and the accusations against the members were mainly those of agitators and seditious activities, clearly reflecting a political opposition to this attempt at Melanesian development, although it was done in relation to the administration, the missions and a settler from Port Vila. The Cooperative had set itself up as a competitor to the colonists and promised to overtake them, but it was not a priori opposed to the Condominium administration, nor to the Europeans. The problem was that the administration saw itself as supporting the settlers and the colonial economy, which were threatened by the autonomous development of the Melanesians.

Racrac Charley's contacts with messianic leaders

Messianic movements appeared in various parts of Melanesia even before the war. In the late 1920s, just opposite North Malekula, at Tasmalum (Santo), Rongofuro opposed the Europeans, promising the appropriation of their property to his followers: a ship sent by the ancestors was to come from Sydney loaded with rice and European goods, but was prevented from doing so by the colonists. Rongofuro presented himself as a prophet announcing the resurrection of the dead, also prevented by the Europeans. This led to the murder of settler Clappot in 1923 and the execution of Rongofuro (Lightner and Naupa 2011). Racrac Charley was far too young to be interested in these events, if he was even aware of them. In 1937, Avuavu took up Rongofuro's themes. He was soon imprisoned. In 1945, the prophets Tsek and Mol Valiv wanted to found their '*school*' (mission) and advocated the rejection of customs. Their cult, called the Naked Cult, disappeared in 1951 when Tsek died. But Mol Valiv, who wanted to break with custom while forbidding the mission to enter his villages, remained an important figure in the Santo centre, protected by the administration. According to Guiart (1958), he had some reasonable ideas about economic development.

We know of only a few late relations of Racrac Charley with Mol Valiv. He met him and other North Island chiefs in Nouméa in April 1956, expressing a desire for development (9.4.1956), and then in Santo in 1956-57 with the aim of involving him in the Cooperative. The latter then made exaggerated promises to provide thousands of workers and to grant free access to its natural resources, but without much concrete commitment (9.12.1956, note of 1.12.1956).

Racrac Charley could have met Nakomaha and the Tanna exiles at Lamap in 1944⁸⁷ when he was imprisoned there for two years from March 1943 or in 1947; although they were isolated from each other this did not prevent indirect relations through the Melanesian prison staff (Guiart 1951). He probably could not meet them in Malo, where they were exiled in the early 1950s, and it is as 'men Tanna' that he wants, in a dream, to bring them from Malo to Matanvat, where they were no longer (7.3.1956).

Thus, long before Nakomaha's refusal to cooperate with the Cooperative (14.7.1956), Racrac Charley shows a distancing from this messianist movement which he avoids naming and which proposes supernatural solutions to the development and autonomy of the Melanesians. It is true that accusations of messianism had already led him to prison, but he knew that he was protected by Guiart and did not fear prison at that time, as his writings to the District Agents show. What he believed in was the

⁸⁷ Before that, he could have met him when he was an Adventist minister in Atchin, visiting the West coast several times, sometimes staying for long periods in the villages south of Tenmian. But Racrac Charley had already distanced himself from this mission. Nakomaha was not remembered - or perhaps even remembered badly - but was not spoken of, perhaps simply because of his later role in the cult of John Frum. It was Atchin's people who informed me in 1978 of his former West Coast charge. Later, I asked the Tenmian people if Nakomaha's ministry was in any way special, they answered that it had had nothing special.

regrouping of all the islands in a nationalist movement based on the economic strength of the Melanesian population, which outnumbered the colonists, in order to develop and liberate the Melanesians from the conditions imposed by the Europeans, and not in a myth.

His greatest rapprochement with the John Frum movement followed the threatened imprisonment of Cooperative leaders in 1957. He wrote to J. W. Nakomaha (Annex 4), but never received a reply, urging him to join in a unified uprising in the North and South against this new repression. In these letters he borrowed themes from John Frum's mythology, notably his supernatural power and the 'cargo', but always altered and modified so as not to subscribe to his doctrine. He did not seek to enter into the supernatural or mythical logic of the movement or to make concessions to facilitate its aims, being manipulative and uncompromising in order to be treated at least as an equal, speaking of a Cooperative office in Santo - which did not exist - which controlled trade, hoping to interest his interlocutor in this project of independent economy.

In October 1957, J. W. Nakomaha came to Santo to invite Racrac Charley to Tanna to attend a (probably Johnfrumist) ceremony and make a report. But he did not go. After his father's refusal to cooperate and his lack of response during the repression that landed Paul Tamulum in prison, he could not stoop so low. Moreover, he visibly rejected the Johnfrumist doctrine, which he treated as myth or folklore. The Cooperative and the John Frum movement were too different - one an economic enterprise and the other a mystical-political protest - to find common ground, except in opposition to the Europeans. But the personalities of Racrac Charley and Nakomaha were too similar to agree to unite on this point, both being enamoured of personal power.

Comparison of the Cooperative with messianic movements

The North Malekula Cooperative was not the first attempt by New Hebrides Melanesians to organise themselves economically. Around 1917, a group of men from Tanna had formed a company to buy a *schooner* and transport copra to Port Vila, despite the advice of the Europeans (Jacomb 1919)⁸⁸. This venture seems to have been mainly for purely economic purposes.

It is difficult to make a typology of Melanesian messianic movements. Davenport and Coker gave up trying to find characteristic aspects and relied on their individual particularities:

"As yet no single and universal set of parameters or dependent variables within cults can be specified. [...] "to each his own" (Davenport and Coker 1967, p. 174).

Moreover, these movements often included factions that had views more or less deviant from those of the founder.

⁸⁸ This project was relatively big, because the population of the island was large, but it did not have the geographical extension of the Native Cooperative Company of Matanvat.

The messianist movements have in common, however, that they started with an individual presenting himself as a prophet following a vision and then playing a very secular role in the organisation of the movement. They are characterised by a rejection of Europeans, and in particular of the missions and their teaching, but the break is not always complete: the presence of the cross in the John Frum movement and Moro's 'vision' which is not always clear whether it comes from the ancestors or from God, variations which can be explained by the more or less close threat of imprisonment. Their position towards custom is also diverse: total or almost total rejection or, on the contrary, a return to custom, often limited to certain aspects, notably related to social structure and land ownership, or, more frequently, the establishment of a new custom, borrowing from tradition and westernisation.

Apart from the attempt to reclaim the mythical source of wealth (Otto 2004), messianisms also had an economic dimension, or rather a claim, but this was limited, on the fringes of the cultic aspect, notably in the John Frum movement and the Moro movement. Paliu (Kais 1998) gave it a more important place, first before the war, in the form of a fund to lend money to the needy. He opposed high wedding and funeral fees and wanted *man bush* and *man salt water* to give each other access to their land and reefs. Faced with the typically 'cargo' Noise Cult, he warned his audience of possible deceptions, but did not counteract them for fear of losing adherents. However, some factions did become 'cargo'. In 1951, as chairman of the Native Village Council, he set up a copra marketing cooperative, which had some success, but tended to collapse after he left to take up a seat in the Papua New Guinea parliament (1964-1972).

Yali's movement (Hermann 2013) would be the closest to the Cooperative's approach, but he limited himself to giving information and incentives without getting involved in concrete achievements. A former soldier in the Australian army, Yali had obtained the support of the Australian government after the war to encourage Melanesians to develop economically by building industrial plantations. He did not introduce any messianic themes, merely spreading the hope of earning more money and a better life through work, as Paul Tamlulum and Racrac Charley had done before the war. However, it worried the settlers who saw it as a threat to the colonial economic system based on indigenous labour, and the missions who feared losing their followers who were too interested in material goods. The administration, realising that indigenous development would one day lead to independence, eventually followed their advice and imprisoned Yali. Some villages had started and continued planting, but without the momentum that the Cooperative created. When he was released from six years in prison, he was a broken man whose name was exploited by illuminati promising the coming of miraculous riches.

With these exceptions, the economic dimension was generally absent at the beginning of the 'cargo cults', except as vague projects, or it developed only late: to use part of the war chest constituted by the members' contributions. This is typically the case with the Moro Movement, with its organisation centred on the person of Moro and with a strong cultural dimension (Davenport and Çoker 1967). A Custom House kept members' contributions and various objects, including traditional money items such

as shell necklaces and dyed mats. The Custom Kampani was a late achievement in the form of a shop, a village piggery, a plantation, a school and a taxi in Honiara, which disappeared more or less quickly. The plantation was more of a collective effort than a cooperative and was abandoned after a few years. Some factions of the movement were simply waiting for a "cargo".

