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Anthropology and the Mining Arena in New Caledonia: Issues and Positionalities

Pierre-Yves Le Meur

Correspondence to: Research Director, IRD (*Institut de Recherche pour le Développement / Research Institute for Development*), Noumea, New Caledonia.

Research Unit: GRED (Governance, Risk, Environment, Development)

Postal address: IRD, BP A5, 98848 Noumea cedex, New Caledonia

Abstract

In the last twenty-five years, the mining sector has become an important field of investigation and controversy for anthropologists. As an object, the 'mine' itself poses specific problems that make it particularly fertile ground for the exploration of inextricably linked theoretical, methodological, ethical and political issues. In this paper, I explore the issue of the positionality of anthropologists within the mining arena. The analysis of positionality is taken beyond an individual perspective focusing on ethics, engagement and responsibility, to additionally include discussions of networking, alliance-building and institutionalising processes. I shall begin by dealing with the problems posed by the anthropology of mining and the various perspectives that respond to it. In the second section, I narrow the focus to the case of New Caledonia. In the third section I present the context and challenges associated

with the discussed cases. I portray the cases in question and, in particular, the new arena represented by the CNRT (National Centre for Technological Research) ‘Nickel and its Environment’, an agency established in 2008 to fund research on nickel in New Caledonia. The analysis in terms of a ‘hybrid’ forum of this arena will be complemented by the consideration of the social demand for the anthropology of mining. In the concluding section, the paper outlines options for further research while stressing the need for a balanced, ‘symmetrical’ approach of the multiple actors’ agendas constitutive of the mining arena.

Key words: Mining; Applied/fundamental anthropology; Positionality; Science-society interface; New Caledonia

Introduction

The mining sector has been an important object of investigation in anthropology for 30 years or more (Godoy 1985). The alternating opening and closure of mining sites causes shifts in the geography of mining and, as a consequence, the research devoted to it. While Latin America and Africa continue to be the location of significant extraction activities (for example, Ferguson 2005, Bebbington 2012), the increased prominence of mining in the Indo-Pacific region has triggered a rapid expansion of literature on the topic into this geographical area (Ballard and Banks 2003).

As an object, the ‘mine’ itself poses specific problems that make it particularly fertile ground for the exploration of inextricably linked theoretical, methodological, ethical and political issues. It is simultaneously an object endowed with a specific materiality, which is captured, in part, by the concepts of the enclave (Sidaway 2007), modularity (Appel 2012) and industrial overflow (Letté 2009), and also a space for the unfolding different types of anthropological analysis (economic, socio-technical, political, etc.). In this sense it is a complex issue that generates diverse and multiple interfaces. Located at the intersection between the anthropology of business, the state and natural resource governance, mining is also a topic that does not belong to the traditional world of anthropology. Nevertheless it generates social change that influences those ‘traditional’ areas of anthropological inquiry (kinship, exchange, cosmology, etc.).¹

Moreover, the multiplicity of arenas, interfaces and actors that constitute the mine – its simultaneously localised and globalised nature – poses problems in relation to methods and access to information, among other things. This complicates commitments to ‘methodological symmetry’ – treating on the same footing all the actors involved – which is a constituent principle of rigorous anthropology. Finally, the extreme inequality of the power relations between actors, and the questions associated with the financing of research in the context of mining, raise important ethical and political questions and render the idea of neutrality illusory. This, in turn, necessitates the re-thinking of the ‘regimes of engagement’ (Thevenot 2006) of anthropologists in the mining arena.

In this paper, I will explore the issue of the positionality of anthropologists within the mining arena. More specifically, I will argue that this issue is not just a matter of individual ethics and engagement, which of course remain of the essence to avoid getting locked into a risky face-to-face with the mining industry. Carrying out a sound ethnography of the mining situation additionally depends on the capacity of the researcher to build alliances with various partners, and, beyond that, on the forms of institutionalisation of the relationships between researchers and the other actors of the mining arena, primarily corporations. This nexus of positions and relations in the mining context will be the major thread of the paper. To tackle this issue, I will begin by identifying the fault lines in researchers’ positions on this (relatively) new topic in relation to mining, which reproduce those that ran – and continue to run – through the anthropology of development. On the one hand, there are researchers involved in various forms of consultancy and applied research, whose studies are often viewed as having very little legitimacy from the perspective of the academic models. On the other hand, we have critical anthropologists who tend to be experts when it comes to deconstruction but refuse to engage in consultancy, which they still suspect of harbouring hegemonic Western objectives (see, for example, Mosse and Lewis 2006; Bierschenk 2008; for the Australian context, Trigger 2011, Responses to Trigger 2012, and Lattas 2012). According to Colin Filer (1999a), this opposition between ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ positions underlies a tension between two perspectives: a pluralist vision of the mining arena, emphasising the diversity of actors and stakes involved, on the one hand, and a dualist (and populist) perspective, on the other, which stresses the unequal confrontation between local communities and mining companies.

I shall begin by dealing with the problems posed by the anthropology of mining and the various standpoints that respond to it. In the second section, I narrow the focus to the case of

New Caledonia. The third section presents the context and challenges associated with the discussed cases and reflects on my involvement as an anthropologist. In particular, I shall portray the new arena represented by the CNRT (National Centre for Technological Research) ‘Nickel and its Environment’, an agency established in 2008 to fund research on nickel in New Caledonia. The analysis in terms of the ‘hybrid’ forum of this arena will be complemented by a consideration of the social demand for the anthropology of mining. In the concluding section, I return to the contribution the anthropology of mining can make through its different positionalities and some of the problematic issues that it faces, and, finally, outline options for further research while stressing the need for a balanced, ‘symmetrical’ approach of the multiple actors’ logics constitutive of the mining arena. This option is consistent with the approach of positionality outlined above, namely an analysis in terms of networking, alliance-building and processes of institutionalisation, and not limited to tackling the individual perspective focusing on ethics, engagement and responsibility. Finally, although the paper focuses on the anthropology of mining, it will also engage with writings and debates from other disciplines that share similar interests on these questions, in particular cultural geography, sociology, social history and political economy.

