

Conflicting Identities and the Search for the Post-Colonial State in New Caledonia¹

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ABSTRACT: Through an extensive historical review and political analysis, the authors emphasize that in the search for the post-colonial state in New Caledonia, there have been three conflicting views of national identity: the ethnonationalism of the indigenous Melanesian Kanaks, the perpetuation, yet reinterpretation, of French colonialism, and, increasingly, a more accommodating pluralistic view. An updated demographic profile indicates that no one particular ethnic category is predominant; New Caledonia is clearly multicultural, although politics have focused around bipolar competition between the colonial French and the indigenous Kanaks. In pondering the future of New Caledonia, the authors conclude that both indigenous ethnonationalism and French neo-colonialism could in fact be accommodated within a pluralistic model; an effective pluralism policy can be formulated and promulgated, moving New Caledonia more purposefully towards full independence.

KEYWORDS: New Caledonia; Nouvelle Calédonie; Ethnic Conflict; Ethnic Relations; Kanak; Indigenous Nationalism; French Colonialism; Colonialism; Nationalism

Introduction

National identity in the South Pacific island state of New Caledonia (Nouvelle Calédonie) has evolved into three distinct forms. First, the ethnonationalism of the indigenous Kanak population is aimed at establishing a completely independent state with Kanak culture and identity central to national identity. Thus Kanaky (Kanaké) would become a fifth independent Melanesian state; Kanak cultural symbolism would become national symbolism; and Kanak languages would be regarded as equivalent to French.³ Second, French neo-colonialism is opposed to complete independence, although it may assume movement toward partial

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3 Fiji gained independence in 1970, followed by Papua-New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978, and Vanuatu in 1980.

independence in the form of autonomy, while emphasizing retention of political ties to France. New Caledonia would cease to be officially colonial. Third, between these polarities there is a pluralist alternative, based on the emergence of a new *identité calédonienne* reflecting the actual ethnic diversity of the New Caledonia population. This alternative aims at an independent New Caledonia (but not Kanaky) possibly retaining some level of cultural, political, or economic affiliation with France. Kanak identity would be emphasized along with other ethnic identities; in other words, the main emphasis would be on multiculturalism. French would be retained as the national language; however, Kanak and other languages and cultures would be taught. In this paper we will describe these three types of nationalism, and we will discuss how they are grounded in the ethnic divisions of the population. But first it is essential to comprehend the ethnic demographics and historical evolution of identity in New Caledonia.

Demographic Profile

New Caledonia's population has steadily grown to 277,148 (census data: Oct. 1, 2017). More than 40% of the total population is estimated to be under 20 years of age. Despite markedly different estimates of the Kanak population back in the early colonial period, clearly the proportion of Kanaks declined rapidly through to the 1920s, then gradually increased and stabilized just short of a majority of the total population.⁴ Yet in recent years the Kanak proportion has steadily declined from almost half the population (48.8% in 1974) to 39.1% in 2014; so, these indigenous Melanesians constitute a minority in their own homeland.

'Europeans' (almost all French) include Caldoches (descendants of early French settlers), 'Métros' (immigrants and temporary workers from metropolitan France), 'Calédoniens' (ethnic French born in New Caledonia but from more recently-settled families), and 'Pieds Noirs' (around 2,000 French from North Africa). The European population has proportionately fluctuated, with the most rapid proportionate increase from the 1950s through the 1970s; now Europeans constitute little more than a quarter of the total population.⁵ In 2009, of 71,721 Europeans, 45.1% were born in New Caledonia, 46.7% in France, and 8.7% 'abroad'—outside New Caledonia or France.

⁴ The Kanak population at the time of original French possession in 1853 has been variously reported as 45,000 (Connell, 1987: 86) or about 60,000 (Kohler, 1987: 1). Ounei, (1985: 3) has commented that Kanaks declined from 200,000 during the 1880s to 26,000 by 1901 through massacres, whereas Connell suggests that they declined to 27,100 in 1921. According to census data, the Kanak population was fairly stable until the 1930s, gradually increased to peak at 48.8% in 1974, but stabilized again at about 42-44%.

⁵ The proportion of Europeans was declining 1901-21, stabilized until 1951, then increased rapidly to the 1970s, finally stabilized again at about 38%, then more recently has been declining again, from a high of 41% in 1969 to just 27.2% in 2014.

	1996	2009	2014
Kanak	44.1	40.3	39.1
French/European	34.1	29.2	27.2
Other Melanesian			
- Ni Vanuatu	1.1	0.9	1.0
Polynesian			
- Wallisian	9.0	8.7	8.2
- Tahitian	2.6	2.0	2.1
East and Southeast Asian			
- Indonesian	2.5	1.6	1.4
- Vietnamese	1.4	1.0	0.9
- Chinese and other Asian		0.8	0.4
Mixed		8.3	8.6
Undifferentiated		6.0	8.7

Table 1. Demographic Trends in New Caledonia, by Ethnic Group Proportion, 1996-2014

Altogether, people of other ethnicities (mostly Polynesians and Asians) have fluctuated.⁶ According to the 2014 census data, 13% are other Pacific Islanders, mostly Polynesians: more than 20,000 are Wallisians, who outnumber their relatives back home in the small French colony of Wallis and Futuna, but they have also been decreasing proportionately.⁷ Tahitians formed 4.8% back in 1976, but had decreased to 2.1% in 2014. Other Pacific Islanders in New Caledonia include a small number of Melanesians who are not Kanaks, such as French-speaking immigrants from Vanuatu (which had been the former Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides) as well as Melanesians brought to New Caledonia through the colonial practice of ‘blackbirding’ (forced indenture) (Shineberg, 1999).

⁶ They were minimal until 1921, then increased rapidly during the 1920s, declined during the early 1930s, were increasing again between 1936-46, declining again to 1962, and steadily increasing proportionately since then (Brou, 1980).

⁷ These numbers do not include residents of the island of Ouvéa/Uvea (pop. 8,302) in the Iles Loyauté, which was likely settled long ago by Polynesian migrants from Wallis/Uvea. Faga Uvea, a Polynesian language, is still spoken, however Iaai, a Melanesian language, is also spoken. The predominantly Catholic Faga Uvea speakers are concentrated in the northern part of the island, whereas the predominantly Protestant Iaai speakers mostly live in the southern part; yet speakers of Faga Uvea have integrated into Kanak society and now tend to regard themselves as Kanak.

The remainder of the New Caledonian population consists of various other ethnic groups adding to the considerable diversity of the population: a decreasing proportion are of East and Southeast Asian origins, mostly Indonesians (who decreased substantially from 3.8% back in 1976 to 1.4% in 2014), Vietnamese, Chinese and other Asians (mostly Filipinos). The population also includes Indians, West Indians, Arabs, and others. Arabs and Berbers descended from deportees imprisoned in Algeria during the nineteenth century number around 2,000; they have become intermixed due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the original deportees were men. Mostly Islamic, they are concentrated around Bourail, especially Nessadiou, which has an Islamic cultural centre and cemetery. The census does not really consider the steady growth of *le métissage mélanésien*, the mixing of Melanesians with other ethnicities; the growing mixed and ‘undifferentiated Caledonian’ population now comprises at least 17% of the New Caledonia population.