The Maasina Rule (also known as the Marching Rule) of Malaita had many cargoist aspects. It was opposed to the government, refusing to pay taxes and levying its own contribution, which led to harsh repression in 1947-1948, especially after the campaigns of civil disobedience and refusal to work for Europeans that followed the arrest of its leaders. He advocated a return to custom and codified it as law in local courts.

Messianic movements in opposition to colonisation have all had problems of unity and a tendency to splinter (Tabani 2009; Lindstrom 2006). In a context of traditional politics where independent villages were the basic political unit and structuring into networks was done through kinship or ceremonial relations, such as the *nanaki* in Malekula or the *toka* in Tanna, the unity of these movements was fragile and often challenged. The contestation of leaders, followed eventually by their overthrow, was sometimes accompanied by a splintering into factions, more or less dissident, calling into question the durability of these movements.

The Cooperative largely escaped these problems, apart from a few defections from villages in Tenmian and the south, linked to old enmities over Kaku's relationship with the Big Nambas, or the latter's reluctance to become actively involved because of the unequal treatment of their refugees in the Matanvat area. It remained united, from beginning to end, around Paul Tamlumlum, Bule Sarinose John, Kaku and a few others, including Racrac Charley, although his views were no longer followed. Its division into three entities Malnatco, Pennatco and Ambnatco was a decision of the administration and it survived its many difficulties with its European managers and the administration until its bankruptcy, decided by Don Gubbay, under cover of the British administration in Santo. The reason for this unity and stability is its mainly economic activity in village-level units based on the traditional society model, and its political, autonomist and independence aims (and hopes).

On a personal level, Racrac Charley did not play the prophecy game. It is true that he wrote down his dreams, but he hardly ever recounted them. He wrote to the District Agents to ask them to remove the assessor or to Guiart to intervene on his behalf with them. He only claimed a vision of Jesus Christ on his fourth trip (a quasi-exile) to Noumea, and that was to the District Agents (24.3.1955), to gain their support and avoid being imprisoned on his return. This had nothing to do with the search for charisma or prophetism among the Melanesians. Similarly, he sometimes wrote prayers almost without fail (13.8.1951), but this was to prove his westernisation - he then asked why the missionaries were fighting his Cooperative - or for the administration to facilitate his aims.

His pronouncements in favour of the missions were very few and very self-serving, practically limited to the low price of marriages. In fact, he was fundamentally opposed to them and favoured the application of customary laws as a solution to the injustices of the assessor system and the settlements of conflicts, including matrimonial ones, by the missions and the administration. It was also a reaction to the cultural discrimination professed by the Europeans, which was later taken up by the demand of the independence parties for the recognition and revaluation of custom. What he advocated was an economic organisation similar to that of the whites. When the project was destroyed, he did not versed in prophecies but sought concrete solutions to revive it on a broader basis. He imagined the Cooperative extending to the whole colony and even to New Caledonia, a dimension that the messianists, often confined to their island, never envisaged⁸⁹.

However, he shared several traits with Nakomaha as some District Agents described him (MacClancy 2007). Both were restless, power-loving, concerned with prestige and the importance of their movement. This led both of them to excesses and to being sidelined. But they were more than that: experts in using tradition and manipulating Europeans, testing their limits to get the most out of them, and above all, but by different means, political activists. Unlike Nakomaha, who was initially a very active Adventist minister, Racrac Charley soon left this mission. He also had a more concrete approach to reality than Nakomaha, who spent much of his life in mysticism.

⁸⁹ However, the Maasina Rule had followers in several Solomon Islands.

Biography of Racrac Charley

Racrac Charley was born around 1910 in Lenelvaklakh. He was a member of the Nekhnel Batikh *nakhamal*, probably a younger branch. His father died before the piercing of his ears by his maternal uncles, which traditionally takes place three days after birth (3.10.1951). His birth name, Racrac, refers to joy. His other name, Charley, is a European distortion of "Sale", chief of Lenelvaklakh in the late 19th and early 20th century. Sale himself is said to have given him this name, without any adoption⁹⁰.

4.1. The personality of Racrac Charley

An eventful life

He was circumcised in Tontar Asak⁹¹ by the Adventist missionary, together with Etienne (5.4.1954). Some time later, in 1924 or 1925, they were taken to school in Aore. He stayed there for about a year (Guiart 2013) and learned to read and write, but he did not much improve his skill in numeracy, traditionally using the pinnates of cycas leaves to count pigs sacrificed in *nanaki* and other social exchanges (*see above*); he still did mistakes in additions (2.11.1953). Then he escaped, taking Etienne with him. They fled from Aore to Malo, and then from Malo to Malekula in an outrigger canoe.

Although he was strongly opposed to missions, he considers, in his biography for Jean Guiart, that he was a Presbyterian at the time when the Lobol chiefs resided in Lokhor after the elder Thimoty Kaskavie returned from mission in Port Vila. But they soon broke away from that religion, moving a few hundred yards away to Lebaike, which became the pagan, rather than the neo-pagan, village of the Lobol chiefs, who had always been very distant and even opposed to missions, except Sale who had contacts with the Adventists during his recruitment in Queensland.

90 Sale had a son, Matan Sale (also deformed into Charley by the Europeans, and christened Etienne) who succeeded him and died childless in 1953.

91 On the mission boat, during a visit by the pastor of Atchin.

He made two *nanaki* in Lebaike in 1934⁹² and 1937 (5.4.1954). He took the name Mal Ili Haem in the first and in the second the names Sobon Mal Tanas (not often used and referring to his ancestor Verlili Mal Tanas) and Mk Saulidal, which he frequently signed in his writings.

He was involved with the Cooperative Native Company from its foundation in 1939, being, according to his writings, the most important member of the Cooperative as "Indigenous Labour Officer", or in charge of keeping papers and documents, a duty held by Ati after the war. He then became a Catholic like the other members of the Cooperative from Lenelvaklakh. Did he really follow their teachings? This is doubtful given the rapid opposition of the Vao Fathers to the Cooperative and the reaction this provoked on his part (13 and 14.8.1951).

He was an NHDF militiaman in Malekula in 1941 as well as several members of the Cooperative. He worked at the American bases in Vila and Santo. In 1942, he raised an American pennant in Matanvat and was imprisoned for six months. Then, in a gesture of cultural equality and disobedience to the Condominium laws and mission rules, he went on a walk in *nambas* in Santo in 1943. He was arrested by the Condominium police and transferred to Lamap prison; on arrival he was severely beaten and fell unconscious. He spent two years there (31.8.1951).

He says he was imprisoned six times in eleven years (3.10.1951): in 1941, with other leaders, shortly after the founding of the Cooperative, twice during the war, once with Kaku and once alone, then in 1947 and in 1949-1950 with the leaders and some members of the Cooperative in Matanvat - when Guiart obtained a reduction of their sentence -, and one imprisonment for drunkenness⁹³. Later, he was imprisoned again for this cause: from April to July 1957, following the disappearance at sea of Mk Sak (Annex 4). From 1941 to 1950, he probably spent almost a third of his time in prison. The Indigenous Code and anti-european activism, or activism to improve their economic situation, very frequently led Melanesians to prison⁹⁴.

Advocating the extension of the Cooperative to the whole archipelago, he was sidelined by the leaders who considered his positions dangerous. In March 1951, M^{me} Alixia Fells of the CFNH (Compagnie Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides) in Santo, helped him to leave for Noumea to avoid being denounced by the assessor and imprisoned again. He worked at the Mohali Trianon, in the home of M^{me} Fells' brother-in-law. Guiart met him in town by chance and brought him to the IFO (Institut Français d'Océanie), where he accommodated him in an outbuilding, in much better conditions than his employer. He asked him to write about the Matanvat tradition in his language. He did a remarkable job, including the history of contact in the region. He made four trips to Noumea - according to the dates reconstructed from the location of his texts and other information: from the end of March to 31 December

92 Filmed by T. Harrisson.

93 Which he mentions in a text without giving the date.

94 Kaku was also frequently imprisoned, five times with Racrac Charley in the period 1940-1951, plus one imprisonment for sexual relations with a European woman in 1939-1940, and another for violence against his wife Rita in 1962.

