CONFLICTING AUTONOMIST AND INDEPENDENTIST LOGICS IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

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On 3 March 2005, the election of the Tavini Huiratiraa’s leader, independentist Oscar Temaru, as President of French Polynesia put an end to several months of political crisis, institutional impasse and power vacancy. The crisis had been triggered by the overthrow of the first Temaru government in October 2004. The UPLD (Union pour la Démocratie) coalition of parties around Temaru’s Tavini had won the Assembly elections in May 2004 with a small majority against Gaston Flosse’s autonomist Tahoeraa Huiratiraa. Together with its autonomist allies, UPLD held 29 seats against 28 Tahoeraa seats in the Assembly. The sudden desertion of one Tavini representative to Tahoeraa allowed the overthrow of the Temaru government on 9 October. Accusing Gaston Flosse of corruption, Temaru and his supporters called upon President Jacques Chirac to dissolve the French Polynesian Assembly and to hold new elections. However the Minister for Overseas France, Brigitte Girardin, stated in response that the “State does not have to follow up the demand for dissolution” of the Assembly. On 16 October, an unprecedented demonstration took place on the island of Tahiti. More than 20,000 people (approximately 10 percent of the total population) marched in the streets of the capital, Papeete, asking for dissolution. For the first time in French Polynesia’s history, demonstrations also took place in Nuku Hiva (Marquesas) and Rangiroa (Tuamotu). The State Council (France’s highest administrative court) confirmed the French President’s refusal to dissolve French Polynesia’s Assembly. But the invalidation, by the same Council, of the May 2004 electoral results in the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Mo’orea), French Polynesia’s largest constituency, brought an unintended solution to the crisis. The by-elections that were held in the Windward Islands in February 2005 confirmed UPLD’s victory, and allowed Oscar Temaru’s re-election as President with a new majority.

In Metropolitan France, the media most favourable to the Independentists and their autonomist allies interpreted the crisis as the outcome of French Polynesia’s long time ruler Gaston Flosse’s corrupt methods and the support he received from France’s President Jacques Chirac. (Gaston Flosse’s Tahoeraa party is affiliated to the party founded by Chirac, the UMP [Union pour un Mouvement Populaire] of the French Right.) In short, the refusal to dissolve the Assembly was seen as nothing more than an anti-democratic gesture against a democratically elected coalition led by the Independentists.
The latter received support from members of the French Socialist Party and French Greens, some of whom denounced a “legal Coup d’État” (Jack Lang). Gaston Flosse’s defeat did largely stem from the will to put an end to his autocratic reign, which many considered to have lasted for too long. Conversely, Oscar Temaru’s victory resulted from the strategy of alliance of his Tavini party with non-independentist parties united within UPLD in their denunciation of Flosse’s governance. This electoral strategy was encouraged by the newly implemented majority bonus of one-third-of-seats with which Flosse hoped to consolidate his majority in the Assembly, and which increased the bipolarisation of French Polynesian political life. Oscar Temaru succeeded in building this alliance by promising to put off any demand for independence for at least ten years and to focus on social and economic issues instead of statutory questions. In the evening following the UPLD’s electoral victory in May 2004, Temaru declared that the elections certainly did not constitute “a referendum on independence” and that his first priority was to “improve the economic situation of the country”. \footnote{UPLD subsequently signed a convention with Nicole Bouteau and Philip Schyle (leaders of two autonomist parties) for a government partnership that would last until 2009. Together they proclaimed their will to promote a new type of governance and a democratic political system. In spite of Gaston Flosse’s attempts to polarise voters between the political concepts of autonomy and independence, threatening that the latter would inevitably lead to chaos and misery, the elections were clearly not a vote in favour of independence, but first and foremost a vote for change (taui).} Nevertheless, the crisis that French Polynesia has gone through cannot be reduced either to a matter of partiality of the French State (and head of State), nor to the autocratic power yielded by a single person. It is the result of a politics that has set up deep divisions among the population of French Polynesia. These cleavages can be better understood by viewing the French Polynesian political field as structured between autonomist (in favour of continuing ties with France) and independentist (in favour of a sovereign nation-state) poles. In this article, I analyse the opposition between autonomist and independentist logics rather than providing a detailed account of the fight between political parties. One reason for this reduction of facts is that affiliation to parties identified as independentist or autonomist is extremely volatile: the sudden desertion of a Tavini representative to Tahoeraa in October 2004 is only one example among many others. In the race for power in French Polynesia, prominent political figures often cross the floor or split away to form a challenging party.

There are two more important reasons that will be further developed in this article. These terms, “Independentists” and “Autonomists” are not just convenient labels for parties competing for power within a multiparty
system guaranteed by an overall accepted institutional framework: it is
the institutional framework itself which is at stake. The denunciation of
the système Flosse (‘Flosse system’, a widely used expression in the years
before the change) is, more profoundly, in the case of the Independentists, a
rejection of the institutional frame—the status of autonomy—set up by the
French Métropole on Gaston Flosse’s request.

A further reason is that Oscar Temaru has not relinquished his wish for
independence. Since his re-election, he has expressed the wish that French
Polynesia be re-inscribed on the United Nations’ list of Non-Self-Governing
Territories (although he was careful to formulate this demand in his capacity
of leader of the Tavini party, not as president of French Polynesia, in order
to avoid tensions with his anti-independence coalition partners). During
the visit to Tahiti of François Baroin, the new Minister of Overseas France,
in April 2006, he presented his project for an agreement modelled on that
which Metropolitan France had had agreed upon with New Caledonia in
1998 (shared sovereignty for a period of 20 years after which independence
could be voted on by referendum). He is currently being criticised for his
frequent travels across the Pacific whereby he seems to show more concern
for his country’s external political status than for internal social and economic
issues. Temaru was able to build a majority by tempering his former radical
discourse by stating that French Polynesia should first be able to stand on its
own before gaining independence. This nonetheless shows that independence
remains the horizon towards which the Tavini leader’s political programme is
oriented. Independence and autonomy are the two poles upon which French
Polynesia’s political issues revolve.

The analysis offered here is structural in that it deals with the polarisation
of the political field between two main logics—autonomist and independentist.
Independentist and autonomist logics should be understood as opposed
principles of the definition of the Polynesian world, competing within that
world, a world which can be apprehended as a field, that is, as a “structured
space of positions” (Bourdieu 1984:136). Such an approach necessarily requires
some degree of simplification, and I shall therefore use as shortcuts the terms
“Independentists” and “Autonomists” to refer to those who advocate each
option, without entering into the details of the parties’ internal struggles or
external alliances. The present analysis is not intended as a factual account of
the competition for power between parties. I will rather try to disclose the logics to
which the labels adopted by political leaders and parties refer. These underlying
logics will be put forward through an analysis of the party leaders’ discourses
and the dominant trends among their supporters. In positioning themselves as
independentist or autonomist—or closer to either of the poles—they make a
statement about what the society they live in should become and this positioning
simultaneously accounts for the structure of the political field at a given moment. According to Bourdieu, every identity struggle, every regionalist or nationalist discourse is a performative discourse that aims at *regere fines*, at legitimising a new definition of borders. Therefore identity struggles can only be understood if one bypasses the opposition of representation and reality, and provided that one includes the representation of reality within that reality (1980:65-66). “Identity struggles” are a particular case of “classification struggles” (Bourdieu 1979), that is, “struggles for the monopoly on the power to make see and make believe, make know and make recognise, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world, and thus to make and unmake groups”. Thus the political field in French Polynesia is structured by the fight for the monopoly on the definition of principles of the (French Polynesian) social world, and for the imposition of representations of the social world that simultaneously constitute that social world. It is these differing principles and representations I analyse in this article.

The current structuring of the political field between autonomist and independentist poles corresponds to, and emanates from, the present state of relations between the Métropole and its colony. In order to situate the current political and institutional issues and to understand how French Polynesia’s political field has become divided between Autonomists and Independentists in the last decades, it is impossible not to refer to the balance of power between the Métropole and its colony. Indeed, the structuring of the political field in French Polynesia operates according to a certain configuration of their relations. As Al Wardi (1988:215) has stressed, “Polynesian political life has not been built upon an opposition between social groups, but essentially on the attitude *vis-à-vis* the French presence.” The present polarisation between Autonomists and Independentists corresponds to a configuration of these relations, wherein the main structuring principle of the field is the rejection of French rule.