Immigrants to New Caledonia were promised abundant land, and (eventually) a high standard of living. The resulting socio-cultural divide between indigenous inhabitants and immigrants is profound. In Nouméa, where two-thirds of the total population of New Caledonia resides, half the population of the city proper is of European origin, the other half consisting not only of Kanaks (who are less than one in five residents here) but also all the other diverse ethnic groups. Much of the ethnic diversity in New Caledonia is found in Nouméa; approximately 90% of those born outside New Caledonia called greater Nouméa home (Connell, 1987: 219). During the colonial era, Kanaks were excluded from *la ville blanche* by *Le Code de l’indigénat*, which limited and strictly controlled the stay of Kanaks in Nouméa until 1946 (Dussy, 2000). In just two decades (1956-76) the proportion of urbanized Kanaks increased from 10.7% to 23.3%; since the late 1980s ‘white Nouméa’ has contained some 80% of the European population of New Caledonia, compared to little more than 20% of Kanaks—now perhaps closer to 30% in Grand Nouméa/Greater Nouméa (Kohler, 1987: 5; Hamelin, 2000: 341-2). Today the urbanized Kanak still has one foot back in the *tribu*, the other in a very different world (Hamelin, 2000: 350-3); one anthropologist has documented urban migrants from the Ajië area moving from *la tribu, un espace conflictuel* (the tribal village, a troubled space) to Nouméa, *un espace délocalisé* (a delocalized space) (Naepels, 2000).

Nearly 90% of the ten thousand French who migrated to Nouméa between 1971 and 1976 lived in Nouméa (Connell, 1987: 219). This has led to the ‘Europeanization’ of the city. Walking the streets of Nouméa, you could be forgiven for feeling that you are in a city on the French Riviera. The area outside Nouméa is referred to as *la brousse* (the bush) while Kanaks sometimes refer to Nouméa as *la ville blanche* (the white city). As one Kanak woman in Nouméa bluntly explained: ‘They

exterminated us here...New Caledonia politics are dirty. We get a lot of development aid but the money stays in Nouméa...the Kanaks don't exist in Nouméa. They fled to the bush.' (personal interview). This development of an ethnic dichotomy between the wealthy urban areas (Nouméa) and the poor *brousse* has reinforced the economic and political marginalization of the Kanaks.

On Grande Terre (the main island) the western coastal plains consist largely of Caldoche ranches, with scattered Kanak *tribus* mostly up in the hills. Here the main towns have substantial French proportions, whereas along the east coast just three towns have French proportions exceeding 10%. Thus, this latter region is the true 'Pays Kanak', although Kanaks rightly claim all of New Caledonia as Kanaky, their ancestral homeland; suffice it to point out that they have been dispossessed of much of this claim around Nouméa and up the west coast. It is problematic to Kanak ethnonationalism that Kanaks comprise 94% of the population of the Iles Loyauté, 74% of the North Province, but just 27% of the South Province.

One final interesting demographic point: while two-thirds of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, just over half of these Catholics are European; of the quarter of the population who are Protestants, most are Kanaks; and there are also some 4,000 Muslims (mostly Arabs, Indonesians, and Indians), Mormons from Tahiti, and Buddhists (Vietnamese and Chinese). To some extent, then, religion tends to reinforce ethnic divisions, although it can also cut across ethnic lines.

The Politicisation of Identity: A Historical Analysis

In the past two centuries New Caledonia has witnessed the rise of several alternative nationalisms and national identities. In the pre-colonial period there was no unified New Caledonian identity, rather numerous Melanesian 'tribes' populated the islands, maintaining their own distinct identities, languages and kinship relationships. French colonialism brought a new nationalism to New Caledonia, a French nationalism grounded in French national idealism, as well as the imperative to disseminate these ideals throughout the French Empire. However, the French colonial enterprise was also driven by an ideology that assumed French superiority over the new subject peoples, although unlike the British, the French emphasized assimilation—maintaining that the indigenous Melanesians could (and should) become fully French. This seemingly inclusive policy also functioned as a negation of other identities.⁸ Rather than achieving

⁸ For example, when then French President Jacques Chirac visited Nouméa in July 2003 'on the eve of a local census' he denounced the inclusion of ethnic identities in the census and argued 'There is only one reply to such a question, you are all French and there are French people of all ethnic origins.' (Fisher, 2013: 104)

equality, this approach serves to reinforce the pre-eminence of French over other identities.

Unified Kanak identity only emerged in New Caledonia in opposition to French imperialism, which exploited the wealth of New Caledonia for the benefit of metropolitan France. As the French colonial presence became increasingly oppressive, Kanak national identity developed in a politicised form and was brought into direct conflict with French nationalism. The marginalization of Kanaks that fuels their ethnonationalist movement is closely linked to the perceived continuum of historical grievance.

In recent years new nationalisms have emerged in New Caledonia that move beyond the French nationalism/Kanak ethnonationalism dichotomy to build more inclusive nationalisms. These new civic nationalisms accept the French settlers and their descendants as a fact on the ground while still seeking to move past French colonialism. This has contributed to an emerging conflict in New Caledonia between the ethnic nationalism of the Kanaks and civic nationalisms that favour multiculturalism over recognition of the centrality of Kanak identity and claims. French nationalism, in turn, functions as an ethnic nationalism masquerading as *civic*—ostensibly inclusive but still grounded in many ways in ethnic identity. Perhaps one can argue that civic nationalism is never fully civic—all societies have implicit racism—a notion of insiders and outsiders. However, these implicit racisms are more acute where colonial powers rule over distant territories. New Caledonia is on the other side of world from its metropolitan power, and is populated by peoples with distinct historical experiences and cultural knowledge.

Moreover, the relationship between New Caledonia and France is built upon a fundamental injustice—the dispossession of Kanaks from their sovereignty and homeland. The right to self-determination is not well served by the democratic principle of one person one vote, which legitimizes France's systematic policy of demographically overwhelming Kanaks so as to ensure its continued control of the territory.

In this section we will give a brief historical analysis of the emergence and politicisation of Kanak identity over time and the conflict between emergent Kanak ethnonationalism and other nationalisms.

The Early Colonial Period

The island territories comprising the political state of New Caledonia were acquired by France in 1853-65. With the imposition of French colonial rule came the desire for the colonial state to consolidate its control through a system of indirect rule that emphasized the use of proxies and traditional institutions. With this system of indirect rule also came the colonial imperative to unite diverse groups under a single administrative

entity and to re-shape traditional institutions to meet the needs of colonial governance. The governor selected a 'Great Chief' for each district and a 'Small Chief' for each tribe; thus, Kanak identity was being re-imagined by the French.

When a penal colony was established in 1864, the indigenous Kanaks found their new neighbours to be criminals deported from France. The use of New Caledonia as a penal colony was the primary imperial interest in the early decades of French colonialism. Between the 1860s and 1897 approximately 22,000 convicts arrived in New Caledonia (Aldrich and Connell, 1992: 46). Hostilities increased between Kanaks and French settlers, culminating in the revolt of 1878, with the resulting imposition of the *indigénat* system which considered Kanaks to be beyond French common law, thus subject to repression and legal subordination. *The Indigénat Code* (1887) required Kanaks to provide free labour and prohibited them from living outside of their reservations without special permission. The code also barred Kanaks from carrying arms in European towns and forbid 'sorcery', drunkenness, and nudity (Connell, 1987: 71). The colonial state's systemic discrimination against Kanaks was increasing.

