

Creating Kanaky:
Indigeneity, Youth and the Cultural Politics of the Possible

by

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Dedicated to my mother, Cora Bennett-LeFevre



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the ways that settler state structures generate, even as they constrain, indigeneity, difference and resistance. I approach these issues in New Caledonia, the Melanesian archipelago and French settler colony. In 2014, the population will vote in a referendum on independence from France. Drawing on fourteen months of fieldwork in Nouméa, New Caledonia, I examine how Kanak youth negotiate political uncertainty and social dislocation through involvement in cultural production—particularly music and dance groups—officially registered as “associations” under French law. The representations of Kanak culture created by these groups not only reflect but also constitute the social world of indigeneity in a French settler-colony where a Republican model of citizenship often serves to suppress cultural difference. Though associations are French structures for organizing culture and animating civic life, Kanak use them in ways that subvert state hegemony, pushing indigenous difference into the public sphere and asserting alternative models of citizenship centered on links to place, attachment to particular cultural practices (*la coutume*) and relational forms of identity. Mobilizing the representations of Kanak culture produced within associations, young people position themselves strategically in relation to the French state, the Melanesian region, global indigeneity and each other. In so doing, they formulate distinctive visions of indigenous sovereignty and make claims about the types of futures possible for Kanak people.

In examining how Kanak youth both engage with and repudiate French notions of universal rights and configurations of national and cultural identity, I draw attention

to the particular exigencies of the French settler state. Theorizing settler colonialism within this singular frame has enabled me to make an original contribution to literature on Indigeneity and recognition. At the same time, I also ask how this scholarship might be challenged by research outside of Latin American and Anglo settler contexts, in locations where neoliberal multiculturalism is not the dominant state frame for managing difference and granting rights. This dissertation makes an important intervention in studies of settler colonialism, indigeneity, race, citizenship and sovereignty, youth and social change, providing commentary on the dynamics of these phenomena within a French context, from a non-Francophone perspective.

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Introduction:

HISTORICAL ENTANGLEMENTS AND EMERGING FUTURES

*Petit Kanak, ne fais pas attention à ceux qui te dénigrent
Tu t'en sortiras même s'ils veulent te pousser dans le vide
Tu es ici chez toi, même si certains pensent le contraire
Tu es ce que tu es, et ton nom te rattache à ta terre.¹*

- Ybal Khan, *Petit Kanak* (2010)

This dissertation explores how hegemony is created, produced—and also resisted—through representational regimes. It asks how particular historical entanglements produce new kinds of modernities and political imaginaries. A central focus throughout these chapters is the way that settler state structures in New Caledonia generate, even as they constrain, Indigeneity, difference and resistance. I describe and analyze how indigenous Kanak—in particular, Kanak youth—engage with these structures, adopting, bending, inverting and transforming them in ways that make other futures possible.

One of the key ways that Kanak have done this is through the medium of cultural production. There is a substantial anthropological literature on the role of cultural production in indigenous social and political struggles (i.e. Ginsburg 1991, 1997; Myers 1994, 2002; Ginsburg & Myers 2006; Turner 1990, 1992, 1995; Conklin

¹ “Little Kanak, don’t pay attention to those who denigrate you/ You’ll make it through this, even if they want to push you into the void/ You are here, in your own home, even if some think otherwise/You’re what you are and your name attaches you your land.”

1997; Mithlo 2004; Jackson & Warren 2002; Prins 1997).² Like this work, my dissertation starts with the assumption that cultural production is a vehicle for the production of deeper identity politics and social transformations. Unlike some of this work, I focus mainly on the processes (rather than the products) of cultural production. Though I am attentive to the content of the cultural forms created by my interlocutors; I am most interested in the *social worlds* that both *structure* and *emerge from* the processes of cultural production. In this way, my dissertation approaches cultural production as a form of labor undertaken by Kanak youth in order to create a space for indigenous sovereignty.

Their labor is a difficult one. As a French settler state, New Caledonia presents a unique set of obstacles, not only to indigenous sovereignty, but to assertions of indigeneity in general. The French republican model of citizenship assumes the indivisible sovereignty of the Republic and the universal equality of all citizens. Each individual is envisioned as engaged in a direct relationship relationship with the state, which should seek to serve only the “general interest” of all individuals together, rather than the “particular interests” of groups. As many scholars have described, French republicanism “blocks the use of cultural differences as the bases of collective mobilization and political claims-making in the public sphere” (Wacquant 2007:193). Consequently, the structures of the French state leave very little space for indigeneity, which is fundamentally premised on a relationship between culture and rights.

² As well as an even larger body of work addressing the role of cultural production in social and political movements more generally.

Moreover, France has long considered “culture” as the proper domain of national public policy. The French state sees culture as an important tool for “animating” civic life and integrating citizens into a cohesive national identity (Ory 2004; Poirrier 2002). New Caledonia thus offers a *very* different frame for investigating and theorizing settler colonialism, indigeneity and sovereignty than Latin American or Anglo settler contexts, where liberal multiculturalism is a dominant state frame for managing difference and granting rights and the state is far less involved in cultural policy.³

This dissertation is also an ethnography of Melanesia. I consider the ways that indigenous Melanesian epistemologies affected processes of racial formation in New Caledonia. I also look at how indigenous and settler notions of identity resisted, intersected and—sometimes—overlapped. As a settler state, New Caledonia clearly presents a different framework for the development of racial categories than a post-colonial Melanesian country like Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu. Along these same lines, I also examine the relationship between the pan-Melanesian discourse of *kastom*

³ Another issue that I do not explore at length in the dissertation (but hope to address in later work) is the fact that the Kanak were never treated as a colonial labor force. In part because the French considered them to be unassimilable savages, the Kanak were kept completely outside of the settler economy and were never proletarianized. This history is in stark contrast to Latin America, where the *hacienda* system brought (forced) indigenous peoples into relations of capitalist production from early on. Much of the literature on indigenous social movements in Latin America analyzes indigeneity as a response to neoliberal state policies, and I think this has much to do with the historical formation of the “indigenous category” in Latin America and its entanglement with the market economy. For now at least, Kanak indigeneity isn’t really being articulated in as a response to neoliberalism. I believe that this is partly because Kanak were never historically positioned as a proletariat (and in some ways still aren’t). Furthermore, the French state in many ways imagines itself as a crusader *against* neoliberal forces. I focus most of my arguments on differentiating French republican settler colonialism from Anglo settler colonialism, but equally strong arguments can be made for why indigeneity is articulated so differently in New Caledonia than it is in Latin America.

and the Kanak notion of *la coutume*. I explore how French colonial ideology has shaped the ways—and the contexts—in which Kanak deploy “culture” as a political rhetoric.

Finally, this work is also framed around questions of temporality, cultural change and generations. I argue that Kanak youth derive their identities in large part from the particular temporal and social locations they occupy. The young people I worked with are part of a generation sandwiched between two major historical events—the Matignon Accords and the end of the violent independence struggle in 1988 and the upcoming independence referendum in 2014. I try to show how Kanak youth have drawn on their *situatedness*—within historical time, cultural logics, networks of relationships and settler state structures—to develop strategies for navigating the political and social uncertainty of life in Nouméa, and New Caledonia more broadly.

This dissertation is also significant as it is one of a handful of existing full-length, English language ethnographies of New Caledonia. To the best of my knowledge (and according to relatively exhaustive searches of online databases), there have only been four English language Ph.D. dissertations written on New Caledonia in

anthropology or closely related disciplines during the past *twenty* years.⁴ Australian anthropologist Bronwen Douglas has published several pieces on cultural history and political economy in New Caledonia (ie: Douglas 1970, 1979, 1980, 1998), but her contemporary work now focuses almost exclusively on Vanuatu and on Oceania as a region (ie: Douglas 2002; Douglas & Ballard 2008). Though not technically an ethnography, James Clifford's (1992) intellectual history of Maurice Leenhardt probably remains the most widely-read book on New Caledonia among Anglophone anthropologists.

The overwhelming majority of anthropological scholarship on New Caledonia is written in French by French anthropologists (and almost none of it is translated into English). Consequently, it often seems like the existence of New Caledonia is forgotten (or at the very least, ignored) by Anglophone Melanesianists (and anthropologists in general). I hope my dissertation (and future work) will serve to address this lacuna by pointing to some of the reasons why New Caledonia is *central*, rather than peripheral, to many of contemporary anthropology's major theoretical and conceptual concerns. On a more personal and political level, I hope that my work might in some way contribute to an increased awareness of the Kanak struggle among English-speaking audiences (this was a hope that many Kanak people shared with me during my fieldwork).

⁴ Only one of these (Morgan 2009) was written by a University of Chicago Ph.D. All the rest were written by Ph.Ds at Australia National University (Horowitz 2003; Chanter 1996; Edo 2006).



Fig. 1.1. New Caledonia's location in the Pacific. (Source: CIA World Factbook)

The Fieldsite

New Caledonia is an island archipelago located in Melanesia, in the southwest Pacific. It consists of one long mountainous main island, the Grand Terre (big land), three large raised coral atolls—Ouvéa, Maré and Lifou (collectively referred to as the Loyalty Islands)—and the Île de Pins and Belep archipelago, located to the south and north of the Grand Terre, respectively. New Caledonia's closest neighbor is the nation of Vanuatu, whose southernmost island, Aneityum, lies only about 175 miles away. New Caledonia is 750 miles east of Australia and 1,400 miles northwest of New

Zealand. It is over 10,000 miles away from France, which nonetheless considers it to be an integral part of French Republic.

Currently, New Caledonia is a “*sui generis* collectivity” of France—so called because its juridical and political status makes it unique amongst the French DOM-TOM (*Départements et Territoires d’Outre-mer*). Several laws in New Caledonia are in direct violation of the French Constitution.⁵ New Caledonia is also distinguished from the rest of the DOM-TOM by its inclusion on the United Nations List of Non-Self Governing Territories (meaning the United Nations considers New Caledonia to be a colonized country with a right to self-determination). According to 2011 census data, the territory’s current population is roughly 225,000 people. About 40% of the population is Indigenous Kanak, 35% is of European (mostly French) origin, 10% are immigrants from the French Polynesian territories of Wallis and Futuna and Tahiti, and the remaining percentage consists mostly of Vietnamese, Indonesian, ni-Vanuatu people. Over 30% of the entire population of New Caledonia lives in Nouméa, the territory’s capital and its one major city, located in the South Province.

⁵ I refer here to several laws enacted with the passing of the 1998 Nouméa Accords. These laws introduced a “New Caledonian citizenship” (citizens of New Caledonia also remain, at least for now, citizens of France and the European Union). The Nouméa Accord also initiated a “devolution of powers.” Key areas such as taxation, labor law, health and hygiene and foreign trade are already in the hands of the New Caledonia’s territorial congress, and further powers are set to be transferred from the state to the local New Caledonian government in the future. Amongst the new laws implemented as part of the creation of a “New Caledonian citizenship” recent changes to electoral policy have elicited the greatest protest from the territory’s Euro-Calédonian population. Beginning with the 2009 elections in New Caledonia, French nationals who did not meet New Caledonian citizenship requirements in 1998 (meaning that they were not yet residents of the territory at that time) were ineligible to vote in territorial elections. This removed around 18,000 French nationals from the electorate (who had all lived in New Caledonia less than ten years).

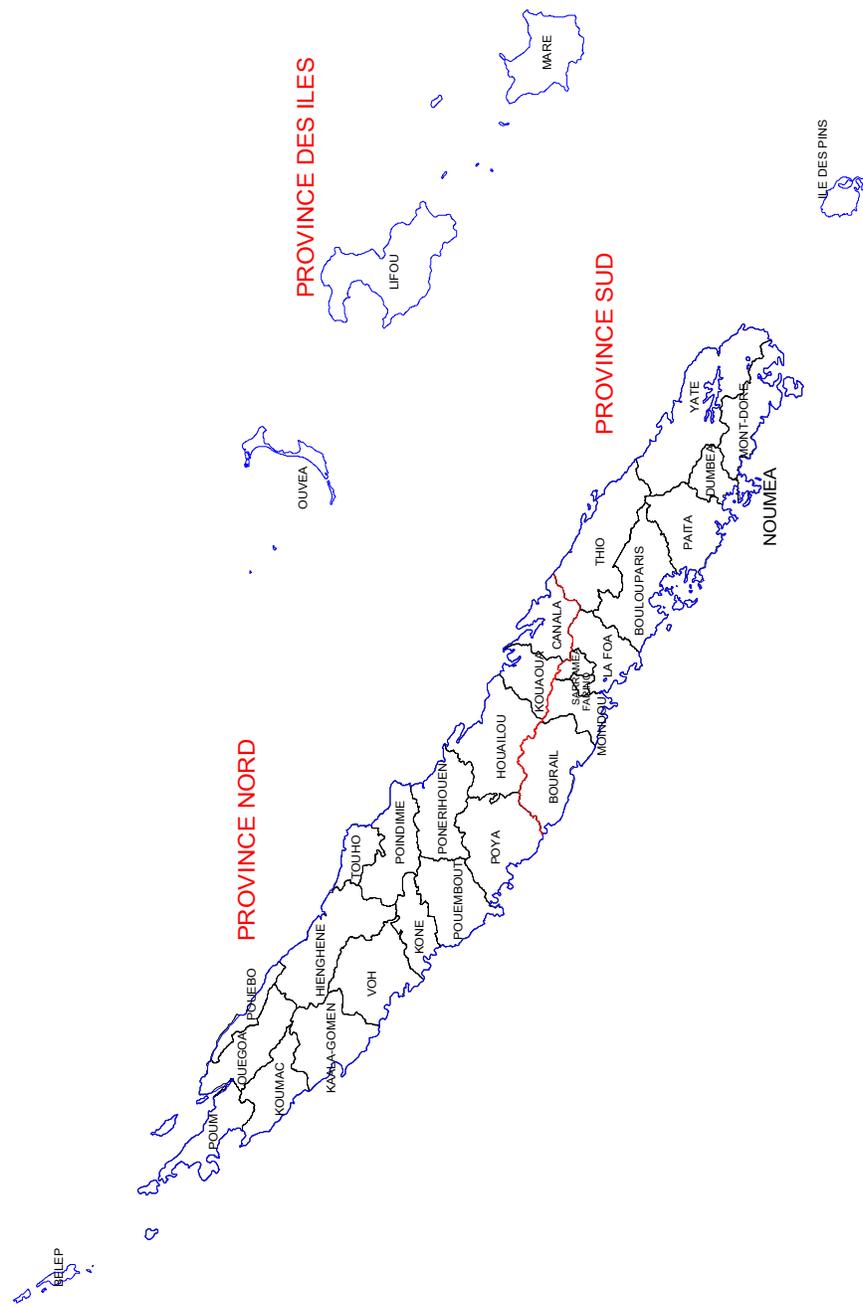


Fig. 1.2. A map of New Caledonia, showing the location of all three provinces and the names of each *commune* [municipal district]. (Source: Direction des Infrastructures, de la Topographie et des Transportes Terrestres de la Nouvelle-Calédonie)

I lived in Nouméa for a little over a year during my dissertation fieldwork. My husband and I rented an apartment in Centre-Ville (downtown) in a somewhat run-down building facing Nouméa's cruise ship terminal. We were often kept awake at nights whenever one of the massive P&O ships stayed in port; its soundsystem blasting the same, unvarying playlist of "party favorites" (ABBA, Michael Jackson, Wham!) for a changing cast of drunk Australian tourists. Outside of cruiseship-related quibbles, Centre-Ville ended up being an ideal home base for my research. In some ways it was a neutral space.⁶ Everyone—Kanak, Caldoche, Métro, Wallisian—came into Centre-Ville to shop, meet friends in the *Place de Cocotiers* and run errands. If I had lived in one of Nouméa's mostly white *quartiers chics* this would have probably aligned me with white French people in the minds of many of the youth I worked with. If I had lived in one of Nouméa's *quartiers populaires* (working class neighborhoods, where most Kanak live), then I would have been identified with that neighborhood (ie: as the "*Americaine* who's always with the *jeunes de Rivière-Salée*.") Instead I was centrally located where people could easily visit me and where I could easily get to where other people lived. Another unexpected boon to my research was the fact that I cannot drive a manual transmission car (much to the chagrin of my husband, who tried his best to teach me but ended up having to frequently chauffeur me around in our busted Renault Clio). As a result, I used Nouméa's municipal bus system to get around. Very few white people take the bus, and almost every time I did, I would run

⁶ In a broader symbolic sense however, as I argue later in the dissertation, the entire city of Nouméa is very much a "settler colonial space," that works to exclude and obscure Kanak presence.



Fig. 1.3. Map of the city of Nouméa, indicating different *quartiers*. The *quartiers* where I spent the most time are Montravel, Tindu, Rivière-Salée and the squat in Nouville (all *quartiers populaires*, poor, Kanak neighborhoods). Nouméa's *quartiers chics* (where most white people live) include Anse Vata, Baie de Citrons and Baie de l'Orphelinat (Map: Bureau du Tourisme de la Province Sud).

into someone I knew (or their cousin, auntie, etc). I also often got rides with Kanak friends (or friends of friends).



Fig. 1.4. Nouméa, looking north (photo by author).



Fig. 1.5. The bus station in Centre-Ville Nouméa (photo by author).

Methodological Approach

Doing ethnographic research with indigenous peoples—particularly in a settler colonial situation—requires that anthropologists consider the role their own work plays within ongoing historical and political process of settlement (Simpson 2011:205). My dissertation research examines the relationship between representation and indigenous dispossession. This may be one of the reasons why I have remained keenly aware throughout this process of my own position as someone producing a representation, and the responsibilities that I feel should come along with that. Anthropologists have increasingly recognized the importance of new research methods—what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls “decolonizing methodologies.” Along with this shift, there are a growing number of Native anthropologists whose work offers an important critique of anthropology’s entanglement with “state power, force, and occupation” (Simpson *ibid.*). Still, anthropology must continue to contend with the legacy of colonial logics and representational practices that shaped it as a discipline (and generated mistrust in many indigenous communities). All of these issues remained in my mind as I designed and conducted the research presented in this dissertation.

That said, working in New Caledonia would have been much harder for me if I were French.⁷ This is not particularly surprising given France’s ongoing relationship

⁷ Because of my last name, it’s completely possible that some people might have *thought* I was French before I met them in person or spoke with them over the phone. As soon as I opened my mouth however, my admittedly strong American accent and occasional inability to understand idiomatic expressions gave me away. In email correspondence, I always foregrounded my identity as a *chercheuse américaine*. In the few cases that people were

of colonial domination with the Kanak people. I have met many of the French anthropologists who do research in New Caledonia, and for the most part, they are lovely, thoughtful, politically-minded people who are deeply involved in the communities in which they work and enthusiastically pro-independence. Yet even for people like this, doing fieldwork in New Caledonia as a French person can be challenging. In a significant part of the Kanak community, there is a palpable sense of suspicion—and in some cases, hostility—towards French people. Gaining access, building trust and achieving a “fieldwork subjectivity” that allows one to be perceived as *not* “like most French people,” can be a struggle (as several French anthropologists told me, and as I was able to observe from the way that many of my Kanak interlocutors spoke about French researchers).

Indeed, I often felt that research was made significantly easier by the fact that I was American.⁸ As I describe later in Chapter 3, America is thought of fondly by many Kanak people because of the history of America’s military presence in New Caledonia during WWII. More recently, the election of Barack Obama seems to have also made an important impression on the Kanak. I was often asked, “What do you think of Obama!?” immediately after someone found out where I was from. Moreover, beyond the global popularity (or hegemony) of American pop-culture, Kanak youth also seem especially enthusiastic about American cultural forms simply because they

confused about my identity, they almost always assumed I was Australian. This was primarily because a substantial number of Australians pass through New Caledonia as tourists or live there for a short time while working for mining companies, but *very* few Americans visit or live in the territory. In many cases, I was the first American people had met.