To introduce the analysis that follows I shall briefly retrace the three main historical stages in the balance of power between the Métropole and the Colony. After the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1797, the institution of a Christian monarchy in 1815 by King Pomare II and the conversion of his subjects to Protestantism, the first stage was inaugurated by the annexation of the Marquesas archipelago in 1842. The following year France established a protectorate over Queen Pomare IV’s kingdom, which comprised Tahiti, Mo’orea, several Austral islands and the Tuamotu Islands. The protectorate was annexed in 1880 under the name *Etablissements français de l’Océanie* (EFO). The French Métropole’s policy towards its colony was, as elsewhere in the French colonial empire, lastingly ambiguous: a civilising ideology coexisted with the *régime de l’Indigénat*. This did not constitute a
formal code; it referred to the set of disparate rulings that were implemented in France’s colonies and applied to those among the indigenes who were not French citizens, but French subjects. (All indigenous inhabitants of French Polynesia were French nationals, but only the inhabitants of the former Pomare kingdom were granted citizenship, while the others remained subjects.\textsuperscript{11}) The régime de l’Indigénat was legitimised by a paternalistic colonial ideology which proclaimed among other points the necessity to maintain the indigenous population on its lands. (The importance of this will be highlighted later.) The need to develop the colony, its budget being only very feebly subsidised by the Métropole, led the colonial administration to allow free Chinese immigration. The management of schools was entrusted to Protestant missionaries, and education was mostly in the Tahitian language. This turned French cultural capital into a scarce—valorised and valorising—resource, as it was one of the principal criteria for obtaining French citizenship.

The second phase starts in 1945 with the granting of French citizenship to all Polynesian inhabitants in parallel to the abolition of the régime de l’Indigénat, and the sudden application of a huge corpus of French metropolitan legislation to what became an Overseas Territory the following year. Whereas the colony had thus far not been given much importance, the transfer of France’s nuclear testing installations from the Algerian Sahara to the Polynesian atolls was accompanied by a tightening of metropolitan control over the Territory in the 1950s and 1960s (the then Gaullist majority at the assembly voted several laws that led to the reinforcement of metropolitan rule). After the trial and exile of independentist leader Pouvana’a Oopa in 1959, his party, the RDPT (Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes ‘Democratic Gathering of the Tahitian Populations’), was banned in 1963. His successors therefore turned into Autonomists. The only possible alternative in these years was either to take an autonomist stand on the one hand, or to support the Gaullists, in favour of the strengthening of French presence, on the other. The Tahitian language was banished from the French public schooling system that prevailed during the 1950s and 1960s. The Chinese minority was naturalised en masse in 1973. The possession of French cultural capital then became all the more discriminatory in that it was more necessary but still scarce (owing to the conditions that prevailed in the previous stage). The transition from one stage to the other thus reshaped the structuring of the field of identifications: from one configuration where the French Métropole’s politics imposed a multiethnic vision of colonial society, to one in which these distinctions had to be erased.

During the 1980s and 1990s, however, France granted increasing autonomy to the Territory through successive status changes. The turning-point was 1977 when autonomie de gestion (‘autonomy of management’)
was given to the Territory. The maintenance of a Territorial status instead of the transformation into a “Department” (as in the Antilles or La Réunion, which are Départements d’Outre-mer) had already allowed the negotiation of special juridical and political arrangements in order to take French Polynesia’s “cultural particularities”\textsuperscript{12} into account. But autonomy strongly augmented these particularistic politics. Furthermore, Gaston Flosse’s sudden change of direction, in 1980, turned his anti-autonomist Gaullist party, the Tahoeraa, into a pro-autonomist party that won the 1982 elections. This move opened up room for the comeback on the political scene of a strong pro-independentist movement. From then on, Gaston Flosse grounded his successive demands for more autonomy on the basis that this was the only way to prevent the Independentists from winning the elections. His calls for more autonomy rested on this threat as much as on the assertion of a Polynesian cultural identity. The assertion of a Polynesian identity has thus been promoted by the Territory in an institutional way and consists of a defence of reo Ma’ohi (Ma’ohi languages\textsuperscript{13}) and the sponsoring of cultural manifestations. For instance, one year after having acceded to ‘internal autonomy’ (autonomie interne) in 1984, the Territory organised the Festival of South Pacific Arts, and on that occasion the Tiurai (from the English ‘July’) celebrations, which until then took place on the 14th of July, were replaced by the Heiva i Tahiti Festival and dissociated from the French national celebration. The balance of power thus changed in a way that favoured the emergence of a Polynesian cultural identity “in contradistinction to the French” (Stevenson 1992:120). Polynesian cultural capital is being revalorised at the same time as French cultural capital keeps its function of “distinction” (Bourdieu 1979). Indeed, as I will show below, the autonomist government of French Polynesia has done everything possible to substantiate the vision of a multiethnic and multicultural society.

The first structuring axis of French Polynesia’s political field is the balance of power between the Métropole and the Colony. This axis gives the field its overall shape by imposing the larger structuring principle and simultaneously accounts for the way the field is internally structured. During the strictly colonial phase French Polynesia was not yet a Territory, but it enjoyed, if less political power, considerable autonomy: the structuring principle of the political field was the issue of even more autonomy. From 1945 to the mid 1970s, in a context of tightening of France’s control, the political field was structured by an opposition between Autonomists and advocates of juridical and cultural assimilation to France. During the 1970s, there was a shift from an alternative between more or less acceptance of French rule to more or less refusal: the field became structured by an opposition between Autonomists and Independentists.
However the field’s structure is also framed by principles proper to Polynesian society. The struggle within the field includes three stakes, which will be developed in the course of this article, but can be briefly presented here. First of all, the parameters of definition of identity: here we can see a fight between ideological discourses that prescribe both the norms governing social relations ("anonymous" egalitarianism—reciprocity and redistribution—versus inter-individual competition—exploitation and accumulation) and the use of either racial or socio-historical criteria. A second stake is the value that should be conferred on cultural capital: the linguistic struggle for the pre-eminence of French as the official language, or for the imposition of reo Ma‘ohi in the Assembly and tribunals. The third stake combines with the first two: it is the project for the construction of a Polynesian political entity as either autonomous or sovereign, whose inhabitants would hold either citizenship or nationality, and of Polynesian society as either plural (multiethnic) or unified by a common Ma‘ohi culture.

In the next two sections of this article, I will show in more detail how the institutional impasse that appeared during the 2004-2005 political crisis reveals the fundamental cleavage between Autonomists and Independentists, before indicating what differentiates them in spite of a common nationalist rhetoric that flows freely during speeches in Tahitian. A scrutiny of what underlies the onomastic (naming) battle between those who prefer the use of the name “Polynesians” and those who argue in favour of the name “Ma‘ohi” will lead to a better understanding of identity mobilisation within the political field. In the two following sections, I will shift my attention to the use by Autonomists and Independentists of the notions of multi-ethnicity and cultural specificity. I will show how the making of a plural society by the colonial administration was used by the Autonomists to ground their demands for a specific citizenship within the French Republic, as well as to deny the Independentists’ claim for a separate Ma‘ohi nationality. This is only one illustration of the way in which the Autonomists use the differentiating policy implemented during the colonial phase to obtain political autonomy while remaining within the French Republic. I will therefore argue in the final section that the Autonomists’ notion of a cultural specificity rests on an acceptance of the attributes imposed on Polynesian culture by the coloniser, while the Independentists reject these attributes which, in their view, perpetuate colonial domination. If a common characteristic of many identity struggles is, according to Bourdieu, that they rely on a strategy of reversal of the stigma—or positive re-valorisation of a previously depreciated identity—this reasoning applies only to the autonomist logic. Identity struggles are indeed struggles for the power to define the social world one lives in. The emphasis should however not only be placed on the struggle for power, but also on the actual definition of the social world. Only
by using this approach may we understand the different logics, autonomist and independentist, underlying identity struggles that are frequently deemed to be one and the same.