Mining and Anthropology: Problems and Positions

Mining and development, both viewed as material, institutional and ideological configurations, present similarities with regard to the controversies triggered in the realm of ‘good’ positioning and ‘legitimate’ involvement of anthropologists. Beyond this issue, the resemblance also concerns the fact that these two domains generate interface situations characterised by very strong disparities in relation to power and resources, as well as profound normative and cognitive discontinuities. We can refer here to Olivier de Sardan’s (2005, 24) definition of development. This is a non-normative definition and development is grasped ‘from a fundamentally methodological perspective’, as a social situation or:

as a sum of the social processes induced by voluntarist acts aimed at transforming a social milieu, instigated by institutions or actors who do not belong to the milieu in question, but who seek to mobilize the milieu, and who rely on the milieu in their attempt at grafting resources and/or techniques and/or knowledge. (Olivier de Sardan 2005, 24-25)

Four major attitudes can be identified within the discipline of anthropology in relation to this nominalist definition:² (i) an ‘a-development’ anthropology which excludes this ‘impure’ object from the discipline as it is always suspected of luring anthropology towards the evils of application; (ii) a ‘neo-dependency’ critical anthropology³, which often tends to over-theorise the issue, that oscillates between populism (idealising people) and miserabilism (powerless people), and that suffers from both ‘ethnographic anemia’ and ‘historical amnesia’, to adopt Moore’s (2000, 659) sharp characterisation; (iii) an applied anthropology which is highly developed in the USA and Australia in particular, adopting an opposite attitude to that of the previous category in that it appears highly empirical and seemingly not very theoretical (Wright 1988; Bennett 1996); and (iv) finally, an interactionist anthropology and development policy study that highlights the processes triggered by ‘development situations’ (Long 1989; Olivier de Sardan 2005; Mosse and Lewis 2006).⁴ The last attitude has increasingly mobilised Callon, Latour and Law’s actor-network theory (or sociology of translation) in the last ten years (Mosse and Lewis 2006; Donovan 2014). I also adopt the approach of this fourth school of thought in this and other papers (Le Meur 2006).

As mentioned above, Colin Filer differentiates between ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ (his terms) positions that anthropologists have occupied in relation to the issue of mining in the Papua New Guinean context. Criticising Stuart Kirsch’s⁵ characterisation of anthropological activism as a natural extension of the reciprocity at the root of the ‘ethnographic pact’,⁶ Filer argues in favour of the neutral role of the ‘honest broker’ for the anthropologist, who must assist the groups involved in understanding and taking their respective expectations and points of view into account (Filer 1999a, 89).⁷ In response to Filer, Kirsch asserts that the structural power differences between mining industrialists and local landowners invalidate Filer’s hypothesis regarding the possibility of negotiating on a (relatively) equal footing (Kirsch 2002, 180; for a similar position, see also Hyndman 2001). Kirsch and Filer themselves acknowledge that their views are not entirely at odds with each other. Filer suggests the strategic possibility for anthropologists to shift from one position to the other based on the appreciation of contextual changes (1999a, 90), while Kirsch concedes that Filer’s analysis in terms of strategic groups is acceptable as long as the structural imbalances are taken into account (2002, 181).

Two other points advanced in this debate are of importance. First, Kirsch stresses the need for anthropology to participate in sufficiently robust alliances in the highly imbalanced context of the mining arena (1996, 2002). For him, these alliances should include indigenous peoples,

NGOs and lawyers. It is not solely a question of shifting the balance of power but also of taking into consideration the alternative cognitive and normative sources which challenge the anthropologist's monopolising of the role of spokesperson, a point later developed in Kirsch (2006). Indeed, let us not forget that the theme of brokerage mentioned by Filer (1996, 26) is structurally organised around the notion of interface, which implies a point of tension between the social and cognitive alignments and disalignments among actors belonging to different life worlds. This tension provides the role of the broker in an interface situation its strategic dimension (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan 2000).

The second point is put forward by Filer (1999a, 90). He relates the positioning of anthropologists (political opposition between moderates and radicals) to a theoretical perspective on the mining arena. As he sees it, the radical position reflects a dualist vision which polarises the company and the community, while the moderate position implies a pluralist vision of the mining arena that is less polarised, thus opening up a larger space for action.⁸ This point leads us back to the analogy between development and mining mentioned above. The metaphor of the graft suggested by Olivier de Sardan (2005, 24-25) does not seem to work that well in the case of mining. Unlike a development project, the primary aim of a mining project is not to graft techniques, knowledge and resources to a local milieu, but to build an enclave. It therefore does not produce the same effects as the development machine (Ferguson 2005). However, recent developments within the arena of mining, such the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) discourse (Dashwood 2013), tend to relativise these differences. CSR discourse pervades the local benefit-sharing agreements, which may be conceived as instruments of a neo-liberal governmentality or as self-regulation tools of the mining sector at global level, but also as elements that contribute to the production of 'bottom-up' public policy (Le Meur, Horowitz and Mennesson 2013). These three interpretations of CSR (in terms of governmentality, global self-regulation, or policy production) are not mutually exclusive. One can also add Catherine Coumans's proposal that 'debates on CSR legitimize and facilitate engagement between a wide range of actors and mining companies' (2011, S29). This proposal should be tested empirically, for the scope for manoeuvre within these engagements varies depending on numerous factors, such as the resources available to actors and the particular strategies they employ. However, it again establishes an analogy between mining and development as a discursive and political issue.