⁸ I’m not sure there are many other locations where this would be the case.

aren't French. In short, being American meant that I was not generally perceived as being complicit in the colonial oppression of the people I was working with. This certainly doesn't mean that I was enthusiastically embraced by every person I met and spoke with, but my Americaness definitely made some aspects fieldwork less difficult.⁹

Prior to arriving in Nouméa for a little over a year of dissertation fieldwork, I had already established contacts with several institutions involved in youth cultural production during a month-long “preliminary research” visit in 2008. These institutions included *le Mouv'* (a rehearsal and concert space in Rivière-Salée), Nouméa's *Service Culture et Fêtes* and *Direction de la Jeunesse et des Sports*, and the Tjibaou Cultural Center (whose administrators I originally met way back in 2003, when I did my undergraduate thesis research). Ultimately, I didn't end up working closely with any of these institutions, and none of them proved particularly helpful in connecting me with the people I *did* want to work with: young Kanak cultural producers, particularly those organized in *associations de loi 1901*. Consequently, the first two months of my fieldwork were slow, difficult and frustrating, because I had to figure out how to meet and connect with these people on my own. I did a lot of

⁹ In fact, the first time I visited New Caledonia, to do research for my undergraduate honors thesis in Lifou, I was confronted several times by people who were suspicious of me and upset that I was there. One older man demanded, “Why is she here? What good does it do us? She is just going to go back to her country with what she finds and we'll never hear from her again. All white people do is take.” During my dissertation fieldwork I was never met with quite as much distrust, but many people were (quite reasonably) wary of my presence and intentions. In many cases, it took a very long time for me to get permission to do an interview, or visit a location, etc. In some cases I never got permission at all. Overall however, people were incredibly gracious and open with me, by which I felt very honored.

awkward cold-calling and randomly showing up in places to introduce myself to people. Very gradually, I began to develop connections with different networks of people, and following one lead led to another. By my second month in Nouméa, I had finally managed to set up a number of possible “fieldsites.” What I didn’t expect was for *all* of them to pan out—which they more or less did. After two months of panicking that I wasn’t accomplishing anything, my I was suddenly busy with almost more research opportunities than I could handle.

In the end, although I focused a part of my fieldwork within three discrete physical sites, I mostly met and hung out with the groups and individuals I worked with wherever they happened to be. In each case, I tried to find ways in which I could be useful to the people I was working with, both in order to better build rapport, and as a method offering something in return for their help and time. Ultimately, I established some type of reciprocal arrangement with all of the groups I studied. I filmed concerts and made music videos for the bands Blue Hau and Extreme. I tried to teach my friend Kazi how to play trombone. I tutored Hassan, the leader of the dance group Résurrection, in English. I also taught English at the Montravel *maison du quartier*, the “Rex” (a youth center in Centre-Ville where many Kanak hip-hop crews practice) and in the Nouville squat, for the “Black Pearl” youth association. My lessons weren’t very formal, and in many cases, I just taught vocabulary using song lyrics, since everyone was very interested in music. The “alibi” of teaching English gave me a reason to hang out long after lessons were done to chat and meet with people. My own background as a musician allowed me to be an especially active participant in the

social world of my interlocutors, and I often hung out and played trombone or sang with groups during rehearsals. Sadly, I did not have any of the abilities necessary to engage in similarly “embodied” participant observation with the hip-hop dance crews I studied (cf. Wacquant 2004).¹⁰



Fig. 1.6. Teaching English at the Nouville Squat with members of the “Black Pearl” youth association and music group—most of which are originally from Maré, one of the Loyalty Islands (author’s photo).

Formally speaking, my research methodology consisted primarily of participant observation and both informal and structured interviews. In addition to Kanak youth, I also spoke with parents, customary authorities, and various

¹⁰ On a somewhat tangential note, I’ll point out that the first place sociologist (and Bourdieu-disciple) Loïc Wacquant worked was New Caledonia, during height of the Kanak independence struggle (see Wacquant 1985, 1989).

government administrators and civil servants. I kept fieldnotes throughout, recorded all of the formal (and many of the informal) interviews, and transcribed most of them. I also collected “life stories” from twelve individuals, many of which are incorporated in some fashion into this dissertation.¹¹ I video and audio recorded dozens of events, meetings and performances. In some cases, I watched or listened to these recordings with the individuals or groups they featured, and engaged in a sort of unstructured form of “dialogic editing” (Feld 1987; Schieffelin 1990). In nearly every case, these interviews (and all other social interactions) were conducted in French. However, I did learn to speak (very basic) Drehu by taking a semester and a half course at the University of New Caledonia and engaging in informal language exchanges with Drehu-speaking friends.¹² Though I had very remedial Drehu language skills, I was still able to overhear some parts of peoples’ conversations, and more importantly, I could “bust out” the occasional Drehu phrase, which proved incredibly effective in my efforts to build rapport with people. Since so few French people ever learn any Kanak languages, my (feeble) attempts to this end were considered meaningful.

¹¹ In most cases, I use peoples’ actual names, rather than pseudonyms. Many of the people I worked with performed in bands and dance groups and were already relatively public figures. Nonetheless, I checked with every individual I spoke with about using their name, and in the few cases that people objected, or seemed anxious about it, I have used pseudonyms.

¹² Drehu is the language of Lifou Island. For various reasons which will be addressed throughout the dissertation, Drehu has the most speakers of any of the 28 extant Kanak languages.

close attention to connections and overlaps between groups. Indeed, owing to traditional Kanak modes and sociality and Nouméa's (relatively) small size, I was constantly discovering that people I had met through completely different channels were actually cousins, uncles, nieces, nephews, close friends or former classmates. Tracing out these different connections allowed me to better understand the social worlds of Kanak youth living in Nouméa as well as see how individuals were positioned within different frameworks and hierarchies.

In addition to the more quotidian aspects of my fieldwork, I was observed and participated in the 4th Festival of Melanesian Arts, held in New Caledonia from September 12th – 24th. I was able to finagle a position as a volunteer through connections at the Tjibaou Culture Center (which effectively served as the festival's organizer). This allowed me to participate not only in the festival itself, but also in several aspects of the festival's preparation, including two volunteer "training sessions." I was also able to get the Tjibaou Center to place me in the same "*pirogue*" as Extreme, a band that I had been working with closely with for nearly eight months at that point.¹³ In this way, I could observe not only the festival, but the experiences and reactions of the boys in Extreme (and their father/uncle Eric Tidjine) to the festival, as well as their interactions with people from the Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu delegations.

¹³ Rather than taking place in one location, the Festival was split into four "pirogues" (canoes), which each traveled to different regions after the Festival's two-day opening in Koné (before joining together again a week later for the Festival's closing ceremonies in Nouméa). I explain the organization of the Festival in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Finally, I complimented the ethnographic components of my methodology with archival research in the collections of the ADCK (Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture, headquartered at the Tjibaou Center) and New Caledonia's Territorial Archives. Both these institutions house large collections of materials on Kanak cultural and social movements. The Territorial Archives also has an a wide-ranging collection of of old newspapers and other out of print publications, as well as 50 years of government documents related to social and cultural policies in New Caledonia. I draw heavily on this archival research in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, which looks at the history of how the relationship between "culture" and "politics" has been constructed in New Caledonia, as revealed by the government's official *politique culturelle* (cultural policy), and the role of cultural festivals.

Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into two parts. Part I: *Becoming an Indigenous People* focuses on the historical entanglements of representation and the cultural and political genesis of the Kanak people. Both of the chapters in Part I work to establish a genealogy for the present day formulation of the “indigenous category” in New Caledonia. They critically examine the development of the Kanak as an indigenous people, a cultural group and a political entity. Chapter 2, Courteous, Friendly, Ferocious Cannibals, starts by looking at the representations produced from the earliest encounters between Europeans and the indigenous inhabitants of New Caledonia. These racialized representations, most of which depicted Kanak as “savage others”—cannibals, monsters, evolutionary relics without any real culture—were central to a settler-colonial project that sought to transform New Caledonia into a French republican space. I examine how colonial representations of Kanak placed them “outside of humanity” in such a way that France rejected its usual “civilizing mission” of assimilation. Instead, the French state seized Kanak lands and forced Kanak onto reserves, creating a spatio-cultural boundary that kept the Kanak completely separate from settler social and economic life. I trace the enduring effects of these colonial policies (and the representations that made them possible) through World War II. I pick up this history in Chapter 3, Canaque à Kanak, which describes the post-war emergence of pan-Kanak political and cultural identity and the birth of an indigenous independence movement. Moving through the present day, I show how the independence movement developed out of broader efforts made by the Kanak to

seize back control over their representation (transforming themselves from “*canaques*” into “the Kanak”). I argue that the contemporary political stakes of representation in New Caledonia reveal the enduring “deep structures” of French settler-colonialism.

Part I provides the historical structure necessary for me to analyze the ethnography presented in Part II: *Creating Kanaky*. In Chapter 4, *La Jeunesse de Kanaky: Generation, Identity and Crisis*, I explore the circumstances of contemporary Kanak youth and the generational shifts underlying transformations of Kanak identity. I focus in particular on the moral panic sparked in New Caledonia the “discourse of youth crisis” [*la crise de la jeunesse*]. I analyze this discourse as it is presented in the media and by the public officials I interviewed. I describe how the *crise de la jeunesse* works to disenfranchise indigenous youth (and urban Kanak youth in particular), by depicting them pathological subjects suffering from culturotemporal confusion. The discourse of the *crise de la jeunesse* also relies on a dichotomy between *Kanak de quartier* (city Kanak) and *Kanak de la tribu* (village Kanak) that Kanak youth themselves do not find socially relevant. Exploring this disjuncture allows me to show how contemporary Kanak youth actually do locate Kanak identity, and how this distinguishes them from their parent’s generation. I end by considering the situation of Kanak youth in light of Mannheim’s notion of “the problem of generations” and Bourdieu’s theories of cultural change and symbolic capital.

Chapter 5, *Niches and Handles: Associations and Indigeneity in a French Settler State* examines how Kanak youth have used a structure of French governance—the *association loi de 1901*—to subvert the cultural and political

hegemony of French settler society. Though associations are intended to foster normative modes of civic engagement and a unified republican public sphere, Kanak engagement with associations has led to the emergence of an indigenous counter-public sphere that deeply unsettles settler society in New Caledonia. Drawing on three specific examples—bands Blue Hau and Extreme and hip-hop dance group Résurrection—I show how associations have been transformed into assemblages—cobbled together from indigenous and French cultural forms— through which to assert alternative, Kanak modes of citizenship and make claims on the future. I conclude by discussing what the use of associations by Kanak youth reveals about articulations of indigeneity across different settler state contexts

In Chapter 6, *Culture, Coutume, Kastom: “Having Culture” in New Caledonia* I continue to examine the particular problems of articulating indigeneity in a French settler state, focusing specifically on the role of “culture.” The Nouméa Accord describes the “promotion and development of Kanak culture” as fundamental to the construction of a Caledonian citizenship and “common destiny.” Yet Kanak and Euro-Caledonians often have very different understandings of what “having culture” means. I explore New Caledonia’s post-Nouméa Accord *politiques culturelles* [cultural policies] in an effort to reveal what is “lost in translation” when shifting between indigenous and settler notions of “culture.” I devote the second half of the chapter to an analysis of cultural festivals, events that have played a decisive role in New Caledonia’s recent socio-political history. I conclude by examining a series of incidents at the 2010 Festival of Melanesian Arts, during which divergences between

Kanak and French notions of culture emerged in stark relief. I argue that post-Nouméa *Accord politiques culturelles* have not instantiated a major shift in settler-colonial power relations, but have instead reinscribed hegemonic republican forms of “culture” that work to subvert Kanak sovereignty claims.

In Chapter 7, The Hegemonic *Métis* State? Representing and Disavowing Difference I bring scholarship on indigeneity into dialogue with literature in critical race studies in order to interrogate how race, particularly as imagined within the ideology of *métissage* intersects and challenges indigenous sovereignty claims in New Caledonia. I examine how the convergence of Melanesian and French republican epistemologies of identity led to the absence of a self-ascribing *metis* group in New Caledonia. Today however, *métis* identity is increasingly promoted and celebrated by loyalist political parties. Taking this into account, I examine how race works to reproduce settler colonial power relationships in to delegitimize Kanak claims to sovereignty based on indigenous difference. The second half of the chapter connects this discussion to events the following the French government’s official recognition of the Kanak flag. Euro-Caledonian reactions to this event highlighted conflicts between indigenous and settler conceptions of the relationships between identity, nation and citizenship. Finally, I consider the possibility that indigenous epistemologies of identity might shape the emergence of a new citizenship in New Caledonia.

The dissertation concludes with a brief summary of my central arguments followed by an anecdote framing some final thoughts on Kanak youth, the assertion of indigeneity and the future in New Caledonia.

Part I
BECOMING AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

- Chapter 2 -

COURTEOUS, FRIENDLY, FEROCIOUS CANNIBALS

The term Kanak, which we have adopted today, is also a position taken in relation to colonization. We were recognized in the beginning; Captain Cook participated in a custom of exchange with the people he found, the Kanak. Then, with colonization, we became “dirty Kanak,” with the missionaries, we were “Melanesians.”

When we started to take into consideration Kanak claims for recognition, especially in 1951, when the Kanak voted and won the majority in the Territorial Assembly, we became “Indigenous.” “Melanesians,” “Indigenous,” we are tired of being baptized differently by people who don’t know us.

Thus we have decided, through the assertion of independence, that we will call ourselves “Kanaks,” and that our country will be “Kanaky.”

- Jean-Marie Tjibaou, 1984

It is the discourse which constitutes the subject position of the social agent, and not, therefore, the social agent which is the origin of the discourse.

- Laclau and Mouffe, 1985

The Kanak became an indigenous people on September 24, 1853. On this date, at the small Catholic missionary settlement of Balade, on the northeast coast of the Grande-Terre, Rear Admiral Auguste Febvrier-Despointes “took possession” of New Caledonia for France. In the presence of naval officers, a handful of Marist Fathers and a few local chiefs, a French flag was raised and saluted with 21 cannon shots from

the warship *Phoque*, anchored nearby. The people and lands of New Caledonia were now subject to the sovereignty of France.

What does it mean to be indigenous? More specifically, what does indigeneity mean in New Caledonia, and to whom?

Wither Indigeneity?

“Indigenous” is generally used to refer to marginalized or subjugated aboriginal peoples of land that remains colonized by another dominant group. This definition is often expanded beyond the category of “fourth world peoples” to refer to a specific national identity for (post-colonial) citizens who define themselves through common discourse of race, ethnicity, and/or culture, which transcends all other identities by virtue of priority” (Sanders 1998; Kenrick & Lewis 2004). The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, responsible for issuing the 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, specifically underlines self-definition as inherent to the delineation of indigenous identity, and maintains a decentralized flexibility to the “indigenous category” (Corntassel & Primeau 1995; Niezen 2003). The difficulty of developing a fixed definition of the term “indigenous” has sparked a series of debates within anthropology concerning the merits and pitfalls of placing definite parameters around the category (c.f. Barsh 1996; Bowen 2000; Colchester 2002; Kuper 2003).

The problems involved in delimiting the indigenous category stem from the marked heterogeneity of indigeneity. As De Oliveira (2006) argues, the indigenous

category only exists in relationship to a nation-state. Indigeneity emerges from “collaborative friction” (Tsing 2005) and includes “practices and institutions other to itself.” Consequently, “indigeneity as a historical formation is ‘partially connected’ with and participates in...nation-state institutions” (de la Cadena 2012:347). Thus the diverse histories of nations-states and their colonial projects have important implications for indigenous cultural and political projects. Nicolas Thomas (1994:190) elaborates:

Just as colonial culture needs to be understood, not as an essence but as a plurality of projects...anti- and postcolonial culture cannot be taken as a unitary set of meanings or a stable position. The ways of subverting limiting constructions of Maoriness and Aboriginality [for example] are thus as diverse as the practices, media and genres through which such subversions are effected.

Most recent anthropological work thus approaches indigeneity as a mutually-constructed subject position defined by particular historical, social and political articulations, rather than any uniform, intrinsically “other” content (Biolsi 1995; Li 2000; Clifford 2001).

Yet what indigenous peoples may share is a dependence on external representations as a matter of survival and surveillance (Fabian 1983; Kenrick & Lewis 2004; Myers 2002; Niezen 2003; Smith 1999; Turner 1991). In Fred Myers’ (2013) observation, “indigenous peoples...have to live through the hegemonic framework of representations produced by the dominant sector.” Nation-states both produce and reify representations of indigenous peoples. In this way, “the recognition provided by institutions such as law, government, and cultural policy not only impact indigenous peoples on the ground – they forge the ways in which they are allowed to

“be” (Geismar 2013). This is perhaps particularly true in a settler state, like New Caledonia. Settler dominions rely on the imposition of particular representational regimes to which the temporal “prior” and its sign, Indigenous peoples are central. The hegemony of the settler state inscribes itself on the lands and bodies of indigenous peoples, whose representation as distinctively “other” is a crucial component in nation-building projects (Myers 1991; Povinelli 1998, 2002; Simpson 2007).

Representation always “takes place in a terrain already partly sedimented and partly penetrated by relations of power” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) and to represent is in many senses to make a claim. The claims made by settler-colonial representations “empower and disempower Indigenous peoples in the present.” As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) notes, it was Captain Cook’s account of Australian Aborigines as “uncivilized” and without any form of land-tenure that led to the doctrine of *terra nullius*—a legal regime that endured until the 1992 Mabo Decision. According to Audra Simpson (2007:69), representations of indigenous peoples thus function as

...[C]ategorical forms of recognition and mis-recognition...indebted to deep philosophical histories of seeing and knowing; tied to legal fiat, they may enable disproportionately empowered political forms (such as “Empire,” or particular nation-states such as the United States, Canada and Australia) to come into being in a very short time, as without that category of knowing and its concomitant force land could not be wrested from those that belong to it, and those to whom it rightfully belongs.

I follow Moreton-Robinson and Simpson here in arguing that exogenous representations of indigenous peoples, especially in the context of settler-dominion,

frequently result in a legal and historical effacement of indigeneity on which the legitimacy of the settler-state is in many ways predicated.

Accordingly, indigenous sovereignty struggles are often deeply intertwined with struggles over self-representation and visibility. This dissertation fits into a larger body of scholarship that examines cultural production as a pivotal arena in which indigenous cultural activists reformulate and resist the representational regime of the state in order to make claims about sovereignty and the future (cf. Ginsburg 1991, 1997; Ginsburg & Myers 2006; Conklin 1997; Turner 1995, 1999). I explore how contemporary young Kanak imagine what it means to be “Kanak” and “indigenous,” and how they create and mobilize representations of “Kanak identity” in order to position themselves in particular ways vis-à-vis the French state, the Melanesian region, global indigeneity and each other. Encoded in these representations is a particular vision of indigenous sovereignty as well as claims about the types of futures that are possible and desirable for Kanak people.

Contemporary formulations of Kanak sovereignty and cultural identity exist both because and in spite of a history of French settler colonialism in New Caledonia. In this chapter, I develop a genealogy for the present day formulation of the “indigenous category” in New Caledonia. In doing so; I critically examine the development of “the Kanak” as an indigenous people, a cultural group and a political entity. Colonial representations of Kanak as distinctively “other” (unassimilable, savage, without a true culture) were central to a French settler-colonial project that sought to transform New Caledonia into a French republican space. Early colonial accounts of Kanak

people became histories and these histories continue to have real cultural, political and juridical implications for contemporary Kanak people. These are representations that reach forward in time. They are strategically cited and re-cited in order to construct a particular version of New Caledonia and to stake claims on its possible futures. Thus what I present here is a history of representation in New Caledonia, one that begins on shores of Balade in September 1853 with twenty-one cannon shots and the raising of a French flag—a moment when Kanak people “left their own spaces of self-definition and became ‘Indigenous’” (Simpson 2007).