Under Governor Feillet (1894) the number of French colonists greatly increased. Moreover, a head tax was levied on Kanak landowners. The only way that tax could be paid was through the provision of labour. Colonists also gave away free alcohol and sought to increase the divisions between tribal groups. At the end of the nineteenth century New Caledonia was characterized by frequent violent confrontations between settlers and the indigenous peoples. After the 1878 rebellion the plantation economy collapsed, and the nickel mining era began. With the reduction of the agricultural economy, a stark economic inequality was emerging between the rural poor white farmers, and the large ranch owners and rich colonist businessmen in Nouméa. Capital in New Caledonia was concentrated in the hands of a few powerful families (such as Lafleur and Ballande); these families soon extended their dominance of economic life to political life. As the much-respected *indépendantiste* leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou has explained, [*La notion du peuple kanak*] *est née de la lutte contre la colonisation, née à l'adversité. C'est une réaction collective, une réalité que s'organise.* (1996: 121) Similarly, Maclellan and Chesneaux (1998: 154) have written:

The term 'Kanak' symbolized a common identity...Even without a common name as a people [at that time], the various Melanesian language groups in the territory were aware during the colonial era of their common political fate: French domination. They knew perfectly well what united them, and what divided them from the French.

As the Europeans began trading with the Kanaks, the first Christian missions were established. The effects of the missionaries were enormous as Kanak culture was gradually being subordinated under European culture (Ounei, 1985: 3). Through the concept of *cantonnement*, France created Kanak reserves, and the colonial definitions of indigenous property; Kanaks were considered too primitive to become private landowners (Merle, 2000).

French colonial policy in New Caledonia marginalized the Kanaks from the economy and political system and sought to assimilate them into the French Empire through an influx of settlers. Kanak resistance to these policies has been strong and the anti-colonial struggle in New Caledonia has arguably been more violent than anywhere else in the Pacific. Kanak marginalization increased as the Kanak population declined while they were being pushed out of their own country by waves of French settlers. By the 1920s the Kanaks were a minority in New Caledonia as a whole, although certain regions—the northeast coast of Grand Terre, the Loyalty Islands, Ile des Pins, and the Belep Islands—still retained large Kanak majorities (Connell, 1987: 86, 103).

The policies of the colonial administration once again garnered Kanak resentment and resistance. This resistance manifested itself in another revolt in 1917. French oppression was rooted in a European worldview that assumed that the Kanaks were backwards and not of equal value to Europeans. This arose from both the racist and paternalistic ideology that the French imperial state held for subject populations. Kanak identity was not something to be acknowledged but something to be destroyed. This ‘sense of racial and moral superiority was not confined only to missionaries; settlers from the lowest strata of European society saw themselves as the heirs of a superior civilization.’ (Connell, 1987: 77) Part of this doctrine of racial superiority was a characterization of the Kanaks as ‘lazy’ and ‘unreliable’ as workers. By 1903 nearly all Kanaks on Grande Terre were confined to reservations. The marginalization of the Kanaks in their own land was nearing completion.

During the first hundred years of French colonial intervention in New Caledonia, the Kanaks made a transition from being many separate groups living in relative isolation from the outside world to being consolidated into a single ethnicity (albeit one with many local variations). Nascent Kanak ethnonationalism emerged gradually in response to French pressures. The cultural space of the Kanaks was becoming severely constricted and the Kanaks responded by mobilizing in opposition to French policies. This can be seen in both the 1878 and 1917 revolts against French rule. For the first time, the Kanaks were beginning to conceive of themselves as a unified group and the effects on New Caledonia would be far-reaching.

The Second World War and Postwar Period

During World War II, not only did New Caledonia find itself close to South Pacific battlegrounds, but also Kanaks were recruited into the French Pacific Battalion to fight in North Africa, Italy and France. The war was to have profound consequences for Kanak identity as returning Kanak soldiers demanded increased political, economic, and social rights. Kanaks began to articulate their national aspirations through political activism. Meanwhile, French policy in New Caledonia underwent many fluctuations, often corresponding with changes in government in France. In fact, much of French policy in the Pacific can be characterized by a focus on short-term management and the 'lack of a coherent political perspective' (Maclellan and Boengkih, 1998: 150). In 1946 the colonial status of New Caledonia was changed to overseas territory, and Kanaks were for the first time given French citizenship (although enfranchisement was still limited). The Kanaks increasingly asserted political, economic, and social demands. The Union Calédonienne (UC) political party was formed in 1953, inclusive of Kanaks, small landholders, union supporters, and some Catholic missionaries, under the slogan *deux couleurs, un peuple* ('two colours, one people'). The adoption of a pro-independence stance by the UC was a watershed in the politicization of Kanaks. The party had originally been supported by *broussards*—poor white farmers, but after its declaration of this new platform many Europeans transferred their allegiance to parties opposing independence.

Kanaks became further marginalized from the political institutions of New Caledonia when the provisions granted in 1958 for the decentralization of power to regions (some of which were dominated by Kanaks) were scaled back during the 1960s (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 150). This had the effect of reinforcing the perceptions of many Kanaks that their political aspirations could not be realized in any form under French colonialism; as the Statute of Internal Autonomy deteriorated, younger Kanak protesters became increasingly radicalized, while older political organizations transformed to reflect the evolution in Kanak politicization (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 155). In June 1975 the Union Multiraciale declared its support for independence; and two years later the UC followed suit.

Meanwhile, the fifties and sixties saw the development of nickel mining with the concomitant industrialization of Nouméa. This resulted in increasing prosperity and a stronger Métro presence in the city, however also an increasing Caldoche resentment of 'outside' French administration and business control. With the nickel boom of the 1970s, another major migration wave began with many economic migrants arriving in New Caledonia from other French possessions (notably Wallis and Futuna) as well as Europe. Aside from economic factors, there was a powerful political motivation for the French migration policy. This policy has

deliberately sought to assimilate the Kanaks and destroy the nationalist movement through sheer force of numbers. The Kanak response to this perceived loss of control over their territory has been politicization. Yet despite the division of the French-origin population into Caldoches and Métros, they tended to share common political interests, together with their allies, all the other immigrant groups who ultimately were dependent upon the Europeans (Kohler, 1987: 7-9). Kanaks were pushing claims to their traditional lands.

Indigenous nationalistic movements elsewhere in Melanesia would have a profound effect on Kanaks, who now became the only large Melanesian population still subject to colonialism.⁹ A movement for total independence began in 1975, led by UMNC (Union Multiraciale Nouvelle Calédonienne). The UC advocacy of just limited autonomy now seemed inadequate. In France the socialist party of Mitterand had been supportive of *auto-détermination* (autonomy and self-determination), but when elected as the national government in 1981 this party proceeded with more cautious policies.

The Turbulent Eighties

Pro-independence parties in New Caledonia, including FULK (Front Uni de Libération Kanak), PALIKA (Parti de Libération Kanak), and UC, now collaborated in 1984 in forming the Front de Libération Nationale et Socialiste (FLNKS). The FLNKS included five political parties, a trade union, a feminist group, and activists from the churches, land rights movements, and others in the NGO community. The UC remained the largest and dominant political force in the FLNKS (Connell, 1987: 265; Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 160). The FLNKS opposed the Lemoine Statute (which increased autonomy) because it was thought by the FLNKS to reinforce the position of the Kanaks as a *minority* within New Caledonia. The FLNKS Charter declared that the French government declarations on the innate and active Kanak right to independence had not been put into practice; that government is directly threatening Kanak people with the prospect of disappearing by decisively making them a minority in their own land; and that government pursues an immigration policy which prevents Kanak control over, and full participation in, the economy. Therefore, in keeping with United Nations declarations, the FLNKS claimed the right 'to be considered as the only legitimate people in the Kanak land...their own homeland', the right 'to practice self-determination', the right 'to obtain restoration of all the lands so as to set up the Kanak country as an integral whole', the right to 'their own sovereignty which will allow them to freely choose their political

⁹ Excluding West Papua, which was annexed illegally by Indonesia in 1969, and over which Indonesia arguably exercises a colonial relationship. See, for example, K. Anderson (2015).

system—Kanak and socialist independence’, and—interestingly—the right ‘to welcome the non-Kanaks’ (Ounei, 1985: 8-9; Maclellan and Boengkih, 1998: 6).