Development is to a certain extent a late colonial invention (as an operational apparatus) that was taken over and appropriated by the leaders of decolonisation (Cooper 1997). The

convergence between mining and development is increasingly obvious, as mining companies now finance or implement development projects under the auspices of CSR. These projects constitute specific forms of compensation (Banks et al. 2013). It is certain that, irrespective of the purpose it serves, the emergence of CSR results in both the expansion of the mining arena and the publicising of the issues involved (beyond the local arena), although, in most cases, certain clauses of the benefit-sharing agreements are subject to the condition of confidentiality (O’Faircheallaigh 2008).⁹

The position of the anthropologist within this expanded mining arena is the product of their political, theoretical and ethical choices, as well as the concrete forms of his or her involvement in various institutional settings and social networks: for example, as a researcher at a research institute, as an independent consultant, as an NGO or mining company employee, and so on. The analysis of these modes of involvement, which are all forms of *encliquage* (incorporation into a ‘clique’) (Olivier de Sardan 2008, 93-94; Le Meur 2011, 100 and 105), should conserve the idea of methodological symmetry. The latter is otherwise undermined by a normative use of the terms ‘embedded/advocate’ (Coumans 2011, S33-36), which are deployed to describe the anthropologists who work on behalf of the mining industry and the local communities respectively. As Welker (2014, 10) puts it, ‘[F]or scholars and cosmopolitan activists alike, embeddedness can take on a different valence as soon as the “community” is the corporation’. Rather than making an assumption about the value of working with/for a corporation (bad) or a community (good), the principle of symmetry calls for an empirical analysis of the forms and conditions of the involvement of anthropologists in the different groups of actors and organisations that compose the mining arena. This involvement has to be assessed in terms of the scope for manoeuvre, accountability and interests.

The conditions and forms of anthropological involvement are in need of further conceptual clarification here. My aim is not to return to a narrow conception of the notion of strategy here, even if it is obvious that the deployment of experts in anthropology or sociology serves the company’s objectives of managing social risks, controlling public information and obtaining and maintaining a ‘social license to operate’. Just as strategic groups (Bierschenk, 1988) form or unravel around the issues involved in a (mining or development) project, the interests of the actors as well as their identities build up in the course of their actions and interactions (on this point, cf. Callon and Law 1982). To explore the forms of involvement, *encliquage*, embedding or activism adopted by anthropologists in the mining arena, I will

follow the framework suggested by Callon (1986), which is organised around the concepts of problematisation (which includes the mutual definition of the actors), ‘interressement’ (as alliance-building), enrolment and the mobilisation of allies and speakers.¹⁰ From a scientific perspective, it is also a matter of weighing the heuristic risks and benefits of a given position. This empirically-grounded position is for instance the one adopted by Golub and Rhee (2013) in their study of high level executives in the extractive industry in Papua New Guinea, contra Kirsch. The latter stresses the risk of empathy and co-optation when conducting ethnographic research within the corporation. He chooses another point of focus to avoid it, namely ‘the dialectical relationship between corporations and their critics as [his] object of study’ (Kirsch 2014, 13; see Welker 2014, 6-12, for a position close to Golub and Rhee’s).

The Anthropology of Mining in New Caledonia

Until recently, mining was of little interest to anthropologists in New Caledonia. The topic featured tentatively in texts compiled in the 1990s. Winslow’s (1993) chapter can be seen as one of the first and rare attempts to tackle the mining issue in New Caledonia from a historical and anthropological perspective. In her assessment of the early years of provincialisation from 1989 to 1991, Isabelle Leblic (1993, 240-251) refers very briefly to haulage on the mines, while Alban Bensa and Jean Freyss (1994) fail to raise the issue in their reflections on the effects of the monetisation of the Kanak economy, as does Michel Naepels in his study on the land conflicts in Houaïlou (1998).¹¹ In the edited volume *La Nouvelle-Calédonie à la croisée des chemins* (David, Guillaud and Pillon 1999), the topic of mining does not feature in the section devoted to development but in that dealing with the topic of rebalancing (‘*rééquilibrage*’) between the north and south of New Caledonia (Carnuccini and Guillaud 1999). A year earlier, Jean Guiart (1998) commented on the book *Economie assistée* by the economist Jean Freyss (1995) and, among others, his analysis of the mining question. This book became a mainspring of recent literature on the topic of mining in New Caledonia.

The following works mark a new social scientific interest in mining in New Caledonia: Leah Horowitz’s thesis in cultural geography (2003), the survey carried out by the *Institut agronomique néo-calédonien* (New Caledonia Institute of Agronomy) (Sourisseau et al. 2006), Sonia Grochain’s doctoral research (2007) in sociology on labour relations in the mining sector, among others, along with her contribution to the creation and functioning of

the ‘Observatory for the socio-economic impacts of the Koniambo project’ (2008), Christine Demmer’s article on the relations between mining and indigeneity (2007), and Matthias Kowasch’s PhD (2010) in geography on the impact of the Koniambo project on the neighbouring Kanak populations.

The establishment of an agency for the funding of research on the topic, the CNRT (National Centre for Technological Research) ‘Nickel and its Environment’, also contributed to the consolidation of this field of investigation (I will return to this point). It is regrettable, therefore, that in a recent article which presents the parameters of the relationship between research and colonisation in a clear and very well-argued way, Benoit Trépied (2011) neglects the CNRT experience and, more broadly, mining (mentioned in passing, p. 163 and p. 175) as an issue in social science research and the building of a decolonised nation.¹² In the same vein, Matthias Kowasch (2014) in a recent article on fieldwork and decolonisation in New Caledonia focuses on the individual dimensions of ethics and engagement without considering the effects of alliance-building and institutionalising processes. The aim of this paper is to fill these gaps by including these issues in the analysis of the anthropology of mining in New Caledonia.