Early Explorers

Captain James Cook anchored the *Resolution* off the coast of Balade in 1774, more than seventy-five years before the French *prise de possession* in the same location. The boat would stay only eight days; its crew had “the utmost difficulty difficulty in communicating verbally with the people they encountered, the language being different from any other they had met in the Pacific” (Beaglehole 1961, in Douglas 1970). Yet Cook and the ship’s naturalist George Forster were able to observe and make “estimations as to the nature and character” of the people with whom contact was made, and their reports are the first known European descriptions of Kanak people and society. Both Cook and Forster were unanimous as to the “friendliness, courtesy and honesty of the people they met” (Douglas 1970). Cook noted that the natives were, “Not in the least addicted to pelfering [sic], which is more

than can be said of any other nation in this Sea” (Shineberg 1967:55).¹⁴ The “friendly” people of newly christened “New Caledonia,” remained as such in the European eye until 1793, when French Captain Bruny D’Entrecasteaux made landfall, again, off the coast of Balade.¹⁵

In the twenty-year interim between the two expeditions, no further contact between Europeans and Kanak took place. It is possible that sandalwood or *bêche-de-mer* traders may have made landfall, but there are no written records of such voyages. When D’Entrecasteaux arrived in Balade in 1793 for what would be a nineteen-day sojourn, he had read Cook and Forster’s reports. Much to his disappointment, the “savages” awaiting him were not, in his own estimation, “good-natured.” The Kanak D’Entrecasteaux met appeared to him as “barbarous,” “surly,” “treacherous thieves” with “warlike habits” (Douglas 1970). Moreover there was “incontestable proof” that they were “anthropophagous: [that] they are avid for human flesh and do not hide it” (Douglas 2009:187 in Jolly, Tcherkézoff & Tryon). Citing what now seemed to be Cook’s misleadingly positive representations of the Kanak, D’Entrecasteaux went on to claim that it would be necessary to “reclassify [them] amongst the most ferocious of peoples.”

It seems Cook and Forster’s 1793 accounts of the Kanak led D’Entrecasteaux and his crew to make a series of decisions ultimately leading to his “unpleasant

¹⁴ Cook’s descriptions of other Melanesian groups were not as charitable. Of the people of Malekula, for example, he wrote, “they are almost completely black...puny, with monkey-like faces and wooly hair. The population of this country is in general the ugliest and most poorly formed of any I have ever seen” (Merle 1995:29).

¹⁵ So dubbed because the island’s rocky coastline ostensibly reminded Cook of his native Scotland (called Caledonia by the Romans).

encounter” with the natives. Douglas (1970:185) notes that the Cook expedition’s “favorable reports lulled [the French] into a false sense of security.” They did not make an initial show of force to “show the awful power of the white man’s weapons,” nor did they maintain guards around the ship. Consequently, several Kanak, who one might imagine, felt no reason to fear these strange interlopers, took the opportunity to come into possession of tools, clothing items and axes, taken from crewmen both on shore and aboard the boat. After these “robberies went unpunished” by D’Entrecasteaux, they were followed by a “full scale” attack against a wood-cutting party, again in order to obtain tools:

This situation was only saved by the use of firearms, and two cannonballs were fired over the heads of the attackers to intimidate them and demonstrate the range of European weapons. Henceforth no serious incident occurred, although an attack always seemed likely. Despite this, communication between the canoes and the ships continued unabated...except for isolated clashes, relations generally were fairly amicable; several inhabitants demonstrated positive kindness to the French, and the others largely ignored them. [Douglas 1970: 184]

Though no one, native or European, was killed during these encounters, they did result in the death of the noble savages whom Europeans had previously imagined inhabiting these shores. D’Entrecasteaux’s visit recategorized the Kanak in European eyes, transforming them from fellow human beings (albeit in a primitive state) to “ferocious cannibals.” Upon leaving New Caledonia, D’Entrecasteaux wrote, “[I]t seems certain to me...that [either] we must renounce visiting [Pacific Islanders] ... , or we must inspire respect in them by very great severity” (1808, 1: 359). As Douglas

(2009:191) notes, this was “a chilling portent” for future relations between Europeans (particularly the French) and the Kanak people.

Ethnohistorian Bronwyn Douglas has produced a substantial body of work on early ethnographic accounts of Melanesian peoples (particularly the Kanak) written by explorers, missionaries and traders. At the end of a detailed historical investigation of the possible changes that may have taken place on the ground in Balade between Cook and D’Entrecasteaux’s landfalls (which could illuminate the ostensible transformation of Kanak behavior towards Europeans), Douglas concludes that discrepancies between the two narratives were not likely rooted in the actions of Kanak, but in European epistemological flux (1982). Douglas maintains that Cook and D’Entrecasteaux’s descriptions of the Kanak must be placed within the wider historical context of shifting European discourses on human similarity and difference and an emerging science of race (c.f. Thomas 1989; Jolly 2007; Ballard 2008). At the end of the 18th century, following Cook’s voyages, “violent political ferment paralleled a dramatic flux in anthropological ideas and vocabularies” (*ibid.*). Douglas elaborates:

This intellectual and semantic volatility registered an analogous series of discursive shifts which in some respects were embodied or prefigured in the written and pictorial legacy of d’Entrecasteaux’s voyage. In art, empirical naturalism supplanted neoclassicism. In literature, Romanticism displaced classical Enlightenment values including idealisation of the primitive. In the natural history of man, holistic humanism gave way to the rigid physical differentiations of the science of race and in the process the modern biological conception of race was distilled out of the term’s older, ambiguous, environmentally-determined connotations...[*ibid.* 176]

Successive voyages of discovery in the Pacific “led to both a displacement and a reversal of an idea”—the idea of “the savage” (Merle 1995:28). The discovery of the

islands of Tahiti, Tonga and Hawaii fed European “ideas of an Austral Eden...where disciples of Rousseau would find confirmation of their ideal vision of the ‘state of nature,’” while encounters with the peoples of Australia and the Southwestern Pacific “elicited great disappointment” (*ibid.*). Bernard Smith (1985) dubbed these contrasting representational tropes “soft” and “hard” primitivism. While most 18th century descriptions of Pacific islanders were “ethnocentric and often racially obnoxious with respect to ‘Negroes’ and other non-white people,” they portrayed all “varieties of man” as having a common origin and were rarely “categorical” in their racial discriminations (Douglas 1998:176). In contrast, nineteenth-century accounts of Pacific islanders depicted “racial differences as permanent, hereditary, formative and, possibly, primordial.” D’Entrecasteaux’s 1793 descriptions of the Kanak thus mark a pivot point in a discursive transition. Douglas argues that they serve as a “synecdoche for the era’s dawning disenchantment with primitivist idealization of the noble savage and its supplanting by negative, ultimately racialized attitudes better aligned with a new age of intensifying European imperialism” (Douglas 1998: 177).

The Wrong Side of the Fence: Kanak and the Melanesia/Polynesia Division

This shift towards a racialized understanding of human difference is epitomized in the writings of D’Entrecasteaux’s compatriot and successor, French navigator Dumont D’Urville. The boundaries of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, as they have been known in in modern anthropology, geography and other related disciplines were set out in 1832 by D’Urville in an essay in the *Bulletin de la Société de*

Géographie. A map published along with the essay represents the divisions between regions much as they are perceived today. Polynesia (the “Many Islands”) includes Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island and the islands of the central Pacific and is peopled by natives with “customs that, with regards to rigor and detail, are not inferior in any way to those of the most civilized nations in Europe or Asia” (D’Urville 1832:5). “Svelte, slightly darker skinned” Micronesians (from the “Small Islands”) can be found in Kiribati, the Marshalls, and the Marianas. Finally, Melanesia (“the Black Islands”) includes Fiji, New Caledonia, New Guinea, the Solomons, the New Hebrides and Australia.¹⁶

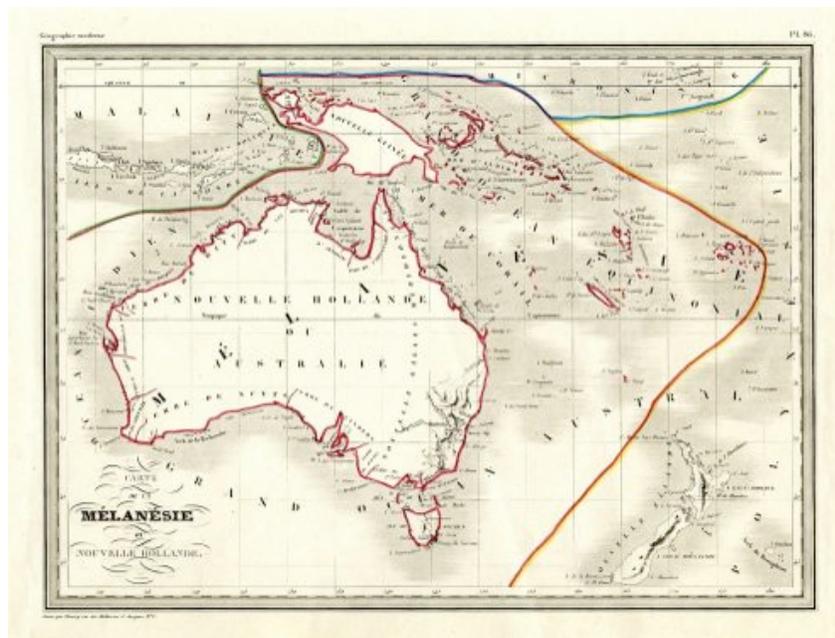


Fig 2.1. 1835 *Carte de la Mélanésie* (Map of Melanesia). Following D’Urville’s 1832 boundaries (Source: *Précis de la Géographie Universelle ou Description de toutes les parties du monde sur un plan nouveau, par Malte-Brun, nouvelle édition revue, corrigée et augmentée*).

¹⁶ Contemporary definitions of Melanesia differ from D’Urville’s original 1832 conception only in their omission of Australia.

The inhabitants of Melanesia are characterized by their “blackness,” “disagreeable features,” “cannibalism” and “hideous women” (D’Urville 1832: 11).

These blacks are almost always grouped in very fragile tribes, the chiefs of which exercise arbitrary power, often in a manner as tyrannical as that of many petty African despots. More degraded towards the state of barbarism than the Polynesians or Micronesians, one encounters neither a form of government nor laws nor established religious ceremonies amongst them. All their institutions appear still to be in their infancy; their dispositions and intelligence are also generally inferior to those of the copper race.

D’Urville also restates a point made by earlier writers—“unlike the hospitable Polynesians, the savage Melanesians always met Europeans with defiance and hostility” (Thomas 1989:31). The “advancement” of different peoples towards “civilization” was closely connected to degree to which their conduct accommodated European wills and desires.¹⁷ The Kanak, immortalized in D’Entrecasteaux’s accounts for their “ferocious” inhospitable behavior are thus “essentially Melanesian.”¹⁸ Despite having never visited New Caledonia himself, D’Urville used D’Entrecasteaux’s descriptions to class Kanak with Tasmanians, whom D’Urville believed to be the “most inferior” Pacific race. The Kanak were understood to be at the very bottom of a

¹⁷ Including sexual desires. The “Friendly Isles” (Tahiti) in earned their name in part because of the perceived sexual availability of native women. See especially the work of Salmond 2010; Kahn 2011; Tcherkézoff 2004.

¹⁸ Much of Douglas’ ethnohistorical work is concerned with locating “indigenous countersigns” in European representations. She argues that, “the very language and content of colonial representations not only register indigenous countersigns, but are significantly, if ambiguously shaped by indigenous agency and presence. That is, colonial texts encode cryptic traces of indigenous actions, desires and patterns of social and gender relations which, in unintended, muffled but sometimes profound ways, helped formulate colonial experiences, strategies, actions and representations” (2001:42). In this way, she argues that “indigenous agency,” is present, even in racialized, hegemonic representations such as d’Urville’s.

racialized hierarchy, the most “degraded” of all peoples found in the Pacific, the Melanesian in his most essential form.

As contact between Kanak and Europeans became somewhat more commonplace in the second half of the 19th century, ethnographic accounts continued to represent Kanak as relics of “deep time” and avatars of savagery (Bullard 2000). Many of these narratives, particularly those produced by missionaries, are particularly concerned with cannibalism. In his 1851 “Report of a Missionary Tour in the New Hebrides,” Scottish LMS Missionary John Inglis expounds at length on the Kanak’s apparent appetite for human flesh, evidence of their “fearful state of moral degradation.” Though Inglis admits that “the Polynesians” may also participate in cannibalism (“a practice happily unknown in the northern hemisphere, either in ancient or in modern times...never hinted at in Scripture”), the Papuans [Melanesians] “appear by far the worst of the two races.” Moreover:

...The New Caledonians are among the worst cannibals...The interpreter on board the "Havannah," who had resided more than a year among them, assured us—and from the universal truthfulness of his statements we had no reason to doubt this—that...on the east of New Caledonia, one chief, in the space of thirty-five days caused as many as seventy people to be killed for the express purpose of being eaten. He always alleged some crime against them; but it was well known that the real object was to obtain their flesh to eat. [Inglis 1851:64]

In his 1845 letter to the Superior-General of the *Société de la Foi*, French Marist Missionary Pierre Rougeyron similarly bemoans Kanak cannibalism. Despite making the observation that Kanak do not eat human flesh simply “out of hunger,” he still describes them as having a “thirst for blood.”

Filling the Savage Slot: The Kanak as Primitive Par Excellence

The word *kanak* or *kanaka*— meaning “man” in Hawaiian and several other Polynesian languages, was adopted by mariners towards the end of the 18th century as a generic term used to refer to all indigenous peoples they encountered in the Pacific. In the 19th century, a French spelling—*canaque*—was commonly employed amongst Francophone voyagers. At the end of 19th century, the word’s connotation shifted—it began to be used to refer to specifically to the dark-skinned, “savage,” peoples of what was by then widely referred to as “Melanesia.” *Kanaks/Canaques* were placed in binary opposition to “light-skinned, intelligent, dignified” Polynesians, who were considered to be “already civilized” (Boulay 2005).¹⁹ In New Caledonia, indigenous revolts, particularly the fallout after the “Grand Insurrection” of 1878, “aggravated this image and imprinted in the unconscious of the settlers an almost generic relationship between black, Kanak and cannibal” (*ibid.*). By the late 19th century, *Canaque* had become a metonym for “savagery.”

Despite inspiring great fear, the “savagery” of the Kanak was also seen as an indication that they were not long for this world. Drawing on the polygenetic science popular at the time, numerous descriptions characterize Kanak as evolutionary relics, “separated from the rest of humanity” (Bensa 1988:188). As late as 1947, Leenhardt

¹⁹ This meaning of “Kanak,” has endured to the present day. In many parts of Melanesia, “kanak” or “kanaka” is used to refer to backwards, uncivilized, rural natives. In Papua New Guinea for example, *kanaka* or *buskanaka* (bush kanaka) is commonly used in Tok Pisin as a mildly derogatory term for provincial, “wild,” villagers. Further afield, in Germany, “kanak” is still employed as a highly derogatory expression for Turkish immigrants. This is probably directly related to its onetime widespread usage in France to connote “dirty, uncivilized savages.”

(largely known for his reasoned and humanistic representations of Kanak) did not hesitate to draw on such scientific racism:

Anthropology has shown how the New Caledonian has, in his physical structure, his skeleton and his muscles, details that recall those of Neanderthal man, and are sometimes even more primitive than this man from prehistoric times. Their square jaw, their eye sockets, their curled toes—which explains why today they kick footballs with their toes without injuring them-- many other particularities led Sarasin [an early 19th century Swiss ethnographer] to see in them a divergent group from that which later became *Homo sapiens*” [*à voir en eux un groupe divergent de celui qui aboutit à l’Homo sapiens*]. [1947:11]

Living as they did as prehistoric relics in such a state of degradation and evolutionary backwardness, Kanak could not possibly survive the arrival of the European race and the onslaught of modernity it premised. Their inferiority in the face of the French civilization was so great it ensured their inevitable extinction. Bensa (1988:190), who characterizes the French attitude towards the Kanak as a “racism of annihilation” explains:

The progressive and inevitable death of all the Melanesians [in New Caledonia] was proof, according to several authors, of a natural process of degeneration and extinction which effects, since time immemorial, well before the conquest, certain ‘species’ of humanity judged to be inferior.

As Patrick Wolfe (1998: 2006) argues, settler colonialism is “governed by a logic of elimination” and “destroys to replace.” Bensa (*ibid.*) agrees that, “the fantasy of a complete disappearance of the colonized, leaving the land free for the occupiers, is without a doubt, part of the entire enterprise of colonial expansion.” But he goes further to note that, as far as the French Colonial Empire is concerned, “nowhere outside New Caledonia did this conviction seem so unanimous and assured” [*nulle part ailleurs qu'en Nouvelle-Calédonie cette conviction n'a, semble-t-il, été aussi*

unanimité et assurée]. The extinction of the Kanak people was considered a *fait accompli*. As French geographer Augustin Bernard opined, “It would soon be necessary to speak of the Kanak in the past tense” (1894:295). The Kanak were simply *too* different from the French “race” to coexist alongside them. H.L. Rivière, a commander in the French Military charged with repressing the 1878 Kanak “Grand Insurrection” reasoned thus that the depopulation of New Caledonia was the result of a general rule inherent to any invasion:

The major cause of the insurrection, the only cause one could say, is the antagonism one sees all the time between the conquering people and the conquered. The latter must be absorbed by the former or it will disappear. However, these black or copper races, whether from the Americas or Oceania, are hardly ever absorbed. They differ too much from the white race by their mores and instincts which have never evolved [*Elles diffèrent trop de la race blanche par des moeurs d'instinct qui n'ont jamais progressé*].

According to Alice Bullard (2000:32), “Kanak were the most reviled of all French colonial subjects, reputedly not even advanced to the ‘lowest rung on the ladder of humanity.’” Under such conditions, in which Kanak were imagined as “incommensurably different” from Europeans, racism in New Caledonia would take Bensa calls a “very radical turn.” It “banished Kanak, disconnected them from New Caledonia society overall, and, at its limits, which were, sadly, often crossed, it expelled them from the human species” (*ibid.* 193).

The racial formation that emerged in colonial New Caledonia, structured on representations of Kanak as incommensurably different, debatably “human,” and *en route* to extinction undergirds the particular iteration of French colonial policy which

would be applied there, particularly with regards to land rights and the juridical status of native persons. Much like the Aboriginal Australians with whom they had been classed in d'Urville's racialized cartography, Kanak were seen "fundamentally unable to possess rights to private property" (Merle 1998). France, drawing on Roman law and 17th century notions of the "*droits des gens*" elaborated by thinkers such as Grotius and Locke, did not consider the Kanak to be an "organized society." To legitimately appropriate the land of an "organized society," an imperial power must either *vaincre ou convaincre* [conquer or persuade] in order to impose and obtain sovereignty *or* negotiate the terms of cessation by treaty (Merle 1998:4). But if the original occupants were not considered sufficiently advanced to qualify as an "organized society," the legitimate appropriation of land could be achieved simply through *occupation*. Kanak, as "savages," were disqualified as sovereigns of their own land, which was legally defined as *terra nullius*—empty.

Thus, at Balade in 1853, the 21 canon shots launched from Rear Admiral Auguste Febvrier-Despointes' warship to celebrate the *prise de possession* were not preceded by Kanak hands putting pen to paper. Only Despointes and a handful of officers and clergy signed the document produced for the event. Within French law, the procedure was unambiguously described as a *taking* of possession, not a "recognition" "request" or "offer" of sovereignty (Morgan 2010:174). The text of the 1853 document reads as follows:

I, the undersigned, Auguste Febvrier-Despointes, rear admiral, commander and Chief of French naval forces in the Pacific Ocean, acting on the orders of my

Government, declare that I take possession of the island of New Caledonia and its dependents in the name of H.M. Napoléon III, Emperor of the French.

In consequence, the French pavilion is raised over said Island of New Caledonia who, from this 24th day of September 1853, becomes, as well as its dependents, a French colony.

