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**LA PRATIQUE DE L'ESPACE  
EN OCÉANIE  
DÉCOUVERTE, APPROPRIATION  
ET ÉMERGENCE  
DES SYSTÈMES SOCIAUX TRADITIONNELS**

***SPATIAL DYNAMICS IN OCEANIA  
DISCOVERY, APPROPRIATION  
AND THE EMERGENCE  
OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES***

ACTES DE LA SÉANCE  
DE LA SOCIÉTÉ PRÉHISTORIQUE FRANÇAISE  
PARIS 30 janvier-1<sup>er</sup> février 2014  
Textes publiés sous la direction de  
Frédérique VALENTIN et Guillaume MOLLE



SÉANCES DE LA SOCIÉTÉ PRÉHISTORIQUE FRANÇAISE

7

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*La pratique de l'espace en Océanie :  
découverte, appropriation et émergence des systèmes sociaux traditionnels*  
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## ***\*Banua, \*panua, fenua: a Austronesian Conception of the Socio-Cosmic World***

Sophie CHAVE-DARTOEN

**Abstract:** This paper aims to understand the major and long-lasting impact of mobility and transplantation on societies in the Austronesian area, in terms of both former and recent practices and representations. Underlining the local conceptions about land, country and landscape, this article shows the socio-cosmic character of local societies and discusses the relevance of archaeological and anthropological approaches to the landscape. It also offers a sociological insight into the dispersal of populations and migration phenomena in the South Pacific. This discussion centers on the meaning of the terms (*banua, fenua, fonua*, and *'enua*) derived from the (reconstructed) Proto-Malayo-Polynesian term *\*banua*, and on the study of its fundamental character in Wallis Island (Western Polynesia). The social, cultural, experiential, practical and cognitive dimensions of the original term are also explored, as are its reflexes and the complex categories to which it refers. The way it functions is also analyzed, particularly in the context of migration and resettlement (i.e. phenomena of segmentation, projection, duplication of social groups and their socio-cosmic world). This study sheds light on the past and clarifies certain contemporary phenomena still perceptible in many Oceanian diasporas.

**Keywords:** socio-cosmic societies, landscape, South-Pacific peopling and migrations, cultural evolution, Austronesian languages speaking societies.

### ***\*Banua, \*panua, fenua : une conception austronésienne du monde sociocosmique***

**Résumé :** Cet article vise à comprendre le poids important et durable des phénomènes de mobilité et de transplantation, tant dans les pratiques – anciennes et récentes – que dans les représentations pour les sociétés de l'aire austronésienne. Dégageant les conceptions locales qui ont été développées au sujet de la terre, du pays, du paysage, il montre le caractère socio-cosmique des sociétés locales, discute du bienfondé des approches archéologiques et anthropologiques centrées sur la question du « paysage » et propose un éclairage plus proprement sociologique concernant la dispersion des populations et les phénomènes de migration dans le Pacifique Sud. La réflexion s'arrime sur la signification des termes (*banua, fenua, fonua, 'enua*) dérivés du terme (reconstruit) Proto-Malayo-Polynésien *\*banua* et sur l'étude de son caractère fondamental à Wallis, en Polynésie occidentale. Les dimensions sociales, culturelles, expérientielles, pratiques et cognitives du terme originel, de ses réflexes et des catégories complexes auxquelles ils réfèrent sont explorées ici, ainsi que leur caractère opératoire, notamment en contexte de migration et de réimplantation (phénomènes de segmentation, de projection, de duplication des groupes sociaux et de leur monde socio-cosmique). Cette étude permet donc d'éclairer le passé, elle permet aussi de saisir certains phénomènes contemporains toujours perceptibles dans de nombreuses diasporas océaniques.

**Mots-clés :** sociétés socio-cosmiques, paysage, peuplement et migration dans le Pacifique Sud, évolution culturelle, sociétés de langues austronésiennes.

**I**N AN OVERVIEW of the relationship between the populations of the Austronesian area<sup>(1)</sup> and their environment, T. Reuter (Reuter, 2006a, p. 11) stressed that “a struggle with the experiences of displacement and re-emplacement has been central to the historical experience of Austronesian societies for millennia”. Mobility is indeed an integral part of these societies' experience, at least for those speaking the Malayo-Polynesian languages in Eastern Indonesia and Oceania. However, it should be

emphasised that although they are not nomadic people, these societies originated and were perpetuated thanks to mobility. Their movements were probably curtailed due to constraints such as demographic growth, food production and access to necessary lagoon and land resources, but this does not explain their structured and structuring characteristics. Archaeological and ethnological studies have evidenced some regularity in their movements, which—for the near past and the present days



at least—clearly stem from social factors such as the spreading of ‘houses’ and ‘canoes’ (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Fox, 2006b), alliance and exchange networks (Kaepler, 1978; Bonnemaïson, 1987; Monnerie, 1996; Bedford and Spriggs, 2008), conquest (as was the case in Tonga, Tahiti and Hawai’i), exile and the integration of foreigners (Sahlins, 1985 and 2012; D’Arcy, 2006; Fox, 2008 and 2012). In the case of precarious settlements, the earlier bases they maintained also obeyed structural, social and ceremonial principles (D’Arcy, 2006; Petersen, 2000). P. Bellwood (Bellwood, 1996 and 2006) stressed the weight of social logic in the face of strictly natural and material determinism. He emphasized the segmental nature of the Austronesian descent groups and their splitting and spreading, comparing this process to ‘colonizing propagules’ (Bellwood, 2006, p. 108).<sup>(2)</sup>