A POLITICAL FIELD STRUCTURED BY THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN AUTONOMISTS AND INDEPENDENTISTS

The nationalist rhetoric of the Autonomists led by Gaston Flosse had served, over the past 20 years, to prevent the Independentists from gaining power by taking over several of their claims—which forced the latter to overbid the Autonomists. Ironically, the institutional reshufflings have recently led to a degree of autonomy beyond which it is difficult to venture without totally disenfranchising Tahiti from the Métropole. In 1996, the new autonomous status recognised the ‘peculiar personality’ (personnalité propre) of French Polynesia within the French Republic. The competences of the Territory were extended to all domains that were not specifically devolved to the State: from then on the Territory exercised control over its budget, foreign investments and maritime and underground resources. A key element that allowed the full extent of the personalisation of power to occur, and which is not merely a matter of authoritarian character, is that from then on all contracts had to be signed by the President in person. Following the last status change in February 2004, the legal framework of the new ‘Overseas Country’ (Pays d’Outre-mer) remains largely that of 1996, but a few additions have been made: the government has acquired the power to sign international agreements, and the title of “President of French Polynesia” has been substituted for the former “President of the Government of French Polynesia”. Furthermore, the “Territorial councillors” have become “Assembly representatives”. They still vote the budget and control the Government but, in addition, they can now vote lois du pays ‘country laws’ in domains that pertained until then to the French State: civil law, labour regulation, taxes, higher education, delivery of residence permits, police. (However, these country laws remain under the control of the Conseil d’Etat (‘State Council’) and not the Conseil Constitutionnel (‘Constitutional Council’)14 as is the case in New Caledonia. Therefore, though they are named as such, they are not really laws. This example shows that the political autonomy obtained by Flosse is largely rhetorical; I will come back later to the fundamental contradiction on which the process of autonomisation rests. Gaston Flosse continuously negotiated new competences as well as more subsidies, and managed to get still more by presenting the prospect of independence as a catastrophe.

In such a context, what the French Metropolitan media (as well as several scholars) called the “totally unexpected defeat” (Le Monde, 26 May 2004)15 of Gaston Flosse after two decades of almost continuous rule over French
Polynesia, might indeed be considered as such. The small majority obtained by the Independentists and their allies, gathered under the banner UPLD, seems to confirm this view. Though they jumped from 10 to 27 representatives in May 2004, this was largely because of the majority bonus of one-third-of-seats that was instituted by Gaston Flosse during the last change of institutional status. UPLD defeated Tahoeraa in only one of the six constituencies—the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Mo‘orea)—by 397 votes. Gaston Flosse’s demise seemed, at first sight, to be the result of his own strategy turning against him.

When closely examining the circumstances under which the May 2004 elections took place, one can see this tauti ‘change’ is not purely a matter of chance. If UPLD’s victory was unexpected, it was only so regarding the circumstances under which the elections took place. Gaston Flosse had obtained the sudden dissolution of the Assembly from Jacques Chirac, officially as a consequence of the last institutional change, which by the organic statutory law of 27 February 2004 transformed the Overseas Territory into an Overseas Country (Pays d’Outre-mer). In reality the motive of this move was first and foremost to profit from the new ballot system with a majority bonus that was brought about by the same law and was supposed to ensure Tahoeraa’s lasting control over the Country. The opposition parties were almost unprepared, and had but two months to conduct their campaign. By contrast, the Tahoeraa government had, for years, undertaken an almost permanent campaign, using public means to service its electoral clientele especially in the most remote archipelagos, the Marquesas and the Australs. UPLD did not run a list in the Marquesas owing to a lack of funds. And though the majority bonus was key to the victory of the UPLD (thanks to its advance in the Windward Islands), the “a-territorial” character of the bonus simultaneously accounted for the over-representation of Tahoeraa in the peripheral archipelagos (Guiselin 2004).

Above all, the UPLD’s victory is not so surprising when one knows of the increasing discontent aroused by the Tahoeraa leader’s politics. First, the rise in the rate of participation (78.51 percent) in the 2004 elections, ten points more than in the previous 2001 elections, clearly points to the wish for change. Second, when looking at the number of votes without taking the bonus into account, it still appears that the majority of the population voted against Tahoeraa, which obtained 45.7 percent of votes (45,146 of 118,473 votes). Third, these figures rose to more than half at the February 2005 by-elections, which consolidated UPLD support in the Windward Islands, so that the gap between Oscar Temaru’s UPLD and Gaston Flosse’s Tahoeraa widened between May 2004 and February 2005 from 300 to 6300 votes. Moreover, UPLD won the by-elections without its former autonomist allies Bouteau and Schyle, who had decided to run together on a common list, the ADN (Alliance
pour une Démocratie Nouvelle), hoping to attract many voters frustrated by the political polarisation between UPLD and Tahoeraa.\textsuperscript{19} On the whole, the elections confirmed the feeling of being \textit{fiu} ‘fed up’ experienced by the majority of voters. The UPLD’s overwhelming victory over Tahoeraa expressed the prevailing opinion that there should be an end to Flosse’s rule.

The problem, however, is even deeper. More than an autocratic mode of governance, it is the system as a whole which is at stake. The \textit{fiu}-ness was especially strong among the youth, who were marginalised by the technocratic system imported from the Métropole and were particularly hit by the high rate of unemployment, but also among the wider population who could no longer bear widespread corruption and “clientelism”.\textsuperscript{20} Though it is difficult to dissociate institutional and political issues, for, as is illustrated in the expression “Flosse system”, both tend to merge in French Polynesia, and the political crisis of October 2004-February 2005 acted as a revelator of the institutional problem. The institutional nature of the political crisis was revealed in the absolute impasse that appeared on this occasion. I will now show how this impasse resulted less from the alleged partiality of the French State than from the absence of consensus about the institutions between the two main parties as well as their mutual denial of each other’s legitimacy. I shall here briefly retrace the chronology of the main events to show how the institutional issue surfaced at each new development.

Following the overthrow of the Temaru government on 9 October, the institutional impasse first appeared as the result of the disagreement between the parties as to the interpretation of French Polynesia’s electoral law. Each party adopted a separate calendar for the Presidential election. The President of the Assembly, the independentist Antony Geros, decided to summon the Assembly on 25 October (an election to which Gaston Flosse himself declared his candidacy). Meanwhile, on the opposite side, the new majority had gathered on 22 October and had re-elected Gaston Flosse President of French Polynesia by 29 votes against 28. French Polynesia henceforth had two Presidents: Gaston Flosse and Oscar Temaru. The crisis deepened in November after the State Council\textsuperscript{21} confirmed Gaston Flosse’s election and rejected UPLD’s requests to suspend the motions of no-confidence that had overthrown the Temaru government on 9 October. Oscar Temaru then began what he called a “spiritual fasting” and refused to leave the Presidential Palace, denouncing the President of the Republic’s refusal to dissolve the Assembly. This was clearly an act of rejection of the institutions, a denial of their legitimacy. Indeed, although part of the crisis was due to the fact that French President Jacques Chirac refused to accept Oscar Temaru’s request for dissolution of the Polynesian Assembly while he had accepted Gaston Flosse’s request six months earlier,\textsuperscript{22} the legal framework was respected. According
to the statutory law governing French Polynesia, the head of State does not have to justify his refusal to dissolve the assembly if the demand stems from the President of French Polynesia. Negotiations were opened at the Ministry of Overseas France in Paris to try to reach an agreement on the principle of renewal of French Polynesia’s Assembly, but they were suspended on 29 November when Gaston Flosse left the table.

The solution to the crisis came from the State Council (France’s highest administrative court). This institution had confirmed the refusal of President Jacques Chirac to dissolve French Polynesia’s Assembly, a decision that led some to cast doubt on the State Council’s impartiality (all the more as several of its members had been nominated by the President of the Republic). Its next decision was to invalidate the electoral results of May 2004 in the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Mo’orea). The invalidation was motivated by the alleged lack of impartiality in the polling station of Mahina (on Tahiti) which was decorated with dark blue pareu ‘cloth’, the colour of the mayor’s Ai’a Api party, which is one of the Tavini party’s allies within UPLD. Ironically, this invalidation led to the holding of the elections on 13 February 2005, which UPLD won with a larger margin than in 2004. At the proclamation of the results, however, the October scenario was reproduced almost identically, and revealed the same reluctance to follow the rules of the institutional game. Gaston Flosse, despite his commitment to resign in case of victory of his opponents, announced that he would not give up his position. He proposed that “a government of union” be formed to “materialize the aspirations for peace of the Polynesian people”—a proposal that was rejected by Oscar Temaru, who eventually was elected President of French Polynesia by the new Assembly.

Though the legal framework was eventually respected under close control by the State Council, the reluctance demonstrated by both sides to follow the rules of the game is linked to their mutual denial of legitimacy. The Tavini leaders’ attitude in October-November cannot solely be explained by their suspicion of corruption by the Tahoeraa leader who was able to “buy” a representative to overthrow the Temaru government. The refusal of the legal framework, as it was set up on request of the Autonomists’ leader, was clearly expressed by Anthony Geros, the President of the Assembly, when Gaston Flosse was re-elected in October 2004: he stated that “today there has been no election”, adding that if there had been an election, it was that of the “President of a party”, the Tahoeraa.