Said taking of possession is made in the presence of Messrs. The officers of the steam powered corvette the *Phoque*, and by Messrs. the French missionaries who have signed with us.

Signed at landfall at the place called Balade on the above day, month, and year.

Signed: *De Bovis — A. Barazar—Rougeyron—Forestier — Vigouroux — L. Candeau — Muller — Butteaud — Mallet— L. Despériers —A.Amet— C. de Moue —Febvrier-Despointes*

According to Yves Person, “it is notable that this was a unilateral *prise de possession*,” in that no local Kanak chiefs were solicited to sign or act as official witnesses, even though they were present as onlookers (Person 1953:182). Well established as savages after sixty years of being represented as such, Kanak were apparently not even qualified to serve as *witnesses* to their own disenfranchisement. The *prise de possession* established France’s exclusive right to all of “New Caledonia and its dependencies.” From this point onwards Kanak were considered “usufructuaries,” not owners of the land (Merle 1998).

The legal *legerdemain* allowing for the effacement of indigenous Kanak sovereignty in New Caledonia was predicated on accounts such as those written by d’Entrecasteaux’s and d’Urville: accounts “that became histories which dialectically informed theories, which then emboldened the laws of [a] nation-state...” (Simpson 2007:70). Representations of Kanak as “too different” to coexist alongside or absorb

into the French “race” enabled France to *take* possession of New Caledonia and informed a colonial legal regime which codified the “inferior” status of the Kanak and their subsequent exclusion from the nation state. Representations became social facts (Rabinow 1986).

The mutually co-constitutive relationship between representation and social reality is distinctly manifest within the sphere of law (especially so in situations of empire). As Isabelle Merle notes, “in the service of a political power, whose legitimacy it enhances, the law participates in the ‘social construction of reality,’ which it imposes on now colonized natives [*aux autochtones désormais colonisés*] (1998:4). From the *prise de possession* onwards, New Caledonia’s colonial legal regime has diverged, often radically, from models employed elsewhere in the French Empire. The juridical specificity of New Caledonia—and its mutual imbrication with racialized conceptions of Kanak savagery—becomes explicitly clear when examined alongside the legal systems of two other locations of French Empire—Algeria and Tahiti.

Land Tenure in Tahiti: The Impact of Imagined Similarities

In 1768, when French explorer Bougainville arrived in Tahiti, he immediately dubbed it “New Cytheria,” after the legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love (Kahn 2003:310). The 1771 publication of Bougainville’s *Voyages*, filled with “references to goddesses, nymphs, noble savages, and the beauty of the landscape,” provided European men with an unambiguous vision of earthly paradise—Eden before the fall (Claessen 1994: 23). Much mention was made of the apparent Tahitian custom

of “offering” sex with young women.²⁰ Despite evidence that the young girls “offered” to the sailors were in fact forcibly presented by adults, Bougainville and others were convinced that “among people who remained in a ‘state of nature,’ women engaging in sexual acts were freely following the impulses of their ‘female nature.’” As Serge Tcherkézoff (2009:136) explains:

The misconceptions of the voyagers meant that Polynesian societies appeared to scholars of the time to grant more freedom to women, and hence they were labelled more “civilised,” in contrast to “Melanesian” societies where sexual presentations during the first encounters had not been staged. There, the women’s absence led the voyagers to believe that the local women had been forbidden by their fathers and husbands to meet the newcomers and, hence, that they were more dominated by men than in Polynesia. The social position of Melanesian women was therefore thought to be “lower,” and Melanesian societies were labelled more “barbarian” and “backward.”

La Billardière, naturalist on the D’Entrecasteux voyage to New Caledonia complained: “[T]hese savages won’t trade, [their women] will not consent to come on board our vessel; and when we were desirous of making a present of anything, the men took it to carry to them” (cited in Bullard 2000:36). Not surprisingly, New Caledonia never had a Pierre Loti or Paul Gauguin to extoll its virtues.

Within the mirror of Tahitian society, the French saw an exaggerated vision of how they imagined themselves: a highly developed civilization devoted to aesthetic and sensual pleasures. Where the Kanak repelled the French with their difference, the Tahitians attracted them with the fantasy of their similarity. Moreover, Tahitian society was hierarchically organized and possessed institutions that seemed analogous

²⁰ Much has been written about the degree to which the Tahitian “custom” of offering sexual favors is primarily attributable cultural misreadings on the part of Europeans (cf. Tcherkézoff 2009; Thomas 1997).

to those found in France—“a legislative assembly, a code of laws and a judiciary independent from political power” (Pillon and Sodter 1991:132). The French also found the indigenous land tenure system to be largely comprehensible within a Western framework for understanding land rights and inheritance. As French Naval lieutenant Edmond De Bovis (in Pillon and Sodter) described in 1855:²¹

[T]he particular character of Tahitian land ownership is to be hereditary and indivisible among members of a single family; it can be taken away through acts of war, or given away through voluntary gifts, or can be confiscated—although this last occurs but rarely and is more of an accident than a custom. It isn't their habit to exchange or sell their estates. So that, even today, Europeans can only manage to acquire land in the territory with great difficulty.

In Tahiti, the imagined similarity of Tahitian and French institutions, coupled with a libidinal attachment to what was perceived to be Tahitian custom, led to an entirely different instantiation of colonial land-tenure policy. The French considered native Tahitians to have ‘natural rights,’ and as such, their land could only be obtained through voluntary agreement or purchase. Since, as De Bovis detailed, Tahitians very rarely agreed to sell land—the French State never managed to obtain any land for the settlement of *colons* (as they did in New Caledonia). Instead, the acquisition of land by Europeans occurred almost exclusively through inter-ethnic marriages. This led to another phenomenon distinguishing Tahiti from New Caledonia—the emergence of a mixed-race social group: the *demis* (cf. Panoff 1989; Dauphiné 1996). These “half-caste” Tahitians became an elite group within Tahiti, as “pure Europeans never managed to reach a critical demographic mass” (Pillon & Sodter 1991:167). In 1880,

²¹ It is worth mentioning perhaps, that de Bovis was also one of the signatures of the document finalizing the *prise de possession* in New Caledonia three years earlier.

France made the unprecedented move of granting French citizenship to all Tahitians. As Pillon & Sodter argue, the “pseudo-egalitarian” aspect of the Tahitian codes of law, “almost unique in history of French colonization,” was founded on “an evolutionist theory of the relationships between nations” (*ibid.*). Within this highly teleological colonial ideology, Tahitians were expected to reach the level of development and civilization of France. Kanak, on the other hand, were expected to become extinct.

New Caledonia: The Myth of “Melanesian Collectivism”

Compared to Tahiti, pre-colonial land tenure in New Caledonia was more difficult for the French to frame in familiar terms. As in elsewhere in Melanesia, Kanak “cultural identity is a geographic identity that flows from the memories and values attached to places” (Bonnemaison 1984:117). “Membership in a clan or social group, individual or collective identity, is inherited through a network of places, the sum total of which constitutes a territory.” Despite being deeply connected to place, traditional identities were as much about journeys as origins (Merle 1995:80). Kanak socio-political organization centered on two distinct structures: the *clan* and the *chefferie* (“chiefdom”). The differences between these two concepts in some ways illustrates the enduring tension between rootedness and mobility in Kanak society.

The *clan* was a descent group connected to a single founding ancestor. This primordial ancestor (often represented as an animal—the totem of the clan) emerged from a specific geographic location, from which his descendants dispersed following a precise itinerary. The landscape of New Caledonia is thus criss-crossed by

genealogies; the routes taken by clan ancestors as they occupied a succession of sites.

Consequently, as Bensa (1997:83) notes:

There is not a mountain, a ridge, stream, swamp, clearing, habitat, a house, which does not bear a name. A significant proportion of these place-names serve to designate social groups, whether kinship groups, residential groups or political entities... These place-names cannot be reduced to simple landmarks, but become a diacritical element within a system of signs that classifies groups of people.

Each member of a clan had rights to these different named sites, which they could return to in order to cultivate, propitiate, or otherwise use. An individual clan's connection to multiple sites lead to a traditional system characterized by "centripetal movement, and a tendency towards spatial dispersion" (Merle 1995:80). As Bensa adds, "The mobility of groups was an ancient phenomenon, due to the fragility of Kanak institutions, each domestic unit having the tendency of reinforcing its own autonomy by distancing itself" (1988:17).²² This mobility was not admired by colonial officials. As one European observer remarked in 1881, "The Kanak are voyagers and their instincts serve them admirably in their vagabond wanderings" (Saussol:1979:19).²³

A *chefferie* aggregated clans into a territorial political unit whose frontiers intersected multiple clan "itineraries." Each clan within a *chefferie* was organized

²² A "typically Melanesian" cultural attribute.

²³ Of course the Kanak were as much farmers as voyagers, but as Merle notes, the Kanak manner of occupying the land also confused French sensibilities. "Fragmented and dispersed Melanesian agricultural space," bore little resemblance to the *paysage* of the Limousin. Cultivated parcels were scattered between unfarmed land, burnt or fallow areas. "Kanak *terroir*" was defined by the "interpenetration of savage and cultivated spaces" and "ignored the clear and distinct opposition, so dear to the Western world, between nature and culture" (Bensa, in Merle 1995:83).

hierarchically according to their perceived order of arrival. The most ancient clans were known as *maitres de la terre* (masters of the land/soil), and wielded significant political and ritual power.²⁴ However, members of “newcomer” clans were sometimes installed as *chefs* (chiefs) by the *maitres de la terre*, who “nonetheless continued to exercise covert authority through their control of the land” (Douglas 1979:17). The “foreign” identity of a chiefly clan was “generally concealed mythologically, but its occurrence illustrates that the principle of seniority of descent could be evaded at the highest political level.”²⁵ In contrast to Tahiti, where political rank was rigidly determined by genealogical descent, genealogy was not necessarily the basis of political status in Kanak society. In describing political organization among several groups in Papua New Guinea, Simon Harrison explains, “people are interested in participation in and allegiance to groups, not in exact genealogical connexions...It is not simply genealogy *but substance* which creates clanship, being absorbed by those

²⁴ This is the French gloss on the terms employed within Kanak languages. This concept exists within each Kanak language group, and most use their own indigenous terminology.

²⁵ Clan origins were often masked through the strategic manipulation of symbols. According to Bensa and Rivière (1988: 287), “These newcomers sometimes conserve their primary identity, and sometimes fit into their hosts’ clan and thus feel compelled to hide their exterior origins. This mechanism, and the contractual relationship that it presupposes, is represented in many narrations by the image of an object (plant or person) discovered in the bush, then brought back into domesticated space. This is a symbol, supposedly agreed upon, which allows the welcomed person to be conferred, within the confines of a social no-man’s-land represented by the bush, an identity that appears to be strictly local.” In this was the newcomer passes through an area of un-socialized space and, thus being cleansed of all previous social attachments, starts afresh with a new identity. Horowitz (2003:70) notes that many myths concerning a clan’s arrival, “an unusual fruit or object is discovered in the wilderness by two unmarried sisters who take this item home only to have it turn into a baby, whom they adopt. This child subsequently becomes the ancestor of the clan that is now no longer a newcomer but a fully-integrated part of the social structure, closely associated with the first-occupant group.”

who work the land...” (Harrison 1989:3). Kanak ideas about descent and political organization follow a similarly Melanesian logic.

French Representations of Traditional Kanak Land Tenure

As traditional “limits on land-use were determined by social relationships,” they were fluid and multiple (Pillon & Sodter 1991:161). Groups could align through marriage, split due to wars, or absorb into one another. Each geographic site usually encompassed several hierarchies of land rights, which were “liable to modifications according to events.” Usage rights were not generic, and certain forms of usage rights were linked directly to the relationships between matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups. For example, in the Djubea Kapone custom area (southern *Grande Terre*), the use of land obtained from *maternal uncles* was limited to the growing of annual food crops, while fruit-bearing trees could be placed on land obtained from *patrilineal descent* (Mapou 1990). Though land rights were inextricably connected to one’s location in a network of social relationships, certain rights to exclusive *only* to the individual at this “location.” As, Alban Bensa (1995:76) argues, “Kanak society is not organized on the basis of a collective appropriation of land.” Rather, even siblings may have different land rights depending on “[t]heir respective personal or family histories, the matrimonial or other alliances formed by each of them, etc.,” resulting in a “constellation of links to the land [which] constructs the social and political identity of each individual [...] and which is constantly made and unmade” (1995: 77).

Faced with such “juridical intricacy and strangeness,” J.C. Roux argues, “it is easy to how the idea of agrarian collectivism could impose itself in the minds of colonial officials.” Whether due to legitimate misunderstanding of Kanak custom or willful misrepresentation, French officials embraced what Merle refers to as “the myth of Melanesian collective property” (Merle 1998). In 1868, Colonial Secretary Mathieu declared:

In planting the French flag on New Caledonian soil, France pledged to leave to the indigenes a certain portion of the land, the first notion of justice given to a people still in it’s infancy [*peuple enfant*]. Traditional Kanak property appears to belong, at least nominally, to chiefs, but consists, in reality, of property which is indivisible and communal to the tribe [*tribu*]. The chief, eminent owner of the land, accords to his subjects the right to use the parcels which he offers to them. The subjects thus have only usufructuary rights to the land.

The decision to legally define all Kanak property as collective was characterized by the administration as, “as measure of respect for the mores and traditions of indigenes who are still cannibals and can not not survive too rapid a transition [to a more ‘civilized system’]” (Merle 1998). The colonial administration drew on depictions of Kanak as avatars of primitivism to “naturalize the principle of collective property and the omnipotence of the chief on the basis of primitive communism” (*ibid.*).²⁶ In essence, these were fictitious (or at least extraordinarily reductionist) representations of Kanak socio-political organization. Yet in being made part of the colonial legal

²⁶ For more on the role of the chief in Kanak political institutions, see Guiart 1963; Douglas 1979; Bensa & Goromido 1997. Though far from a stereotypical Melanesian “big man,” Kanak chiefs were in no way “omnipotent.” As Douglas (1979:18) argues: “New Caledonian socio-political units demonstrated a complex interaction between the principles of ascription and achievement in recruitment to local and descent groups and in succession to and retention of chiefly office.”

regime, they were willed into reality, resulting in what Merle calls—“the reorganization of the indigenous world.”

The colonial administration carved up Kanak countryside into *tribus* (tribes)—strictly delimited parcels of land bearing little conceptual or geographic resemblance to preexisting Kanak *chefferies*. In a decree issued on January 22, 1868 Governor Charles Guillain stipulated:

The indigenous tribe (...) forms a legal aggregation having the attributes of property. The tribe is administratively and civilly liable (...). An area of land will be delimited for each tribe (...) proportioned according to the quality of the terrain and the number of members composing the tribe (...). The territories thus delimited will be the incommutable property of tribes. [cited in Merle 1998]

Merle argues that by “constituting [the *tribu*] as a collective moral being having the attributes of property,” the colonial administration, “cleared the way for the final triumph of the myth of Kanak ‘collectivism.’” This “final triumph” had immediate practical implications. Since the entire *tribu* was rendered collectively responsible for the “conduct” each of its members, land could easily be placed in receivership and expropriated by the State as punishment for whatever the administration judged to be transgressive behavior. Ultimately, the invention of the *tribu* (and the definition of collective property to which it was bound) enabled the institution of an indigenous policy unlike any other in the French empire.

L’Indigénat: New Caledonia vs. Algeria

It was necessary that the Kanak remained “the primitive” in the colonial imaginary—equipped with a herd instinct and a mentality impermeable to progress—in order [for France] to

remain legitimate in the definition of collective property, the expropriation of land, and then the confinement [of Kanak] in reserves. (Pineau-Salaün 2006: 162)

The first *code de l'indigénat* (indigenous code) was implemented in Algeria in 1865. Over the following century, various other *codes* were enforced throughout the French colonial Empire. Instruments of “regular and daily” state violence, these codes created an inferior legal status for natives of French colonies; instituting forms of surveillance, restriction and punishment unlike any faced by citizens of Metropolitan France (Merle 1998). The existence of these repressive legal regimes, which generally denied citizenship to colonial subjects, directly contradicts the Republican ideologies of *assimilation* and the *mission civilisatrice*. Merle notes, “Like ‘Vichy France,’ ‘Colonial France’ is too often considered to be an episode which is bounded in time and completely specific, producing exceptional situations and results which are largely unrelated to France as a nation” (2004:39). Recent work by historians and anthropologists criticizes this tendency towards “colonial exceptionalism;” and the *code de l'indigénat* is often at the center of this revised historical thinking about French colonial policy (cf. Saada 2003, 2007; Lorcin 2006; Trumbull 2009). As Merle (2004:140-141) argues:

Studies of the *régime de l'indigénat* highlight the contradiction that lies at the heart of French colonial expansion between the fundamental principles of a democratic nation on one hand, and the exorbitant exercise of sovereignty from a distance on the other. This structural contradiction creates tensions not only at the highest echelons of the State, but in the valleys of New Caledonia... Indeed, among the new juridical frameworks created for the needs of the French Empire, the *régime de l'indigénat* undoubtedly raised the most acute contradictions in the Republic.

Many of the particularities in the New Caledonian *code de l'indigénat* closely resembled, and were inspired by, the indigenous code of Algeria. The reasoning is simple: both Algeria and New Caledonia were settler colonies (the only two in the French Empire). One of the primary goals of indigenous policy in both locations was to appropriate land for the installation of *colons*. Yet despite the similar logics behind the implementation of the indigenous codes of New Caledonia and Algeria, the New Caledonian *indigénat* would ultimately diverge in form and scope from its Algerian inspiration. As Pineau-Salaün notes, this divergence—like the disparity between the legal recognition of land rights in Tahiti and New Caledonia—was fundamentally based on racialized representations of Kanak as primitive savages. The same representations enabled the codification of Kanak collective property and the creation of *tribus*; and these legal mechanisms were the antecedents of the New Caledonian *indigénat*'s most exceptional feature: indigenous reservations created through the policies of *cantonnement*.²⁷

The indigenous reserves in New Caledonia have no equivalent in the French Empire. Though land was “reserved” for natives in the French possessions of Madagascar, the Congo, Cameroon and the New Hebrides, these cases involved delimiting the area around indigenous villages in order to protect them from the intrusions of planters and major concessionnaires. In New Caledonia, on the other

²⁷ Meaning the “confinement” of the indigenous population on delimited parcels of land legally defined as collective.

hand, populations were systematically regrouped in administratively and often arbitrarily defined territories in order to free land for both “honest settlers” and convicts (Merle 1998). France merged a settler-colonial ideological apparatus already developed in Algeria with a colonial project directly inspired by British Australia. New Caledonia would become the new “receptacle of choice” (replacing Guiana) for the “dangerous working classes” of a France plagued by political and social unrest.²⁸

Starting with the tenure of Governor Charles Guillain (1862-1870), France began an “experiment unprecedented in the context of the French empire: The construction of a “new society” in the antipodes, founded on a mixture of condemned and “honest migrants,” to whom France would generously offer the most precious commodity of the time: land ownership, and the hope of seeing flourish, in the Pacific, a little French peasantry, industrious and harmonious. Like the English convicts deported to penal settlements in Australia, French prisoners would build the infrastructure necessary for the development of a colony. Removed from the “pernicious elements of the *vieux monde* (including the anarchist and Marxist ideologies increasingly popular amongst France’s working classes), and forced to struggle in the “savage wilderness,” convicts would find redemption, and the path back to good. At the same time, the *bagnards* (as the prisoners were known in New Caledonia) would stimulate “honest emigration,” since “honest settlers” would be

²⁸ Guiana (in South America), with its sweltering tropical climate and pandemic tropical diseases, was deemed too insalubrious to maintain as a major penal settlement. Guiana’s infamous “Devil’s Island” prison did remain open until the 1930s however, and continued to house convicts—including Alfred Dreyfus and Henri Charrière, author of the escape *mémoire Papillon*—albeit in smaller numbers.

attracted to a country that was already “equipped” (Merle 1994). In turn, these “honest settlers” would provide an example for the *bagnards* and the assurance that the population this “new society” would not be exclusively criminal. France sought not only to copy the Australian model, but surpass it. In addition to time served *in* the penal settlement, most convicts faced double life sentences in exile, making their return to France extremely difficult if not impossible. In exchange, France promised ex-convicts land ownership in a much more systematic manner than the English had offered in Australia. In Merle’s (1993:5) view:

Here, the values are very French: The land as redeemer of all vices, promoting serenity, and the love of work and family. It is also this land that will be offered to poor migrants [to New Caledonia], from the potentially dangerous “laboring classes.”