The human colonization of Oceania matched the rapid development, a little less than four millennia ago, of a cultural complex called Lapita that was associated, by linguists and archaeologists, to speakers of Malayo-Polynesian languages (Bellwood, 2006; Kirch, 2000; Noury and Galipaud, 2011). This seems to have been the outcome of some Asian populations meeting with previous inhabitants<sup>(3)</sup> in island Melanesia. From there, they sailed eastward to progressively reach most of the remote Polynesian islands. They developed a rather unique civilization that somehow remained very close to the social life, ideas and values found elsewhere in island Melanesia, Eastern Indonesia, Madagascar and Micronesia. In this paper, ‘Oceania’ and ‘Pacific’ will refer to the southern part of this cultural area, including the south-east of Indonesia. Following on from the work of M. Sahlins (Sahlins, 1957), J. Fox (Fox, 1995a and 1995b) pointed out the branching and segmentation phenomena that occurred in this area, which combined generational structuring and relative seniority from a spatial and genealogical point of origin. This pattern established a status distinction between groups and individuals according to their closeness to a reference ancestor. This distinction governs the distribution of rank, responsibilities and authority and structures internal relationships and interrelationships between groups. The control of land rights, the ritual management of land fertility (Wessing, 1999; Wessing and Barendregt, 2005; McRae, 2006; Reuter, 2006a, 2006b and 2006c; Fitzpatrick and Barnes, 2010), and the monopoly of violence—sometimes delegated to juniors or strangers (Gunson, 1979)—are often associated with it. Status adjustments are made possible by competition and/or usurpation. Bellwood (Bellwood, 1996) added a ‘founder-focused ideology’ to these social features, i.e. a ‘frontier ideology’ focused on the opportunity for ambitious juniors to gain autonomy by secession and the starting of their own dynasty. A. Pawley (Pawley, 2007, p. 12) took up this idea, defending “a culturally sanctioned desire to found new settlements in order to become a revered (or even deified) ancestor in the genealogies of future generations”. This hypothesis shields the issue of population dispersion from the exclusive influence of biological or material determin-

ism. However, this is a simplistic vision because it attributes these phenomena to the effects of individual ambitions and to the juniors’ quest for autonomy as a response to their elders’ authority and power. It seems to overlook some essential aspects of precedence and authority in the Malayo-Polynesian speaking societies, where authority is mainly established on ritual mediation and the benefits it provides. In Wallis Island, for instance, the success of a man does not show his strength or skills as much as it demonstrates the joint investment of the deities, the ancestors, the allies and the dependents in his actions (Chave-Dartoën, n. d.). P. Bellwood and A. Pawley’s hypothesis also overlooks the large, dense, social and ritual networks that constitute the social space, and which defined these societies and facilitated and organized their expansion over time (e.g. Terrell et al., 2003; Terrell, 2004; Fox, 2006a).

It is both difficult and hazardous to reduce facts of a different nature, scattered in time and space, to a single explanatory model, and, indeed, this is not the aim of the paper although it proposes an anthropological point of view on Pacific migration. It incorporates the material constraints and the weight of events—which can ensure from individual aspiration and actions—in an history with its own deep logic and enduring values. For this paper, I studied the characteristics and values of Eastern Indonesian, Melanesian and Micronesian and mostly Polynesian societies. In this paper, ‘ideology’ is not to be understood, as Bellwood defined it, as culturally shared ideas based on the individual interests of juniors searching for power, and the posthumous status of a founding-ancestor, but as a system of joint ideas and values which durably organize a social world, its practices, its representations (Dumont, 1978 and 1983) and its perceptions and experiences.

Some ethnological works (e.g. Firth, 1967; Mahina, 1992) and historical anthropology (e.g. Sahlins, 1985; Babadzan, 1993; Gell, 1995) show the ‘socio-cosmic’ character (De Coppet, 1990 and 1995) of Oceanic societies: living people, ancestors, and deities are interdependent, and the social world is coextensive with its cosmos. Here, social institutions, particularly rites, jointly adjust the order of the world and the relationships between its various entities. This characteristic is certainly common and long standing, but it is frequently overlooked in attempts at historical reconstruction. It is, however, an essential parameter in understanding the way the social domain and its transformations are locally conceptualized and experienced. I will reconsider here some theories about Oceanic population and migration by taking into account these ideological implications. The Wallisian concept of *fenua* provides a helpful point of comparison. It also provides the opportunity to question certain epistemological foundations directly linked to the modern Western ideology underlying them.

An ethnographic project carried out over more than twenty years in Wallis Island convinced me about the centrality of what is called *fenua* in the Polynesian conceptions of society. According to historical linguistics,<sup>(4)</sup> this word is derived from the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian term

*\*banua*, whose reflexes are found in Eastern Indonesia and most of Island Oceania except in Australia and Papua New Guinea languages (Blust, 1987; Fox, 2006d; Reuter, 2006b; Ross et al., 2007). The link between the reconstructed semantics of this term, the known population facts and local contemporary conceptions of the socio-cosmic world shed light on the movement and the settlement of these populations in the regional space. It also facilitates the understanding of certain principles which seem to define these conceptions in the long term.

This paper starts with a review of the concept of landscape, which is widely used in theories about the Lapita and Polynesian expansions. According to J. Fox (Fox, 2006a, p. 2), the anthropological use of this concept follows three perspectives: “a topographic vista, an intimate emplacement of local experiences, or [...] an ‘interanimation’ of sense, speech and memory.” In the theories presented below, this corresponds mainly to an ecological unit submitted to human action. I shall confront this specific—archaeologically-oriented—meaning of the word with proposals from other archaeologists, linguists and anthropologists. It should clarify some aspects of the societies for whose analysis this concept has been used. T. Ingold’s proposals (Ingold, 2000) have a dual interest: they address archaeologists by giving specific orientations to their discipline, while facilitating the approach of the relationship between man and his environment. I will show that, for Western Polynesia at least, the local category of *fenua* challenges certain points of this debate by deepening our understanding of the complex phenomena at work.

My hypothesis is that of a conceptual proximity between the term *\*banua* (and its reflexes) and a concept of landscape with a specific idea of the socio-cosmic world, in which the efficient action of humans, ancestors and deities are all essential to its renewal, according to various modalities and responsibilities.

## THE ISSUE OF LANDSCAPE

In the scientific literature regarding the populations of the Pacific Islands (e.g. cultural evolutionary anthropology, human ecology), the word ‘landscape’ refers to two kinds of phenomena: first, the natural milieu with its potentialities and its constraints; and second, the partly artificial heterogeneous environment resulting from the conjunction of ecological (i.e. geophysical, biological, climatic) factors and direct or indirect human action.