1951, from 2 March to 13 October 1953, from February to May or June 1954 and from March 1955 to July 1956. Unpublished letters inform us that the first two trips were paid for by Mr^{me} Fells in exchange for work for his brother-in-law at Mohali Trianon.

In the 1950s, he travelled extensively during his stays in the New Hebrides, residing more and more rarely in Matanvat because of growing tensions with Mk Taivar, Kaku and some others. These trips were partly related to his activity in the development of the Cooperative. His exclusion was not a rejection; he continued to attend meetings, but his views were not followed. He also visited the villages to buy traditional objects for the IFO and Porte Dorée museums (Museum of African and Oceanian Arts⁹⁵), and to collect ethnographic information. He transcribed many *nejinak* funeral songs (Annex 1).

He was known to have had sexual relationships with several women. But he was not known to have a child. In Noumea, he had relations with women from the Loyalty Islands and New Caledonia and one of them proposed marriage to him. Fights between Melanesians at parties in IFO accommodation led to a weekend in prison in 1955.

He married late, after lengthy negotiations with the Betnasal, partly due to disagreements between the chieftainship members over the amount of the dowry in reverse to be paid. His celibacy reduced his audience in Matanvat, which was of great concern to him. Celibacy weighs heavily on a man, not because of the absence of sexual relations, which are often with casual partners, but because you are only really listened to if you are married, i.e. if the members of the *nakhamal* have agreed to buy you a wife, and if you have descendants. Negotiations for his marriage to Violette (Betnasal) began in 1953, but the payment was not finalised until May 1960. In the meantime, the Betnasals are said to have considered marrying her to a *Teste* from Leneluab. In preparation for her marriage to Racrac, she converted to Catholicism under the name Marie-Justine. He is said to have been baptized separately; however, no one remembers exactly when. He took (or let himself called by) the name Edmond and had a customary marriage. The dispute over Marie-Justine's virginity, confirmed by an old woman from Vao, led Lenelvaklakh's men to claim part of the payment - all of it, according to the Betnasals.

Following one of his many quarrels with Kaku in the early 1960s, he moved to Vovo, near Jimmy Kaku's house. According to some, he prepared a curse to kill Kaku and had it in his pocket when Marie-Justine threw a stone at him after an argument. According to others, a man threw a stone at him that had been dipped in poison. This caused a wound in his thigh and a serious infection. He could not be treated in Santo and returned to Tontar Asuv to die at the end of 1962.

95 The collections of this museum are now at the Musée du Quai Branly, in Paris.

A child, Robert, was born to Marie-Justine in 1963⁹⁶. However, the long period of time between the marriage and the birth suggests that he was sterile and Kaku was the father of the child. He was in prison at the time of Robert's birth because he had beaten his wife, Rita, who accused him of sexual relations with Marie-Justine. She later became his second wife and had a total of eight children.

A particular and determined character

A chieftaincy aspirant and intellectually oriented, he was more interested in giving his opinion on the running of the Cooperative than in making copra. However, he did make copra, it was his only means of income, and the time he spent writing was much more limited than his critics claim. They were mostly notes of a few lines, later translated into English and collated. His longer writings were written in Noumea.

His memory was excellent, even if there are some flaws. The dates of the events he mentions are most often precise and consistent between his various texts. However, we cannot exclude that he invented some of them, as for the arrival of the immigrants in Matanvat, which was in fact staggered in time. On the other hand, his memory is accurate when, in 1951, he gives an account of the founding of the Cooperative in 1939 and lists the names and functions of its leaders in each village at the time of the founding or during the post-war reorganisation. His accuracy was admired by informants in 1978.

This elephantine memory made him hold a particular grudge against District Agent Adam who kept the assessor Mk Taivar in place (26.4.1951). He was not the only one, for Adam, whose administration was based on brutal policing, generally left Melanesians with very bad memories. In contrast, he had a very good image of Resident Anthonioz who wanted to help them in their development efforts. For him, colonial society and its injustices required an answer which he sought in tradition. He needed clear and fair rules. But his justice was that of the chiefs, in a very hierarchical society. He tried to usurp land from the Teste and was not kind to immigrants.

He was disappointed by the missionary teaching, centred on the Bible and the prohibition of practising his customs, replaced by Adventist prohibitions, which he felt was a discredit to his culture. This opposition to the missions was exacerbated when they opposed the Cooperative from its foundation. He remained very distant from all missions, withdrawing into his tradition. In his autobiography (5.4.1954), he considers that he followed the school of custom. However, despite his hostile feelings towards the missions, he did not forget his personal interests, agreeing with their position on low marriage prices – but not as low as requested by the missions. This was not an ideological contradiction, but pragmatism: the instrumentalisation of the missions and the administration was general among the Melanesians. He also knew how to present himself as pro-immigrant to please the administration. He criticized settlers who stole land, paid low wages or 'kept the Cooperative's money in their

⁹⁶ Crossed out "1964" on a family record kept by Kaku's family. He went to work in Vila where he died of cancer, aged less than thirty. He is buried in Tontar.

pockets' (16.1.1952). However, he was in constant contact with Don Gubbay when he was in Santo. He wrote mainly to the English District Agent, except for one letter addressed to the French and English District Agents, or to Resident Anthonioz.

He was unique at the time in that he wrote and, as a result, he was worrying. He was very withdrawn, not sharing his problems, especially with Kaku over the chieftainship and the management of the Cooperative in Matanvat, following the death of Etienne, or during the negotiations for his marriage (1 and 2.11.1953). The settlers regarded him as the devil, telling false and stupid stories about him in order to have him put in prison or simply to keep the administration on its toes (Guiart 2013). He never said anything about it, refusing to argue about colonists' stupid discourses. However, this highlights the discrepancy of the colonial society, living in an unreal world that it maintained for its own benefit, so as to keep the administration on its toes, and the latter remained in the illusion of a hostile Melanesian environment that it thought it was controlling, until events woke it up, such as, for instance, a resumption of the activities of the John Frum movement or later the demand for independence. It is surprisingly concrete that he did not fall into this game and remained focused on what he considered to be the core issues: restoring justice and raising the standard of living for Melanesians. He stuck to his line of action, as he did with Nakomaha, father and son, without deviating or becoming irrational.

On the other hand, he was exuberant in urging Melanesians to join the Cooperative, criticising those who did not follow his ideas, did not respect tradition or acted dishonestly. He sometimes even wrote it on the post he had erected in the village. Many people recognised his views on North Malekula society and the Cooperative, but the solutions he proposed seemed too original and unrealistic. He was the opposite of a pragmatist and was not followed, indeed he was considered dangerous in the conditions of the time.

4.2. A committed writer

His surviving texts were written mainly for Europeans. They are letters or long 'reports' on events affecting the villages of North-West Malekula, intended for the administration or Jean Guiart and aimed at influencing the local political situation. They are therefore committed writings and not a diary or a chronicle. He signed all the written texts that he had translated into English, like letters that he was about to send. His judgement on the impact of colonisation is very perceptive and caustic.

A born manipulator

Racrac Charley wrote quickly, as ideas came to him, with shortcuts, leaps forward in time and also backwards. No doubt this was intentional, to limit the information given to Europeans. But, as a result, his writings are difficult to follow, even for the

villagers who knew the facts. He sometimes seemed to mix things up, with surprising allusions that were 'out of place', but which, on reflection, made sense. However, he is sometimes inaccurate, intentionally or not, or to make himself look good: for example, when he claims to have compensated Big Nambas villages – and also a Small Nambas village in the interior, Tanmwelip, that was not known to have been involved – for the imprisonment of chiefs after the murder of Mazoyer. He probably did not reread his notes or check his enumerations (in which terms are often missing). His knowledge of the tradition is sometimes incomplete or appears to be erroneous, as he was only about ten years old when the men of his fathers' and grandfathers' generation died: Chief Sale, Mk Talvaru and Mk Sare, the only ones left to pass on the tradition (5.4.1954). Kaku, being older, had a more precise and accurate knowledge.

However, many of what could be considered mistakes were in fact recompositions of myth and tradition (17.8.1951) which he was quite capable of memorising correctly: he had well memorised Christian prayers which he did not believe in. He claimed to be the chief and wanted to remake history, to leave his personal mark. But above all, by recomposing the myth on various points, he created a new version that did not differ from the original only on the point of his manipulations regarding land or rank in the chieftaincy. Thus, he had a different 'other version', which justified his claims and made them more credible.