The moralizing “wilderness” of New Caledonia would enable the creation of an antipodean *France profonde*.

In classic settler-colonial fashion, France’s project was premised on a vision of New Caledonia as “an untamed land, freely available for French husbandry” (Bullard 2000:163). The Kanak had no place within this imaginary. The success of the colonial project in New Caledonia depended on France’s ability to obtain land for *colons* and convicts; and so the Kanak must cede their territory. But the French would take a different tack than they had in obtaining land from Berbers and Arabs for Algeria’s *pieds-noirs*. Though the colonial policy of *cantonnement* was first used in Algeria during the 1840s for the settlement of dispersed nomadic groups, France shifted its approach towards indigenous land tenure shortly thereafter (Ruedy 1967:87). Algeria

was to be an integral part of France, and so the Arabs must be exposed to the full benefits of *la civilisation française* in order to “evolve” and assimilate. Thus the policy of *cantonnement* could only to be a “stop-gap measure,” employed until “Arab society was sufficiently advanced along the path towards civilization” (Merle 1998). As one colonial minister expressed, living on a reserve under “the exclusive influence of chiefs, on communal land postponed the constitution of individual property—the basis of civilized society,” and instead “places the native outside of the general movement of transactions [the market economy], that is to say the beneficial influences of colonization” (*ibid.* 9). Algeria was destined to become a “modern society,” conforming to a French model into which the natives were supposed to integrate via the laws of the market. In 1870, France officially assimilated Algeria as a *département français*.²⁹ In 1873, the lands that had formerly been reserved as indigenous collective property were divided up and privatized. In no time at all, the Arabs *were* fully exposed to the wonders of the free-market: after a period of intense speculation, the vast majority of Algerian land was expropriated by *colons* who amassed immense estates (cf. Ageron 1968; Bourdieu & Sayad 1964; Bennoune 1988).

Though the Arabs and Berbers of Algeria were “civilized” enough to have their land dispossessed in this fashion, the Kanak were supposedly unready to face the full

²⁹ Metropolitan France is divided into *départements*, or administrative units, which all of identical legal status as integral parts of France. Transforming Algeria into a *département* meant that it was subsumed under the same legal umbrella as the *Creuse*, *Vosges*, the *Loire*, etc.

brunt of the modern free market (cf. Mitchell 2002).³⁰ Their land, now carved up into legally defined *tribus*, would remain collective property. Why? Because, according to the reports of a commission on land tenure policy organized by Governor Guillain, the Kanak had not made “any progress” towards civilization, and as such, it was necessary to continue to treat them as “minors” incapable of ownership:

...The title to property must be individual and serve as an award for a real rapprochement towards our own morals...it is necessary to consider them [the Kanak] as the occupants [not owners] of state land...[cited in Merle 1998:10]

In this view, the recognition of private land ownership, so dear to the French, was a measure of progress towards “our [French/civilized] morals.” The Kanak, unlike the Algerian, was still a long way from obtaining this recognition. In fact, explicit comparisons between Arab and Kanak society were often made in debates on land tenure policy between colonial officials. During the drafting of new statutory text on land tenure in 1876, one colonial official argued:

While the Arab, in his definition of property, is much closer to our own laws, the Kanak is still in the primitive state in which this definition does not yet exist. The former has already managed to free himself from the assets of the *tribu* and create the ‘*melek*’ or property with a single owner [...] as for the second [the Kanak], on the contrary, property is a word almost empty of any meaning that corresponds only the concept of occupation. The issues that could arise from this vary according to the whims of a chief. [Cited in Merle 1998:14]

Since the Kanak were in such a “primitive state,” it would be unwise to attempt to bring them into the modern world too quickly. Guillain chose not to build a “colonial

³⁰ This is not to say that the French did not also frequently characterize the Algerians as exotic primitives. For instance, George Trumbull IV (2005:299) notes that, “many French ethnographers interpreted religious ritual in Algeria as evidence of Islam's failure to follow the normative teleology established by the French, and thus as proof that Algerians remained “primitive” objects ripe for French civilizing—and civilization.” Arabs and Berbers were also commonly described in French texts as “children” and “savages.”

economy that integrated the Kanak in the developments to come, based on the workforce they represented” (Merle 1995:103). Under his policies, Kanak were instead confined on “traditional” collective terrains, “separated from colonial dynamics and marginalized at the frontiers of European world in which they had no place.” As a “race,” the Kanak were too far removed from the French to be assimilated, except perhaps after a very long period of time. As Guillain’s successor, Governor Nouët proposed in 1886:

The assimilation that is the final goal cannot in my opinion be obtained all of a sudden by the contact of the two races unless there were to be a sudden inundation of the country by the French element. In the contrary case, any premature effort at assimilation can only lead to confusion and waste. It would be best to leave the native population its institutions and its chiefs all the while reinforcing the police and security measures made necessary by the presence, throughout the country, of isolated settlers. At present, it is not so much a matter of dotting the New Caledonian native with new institutions as giving official recognition to those that exist, of defining them and ensuring public order. [Cited in Muckle 2010:133]

Of course, collective property (at least in the form of the *tribu*) was already a completely “new” Kanak institution, forcibly imposed by the colonial administration. Regardless, in the evolutionist logic adhered to by Nouët and others, the Kanak were “savages, living in a state of primitive communism which excluded their access to private property, the symbol of ‘evolved’ civilizations” (Merle 1993:5). Despite its deep ideological underpinnings, this reasoning was brutally practical as well. The success of the colonial project in New Caledonia depended on the availability of lands to allocate to free settlers and former convicts. By defining *tribu* lands as inalienable and prohibiting direct sales between *colons* and Kanak, the administration was able to

maintain complete control over the partition and allotment of terrain and avoid the rapid dissipation of land resources.

Kanak Resistance: The Great Revolt of 1878

In 1878, the largest indigenous insurrection ever experienced in New Caledonia—known as the “Great Revolt”—provoked a “profound historical rupture in the history of the country at the same time as it created the conditions of a colonial revival” (*ibid.* 106). The land policies instituted by Governor Guillain between 1862-1870 had opened up the fertile lands of the La Foa Valley region (100 km north of Nouméa) to settlement by *colons* while delimiting the lands around local *tribus*. Following the notion that Kanak land tenure only extended to land that was “occupied,” land used for crop rotation was declared “empty,” seized by the government, and redistributed to settlers. Kanak were pushed into surrounding high mountain valleys with poor soil, and even there, settlers’ cattle strayed into their gardens, destroying taro and yam fields. Tensions reached a breaking point in June 1878.³¹ Led by *grand chef* Ataï of Komalé, Kanak launched a prolonged series of raids and attacks on settlers and military outposts. The events allied several thousand Kanak from *chefferies* in the region between Boulopari and Poya, which had been particularly hard hit by the imposition of recent land policies. The colonial administration was taken completely by surprise as well-organized parties of Kanak insurgents descended on *gendarmaries*, penitentiary camps and the farms of isolated *colons*, burning

³¹ In a famous anecdote, Ataï is said to have approached a colonial official with two closed fists. He opened one, filled with soil, and said: “This is what we had.” Opening his other hand, full of pebbles, he added: “this is what you have left us” (Saussol 1979:194).

settlements and killing soldiers and colonists. Residents of Nouméa were apparently terrified that Kanak would eventually make it far enough south to take the capital.³²

It was not to be. After nine months of fighting, the revolt was put down by the French military forces and alliances that pitted Ataï's clan against rival clans from the Canala region on the east coast. Ataï and Andja, his "*sorcièr-guerrisseur*" (sorcerer-healer) were speared and killed by another Kanak. Both of their decapitated heads and one of Ataï's hands were preserved in formaldehyde and sent to France, where they were examined by famed physical anthropologist Paul Broca.³³ The Paris Anthropological Society pronounced it a likely missing link to apes (Dauphiné 2006:73). It is hard to imagine the head of Abd El-Kader (the 19th century Algerian military leader famous for leading the struggle against French invasion) preserved in formaldehyde and subjected to the same evolutionist, anthropometric curiosity. Their categorization as "cannibal savages" allowed Kanak (and their political leaders) to be treated as scientific curiosities, something other than fully human. Even when clearly exercising political agency through a series of intricately organized attacks against

³² A great deal has been written in French about the 1878 revolt. See Guiart 1968; Latham 1978; Dousset-Leenhardt 1978; Boubin-Boyer 2008.

³³ In a 1879 report published in the *Bulletins de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, Broca remarked that Ataï's head "had arrived in a perfect state of preservation," one could easily observe that he was "of the Melanesian race," his skin was "absolutely black," and the "creases in his palms appear similar to ours" (Broca 1879:616). The same report continues to debate whether the "sorcerer" was Polynesian or Melanesian, as he "has straight hair, but the face of a Melanesian." D'Urville's racialized divide continued to confound. Also worth noting: there is an active movement to return Ataï's head to New Caledonia. According to the French Government the head is officially "lost." It's last known whereabouts were the Musée Broca. I was told by one older Kanak activist, mother of well-known musician Dick Buama, that, "If they [the French government] ever return the head, they better be ready, because it will be war. It will remind all the young Kanak of what happened."

colonial rule, Kanak actions were encompassed by the discourse of savagery. The New Caledonian press characterized the insurrection as the result of irrepressible Kanak savagery, not as a reaction to harsh colonial policies. The French considered the “comportment of the Kanak” as the “antithesis of civilized morality...revealing nothing of a culture and referring only to instinct” (Kohler 1991:47). Their representation as savages only capable of following their “instincts,” robbed Kanak of political agency. As Alice Bullard (2000:50) remarks:

Kanak volition and actions were subsumed in an encompassing discourse of savagery and civilization. Relegated to the category “savage,” the Kanak could not resist the French without triggering further allegations of savagery. French incursion, Kanak resistance, and further French incursions with increased violence: this pattern of interaction contributed to escalating violence and displacement, as well as to escalating rhetoric of “savagery.”

As I will argue later in this dissertation, this same rhetoric continues to override Kanak struggles for political rights and recognition today.



Fig. 2.2. Engraving of Chef Ataï (from *Le Courrier illustré de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 24 août 1878. *Coll. Bouge*).

The final toll of the insurrection was staggering, particularly if one considers the territory's population at the time: two-hundred Europeans dead, and at least 1,200 Kanak (Saussol 1979:242). Guiart (1968) estimates that the number is actually closer to 2,860, or about a third of the Kanak population living in the central Grand Terre. Retaliation by the French was swift and brutal. Villages were systematically destroyed, crops burnt. Hundred of "rebels" were exiled to Île des Pins or Belep (smaller islands to the far south and north of the Grande Terre, respectively). Clans who fought alongside Ataï lost their lands and were forcibly relocated to reserves in distant regions, conveniently freeing up some of the best agricultural land in the territory. Ironically, the insurrection temporarily decreased tensions between Kanak

and settlers over land, since the huge swath of terrain opened up by the forcible relocation of clans provided the administration with plenty of land to grant to *colons* and convicts. With Kanak villages empty, there were no yam and taro gardens left for settlers' cattle to pillage. The "wild frontier" of New Caledonia had been brought into the realm of French civilization, its fecund landscapes inviting the domesticating labor of settlers. As celebrated *Caldoche* writer Jean Mariotti wrote:

All of this [the success of colonialism] did not take place without some opposition. Cyclones and floods often put everything in question. Certain plants that were thought to be useful were found to be poisonous. The great Insurrection of 1878 threatened to compromise the entire enterprise undertaken [...] Plants and men fought before finding their balance. [...] The whole island is now pacified and fertile. [Mariotti 1953:82]

Mariotti characterizes the Kanak insurrection as a "natural" obstacle to be overcome by French settlers, like "cyclones and floods" or "poisonous plants." By positioning the Kanak as a natural, rather than cultural element of the landscape, Mariotti draws upon a common settler colonial trope. The Kanak are not men engaging in a rebellion to protect their lands and way of life, but constitute part of a wilderness that must be tamed and "rebalanced" for settlement to take place.

From *Cantonement* to Reservations

But the settlers kept arriving. In 1887, France expanded the "*code d'indigénat*" to all of its colonies, officially creating a new juridical space outside of metropolitan French law for dealing with indigenous subjects. The codification of Kanak collective property and the category of the *tribu* had already placed New Caledonia's indigenous

policy outside of French common law. But the Empire-wide declaration of the *indigénat* provided “an occasion for colonial authorities to perfect the administrative organization of the indigenous population by specifying the outlines of ‘tribes’ and fixing the responsibilities of the agents responsible for their supervision” (Merle 1996:225). The governor would set a definitive list naming all recognized *tribus*, defining the frontiers of their territories and designating their official chiefs.³⁴ In doing so, Merle remarks, “[the colonial State] constructed one of the fundamental categories of colonial power. The idea of the *tribu* becomes institutionalized. Named, they emerge as defined entities that one can collectively surveil, displace, punish” (1995:304). Chiefs were to provide the administration with an exact census of the population of their *tribu*—particularly men. The census provided the means for the implementation of “instruments of rational exploitation: corvée labor, provision of services and above all the imposition of a head tax.”

Indigenous policy until this 1887 had focused primarily on land and property. After the declaration of the *code d'indigénat*, the State’s attention focused on controlling and containing indigenous bodies. Colonial administrators were assigned as “district agents” entrusted with judiciary powers over *tribus*. These agents could rule on “disciplinary violations” committed by *non-citoyens français* (indigenous non-citizens), and were able to assign penalties of corvée labor, up to 15 days in jail or fines of up to 100 francs. The code also confirmed the right of the governor to forcibly

³⁴ Very often the assigned chiefs were not necessarily individuals who actually occupied a position of power or respect within the tradition political system. This created ongoing internal disputes within clans and chefferies, some which continue to this day.

remove Kanak from their *tribus* and detain them for an indefinite period of time (Merle 2004). This rule allowed the administration to expropriate Kanak land and resettle populations under the pretense of punishment for “infractions.” The following (cited in Merle 2004:154) is the 1887 edict listing “special infractions for indigenous non-citizens” (translation mine):

1. Disobedience to orders.
2. Being found outside of one’s district (*tribu*) without proof of authorization.
3. Carrying Kanak weapons in localities inhabited by Europeans.
4. The practice of sorcery or making accusations that others have practiced sorcery.
5. Entering into cabarets or drinking establishments.
6. Nudity on roads or in European centers.
7. Entering the home of a European without their authorization.
8. Clearing brush with fire.
9. Disturbing the order of work in homes, workshops, construction sites, factories or stores.
10. Circulating in the roads of the city or outlying neighborhoods after 8pm.
11. Disturbing the peace in the roads of Nouméa and the centers of the interior.

By making it illegal for a Kanak person to be found outside of their administratively defined *tribu* without official authorization (infraction #2), the *indigénat* code pushed *cantonnement* into a real system of indigenous reserves, in many ways reminiscent of

United States, South Africa or Australia. The resemblance is especially paradoxical given France's frequent condemnation of these reservations as "the mark of extreme violence that 'anglo-saxons' exercise against the primitive peoples they subjugate" (Merle 1998:100). Yet the Kanak's categorization as particularly intractable savages allowed France to reason that its indigenous policies in New Caledonia were somehow still copacetic with the "civilizing mission." Along these lines, forcibly sequestering Kanak on reservations could even be legitimized as "compassionate." As Père Lambert, a Marist missionary (and author of one of the first ethnographic accounts of the Kanak) opined:

It is humane and politic to leave the Kanak alone on their territories, where they now keep to more and more. In being separated, they longer impede colonization. We would not be assisting them by letting them intermingle (with *colons*). [in Lambert 1900:47]

Similarly, the imposition of the head tax and *corvée* labor (though disputed by some *indigenophiles* as unjust) was framed by colonial leaders as an essential element in the long, "generous" civilizing process led by the French. In an 1886 speech, governor Adolphe de Boucher proclaimed:

France is a generous nation, France was the first to proclaim the emancipation of the Blacks, France will never consent to destroy or to enslave the men under its rule. There is another way: to civilize them through work and instruction. It is also fair to have the aboriginal inhabitants contribute to the expenses of the general administration, which assures them a security that they never enjoyed before France claimed possession of this island. [in Merle 1996:234]

“Nuit Coloniale:” The Feillet Plan to WWII

In 1895, the appointment of “young and brilliant functionary” Paul Feillet as Governor presaged another brutal turn in indigenous policy. Feillet brought an end the transportation of convicts (he called it “shut off the tap of dirty water”) and began a massive project of “free and honest immigration” to New Caledonia in order to establish “a solid and vigorous rural democracy, in the image of the great *Démocratie Française*” (Feillet 1898). Under the “Feillet Plan,” the administration issued 133 decrees setting further limits on *réserves indigènes* between 1898 and 1900. As a result, Kanak reservations decreased from 79,000 acres in area to barely 30,000 acres in over just two years (Saussol 1979).³⁵ Feillet claimed much of the territory concerned was actually “surplus land, occupied by the Kanak at an earlier time” but now “abandoned due to the rapid *extinction* of the race” (cited in Merle 1995:298, italics mine). Like his predecessors, Feillet invoked the language of “civilization” to characterize his policies as munificent, rather than ruthless. Concerning the benefits of reservations to the Kanak, he remarked, “Having now fixed the extent of their [the Kanak’s] territory, we can now teach them how to draw maximum benefit from it. That is above all what I mean by ‘to civilize’” (cited in Saussol 1979:303).³⁶

³⁵ According to Marston Morgan, Feillet’s ultimate goal was “to turn New Caledonia into an administratively and financially autonomous colony (modeled on the relationship of New Zealand had with England at the time) and allow it to become its very own civilization” (Morgan 2008:252).

³⁶ In general, the French assumed that the Kanak were “inveterately lazy,” and as their agricultural practices did not appear to fully exploit the natural resources available, the Kanak needed to be instructed as to the *mise en valeur* of the land.

Unlike most formulations of the French “civilizing mission,” Feillet’s approach unites *civilisation* from its usual ideological partner, *assimilation*. In lieu of assimilation, Feillet endorsed an indigenous policy founded on the recognition of the *difference* between races. In a 1901 speech to the Chamber of Deputies, Feillet affirmed:

As for the natives, we must not delude ourselves with the hope of leading them into an impossible civilization, we will endeavor to make them enter the way of progress, in that direction, in line with the logic of their characters, their manners and traditions, to carry them there—that is the most attractive definition that I can find—for them to evolve themselves, not in our civilization, but in theirs. [in Merle 1995:306]

This conception of native policy placed New Caledonia far outside the established ken of French colonial projects. Premised on the idea that Kanak were essentially *unassimilable*, the “Feillet Plan” justified and legitimated the logic of marginalization introduced by *cantonement*. From here forward, Kanak were fixed on their reserves, separated from the world of Europeans, outside of and invisible to the dynamics of the colony. This system, known as “*grand cantonnement*,” remained relatively unchanged until after WWII, and over time, Merle argues (*ibid.* 8) it, “ceased to be contested. On the contrary, in the eyes of the majority of both colonizers and colonized it acquired the force of a phenomenon perceived as natural, as inscribed in the order of things.” The established structures of Kanak subordination were routinized to the extent that the colonial administration virtually discontinued its focus on indigenous policy. In a way, the Kanak had been pushed so far to the margins of the colonial imaginary (and colonial territory) that they seemed to disappear. As Salaün (2005:2) remarks, “To use

a psychoanalytic metaphor, the repression of the indigenous presence had a direct consequence: the absence of indigenous policy, or more so the implementation of a simple policy of waiting, until WWII.”