### Landscape and differential evolution of Polynesian societies

Concerning Polynesia, M. Sahlins (Sahlins, 1957) made essential proposals that combine living conditions and the availability of the ‘resources across the landscape’ among the factors of ‘cultural adaptation to distinctive environments’. M. Sahlins hypothesized that ecological

and technical constraints had led to the adaptation of migrant populations and the differentiation of their social organization. These small, more or less autonomous, social groups would have developed in environments allowing autarkic production units, according to the pattern of ‘truncated descent lines’. Meanwhile, vast ‘ramifications’ would have developed where resources were more scattered. In this case, the principle of seniority would have organized production and distribution within the social group. M. Spriggs (Spriggs, 2008, p. 215–16) stresses that this idea of secondary adaptation to the conditions in high islands and those found in atolls was the founding stone of the ‘cultural drift’ theory (Vayda and Rappaport, 1963). The resources of the environment, and more particularly their distribution in the ‘landscape’, became a major concern. In this perspective, which heralded behavioral ecology (Anderson, 2009), the concept of landscape focused on the climatic, geophysical and biological determinisms shaping it (i.e. landscape history). It also questioned the environmental constraints on the development of human societies and their cultural and technical adaptation. These deterministic factors are still important in some theories but they often constitute only part of the causal explanation. M. Sahlins (Sahlins, 1976, p. 209) stated: “nature is to culture as the constituted is to the constituting.” He went on to say:

[the] action of nature is mediated by a conceptual scheme, a cognitive ‘map’ of how the world—or an island—was to be ordered. [...] Thus, having arrived in a particular island group, Polynesians did not simply adapt passively to its constraints and limitations. They actively modified and molded their insular world, with [...] often dramatic consequences for their own mode of existence (Sahlins, 1976, p. 210).

### Landscape and preferential settlements

It should be noted that the issue and the meaning of ‘landscape’ differs according to theories and perspectives. The measure of human impact on ‘landscape’, and the determination of ‘cultural landscapes’ resulting from it (i.e. paleoecological records), is measurable far back in the past (Head, 2000). When talking about well-established populations, it is “widely acknowledged nowadays that our species has domesticated not only particular species of plants and animals, but also landscapes—a term that we take to mean not only certain places, or types of places such as estuaries, coastal plains, and tropical forests, but also the ‘species pool’, or range of species inhabiting such places” (Terrell et al. 2003, p. 325). By domesticated, J. Terrell means an intimately known ‘landscape’ that is used as a garden to provide a wide range of food thanks to different techniques, ranging from collecting to cultivating. It therefore differs from the ‘natural’ or ‘wild landscapes’ encountered by colonizers moving eastward. However, it is still quite consistent with the idea of a ‘transported landscape’ presented below.

Most of the theories concerning human settlements in the South Pacific, especially M. Sahlins', do not rely on simplistic forms of determinism between man and his environment. G. Clark and S. Bedford (Clark and Bedford, 2008), for example, proposed the ecological concept of the 'colonization friction zone' or 'friction landscape'. Their definition combines environmental, demographic and cultural factors:

Landscape can be conceived of as composed of aggregates of factors that either impede or facilitate the movement of living organisms (Clark and Bedford, 2008, p. 59).

During the Lapita expansion, some unfavourable zones, either unfamiliar or difficult to reach —such as the Solomon Islands, Samoa and the north of Tonga—would have temporarily hindered the process of migration. However, cultural factors, such as demography and the accessibility of an island, would have partially facilitated the movement. Numerous authors<sup>(5)</sup> have emphasized the relationship between population and resources by associating demographic and techno-cultural constraints with more strictly environmental, or landscape-related, ones. As A. Pawley put it:

[Lapita settlements] were situated facing passages in the reef through which canoes could come and go. Most were in areas where there is either a broad fringing reef, or a lagoon and a barrier reef, or both. They were also adjacent to identifiable fresh water sources and every site has arable land nearby. Small islands generally offered the further advantage that they were only lightly wooded so that gardens could be planted without first cleaning primary forest (Pawley, 2007, p. 6).

In other words, Austronesian language speakers (at least those associated with the Lapita cultural complex) were under external constraints, yet they chose where to settle and from where to radiate outwards. Here again we find the conjunction of culturally defined needs and expectations of migrant groups organized in social and ecological units gaining access to a variety of resources. Like P. Bellwood (Bellwood, 2006, p. 101-103), A. Pawley also insists on "the inherent transportability of the agricultural economy to support colonizing propagules" (Pawley, 2007, p. 12). This cultural dimension, embedded in the initial choice of suitable places for settlements, provides an operational aspect to the concept of 'landscape'. Through their activities (e.g. from food collecting to shifting horticulture, from irrigated taro plantations to monumental settlements), migrants modified their environment according to their needs, practices and the ideas that guided their development. Such a modified environment is nowadays termed 'landscape', and it became an operational concept as soon as the cultural dimension of settlement location was taken into account: exploratory research of Lapita settlements usually starts at sites that may have formerly fulfilled such criteria.

## Transported landscapes

The concept of 'landscape' has had a huge theoretical impact amongst historians, anthropologists and archaeologists. E. Anderson (Anderson, 1952, p. 9) noted that: "unconsciously as well as deliberately man carries whole floras about the globe with him... he now lives surrounded by transported landscapes." Later, P. Kirch<sup>(6)</sup> continued:

In Oceanic islands, the introduction of highly competitive weeds and predators had drastic effects on the vulnerable endemic biota.<sup>(7)</sup> In the colonization of new land, however, humans [...] carry with them a cultural concept of landscape which causes them to actively shape a new environment in that mold. For Polynesians, this cultural concept of landscape, transferred from previously settled archipelagos in the south and southwest Pacific, included such notions as the suitability of the valley bottom for irrigated terracing and the efficacy of fire in converting forest into shifting cultivation (Kirch, 1982, p. 2-3).