With both the FLNKS and French pursuing militant confrontational tactics, the mid-eighties—a period referred-to as *Les Événements* (the Events)—were characterized by intense racial provocation between pro-independence Kanaks and Europeans with their assimilated and anti-independence allies. *Les Événements* (1984-1988) was the most violent period in New Caledonia’s colonial history. They represented the moment when Kanak ethnonationalism reached its zenith and met the immovable French state, with explosive results.¹⁰

The FLNKS began to garner some international support for its cause in the United Nations, the Non-aligned Movement, and in neighbouring states through the South Pacific Forum; yet the French were not moved by this condemnation and continued to take a hard line.¹¹ Non-violent Kanak demonstrations were often met with a brutal response from the police. In 1985 a planned referendum on self-government in association with France was rejected by the independence movement as being inadequate, however a very short-lived program of land reform and limited autonomy was initiated by the territorial government, only to have the new conservative government for New Caledonia announce a plan to decrease autonomy for

10 Before *Les Événements* relations between the Europeans and Kanaks had been relatively free of violence. Kanak nationalist hopes, raised with the 1981 election of François Mitterrand, were dashed when on September 19, 1981 UC Secretary Pierre Declercq was assassinated. The escalating cycle of violence was accompanied by escalating rhetoric on both sides and the hardening of positions; a zero-sum game had developed where every act executed by one group was met with violent reprisals from the other, as violence was transformed from sporadic to sustained. During *Les Événements* Kanak militants blockaded roads; took an Australian tourist family hostage; set off multiple explosions; organized an ‘active boycott’ of the New Caledonian elections and smashed ballot boxes in November 1984; declared a Provisional Government of Kanaky in December 1984 and adopted their own Kanak flag; occupied economic and government institutions; engaged in isolated attacks, arson and occupation of lands held by French settlers; clashed with settlers and the French state; actively boycotted government institutions; seized control of a gendarmerie; and stole explosives from the nickel works. French settlers and the military and police also used violent tactics: France flew riot police in from Tahiti and banned the carrying of guns; Kanak militant Eloi Machoro was killed; on December 5, 1984 settlers ambushed and massacred ten Kanaks near Tiendanite in the Hienghène Valley; thousands of Europeans fled the towns of the east coast for the relative safety of Nouméa; under Chirac the powers and finances of regions controlled by the FLNKS evaporated; New Caledonia became a heavily militarised area: eight thousand police and troops were deployed in rural areas around the territory in small mobile units (this *nomadisation* policy intended to help quell resistance to French rule, but it only succeeded in fuelling the escalating cycle of violence and feelings of insecurity on both sides). Nonetheless, there were also many attempts at conflict resolution in this period, including the Pasani and Fabius Plans, the Pons Plan, and the Matignon and Oudinot Accords.

11 Both relevant regional organizations—the South Pacific Forum (since renamed the Pacific Islands Forum) and Melanesian Spearhead Group—have supported the independence of New Caledonia. In fact, the Spearhead Group recognizes the FLNKS as the official representative of New Caledonia, rather than the governments of France or New Caledonia.

the four regional councils and abolish the lands office charged with obtaining land for Kanaks.

An independence referendum was finally held in Sept. 1987; however, it was boycotted by a large proportion (some 84%) of eligible Kanaks, so of the 59% of total New Caledonian voters who did vote, 98% were opposed to independence. The lines of ethnic voting were clearly drawn, with virtually all French, Polynesians, and other ethnic groups and some urbanized, assimilated and mixed Kanaks opposed, while a high proportion of rural and many urban Kanaks were supporters (Kohler, 1987: 2-3).

In January 1987 the French National Assembly approved yet another new policy, the Pons Plan, for New Caledonia; elections in France had returned a socialist government intent on ending bloodshed in New Caledonia. However, frustrated by repeated rejection of their proposals, the FLNKS announced a 'muscular mobilization' campaign, soon resulting in an attack on the police station on Ouvéa.¹² In June 1988 the Accords de Matignon were signed by the FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the leader of the ruling Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR). The Accords advocated renewed recognition and enhancement of Kanak culture and specified that New Caledonia would now be divided into just three regions: South (largely pro-French), North and the Loyalty Islands (both predominantly Kanak). Moreover, another referendum on self-determination would be held in 1998 and the economy would be rebalanced to give Kanaks a greater share of resources. The Accords spoke of 'negotiated independence' and 'power-sharing', increased autonomy and redefinition of New Caledonia's relationship with France; thus, the Accords were seen as the *début* of a solution to *le problème calédonien* (Bernut-Deplanque, 2002: 43-5). But with feelings still running high, in May 1989 Tjibaou was assassinated by a local FULK supporter on Ouvéa; some local Kanaks felt he had compromised too much with the government.

The Nouméa Accord and Recent Events

In May 1998 a new accord, l'Accord de Nouméa, came into existence as an updated agreement between the FLNKS, RPCR, and the territorial and French national governments. This Accord re-examined the historical colonial and contemporary redefined 'special' status of New Caledonia, as well as Kanak identity and civil status, traditional structures as they relate to law, the cultural patrimony, and the concept of land entitlement (Bernut-Deplanque, 2002: 55-61). The Accord recognized that French colonialism

¹² In April 1988 on Ouvéa, the police station was attacked by militants, four gendarmes were killed, and others held hostage in a cave; when the inevitable French military counterattack occurred, nineteen Kanaks were killed.

did not establish legal relations with the indigenous population; rather treaties passed with traditional authorities constituted not equality accords but unilateral acts. The Accord redefined New Caledonia from being a *territoire d'outre-mer*/overseas territory to be a 'special territorial entity within the French Republic', a rather vague status which was supposed to allow gradual change aimed at increasing political autonomy.¹³ Most importantly, immigration into New Caledonia would now be 'controlled', yet France soon violated the spirit of the agreement by increasing immigration.¹⁴ The Accord suggested that it was now appropriate to start a new stage marked by full recognition of a social contract between all the ethnic communities, and by sharing sovereignty with France, yet to embark on the track of full sovereignty. The full recognition of Kanak identity would lead to precise specification of customary status, foreseeing the place of traditional structures and institutions.

As New Caledonia approaches the referendum called for under the Accord (no later than November 2018) political debate centres on the nature of the referendum, as well as alternatives to the dichotomous continuation of the status quo or complete independence from France. A central issue still is who will be allowed to vote in this referendum and other New Caledonian elections, given the requirement that all voters in elections in New Caledonia must have been residents for at least ten years in 1998 or be those born to such individuals.¹⁵

Moreover, the requirement that all voters in the referendum must have been registered on the local election rolls tends to discriminate against the Kanaks, when more than a quarter of Kanaks are not registered. While there has been discussion of automatically registering all Kanaks as eligible voters, this has not yet occurred.