He used a similar strategy towards J.W. Nakomaha, mentioning the 'cargo' and emphasising his belief in the supernatural power of John Frum. In this way, he conformed to the traditional diplomacy of opening negotiations by acknowledging the other's position, even if he had to bend or reject it later. Then he systematically modified the classic theme of 'cargo': bringing it from Japan as well, granting himself a relationship to America through an American woman who supported polygamy or putting a *nadal* as a flag on an American ship. He also dictated actions to John Frum, who carried them out. But what mattered to him was an autonomous and independent Melanesian economy, as he wanted the Cooperative, imagining a free, or extraterritoriality zone, not controlled by the Condominium, in Santo, and a unified opposition movement against colonisation which he presented as an aspiration of all Melanesians (Annex 4). This was a mark of intransigence and a desire for domination that was unacceptable to his interlocutor.

He played with any mythical material, including Christian doctrine, claiming that the truth is the opposite of its dogmas in order to impose himself on the District Agents and get them to imprison or exile Kaku and the assessor, which would allow him to return to Matanvat to run the village and the Cooperative (24.3.1955).

On a more mundane level, he wrote very often against the assessor, Mk Taivar, listing his misdeeds which he reinterprets or 'redirects', lending him intentions so as to worry the administration into removing him and giving him his position. He even went so far as to remove his status as a member of Nekhnel Batikh, which the administration did not care about. He also attacked other people: Kaku, whom he discredited, like his ancestor Salior; John Bwil, Tenmaru's assessor, whom he blamed for attacks

sponsored by Vikhambat, etc. He sought to have the assessors or Kaku imprisoned, which would have enabled him to take over the chieftainship of Matanvat or even to become the assessor of North-west Malekula (26.4.1951; 20.2.1954; 24 and 31.3.1955). At the level of the Cooperative, he accused Kaku of having a false agenda against its founder, Chief Etienne; of colluding with Don Gubbay; of accepting payment of copra in alcohol; and of being wrong against Don Gubbay, whom he had accused a few months earlier. He indirectly sought the same goals in his writings to Jean Guiart, who once told me: 'If I had followed him, I would have fought with the whole world'. He wanted to make his vision of things known to the District Agents and to show them the injustices of the colonial system. The administration remained deaf to these ideas, imposing itself by force if necessary.

To give force to his claims, he advocated a return to custom as the only way to overcome the general disorder of colonial society under the Condominium regime. He claimed to be the heir to the chieftaincy and wanted to be the chief instead of Kaku⁹⁷. This ploy was well understood by the villagers, who recognised the accuracy of his analyses, but were not fooled by his intentions. In this respect, he was a full participant in the political game of the time, where real power depended on the Europeans who had most often attributed it to usurpers. So he was not taken seriously. This lack of credibility led him to overbid in the areas of the Cooperative and tradition, which further distanced him from his goals.

His strategy towards the Europeans was based on the principle that you can tell them almost anything, because they know nothing about tradition - or the wrong things. So all you have to do is convince them that you have rights to power or land. On the traditional side, his strategy is simple: he systematically manipulates genealogies⁹⁸, placing himself before Kaku, as if he were from a more senior branch, to claim the right to be the chief. He transforms the name of Mk Vomu (a name which means that he is the second son of Salior), Kaku's real grandfather, into Mk Vovomu (although it has no relation to the village of Vovo) to hide the latter's right to chieftaincy, due to the extinction of the elder line descending from Salior (5.4.1954). He systematically undermines the historical role of Kaku's great-grandfather, Salior. In fact, with a few exceptions, he does not mention him at all, attributing his achievements to his *nakhamal*, Nekhnel Batikh - or even to his own ancestor Verlili - and reducing him to a great polygamist. On the other hand, he frequently refers to his great-grandfather, Verlili Mal Tanas, whose name of *nanaki*, linked to the sacrifice of a natural child, inspires fear. He uses it for various purposes: to claim the chieftaincy, to threaten to apply the traditional capital punishment in order to get people to do what he wants, a kind of blackmail that most often ends in the payment of fines, or simply to frighten

97 Challenging the position of Salior, Kaku's great grand father, who had taken the ascendancy over Nebet Taram, the chiefly line, three generations earlier, a situation which had been perpetuated by his descendants until then.

98 Oral genealogies record the names of men down to the grandparents and often to the great-grandparents, especially among the chiefs. The eldest line of the chieftaincy (Nebet Taram) has longer genealogies, but this is more of a counting of generations, as the founder's name is reused and a number is added: Tor Iamu, (Tor First), Tor Vakharu (Tor Two, etc.), giving the seniority of the chieftaincy. However, nicknames are also used: Tor Tara.

and worry the Europeans. Sometimes he even went so far as to present himself as the heir to the chieftaincy before Etienne, of Nebet Taram, or he accused him of hostile feelings towards immigrants in order to remove him from the eyes of the administration, which provoked the indignation of the informants when I read the texts with them. Moreover, he was harsh with immigrants.

In the area of land, the Europeans did not have the concept of immigrant chieftaincy; for them, the chief was the owner of the land, which was not always the case in North Malekula. On the basis that the Teste 'gave' land in usufruct to his ancestor, he claims ownership and then claims the land in Matanvat, using the administrative name that covers the whole area south of Tontar Asuv to the Tenmian border. Similarly, he uses manipulated genealogies and conceals historical facts (such as the integration of refugees in Nekhnel Batikh by Salior) to claim in his name alone lands in Norukvat and Naure that actually belong to the whole *nakhamal*. He even extends his claims to land outside the Matanvat area, due to various debts. Some of these claims are real rights, others are totally irreceivable for Melanesians (21.8.1951), provoking laughter from those who should be concerned.

The true heir to the Lenelvaklakh chieftaincy

It is difficult to unravel the claims to chieftaincy. It is necessary to trace the order of the brothers at earlier levels of the genealogy, but this is sometimes difficult to follow because of lineage extinctions and especially genealogical manipulations. The elder branch of Nekhnel Batikh had died out. But before that, Salior had gained great authority through his cultural innovations and the wars he had waged. Nebet Taram and the other chiefs had challenged him, organising the *Nanaki* 1,000 where Racrac Charley's ancestor took the title of Verlili Mal Tanas. Verlili means 'to reverse', i.e. the 'putting in his place' of Salior. Does this show that he was the elder of Salior? Not necessarily, as the chief could ally himself with a younger branch. However, Racrac Charley may have had another reason to claim the position of chief. The first son of Salior's first wife was Mk Vom¹ – whom he calls Mk Vovomu to hide his real filiation – but, before that, Salior had a son by his second wife. It is always the first born of a chief who inherits the position. With this line extinct, Kaku normally took over the office from his great-grandfather. However, Salior whose power raised during the wars, may be of a youner branch than Verlili, Racrac's ancestor. The question of who was closer to the elder branch would remain unanswered if, in his autobiography (5.4.1954) and also in another text (31.8.1951, noon), Racrac Charley did not link himself to Kaku's real lineage, indicating that he belonged to the elder of the surviving branches. Moreover, Verlili's traditional function was to cut up human victims, which proves his inferiority to Salior, the warlord; unless Salior's hierarchical ascension changed the genealogical order (of birth ranks) on several points. But, since Tor Tara, power goes to the one who is able to lead, not necessarily to the eldest.

¹ This title, Mk Vom¹, could roughly be translated as Mk 'After'. It is the title of *nanaki* traditionally given to the first-born of the chief's first wife if a boy is born before him to another wife of the chief.

He is also a typical example of the harmful effect of exile on political opponents. As he travelled to Nouméa, all of them more or less "forced" exiles, he developed a growing sense of persecution (14.7.1956), hardened his positions (20.2.1954), to the point of sometimes losing his sense of reality (24.3.1955), especially when he addressed the administration to get it to break out of its immobility. He often used the strategy of worrying the administration - which feared more than anything else an uprising that would have led to the transfer of civil servants - to make it act in his favour. He first showed his favour for the Americans (1.5.1951), then, on his fourth trip (24.3.1955), he made death threats in the name of traditional laws, blackmailing them to imprison or remove Kaku and the assessor. His threats were directed against his fellow men, but they would nevertheless have made his return impossible. He knew he was protected by Guiart, who had got him out of prison and also prevented him from returning, which explains his boldness in front of the administration. Finally, he added the names of the movements opposing the Europeans to his signature (1.5.1958): he then openly became a political opponent dictating his demands to the Condominium.