The colonization of the Pacific Islands consequently initiated a "process of conversion of a natural ecosystem into an actively manipulated cultural landscape" (Kirch, 1982, p. 4). For A. Anderson (Anderson, 2009, p. 748), this process started a "serial replication of agricultural landscapes" from the southern Solomon Islands to Eastern Samoa 3,000 years ago. It was based upon "an integrated package of root and tree crops, plus domestic scavengers, that was re-created, island by island, through frequent long-distance voyaging."

These practices were probably less homogeneous than this model suggests. For A. Anderson and S. O'Connor (Anderson and O'Connor, 2008, p. 7), seafaring migration was probably associated with 'colonizing behaviors' that changed over time. They acknowledge that the model of a 'transported landscape' explains how and why "[the] landscapes of so many Pacific islands have been modified by human influence". This model also implies "a sense of deliberate and repetitive re-creation, especially of agro-arboreal production" (Anderson and O'Connor, 2008, p. 7). However, the authors highlighted that the first colonization of Remote Oceania mostly depended on the intensive gathering of available resources (e.g. sea shells, flightless birds, nesting turtles) prior to horticulture and animal breeding, although archaeologists have shown that the ancient degradation of the forests was probably caused by early shifting agriculture. Moreover, population settlements were probably the outcome of multiple intraregional movements, apart from the most isolated islands. "It follows that migration was not restricted to the founding events of island settlement; rather, it continued as a significant component of the formation and reformation of island cultures up to the historical era and, of course, within the present day" (Anderson and O'Connor, 2008, p. 7). In summary, archaeological data and ethnology show the cultural unity in the south Pacific and the pervasiveness of some populating processes, but they do not prove the extreme antiquity of a unique, complex



pattern of a ‘transported landscape’ (Anderson, 2009, p. 748). Oceanic landscapes, therefore, probably result from a process of interactions lasting many centuries.

While the colonists did not immediately create the landscapes or the contemporary settlement patterns, they did gradually contribute to them. The cultural unity of insular Pacific societies is probably not solely attributable to the common origin of the population or current societies, but rather results from a long tradition of contacts, exchanges, migratory movements and the dissemination of common processes and/or structural aspects, such as the organization of groups according to the environment and the temporality of their activities. T. Ingold’s proposals, centered on the complexity of the perceptions and the practices of the landscape, shed light on the importance of these connections, and the ‘landscapes’ encapsulating features.

### Landscape and experience

T. Ingold (Ingold, 2000, p. 189) promotes “a ‘dwelling perspective’, according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of—and testimony to—the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and, in so doing, have left there something of themselves”. The ‘landscape’ cannot, therefore, be reduced to features: it encapsulates tasks and temporalities. The link between cultural practices and the necessity of dwelling is anchored in it. T. Ingold (Ingold, 2000, p. 198), quoting F. Inglis (Inglis, 1977), considers that “a landscape is the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself.” To paraphrase G. Mead, “if every object is to be regarded as a ‘collapsed act’, then the landscape as a whole must likewise be understood as the taskscape in its embodied form: a pattern of activities ‘collapsed’ into an array of features” (Mead, 1938). However, “to perceive a landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past” (Ingold, 2000, p. 189). I would add that the pervasiveness of actual activities should not be overlooked. T. Ingold also discusses (Ingold, 2000, p. 149) the relational conceptions of the hunter-gatherers regarding their world: “To exist [...] is already to be positioned in a certain environment and committed to the relationship it entails. Reality, then, is relational through and through... The relational field is [...] the very ground from which things grow, and take on the forms they do. Another word for this ground is land”. Consequently, a “relational approach” is necessary in order to grasp “the generation of knowledge and substance” which is “embedded in life-historical narratives of the deeds of predecessors, of their movements and emplacements, and of their interventions—oftentimes from beyond the grave—in the lives of successors” (Ingold, 2000, p. 133).

Another point made by T. Ingold is that the inhabitants of a landscape use it and therefore perceive the conditions of their existence, both whilst alive and dead, and their own relationship with the environment and the non-human

entities that populate it. In this perspective, “a skill well remembered is one that is flexibly responsive to ever-variable environmental conditions” (Ingold, 2000, p. 147), whereas people are understood as “centres of progenerative activity variously positioned within an all-encompassing field of relationships.” They all circulate, leaving their trace behind them and creating a mobile space where the relationships which constitute them come to mingle.

For T. Ingold, the meaning of ‘landscape’, therefore, associates the environment and practices with experiences based on perception and memorization. This proposal brings out the independent complexity of the natural, cultural and cognitive phenomena as well as their interweaving. The people, their private and collective experiences and their worldview are at the heart of mobility issues. In this perspective, a ‘transported landscape’ could not result from the mere transportation of techniques, material culture, animals and plants.

T. Ingold’s challenging proposals pertain to an essentially perceptual and cognitive register. Moreover, they cast light on the epistemological biases stemming from our modern Western ideology—which he calls the ‘genealogical model’. T. Ingold promotes a conception of sociality based on the primacy of relationships and shared experience. He invites us to take a closer look at unnoticed or often underestimated ways of perceiving, thinking and acting.

These proposals converge with those of anthropologists such as J. Fox and N. Munn. Their theories are also relational, but they are more focused on the culturally based dimensions of subjectivity. Underlining the intimate relations existing between language, culture and perception, J. Fox asserts (Fox, 2006c): “The ordering of space is fundamental to the creation of locative identities and to some extent reflects patterns of *deixis* that are a key feature of Austronesian languages”. His conclusions (Fox, 2006a, p. 4) stress that—as with any other human language—perception and expression of space constitute, in Austronesian languages, a category in which powerful cultural and social determinisms are profoundly anchored.

For N. Munn (Munn, 1996, p. 458), conceptions of space include eminently cultural phenomena of perception. The Australian Warlpiri even acknowledge the active presence of ancestors whose “corporeal boundary [is transposed] onto the land [...], giving it fixed, relatively enduring markers”. In these cases, their presence is perceptible through signs, warnings, and misfortunes seized in the interaction: “This combination of communication and force characterizes the Aboriginal sense of country.” N. Munn wrote (Munn, 1996, p. 460). Although Warlpiri Aborigines are not linked with the Malayo-Polynesian cultural complex, this assertion is true for most of the other regional societies.