13 Specifically, Article 77 of the French Constitution and Organic Law 99-209 now conferred upon New Caledonia a unique status yet still short of complete independence. Under Article 4, a New Caledonian 'citizenship' was introduced; only New Caledonia 'citizens' (defined by Article 188) would have the right to vote in New Caledonia elections; additionally, all adult residents of New Caledonia who are French citizens (i.e. including metropolitan French, Wallisians, Tahitians, etc. who have been resident for at least six months) would be entitled to vote in national elections of France and to elect three representatives to the French National Assembly. The Accord clearly advocates a process of decolonization and progressive movement toward full sovereignty, though not specifically along the lines suggested by Kanak ethnonationalism. The Accord brought about a significant devolution of powers.

14 Controlled immigration had long been advocated by the FLNKS, as unlimited immigration plays a key role in containing Kanak ethnonationalism as well as in serving the interests of European settlers and the distant mother-country in maintaining French supremacy.

15 The ten-year residency requirement was stipulated in the French organic law implementing the Nouméa Accord. The Kanak interpretation of the residency requirement as being 'frozen' at the time of the accord was approved in a decision of the European Court of Human Rights on 11 January 2005 due to the 'local necessities' justifying it.

The Three Alternatives

So, what is at stake in a referendum? There are three distinct positions on the future identity of New Caledonia.

The Kanak Position

There are inherent challenges in Kanak ethnonationalism. Although Kanaks remain a minority within the New Caledonian population, collectively they form a plurality (i.e. they are the most numerous ethnic group). However, other ethnic groups may not accept Kanak political or cultural symbolism as national. Kanak solidarity has gradually evolved, and rural Kanaks tend to be more enthusiastic about Kanak ethnonationalism than urban Kanaks. While progressive urbanization may have been affecting knowledge of Kanak culture, to some extent (especially among young people), most Kanaks still live in their own communities relatively unaffected by French culture. Kanaks remain divided linguistically and regionally.¹⁶ Moreover, land title, redistribution, and nationalization remain extremely problematic and complicated.¹⁷

The Preamble to the Nouméa Accord acknowledged that New Caledonia was not empty when the French took possession but already inhabited by Melanesians who had developed their own civilization with traditions, languages, and customs which in turn affect social and political organization.¹⁸ Like other Melanesian cultures, Kanak identity is founded upon a relationship with the land.¹⁹ Each individual and clan is defined by

16 Kanak society is divided into twenty-eight language groups, in turn consolidated into eight principal cultural districts. Ozanne-Rivière (2000) divides thirty-one indigenous languages in New Caledonia into three main groups: 14 northern, 12 southern, and 5 in the outer islands. Moreover, there are wide variations in the number of speakers of Kanak languages, from thousands (Drehu, Ajië) to only a couple of hundred (Zirë, Arhâ). And in addition to all these Kanak languages, there are speakers of Tayo, a pidgin synthesisation.

17 New Caledonia was a diverse and divided country in the pre-colonial era and many of those divisions survive today. There is a regional cleavage among the Kanaks between the Kanaks of Grande Terre and the Kanaks of the Loyalty Islands, who have a greater Polynesian influence on their culture. Loyalty Islanders have long been dominant among the Kanak community in Nouméa; in fact, back in 1959, 71% of the Kanaks in Nouméa were from the Loyalty Islands and although this number has decreased somewhat, Loyalty Islanders have tended to be disproportionately represented in Nouméa-based positions in the public service. (Connell, 1987: 264). Political parties have tended to have a regional support base.

18 Kanaks, like all Melanesians, typically emphasize custom (often referred-to as *kastom* in Melanesia—see Lindstrom and White, 1994)—customary ways encompassing traditional architecture, rituals (dances, music and ceremonies), mutual social obligations and trading patterns (including gift exchanges and traditional ‘money’ in the form of long strings of shells), oral tradition (for example *mwakaa*—the ‘true word/pathway’ and historic mythology), strong respect for land and territoriality, and kinship lines. (Centre culturel Tjibaou, 2000; Bensa and Leblic, 2000). At the time of initial colonization, at least 300 *tribus* or clans existed. Each *tribu*—which can include one or more villages—is headed by a traditional chief who lives in the *chefferie* (chief’s house) but whose power is represented in the *grande case* (great house).

19 Land rights played a primary role in the Kanak-European conflagration of the 1980s. During *Les Evénements* land occupations increased and the land office, the Agence de

this rapport and retains a memory of reception by other kin. Traditional placenames, taboos, and customary paths structure Kanak space and exchanges.

The Accord acknowledged that colonization had a durable effect on the original population, who lost both their name and their land; colonization resulted in widespread displacement of the Kanak population and reduced Kanak clans to a dependent subsistence level. A traumatic Kanak identity crisis was accompanied by social restructuration, replacement of power/authority relationships, and the negation of the Kanak artistic realm, in other words the near-obliteration of fundamental elements of Kanak identity. Colonization deprived the Kanak people of their identity and dignity, and systematically marginalized them.

The politicization of Kanak identity has both assertive and defensive aspects.²⁰ The Kanaks have endured the harsh assimilationist repression of French colonialism and Kanak political mobilization has largely been a reaction to these pressures. This represents a defensive politicization where Kanak cultural survival was deemed to be at stake. The other aspect of Kanak ethnonationalism is an avowal that Kanaks have a special claim to paramountcy over the land by virtue of their status as the indigenous inhabitants. This second assertive form of politicized Kanak identity is somewhat more exclusionary. As Kanaks have become a demographic minority they utilized their indigenous status as the basis for the demands for political control rather than the principal of democratic majority. Moreover, the failure of the French state to attempt to accommodate Kanak nationalist demands within the political system has led some nationalists to seek extra-political means to achieve their national goals.

Over the past half century Kanak identity has transformed from being a somewhat sporadic and loose resistance to French rule (with an accompanying sense of being Kanak) to an organized nationalist movement, supported by most Kanaks, with the goal of an independent Kanaky (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 153).

The resurgence of Kanak identity has been both a cultural and political phenomenon (O'Connell, 2016). One aspect of this revival has been 'Kaneka' music: a blend of Kanak rhythms, rock, and reggae with lyrics about Kanak pride and resistance. The Kanak movement was increasingly effective at mobilizing support at home. Kanak nationalist activities included the creation of independent institutions such as media and Kanak

Développement Rural et d'Aménagement Foncier (ADRAF), which had a reputation for extensive mismanagement and corruption, was repeatedly bombed. As Kanak-European relations improved the repatriation of land to Kanaks began again in earnest. Between 1988-1996 ADRAF purchased 83,500 hectares of land and redistributed 68,200 hectares of this to customary owners and 15,300 to individuals. Land is significant not only as a physical anchor for group survival but also as a symbol of reclaimed cultural heritage.

20 For more on assertive and defensive politicisation see K. Anderson (2004).

popular schools (Ecoles Populaire Kanak, or EPKs), and local co-operatives as an alternative to European firms (Chanter, 2000).