An eclectic character

It is not known which books he had the opportunity to read, especially during his time at the IFO. It is known that he had in his hands *Savage Civilization* by Tom Harrisson (1937) and a manual on cooperative management published by Longman Green.

Tom Harrisson's (1937) unhealthy curiosity and interest in human sacrifice and cannibalism - he overdeveloped the Mal Tanas *nanaki* of Verlili and took as real *nanaki* with human sacrifice that never took place - showed and encouraged him to write about these subjects for Europeans, when the missionaries forbade even the utterance of words in the village referring to spirits or paganism. If Tom Harrisson could do it, why not him. So it is when he sets himself up as his ancestor's heir and considers it his duty to perpetuate the cruel order that Nekhnel Batikh was responsible for enforcing (17.7.1954; 24.3.1955). The death penalty did exist, but it was not always applied; more often than not, a fine in pigs was agreed upon, a position with which he agrees also. There is a lot of manipulation and threatening of his interlocutors in his judgements which are initially presented as implacable. But he did not delight in describing violence. He never goes into detailed descriptions of wars or murders, unlike Kaku's accounts (Annex 5). He mentions the facts first and foremost for the causes and consequences they actually had or that he attributes to them in the context of the local political game.

Reading Longman Green's book probably gave him great hope that the Cooperative would achieve its goals. However, when he names this publisher at the end of a text, next to the John Frum movement and the Cooperative, which he then calls a "Movement" (1.5.1958), it should not be seen as an avatar of messianism, but as a

kind of manifesto brandished at arm's length, i.e. as a threat to the administration, a prelude to the demand for independence that he still dares to express only in dreams.

He had assimilated the Christian doctrine and understood its use in the context of colonisation, to the point of finding fault with its arguments and returning to the missions and the administration their illogicalities, claiming that his customs held the truth (24.3.1955). It is mainly a claim of equality in the face of the disrepute to which they were subjected by the Europeans. Nevertheless, he made extensive use of religion to show himself to be Christianised, westernised, making numerous signs of the cross and reciting prayers in order to gain access to power, to no avail. He finally claims to have visions of Jesus Christ and turns the Last Judgement and the coming of the new world to his advantage, which he brings up from the caves of the ancestors.

Having been in contact with very diverse currents of thought, in competition for the chieftainship, and not much listened by the leaders of the Cooperative, Racrac Charley appeared, according to Guiart, as a "free electron". This expression should not be taken in relation to the excesses of messianism, but rather as an early manifestation of anti-colonial, nationalist and independence sentiments that were very premature at the time. Having met Nakomaha and chiefs from other islands, he tries to get them to participate in the Cooperative. But he clearly shows that he wants to bring his interlocutor to his position and lead alone, and he easily puts Lenelvaklakh or the Cooperative at the centre of his grand plans. The Americans had given him the example of a highwage society and they professed racial equality and anti-colonialism. Longman Green's manual on cooperative management carried his hopes of the possibility of an independent Melanesian economy. All of this, taken together, makes him look like a fool. However, he proposed concrete solutions to the problems of the Cooperative faced with the difficulties of island economies, which are still the subject of the development programmes of the International Organisations in the region. Many of his ideas, such as the revaluation of custom and the restoration of social justice, were to be found at the root of the independence movements.

Was it necessary to take seriously his demands for a return to tradition and polygamy, which have some similarities with the messianic movements? Rather, it was a way of opposing the justice (or lack of it) of the assessor system and outbidding Kaku and some others. Would he have practised the return to traditional justice that he kept calling for? Rather, he showed himself ready to enter the colonial system with his many letters and reports to the District Agents, but he did not send them all. The return to polygamy was probably his dearest wish. In fact, polygamy had never stopped. Besides a few cases of "traditional" polygamists who were already old, it had taken other forms - on the European model - in which he participated like most Melanesians: occasional or permanent girlfriends, ephemeral or repeated encounters during stays on the plantations or trips to Santo, Port Vila or Nouméa.

An ambiguous visionary

In giving me his writings, Guiart had presented him to me as 'An interesting, but eccentric character'. Later in my work, he told me that he was 'a good witness of the

society of his time', in which he participated. But he had contradictions: 'He accused Donald Gubbay and hated the settlers, but, as an English speaker, he was always "stuffed" at his house or at Mrs. Fells' when he was in Santo. After the dissolution of the Cooperative by Don Gubbay, he imagines a new start with him (for lack of anything better?) in an organisation extending to the whole archipelago and exporting copra to New Caledonia. Guiart chose the title of my postgraduate thesis 'Un visionnaire ambigu'. I had reservations about the adjective. In his writings, his positions, including his contradictions, are very clear and stable, but I did not know him in real life. It is true that he was always critical of the missions, except for the amount of the dowry, but he recognised an amount of a hundred pounds as acceptable, not the five or ten pounds to which they were attached.

His escape from the school in Aore, his manipulation of the District Agents and his plans to expand the Cooperative were admired by informants, but when he intended to use the immigrants to impose his views, there was outrage. Similarly, his bold manipulations of Christian or John Frum's myths were laughed at, but the changes he made to traditional myths were immediately decried. His claims to land were often justified, but he sought to take more than his *nakhamal* share, and others, especially among the Big Nambas, were totally impossible. He would claim tradition but accuse the chief or his future in-laws in front of the administration, which is traditionally inconceivable, and informants often did not see clearly what he was getting at. These inconsistencies are the essence of his ambiguity, much more so than his so-called 'cargo' prophecies, which the administration accused him of in order to justify several imprisonments. He may have used this theme to attract new members, but his means of achieving wealth were always economic. His letters to J. W. Nakomaha are more a manifestation of his 'eccentric' and mocking side than an ambiguity. It is clear where he is going with this: to get Tanna to agree to his plans and not to follow the John Frum movement.

Of course, it was eccentric to write a vision of the Last Judgement in which he justified the sacrifice of a natural child in *nanaki*: he enjoyed confronting Europeans - and this made informants laugh in 1978. It was part of his strategy to manipulate them for village 'politics'.

What was most remarkable about him was his ability to reproduce the logic of the reasoning behind Christianisation and colonisation and to turn it to his advantage, inverting certain terms. The extreme point being that he claims to have seen and spoken to Jesus Christ in order to contradict the missionaries with a complete inversion: of the true and the false, the good and the bad, the dominant and the dominated and, on this basis, to impose on the administration to help him achieve what Christ asked him to do, act as the chief and Cooperative leader. In his dreams he will reverse the positions of Europeans and Melanesians in production and political decision-making.

All decisions came from the Europeans, authoritatively from the administration and the missions, and also supernaturally from the latter. The spirits of their dead had failed to protect them, most of their descendants were dead, and the missions forbade

even the utterance of words referring to ancestor worship. A way had to be found to be heard. Most often, new cults were invented, including cargo cults. Racrac Charley did not fall into this sterile and ineffective copying. He appropriated Jesus Christ - an instrument of missionary domination that the cargo cult leaders wanted to ignore - and turned their strategy on its head, thereby challenging the colonial system itself. He then found himself on the theoretical road to independence.

An independence activist

Racrac Charley was a pro-independence activist and is still regarded as such by Melanesians, along with Paul Tamlulum and several others, such as Kaku, Bule Sarinose John and Ati who worked for the Cooperative. His journey began with his escape from the Adventist school, a bold display of opposition⁹⁹ to the sense of cultural disrepute he felt there. The discrimination at the basis of the Code de l'Indigénat will lead him to claim cultural and also social equality. In this context, he justified practices that were the instruments of colonisation: the sale of arms and alcohol. He refused to allow the administration to imprison Melanesians who used or consumed them, while leaving the colonists free to do so - which is proof of discrimination - and to sell them alcohol despite the Condominium laws - which is an injustice (31.8.1951 10 o'clock at night). The disorder resulting from the Condominium's judicial system, its support for the false denunciations of the assessors, as well as for the settlers usurping land, the Cooperative's accusations of ideological offences incomprehensible to them and the unjust imprisonment of its leaders showed him the lie of the Europeans' speeches and the reality behind them: the discrimination at the base of colonial society, making any dialogue impossible in the end. He will put traditional law before condominium law, both translated as '*orders*', but it is the former that opens the access to paradise (24.3.1955).