The crisis French Polynesia went through between October 2004 and February 2005 was not just a matter of political competition between parties and their respective leaders. The crisis took on an institutional turn, which is not surprising considering the institutional obsession that had characterised two decades of French Polynesian political life. It is therefore logical that one
of Oscar Temaru’s first statements after his election on 3 March was: “We should stop the statutory overbidding that has, for years, concealed the real problems of this country.”26 This statement is a double bind. On the one hand, it can be explained by Temaru’s strategy of alliance with non-independentist parties. This alliance was only rendered possible when Temaru renounced his former claims for immediate independence. On the other hand, it is a reaction to Flosse’s past attempts to hold on to power by taking over the Independentists’ claims. In Temaru’s view, the final aim is independence and the successive granting of more autonomy were only half-measures that have clouded the country’s real problems; yet these problems result from the system that was put in place by Flosse with the support of the Métropole. The denunciation of the Flosse system is a rejection of the institutional status set up at Gaston Flosse’s request: the Territory that is now an Overseas Country. This institutional status consists of formal political autonomy that is distorted by economic dependency on the Métropole (I will develop this point in the final section). Therefore the Métropole subsidies should be used to reach economic independence in order to eventually achieve institutional independence—sovereignty, instead of being used to secure power as Gaston Flosse used it.

In this section I have stressed that “Independentists” and “Autonomists” are not merely convenient labels for parties competing for power within a consensual institutional framework. Rather, it is the institutional framework itself that is at stake in this competition, and independence and autonomy are the two main options. In the following section, I will show that the opposition between the two is not just a political struggle for the definition of institutions but an identity struggle for the imposition of representations of the social world. What separates them is crystallised in the onomastic opposition between the names “Ma’ohi” and “Polynesia”.

POLYNESIANS AND MA’OHI

To analyse the division of the French Polynesian political field between Autonomists and Independentists, I now focus on the efforts they have undertaken to impose their own ways of defining the French Polynesian social world, starting by the ways in which they name their world: “Ma’ohi” on the Independentists’ side, “Polynesian” on the Autonomists’ side. Despite the complexity of their use, it seems that we can clearly establish two facts. First of all, there is the obvious opposition between the notion of nunaa Ma’ohi ‘indigenous people’ used by the Independentists (the Tavini’s full name is Tavini Huiratiraa no te Ao Ma’ohi27), and the Autonomists’ preference for the name “Polynesia”. Second, the term Ma’ohi has always been used by the people of French Polynesia to refer to an indigenous way of speaking, making things or
behaving. It seems that this notion has acquired, at least in the past decades, a racialist connotation in the definition of self, even though it still works concurrently with a second parameter, that of locality, of place of origin.

The idea of *Ma’ohi* people and values as they are used by the Independentists has been put into question by commentators of the French Polynesian political stage, especially regarding its “coherence” and “existence” (recurrent terms in these types of questioning). But one just has to observe the violently negative reaction of the local supporters of autonomy within the French Republic when they are asked if they regard themselves as belonging to the *Ma’ohi* world, to understand that it is certainly not merely a “fashionable” word, as some observers imply. “*Ma’ohi*” is not a label intended for outside observers, but constitutes, in the Tahitian and other Polynesian languages, a specific manner of referring to indigeneity. It is not a signifier cut off from the signified—a signifier that would only refer to its own significance as part of a ‘chain of signifiers’ (*chaîne de signifiants*). The political signs of belonging to a *Ma’ohi* world, whether overt—hoisting blue and white striped flags in front of the houses—or out of sight—holding of a “*Ma’ohi* passport” by way of party membership card—are signifiers that refer to a world of meaning. The term first and foremost refers to a meaningful world, a specific local, indigenous way of behaving and viewing the world, a *Ma’ohi* ‘mode of being’ (see final section). In this respect, the break with the pre-colonial world does only exist from the point of view of colonisers, for if many of those who advocate independence reject the “pagan” past, they do so because they have indigenised the Protestant religion brought by the LMS, who contributed to safeguard *Ma’ohi* culture. Indeed, Tahitian youth, who are sent to school in the French system in which Tahitian is taught as an option, as a “second foreign language” (*seconde langue étrangère*), learn to speak and read Tahitian during Bible classes given by the Protestant parish. Reference to the pre-colonial period, although not in the sense outside observers confer on it, is an essential element in the fight for independence.

Therefore, although UPLD won the elections within the autonomist institutional framework, and despite its leader’s appeal for support among the Metropolitan left, it is this same framework he wishes the *Ma’ohi* people to free themselves from. The Tavini’s emblems are not those of a party aspiring to be brought to power within a multipartite institutional framework; they are the emblems of a nation aspiring to independence. As soon as the autonomist institutional framework is dismantled, the flag of the Tavini should replace the flag of the Overseas Country, which in their view is not some transcending reality, but one and the same with Tahoeraa, Gaston Flosse’s party. (This view is not only held by members of Tavini: it is a widely shared point of view that French Polynesia’s flag is not a country’s flag but a partisan
flag.) As Bourdieu would put it, it is a struggle for the definition of political principles of vision and division of the social world, which leans on subjective representations—the belief in the existence of a Ma‘ohi people—that it aims at bringing to existence—the construction of a Ma‘ohi Nation-State.

This fight is translated into the onomastic debate, which crystallises first on the name “Tahiti”. The designation “French Polynesia” had been proposed for the first time in 1951 at the Territorial Assembly to replace the “Etablissements français de l’Océanie” whose connotation was too colonialist (Regault 1996: 299). This proposal was criticised by several councillors, who wanted the world famous “Tahiti” to be used (at a time when the Faa’a airport was under construction and plans were made for the development of tourism). “French Polynesia” was finally chosen in 1957 for two main reasons. First, the members of the Assembly of the Union française thought that an element underlining France’s possession of these islands was an absolute necessity. Second, “Tahiti” could be perceived as offensive by the inhabitants of the other islands and archipelagos, and would be too much of a reminder of past expansionist politics of Tahitian chiefs. “Polynesian” was chosen because it was an overarching term, which recognised belonging to the Polynesian triangle formed by Hawai‘i, Rapa Nui and New Zealand, and included all archipelagos possessed by France.

This was also the reason why the name “Tahiti Nui” (Great Tahiti), which Gaston Flosse was trying to substitute for “French Polynesia” a few years before losing power, was strongly disapproved of. The critics particularly resented the “Nui” that recalled the hegemonic tendencies of Tahiti. But it is also because of its connotations that the term “Tahiti” was rejected. According to the independentist intellectual Duro Raapoto “this denomination has essentially a demagogic, touristic, snobbish and rubbish vocation… Tahiti is an exotic product fabricated by the Occidentals for their own consumption” (Regault 1996:307). Jean-Marius Raapoto (Duro’s brother and minister for education in the Temaru government) had been one of the first Tavini leaders to take the ancient term “Ma‘ohi” and transform it into a political project. A few years later, Oscar Temaru proposed “Ao Ma‘ohi”. For Oscar Temaru the term has a “cultural aspect… [referring] to our history, our language, our culinary tradition, our spirit….”

However, the fluctuating political usage of these names as distinct from their ideological roots should be emphasised. Gaston Flosse, who had started calling himself “Pereteteni no Tahiti Nui (President of Grand Tahiti)” even before the last status change of February 2004 (refer to first section), had subsequently renounced this bombastic appellation in favour of “President of French Polynesia”, which was the most he could get from the French authorities. Symmetrically, Oscar Temaru, who had referred to “our country,
“Ma’ohi” on the day following his re-election in March 2005, has since then adopted Tahiti Nui as a name for the country. When he presented his project for an agreement modelled on New Caledonia’s to François Baroin, Minister of Overseas France, at the beginning of April 2006, this project was labelled “Tahiti Nui”. The onomastic fight between “Ma’ohi” and “Tahiti Nui” seems now to have switched to an opposition between “Tahiti Nui” and “French Polynesia”. Political leaders in French Polynesia will abandon a name and opt for another to avoid conflicts with the French authorities or their grassroots supporters. This is also a further example of how Autonomists and Independentists mutually takeover each other’s claims and overbid one another in the use of a nationalist rhetoric.

Both are nevertheless underpinned by two dissimilar logics. Putting aside the contingencies of political considerations, both these oppositions reveal a more profound cleavage between the autonomist logic that supports the project of a multiethnic Polynesian citizenship and the independentist logic that advocates the building of a Ma’ohi / Tahiti Nui Nation-state. Having shown how the onomastic battle translates an identity struggle for the imposition of representations of the French Polynesian world, I will in the two following sections scrutinise the competing definitions of principles of that world.

MULTIETHNIC CITIZENSHIP OR MA’OHI NATION-STATE?

