

ceeded in recounting the social links the priest established with the Kanak community (mostly in the Hienghène region) over the fifty-six years he spent in New Caledonia. The charismatic religious leader is unveiled as an authoritarian and paternalistic figure among this indigenous people. The origin of this book emerged from the manuscript Father Rouel left, containing the photographs. It is around the images that Mokaddem weaves the major events of the priest's life.

In the Marist tradition, missionaries in the Hienghène region wove close relationships with the chiefdoms of Ohoot and Hwahwap. References to Father Murard, accused in 1917 of protecting rebels from the French authorities, are both informative and revealing of the complex alliances among the Catholic Church, villages, and tribes. The author traces the broad sociopolitical context in the area to outline the complexity of the institutional actors such as Father Rouel. There is a sympathetic description of Father Rouel's initiatives in defending the oppressed Kanak against the injustices of the French administration. In the configuration of relations of authority ("settler, gendarme, priest"), Mokaddem observes, "Father Rouel substituted at the indigenous affairs bureau held by the police, and was considered by the Kanak as a privileged interlocutor" (27).

Captions help the reader understand what Father Rouel was trying to reveal through his photographs. Besides striving to describe the origin of some of the postcards included in the Rouel manuscript, this is a noteworthy attempt to remove photo-

graphic images from the merely illustrative role they have traditionally played in our collective knowledge of New Caledonia's colonial photography.

EMMANUELLE CRANE
*École des Hautes Etudes en
Sciences Sociales and Royal
Melbourne Institute of
Technology*

* * *

Insularités: Hommage à Henri Lavondès, edited by Alain Babadzan. Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 2003. ISBN 2-901161-73-1; 268 pages, tables, figures, photographs, appendixes, notes, written in French, bibliographies. €21.85, FF143.33.

These writings about "insularities" (island worlds), collected by Alain Babadzan, pay homage to the French ethnologist Henri Lavondès, who died in 1998. But the accounts of these island worlds are so heterogeneous that they do not even constitute an archipelago; the book would have been more appropriately called "mélanges" (miscellanies) to avoid misleading the reader. Despite the use of plural forms in the titles of the two parts of the book ("Oceania" and "Harmonics") in a vain attempt to pull the contributions together, the component parts range very broadly—from a purple patch written by French ethnologist Paul Ottino (who passed away shortly after the death of Lavondès, his colleague and friend), to a study of ritual shouts in the Amazon, to crime and punishment in Africa. The reader may also be

put off by the repeated allusions to the unpublished work of the “unassuming scholar” (Lavondès).

Encouragingly, a few contributions do reveal the riches of the mythological data Lavondès collected in the Marquesas. In the first part of the book, fired by the pan-Polynesian motif of the “Island of Women” (Lavondès, *Terre et Mer*, 1975, 411), Marika Moisseff launches into a challenging analysis of the contemporary inability of affluent societies to cope with all the responsibilities inherent in pregnancy. Singling out a suggestive myth variant collected by Lavondès, she is the only one among a dozen fellow contributors to actually pay tribute to the beloved master. Next, Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudy-Ballini cast a sharper light on ritual objects from the Bismarck Archipelago than any museum will ever shed. Marie-Claire Bataille-Benguigui takes over to resolve the symbolic contradiction proffered by sharks in Oceania: contrary to their negative image in other parts of the world, Pacific sharks are deemed human—and often feminine—or divine. Living up to his responsibilities as editor of this volume, Babadzhan writes a bracing analysis of the cultural manipulation of symbols in modern Tahiti. Herman Melville would have relished the universal cannibalism tackled by these baroque “Oceanias.”

The second half of the book, “Harmonics,” begins with a contribution that is rather jarringly entitled “Dizziness.” Supposed to honor Lavondès’s taste for the game of swing or seesaw, this contribution

goes back to remnants from fieldwork conducted by author Jacques Galinier in the early 1970s in Mexico. In the next contribution, Philippe Erikson explores the sexual antagonism expressed in the ritual use of speech sounds among the Matis of the Brazilian Amazon. Next, Alfred Adler carries on from his former collaboration with Lavondès in the field of political anthropology. Adler suggests that killing in Black Africa (1) by definition eliminates someone; (2) releases destructive forces against the criminal; and (3) affects life as a whole—its very origin, the earth, the ancestors. In other words, a homicide does not just affect moral standards, it affects all society; this is a subtle distinction, granting status to the killer, and grounding a kind of primordial social hierarchy. The final, real contribution to this second part of the book, Manga Bekombo’s “The Word-dizzy Bard,” artfully responds to the opening contribution “Dizziness.” The real interest in this piece, however, lies more in the story itself—whose hero, like the Hawaiian demigod Maui, is able to come out of and go back into the maternal womb at will—than in the formal considerations of oral culture in coastal Cameroon.

The use of the expression “real contribution” above is meant to draw a line between the chapter-like papers, and the letters of condolences, as it were, written by Claude Robineau and Georges Condominas at the beginning of the volume, and by Jean-François Baré (not even two pages in length) and Marie-Dominique Mouton (who provides a list of Henri Lavondès’s works) at the end. From

Condominas, we learn that the life-long friendship between Lavondès and Paul Ottino started in Madagascar, with the two men representing what at first appeared to be the most irreconcilable binary set of French anthropological opposites possible. This sets the stage for the highly personalized fifty pages by Ottino through which, caught between the violent colonial past and the unbearable present of Madagascar (liminally paired with Algeria), we come to understand the profound nostalgia and pessimism of someone who was about to join his dear professional twin, Lavondès, in death and was even aware of it. Ottino wrote, "I'm almost afraid of opening what I know is another Pandora's box, to release a long downpour of emotions, impressions and other vague feelings" (29). The haunting connection between personal life and professional calling is part of ethnology, a science, according to Ottino, which can only reach its goal by transcending the opposition between subject and object. He provides a lengthy list of "epiphanies," interspersed with technical comments on fieldwork. Living up to the Austronesian connection, the two "twins" (Lavondès and Ottino) were reunited in Polynesia before sharing Nanterre University, where the general insurrection of May-June 1968 was to start in France suddenly and bring the whole country to a halt, before the Gaullists crushingly took over from the Leftists. Despite his political leanings, I like the way Ottino acknowledges our daily, multifaceted identities.

For the Sulka masks of New Britain and the Mandak carvings of New

Ireland, as Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudy-Ballini explain, beauty and ritual efficiency were as short-lived as their making was long and hidden. What significance could therefore be given to their lasting presence in the museums of white people at the origin of their demise? Could their precious cache be linked with shell money?

The most challenging contribution of the volume, though, is by editor Babadzan, who shows how the Tahitian ruling class, sitting on the wealth generated by years of nuclear testing, is now bent on securing cultural power. Babadzan dates the phenomenon to the late 1970s. This was accomplished by minimizing the radical split between traditional Tahitian beliefs and Christianity. Christian teachings have led Tahitians to believe that the missionaries saved not only their souls but also their pre-European cultural values. Thus, paganism and Christianity have been wedded forever. Could one dream of a better justification of the Church?

Although this Christian model is crumbling in sprawling Papeete and the shantytowns, Babadzan says that it is still strong on the remote islands. The pagan past, whose darkness had been equated with evil, is being resuscitated and idealized to forge a shared cultural identity among all Tahiti's people, allowing feelings of nationalism to blur the blatant social inequalities that exist.

SERGE DUNIS

*Université de la Polynésie
française*

* * *