In contrast, the experience of a different world on American bases was proof that equality between whites and blacks was possible and he called for more honesty in economic relations between Europeans and Melanesians (28.2.1958). More significantly and permanently than raising an American flag in Matanvat during the war, he planted a pole (Figure 23) in Tontar Asuy, similar to the poles in the dancing ground (there was no *nejar* in coastal villages), where he inscribed various information on boat passages, copra collection, but also maxims to remind all the villagers of the aims of the Cooperative and the values of the custom. This was certainly a desire to dominate, but also a demand for justice in the face of the deleterious colonial society of 'every man for himself'.

In 1958, when Don Gubbay declared the Cooperative bankrupt, he was very active in the meetings, looking for solutions to the dead end it had been brought to. In order to overcome the opposition of the settlers and the administration, it was necessary for the enterprise to regroup all the islands, the embryo of a Vanuatu nationalism. He understood before anyone else that the settlers' obstruction of the Cooperative would never cease, and that a common political basis for all the islands was needed for this

99 Leaving the missionary school in this way could be interpreted as a rejection of Westernisation and opposition to colonisation and Europeans, and could lead to imprisonment.

economic initiative to succeed. In a remarkably modern move, he imagined a zone of extraterritoriality in Santo controlled by the Cooperative, i.e. an autonomous, independent Melanesian economy.

Sure that he was right, he refused to accept a theory that had no chance of success under colonial rule and went ahead with his ideas. He did the same with Nakomaha and his son John William, proposing to them, failing to get them to join the Cooperative, a unified opposition movement in an uprising in the face of the imminent threat of imprisonment of Cooperative leaders - and those of the John Frum movement, if he knew about it (Annex 4). He was uncompromising and appeared outrageous, lacking all but lip service. He had the same attitude towards the administration, never using the word "Capman", even in writings not directly addressed to him, but always the words 'Delegate' or 'Delegation'. He placed himself as an equal, he as a "chief" (20.2.1954) and they as officials of the administration, refusing to be dominated.

Thus, Racrac Charley and the Cooperative were the first movement to oppose the Europeans on an economic basis and the precursors of the demand for independence. The theme of the value and a certain form of rehabilitation of custom appears clearly in his work and will be found as a ferment of the independence movement. But his plan for a 'nationalist' party, or movement, came too soon, given the cultural and political mosaic that was the archipelago and each of its islands. He only conceived of independence gradually and only in his dreams, without being able to free himself completely from European supports, such as Resident Anthonioz (8.1.1957) or even Donald Gubby (19.10.1955).

In short, his ideological path is based on a demand for equality. The depreciation of his customs by the missions almost definitely discouraged him from converting. The administration, incapable of enforcing justice, supported its representatives and the colonists and was the epitome of discrimination against the Melanesians, who were seen as exploitable workers, if not beasts of burden. The fact that all the Europeans joined in opposition to the Cooperative showed him that, despite all the rhetoric about civilisation and equality, they were being denied the right to be equal to the whites. He then refused the place, at the very bottom of the social ladder, that colonial society gave to Melanesians. This realisation led him to reject the Europeans, accuse them and force them to acknowledge their faults (Annex 4), then progressively to try to develop a neo-Hebridean - and Melanesian - nationalist current after his trips to New Caledonia, and, in his dreams, to attack the Europeans in their property, then their person, and finally to claim political power.

Since dialogue with the Europeans proved impossible, he rejected the teaching of the mission and its illogicalities. He wants to dictate his decisions to the Condominium, first by the soft way, manipulation, then by blackmail and finally in the name of anti-European movements. But, until the end, he will try to collaborate with the Europeans who work well, like Resident Anthonioz in 1957-1958, as opposed to those who "don't work well" or "lie and steal too much", as he says in his dreams (28.4.1954). Following his trips to Nouméa, he turned to New Caledonia, Jean Guiart and, in 1958,

in desperation, to CPS and the publisher Longman Green to save the Cooperative. This may seem strange to us, but it is an attitude often found in ill-informed people who cling to any contact that might help their projects¹⁰⁰. But he never waited for miraculous wealth, only political and economic help for Melanesians to take control of their own affairs and prosper.

He was impulsive, quickly getting enthusiastic, starting traditional constructions intended to become an office or a health centre. The problem was that he did not have the power of decision to manage these projects, which were blocked at the base by the Condominium administration; the only possible way to make them a reality was to start building them 'on the ground'. But he was even more of an idealist, in love with justice and equality in relations between Melanesians and Europeans, but not between Melanesians where he remained attached to the rank inherited by descent. He never promised "cargo", but only wealth through work in the Cooperative. He did not take refuge, even at the most uncertain moments of the Cooperative in 1957 and 1958, in a mythical or mystical universe that would have represented the solution to his problems. He was looking for concrete solutions.

He is also a good reflection of the society of his time. Like other Melanesians, he was disappointed and disoriented by the lack of consultation in the decisions of the colonial administration. Nevertheless, he participated in the internal struggles within Melanesian society for a power that was no longer based on tradition and was nothing without the backing of the Europeans. Thus, he addressed the District Agents to get the support he lacked to become the chief, although he was not the first to be entitled to this position. The question cannot be answered: what would he have done if he had had the support of the administration? He was a thinker who had a great understanding of the local social and political situation and of the mechanisms of colonial power, the various instances of which he enumerates, wanting them to work together - under his authority, of course (1.5.1951; 13.6.1952). But he was undoubtedly lacking in leadership and practicality. He was a visionary, a dreamer, not a politician or a leader.

His commitment to Melanesian society is still well recognised by his peers. The pole he erected still stands in the village of Tontar Asuv, and on his death Kaku hung a red mat on it. It was around this pole that Chief Gregoire's *nanaki* dances took place in 1985.

The writer

No text in Bislama has come down to us from Racrac Charley. He wrote in the Matanvat language¹⁰¹ and then translated some texts into English, rather "*broken English*". He also used some French words, often misspelled. This gives us some

100 Some of the letters from the Cooperative to Racrac Charley were addressed to : Longman Green & Co, IFO, Anse Vata, Noumea, with Melanesians thinking it was all together at SPC.

101 He was well aware that it was being lost, as the large number of immigrants in Matanvat meant that it was hardly used any more.

neologisms that would delight linguists: 'house pital' for *hospital*; 'thenafter' for *thereafter*; 'twogether' and 'threegether' for *together* – the Matanvat language has a duel and a triel. He also translated traditional words and concepts with skill: *nokulu* (warrior) is a *native policeman*, the *Notuloghian*: Christmas, the *natab*: an altar, the *nanarev*: communion, *nebetingting* (big drum): a bell, *tafu* (marine conch): a trumpet, etc. He was careful to use the same words 'orders' for both condominium and traditional law (24.3.1955), and 'fraid' for the repression fear of the Melanesians and the uprising fear of the whites (Annex 4, 26.7.1957). These were ways of revaluing one's custom and a demand for cultural and social equality.

His fast writing, with leaps forward and backward in time, gives him an alert style. But sometimes we lose essential details. In contrast, he also uses the traditional narrative style, with its repetitions - which seem to us to be lengthy - with each village contributing in turn (9.7.1954). Although his *broken English* makes it difficult for us to appreciate him, he had a real literary talent, as shown by the solemnity of the beginning of the story of the founding of the Cooperative (7.8.1951). He had the art of presenting dangerous ideas, with gradual shifts in meaning, such as the Melanesians' fear of repression turning into the Europeans' fear of an uprising (Annex 4) or to claim that the Europeans support polygamy, which they practise in various ways.

He also had a keen sense of theatre, as he portrayed the District Agents handing over a land register to him, sometimes with a touch of mockery: the settlers imploring him not to abandon them to their fate (19.10.1955), the District Agent Adam being afraid of him and giving him his house, the Adventist pastor's weeping - if it was real - or his angry gestures (22 and 23.8.1951, 6 o'clock).