The uses of the concept of ‘landscape’ reflect the complexity of the issues it raises concerning the peopling and cultural evolution of the Pacific societies, explanations based on material and environmental determinisms, individual aims and initiatives, psycho-cognitive functions or more specific cultural and social aspects, all of which are diversely favored according to the theories.

### **\*BANUA/FENUA: CONCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIO-COSMIC WORLD AND COMPLEX OPERATING CATEGORIES**

The theories concerning ‘landscape’ provide an insight into the complexity of the vernacular concept of *fenua* (*\*banua*). Three aspects will be examined here: firstly, the intimate and culturally mediatized relationship that people maintain with their environment in the Pacific area; secondly, the ecological and social unity of the socio-cosmic world designated by the term *fenua*; and thirdly, the operational dimension of this concept, which corresponds to a concrete, empirical category of social space. Some aspects of this, both structured and structuring, abstract concept are constant in many Malayo-Polynesian-speaking societies<sup>(8)</sup>. This concept refers to cultural patterns and a set of principles that organize time and space in a given society, thus organizing its experiences, practices and representations. In other words, beyond the experience and immediate dimensions stressed by Ingold, I suggest considering the cultural—and culturally transmitted and shared—cognitive dimensions of the emic concept of *fenua*.

#### **The opposition between land and sea: an anthropocentric semantic field**

Linguists have proposed the reconstructed form *\*banua* as the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian original term of later reflexes. In the sub-section of the lexicon dedicated to the Proto-Oceanic landscape-related terms (*\*panua*), M. Ross and coworkers (Ross et al., 2007, p. 36-91) point out that while *\*tanoq* refers to the ‘ground’ or the ‘soil’, the meaning of *\*panua* is more abstract (Ross et al., 2007, p. 395): “1. inhabited area or territory, 2. community together with its land and things on it, 3. land, not sea, 4. (with reference to weather and the day/night cycle) the visible world, land and sky”. The term corresponds to the idea of an overwater land or a large island, as opposed to islets and reefs. Contrary to the sea, the ‘land’—Proto-Malayo-Polynesian *\*banua*, Proto-Oceanic *\*panua*, and East-Uvean/Wallisian<sup>(9)</sup> *fenua*—is essentially defined as being populated by a human community.

The binary opposition ‘land/sea’ is a frequent form of relative spatialization in the Austronesian area (Fox, 2006a; Fox, 2006c; Ross et al., 2007, p. 229–230). My own fieldwork in Wallis Island (Chave-Dartoén, 2000) has demonstrated that the ‘land/sea’ (*fenua/tai*) opposition overlaps another more abstract one: *uta/tai*, which distinguishes a ‘land side’ from a ‘sea side’ in any given position. In both oppositions, the ‘land’ corresponds to a center, an ‘inside’ (*loto*), the damp and cool core where the local society develops and renews itself, with generative responsibilities being incumbent upon men (e.g. horticulture) and women (e.g. maternity). This contrast with the sea—an open, dry, hot and dangerous realm from where deities and foreigners arrive—highlights the characteristics of the *fenua*: a secure and fertile island,

and the only place suitable for the development of human and social life. However, it should be remembered, as M. Sahlins (Sahlins, 2008 and 2012) and J. Fox (Fox, 2008) noted again recently, that Austronesian societies do value what comes from the outside: it is generally incorporated into the social world and helps consolidate the social order and establish social distinctions. This is particularly true in Fiji and Western Polynesia (Sahlins, 1985 and 2012), where status hierarchy is founded on external (divine or foreign) references. Thus, the outside does not correspond to an absolute otherness, left at the margins of the social world, but is structurally internalized and made a constituent of the locality. In other words, the social world (*fenua*) is defined in terms of its difference from the outside, while concurrently using structural and ritual means to incorporate it into the cosmos and the mechanisms operating its own renewal.<sup>(10)</sup>

H. Guiot (Guiot, 2000) defined the *fenua* (in Futuna) as a welcoming and fertile land. She pointed out—as A. Babadzan (Babadzan, 1983) and B. Saura (Saura, 2000) previously did for Eastern Polynesia—the matrix character of the land. On Futuna—as in Wallis (Guiot, 1998)—the inland forest is “a generator of fertility for the soil of the island and, consequently, of well being for the people” because it is the “place of the vitality of the land”,<sup>(11)</sup> “le ma’uli’aga o le fenua” (Guiot, 2000, p. 22). The *‘uhufenua*—“all the animated entities produced by the land”—originated here: “domesticated or wild plants, animals, rocks, spring and river water as well as human natives of the *fenua*”, but only those who were born there (Guiot, 2000, p. 22).

Such representations are ancient and common in the area where the Malayo-Polynesian languages are spoken. The radial organization of the socio-cosmic space has been pointed out in Madagascar (Thomas, 2006), Melanesia (Spriggs, 1997) and Polynesia (Sahlins, 1957; Gérard, 1974). In Indonesia, for the Baduy people of West Java (Berthe, 1965; Wessing, 2005; Wessing and Barendregt, 2005), as in the mountains of Bali (McRae, 2006; Reuter, 2006a and 2006b), social and ritual organizations overlap. The genealogy of local groups, the fertility of the land and the social world are considered to have originated in the deep and wooded valleys of the center.<sup>(12)</sup> This relational and spatial organization conjugates the upward orientation of the ancestral genealogical references—and their increasing gradation in value—with the downward orientation of the beneficial flows giving life to the land and the people. This pattern is frequent in the high islands of Oceania, and is consistent with M. Sahlins’ observations (Sahlins, 1957) about the radial organization of the autarkic social units which extend from the center of the island to the sea.