It should be stressed that all those who are engaged in politics in French Polynesia, whether Independentists or Autonomists, share a common vision of a multiethnic society, where ethnic groups are neatly separated and identifiable. On the autonomist side, this is illustrated in the ways in which the Territorial authorities organised the 1988 population census. Until 1988, the censuses were run by the French State and based on subjective identification with different categories (Chinese/ Polynesian/ Demi). The 1988 census sought to classify the population “objectively”, following racial criteria. French Polynesia’s population was thus divided into three groups: the Chinese (constituting approximately 4.5 percent of the population), the Europeans (11.9 percent) and the Polynesians (82.7 percent). Since the Institut Territorial de la Statistique (ITSTAT) was relabelled Institut de la Statistique de la Polynésie française (ISPF) in 1999, it has run the censuses under control of the State: therefore the 1996 and 1992 censuses did not include questions relating to the “racial origins of persons”. The weekly To’ere (independentist) questioned the withdrawal of these criteria, and criticised this control by the state, finding this attitude “surprising” on behalf of a supposedly territorial Institute for Statistics in a “Territory that claims to be autonomous”.

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33 te Ao Ma’ohi
34 The weekly To’ere (independentist) questioned the withdrawal of these criteria, and criticised this control by the state, finding this attitude “surprising” on behalf of a supposedly territorial Institute for Statistics in a “Territory that claims to be autonomous”.
35
Indeed the defence of *Maʻohi* cultural identity coexists with a multiethnic conception of society. First, it relied (before the change of government) on the denunciation of the system as it was maintained by “those who are in power, Flosse and the Chinese community”.

This vision was largely shared in Tahiti and elsewhere. The presence of several members with Chinese origins within the government, and the political-economical ties that linked the Tahoeraa leader to Chinese tycoons, illustrated this alliance. This situation accounted, behind the seemingly innocent pun, for the nickname that had been given to members of the Flosse government by the independentist To’ere: “canards laquais”.

Second, reacting to what is perceived as a radical transformation of society resulting from the influx of metropolitan funds, the independentist leaders pleaded for the preservation of distinct communities and cultural identities. Temaru does not see any disadvantage in a future multiethnic independent State: “[T]his is what makes the strength of the United States.”

While both Autonomists and Independentists favour the construction of a specific citizenship, the latter advocate a form of citizenship (*citoyenneté*) resulting from a *Maʻohi* nationality (*nationalité*) as the attribute of a sovereign country, while the former emphasise a globalising view of the future Polynesian citizenship that would take shape within the framework of the French Republic (and thus be subsumed to French *nationalité*). In this perspective, the two criteria required for attaining benefit from the status of Polynesian citizen are, first, to hold French citizenship (this would exclude all foreigners as well as European Union nationals other than French); and second, to have resided in French Polynesia for a period whose length remained to be defined.

The creation of a Polynesian citizenship would aim at protecting local employment on one hand, and preventing lands from being sold to foreigners on the other. Here the Autonomists stress that several legal texts had already consecrated “territorial preference”.

In matters of land ownership, they recall that the first measures to control transfers of land proprietary rights were taken as soon as 1845, and that the decree of 4 July 1932 gave the Governor of the colony the right to control all land acquisitions in the EFO. Significantly, the Autonomists’ argumentation in favour of the creation of a “Polynesian citizenship” rests on the particularistic measures of the *régime de l’Indigénat*. “Why, if the Governor [of the Colony] had the power to protect land property, shouldn’t the Polynesian representatives not be able to do so?”, asked Gaston Flosse (UFP 1998). This Polynesian citizenship would thus have a social and economic content, by defining rights negatively (preference given to locals in matters of employment, limitation of land alienations to non-residents).
Radically different conceptions of the modalities of citizenship acquisition are linked to whether or not it is associated with a separate nationality. The Independentists do not conceive of citizenship other than related to a sovereign *Ma‘ohi* people. The Autonomists want any future citizenship to be recognised within the French Republic. Therefore, in the same way as in regard to land ownership, the Autonomists argue on the basis of the differential citizenship regime that prevailed in French colonial law before and shortly after the Second World War. Gaston Flosse alluded to the Lamine-Gueye law of 7 May 1946 by which all French nationals of Overseas Territories were eventually given French citizenship that most of them had previously been denied (UFP 1998). Although this law was a step forward, it still stated that, “the exercise of citizen rights [in the former colonies] will be ruled by specific laws”. Indeed, one of the main elements discriminating between the former French citizens and French subjects had been that the latter were deprived of political rights. Although this law was supposed to put an end to this dichotomy, it still reserved voting rights to *Français de souche* (‘of French stock’, settlers originating from the Métropole) and to “the most evolved among the indigenes”. When Gaston Flosse makes a reference to this law to legitimise his request, it becomes apparent that what underlies the autonomist demand for a specific citizenship within the French Republic is a logic founded on the distinction, operated by colonial politics, between “French indigenes” and “metropolitan French”. Whereas Independentists use indigeneity to reclaim the end of colonial rule, the Autonomists use indigeneity to perpetuate differentialist colonial politics.

Now, except for official recognition by the French Republic of its own historical contradictions and the return to a differential regime in matters of citizenship, which seems highly improbable, the next step to autonomist overbidding could only be independence. For this reason, the Autonomists’ arguments against independence are founded, as a last resort, on the co-presence in French Polynesia of several ethnic groups. Gaston Flosse had openly stated:

Either we let the concept of autochthony prevail, and in this hypothesis, the beneficiaries of citizenship rights could only be those who inhabited this country before the arrival of new immigrants. This is an ethnic conception very close to racism… Or we refer to a different concept, which concerns all persons, all ethnic groups that have established strong, quasi-definitive ties, to Polynesia. Then, the criteria can only be place of birth or length of residence. This question deserves to be deepened and debated by the institutions of French Polynesia. (UFP 1998)
In this latter case, according to Gaston Flosse, citizenship is no longer linked to French civil status; the new Polynesian citizens “maintain their personal, local status”. In other words, “citizenship becomes multicultural” (UFP 1998). Hence the Autonomists’ preference for the name “Polynesia”, and the attempt, playing on the prefix “poly-”, to give a cosmopolitan connotation to the term “poly-nesian”, based on the idea of métissage and multi-ethnicity, which aims at imposing an alternative to the \textit{Ma‘ohi} identity defended by the Independentists. In this context, although French Polynesia has often been cited as an example of a successful melting pot, several authors have recently challenged the idea of a “harmonious cultural mix”. Socioeconomic inequalities obviously follow ethnic boundaries (Ciseron and Hienly 1983). The analyses of the 1988 census made by Bernard Poirine (an economist at the University of French Polynesia) do reveal extreme inequalities (1992:103). And Bruno Saura (another local intellectual) asserts that “the idea of a fusion” of the Chinese, \textit{Demis} (Europeanised Tahitians) and some \textit{Popa’a} (Whites) has been formulated by the dominant ethnic and cultural minorities. “The \textit{Ma‘ohi} world, the true Polynesian world, does not accept this new cultural model” (Saura 1985:5).

The Independentists, although they acknowledge the existence of different ethnic groups, hold a view opposite to this “multicultural citizenship”. In their perspective, citizenship should be the corollary of a \textit{Ma‘ohi} nationality. Even though the leader of Tavini remains vague, during interviews, about the criteria that would be used to grant \textit{Ma‘ohi} nationality, he has made it clear that they would not only be restricted to a combination of \textit{jus sanguinis} and \textit{jus soli}, but would also be cultural (speaking at least one of the \textit{reo Ma‘ohi} languages for instance). “\textit{Ma‘ohi}” and “Polynesian” are thus far from being “assumed to be univocal and synonymous” as stated by Brami Celentano (2002:367). Using either name refers to clearly different political visions: the former is related to autochthony and opposes the \textit{Ma‘ohi} to the elite comprising \textit{Demis}, Chinese and Europeans, and the latter is preferentially used by this elite to promote a “neo-Polynesian society” (Saura 1985:1) that is both multicultural and \textit{métisse}.