He also knew how to speak to the reader of his letters, to manipulate him, to worry him: alternating threats, blackmail and flattery, demonstrating westernisation, most often in the form of Christianisation, while at the same time challenging missionary teaching; he knew how to play on several levels at once. In his letters to the District Agents, he included the Americans in the various social components of the village that he wanted to see represented before the administration. He shocked him with abrupt and crude statements about traditional justice and the right to kill the assessor and some others. Suddenly, he says that he is serious about sacrificing a natural child that his *nanaki* partners will eat. He cites the *nanaki* of a hundred emasculated men mentioned by Tom Harrisson (1937), which he certainly knows never happened, to impress them and scare them. The Melanesians laughed at his audacity to say such things to Europeans. Among the local Europeans, this type of story raised unease, linked to the memory of the cannibalism that cost the lives of some of the early missionaries and settlers. It was also felt to be a kind of threat, not really taken seriously, but always present¹⁰². All this was intentional and not peculiar to him; all Melanesians knew how to annoy the Europeans with this sort of story. But he was the only one who wrote it, before showing himself at his best: reciting pages of prayers,

102 Before independence, French policemen in the outer islands feared an uprising that would have been accompanied by a 'return to barbarism'.

making the sign of the cross or simply becoming reasonable and asking for fines instead of the life of the offenders.



Figure 3. – Chief Grégoire, Kaku's son, standing in front of Racrac Charley's news post in Tontar Asuv

He was very clever at making fun of someone: "Will Kaku never die" (20.2.1954); at putting him down: Mk Taivar's four wives are "women he has stolen", in a way divorced (26.4.1951) or at ridiculing him: District Agent Adam is afraid of him and bids farewell to his police (22.1.1956). His good sense made him very adept at demonstrating the illogicalities of the missionaries, taking them at their word and turning their arguments on their head, for example, when he denied that Botorvoro was 'a place of sinners' (2.6.1952), whereas the whole earth had been one since original sin; when he denied that men would go to heaven, and asserted, on the

contrary, that the new world would come from below: from the caves of the spirits, without explicitly saying so (24.3.1955). His imagination was abundant, sometimes unbridled, as in his dreams or in the account of his coma. He knew how to show off very naturally, and it is necessary to know the tradition, the genealogies and the "underside of the story" to decipher his intentions.

The dreams

The 'divinatory' dream - a misnomer in the case of North Malekula and in Melanesian cultures in general where religion is not based on one or more gods, but on the worship of ancestors, who inspire dreams - is traditionally the basis of any cultural, social or economic innovation, which is thus justified (Lohmann 2003; Etienne 1979). For example, Kaku says that he had a dream, asking him to create the Cooperative. Other founding members, in the islets and other centres of the Cooperative, also say they have had dreams¹⁰³. The people of Vovo say they were inspired by Lerelrel, the daughter of the Tavo snake (Annex 6), whose migration unites Norukvat in North-west Malekula and Longana in Aoba, where Paul Tamlumlum, its Melanesian director, came from.

Dream writing

Racrac Charley wrote many of his dreams, most of them very short and generally quite common, as the 1958 Matanvat language notebook attests. But he translated only a minority of them into English. All those that have come down to us (except the one of 8.1.1957, in Santo) were written in Nouméa, showing that the rewriting of his dreams was a substitute for the activity he could not have outside Malekula. This situation led him to develop more general ideas which he presented as dreams. The first one to come down to us is dated 14 April 1954 (28.4.1954)¹⁰⁴. He also wrote down dreams that are old or that he dates as such. In 1955 and 1956, during his fourth

103 According to informants, Racrac Charley never claimed dreams for his various projects to expand the Cooperative to all the islands, to bring in immigrants, etc., as the subject matter was not suitable, being out of place or contrary to tradition.

104 It is a long dream (not reproduced in this book) with erotic overtones and borrowings from Christian themes. An old Japanese woman (probably because sexual relations with white women were forbidden to Melanesians and punishable by imprisonment, or in memory of the Europeans' fear of a Japanese invasion), who is very poor, promises him sexual relations when her son comes into the world at the end of December, granting equality to men of all colours, showing that he considered that the missions had not achieved what they professed.

trip to Nouméa, dreams became the most frequent subject of the writings he gave to Jean Guiart. This long stay of more than a year took on the appearance of an exile that weighed more and more on him.

If, in Melanesia, dreams are considered a social fact (Poirier 1994), this is indeed the case of Racrac Charley's written dreams which are a form of political expression, sometimes expressing concrete demands. They often contain subversive ideas such as the departure of the Europeans (19.10.1955) and the condominium administration, and the demand for independence (8.1.1957), which would have been dangerous, less powerful and traditionally impossible to present as coming directly from himself.

The dream is interpreted by the Europeans as a compensation, which is the case when he presents the fulfilment of his desires: to be recognised as a leader or to lead the Cooperative, albeit with local socio-political implications. But, above all, it was a form of political expression, aimed at action. The content of some of the dreams is little different in substance from his positions on power at the village level, and their expression in this form is intended to give force to his ideas. But the dream written down and given to a European is more than that. It is a strategy to manipulate, to get Guiart, to whom he gave them, to help him end his troubles, his exile, to take over the Cooperative, to get the colonists to leave and to gain independence.

The villagers were unaware of his dreams, like most of his other writings. They vaguely remembered that he sometimes recounted them, but it was not very often. Only in exceptional cases did they know about the ones he had written and that I had read to them. However, they often recognised real events in them, which made them doubt their reality as dreams. Rather, they saw them as a way of making themselves heard, to gain support for their positions, which is the traditional function of dreams. Thus, for them, these texts translated intentions. They were most often surprised by their ideological audacity, which provoked admiration, and also by the manipulations they contained, such as his recognition as a chief by immigrants, which provoked indignation.

The themes of his dreams

Apart from a few dreams of a mainly or incidentally sexual nature, the most frequent themes are anti-European. They deal with Christianisation, colonisation, administration and the place of Melanesians in society. More rarely, they aim to resolve their problems with other Melanesians, within the framework of the Cooperative. Thus, they often feature settlers, missionaries, District Agents, chiefs, leaders or members of the Cooperative, Kaku and Paul Tamulum, and people from Matanvat.

While his ordinary texts give us his punctual reaction to particular events and people, in the dreams he gives us a general judgement on the missions, the administration and the colonists or, more globally, colonisation. In his various letters and reports, he criticises the assessors, some of his colleagues, pastors, *teachers*, etc. by name, except

for the District Agents. But in the dreams, he fundamentally challenges Christian doctrine and accuses the missionaries, as well as the District Agents, of lying and stealing at a general, or 'ideological', level (28.4.1954) as the basis of anti-colonialism and the demand for independence. They were lied to about bringing a civilisation that would make them equal to the whites, but in fact they were kept in a state of dependence, colonial administration supported those who usurped land or did not pay them as agreed. This inevitably leads to physical attacks on the settlers' property, and then on their persons, including some members of the administration, which is never encountered in the other texts, where he only threatens his fellow men with death.

The political, anti-colonial meaning of the dream is often very clear. It demands and 'achieves' the improvement of the living conditions of the Melanesians: through an increase in salaries (14.10.1955), by giving them back the usurped land or by giving them authority over the colonists in a reversal of roles: the Melanesians reducing the Europeans to servile labour or expelling them (13 and 19.10.1955, dream of 4 April 1953). Customs are often invoked in the dreams as actors, alongside the Melanesians, in the eviction of the Europeans from the New Hebrides. *Kastom*, the recognition of customary values, will later be an essential element uniting Melanesians around the parties demanding independence.

As time went by, it attacked the Europeans more and more directly. First, the natural elements, a cyclone, attacked the symbols of the European presence, the masts bearing the two flags of the Condominium (28.4.1954). Then the Residence boat sinks for an unknown reason (13.10.1955), then a settler's boat, driven by him and Kaku, hits the reefs, implicitly an act of sabotage, and this is how the informants understood it, which, on the eve of independence, amazed them but also worried them. Finally, he killed a European. He also threatened District Agent Adam, who decided to return to Europe (22.1.1956).

The Americans occasionally appear in the dreams, helping the Melanesians, but they are not as favourable to them as one might expect. A kind of disappointment or resentment seems to be in the air: they leave, leaving them with the colonists (14.10.1955, dream of 6 January). In the last dreams, Resident Anthonioz transfers power to him (8.1.1957), which is to claim and grant himself independence, but he asks him to stay and help him technically: translating a difficulty in conceiving a return to the time before contact, or being well aware that the education system, consisting only of missionary schools, did not prepare the Melanesians to run alone politically and economically a modern state.