According to the Nouméa Accord, decolonization is the means to reestablish a durable social tie between ethnic communities living today in New Caledonia, in permitting the Kanak people to establish, together with France, new social relationships corresponding to the reality of our times. The Nouméa Accord clearly advocates a process of decolonization and progressive movement toward full sovereignty, though not specifically along the lines suggested by Kanak ethnonationalism. Rather, there is to be 'full recognition' of Kanak identity. While the Nouméa Accord seems to have made considerable progress in meeting Kanak aims, it has been criticized from several different political perspectives. Even the FLNKS, a co-signatory, had not reacted altogether positively. Of course, the conservative and often militant pro-French elements wishing to preserve colonial status, or at least a strong link to France, believed that the Nouméa Accord was a sell-out.

A key section of the Nouméa Accord (Section 1) made a number of points about Kanak identity. It recognized the persistence of civil status and common law (*statut coutumier*) in Kanak tradition. Kanak placenames were to be researched and re-established, as well as Kanak sacred sites. The state should favour the return to New Caledonia of Kanak traditional objects from foreign museums and collections. Additionally, the Kanak languages should be, with French, the languages of teaching and of culture in New Caledonia. This was a particularly important new policy statement, far-reaching, and much debated as to its exact meaning and possible implementation. Kanak cultural development was to be fostered by the state, as exemplified in the elaborate Centre culturel Tjibaou built outside Nouméa in 1998. Traditional tribal lands were to be defined and protected as reserves. The Accord acknowledged 'national' symbols, including the Kanak flag; this soon resulted in this formerly suppressed symbol appearing even over the *mairies* (town halls) in the heart of Caldoche country (though arriving at singular national symbols remains controversial).

Education has been emphasized as a prime means of *francisation* of Kanaks, what Pineau-Salaun (2000) called *le projet colonial*, which led to the later development of *le système scolaire indigène*. However, now that the Nouméa Accord explicitly stated that the Kanak languages are to be recognized along with French as official languages of teaching and culture, several important questions could be raised: Many teachers—including within the predominantly Kanak areas—have hitherto been imported from metropolitan France; their familiarity with Kanak culture has been minimal at best, their knowledge of Kanak languages non-existent. So, would this now mean a new policy of hiring more Kanak teachers (if in fact available) to teach Kanak culture and language? And does this imply

some standardization of the many Kanak languages? There was debate, too, over the exact meaning of this clause in the Accord: did it mean teaching of Kanak languages, about these languages, and/or in these languages? (Kasarhérou, 2000; Bril 2000)

The French Position

The ethnic French population of New Caledonia strongly supports either continual colonialism or at least some form of neo-colonialism. Yet the long-established Caldoches do not necessarily agree with the more recent or temporary residents from France, *les Métros*. The former tend to emphasize colonial identity and culture and a more cautious, distant political tie to France; the latter contemporary French culture and a direct political link. Yet both stress the importance of French cultural influence and French as the sole national language. This position is unacceptable to all but the most assimilated Kanaks. Other ethnic minorities may tend to go along with this position, especially if they owe their jobs and livelihood to French employers. Economic reforms are not popularly received; and land redistribution and nationalisation are viewed as unnecessary. The Caldoches are mostly cattle ranchers, many descended from convicts brought to New Caledonia when it was a penal colony, who have developed their own unique lifestyle. *Les broussards* (back country people) tend to be divided in their views on how they should be identified and stereotyped, on their relationship to the primarily urban Métros who share their French origin and mother tongue, and on the meaning of an emergent *identité calédonienne* (Terrier-Douyère et. al., 1996; Bernut-Deplanque, 2002: 48-52).

The Caldoches have developed a unique cultural identity, which can be suspicious at times of the metropolitan government and is very much tied to New Caledonia. They have complicated feelings towards France; they are loyal but assert their unique identity and express their feelings of alienation from French bureaucrats who don't understand the needs of New Caledonia (Maclellan, and Boengkih, 1998: 149). They are often said to be bound together by a collective myth of the hardiness of their pioneer ancestors. There are also class dimensions within the European group. Several of the original Caldoche mining and ranching families have maintained their economic and political dominance of New Caledonia over time. This has resulted in class divisions between these powerful families and the poor, rural Caldoches. Guiart called these rural Caldoches 'the most insular, without secondary education, the least capable of adaptation if forced into exile, the most violent in language and the Europeans who have the most to lose.' (Connell, 1987: 141) The rural Caldoches *are* among those with the most to lose if Kanak socialist independence becomes a reality. Many rural Caldoches are conservative in their political values and are gun-owners. There is a kind of siege mentality among these

Caldoches that is not unlike that of European minority settlers in other areas such as Boers of South Africa, the *Pieds Noirs* of Algeria, or the 'Rhodies' (white Rhodesians) of Zimbabwe. The threat of losing their land may have made the Caldoches more conservative (Connell, 1987: 141). It is these conservative Caldoche forces that resist the evolution of New Caledonia's national identity to reflect the Kanaks.

Nevertheless, there has been an increasing recognition in recent years that for New Caledonia to prosper, there must be some accession to Kanak demands. There is sentiment among many Caldoches that the Métros are not loyal to New Caledonia and that they are simply an encumbrance who take employment from New Caledonians. The Caldoches sometimes refer to Métros as *Zoreilles* ('big ears', from '*les oreilles*')—because they supposedly are always listening and reporting what they hear to France. In return many Métros view the Caldoches as being rough and unsophisticated. Yet, the Métros serve an important function for the Caldoches in shoring up the anti-independence forces in New Caledonia.

Europeans have been in New Caledonia for generations and although they represent a distinct community, they still have strong ties to metropolitan France. These ties may stem partially from a fear over the nature of the independence movement, that is grounded in an ethnic (Kanak) nationalism which may be perceived to threaten Caldoche identity and legitimacy. In this sense, the politicization of the Europeans is defensive in nature (although the colonial project asserts French identity over other competing identities). The Europeans with their ethnic allies have constituted a majority in New Caledonia for at least several decades and therefore they have been more likely to support democratic mechanisms for conflict resolution such as referendums. The Caldoches lack the ability to assert their own indigenous claims as an anchor for their status in New Caledonia, yet their historical roots in the country are multi-generational. They are both the force that denies the Kanak national dream and 'victims of history'.

In New Caledonia a collusion of interests has dominated political and economic life since the colonial period. These interests are primarily economic and are shared by the French state and the European settlers in New Caledonia. The power and privileges of this elite have been perceived as threatened if the Kanak nationalists' goal of Kanak socialist independence becomes a reality. The elite resists Kanak nationalism both through democratic politics and the direct coercive intervention of the French state (Dommel, 1993; Dornoy, 1984). A colonial bourgeoisie developed around Nouméa. The great Caldoche families that prospered during the colonial period continue to be very powerful today. They control key sectors of the economy such as nickel, retail, and import-export (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 146). The ties between the Caldoche economic elite have been further tightened through interlocking

shareholding arrangements (Connell, 1987: 150). This Caldoche elite has also formed alliances with Métros in commerce and administration and has dominated the economic and political life of New Caledonia. For example, one mayor of Nouméa, reportedly the richest man in New Caledonia, led the RPCR while being a major shareholder in Ballande and other companies (MacLellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 149). The RPCR has long been the main political tool of this elite, although there has also been a 'radical fringe' with allegiance to the extreme right (this radical group is less on the fringe today, with the near victory of the National Front in New Caledonia in the 2017 French presidential elections). Further cementing the power of this cadre has been their control over the media. Moreover, the Catholic Church hierarchy in Nouméa also has evidenced close relations with the RPCR. This confluence of interests, often under the direct influence of Paris, is what some commentators have labelled the 'RPCR state'; clearly it has been in the best interests of the 'RPCR state' that the Kanaks remain politically and economically marginal. The 'RPCR state' failed to adequately distribute the benefits of the mineral wealth of New Caledonia and instead passed profits on to a narrow group within its clientelist networks. Thus, the economy became a model of dependency built upon the flow of New Caledonian raw materials outside of the country and the importation of French goods. This artificial economy has had the effect of concentrating power in the hands of a few individuals. While Kanak nationalists have led the challenge to the power of the 'RPCR state' and have forced changes to the structure of the government and economy, there have also been those within the Caldoche community themselves who resent the power of the RPCR elite and have sought to challenge it. This challenge to the RPCR has been manifested in the reconfiguration of electoral politics in the 2014 elections, perhaps presenting an opening for new political solutions.