There are several possible non-exclusive interpretations of why New Caledonia’s anthropologists have only recently directed their attention to mining as a topic of research. The first relates to the ongoing influence of a very classical style of anthropology in French anthropology. This style is very unlikely to tackle non-traditional issues and corresponds to the group of ‘a-developmental anthropologists’ referred to in the previous section.¹³

Another interpretation is that this inattention is a product of the country’s historical and political context. This bears the hallmark of a long history of racial and spatial segregation, the civil/colonial war climate that characterised the 1980s, and the enduring effects of this trajectory on a New Caledonian society, which still functions on a highly segmentary basis. The historical studies by Isabelle Merle (1995) and Benoît Trépied (2010) broach the question of mining in the colonial era. It is striking to note that, after a gap of around ten years (the period that separates the fieldwork on which these two doctoral theses are based) and the easing of the political situation, it has become possible to carry out research in the different ethnic communities under the condition of a sufficiently long period of immersion. In this respect, mining is a complex subject-matter from a socio-ethnic and geographical perspective. First, it does not fit well in the rural-urban divide. Second, the advent of the

Kanak involvement in the world of mining, which goes back further than is often claimed,¹⁴ accelerated with the end of the *indigénat*¹⁵ in 1946 and, in particular, from the 1980s onwards. The progressive opening up of the mining arena and the development of social science research on the topic reflect the relative easing of the political climate in the country which has been involved in a process of ‘negotiated decolonisation’ for more than 15 years.

A concomitant change in context provides the third analytical explanation of the relative absence of the questions on mining in previous anthropological studies. This change that came with the *préalable minier* (‘mining prerequisite’) and the Bercy Accord of 1 February 1998, directly concerned mining and was in focus during the negotiations between the pro-independence parties from the 1990s, whereas, paradoxically, it had been very much a background issue in the 1980s. It reflects a shift that took place from a predominantly rural utopia (Demmer 2002, 125-37; forthcoming) to another utopia structured around the development of mining.

Simultaneous to the rise of environmental policies and apparatuses, projects launched for the mining and processing of nickel have engendered increasing complexity in the mining context. This included the entrance of new actors (multinationals, international NGOs, multilateral agencies) and new discourses (CSR, sustainable development, the environment, indigeneity) into the scene. It also implied the possibility of negotiating certain contentious issues in new external arenas (in particular UN arenas), and the emergence of new¹⁶ political brokers.

Corresponding to these changes in the mining arena (see also Ballard and Banks 2003), the discipline of anthropology experienced a period of innovation in relation to its research topics and approaches, which have become more attentive to the multi-situated logics inherent to the heterogeneous processes subsumed under the catch-all term ‘globalisation’ (Marcus 1995). The two trends corresponding to changes in both mining and anthropology resonate with a social demand emanating from administrations, firms and civil society and driven by the political and economic changes that were underway at the time. Combined with an increasing interest in the topic of mining, the diversity of this growing social demand opened up extensive opportunities for anthropology in terms of both the types of research undertaken and the institutional positions adopted.

Practicing the Anthropology of Mining in New Caledonia: Between Bilateral Strategies and Institutionalisation

New Caledonia is a small country with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants. It is highly segmented geographically, socially and politically, and is structured by clientelist networks that facilitate rapid access to the ‘national’ arenas. To paraphrase the terminology of British social anthropology of the 1950s-60s, on one level or another, this distinctly small-scale ‘face-to-face society’ can easily shift towards the conflictive situations of a ‘back-to-back society’ (Bailey 1965, 5-7).

The tension between the polarisation and pluralisation of the mining arena, and the corresponding anthropological approaches to the topic, is also maintained by the strategies of the mining actors themselves. While certain recent initiatives aim to establish greater openness and transparency – often in the context of discussions about the environmental impacts of mining – the old (but enduring) reflexes of the mining industries drive these initiatives towards a bilateral and opaque approach.

These initiatives are frequently the long-negotiated outcome of mining conflicts. For example the *Conseil consultatif coutumier de l’environnement* (CCCE, Customary Consultative Council for the Environment) arose from the “Pact for the Sustainable Development of the Far South [of New Caledonia]” negotiated among the indigenous committee Rhêébù Nùù (meaning “the eye of the country/land” in the local Djubea language), the customary authorities, and the company Vale in 2008 (see Horowitz 2012, 2014; Levacher, forthcoming). *Observation et informations sur l’environnement* (OIEIL, Observation and Information on the Environment) was established by the South Province in 2009 under the pressure of local ecological associations and the broader rise of an environmental concern. These organisations, associated with the mining industry in the South, have counterparts in the North in the Koniambo project.¹⁷ The *Comité environnemental Koniambo* (CEK, Koniambo Environmental Committee) and the *Observatoire des impacts socio-économiques du projet Koniambo* (Observatory for the socio-economic impacts of the Koniambo project; see Grochain 2008, 2013) are two bodies that monitor the effects of mining. They suffer from either a lack of financial and institutional autonomy (in the case of the former) or a lack of support on the part of the mine operator (in the case of the second, although the situation appears to have recently improved somewhat in this regard¹⁸).

The current situation in New Caledonia regarding mining operation and policy is characterised by a pervasive pluralism involving the political-administrative mechanisms (the multi-layered institutional structure of New Caledonia), the mining companies' financial and economic arrangements, and the discursive repertoires – political, indigenous, customary, environmentalist, developmentalist – mobilised in the mining arena. In this context, the relations between scientific research and the world of mining, which were tainted with misunderstandings and mutual distrust for a long time, took a new and more institutionalised direction, in particular through the creation of an agency for the funding of research on nickel in 2007, the CNRT 'Nickel and its Environment'.

The CNRT 'Nickel and its Environment' as a Hybrid Forum

The CNRT 'Nickel and its Environment' is a scientific interest group (*'groupe d'intérêt scientifique'*). While its funding is provided by the public authorities and the mining industry, its functional bodies (scientific board, administrative council) are based on an equal representation of public authorities, mining companies and research institutions.

The CNRT plays a role in translating (part of) the social demands in relation to mining into scientific programs. It adopts a hybrid form in the sense that it constitutes a device for exploring the identities and sharing knowledge among its members (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001, 58-59). Because its composition reflects only one segment of the mining arena and is limited to institutional experts in the area of mining policy, it may be described as a hybrid 'expert' forum rather than a 'civic' one. In addition to directing and funding research, the CNRT functions as an institutionalised interface that regulates previously bilateral and opaque relationships. It progressively enables mutual understanding between actors in the mining arena,¹⁹ for instance, between the industry, the public authorities and the research triad. In other words, 'civil society', in particular environmental associations, indigenous organisations, international NGOs and customary authorities, are not involved in this agency – a fact that raises questions when one considers the role of these bodies in mining conflicts and the negotiation of the Pact for the Sustainable Development of the Far South with Vale, for example. The potential for an alliance between indigenous populations, NGOs, lawyers and researchers, in particular anthropologists, referred to by Stuart Kirsch comes to mind here (1996, 2002).