The making of a plural society by the colonial administration is now used by the Autonomists to ground their demands for a specific citizenship within the French Republic, as well as to deny the Independentists’ claim for a separate \textit{Ma‘ohi} nationality. This same analysis can be applied to the question of clientelism: while the Autonomists justify the system by referring to a “Polynesian cultural specificity”, the Independentists try to reverse the stigma. This point, which I shall consider at some length in the next section, leads me to underline a weakness in Bourdieu’s analysis of “identity struggles”. In order to understand the difference between autonomist and independentist logics, identity struggles should be treated not only as re-valorisations of a depreciated identity but also as creations of new identities.
The clientelist system that was put into place in the Territory has frequently been explained by the Polynesian values of reciprocity and redistribution that are predisposed to clientelism (Al Wardi 1988: 211-13). However, those who support the independentist cause, and present themselves as “Ma’ohi” in the course of interviews reject the “Flosse system” that has become synonymous with “clientelist system”. Take for instance this vanilla cultivator who refused to “ask the Territory for subsidies”, arguing “I’d rather let my vanilla grow in the Ma’ohi way, in nature” (instead of in a greenhouse). The valorisation of the Ma’ohi principles of reciprocity and redistribution is combined with a liberal economic ideology, promoting economic independence of small entrepreneurs and cultivators. The city of Faa’a, whose Tavana (‘Mayor’) is Oscar Temaru, was organising training courses for unemployed young people wishing to launch their own enterprises. If Oscar Temaru defends Ma’ohi cultural identity, it is because he considers this identity as jeopardised by

the system that was put into place, which equates to a cultural genocide…. Before, one had to know how to milk a cow, how to climb in a coconut tree. It was essential to survive. Today, young people no longer know how to fish…. Young Tahitians can do nothing by themselves. They need teachers for everything, to learn how to swim, whereas previously, they could swim even before they walked. People can’t even speak their own language anymore.

The colonial system has been amplified, in his view, by two decades of autonomy. Indeed, investments that accompanied nuclear testing have transformed an economy that formerly relied on self-subsistence into an ‘assisted economy’ (économie assistée). Until the 1960s, the Territory’s resources came from its exports (copra, shell, vanilla) that represented 90 percent of import income. This ratio collapsed to 10 percent in the early 1970s, 6 percent in the 1980s. The Métropole injects €150 million per year that largely contribute to the maintenance of a clientelist system in this country of 240,000 inhabitants. Polynesians depend on these subsidies to be able to consume imported goods. The ideal of economic independence, although inserted into a capitalist (exploitation-circulation) vision of social relations, does not contradict principles of reciprocity and redistribution. These allow those who are excluded from the system to survive without having to pay for expensive goods imported from the Métropole, by means of a whole parallel circuit of exchange of food between those who live in the suburbs of Pape’ete and their families left in the islands. It relies on an egalitarian vision of social relations, according to which all could live from the products of fishing or crops. (This is still the case in the more rural islands, but not in Faa’a’s slums.)
This raises a difficulty in Pierre Bourdieu’s approach of the “identity struggle”. The rejection of clientelism by the Ma’ohi movement, clientelism as it is justified in the autonomist logic by reference to a “Polynesian cultural specificity”, leads me to question the way in which Bourdieu links “identity struggles” to the “reversal of the stigma”. According to Bourdieu (1980:69, my emphasis):

The collective fight for the subversion of symbolic power relations, that does not seek to wipe out stigmatised traits but to reverse the table of values that constitutes them as stigma, to impose, if not new principles of division, at least an inversion of the signs attributed by classifications produced according to older principles, is an effort towards autonomy, understood as the power to define according to one’s own interests the principles of division of the social world…. The stigma produces the revolt against the stigma, which starts with the public claim of the stigma.47

I would first note that the process of reversal of the stigma as presented by Bourdieu perfectly matches the process of substituting the term “Ma’ohi” for the term “indigenes” imposed by the colonial terminology. The pejorative connotation of “indigene” is erased in the term “Ma’ohi” while designating the same autochthonous reality. In effect, on the level of the significant – the onomastic signifier – “what is at stake in the symbolic revolution against symbolic domination… is not, as it has been said, the conquest or reconquest of an identity, but the collective acquisition of the power over the principles of construction and evaluation of one’s own identity” (Bourdieu 1980:69).48 However, on the level of the signified—of sense and value—something else is at stake than the simple regaining of the power to define oneself. Among the most disputed symbolic stakes within the Polynesian identity field, linked to the stigmas that were attached to the “indigenes” by the coloniser—indecency and laziness, I will take the latter as an illustration. In the archives of the correspondence between the governors and the Ministry of Colonies, the phrases that constitute the indigenes’ “nonchalance” and “natural weakness” as their intrinsic properties are countless. The régime de l’Indigénat (see introductory section), which conferred the status of “subjects” on part of the Polynesian population, was justified in the following manner by a colonial inspector in 1929:

The question was asked whether it would not be appropriate to naturalise en masse the indigenes of the Leeward Islands. Neither the evolution of these indigenes, nor their own interests militate in favour of such a measure. Their state of evolution is so little advanced that they still must be protected by special rulings against their own impulses; so high is their ingenuousness when they contract engagements against some European or Asian settlers.
For, according to this same inspector, their naturalisation, that is, the granting of French citizenship, would “remove the elementary guarantees without which most would soon be deprived of the possession of lands, which constitute their sole resource”. In brief, the indigenes are “naturally” indolent, not very inclined to work, and they prefer to dance and sing rather than to work in the plantations. (This view justified very liberal colonial politics in the matter of Chinese immigration, which was supposed to contribute to the economic development of the Colony.)

The Autonomists picked up these categories and presented them in a positive light. The successive statutory bids for more autonomy are justified by this Polynesian “cultural specificity”: the autonomous Territory has fostered (to the great displeasure of the Protestant churches) the reactivation of dances that were practiced prior to evangelisation, while clientelist practices are legitimised, although less openly—but do the intellectuals not legitimate them a posteriori?—by the cultural specificity of Polynesian social and economic relations. In the same way, the absence of RMI (Revenu minimal d’insertion) and the thin social security net (compared to that which applies in the Métropole) are justified by pro-autonomist employers on the grounds that one should not encourage the Polynesians to be lazy (as they are already naturally lazy). Lastly, as I have shown above, the autonomist demand for a specific citizenship is justified by the statutory discrimination that was previously carried out by the coloniser.

I have stressed the word “autonomy” in the above quotation of Pierre Bourdieu’s article, because of the perfect match of his definition of this term to the autonomist logic in French Polynesia. The autonomisation of the Territory has relied on a “reversal of stigma” as presented by Bourdieu, that is, a struggle for the positive re-evaluation of the identity that had been assigned by the coloniser. It is equivalent to what we could term an internal “auto-colonisation”, in the structural continuity of the alliance that was forged, in the middle of the 19th century, between the Tahitian aristocracy and the coloniser.

In the independentist logic, the reversal of the stigma does not only consist in claiming the power to define the principles of definition of the social world according to one’s own interests; it is also a struggle for the definition of self. Independentists do not fight for the re-evaluation of devalued categories; they reject the identity assigned by the other. As I have mentioned above, independentist discourse favours individual economic independence, as it relies on valorisation of both entrepreneurship and self-subsistence—it has nothing to do with positive re-evaluation of “laziness”. Once the artificial bubble created by injection of huge amounts of metropolitan money into the economy has burst, the independent Ma’ohi nation should eventually be able to live off its own resources. In the same manner, the refusal of “ready-made”
Conflicting Logics in French Polynesia

identity for tourists, which offers, according to the Independentists, a false image of the Ma’ohi world, does not rely on a reversal of the stigma imposed by the London Missionary Society. The rejection of ancient “pagan” times could be seen as part of the “assimilation process that supposes an endeavour aimed at erasing all signs that recall the stigma” and which, according to Bourdieu (1980:69), amounts to accepting the dominant, stigmatising, definition of identity. It may be argued instead, that assimilation operates in a double direction: when the Polynesian people were converted to Protestantism at the beginning of the 19th century, they not only fully internalised the stigma striking their previous beliefs, but also assimilated Christianity into indigenous cultural categories. It is therefore not surprising that the Protestant church is, as elsewhere in the Pacific, at the avant-garde of the struggle for independence (significantly in August 2004, the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia renamed itself Protestant Ma’ohi Church).

Bourdieu’s alternative between the resigned acceptance of the “dominant definition of identity” —assimilation—and the “revolt against the stigma”—autonomisation—is here challenged by what appears as the conquest of a new identity. According to Oscar Temaru:

The Polynesian “cultural renewal” is only folklore. It is not lived by the people; it is made for tourists and shopkeepers. There was a time when we danced for ourselves, when we rowed for ourselves, when we made alcoholic drinks for ourselves. When we held pirogues competitions, everyone came from the districts, no one stayed behind. (…) Today, there is this huge logistic support, sponsors, etc., it is politics. (…) What does “cultural renewal” mean? That our culture is dead, that it should be resurrected? No, it is still alive, but it suffocates.”

The Church does not oppose the dancing but a certain way of dancing. The dances are trafficked, prostituted; it is nudism, almost erotic. This is not at all what [our dancing] is about. Before, there was decency. This is what is wrong. People get the impression that this is the country where girls go topless, their behinds stuck out. This is what hurts our feelings.