The Pluralist Position

The people of other ethnic origins in New Caledonia may tend to support the political and economic status quo, while perhaps leaning toward limited nationalization. Kanaks resent the importation of large numbers of other minorities, especially Wallisians, who dilute Kanaky and support French ties. A pluralist view of New Caledonian society would make the most sense to these other groups; yet this view is not enthusiastically favoured in predominantly Kanak areas nor in Caldoche areas, although some acceptance of a pluralist position is emerging among urban Kanaks and liberal Caldoches. Some authors (including Brou, 1980: 7, 31-2; Franceschi, 1998; Bernut-Deplanque, 2002) have argued that *le fait calédonien est pluriethnique* ('ethnic pluralism is the fact of New Caledonia'), represented in a progressive *calédonisation* of the population;

whereas others (Soriano, 2000: 241-4) refer to *le paradoxe multi-ethnique* which developed particularly during the fifties.

The presence of a substantial Polynesian population in New Caledonia further complicates ethnic politics. Although there are Wallisian-based political parties, the Wallisian community and parties have tended to ally themselves with the Europeans and be opposed to independence. This is not surprising, considering that they came to New Caledonia to work in a French colony and the prospect of Kanak independence might threaten their place. In fact, there is a unique treaty between France, New Caledonia, and the French colony of Wallis and Futuna that has given Wallisians easy access to work permits for New Caledonia. There is not really a Wallisian nationalist movement and Wallisian political demands are subsumed under the bipolar politics of New Caledonia. The Wallisian ethnic alliance with the Europeans has been a form of defensive politicization as the Wallisians perceive Kanak nationalist aspirations as being a threat to their position in the territory.

Altercations between Wallisian immigrants and indigenous Kanaks go back a long way. Ounei (1985: 12) has reflected on how earnestly Kanak organizers attempted—though usually with limited success—to swing Wallisian support over to their cause: Tensions between these two ethnic communities in the St-Louis area had been developing for years, primarily over disputed mission land claimed by the local Kanak *tribu* upon which over a thousand Wallisians (some 5% of the total Wallisian population in New Caledonia at the time) had settled. These tensions had escalated into violent confrontations by December 2001.²¹ In 2017 violence has once again broken out in the area, with the road south from Nouméa to St-Louis being closed after gunshots were fired at cars travelling on the road, then at police investigating the shootings. France deployed four armoured vehicles and 130 additional police, in response to the violence; 57 people have been detained and 160 questioned.²²

The Wallisian population tends to be young and economically depressed. This puts them in direct competition with Kanaks in the job market. The Kanaks regard the Wallisians as being ‘culturally inferior, clannish, and quarrelsome’ (Connell, 1987: 223). Most Wallisians have been opposed to independence, therefore many Kanaks view the Wallisians as foreigners (like the Europeans) who are interfering with Kanak national aspirations. An important political development in the Wallisian community was the formation of a Wallisian pro-independence

21 Street fights resulted in victims being hospitalized, houses were burned down, vehicles and houses were fired-upon, and a young father was killed in a gun battle. In April 2002 an agreement was reached to find a solution in keeping with the ‘Pacific Way’ (whereby Pacific Islanders should be able to resolve their problems themselves without external interference).

22 Radio New Zealand, 15 March 2017.

political party named the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanienne (RDO); however, this party has failed to garner much support, revealing that the Wallisian community itself had divided loyalties. In an independent New Caledonia, the Wallisian community may begin to assert more political and economic demands as ethnic bipolarization gradually declines and new political cleavages come to the forefront.

And among other ethnic groups, moderate political options would include those advocating stronger Caledonian identity based on pluralism and looser ties with France without sacrificing economic benefits.

The Future of New Caledonia

The future status of New Caledonia is not only a question of political structure but of the very identity which the citizens of New Caledonia will assume. Will an independent New Caledonia be Kanaky, a Kanak homeland? Will it remain an overseas part of France? Or will it become an independent state founded on the principles of multiculturalism and citizenship? With the Matignon and Nouméa Accords reconciliation became the political order of the day, although there is growing impatience among the Kanak ethnonationalist movement. There is also a movement within New Caledonia to establish a new 'Caledonian' identity that includes all the peoples of New Caledonia, an identity which emphasizes shared citizenship over cultural differences (Bernut-Deplanque, 2002: 175). Moreover, Caldoche identity has also been undergoing significant changes in New Caledonia. In Nainville-les-Roches in 1983 the Kanaks pledged to work with the other 'victims of history'. This was somewhat of an acknowledgement by Kanaks of the Caldoche fact in New Caledonia. For their part, in the post-Matignon period the Caldoches have come to accept that New Caledonia is a part of the Pacific Islands and not France (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998: 176).

In New Caledonia the central axes of political competition are still centred on two dominant ethnic groups. Politics may be more conciliatory between elections but during election campaigns ethnic appeals and bipolarization come to the fore. In New Caledonia bipolarization may seem to be decreasing somewhat, but there remains a strong social division between the various ethnic groups. As identity becomes more inclusive in New Caledonia in the coming years and economic inequality decreases, one might expect that old social divisions may also be challenged, yet a lack of social interaction between ethnic groups may continue to contribute to perceptions of difference.

With New Caledonia having almost a third of known world reserves of nickel, France has remained committed to preserving New Caledonia as one of the most developed states in the South Pacific with a high standard of living and very expensive cost of living. But how much benefit Kanaks

have reaped from all this is questionable. Doubtless the largely paved roads and efficient transportation system, and not the least a strongly French educational system ensuring complete fluency in the French language, have facilitated Kanak movement into the city and larger towns. Yet in an urban environment they have often struggled to find employment and have comprised an increasingly evident population of homeless and transient vagrants. From an independentist viewpoint, mining profits, which could make New Caledonia even more advanced, exit the country. The residents of the numerous fine homes and expensive apartments in Nouméa are almost all French, as are the people frequenting the better cafés, restaurants and beaches, and the owners of virtually all the better farmland and the estate homes on those farms.

Two-thirds of the Kanaks remained confined to the traditional rural sector, where according to Kohler (1987: 3-4) they were 'more or less condemned to a life of mediocrity on the edge of the capitalist system'. Despite the exodus of settlers to a city life, many indigenous communities remained in cramped conditions, within the confines of the poor land on to which many were driven. Although they were twenty times less numerous than Melanesians engaged in agriculture, European stockbreeders and farmers held almost twice as much land at their disposal.