The history of the negotiations that took place in the creation of the CNRT ‘Nickel and its Environment’ has yet to be documented.²⁰ However, certain facts have been established with regard to the delicate balance that had to be struck between the mining companies. The *Société le Nickel/SLN*, which is the company historically associated with New Caledonia’s colonisation, the Brazilian Vale, and the *Koniambo Nickel SAS/KNS* are represented and the other two seats are allocated to the trade union for the mining industry, which allows for the representation of ‘small miners’ – one of the latter, Alban Tremblier, was President of the Administrative Council of the CNRT until 2012.²¹ Mining operators also struggled over the name of the agency, rejecting “Nickel and environment” which stressed ecological issues in a too obvious manner. They suggested to add ‘its’ to ‘environment’ to reduce the scope of investigation. In terms of public authorities, the three provinces, the government of New Caledonia and the French state are represented. Despite the importance assigned to health in the CNRT’s official discourse on priority areas of research, the *Institut Pasteur* is not included in the research bodies represented at the CNRT.²² Civil society and the customary authorities were excluded from the process at a very early stage and there was no public debate on this issue (although I recently learnt that the CNRT could invite customary authority representatives to the board meetings in an advisory role).

As a hybrid expert forum the CNRT therefore constitutes a limited challenge to the classic forms of delegation of power and knowledge to political and scientific actors respectively (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2001). Beyond the quest for political and institutional balance, which shaped the composition of this body, the analysis of its functioning during its first five years of existence and the evolution of its members indicate the scope of this challenge. Three areas are funded equally – environment, society, and technology – and the interdisciplinary aspect of these fields was limited during this initial period (this has changed somewhat in the second five year period). However, despite the initially significant reticence, particularly on the part of the industries, the CNRT became involved in basic research, including in the social sciences.

In 2008, two calls for project tenders were launched simultaneously by the CNRT in relation to the ‘Nickel and Society’ theme: one on mining governance across the different mining and processing sites, and a second with a more ‘macro’ focus on the role of the nickel industry in the country’s development. The project on ‘mining governance’ chosen for the first tender produced a comparative historical analysis of the social, political and economic re-configurations experienced by the mining arena and has focused, in particular, on local sub-

contracting and on the agreements between the communities and industries. These were conceived as social interfaces, as vehicles for the recognition of indigenous peoples, as instruments for the circulation of mining rent and as elements of public policy production (see the final synthesis report, Le Meur, 2015 and forthcoming; Filer and Le Meur forthcoming).

The second tender, which attracted two applications, was ultimately cancelled in February 2013 after a lengthy conflict led by the University of New Caledonia (UNC), which concluded in court to the advantage of the University (on a formal and not substantive argument). This case is significant in relation to what it says about the governance of the CNRT. This agency established a form of governance based on the principle of consensus, an approach that has proved beneficial throughout New Caledonia since the Noumea agreement in 1998, but can only function if all of the participants agree on this basic principle. If one of the participants rejects it, as UNC did in this case (irrespective of the reasons for this position and what one may think of them), and the other parties persist in their quest for consensus, the process is blocked to the advantage of the body that caused the blockage.

Subsequent calls for tender for projects on sub-contracting and indicators for socio-economic monitoring were not completed for two reasons. First, the local research pool contained too few suitable researchers. Second and above all, there was a mismatch between the request for consultancy (implying consultants' fees) and a mode of funding adapted to the research world (based on marginal costs). In 2011, a third call for tenders within this second wave gave rise to a programme (*Négocier, évaluer, reconnoître la valeur des lieux/NERVAL*), launched in 2013, on the value of place in the mining areas and, more specifically, the criteria, scales and meanings which form the basis on which the social actors assign value to a place, land or space. Hence, this programme combines the fundamental, empirically-based study of the concepts of value and place with more applied research. The aim consists in the possibility of establishing equivalences between these value scales to enable the initiation of negotiations between the parties involved in a mining project. We will return to the issues surrounding this programme below.

Social Demand and Anthropology of Mining

The question arises as whether the creation of the CNRT succeeded in establishing more productive relations between research and the mining industry and, indirectly, public authorities. To answer this question it is necessary to focus on the way in which demand for research emanating from mining corporations and political-administrative bodies is transmitted towards the CNRT. The CNRT is viewed here as a mechanism for the translation and shaping of heterogeneous interests and information. The suggestions and expectations of the industries, elected representatives and administration were expressed in written documents structured by CNRT according common guidelines (topic, objective, means needed, priority, sites, confidentiality...), which were discussed during forums for the first five-year period in 2008 and in preparation for the second in 2012. The seemingly linear appearance of the process should be qualified. The results of the ongoing research programmes, the partial restitutions carried out in this context and the discussions with the political bodies nurtured the thinking and enhanced the proposals, thereby extending and enriching the 'field of restitution' (Vidal 2010, 151-191). Hence, the presentation of the programme on 'mining governance' to the members of the strategic industrial committee (*Comité stratégique industriel/CSI*; managed by Anne Duthilleul acting on behalf of the French state) on 14 October 2011 made it possible to understand how its results were received by political actors. The intense debate it triggered demonstrated the high level of interest in the topic among the pro-independence elected representatives and the heterogeneity of the points of view (between politicians and industrialists and also among the elected representatives), thereby indicating the educational value of the results provided by the project on 'mining governance'.