The importance of the opposition between land and sea is also striking in Polynesian myths. The land (*\*banua/\*panua/fenua*) is particularly significant there: it constitutes a whole, defined solely by the development of social life. This opposition may be original, as in the Tongan origin myth (Herda, 1988, p. 20-21): emerging from the primitive sea—the ‘home of the spirits’—land appeared (a trembling rock), from which a pair of primitive twins rose. However, the land can also be raised from

the bottom of the sea by a fishing deity. In both cases, of primitive opposition (between the world of spirits and the social world) or more incidental distinction (between the sea roamed by deities and the land allocated to human beings), the 'land/sea' opposition is a founding factor. In this conception of the world, the land is not a matter of natural reality: it is a social space, shaped by the gods, the civilizing heroes, the ancestors and the living humans who, by performing rituals, ensure its permanence and its renewal (Gell, 1995; Douaire-Marsaudon, 1998).

Another aspect of this opposition is apparent in the uncountable mythical and ritual transactions associated with the rise of new societies and communities where places are transferred with the relationships they encapsulate. A process similar to plant reproduction by cutting and cloning: baskets of earth, sand, wood chips or ashes are transported and spread to create new islands;<sup>(13)</sup> water springs are stolen by deities;<sup>(14)</sup> stones are moved<sup>(15)</sup> and taken from their former sites to create new settlements (Gérard, 1974). This process is the same for human communities or social groups, which are split, re-implanted and even duplicated.<sup>(16)</sup> Such facts can probably be linked to the transfer of place names,<sup>(17)</sup> widely attested in Wallis and Tuvalu,<sup>(18)</sup> like the names of islands and archipelagos such as Savai'i/Hawai'i, 'Uvea/Ouvea, or Futuna. These phenomena deserve specific study, but it should be noted that place names, like personal names, form multi-dimensional cognitive entities to which processes of memorization, condensation and valuation are bound (Chave-Dartoen, 2012). Their use and transfer refer to places as much as to mental and social spaces (Lefebvre, 1974) organized by myths and narratives. In certain cases, they form spatio-temporal routes that J. Fox called topogenies: "a landscape of [named] places forms a complex structure of social memory" (Fox, 2006a, p. 7; for a case study: Fox, 2006e). Therefore, a transfer of place names indicates the likely migration of a social group, as well as the transfer of its specific cultural and cognitive references and the system organizing these references.

I would add that some contemporary reflexes of \*banua also refer to the placenta (Chave-Dartoen, 2000; Saura, 2000), the person's original alter ego, immediately buried after birth. In Wallis, the grave is like a mooring bollard for dead people (*mate*) wandering at night. It therefore becomes a genealogical reference as the physical fluids, flowing from the decomposing body, penetrate the ground (*fenua*) which is then fertilized by the beneficial action of the ancestors and the deceased who are buried there (Chave-Dartoen, 2000).

The opposition between the original marine environment and the land defines the latter as being occupied by both living and dead people and their fertility rituals. This opposition is undoubtedly more significant for Polynesians than for other societies speaking Austronesian languages (e.g. in Bali or Java), who withdrew inland after the rise of Hindu or Muslim coastal states. On the other hand, totally foreign 'spirits of the place' are hardly ever found in Polynesia: dead people, ancestors and deities are all incorporated at some level of the socio-cosmic world.<sup>(19)</sup>

In any case, the concept of 'land' (\*banua/\*panua/fenua) roots its definition in the cultural and social dimensions of the relationship between the local society, the ground where it settled and the environment in which it evolves. This 'land', coextensive with the society (i.e. humans, ancestors, deities) and its cosmos, is the foundation for its practices, representations and experiences. It extends as far as the limits of the social, visible and invisible world, and sometimes includes the surrounding marine world.

Wallisian *fenua* is translated as *pays* in local French as it would be for an English translation as *country*, this translation matches the socio-cultural dimension of a space inhabited by a human community, but ignores the encompassing and relational character of the Polynesian term. This excludes any substantial definition of the 'land' as a 'country' commonly defined by limits or fixed attributes, as is the case for nation-states or a territory.

In Wallis, social units are not defined on a territorial basis, but according to the mutual bonds and duties ceremonially maintained between a chief and his dependents (Chave-Dartoen, n.d.). Gathering the villagers who maintain a ceremonial relationship with him, the chief shapes the village boundaries, which encompass the lands on which people 'make their living' (*ma'uli'i ai*). The same principle underpins the position and the function of the king, whose figure aggregates what is considered as the 'land' (*fenua*) at the level of the whole society (Chave-Dartoen, 2000 and 2010).

This principle can be found elsewhere in the region, as far as Indonesia. Most of the time, the existence of the 'land' (\*banua/\*panua/fenua) is essentially established on the ritual and ceremonial relationships which define the socio-cultural group inhabiting it. This relational definition of the 'land' and its community implies the coherence of its social whole, not its closure and the exclusion of other similar entities. In this respect, the concept not only admits creations *ex nihilo*, but also displacements, duplications, as well as, for migrants, the progressive disappearance of its original founding relationships behind new reconfigured relationships. Finally, the concept admits that different *fenua* can coexist in the same place. They may be juxtaposed, somehow superimposed or interlocked, according to how local groups define themselves and others, and how they integrate their environment and their neighbors.

### The social definition of an ecological unit

This definition of the *fenua* converges with that of R. Blust:

"[Proto-Malayo-Polynesian]\*banua tells us that the territorial unit which contributed to the life support of the human community was terminologically distinguished from territories external to it (the latter probably being represented by PMP \**alas* 'forest'). This inhabited territory included the village, its fields and fruit groves, its domesticated animals, its sources of drinking water and its places for the disposal of the dead (the goodwill of the deceased being indispensable to the prosperity of the living) (Blust, 1987, p. 101).



This lexical reconstruction partially relies on examples from the Solomon Islands.

Concerning Polynesia, Tonga can also be added to the Wallisian example. Before the reorganization of the chieftainship operated in the 19th century, the term *fonua* used to designate “the people of/and place”, i.e. “a local territorial entity that incorporated the land and natural surrounds associated with a chiefly title-holding, and the people residing on that land” (Francis, 2006, p. 345). Within this entity under the authority of a title-holder “human agency is integral to a physical landscape that includes the land, the ocean and the sky” (Francis, 2006, p. 345).