There is arguably an internal colonialism present within New Caledonia that mirrors the core-periphery relationship at the heart of French colonialism. While New Caledonia is relatively wealthy (ranking high in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index), wealth inequality is also rampant. This inequality is largely manifested as Kanak poverty.²³

This situation may have been improved somewhat through the construction of a nickel smelter in the North Province (near Voh), yet serious inequalities remain. Thus, even with the increasing autonomy implemented since the Nouméa Accord, Kanaks have remained in a disadvantaged position within the economy. Moreover, the dichotomy between Nouméa and *la brousse* has political effects with those who benefit most directly from French colonialism (especially in the South Province and Nouméa) being those most likely to vote in favour of a continuing association with France.

Kohler has further emphasized that 'having profoundly repressed the colonial relationship...the Melanesians have long been resigned to their lot, eventually considering themselves unworthy and unfit to take up the political, economic and cultural challenge of the European'. Yet the Kanak

23 Kanak unemployment is 28% in comparison to an overall unemployment rate of 9% and 'the average monthly household income in the predominantly Kanak North Province is \$2,575 whereas it is almost twice that much (\$5,085) in the predominantly European South Province' (Prinsen and Blaise, 2017: 68).

ethnonationalist movement 'has continued to increase the struggle against the many forms of this alienation, passing progressively from cultural demands to demands for land, then to seeking actively to take political control...' While Melanesian society is far from being monolithic in New Caledonia, faced with the colonial reality Melanesian ethnonationalism has created a powerful ideological bond (Kohler, 1987: 6-7).

So, the essential question must still be how a longstanding French identity and citizenship inherited through colonialism, or perhaps a new evolving Caledonian identity and citizenship would relate to more specific Kanak ethnonationalism. In New Caledonia, the economic interests of the Caldoches and the French state are directly threatened by the ascendancy of Kanak socialist independence. The Kanaks are demanding a greater share of the economic wealth and resources of New Caledonia. The elite among the Caldoches has united with the French imperial state to actively resist change through various means including demographics (the importation of numerous settlers from France and Polynesia), and coercion (through the military and police). It is in the interests of this elite to make racial appeals to all the Europeans of New Caledonia to combat the Kanak threat to the survival of their culture and way of life.

In New Caledonia the French colonial (now territorial) government has safely advocated 'democracy' because the indigenous Melanesians, the Kanaks, who would largely support independence, are outnumbered by French settlers, their Polynesian allies together with other ethnic groups and some Kanaks who wish to maintain the French connection. Thus, 'democracy' has actually served to delay a referendum on independence and effectively countered Kanak ethnonationalism. Kohler (1987: 9) has described democracy 'led astray', Franceschi (2000) *la démocratie massacrée*, Bernut-Deplanaque (2002: 145-169) *la démocratie culturelle*.

However, the RPCR is no longer the leading political party. In the 2014 election, separatist/pro-independence/Kanak nationalist parties took 19 (35%) of the 54 seats in the Congress, colonialist/pro-French parties took 14 seats (26%), whereas moderate/centrist/pluralist parties took 21 seats (39%). The alliance (following the election) between Calédonie Ensemble and the FLNKS may signal new modes of political cooperation in New Caledonia that move past ethnic bipolarism (Chappell, 2015: 56-72; Maclellan, 2015: 168-188).

Which of the three nationalisms will prevail in New Caledonia? How can the independence question be resolved? Given the fact that both Kanak ethnonationalism and French [neo]colonialism serve only minority positions of the total population, recognition of ethnic pluralism is essential. Pluralism or multiculturalism as a national policy, much as it may serve as a counterpoint to either Kanak ethnonationalism or French neocolonialism, would seem to be the only rational alternative for New Caledonia to pursue. So, the penultimate question has to be whether

compromise between rival ethnic factions will be possible—obviously it is preferable for a state currently enjoying one of the highest standards of living in the South Pacific.

Let us conclude by suggesting: First, that much of Kanak ethnonationalism could be accommodated within a pluralistic state. Kanak culture and languages could continue to be valued, promoted, preserved and taught as vital to New Caledonian national identity. However, how acceptable will the inevitable Kanak emphasis of indigenous paramountcy within what has become a *de facto* pluralist state be to the other ethnic groups in New Caledonia? Moreover, even in the absence of direct French colonialism there is a risk that internal colonial structures within New Caledonia may continue to ensure Kanak marginalization within an autonomous or independent state. Indigenous sovereignty must be recognized within a multiethnic framework. Moreover, New Caledonia should strengthen its integration into the Pacific Islands region.

Second, the longstanding French presence and influence could similarly be recognized, however the French should not dominate at the expense of other ethnic groups, and it is not likely that most Kanaks will value continuing French presence after more than a century and a half of oppression. To preserve a strong economy, perhaps some affiliation with France could be maintained, yet alternative investment from other countries should be encouraged; the problem must be how to reduce dependency upon France. Presumably the presence of *Métros* would lessen when their services become replaced. Positive steps should be taken to improve relations between *Caldoches* and Kanaks, particularly including gradual land reform and the systematic reduction of Kanak marginalization.

If the political relationship continues to evolve between France and New Caledonia one could ask whether emerging governance systems in New Caledonia represent new forms of sovereignty or new forms of colonialism?²⁴ In other words, whose interests are served if New Caledonia maintains some form of formal political association with France? Prinsen and Blaise (2017) argue that new ‘islandian forms of sovereignty’ have emerged in small island states that render classical perspectives on sovereignty, which privilege independent statehood, obsolete. Rather sovereignty could be achieved through free association with a larger metropolitan state, as has occurred in Palau, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia—with the United States—and Niue and the Cook Islands—with New Zealand. In each of these cases the small island state cedes responsibility for its defence to a metropolitan power

24 Many writers have explored the political ramifications of the redefinition of New Caledonia for other French territories (for example, Kohler, 1987; Aldrich and Connell, 1992; Dornoy-Vurobaruvu, 1994; Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998; Maclellan and Boengkih, 1998; Fisher, 2013; Morrison, 2014; Saura, 2015).

(and its foreign affairs in the case of Niue and the Cook Islands). While there are doubtless benefits for these small island states in maintaining a relationship with their former colonial power there are also benefits for the metropole. The interests of the colonial power are largely neo-colonial: they continue to exercise wide-ranging influence over their former territories, projecting their power far beyond their terrestrial borders, and reaping economic benefits. Despite the change in status of New Caledonia from a *Territoire d'outre-mer* to a Special Collectivity of France following the Nouméa Accords, New Caledonia remains on the UN Committee on Decolonization's list of non-self-governing territories. If New Caledonia maintains ties with France it will gain economic rewards (in the form of official development assistance, for instance) but it will also be unable to exercise the full range of powers that a sovereign state normally enjoys. The continuation of a relationship with France (in the form of 'free association' or 'sovereignty-association') may be a necessary compromise to ensure increasing sovereignty, but it also imposes limitations on New Caledonia's ability to exercise the full range of powers enjoyed by sovereign states, as well as binding New Caledonia's future identity strongly to its historical colonial relationship with France.

Finally, with carefully restricted immigration, the ethnic diversity of the rest of the population could be contained until an effective pluralism policy can be formulated and promulgated. New Caledonia ideally could move inexorably, and hopefully more purposefully, towards full independence, as it has been proceeding via an interim stage of increased self-government, to take its long-delayed place as the newest, and indeed most affluent independent state of Melanesia—but as a pluralist country respecting both indigenous Melanesian tradition and in certain carefully defined aspects, economic (more than political) ties to France. Admittedly, this is difficult—but necessary—to accomplish.

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