However, the debate was still situated within the boundaries of the CNRT, that is, the boundaries of an expert hybrid forum. The question arises as to whether anthropologists can play the role of the 'honest broker' in this situation, as proposed by Colin Filer (1999a), and practised, for example, during a workshop in Canberra on 2 May 1997. This workshop convened many of the stakeholders involved in the conflict arising from the environmental disaster at the Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea to discuss the results and implications in a 'relatively neutral' context (Banks et Ballard 1997).

The choice made by the CNRT and the CSI to limit itself to a segment of the mining arena puts anthropologists in an awkward position. They become, by default, the quasi-institutional spokesperson (in this context, at least) of the absent actors, whose voices they must make audible. This contradicts the general evolution of anthropology which places anthropological

authority under scrutiny and valorises the plurivocality and multiplicity of sources and knowledge. The risk of ‘institutionalised *encliquage*’ inherent in this configuration is clear. This is the very risk that the establishment of a project like the aforementioned one on the value of land and place (NERVAL) attempts to counteract through a participatory mechanism which is open to the actors excluded from the CNRT. At the same time, the combination of the institutionalisation of the CNRT (that is, the implementation of rules and procedures concerning the financing, knowledge produced and organisation of debates) with the option of financing basic research (even with a defined objective) opens up a public space that is often denied to consultancy and applied anthropology, which are subject to confidentiality clauses in most cases (see Filer 1999b; Coumans 2011).

The establishment of the CNRT contributed to changes in the relationships between researchers and industrialists, but also between industrialists and politicians *vis-à-vis* the research the centre produced. These changes should not be overvalued or idealised and responses in terms of bilateralisation and opaqueness are similar in essence to industry’s ‘contractual’ logic (in the sense of business law). This was evident in the communication strategy Xtrata launched in 2012 to address the relative invisibility imposed on it by its association with the *Société minière du Sud Pacifique*/SMSP within the KNS in New Caledonia (and, undoubtedly, with a view to negotiating mining rights in its own name). The approach it chose, that of funding research on the basis of a principle of corporate sponsorship, was implemented with complete lack of transparency and an ignorance of the local institutional landscape. The corporation allocated grants to the quickest to respond without paying much attention to scientific competences and without any other strategy than providing publicity to this sponsorship. This sort of ‘divide and rule’ attitude of allocating research funds generated tensions among research institutions and did not result in a long term research-funding policy from Xstrata.

In parallel to CNRT action, there is an increased tendency among mining companies to approach the social sciences for expert reports, impact assessments and social mediation based on terms of reference that vary with regard to their restrictiveness and negotiability. My own experience prompts me to believe that there is in New Caledonia a fragile (and probably reversible) trend towards a certain degree of opening up to research. This may be an indirect effect of the founding of the CNRT in its functions of recognition and mutual learning. In 2006, I worked for the French development NGO (*Groupe de recherche et d’échanges technologiques*, GRET) also involved in the fields of policy and research. We

were contacted by Vale (CVRD at the time) which had taken over INCO and had hence gained control of the Goro industrial project. Our policy at GRET was to examine all requests, including those originating from large industrial corporations (Areva, Total, etc.) to gauge the scope for manoeuvre that would be available to us. It quickly emerged that what Vale was essentially asking us to do was to help identify local leaders with the aim of circumventing them, and not a sociological or anthropological study aimed at gaining a better understanding of the arenas in which the project was located. Hence, we did not pursue it. Six years later, although it remained within the bilateral framework of the commissioning of a group of researchers by a company,²³ a proposal by the SLN to establish a social mediation study is nevertheless opening up greater scope for negotiation. This is reflected in the actual description of the project (applied research and not consultancy) and the allocation of intellectual property rights (to the researchers and not to the industrial concern). We shall see what difference this undertaking, which aims to describe the arena polarised by the SLN in different locations and contribute to improving the social dialogue, will achieve on the ground.

Conclusions and Prospects: Toward a Symmetrical Anthropology of Mining

At the beginning of my academic relocation to New Caledonia in 2008, I embarked on a field study in Thio which intended to focus mainly on land tenure and land policy issues. Because it was impossible to move an inch without coming across a mine site, and because this activity had clearly left an indelible mark on the landscape of this municipality, I reorganised my research to incorporate the issue of mining into the anthropological research process. The arrival of a trainee from the Master's programme 'Anthropology and sustainable development professions' at the University of Aix-Marseille (Dégremont 2008) prompted me to request funding from the SLN. Given the background of the above-mentioned discussions we had had two years earlier with Vale/CVRD, I was surprised by the alacrity with which my application was accepted by the mining director Daniel Marini. Five years later, the situation has developed further. The major industrial projects have progressed at different rates, other operations have been established and New Caledonia's mining and industrial strategy is an issue surrounded by lively controversies between the companies and governmental agencies.²⁴ In the last two years, however, the situation has become tenser as far as mining policy is concerned. The competition between the major mining companies operating in New

Caledonia is fierce and interferes with the political agendas. The pro-independence parties have not reached any agreement regarding the selection of the mining representative in the New Caledonian government. There is severe conflict among the anti-independence parties about the attribution of an extremely promising nickel concession in southern New Caledonia. This increasing tension is reflected in the reluctance expressed by mining companies to fund research which could expose them to public scrutiny and which has no direct and visible benefit for them.²⁵

In this context, the role of the social sciences and, more specifically, anthropologists is becoming visible to the different actors. The institutionalisation of relations, for example through mechanisms like the CNRT ‘Nickel and its Environment’, would appear to provide a necessary safeguard against the bilateralisation and opaqueness of relations with industrialists, which gave rise to particularly harmful effects in the past.²⁶ It is certainly not a panacea, however. There are risks for the anthropologist in particular, associated with the institutional *encliquage* generated by membership of this very specific segment of the mining arena. It includes the potential to lock them into issues and processes influenced by the industries and authorities (without providing full access to the strategic core of the mining industry²⁷). In the absence of the extension of the rules of membership of the CNRT, the role of mediator or broker comes into play through the capacity of researchers to carry out high-quality research that is capable of giving a voice to those excluded from this mechanism and to adopt multiple restitutions in discourses and analyses. Tensions were also evident during the recent internal debates with the CNRT scientific committees regarding the opportunities for developing and funding research programmes on legal issues. Research proposals focusing on the implementation of the recent mining code and on the relations between law, participation and citizenship were bluntly rejected by the DIMENC²⁸ and not supported by the other administrations and mining companies which are members of the CNRT. The ensuing discussion on the relevance of including law as a legitimate research field for the CNRT did not reach a conclusion. This raises the question as to whether the discussion around the future of the CNRT has not already started – that is, according to my hypothesis, its appropriation by the mining industry as a technological platform rather than a research funding agency. Such a development that would mean a return to heteronomous ‘corporate science’ (Kirsch 2014, 127-158).²⁹

The absence of institutional symmetry makes the need for methodological symmetry – treating all the actors of mining on an equal methodological footing – all the more acute.