Of course, the Kanak had not disappeared. But the *indigénat* had profound consequences. Kanak society was plunged into what Jean-Marie Tjibaou famously dubbed *la nuit colonial*, or “colonial night.” The transplantation and confinement of Kanak groups resulted in the “loss of familiar places now forbidden to them” and “devastated a mainspring of pre-colonial Kanak society” (Saussol 1979:303). As Saussol (*ibid.* 295) explains, “space was a projection of the clan and its lineages. They [Kanak clan groups] could not maintain their [former level of] cohesion without the support of their environment, since it served as the record of their oral culture, as a history that emerged from the commentary of a landscape.” As a result of the profound spacio-cultural dislocation, Kanak suffered from what many called a *mal de vivre* (great unhappiness). Directly following the Great Insurrection of 1878, birth rates dropped precipitously, infanticide supposedly became common. Epidemics of sorcery, some resulting in the development of cargo-cult-like Messianic movements, swept across reservations.³⁷ One French commentator (again relying on a narrative of Kanak primitivity versus French civilization) suggested that the Kanak were suffering from “psychosis” provoked by having been “suddenly dumbfounded by the spectacle of

³⁷ Sorcery outbreaks were undoubtedly connected to the jealousies, suspicions and general social conflict provoked by confining two or more Kanak groups on an area of land that probably only “belonged” to one of them (if any of them). The traditional practices for incorporating “strangers” into a community were difficult to maintain in an era when many of the traditional relationships to space had been disrupted. For an analysis of the “Doki Cult,” one of the “messianic movements” that emerged during this period, see Guiart 1959.

new races...for whom everything is permitted and everything seems to succeed” (Brou 1973).³⁸ Racialized evolutionist teleologies predicting the extinction of the “savage Kanak race” in the face of modernity seemed to be confirmed. A 1908 article in *Bulletins de la Société d’anthropologie de Paris* entitled, “On the Chances of the Duration of the Canaque Race,” blamed the demographic downturn not on the effects of colonialism but on the fact that Kanak were “always hungry because they were “lazy” and did not care for their sick and old because of “their characteristic state of profound moral wretchedness” (Archambault 1908:492). The author also falls back on some other classic representations of Melanesians, noting that the Kanak were, “cruel and vindictive [...] the condition of their women is one of true slavery [...]” and that their traditions were “incompatible with the logic of our civilization” (*ibid.*). He concludes that the chances of the survival of the Kanak “race” are indeed “very uncertain.”³⁹

Yet even as the *regime de l’indigénat* brought destruction and suffering, it never resulted in the extinction of the Kanak people or the total dissolution of Kanak culture. In fact, far from it. As Merle (1998:98) asserts, the reservation became not only a “narrow place of confinement, but also a sort of private space that, sheltered from the eyes of whites, permitted the recomposition of solidarities, the perpetuation of a culture and the maintenance of an internal self essential to the survival of the

³⁸ This statement reads like a warped version of Fanon’s “nervous conditions.”

³⁹ Archambault (1908:501) also asserts that even Kanak who have “been assimilated to a certain point,” and “liberated from their ancestral prejudices...and obsolete practices” through French instruction or religious conversion, “can still not be accepted into our *polis*, that would obviously be premature.”

community.” In an ironic twist, the decision to contain Kanak on reserves, based on the assumption that they were likely becoming “extinct,” played a role in their cultural survival. Despite being “part and parcel of the colonial apparatus of racial and spatial segregation,” the reservation was also the locus around which “social relations are organized and from which exchange networks and alliances are developed that structured the Kanak world” (Waddell 2008:111). It is where the first born originates and where the ancestors are buried; where the yam crops that mark the passage of time and the rhythm of Kanak life are cultivated. As Jean-Marie Tjibaou later said in one of his earliest political speeches, in 1978:

The principles of the reservation, we are attached to them, because it is there that we live our cultured lives...Neither school, nor television, nor radio, or literature, nor theater, nor cinema offers us an *image of ourselves*. There is only the *tribu*. [in Mokaddem 2005:353, emphasis mine]

The reservation became a Kanak space, where the Kanak were permitted to “be themselves.” Though colonialism had made them the victims of other people’s representations, on the reservation, Kanak were safe to create and produce “*images of themselves*.”

However, as far as the European settler population was concerned, these “images”— these cultural representations—were out of sight and out of mind. There was very little interaction between whites and Kanak, the *indigénat* and the reserves had created a veritable wall between the two populations.⁴⁰ As Merle (1995:364)

⁴⁰ “White,” should be perhaps put in scare-quotes here, as in many cases “white” settlers were actually of biologically mixed parentage. But as I will discuss in chapter seven, identity in New Caledonia is culturally, not biologically determined.

explains, the frontier between whites and Kanak was traced on the limits of reserves, limits that symbolized the cultural gulf between the two communities.” Virulent racism among settlers towards the Kanak only made the cultural barrier more impermeable. “The *colons* did not know the Kanak and wanted above all to rigorously ignore everything that had to do with Melanesian culture or traditions” (*ibid.* 362).⁴¹ Most contact between whites and Kanak occurred in the context of *corvée* labor on public works or plantations, always structured by an explicit and formal relationship of colonial domination. As Bensa (1988:193) argues, the reservation system, “fed the [settlers’] illusion that Kanak society did not exist.” It created a chasm between the “white space” of Nouméa, and the “Kanak space” of the reservation that remains to this day, now re-encoded as an opposition between *la ville* and *la brousse* (the bush) (and now also the “white space” of Nouméa’s *quartiers chics* (trendy, nice neighborhoods) and the “Kanak space” of *quartiers populaires* (poor, majority Kanak neighborhoods) like Rivière Salée, Montravel, and Tindu, where my fieldwork mostly took place).

This colonial “natural order of things” was finally unsettled by the fall of France in 1940, when the “*mère patrie* itself became, directly or indirectly, a temporary colony of Nazi Germany” (Chappell 2003:189). New Caledonia rallied to Charles de Gaulle’s Free France on September 19th, 1940 and subsequently deported Vichy

⁴¹ Merle attributes this to the anxieties many settlers had about becoming “*encanaqué*” (‘Kanak-like’). “For the *colons*... isolated in a strange and foreign country, the challenge was to protect at all costs their belonging to “the civilized word,” to the social universe in which they had been born and in which they intended to reproduce. The major risk of the ‘colonial adventure was to lose oneself, little by little in becoming ‘wild’ or ‘*encanaqué*’” (Merle 1995:362).

supporters and Japanese residents. Suddenly, the colony was cut off from Metropolitan France and much more dependent on links with its regional neighbors. In March 1942, a veritable flotilla of American Troops arrived in the Nouméa harbor. New Caledonia was to become vital link in the Pacific war efforts and home to over 40,000 American troops (cf. Weeks 1989; Henningham 1994; Munholland 1986, 2005). As Munholland (2006: 91) writes, “American casual generosity contrasted vividly with the relations adopted by the...[colonial administrators] toward the Kanak.” The striking contrast between colonial and American treatment of indigenous people is not unique to New Caledonia, but mirrors similar situations throughout the Pacific where U.S. troops were stationed (such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, and Vanuatu). As Brij Lal (2004:50) notes:

Islanders were struck by the egalitarianism and generosity of U.S. troops. Transients without the vested interest in maintaining the acceptance of their superiority that was such a strong pillar of the colonial system, U.S. service men largely ignored orders against fraternization and giving gifts. The manner of their giving was important also, fitting into the island ways of cementing relationships.⁴²

Such was the situation in New Caledonia, where, for example, “it was not uncommon for American truck drivers to offer rides to Melanesians walking along the roads in the interior...[as well as] gifts of clothing and liquor” (Munholland 2006:157). The Americans also employed hundreds of Kanak to help unload supplies, clean camps, do servicemen’s laundry and act as guides, paying them wages exponentially higher than the “indigenous rate” offered by the French for non-corvée labor. Furthermore,

⁴² For more on Pacific Islanders’s experiences during WWII, see White & Lindstrom 1989; Laracy & White 1988.

“Kanak in American military employment were housed in minimal conditions that were nevertheless an improvement over conditions on the reservations” (*ibid.*).

European Caledonians fretted over the “moral dangers” associated with Americans’ visits to Melanesian villages. Munholland notes that the American’s “casual familiarity upset many Caledonians who complained of the increasingly ‘arrogant’ manner of the Kanak who, they felt, were becoming spoiled by the Americans” (*ibid.*). The American presence also seemed to be interfering with the colonial administration’s accepted teleology of indigenous “progression.” In a letter to the army’s General Counsel Lincoln, Governor Laigret wrote:

The native only works well under a certain constraint, fair but strict, and moderate in remuneration, that, to be sufficient, need not be excessive. The native collectivity must not be disorganized if we want to see the native population progress in number and quality. Local authority must be maintained if we want to be able to use indigenous labor in the best interest of all and too avoid future problems. (in Henningham 1994:31)

Ultimately, it was too late for the colonial administration to avoid the “future problems” to which Laigret alludes. As Kanak militant and current *doyen* of the customary senator Gabriel Païta asserted, “It was the Americans who led to the advancement of the Kanak people” (Païta 1999). As it had for islanders elsewhere in the Pacific, American occupation called the legitimacy of colonial structures of oppression, especially the brutal *code de l’indigénat* into question. Kanak experienced

what it was like to be treated as relative human equals, to be paid fair wages for work, and travel freely outside of a reservation.⁴³

Finally, in 1946, the *indigénat* was abolished. Kanak were again allowed to circulate freely, both day and night, and recovered the right to reside and work where they pleased. The constitution of the newly established Fourth Republic gave New Caledonia the status of a *Territoire D'Outre-Mer* (overseas territory), and Kanak became citizens of the *Union Française* (however, France did not grant the Kanak universal suffrage until the *loi-cadre* of 1956).⁴⁴ The enfranchisement of Kanak finally allowed their legitimate participation in New Caledonia's political life. The Kanak experience of WWII called the colonial "order of things" into question and enabled the development of a Kanak political consciousness. In 1951, Kanak won the majority in the territorial elections. In Tjibaou's words, this event marked the point at which Kanak claims were finally "taken into consideration." Rather than *sales kanaks* (dirty Kanak) or "Melanesians" Kanak became *autochtones*—indigenous peoples. The seeds of the Kanak nationalist movement had been planted.

⁴³ Older Kanak still guard fond memories of Americans, which they have largely passed on to younger generations. My husband and I frequently joked that New Caledonia was one of the few places in the world where being American was instantly a point in one's favor (among the Kanak, not so much among the territory's metropolitan French). Older Kanak men and women in their 70s and 80s who had been children during WWII, would often light up upon hearing my accent, and ask me to sit down with them so they could regale me with their memories of the American occupation. I was told numerous times that, "the Americans will always be a friend of the Kanak people." Memories of this period are still very much part of the narrative of the Kanak independence struggle.

⁴⁴ Under the *loi-cadre* (1956 reform act), France transferred a number of powers from Paris to elected overseas territorial governments and removed remaining voting inequalities. It was the first step in the creation of the French Community, comparable to the British Commonwealth of Nations.

- Chapter 3 -

CANAQUE À KANAK: RECLAIMING REPRESENTATION

We have decided to say no in order to become ourselves. “The Canaques, we know them,” say the colonizers. “They always say yes and we can make them accept anything.” However, deep within ourselves, we would like to say “no.”...Our elders, their memory full of blood, told us stories of imprisonments, of lynchings, of beatings, of which they were victims, for having dared to think and to say what they thought...Nothing is more intolerable than seeing a native hesitate (or scratch his head) to knock on the door of a European to demand from him what he is due...We are struggling for humanity and not against the White... The condition for racial harmony in New Caledonia [is that] each ethnic group should develop its personality.

- *Nidoish Nasseleine, September 6, 1969*⁴⁵

From the “formal end of the colonialism until the emergence of the Kanak movement for independence,” the most prominent political party in New Caledonia was the *Union Calédonienne* (UC) or Caledonian Union. According to the new French Constitution of 1946, the link between metropolitan France and its ‘overseas peoples’ would henceforth be based on ‘equal rights and duties without distinction of race or religion.’ Both the Melanesian and European leaders of the UC, whose official motto was *Two Colors, One People*, “viewed their political commitment and activities as part of the broader and renewed colonial framework of the *Union Française* (French

⁴⁵ Cited in Chappell 2010:50.

Union), established after World War II to replace the former French Empire” (Trépiéd 2009:247). Emergent Kanak political activists and their non-Kanak allies sought to bridge the immense social and economic gap between the Kanaks and Whites, by working towards the progressive unification of the “two colours” into “one people.” The Kanak still had a demographic majority at this time, and since virtually the entire Kanak electorate as well as a minority of “European” voters supported the UC, the party was able to hold New Caledonia’s sole parliamentary seat and control of the country’s Territorial Assembly and numerous *mairies* (municipal councils) until the late 1960s (Trépiéd 2009).

However, the UC’s project of “gradual multi-ethnic decolonization” was interrupted by what David Chappell terms “recolonization” by France in the 1960s and 1970s (Chappell 2004:200). At the beginning of the 1960s, Algeria and France’s other African possessions obtained their independence. Though decolonization in Africa was “essential to the peace plan in Africa...Algeria complicated matters because it was a settler colony” (Chappell 2003:190). David Chappell explains that, “based on their experience in World War II, Gaullists saw the empire as crucial to French prestige and power and actively helped to undermine the weak Fourth Republic” (ibid). Although de Gaulle was “willing to let Algeria go, he intended to hold on to the remaining overseas territories.” Thus France aimed to reinforce its position in New Caledonia (Dornoy 1984:94).

Simultaneously, the global price of nickel increased dramatically, launching New Caledonia (which is estimated to possess up to 40% of the world’s nickel

resources) into the “Nickel Boom.” The “Boom” created thousands of jobs and led to major government infrastructure projects, including the construction of two dams, the first transversal road in the north, and the electrification of much of the territory. Very few newly created jobs went to Kanak, who lost their demographic, and thus electoral, majority in 1963 (Léblie 2003:301). Instead, positions were filled by newcomers from Metropolitan France and Polynesia. By 1976, fifteen to twenty thousand new settlers had arrived, of which over 2,000 were *pied noir* exiles from Algeria who were “completely foreign to the history of this territory and who were hardly concerned with the slogan ‘two colors, one people’” (Freys 1995: 26).

Thus, as much of the French Empire became sovereign states, and New Caledonia’s neighbors in Anglophone Melanesia were granted independence (Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978 and Vanuatu in 1980), the Kanak found themselves even more firmly under the colonial thumb of the French. In 1972 a Loyalist political party won the territorial elections, “thanks to the recent demographic reversal in the electoral body” (Léblie 2003:302). France continued to actively encourage migration, even opening a special recruiting office. As the first stirrings of the Kanak nationalist movement began to make themselves felt, Nouméa’s Mayor Roger Laroque called on Caledonians to “breed whites” (*Il faut faire du Blanc*) (Bobin 1991). Remarkably, such sentiments were far from provincial. In a letter to the Secretary of Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOM), Prime Minister Pierre Messmer trumpeted the virtues of immigration as solution to indigenous independence claims, writing:

The French presence in Caledonia could only be menaced, save for world war, by an indigenous independence movement supported by some other eventual allies from other ethnic communities coming from the Pacific. In the short and medium term, the mass immigration of Metropolitan French citizens...should allow us to avoid this danger, by maintaining and improving the demographic ratio between communities. [in Léblic 2003:302]

In response, Kanak political activism made a dramatic shift from a focus on multiracial unity, to calls for independence. In Chappell's words, "the outnumbered Kanak now had to assert their indigeneity as leverage" (2003:200).

The Rebirth of Ataï: Establishing Kanak Difference on Kanak Terms

In addition to the threats posed by mass immigration, Kanak suffered the effects of a long history of colonial oppression and marginalization. Still largely relegated to the margins of society and mostly living in small rural villages located on former reservations, Kanak were stricken by poverty, alcohol abuse and a lack of educational opportunities. The first Kanak to *ever* receive a high school diploma did so in 1961. This is fairly shocking, even when considered in the context of other indigenous populations subjugated by settler colonial racism and oppression (such as Australian Aborigines, Native Americans, or indigenous Latin Americans). Indeed, in 1969 the per capita income in the (almost entirely Kanak) villages was nine times lower than that of the Europeans of Nouméa (Freys 1995: 254). The average life expectancy for Kanak in 1980 was 59.6, compared to 72.5 for European New Caledonians. That same year, the infant mortality rate for Kanak was 6.9 per thousand, better than neighboring

Melanesian states with rates of over 11 per thousand, yet over ten times higher than that for European New Caledonians with a rate of 0.6 (*ibid.*).

As Kanak faced this grim socio-economic reality and France tightened its colonial grip, a small but significant group of young Caledonians (both Kanak and European) were pursuing university studies in France, where they bore witness to the full brunt of sixties French radicalism, including the student-worker uprising of May 1968. Not all these students became radicals, “but among the many who did, two main tendencies emerged: Third World leftism and indigenous nationalism, both of which often allied against colonialism” (Chappell 2003:192). Among the newly radicalized students was Nidoish Naisseline, son of the *Grand Chef* of Maré. Naisseline returned to New Caledonia armed with the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Albert Memmi. In 1969, Naisseline started the *Foulards Rouges*, a radical political group named after the *foulards rouges* (red scarves) that Louise Michel, French anarchist, *communard* (and the most famous New Caledonian convict), gave to Kanak fighters as a gesture of her support during the Great Revolt of 1878. Clearly inspired by the *negritude* movement’s reclamation of *negre*, Naisseline called for Kanak to take back the formerly pejorative *canaque*, switching the French orthography to “K”s and uniting themselves as one people against colonial oppression. In the journal he helped found, *Reveil Canaque* (Kanak Awakening), Naisseline declared, “The colonized people are no longer from Mare, Lifou, Houailou or Canala. They are simply Kanaks” (cited in Dornoy 1984:204). Again drawing on the intellectual currents he discovered in 1968 France, Naisseline argued that Kanak should be able to

preserve their alterity. They wanted to “be themselves” on their own terms and thus demanded recognition for their culture. As he remarked, “We want to establish difference in order to mutually respect each other” (cited in Chappell 2010:59). When the colonial administration brought charges against Naisseline for “inciting murder and racial hatred,” Naisseline responded, “It’s true, we wanted to commit two murders: that of the myth of white racial superiority and that of the myth of Canaque savagery” (*ibid.*197).

A significant element in the struggle to “murder” the myth of Kanak savagery was the recuperation of Ataï as a revolutionary cultural hero. Naisseline and his contemporaries sought to destroy the notion, then widely held, that Kanak had passively accepted French colonialism. Instead, they sought to place the figure of Ataï into a long narrative of active and united Kanak resistance, one that continued to the present day and offered a model for Kanak nationalism. At the same time, an unpublished masters thesis on Chief Ataï by recently deceased Father Apollinaire Anova-Ataba (a Kanak Catholic priest) was circulating widely amongst Kanak and European political activists. The thesis, later published in 1984 under the title *D’Ataï à l’indépendance* (“From Ataï to Independence”), was a remarkable argument for the restitution of Kanak sovereignty and the simultaneous recognition of the legitimacy of other ethnic groups in New Caledonia. Anova-Ataba wrote, “We should not deny those who built churches and roads and constructed schools and hospitals. They are also pioneers. We owe them our admiration and profound respect” (1969:202). At the same time, he declared that the Revolt of 1878 was a “momentous moment” that had

“branded the minds of all Caledonians.” Directly comparing the events of 1878 to the French Revolution, Anova-Ataba asserted that the insurrection, “still profoundly marks, even today, the temporal and religious structures” of New Caledonia, and New Caledonians’ “mode of thinking and acting” (*ibid.* 202). At a time when a monument in the central square of Nouméa still glorified French victories by depicting a near naked Ataï surrendering his weapons and cowering at the feet of French Admiral Orly, Anova-Ataba’s radical text described Ataï’s demise as:

The tragic death of the man who was the apostle of unity, liberty and the independence of his people, who should serve as a symbol of hope for both Indigenous and European Caledonians. He unknowingly fought so that one day Caledonians, both white and black, would form a single people who bathed their roots in blood and who wanted to fight and die for their liberty...Melanesians must be proud of the man who was the spirit of the 1878 insurrection: Great Chief Ataï: in him is a symbol: the incarnation of this must be the model for building our country. [Anova-Ataba 1984:58]

Though still in its nascent form, Kanak nationalism was already beginning to unsettle established colonial regimes of representation.