Once again, we should note the relational definition of *fonua*. As in *\*banua/\*panua/fenua*, this territorial reference is subordinated to that of the people, including ancestors and deities. R. Blust’s proposals were discussed by M. Ross and co-workers (Ross et al., 2007), J. Fox (Fox, 2006d) and T. Reuter (Reuter, 2006b), and all insisted on the polysemy of the term. J. Fox and others showed that ritual practices were essential to the constitution and the territorial setting-up the societies of the islands of Southeast Asia and Melanesia speaking Malayo-Polynesian languages. This is a fundamental point. The importance of the ritual foundation of local societies has also been highlighted by French ethnologists following on from M. Leenhardt’s work (Leenhardt, 1971) in New Caledonia. Later, D. De Coppet (De Coppet, 1990 and 1995) suggested that they should be characterized as socio-cosmic or cosmomorph. Therefore, the various definitions of the term *\*banua* refer to the cosmomorph dimension of these societies and their holist character.

In this respect, it corresponds particularly to what C. Friedberg (Friedberg, 2005, p. 28) termed a ‘complex category’ when analyzing vernacular classifications and associated practices.

She explained that such categories are “organizers of the space” and “can play the role of encompassing categories for certain plants at the same time”. They originate in use and experience. The Wallisian language contains other categories of this type such as *vao* (forest), *toafa* (barren zone) or *to’oga* (taro irrigated plantations). Because of its general characteristics, the category *\*banua* is clearly on a higher level. The term corresponds to a social and ecological unit that includes a human community with its invisible counterpart (i.e. dead people, ancestors and deities), the lands on which it subsists and the different ecosystems that provide resources and activities. Usually, these ecosystems are aligned along the radial axis of the island and structure the ordinary and extraordinary activities of the people (Ross et al., 2007): dense forest, fallow lands and coconut plantations (which offer additional food resources and plant materials) where the shifting gardens are open; dry or wet coastal zones (villages/taro irrigated plantations and mangrove swamps), beaches, lagoon and reefs. Whether it refers to an island, a community or a social unit such as a household, the *\*banua/\*panua/fenua* category refers to a complex whole. It constitutes a human group and the social, cultural and technical appropriation of the environment it lives in, subsists on and ‘embodies’ (Ingold,

2000, p. 63). From an emic point of view, this close relationship not only means that the people are dependent on their environment, but that their investment acts directly on the environment and defines it as coextensive to the social world in development. Such complex categories are operational. They refer to experiences, representations and technical practices. By doing so, they organize actions according to very complex cultural schemes (Friedberg, 1997, p. 47).

For C. Friedberg (Friedberg, 2005, p. 30) “a society and the real or imagined environment in which it lives must be considered as a whole.” Such a proposal corresponds exactly to the conceptions that Pacific societies have about the social world and life, as stressed by the Tongan ethnologist O. Mahina concerning his own society. The myths and the representations transmitted by the “oral tradition” (*talatupu’a*) “may be regarded as a cosmic representation of the social arrangement, where the environment is seen as merely an extension of human society. It follows that, as far as the *talatupu’a* is concerned, the origin of the universe is socially connected. [...] Literally, the universe is thus made social—and environmental—specific to the Tongan social world, and the universe, at least for the Tongans, is symbolically Tongan society” (in Francis, 2006, p. 345).

The complex nature of the category *\*banua/\*panua/fenua* is clear. It corresponds to the ritual, ecological and social unit constituted by cosmomorph groups or societies. The terms ‘land’ and ‘landscape’ only translate part of the meaning of this complex category. One should keep in mind that, as pointed out by T. Ingold, J. Fox and N. Munn, its meaning is not substantive but relational and based on the experiential, cognitive and social dimensions of space. The point of view here has to be emic: the category *\*banua/\*panua/fenua* refers to the cultural model, to the social and ritual organization as well as to the forms of sensitivity of the society developing here. Bearing the imprint of these sensitivities, values, representations, actions and techniques, the ‘land’, ‘landscape’ and ‘environment’ have no other existence than that defined by their inhabitants.

We can therefore suppose that, when moving or migrating, speakers of Malayo-Polynesian languages looked for settlement sites that allowed the organization of a socio-cultural space corresponding to the *\*banua/\*panua/fenua* category. A place offering propitious conditions for the development of social life and for the technical and ritual unfolding of a new (re-)created cosmos. In this perspective, a successful and long-lasting settlement implies a culturally defined choice of place and, more importantly, a place shaped by the technical and ritual, direct and indirect actions of men.

## SYNTHESIS

Several fundamental aspects of the South Pacific societies deserve to be recalled in this synthesis.

The reflexes of *\*banua* refer, above all, to socio-cosmic worlds (or to coherent units within it) based on the inseparable relationship between the living and the dead, ancestors, deities and the ‘land’—extended to what we call ‘landscape’—from which life flourishes. Together, they shape and renew it. In these worlds, all socio-cosmic relationships are organized around the ‘elders’, with all social entities, including deities and ancestors, finding a place in the gradation of status and authority determined by relative seniority. Rank and authority originate in the relationships maintained with ancestors and deities—nowadays the Christian God—providing fertility to the land and prosperity to the society that inhabits it. Rituals and respect for social values ensure the stability of these beneficial relationships and the renewal of society.

Concerning Wallis and Futuna, H. Guiot (Guiot, 1998 and 2000) showed that the *fenua* is seen as a well-nourished land where everything grows. In Wallis Island, the ‘king’ is made responsible for it by God’s will (Chave-Dartoen, 2000). The same is true in Tonga, where the ‘land’ is not understood as an entity standing outside the social world, as would be the natural domain, opposed to the culture subsisting on it. In spite of the deep social changes at work, many local societies still devalue strictly individual ambitions and ignore a transcending order, such as natural laws or fate. In such socio-cosmic societies, values, institutional organization and the efficiency of technical and ritual practices shape the environment and the order of the whole cosmos. It was certainly the same in the distant past, as shown in comparative studies in linguistics and social analysis at a regional scale (e.g. Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Bellwood et al., 2006; Reuter, 2006c).