We have chosen a selection of Racrac Charley's dreams illustrating the main themes mentioned above, in their most elaborate version. These texts are often quite long, whereas many of the dreams he wrote in his 1958 notebook are only a few lines long, undoubtedly showing an important work of recomposition of the dreams written in Nouméa, which makes them interesting documents on the emergence of the independentist ideas.

Below we give the theme of some dreams, not published in this book.

- The objects in the IFO Museum call for the whites to leave New Caledonia and the New Hebrides and they take down their flags. A woman fearfully gives him back the traditional objects, which he calls 'indigenous flags'. - Note the role of customs in the rejection of Europeans.

- Ballande, a wholesaler, leaves New Caledonia.

- A bomb falls on a house in Noumea - a reminder of Europeans' fears of being bombed by the Japanese.

- Together with Ati and two others, he urges men from all islands to join the Cooperative with Don Gubbay.

- He and Kaku try to lure the Big Nambas into the Cooperative.

- He brutally hits a European with an assegai and tells him it's because you steal too much and he dies.

- The bank gives him money in Noumea. This dream recalls several texts mentioning work done for the colonists, some of it in Nouméa, and never paid for.

- The Condominium gives the people of Santo their land back.

The reception of Racrac Charley's writings in Matanvat

The reaction of the people of Matanvat and North Malekula to the texts of Racrac Charley in 1978, 1982 and 2012 revealed important aspects of the character and how he was seen by his fellow human beings, the people who were in contact with him every day.

In 1978 and 1982, I met his contemporaries: Kaku, Joe, Josis, Mk Kila, Mk Sob, Ati, Jimmy Kaku,¹⁰⁵ to mention only those he names most often. The reception was very varied. Everyone was a bit afraid of what was in these texts that no one knew. His grievances and his positions were found there. They reacted in different ways, avoiding talking about it, trying to direct me towards problems that interested them more, such as the forthcoming independence or land conflicts, and to make me play a role by putting in black and white the land rights they claimed, or, on the contrary, with impatience: at the first meeting, some of them made me read most of the texts late into the night. They didn't comment on them, they wanted to know everything before they spoke - I skipped the most awkward sections. They expected revelations about their antagonists, but they also showed fear when they heard their names. Sometimes, during group readings, I was interrupted and asked to move on. In one-on-one sessions, I was told not to talk about it to anyone, especially not to such and such a person. Some said '*al e tru*' (it's all true), others '*e tru, ba e no stret*' (it's true, but it's not right). The facts are correct. All these events took place. He hardly ever makes things up, but he often dresses up reality in a way that suits him. He establishes dubious causalities and lends people intentions according to his interests.

On the whole, people seemed happy that he had not lied, made things up, or been tougher. Distrust was replaced by a certain satisfaction that their history and culture were being studied. More than that, they appreciated that this study immortalised the Cooperative, which had been the great struggle of their lives. Despite its failure, it was a testimony to their struggle, a struggle that did not end in 1958, but would soon lead to independence.

In order to get the fullest possible information on the events reported by Racrac Charley, I spent two weeks in Tontar Asuv with Kaku, who only agreed to talk about the tradition, fearing Racrac's writings against him. Then I went for a fortnight to

¹⁰⁵ Mk Taivar had died by then.

Tontar Asak to Mk Sob, chief of Leneluab, to stay between Kaku and the Teste; he was very open, as well as his son, Louis Ross, future Adventist pastor, who made with me the translations of the texts in Matanvat language. I then went to Matanvat to Joe's house, where I had spent an afternoon and read almost all the texts to a small group of men late into the night. He was waiting for me and gave me a lot of information about the custom, the problems with the assessor, the conflicts between different people and the difficulties of the Cooperative. I then went for a few days to Sebukhas to Mk Kila where I also met the people of Beter, and then returned to Tontar Asuv. I visited, in short stays, Temian, and the villages in the south, going up on the Big Nambas plateau to Amokh where Vikhambat resided with his wives and a small group of watchmen and warriors. Then, back to Tontar Asuv, I went back to the east coast to the islets Vao and Atchin. And finally, I visited some of the Cooperative's centres in Ambrym and Pentecost, where there was little to learn other than distant memories. I was often asked where the Cooperative's money was, how to find it, how to get it back. Many knew that this was now impossible.

In 1982, after independence, the youth of Wala and Rano refused me access to the islets and Ati had to come and meet me on Malekula. There had been serious conflicts between the mission on Malekula and the Wala and Rano islets. I was criticised for not having given the same advice in 1978 as I had to the chiefs of Vao: not believing the Minister of Overseas France who had come to make speeches to the French-speaking people to oppose independence by means of an uprising, an operation which had no chance of success on any of the islands of the archipelago because of the cultural and linguistic fragmentation. I then informed the Atchin chiefs of my conversations in Vao. They later held a meeting with their Vao counterparts and there was an agreement not to carry out any anti- or pro-independence actions between these islands. I would not have been able to achieve the same result at the Wala-Rano mission on the big island, given the indoctrination practiced by the Catholic missionary. In Matanvat-Tontar, where Pastor Louis Ross and the future Chief Grégoire had worked in New Caledonia and knew the place of the Melanesians there, everyone was for independence.

In Matanvat itself, interest in these texts and in my thesis, which I had brought with me, had greatly diminished. They did not ask me to read them again. They knew what he had written and that was enough for them. They had a lot of other things to worry about after the events of independence, with the aftermath of the conflicts between French and English speakers. They were looking for advice on what the Vanuatu government was doing or wanted to do. It was more on the subject of land, income generation and development that comments and advice were sought.

In 2012, Racrac Charley's adult contemporaries were no longer of this world. Their children were less directly involved and spoke more readily, more openly about the ancient stories. But they had only second-hand information: they could not say more than what their fathers had passed on to them. They did not have the answers to all my questions. Some of them, who had known Racrac Charley when they were ten years old or more, could give some details about certain events, their actors, their

place and their chronological order, but that was often all. Land issues also continued to limit the topics.

Their image of Racrac Charley was less nuanced, more stereotypical, depending on his stance towards their parents. He would go down in history, but he was not alone in promoting the Cooperative. He was a smooth talker, but it was others who acted. He had changed the myth in his own way, against the truth, and that could cause trouble. Fortunately, the real version was known - each in their own way.

Since Kaku's death in 1997, Gregoire has been the chief. He provided extensive and important information on the custom. His eldest son, Charlie, the '*young chief*', was a student at the University of South Pacific in Port Vila, as were two sons of Grégoire's brother Gilbert, and they felt that this knowledge was being lost. Chief Grégoire arranged meetings with John Bwil's son, the chiefs of Naure, Tenmian, Rambek (Makhawe). However, most of them were not direct witnesses of the events of the 1950s. Their main concern was that the loss of knowledge of customs, ignorance of the past and manipulation of genealogies would make land disputes more frequent, harder and more difficult to resolve.

The manipulation of myths or long genealogies, as Racrac Charley did, is no longer used to claim land or, more rarely, a hierarchical position. Uncertain descents are claimed over two or three generations, and *nakhamal* or other names are interpreted in a particular sense to justify one's hierarchical position and the associated right to land. These claims are increasingly made on the basis of spurious arguments: over time, filiations become more and more difficult to prove or disprove. The meaning of proper names is the subject of controversy over inaccurate translations. The most unacceptable cases have led, in other islands, to the eviction of the "wrongdoers", sometimes entire *nakhamal* had to leave for Port Vila or Santo. Except for a few points directly concerning Lenelvaklakh, Racrac Charley did not give precise information about the land, nor about the hierarchy, rather presence, of *nakhamal* and their different lineages that he too was trying to manipulate.

Finally, I was reminded - as I had been requested many times during the reading of the texts in these three missions - to correct Racrac Charley's words as necessary. This was quite impossible given the contradictory demands of the various interlocutors. I also had to give him back his own text. The aim of the commentary is to correct the main inaccuracies, which are few in number, and above all to show the subtleties of the dialectic between the Melanesians on the one hand, and the colonists, the colonial administration and the missionaries on the other, and also between the Melanesians themselves. Nevertheless, conflicts are still potentially linked to their misunderstanding as indicated in the initial warning. - It should be remembered that Kirk Huffman, then Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, put access to the thesis from which this book is derived on a restricted basis.

For the inhabitants of the Matanvat region, the writings of Racrac Charley are part of their history, customs and life before and during colonisation that they would like to pass on to their children.