However, this must extend to the key actors from bodies like the CNRT. Julien Merlin's doctorate on the processes of mobilising scientific expertise and other forms of knowledge in the context of the environmental controversies surrounding the Goro project, which is currently being written, constitutes a step forward in this direction (Merlin 2014). This opening up reflects a scaling up and multi-localisation which are essential to the ethnography of mining. At the same time, it will continue to be difficult to gain access to certain arenas and participant observation (or rather 'observant participation') associated with consultancy situations will continue to offer very effective responses to this limitation in some cases. In keeping with a pluralist vision and symmetrical approach to the mining arena and the capacities and competences of its stakeholders as actors, producers of knowledge and audiences, 'reverse anthropology', which Stuart Kirsch advocates (2006), should be systematically applied. For the anthropologist, this also implies engagement in alliance-building and institutionalising processes favouring the consolidation of individual ethics, engagement and responsibility.

List of Acronyms

CNRT, National Centre for Technological Research – Centre national pour la recherche technologique)
 CEK, Koniambo Environmental Committee – Comité environnemental Koniambo (
 CCCE, Customary Consultative Council for the Environment – Conseil consultatif coutumier de l'environnement
 CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility
 CSI, Strategic industrial committee – Comité stratégique industriel
 DIMENC, Department of Industry, Mining and Energy of New Caledonia – Direction de l'industrie, des mines et de l'énergie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie
 GIS, Scientific interest group ('groupe d'intérêt scientifique'
 IAC, New Caledonia Institute of Agronomy – Institut agronomique néo-calédonien
 IRD, Research Institute for Development – Institut de Recherche pour le Développement
 BRGM, French Geological Survey Office – Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières
 IFREMER, French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea – Institut français de recherché pour l'exploitation des mers
 KNS, Koniambo Nickel SAS
 MMSD, Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development
 NGO, Non Governmental Organisation
 Observatory for the socio-economic impacts of the Koniambo project'
 CEIL: Observation et informations sur l'environnement – Observation and Information on the Environment

Pact, Pact for the Sustainable Development of the Far South – Pacte pour le développement durable du Grand Sud

SLN, Société le Nickel

SMSP, Société minière du Sud Pacifique

UN, United Nations

UNC, University of New Caledonia

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¹ In the aforementioned literature review, Ricardo Godoy (1985) notes the weakness of the anthropological literature on mining with the exception of the area of migration and inter-ethnic relations.

² "Development" simply exists where there are "developers"; where one of the groups claiming to implement development organizes a mechanism for intervention involving other social groups' (Chauveau 1985, 164). This definition does not contradict the more usual one of development as a form of organic process of societal evolution, however it emphasises the twofold dimension of apparatus and intentionality – the 'will to improve' (Li 2007) – of development interventions.

³ Neo-dependency in the sense that Foucault, who is often hastily read, has replaced Marx who was the major reference of the dependency theories in the 1960s-70s (see Bierschenk 2008)

⁴ The anglophone literature establishes a distinction between 'development anthropology' (applied) and 'anthropology of development' (critical) which roughly corresponds to the categories 3 and 4 of my typology (see for instance Grillo 1997, 2-3).

⁵ It is noteworthy Kirsch worked with communities downstream from the Ok Tedi mine while Colin Filer played an important role in establishing applied anthropology for mining companies in PNG.

⁶ In the sense of the term used by Abélès, that is, as a more or less explicitly negotiated agreement between the anthropologist and his or her informants which enables the former to carry out a study (2002, 37-40). Olivier de Sardan uses this expression to qualify the relationship between the researcher in the field and his or her reader (2008, 28-32). It appears to me that these two meanings could be combined – something that does not simplify the relations involved – in the increasingly common contexts, in which the 'informants' are

equally the producers of alternative knowledge and the anthropologists' readers or listeners (see Kirsch 2006; Le Meur 2011).

⁷The controversy started in *Anthropology Today* (Kirsch 1996; Filer 1996) and continued in subsequent texts (Filer 1999; Kirsch 1997, 2002). The concept of 'reverse anthropology' in the work of the same name by Kirsch (Kirsch 2006) constitutes a detailed exploration of this idea as does its commentary by Catherine Coumans (Coumans 2011, S40-41): 'The concept of *reverse anthropology* was first used by Roy Wagner (181, 31) to describe how Melanesian cargo cults engaged with capitalist notions of profit, wage labor, and production. Wagner argued that cargo cults were the interpretive counterpart of the study of culture, and consequently a kind of reverse anthropology. I expand on this analogy by examining how the Yonggom deploy indigenous analysis in their political struggles with the mining company and the state. I also show how insights derived from indigenous analyses can contribute to contemporary political and theoretical debates on these issues' (Kirsch 2006, 3). Echoes of, and comments on the subsequent controversy launched by Coumans' paper and the polemical analogy she makes between consultant anthropologists and journalists embedded in the military are to be found in Burton (2014), Golub (2014, 211-212), Kirsch (2014, 150-151).