Melanesia 2000: Projecting an Image of Kanak Culture

Anova-Ataba’s writings on Ataï also inspired another Kanak activist (himself a former Catholic priest): Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who would go on to become the leader, figurehead and martyr of the Kanak independence movement. Though Tjibaou did not share the same ideological leanings as Naisseline, they both saw the need for Kanak to reclaim power over their own representation as central to the struggle for cultural and political rights. Tjibaou called for the reassertion of Kanak cultural difference and the

recognition of the value of Kanak culture. He sought to destroy the illusion, so embedded in the New Caledonian settler-consciousness, that “Kanak culture did not exist.” As part of these efforts, Tjibaou focused on reestablishing links between Kanak and other Melanesian peoples. As inhabitants of the only French colony in Melanesia (and now the *only* colony) the Kanak had been cut off from much of the recent economic, political and cultural currents in the region. Bensa and Wittersheim (1998:370) note that, “one of the Kanak’s major objectives, through their demand for sovereignty, was to rejoin the other independent countries of Oceania.” Tjibaou was deeply inspired by the work of Melanesian leaders like Bernard Narokobi in Papua New Guinea and Walter Lini in Vanuatu. Adopting Narokobi’s “Melanesian Way” philosophy, Tjibaou:

Tried to emphasize a cultural background or art of living that was common to all indigenous societies in the Pacific.... He accorded great importance to what appeared in the Pacific as a resurgence of a *volksgeist*, a foundation for spontaneous complicity between Kanak and ni-Vanuatu, between Papuan and Maori and so on. [*ibid.* 375]

Beyond this, Tjibaou also wanted Kanak—who had long been positioned by the French as the *antithesis* of civilization—to recognize the existence and the value of *Kanak civilization*. As Bensa and Wittersheim argue, Tjibaou “attempted to establish links between the local and the universal, between Kanak civilization and all other civilizations” (*ibid.* 376). He advocated for a “new Kanak identity...which looks boldly to the future to allow the people of Kanaky to edify themselves, and to create an image of themselves which is well-rooted, but also new, favorable, and *influential*” [*italics mine*] (Tjibaou 1996:27). In a way, Tjibaou’s political thought takes up and

subverts the hegemonic trope of French cultural universalism, using it to instead articulate the universal value of Kanak culture and its ability to influence all other cultures of the world.

This was the philosophy that undergirded Melanesia 2000, a cultural festival organized by Tjibaou and held in Nouméa in 1975 (on the grounds of the future Tjibaou Cultural Center). The festival united Kanak from all of the *tribus* (tribes) of the Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands in one location with the goal of showcasing the depth and breadth of Kanak culture to both Kanak and non-Kanak New Caledonians. Tjibaou declared that the event would:

Allow Kanak to *project an image of themselves for themselves* in order to discover and redefine Kanak identity today, in 1975...to help the Kanak recover confidence in himself and to recover more dignity and pride...to psychologically unblock his inferiority complex, caused by the *cultural insignificance* to which he has found himself reduced. [cited in Levallois 1995:127, emphasis mine]

For Tjibaou, the Kanak's struggle to escape colonial constructions of Kanak-ness and live through *representations that they themselves had created* was inseparable from a struggle for political sovereignty. As I will delve into further details about Melanesia 2000 (particularly how the fits into a larger narrative of conflict between Kanak and French ideas about "having culture") in a chapter six of this dissertation, I will be brief here. Suffice it to say that Melanesia 2000 was not simply a cultural festival but, "an act, a political gesture fully assumed by its organizers, both Kanak and European" (*ibid.*). This large-scale "projection" of Kanak culture was a crucial turning point in

the political and cultural history of New Caledonia. Bwënga Raymond Pwârâpwépwe, who helped with the organization of the festival recounted:

We tell them [Whites]: “You have shown us your patrimony, and us, we want to show you ours.” Starting with mutual recognition, one can build a society... Today, if there is a white person who ignores our culture, that’s his problem... After Melanesia 2000, people started to respect the Kanak, they started to *vouvoyer* [address us in the polite form] for example, when before they would always *tutoyait* [address us in the informal form, used to speak to children, for example]. Then I saw that we were respected. If I am a guest I don’t impose myself. But him, the white, that is what he does, otherwise there would be no conflict. We must show our culture and demonstrate it, for he will respect us if he sees it. [Pwârâpwépwe 1995:147-149]

Les Evenements: The Birth of Kanaky, the Death of Tjibaou (and Independence?)

Following Melanesia 2000 and the rise of Jean-Marie Tjibaou as an important spokesman for the independence movement, violent confrontations between Kanak activists and French authorities continued to increase. Kanak leaders were frustrated with “attempts to make progress on the question of independence and the hostility or racism” of the *Caldoche* (historical settler) community (Muckle 2007:115). In the 1980s, the political discourse of the independence movement, in accordance with the worsening political situation, “became less compromising towards settler communities” and began to “increasingly challenge universalizing discourses and stress Kanak difference” (*ibid.*). Tensions came to a head between 1984 and 1988, during a period known as *Les Evénements* or “The Events.” In September 1984, Tjibaou, now leader of the FLNKS (*Front de Libération Kanak et Socialiste*) announced a general boycott of the territorial elections. Eloi Macharo, secretary general of the FLNKS, shattered a ballot box with an axe, Kanak set up barricades

around the island and some settler's houses were set on fire. That December, Tjibaou declared the provisional government of Kanaky and raised the Kanak flag for the first time.



Fig. 3.1. A 1985 Issue of *Bwenando*, “Kanak’s First Newspaper,” (photo by author, from Territorial Archives). The text reads: “Me too I want to live in a sovereign and independent country KANAKY.”

A long period of both organized and spontaneous violence ensued. Ten unarmed Kanak political activists (including two of Tjibaou's brothers) were gunned down by settlers in Hièngghène. Kanak militants occupied and destroyed the homes of settlers, many who fled *la brousse* for the safety of Nouméa. In 1985, FLNKS secretary general Eloi Macharo was assassinated (or "neutralized") by gendarmes. Several other young Kanak were killed by settlers who faced little to no repercussions for their acts. The assassins involved in the Hièngghène massacre were acquitted in court, leading independentist publication *Bwenando* to argue:

France is putting into place the legal tool that will allow, with impunity, the killing of Kanaks - the perpetration of genocide against the Kanak people. The Kanak hunt is therefore open, but this hunt is not even regulated (the chasing of deer at night with lamps is prohibited). [*Bwenando*, November 1986, cited in Chanter 1996]

In her dissertation on media and independence in New Caledonia during the 1980s, Alaine Chanter notes that the racist taunts shouted from the public gallery during the trial also "reinforced the perception among Kanaks that anti-independence extremists characterized them as a lower form of animal life" (1996:291).

One of the prosecution lawyers referred to a comment from the gallery, heard when a survivor was showing the wounds on his stomach, that 'next time we'll shoot you in the head, fucking monkey'...[newspaper] *L'Avenir* gave other examples, including the comment from one Caledonian Front member at the opening of the trial that: "when I think that during the next 10 days I am going to have to breathe the odour of monkeys."

The trope of the monkey recapitulates long established colonial representations of Kanak as somehow less than human, or outside of the realm of evolutionary progress.

As they had the past, these representations continued to enable acts of violence against Kanak.

Much of the violence directed at Kanak during *Les Evénements* was perpetrated by the French government itself and culminated in the tragic events of April 1988 in Ouvéa. The independence movement was growing increasingly desperate after the right wing's return to power in the recent French national elections. Newly elected Prime Minister Jacques Chirac acknowledged the wish of the Loyalist RPCR Party (*Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République*) to outlaw FLNKS in the name of respect for the integrity of the 'republican order'. As Bensa and Wittersheim explain, "FLNKS thereby shifted instantly from the position of privileged interlocutor of the French government to that of terrorist group" (1998:221). Shortly afterwards, the government proposed a new statute for New Caledonia that would effectively eliminate the possibility for self-determination as well as eliminate the "particular legal status which guarantees to Kanaks their difference in the French constitutional system" (Bensa & Wittersheim 1998:222). The legislation was designed and named after DOM-TOM Minister Bernard Pons, who believed, "the notion of the Kanak people is a by-product of Marxist dialectics" and that there were "no Kanaks but only one New Caledonian community which was a 'mosaic'" (*ibid.*) Again, the Kanak found themselves confronted with the illusion that they did not "exist" as a people and had no right to their cultural difference. The FLNKS called an immediate boycott of the territorial government.

On April 22, as part of the boycott, a group of FLNKS militants attempted to peacefully occupy the gendarmerie of Ouvéa. The gendarmes resisted and the Kanak militants panicked, killing two of the French officers. They took the rest hostage in a *grotte* (cave) located in the *tribu* of Gossanah. France declared martial law and French soldiers arrived in dozens of helicopters to occupy the island, now forbidden to journalists. French forces allegedly subjected the villagers of Gossanah to torture and interrogations. After two weeks of negotiations between FLNKS and the French government, the militants had agreed to release the hostages. France, however, wanted to make a point that further “insurrections” would not be tolerated. Bernard Pons, with the consent of President Mitterand, launched “*Opération Victor*,” “a veritable act of war,” consisting of an assault on the *grotte* by French Special Forces (Léblie 2003). Nineteen independantists were killed, including at least three who were shot to death after having surrendered.

The French media fixated on the “savagery” of the Kanak militants, noting in particular that they had used bush knives to attack the gendarmerie. In most cases, the reasoning behind the attempted occupation of the gendarmerie and its connection to the proposed statute was ignored and the events were depicted as if they were the result of some sort of atavistic barbarism. Anti-independence groups also fell back on the same stereotypes used to justify earlier colonial policies, repurposing them to support their contention that Kanak independence would result in a country plagued by constant instability and “tribal warfare.” As it had been in the Revolt of 1878, Kanak political agency was represented instead as “savagery” and the FLNKS

militants in Ouvéa were characterized as following their “primitive instincts,” rather than engaging in nationalist struggle.⁴⁶

Les Événements officially ended a month later, in June 1988, with the Matignon Accords. Tjibaou, wanting to avoid further bloodshed, signed the agreement along with political opponent Jacques Lafleur, one of the wealthiest men in New Caledonia and leader of the right-wing RPCR party. The accords promised the restitution of Kanak lands, rural development activities and economic and social *rééquilibrage* or rebalancing between the Kanak and European populations. The text also stipulated that significant government funds would be designated for the “promotion of Kanak culture.” Finally, the accords called for another referendum on the territory’s future in ten years’ time (in 1998). Many independantists were unsatisfied with the compromises reached in the accords and felt that Tjibaou had “sold them out” by foreclosing any chance of independence in the near future. On May 4th 1989 at a customary ceremony marking the end of a year-long mourning period for the deaths at Gossanah, Tjibaou and his right-hand man Yeiwene Yeiwene were assassinated by

⁴⁶ Even Jean Guiart, celebrated ethnographer of Kanak society since the 1950s, claimed “the drama [of Ouvéa] followed well-trodden traditional routes” and that the Kanak militants acted “according to the rules of tribal warfare...in order to increase their *mana*”(1997:85-87). He also claimed that the attack on the gendarmerie was not well coordinated and that this is unsurprising as, “There has never been any coordination between Kanak acts of resistance. Actions against the white man have always been in the context of prestige competition between the principal areas and the highest born lineages” (88). In a scathing response to Guiart, French anthropologists Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim argue by depicting “the Kanak activists involved... as atavistic ‘Ouvéa warriors’ who ‘could not think in other terms’ than those of ‘the rules governing traditional war,’” Guiart entirely disqualifies the political factors behind their actions (*ibid.* 222).

Djubeally Wea, a Kanak militant who had been injured in the Ouvéa massacre the prior year.

Le Désaccord des Accords:
“Rebalancing” and the Depoliticization of Kanak Culture

Tjibaou paid a high price for his attempt to negotiate the terms of a compromise between the Independence Movement, Loyalists and the French government.

Ostensibly, the political accord that cost him his life was meant to spur economic, educational and social development as well as mandate the recognition and financial support of Kanak culture. Finally, after ten years, the Matignon Accords were to culminate in a referendum on independence in 1998. On most accounts, the accords were unsuccessful. As Australian Geographer John Connell explains

[A] proposed referendum on Independence in 1998 was never held, and divisions appeared within the pro-independence, largely Melanesian, FLNKS coalition... senior management levels remained dominated by Europeans, with only 188 Melanesians to 1277 Europeans at the end of the period; over the same time period the number of French-born public servants in Nouméa doubled. Similarly in the mid-1990s there were 551 Europeans, seven Wallisians, three French Polynesians and just two Melanesians in the ‘liberal professions. [Connell 2003:125-129]

France had hoped that the influx of state money into the territory would lead to the emergence of moderate Kanak leaders and “social and economic development would reduce the demand for independence.” Thus, rather than an unprecedented compromise with the independence movement, the Matignon Accords were “similar to earlier more conservative policies that effectively sought to recolonize the territory on a more secure economic and social basis” (*ibid.* 125). As Connell (128) concludes, “In

many respects the Matignon Accord resembled nothing so much as a ‘hearts, minds and pockets campaign.’”

Furthermore (as I explore in Chapter 6), the massive spending on Kanak culture stipulated in the Accords (resulting in the creation of ADCK—Agency for the Development of Kanak culture—and the Tjibaou Cultural Center), has actually served to depoliticize Kanak cultural demands while integrating Kanak difference into the French state framework. Despite the specificity of the Matignon Accords to New Caledonia, France’s changing policies towards Kanak culture fit more broadly into 1980’s politics of *rééquilibrage* and *décentralisation* (rebalancing and decentralization) within metropolitan France. During the Mitterand administration, the French government transferred certain powers from Paris to local governments and supported policies explicitly directed towards recognizing and “developing” regional cultures while at the same time politically integrating them at a national level (Lebovics 2005). In this sense it is not surprising that Bensa (in Findley 1996:78) claims “public authorities seem intent on making this [the Tjibaou Cultural Center] a monumental facility...a flagship for the new role France hopes to play in the Pacific.”

The recognition afforded to Kanak culture under the Matignon Accords had the effect of emptying out much of Kanak culture’s political content, essentially re-inscribing New Caledonia as just “another region” of France with some cultural specificities. Though most Kanak “think of their culture as the basis of their future nation Kanaky,” France refuses to recognize culture as the legitimate basis for political claims. Thus, although commentators like Nic Maclellan (2005) have characterized

the post-Matignon era as one of “cultural revival,” I tend to take a more cynical position. Rather than developing Kanak culture “as a medium of access to independence,” the particularly Republican form of “cultural recognition” afforded to the Kanak under the Matignon Accords reduces the political dimension of Kanak cultural demands and undermines aspirations for sovereignty. As Bensa remarks, “At the very point at which the Kanak world is asserting its political singularity it is, paradoxically, being trivialized through its integration into the international network of museums and art shows” (2002:300).

A New Common Destiny? Reconciliation, Multiculturalism and the Nouméa Accords

Rather than a referendum on independence, the Matignon Accords terminated in 1998 with *another* political agreement—the Nouméa Accords. The Nouméa Accord continued the rebalancing project of the Matignon Accords while further delaying the question of independence. The agreement, signed by representatives from both the Independence and Loyalist parties, set out a 15-20 year period for the transition to possible independence along with further initiatives for regional economic development. A referendum on independence was scheduled for some time between 2014 and 2018. What made the Nouméa Accord unique however, was its preamble, which was widely hailed “for its unprecedented acknowledgement by the French State and by the non-Kanak signatories of a Kanak identity and the effects of French

colonization” (Muckle 2007:106). The preamble states that the “territory was not empty” when France took possession, but that the:

Grande Terre and the islands were inhabited by men and women who were called Kanak. They had developed their own civilization, with its traditions, languages and customs organizing the social and political spheres...Kanak identity was founded on a particular connection to the land. [Nouméa Accord 1998, see Appendices for text of the entire agreement]

The document then goes on to claim that “the time has come to recognize the shadows of the colonial period, even if it was not completely devoid of light,” and admits that:

Colonization violated the dignity of the Kanak people and denied them their identity. Men and women lost their lives in this confrontation or their reasons for living. Great suffering resulted from it. These difficult times should be remembered, the mistakes acknowledged, in order to restore to the Kanak their confiscated identity, which for them equates with a recognition of their sovereignty, *prior to the forging of a new sovereignty, shared in a common destiny*. [*ibid.* emphasis mine]

Does the Nouméa Accord signify a historical rupture? Does the French State’s “unprecedented recognition” of Kanak culture and the impact of colonization work to realign relationships between Kanak and settlers or restructure existing settler-colonial categories of representation? Does the Accord actually lay out the ground work for the possibility of a “shared future” in a “sovereign” New Caledonia? In my estimation, it does not. As Australian jurist Alan Berman claims, the Accord, “perpetuates the colonial dynamics of subjugation and domination...The emancipation called for in the Agreement is a convenient guise for maintaining more than a century-old colonial harness” (2001:12). This is largely because the Accord recapitulates (or at least leaves unquestioned) many of the representational tropes I have traced in this chapter. Furthermore, the “common destiny” called for by the Accord is intercalated with a

republican project of integration and a notion of *politiques culturelles* [cultural policies] that, rather than serving Kanak aspirations for sovereignty, perpetuates their marginalization and the effacement of their identity at the hands of the French State.

As historian Adrian Muckle notes, the preamble of the Nouméa Accord does not “involve a radical reappraisal” of the colonial past. “It certainly does not appear to suggest the presence of any decolonizing movement that might involve putting in place new sources of authority and placing distance between colony and Metropole” (2007:112). Ultimately, Muckle concedes, the preamble, “reinforces Metropolitan French authority and *privileges the overarching narratives of the sort that legitimized colonization* (denying the legitimacy or reason of Kanak resistance) and which attenuated the responsibility of either colonial administrators or settlers” [emphasis mine](*ibid.*). For example, the language of the Accord denies Kanak legitimacy and conscious agency to Kanak resistance. The preamble describes how:

The Kanaks were relegated to the geographical, economic and political fringes of their own country, which, in a proud people not without warrior traditions, could not but cause revolts, which were violently put down, aggravating resentment and misunderstanding. [Nouméa Accords 1998]

As Muckle (113) argues, in this account of marginalization, “Kanak appear as passive, or at best rebellious, with no active role in the development of the territory.”

As “proud and warlike people” Kanak “could not but” react against their unnamed aggressors “and in turn became the victim of their own “revolts” (*ibid.*). As they had been during the Revolt of 1878 and *Les Événements*, Kanak are not represented here as enacting political agency but as driven by their instincts as a “proud and warlike

people.” Propelled by powerful urges, how could Kanak know that the results of their actions would “aggravate resentment and misunderstanding.” The text of the Nouméa Accord depicts such conflict and violence “as a natural or inevitable consequence of European colonization or settlement” (*ibid.* 116).