This same discourse is held by many militants of the independentist cause, and it rests both on the negation of the very principle of identity ascription by the coloniser—a claim to the power of self-definition—and on the negation of the characteristics attributed by the Other (laziness, indecency)—a claim to a self-defined identity. There is thus a double reversal of stigma: identity is not merely a question—which may be more proper to the academic field—of (performative) definition of the social world, but is also a question of (significant) definition of self.

* * *
The reconfiguration of relations between the Métropole and its colony since the granting of ‘Autonomy of Management’ in 1977 has led to a clientelist system that has widened social inequalities as well as to a polarisation of political life around the question of the rejection or the promotion of an autonomous institutional framework, which is correlated to the opposition between independentist and autonomist logics, between “Ma’ohi” and “Polynesians”. The May 2004 elections and the crisis that followed have shed light on this profound division among French Polynesia’s population. It would be erroneous to interpret this political crisis only as the rejection of an autocrat.

An increasing part of the population revolts against the politics of statutory overbidding that has benefited only the dominant class. Autonomisation also involved promotion of a nationalist rhetoric and defence of a “cultural specificity” whose falseness is denounced by the other side. Observers have stressed, on one side, the lack of interest in pre-European culture and rejection of pagan times and, on the other, the political instrumentalisation of pre-European culture by the dominant class to show how illusory the identification with the Ma’ohi world is (e.g., Baré 1987:411). But is this way of phrasing the question really relevant? On the one hand, by denying the major part of French Polynesia’s population the right to claim an autochthonous cultural identity, it occludes the reality of this identification. On the other hand, by focusing on the “instrumentalisation” of “culture”, it distorts the understanding of French Polynesia’s political field. This interpretation underlies a number of studies that reduce all identity claims to mere strategies of power to regere fines (Bourdieu 1980: 65) without taking into account culture as it is lived by the territory’s inhabitants. Indeed we can read in recent work that “the Ma’ohi nation, impalpable in itself, exists and is embodied only as a symbolic stake of struggles within the field of political power” (Brami Celentano 2002:371).

But the analysis of the political and identity field cannot be reduced to such an approach: the islands’ population has not waited for the term Ma’ohi to be instrumentalised within contemporary political struggles before using it. Identity struggles are indeed struggles for the power to define the social world one lives in. The emphasis, however, should not only be placed on the struggle for power, but also on the actual process of defining the social world. By placing the emphasis only on the first and neglecting the latter, we may miss the different logics that identity struggles are using and the complexity of the identity field in a country such as French Polynesia may escape us. I have shown that the struggle between Autonomists and Independentists neither neatly opposes pro- and anti-colonialists, nor are the two movements one and the same underneath merely rhetorical outward differences. There is certainly some degree of convergence between the two, for in the present state of relations between Métropole and Colony, the principle according
to which the political field is polarised is one of more or less rejection of political dependency upon the Métropole.

The “legal Coup d’Etat” that took place in October 2004 was seemingly a matter of interference within a democratic multipartite system. What it revealed, though, is the profound dividing line drawn between those who advocate political autonomy while invoking the spectre of independence so as to uphold a clientelist system justified by a so-called cultural specificity, and those whose significant identification with a specific culture works to reject colonialist clientelism. The latter do not reverse the stigma, they reject it. The Tavini’s leader has therefore made a priority of French Polynesia’s economic recovery. After his (re)election, he announced that he would go to Paris to negotiate a “new contract for development”. During the past decade, Oscar Temaru’s discourse has become a little less radical. “If we want to turn the page of Flosse’s demagoguery, clientelism and trading economy, we must work and talk with Paris.”55 This does not mean he renounces the perspective of independence; he takes the “multi-annual plan for New Caledonia” as a model. Would such a solution not be the logical outcome of increasing autonomisation since the 1970s?

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NOTES

1. This article is based on research carried out in French Polynesia between 2001 and 2004 (12 months in total), archival research in the Centre des Archives d’Outre-mer (CAOM) in Aix en Provence in 2003 and 2005, and the reading of French Metropolitan and French Polynesian newspapers during the political crisis that lasted from May 2004 until March 2005. Since then, Oscar Temaru has remained President of French Polynesia, although his government has been put in minority: on 13 April 2006 the President of the Assembly of Representatives, who was until then a member of the Tavini (Tony Geros), was replaced by an autonomist (Philip Shyle).
Though the first version of this paper was written just after Oscar Temaru took the presidency of French Polynesia in March 2005, what has happened since then does not detract from the analysis offered in this article, which is centred on the differences between autonomist and independentist logics.

2. In the central constituency of the Windward Islands (Tahiti and Mo’orea mainly), Emile Vernaudon’s Ai’a Api and three other parties, Here Ai’a, Ia Mana Te Nunaa and O Oe To Oe Rima gathered around Tavini to form the UPLD. In the Leeward Islands, this union included Tavini and Here Ai’a as well as Fetia Api and Heiura-Les Verts. UPLD lists were also formed in two other constituencies, Western Tuamotu and Gambier–Eastern Tuamotu, but without the Fetia Api. In the Australs, the opposition parties jointly supported the list led by Chantal Florès.

3. Tavini and Tahoeraa are abbreviations for Tavini Huiraatira, in the ‘service’ (tavini) of the ‘population’ (huiraatira), and Tahoeraa Huiraatira, ‘union’ (tahoeraa) of the ‘population’.

4. Nicole Bouteau, leader of No Oe E Te Nunaa, was a former supporter of Gaston Flosse who had become disenchanted with his iron rule; Philip Schyle, leader of Fetia Api, had always been opposed to Flosse. (Fetia Api was formerly led by Boris Leontieff who died in a mysterious plane crash during the 2002 legislative campaign.).

5. This demonstration was organised by representatives of the political parties that combined with Tavini within the Union pour La Démocratie (UPLD), by the autonomists Nicole Bouteau’s No Oe E Te Nunaa and Philip Schyle’s Fetia Api, as well as Heiura-Les Verts (Greens), Te Hono E Tau I Te Honoaui (independentist), and Te Tapura Amui No Raromatai (Democratic Movement of the Leeward Islands, the Leeward Islands version of UPLD.)

6. The Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) is a group of French political parties created in 2002 to support Jacques Chirac’s re-election as President of the Republic (its initial name was Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle). French Polynesia elects two deputies to the National Assembly and one member of the Senate. Present deputies (until the next elections in 2007), Michel Buillard and Beatrice Vernaudon, as well as the present senator, Gaston Flosse, are members of the UMP. Tavini has signed an agreement of co-operation with the French Socialist Party (on 21 May 2004) without being affiliated to it, and, as yet, does not have any representatives at the French Assembly or Senate.


8. Temaru’s campaign was centred on the call for taui ‘change’ not only of the ruling party but more fundamentally of the whole society (see final section). The period after 13 February was referred to as the period of Taui Roa ‘Big Change’ (Tahiti Pacifique Magazine, February 2005).

10. “La vie politique polynésienne ne s’est pas faite sur une opposition de groupes sociaux, mais essentiellement sur une attitude vis-à-vis de la présence française” (Al Wardi 1988:215).

11. The complexity of this issue prohibits me from elaborating further, but it should be noted that even those who were citizens in the colony did not have the same rights as Metropolitan citizens.

12. An expression commonly used in French Statutory laws referring to French Overseas Territories.

13. Generic term for all the languages spoken in the archipelagos that compose French Polynesia: Tuamotu, Marquesas, Gambier, Australs and Society Islands (Windward Islands and Leeward Islands).

14. The State Council verifies the adequacy of administrative rules and regulations to the law; the Constitutional Council verifies the adequacy of laws to the Constitution of the Republic. New Caledonia thus enjoys partial sovereignty, while French Polynesia does not.

15. Le Monde is the French intelligentsia’s centre-left newspaper.

16. The Tahoeraa leader was accused of, among others, using Air Tahiti planes for so-called “missions” in faraway islands that were in fact campaigns in favour of the Tahoeraa Party. These accusations were regularly printed in the local opposition press (Tahiti-Pacific magazine, To’ere).

17. The four peripheral constituencies, with smaller populations and remote from the central Society Islands archipelago, each contain three seats. Under such circumstances, the application of a majority bonus of three seats to the list that obtains the largest number of votes is profoundly absurd and undemocratic (Guiselin 2004:151, 154).

18. At the May 2004 elections, 43.1 percent of votes went to lists that are more or less close to the independentist pole, either at a “pan-archipelagian” level (Tavini Huiratiraa, Te Taata Tahiti Tiama, Heuira, Te Hono E Tau i Te Honoaui) or at a local level (Te Reo O Te Nunaa in the Leeward Islands, Comité Justice Défense Fenua-Tupuna in the Tuamotu and three Marquesan parties). If one adds the autonomist lists that allied to Tavini to form the government, the total amounts to 53.4 percent of votes.