⁸This correlation could be extended between political and scientific registers on the methodological and ethical level whereby the moderate/pluralist position is associated with methodological symmetry (which is also axiological: the recognition of an action capacity for all actors, irrespective of constraints) while the radical/dualist position obviously risks yielding to forms of populism or ideological miserabilism (two sides of the same coin; cf. Olivier de Sardan 2005, 118-120). However, this opposition is not necessarily homologous to that between a basic and applied position (I would like to thank Benoit Trépiéd for drawing my attention to this point).

⁹It may be added that, conversely, development's 'logic of grafting' has also generated enclave phenomena in that the channels of the development rent became decentralized without being coordinated, and hence generate inequalities between territories, social groups, administrations and organizations in terms of distributed resources.

¹⁰Enrolment does not imply, nor does it exclude, pre-established roles. It designates the device by which a set of interrelated roles is defined and attributed to actors who accept them. Interessement achieves enrolment if it is successful. To describe enrolment is thus to describe the group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interessements and enable them to succeed' (Callon 1986, 210). 'Interessement is the group

of actions by which an entity (...) attempts to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors it defines through its problematization' (id.).

¹¹His last book, which presents an historical anthropology of politics and violence in Houaïlou, also overlooks the topic of mining, and merely makes a quick allusion to the contemporary transformation of household economies (2013, 233-234), despite the fact that the topic is central to the history of this locality.

¹²Unfortunately, the experience of the *Institut Agronomique néo-Calédonien* (New Caledonia Institute of Agronomy), whose programming is also the outcome of efforts by elected representatives and researchers and based on a request by the former, is not analysed either and merely mentioned (Trépiéd 2011, 170). However, this consideration of a political demand, which is found in a slightly different form in the CNRT 'Nickel and its Environment' and, for some time, at the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (IFREMER), is at the core of the relationship between research and decolonization and hence deserves critical analysis.

¹³ This position could also imply a doubt concerning the possibility to keep scientific autonomy in working in the mining arena. There are researchers who strive to work discretely, outside public institutions, including local research institutions, to avoid any form of 'encliquage', but they do not work much on mining.

¹⁴See, in particular, the inspection reports for the years 1920 and 1930; Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (Aix-en-Provence), Fonds ministériel, Affaires politiques, cartons 746-747.

¹⁵The *Indigénat* regime was a 'set of exceptional measures to streamline the governing and summary repression of persons defined as *indigènes* ("natives")' (Muckle 2012, 309).

¹⁶The somewhat insistent repetition of the adjective 'new' tends to mask the fact that, although this renewal would radically transform the morphology and functioning of the mining arena, in some cases, the developments involved were incremental (the multilateral agencies were already around before the 2000s and the discourse surrounding indigeneity already existed, admittedly based on different meanings).

¹⁷The company KNS (*Koniambo Nickel SAS*) is originally the product of a joint venture between SMSP and Falconbridge. SMSP, which has been owned by SOFINOR (the investment company of the North Province, which is governed by pro-independence parties) since 1990, is the majority shareholder with a 51% holding. The remaining 49% is held by Xstrata, an Anglo-Swiss multinational which absorbed Falconbridge in August 2006 before

merging on May 2 2013 with Glencore to become the world's fourth largest mining company.

¹⁸Interviews in 2012 with Alcide Ponga, Director of External Services at KNS, and Jean-Louis Tydjepache, Head of the Department of Relations with the Communities and Corporate Social Responsibility, within the same section.

¹⁹ This could be seen as a 'miniaturized' and localized form of the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) project (2000-02); I thank Colin Filer for this remark.

²⁰It is interesting to note that three years passed between the official announcement of its creation during the research conference in 2004 and its actual establishment in the *Journal official* of 10 October 2007.

²¹Prior to becoming 'Mr Mining' of the South Province in 2012 (until 2014), Alban Tremblier managed the mining company Gemini (*Gestion exploitation mines de nickel*) which mined the massifs of Nakéty (Canala).

²²The following institutes are represented: *Institut Agronomique néo-Calédonien* (IAC), *Institut de Recherche pour le Développement* (IRD), *Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières*, French Geological Survey Office (BRGM), French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (IFREMER) and University of New Caledonia (UNC).

²³Geert van Vliet, Géraud Magrin and Jean-Michel Sourisseau (CIRAD), Sonia Grochain (IAC), Gilles Pestaña (UNC) and myself for the IRD.

²⁴See the recent controversies between Anne Duthilleul (CSI) and Laurent Chatenay (for the prospective development plan for New Caledonia 'Nouvelle-Calédonie NC2025') on the one hand, and the SLN and SMSP, on the other. The request made of the CNRT, in particular originating from the North Province, to launch a call for projects on the distribution of value-added within the nickel sector in New Caledonia would appear to constitute an attempt at the 'positive instrumentalization' of this organization: 'positive' in that the non-neutral starting point of the North Province in the context of this controversy may result in a research programme that will produce new knowledge.

²⁵ As we experienced during a difficult round of negotiations with SLN representatives in relation to the funding of a research programme on small-scale mining companies in New Caledonia, which had otherwise received an extremely positive evaluation from the external reviewer.

²⁶See, in particular, the internal controversies at the Centre IRD in Noumea between 2004 and 2008, which resulted in the break-up of a research unit. These controversies are traced and

analysed by Julien Merlin in his doctoral thesis in anthropology which is currently being compiled and is co-supervised by Madeleine Akrich, Director of the Centre for the Sociology of Innovation Mines-ParisTech and myself.

²⁷ The risk is real as demonstrated by the refusal of an application for a research permit submitted by an Australian colleague who wished to investigate the situation of Chinese workers in the Vavouto processing plant (under construction at the time) – although the KNS head of external relations had agreed on the research proposal, which, moreover, was part of a research programme on mining governance funded by the CNRT ‘Nickel and its environment’!

²⁸ DIMENC: Department of Industry, Mining and Energy of New Caledonia (*Direction de l’industrie, des mines et de l’énergie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*), created by the Organic Law of 1999.

²⁹ The source here is my participant observations as IRD member of the CNRT scientific committee since 2008.