The reflexes of *\*banua* correspond to what C. Friedberg termed a ‘complex category’. It designates a complex whole (a socio-cosmic world) including technical and ritual practices, as well as the experiences and representations ensuring its life and renewal. This whole, however, is not so much composed of material substances but rather of socio-cosmic relationships. It can be displaced and transposed when one of its segments moves to re-establish a world where the living and the dead will cohabit, under the responsibility of an elder chief. The term *\*banua* and its contemporary reflexes therefore correspond to what appears to be an operational, performative category: any social unit corresponding to a socio-cosmic world perceived, identified and experienced as such by the people participating in its renewal, is *\*banua/\*panua/fenua*.

Although societies where Austronesian languages are spoken are numerous and diverse, and may be impacted differently by environmental constraints and historical events, they have at least partially maintained institutions, practices and representations from their common origin and history. For instance, most of these societies still recognize the coherence of the cosmos, whose renewal is jointly ensured by both the living and the dead.

These socio-cosmic worlds and the institutions that create them are not unchangeable but they are condensed

in the *\*banua* category and its reflexes. All the relationships constituting the socio-cosmic world are condensed within it. The environment is internalized on two levels of these socio-cosmic worlds: experience and rituals. The term *\*banua* designates the cosmos in its very order, submitted to the rituals and the beneficial interactions of humans, ancestors and deities. Human society, coextensive with its cosmos, depends on it just as much as it deploys it, shapes it, renews it and, if necessary, re-configures it.

## NOTES

- (1) This category is a conceptual construction based on linguistic features (Bellwood et al., 2006). This paper focuses on the speakers of Malayo-Polynesian languages, a branch of the Austronesian languages coming from Southern China and Taiwan, and ranging southward and eastward through the Indo-Pacific ocean. This linguistic family encompasses a cultural area stretching from Malaysia through Indonesia and Micronesia down to Eastern Polynesia, excluding Australia, most of inland New-Guinea and some isolates. It does not mean that an ‘Austronesian people’ or an ‘Austronesian society’ ever existed.
- (2) French word meaning “a small natural cutting formed by some bryophytes” (Larousse dictionary, personal translation).
- (3) Whether the inhabitants came all the way down from Southern China and Taiwan with their cultural baggage (e.g. see Kirch, 2000) or were already settled, having developed a truly original culture at the contact of nearer Asian influences (Terrell, 2002), is a matter of debate (see Anderson and O’Connor, 2008 for a synthesis). Later arrivals from Northern Micronesia are also reported. Genetic analysis on introduced animal bones found in archaeological excavations (e.g. pigs, rats, poultry) show different routes and origins. Human displacements are therefore shown to be complex and diversified (Anderson, 2009). Most of the interesting theories about migration are based on the need to exchange. See J. Terrell (Terrell, 2002) concerning what he termed Greater Near Oceania; e.g. see also P. Bellwood (Bellwood, 1996) and P. Kirch (Kirch, 2000), concerning the expansion of Lapita.
- (4) One method of historic (phylogenetic) linguistics—its semantic approach—consists in lexical comparison and the reconstruction of ancient vocabularies by studying morphologic and semantic mutations.
- (5) D. Frimigacci (Frimigacci, 1980) for New Caledonia, for example; see P. Kirch (Kirch, 2000) or A. Noury and J.-C. Galipaud (Noury and Galipaud, 2011) for synthesis on the matter.
- (6) See also Kirch, 1984, p. 135.
- (7) Polynesian people transported three species of mammals, two species of lizard, snails and weeds. Their settlement deeply modified the local ecosystem and, in some cases (as in Hawai’i), destroyed it (Kirch, 1982).
- (8) T. Ingold rejects the idea that perception, experience and culture could be structured. My synthesis goes against his theory on this point.
- (9) In linguistic literature, East ‘Uvean is the language of Wallis islanders (‘Uvea is the island’s vernacular name). For the meaning of *fenua* in Wallis, see K. Rensch (Rensch,

- 1984). After my fieldwork, I was able to develop the issue (Chave-Dartoén, 2000, *index* and p. 767).
- (10) This configuration, termed ‘included third (*tiers inclus*) by L. Dumont (Dumont, 1983, p. 121) is an ‘encompassing of the contrary’ (*englobement du contraire*).
- (11) All translations from French into English were made by the author.
- (12) This characteristic flowing pattern diverges from other ones, as in Kerala for instance (India), where fertility stems from the grove surrounding the village (Uchiyamada, 1998).
- (13) For Tonga, see Gifford, 1924, p. 68 and 88–102 and Herda, 1988, p. 26).
- (14) ‘Aliko Liufau (personal communication) about Nuku’ifala and Nuku’ione water springs in Wallis.
- (15) P. Herda (Herda, 1988, p. 39–40) says that stones from Rotuma, Wallis, Niue and Samoa were sent to Tonga, as a ceremonial tribute (*fatogia*) to the Tu’i Tonga Tu’itaatui. In this case, stones and yams had the same function.
- (16) A. G. Haudricourt (Haudricourt, 1962 and 1964) pointed out that this kind of duplication fits the conceptions of Oceanic people with regard to the reproduction of plants and social groups.
- (17) In Wallis, the personal names of people and things circulate only within groups owning rights to them. The transfer of a place name therefore implies the migration of one of its owners. This may be true for the whole area.
- (18) 33% of Wallisian place names probably came from Tonga (Kirch, 1984, p. 235). See Herda, 1988, p. 40 for Tuvalu.
- (19) One hypothesis could be that, according to common representations in South-East-Asia, ‘spirits of the place’ are dead, displaced or slaughtered populations or outcasts deceased without any relationship with the people (see Platenkamp, 2007, for discussion). To my knowledge, there are no such entities in Polynesia where the cosmos is ritually made encompassing.

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