19. During the by-elections campaign, Philip Shyle and Nicole Bouteau decided to refuse the possibility of joining a governing coalition either with UPLD or Tahoeraa. As a result, Temaru was one seat short of an absolute majority in the aftermath of the 13 February by-elections; UPLD held 28 seats, Tahoeraa 27 and AND (Alliance pour une Nouvelle Démocratie, Schyle and Bouteau’s union list) 2. Temaru was finally elected president of French Polynesia by 29 votes thanks to Jean-Alain Frébault, who deserted Tahoeraa (he had already switched several times between parties).

20. This neologism, a direct translation of the French clientélisme, can be understood as a system of interpersonal exchanges of non-merchant goods and services, escaping any juridical framework, between agents disposing of unequal resources. I borrow this definition from Alain Guarrigou, who has shown for France how clientelism spread under the Third Republic (from 1871 onwards), the period during which voting rights were extended (first to all male citizens.
no matter their level of income, later to women) and the Republic became truly
democratic. Therefore, nothing authorises us to consider clientelism \textit{a priori} as
a residue from the past (Jean-Louis Briquet and Frédéric Sawicki 1998:2-3).
Clientelism in French Polynesia is generally attributed to the remainders of the
pre-European political organisation. I contend that it should firstly be seen as the
direct consequence of the system of transfer of funds put in place by Metropolitan
France. This funding was largely indirect in the period of nuclear testings; since
then, a system of annual direct injection of funds has been put into place to
replace the nuclear income.
21. See endnote 12.
22. If the President of the Republic decides to dissolve the assembly, his decision
should be justified; but if the demand stems from the President of French
Polynesia, then he can refuse without justifying his decision. Organic law n°2004-
192 of February 27th 2004, on the autonomous status of French Polynesia, article
23. Presidential decree of 2 April 2004
24. Arguing that the public buildings in Pape’ete were still occupied by Temaru’s
followers (since Temaru lost power in October), although Temaru had promised
to clear them. For a detailed account of the events in French Polynesia from
25. In preparation for the February 2005 by-elections in the Windward Islands, UPLD,
which already comprised four parties allied to Temaru’s Tavini Huiraatira, was
joined by two organisations, Jacky Bryant’s Heiura-Les Verts (the local Green
Party) and Stanley Cross’s Te Hono Party. On the opposite side, Tahoeraa lost two
of his allies, Reynald Temarii, chairman of the Tahoeraa youth wing, and Robert
Tanseau, the leader of an ethnic Chinese party who had rallied Tahoeraa.
26. “Il faut arrêter la surenchère statutaire, qui a occulté les véritables problèmes
du pays pendant des années” (Polynesian Assembly, 03/05/2005), http://www.
assemblee.pf/seances/article.aspx?id=424
27. ‘In service of the people of \textit{Ao Ma’ohi}’ literally, the \textit{Ma’ohi} world. \textit{Ao} refers to
the day, the universe, the human realm, as opposed to \textit{po}, the night, the world
of spirits.
28. In the French schooling system, children chose a “first foreign language” in sixth
grade, to which they add a “second foreign language” when they enter the eighth
grade (when they reach the age of about 13-14).
29. Blue and white flag against red and yellow flag, blue shirts against orange
shirts.
30. The creation of the \textit{Union française} in 1946 modified the status of the colonies.
The “French colonial empire” became the “Union française” and the “colonies”
became Overseas Territories and Departments. The Union was abolished in 1958
and replaced—for a short period—by the \textit{Communauté française}.
31. The term \textit{Ma’ohi} was used for the first time in politics after the Second World
War when all inhabitants of the EFO were granted French citizenship and the
independentist movement was launched by Pouvana’a a Oopa.
33. Interview with Oscar Temaru, 16 October 2002.
34. ‘Origine raciale des personnes’: quotation from the Informatique et Libertés Law of 1978 that bans as well any questions relating to the political opinions, religion, syndicate membership and sexual orientation of persons from public censuses.

35. To’ere, 21-27 November 2002.

36. Interview with a member of Tavini, Tahiti, October 2002

37. A pun on canard laqué (‘peking duck’) and laquais (‘lackey’). For instance: “all the canards laquais that hold office in the semi-indigenous franco-maohi government…” To’ere, 9-15 January 2003.

38. Interview with Oscar Temaru, 16 October 2002

39. The law of 23 June 1956 (loi-cadre Defferre) facilitated access of civil servants with local origins to all echelons of the administrative hierarchy. The statutory laws of 1984 and 1996 require that ministers of the territorial government have resided in French Polynesia for at least five years.

40. It would amount to giving French Polynesian authorities the power to control all land transactions involving persons without lasting connexions to French Polynesia. This possibility was inscribed in a project for a new statutory law that was rejected by the Constitutional Council on 9 April 1996.

41. Many scholars consider the differentialist regime that was implemented in the colonies as an exception, an anomaly in regard to the fundamental principles of the French Republic. For the past few years, some have begun to argue instead that these policies are the logical consequence of France’s racialist conception of nationality as manifest in the politico-juridical difference between “citizenship” and “nationality”.

42. Even if French Polynesia’s Assembly can now adopt measures of “local preference” in employment and land matters, the last change in status (February 2004) did not amount to recognition of the specific “Polynesian citizenship” that Gaston Flosse hoped for. Indeed such a measure would require either revision of the Republican Constitution, or depriving French Polynesia’s inhabitants of their French citizenship (that is, independence).

43. Notably by Michel Panoff according to whom “the history of this little island and of its inhabitants is of interest for all of those who are concerned with the possibility to live with foreign ethnic groups or to arbitrate between different ethnic groups” (Panoff 1989:14, my translation).

44. When people in French Polynesia speak of “the Demis”, they refer to a group of high status individuals belonging to well known families, who have played and still play an important economic and/or political role, and who have both Polynesian and foreign (French, English, American etc.) origins. The term is also more generally used to refer to people of mixed ancestry, but in that case the ethnic groups are frequently specified: “he is a half-Chinese, half-Polynesian demi.”

45. Interview with an inhabitant of Uturoa, Raiatea, October 2003.

46. Interview with Oscar Temaru, 16 October 2002.

47. “La lutte collective pour la subversion des rapports de forces symboliques, qui vise non à effacer les traits stigmatisés mais à renverser la table des valeurs qui les constitue comme stigmates, à imposer, sinon de nouveaux principes de division, du moins une inversion des signes attribués aux classes produites selon
les principes anciens, est un effort vers l’autonomie, entendue comme pouvoir de définir conformément à ses propres intérêts les principes de définition du monde social (…) Le stigmate produit la révolte contre le stigmate, qui commence par la revendication publique du stigmate” (Bourdieu 1980:69).

48. “La révolution symbolique contre la domination symbolique (…) a pour enjeu, non, comme on le dit, la conquête ou la reconquête d’une identité, mais la réappropriation collective de ce pouvoir sur les principes de construction et d’évaluation de sa propre identité” (Bourdieu 1980:69).


50. In Metropolitan France, the *Revenu minimal d’insertion* (‘Minimal Insertion Income’) provides a regular income to any person with resources below a certain threshold.

51. It should however be noted that although several party leaders are members of the Protestant church, Oscar Temaru himself is a fervent Catholic and most of his grassroots supporters in Faa’a (the largest populated town on Tahiti, that has been governed by Tavini since 1983) are as well. Indeed, Catholicism predominates in the Windward Islands (and in the Tuamotu, Gambier and Marquesas Islands), whereas Protestantism predominates in the Leeward Islands.

52. Because it is framed exclusively in economic terms—the reversal of the stigma as a positive re-evaluation of identity or assimilation as the acceptance and internalisation of a de-valourised identity—Bourdieu’s approach cannot fully discriminate between identity struggles. It provides a useful framework for understanding the autonomist logic, but fails to account for the cultural definition of an alternative identity in the case of the independentist logic. My purpose in this article is not to provide a new framework for the analysis of the identity field (a work which I undertook in my 2005 Ph.D. dissertation) but only to indicate the limits of Bourdieu’s approach when applied to the case of identity struggles in French Polynesia.

53. Interview with Oscar Temaru, 16 October 2002.

54. My translation: “La ‘nation Ma’ohi’ impalpable en tant que telle, n’existe et ne prend corps qu’en tant qu’enjeu symbolique de luttes dans le champ du pouvoir politique” (Brami Celentano 2002:371)

55. Interview in the (Metropolitan) *Journal du Dimanche*, 20 February 2005.

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