Given the fact that similar language can be found throughout the document, perhaps is not surprising that the Nouméa Accord further delayed the question of independence. In the meantime, the Accord has failed to reduce inequities and make an appreciable difference to the living conditions and standards of ordinary Kanak people. It has also failed to control immigration. Perhaps most disturbingly, particularly given the Accord’s emphasis on “the future,” it has done little to assist young Kanak people, who suffer from high unemployment rates and educational failure. Since the Matignon and Nouméa Accords, the rate of urbanization has gone up exponentially. Nouméa, long known as “*la ville blanche*” (the white city) because so few of its residents were Kanak is now almost half Kanak. Many Kanak arrivals, particularly young people, live in shanty town settlements on vacant areas in and around Nouméa. Several of these squats (as they are known) have no access to running water, electricity or the city’s sewage system. As I examine later on, there is a significant sense of malaise and anger among unemployed urban Kanak youth. As Henningham (1993:529) noted twenty years ago, “Many of these young people are adrift between the “traditional” and the “modern” worlds, and—like their counter parts elsewhere in the Pacific Islands region—are prone to drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism and crime.” This situation, commonly referred to a *la crise de la jeunesse*

(the youth crisis) has provoked a full-fledged moral panic in New Caledonia.

Politicians on both sides have made ominous predictions of an impending “social explosion.”

Yet loyalist leaders in particular claim the Nouméa Accord has been a success. In a visit to New Caledonia in 2003, President Chirac “congratulated New Caledonia for having the will, after so much suffering, to construct its future ‘in peace and respect for others’” (Chappell 2003:385). It is clear however that Chirac (and the French State) have a very specific view of the future New Caledonia should construct. During his visit, Chirac also noted that he hoped New Caledonia would, “achieve its great potential and also play a key role in the Pacific.” Along these lines, he planned to revive French economic and technical aid to the region, because “France is an agent for stability in the South Pacific.” Other leaders cautioned New Caledonia to be “careful” about the decisions they made concerning the future referendum on independence called for in the Accord. RPCR head Jacques Lafleur warned, “All Caledonians must understand well, in looking at other countries in the Melanesian arc, how essential it is to have the support of a great nation...If we make a bad choice, we risk failure. If we decide to stay within the French nation, then this country will be heading towards hope” (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 7/19/2003).

Despite being hailed as an “unprecedented move” on behalf of the French State, the Nouméa Accord is still firmly rooted in Republican ideas about cultural difference and political identity. It is imperative to “recognize” the Kanak, but only before forging a “shared common destiny.” The French government and Loyalist politicians

in New Caledonia both clearly view this “destiny” as within France. As I will explore at points throughout this dissertation, the Nouméa Accords may call for the “recognition of Kanak culture,” but this is culture as conceptualized in the republican paradigm—as a form of identification subordinated to an undifferentiated “New Caledonian” citizenship (which ultimately equates with French citizenship). Connell notes, “It may be that the Nouméa Accord is innovative in embodying what can be seen as a ‘post-imperial dialogue—informed by the spirit of mutual recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity’” (2003:141). The promotion of “recognition” and “cultural diversity” may be “post-imperial,” but it certainly isn’t always emancipatory, particularly for indigenous peoples. As Povinelli (2002) argues, multiculturalism often functions as a form of domination: “The real hopes and optimisms invested in... multiculturalism...divert social energy from other political forms and imaginaries...[and]...make certain violences appear accidental to a social system rather than generated by it” (2002:7).

A parallel can be drawn between the Nouméa Accord and “post-imperial” efforts towards “reconciliation” in other settler colonies (such as Canada’s 2008 apology to Native Canadians subjected to the residential school system, New Zealand’s 1998 apology for its failure to prevent the dispossession of Maori lands or Kevin Rudd’s 2008 apology to Aboriginal Australians). Kiwi anthropologist Miranda Johnson argues that “what has happened through the affective phrasing of reconciliation is that the authority of the settler state has been cast away from the former imperial metropole and localized in terms of more indigenous claims of political belonging” (2011:187).

Yet this is certainly *not* the case with the Nouméa Accord, which arguably *re-locates* authority in Metropolitan France. Furthermore, the term “post-imperial” seems particularly problematic in the case of New Caledonia, a French possession still on the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Johnson (*ibid.*) also claims that what reconciliation “denotes might also be considered as a kind of postcolonial nationhood in settler states.” But the Nouméa Accord fails to recognize an independent Kanaky as possible form of post-colonial nationhood. As Povinelli notes, “national pageants of shameful repentance and celebrations of a new recognition of subaltern worth remain inflected by the conditional (as long as they are not repugnant; that is, as long as they are, at heart, not-us and as long as real economic resources are not at stake” (2002:17). In New Caledonia, I would argue that Kanak identity (or at least Kanak identity as a *political* identity) remains “repugnant” within the French republican context *and* real economic resources are certainly at stake—so the recognition afforded by the Nouméa Accord is highly conditional indeed.

Conclusion

Patrick Wolfe argues that we must problematize the idea that recent reforms (such as the Mabo Decision and the Native Title Act in Australia) “effected a historic rupture that was sufficient to reconstitute the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler societies” (1999:163). In Wolfe’s view, for such a claim to be evaluated, “it is necessary to analyze the deep structures of the Australian colonial project.” Similarly, in order to understand the real impact of the Nouméa Accord on the

relationship between Kanak and settlers, we must examine the “deep structures” of the New Caledonian colonial project. However, as I hope I have hinted in this chapter, the “deep structures” of settler-colonialism in New Caledonia are rooted in an ideological history that diverges in important ways from Anglo-Saxon colonial projects in the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. As a result, the “indigenous category” has a slightly different valence, and perhaps different stakes, in New Caledonia—a French settler-colony, not yet separated from its metropole. As Marcel Djama notes:

In the history of France, the theme of *autochthonie* (indigeneity) only appears in rare historical occurrences. The idea of Republicanism, from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution does not tolerate particularisms: it seeks to impose a homogenous nation by mobilizing the resources of a highly centralized state, by introducing the principle of *laïcité* (secularism) and imposing the exclusive use of the French language. One of the principal specificities of the French Republican model is that it privileges a political rather than ethnic conception of the nation: *in this it distinguishes the logics of identity from the principles of citizenship*. [2009:197, emphasis mine]

This Republican conception of the relationship between identity and citizenship is clearly expressed in the Nouméa Accord. Thus the Kanak struggle to articulate an indigenous identity and make claims about sovereignty and the future is seriously limited by the structures in place in New Caledonia. Interestingly, since the Nouméa Accord, Kanak activists have increasingly tried to connect to the global indigenous movement. For the past ten years FLNKS has sent a delegation to the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues. The independence movement has also begun to reformulate their demands using the language of the UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights (to which France is a signatory). In 2005 a Kanak activist group organized a seminar on “People,

Land and Human Rights,” which called for greater recognition of the indigenous Kanak population under French Law. Organizer Pastor Sailali Passa, the former President of the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia explained:

We’re trying to read the Nouméa Accord again in the light of international law on the rights of indigenous peoples. We’re trying to see if the rights of the Kanak people are respected, or whether we need to go further. We feel that in spite of the preamble of the Noumea Accord, there are many things that are still missing. The Kanak people have some specific rights and we’re going to continue to claim those rights.

Since the dawn of time, the West has always sought to defend individual human rights. But many communities and many governments do not recognize or do not support collective human rights. However, since the arrival of indigenous peoples within the structures of the United Nations, lots of doors have opened. Defining human rights as the rights of the individual is no longer sufficient. We have to go beyond that. There are other peoples who have different ways of living, different ways of understanding, different ways of relating to the land and the natural environment. [as quoted in Maclellan 2005:7]

Passa’s sentiments reflect a broader effort by Kanak activists to connect with international indigenous movements. As Marisol de la Cadena (2007:4) writes:

Indigenism today is a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, In short, not a fixed state of being. In it’s most ambitious expressions, and articulated to alter-globalization processes, the new indigenism seeks to undo hegemonic signifiers, affect their usual semantic chemistry to produce new valences, and thus reconfigure indigeneity itself.

As I have shown in this chapter, the “indigenous category” in New Caledonia emerged from a long history of encounter, misunderstanding, violence, non-recognition and resistance. As the rest of this dissertation will illustrate, a post-*Évenements*, post-Accords generation of increasingly urbanized, globalized Kanak continue to reformulate and resist the representational regime of the New Caledonian

settler-state to make claims about sovereignty and the future. In so doing, they reconfigure not only what it means to be Kanak, but what it might mean to be indigenous more broadly.

Part II
CREATING KANAKY

- Chapter 4 -

LA JEUNESSE DE KANAKY:
GENERATION, IDENTITY AND CRISIS



Les jeunes, ils sont comme les couilles des boeufs, qui balancent entre les jambes. Avec les vieux, ils disent qu'ils ont l'instruction et la coutume des Européens; et avec les Blancs, ils disent qu'ils ont la coutumes des Canaques. Mais ils ne connaissent rien avec les Européens et ils ne connaissent rien dans la tribu.

- Phillippe Paado, tribu de Netchaot, early 1980s⁴⁷

⁴⁷ "Young people are like bull testicles, swinging between the legs. With our elders, they say that they have the teachings and the customs of the Europeans; and with whites, they say that they have the customs of the Kanak. But they know nothing with the Europeans and they know nothing in the tribu" (cited in Kohler and Wacquant 1985).

Each generation must out of relative obscurity
discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.

- Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 1963

“Vive Kanaky! Nique la France! Kanaky 2014!” Waimo shouted, and took a swig from the bottle of Johnny Walker before passing it to me. I politely shook my head and passed the whisky back without imbibing, as a small crowd milled around the parking lot in Centre Ville, next to the Place de Mwâ Kââ. It was after 10pm on July 17th, 2010. The night was humid and cloudy. “Mais ouiiiiiii! Vive le drapeau de Kanaky!” a wobbly- looking teenager in a Ché Guevara t-shirt whooped and ran by, as I slapped a mosquito off my arm.

The impromptu party was a celebration of the day’s earlier events, when visiting French Prime Minister François Fillon participated in a ceremony marking the official recognition of the Kanak flag by the French Government. For the first time ever, the Kanak flag had been raised outside the Haut Commissariat, and flew side by side with the *tricolore*. Afterwards, the customary senate had organized a large, joyous rally in the same parking lot in which we now stood. There were now only a few stragglers leftover from that event, including my friends Nico, Darewa and Florenda. They sat in the shadows around the side of the lot, smoking and warily watching the younger, drunker merry-makers, who had arrived long after the rally’s speeches and dance performances were over. Most of that group—including Waimo—lived in the Pierre-Lenquette housing project. Unlike Nico, Darewa or Florenda, they weren’t regularly

involved in political or cultural activism. Many were school dropouts and few were currently employed.

“*Yo, yo! La bande! Viens voir ce qu'ils font!*” Come see what they’re doing! Someone yelled from over by the two large flagpoles at the far end of the parking lot. During the rally earlier that afternoon, officials had installed a Kanak flag on one of the poles, next to the French flag that normally flew there. As I jogged over, I saw that while the Kanak flag was still up, two young men were vigorously yanking down the French one. When they got it to the ground, a third youth ripped it off the pole entirely—much to the excitement of the group that had run over to see what was happening. As people drew into a circle surrounding the crumpled-up *tricolore*, someone took a lighter and set the flag on fire. “*Allons enfants de la patriiiiiiiiiiii*,” Waimo launched into a burlesqued version of the French national anthem, incorporating a string of extra expletives. A chant started up as the smell of burning nylon filled the air, “*Kanaky 2014! Kanaky 2014! Kanaky est entrain de naître!*”
Kanaky 2014! Kanaky is emerging!

“2014”—scrawled in marker on bus stops and carved with pen knives in park benches, printed on t-shirts and chanted by young people—the number seems like an incantation, or a mantra. For many young people, the date set by the Nouméa Accord for the possible independence referendum from France holds an almost messianic promise for the emergence of a new, radically different future. This chapter considers

how Kanak youth imagine the future—by exploring how they position themselves in the present with regards to the past. Is this a generation defined by rupture or continuity? How has French settler colonialism shaped the temporality of today’s Kanak youth? I focus in particular on the increasingly pervasive discourse of a Kanak *crise de la jeunesse* (youth crisis). In examining how this discourse depicts Kanak youth as “temporally confused,” I will illustrate the serious political implications it may have for indigenous sovereignty and Kanak independence. Additionally, I investigate why many young people do not identify with the ways they are represented within the *crise de la jeunesse* discourse. I also address the generationally specific framework within which young people locate Kanak identity and stake claims on the future. In the chapter’s conclusion, I consider how contemporary Kanak youth may or may not be positioned to enact the transformations they seek. Thinking back to Waimo’s chant on a night filled with incredible hope but also marked by desperation and anger—is Kanaky emerging? In the words of Frantz Fanon, will this generation “discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it”?

“Figuring the Future:” Anthropologies of Youth and Cultural Change

Initially, anthropologists were interested in childhood and youth as objects of study insofar as they offered insight into broader questions about ritual, society and adult notions of personhood. In her classic work *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), Margaret Mead studied Samoan adolescents as a means to construct an argument against universalist accounts of socialization and sexuality. Youth offered a useful

point of entry into the analysis of cultural patterns, but were not placed at the center of anthropological inquiry in their own right. This began to change during the 1950s and 1960s, with the advent of Birmingham School “youth culture studies.” Heavily influenced by Marxism and semiology, Birmingham School social theorists investigated adolescence, not as a staging ground for integration into the adult community, but as an important site of agency, resistance, identity construction, and social change (i.e.: Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1978; Hall and Jefferson 1993). Work in this vein initiated a shift in youth studies that led to productive understandings of broader anthropological questions—especially problems of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Though Birmingham School youth studies continue to be influential in anthropologies of youth, more recent work by anthropologists has increasingly focused on the central role that young people play in mediating processes of globalization and modernity (i.e. Hansen and Dalgaard 2008; Lukose 2009; Maira and Soep 2005; Katz 2004). In the language of prominent social theorists, globalization has led to “time-space compression” (Harvey 1990), “social acceleration” (Lyotard 1991) and “temporal disjuncture” (Appadurai 1990)—all part of modernity’s distinctive futurity.

Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (2008:21) argue that youth provide the symbolic material through which a society “figures the future.” When the radical transformations engendered neoliberal globalization threaten to quickly render certain forms of knowledge and ways of life obsolete, “youth are increasingly central

to...social processes of hope" (*ibid.* 15). Yet with hope comes danger and uncertainty, and in many parts of the world, younger generations also embody the apocalyptic specter of culture loss and social disintegration. As Cole and Durham put it, "the practices undertaken by young people...are on the cusp of success and failure" (*ibid.* 12). In many ways, the onus of social reproduction—the question of continuity versus rupture—rests on youthful shoulders.

Persons, Continuity and Rupture in Melanesia

While a growing emphasis on the transformations engendered by globalization has shifted youth to the forefront of anthropological concern, it has threatened to marginalize Melanesia—an area previously “cited as the foundational scene of ‘real anthropology’” (Lederman 1998:429). Though work by Melanesianists during the 1970s and 1980s inspired disciplinary-wide debates on personhood, knowledge production and gender, many of these analyses also sustained a regionalist focus on radical cultural alterity and largely ignored ramifications of culture contact and change (e.g. Wagner 1981; Strathern 1988).⁴⁸ Despite an enduring tendency to treat Melanesia as “a last frontier,” the region is, of course, profoundly implicated in and affected by its integration into modernist projects, global markets and cultural flows. In the past decade, as the quickening pace of globalization continues to inspire intense

⁴⁸ Work on *kastom* movements is probably an important exception to this trend (ie: Keesing 1982; Tonkinson 1982; Akin 1987). For the most part, this work focuses specifically on *kastom* as a *product* of cultural contact and change.

anthropological interest in theorizing change, Melanesia is actually moving back towards the forefront of the disciplinary concerns.

Melanesians' creative and highly divergent responses to modernity have both informed and significantly complicated "scholarly attempts to theorize, model, or describe the dynamics of change in terms of continuity/discontinuity, assimilation, adaptation, and hybridity" (Schieffelin & Makihara 2007:5). Throughout the region, groups have embraced, contested and diverted modernity into localizing practices. They have often, as Andrew Lattas (2010: xvii) writes, "sought to localize modernity's futurism, that is, its utopian transformative potential and promises." This localization of modernity, which also "modernizes the local," has been a feature of millenarian movements, churches, judicial-legal institutions, politics, new forms of consumption and youth cultures (Eriksen 2008; Foster 1995, 2002; LiPuma 2001; West 2006; Gewertz & Errington 2010).

Scholarship on such cultural phenomena falls roughly into two camps—work that represents contemporary Melanesian social life as primarily defined by rupture and radical disjuncture and work that focus instead on underlying logics of continuity. The first group understands the moment of contact as having created a profound temporal break that results in the "periodization of modernity" –a fundamental severing of the present from the past (Lipuma 2001). Other literature, while recognizing the reality of cultural change, stresses the "radically improvisatory nature of Melanesian societies," which has lead "supposedly traditional people to generate radical transformations in thoroughly *traditional* ways" (Barker 2007: 9, emphasis

mine). Indeed, the extent to which contemporary Melanesian social practice troubles distinctions between “rupture” and “continuity” is why ethnographies of Melanesia continue to make critical contributions to global theorizations of change (ie: Akin & Robbins 1999; Robbins & Wardlow 2005).⁴⁹

Personhood lies at the center of these debates. Many anthropologists have described a pervasive Melanesian ontological schema in which all human relationships are seen as essentially analogous. As a result, humans must carefully work—through the medium of exchange—to produce the differentiation necessary to create and maintain proper kinds of persons and social relationships (Leenhardt 1947; Wagner 1977; Strathern 1988).⁵⁰ Rather than bounded selves, Melanesian persons are thus “dividuals”—selves constituted by their position within a network of social relationships. Colonialism, Christianity, entry into wage labor, neoliberal policies and urbanization have presented profound challenges to this model of personhood. A wealth of recent ethnographies charts the growth of “possessive individualism” in Melanesia—a view that one is the “proprietor of the self, owing nothing to society” (Macpherson 1962). In several studies, anthropologists have examined how members of emerging Melanesian middle-classes and indigenous elites limit the social scope of

⁴⁹ Much of this work draws inspiration from Marshall Sahlins, particularly his arguments in the article “The Economics of Develop-man in the Pacific” (Sahlins 1992). Sahlins uses the term “develop-man” (his mishearing of a tok pisin word) to describe the ways that “non-Western people use their encounter with the world capitalist system to develop their culture on its own terms” (Sahlins 1992:9). In “develop-man” (as opposed to Western development), the “ends of social life remain the same, only the means of attaining them change.” In this way, *change ultimately produces continuity*.

⁵⁰ Some of the richest work on Melanesian personhood and social relationships comes from linguistic anthropology (ie: Schieffelin 1990, 2002; Kulick 1992; Handman 2010).

their *kastom* ties, refusing to properly engage in reciprocal relations of sociality and exchanges of material wealth, “in an attempt to assert a 'possessive individual' view of themselves as persons who are the owners of their own capacities in contexts such as business” (Martin 2007). For “grassroots” villagers, failing to return to the village and share earnings according to customary kinship obligations identifies such individuals as dangerous, socially sterile, “bitter people” (Gewertz & Errington 1997; Kirsch 2006).⁵¹

Modernity has incited a radical reordering of social relationships and systems of value, reflected throughout Melanesia in discourses of moral crisis and social decline. Youth occupy a central place in these discourses. Jean Mitchell argues this is because youth—particularly urban youth, “experience most intensely the rapid changes in society and culture” (Mitchell 2011):

Marginalized from both the customary world of gift exchange and from a modernity that they identify with and claim knowledge over, they become powerful articulators of discontent. [in Lattas and Rio 2011: 12]

Throughout Melanesia, the term “youth” often has strong associations with delinquency, social decline, fears of state failure, cultural loss and moral peril.

Discourses surrounding “raskolism” in Papua New Guinea are probably the best-documented examples of this phenomenon. Raskols are young, unemployed men who

⁵¹ Again, some the most useful scholarship along these lines come from linguistic anthropology. Language is, “transformed by and transforms changing social realities” and, particularly in the Pacific, language and speech practices are central “in the construction of self and sociality” (Makihara & Schieffelin 2005: 7; Myers & Brenneis 1984). Much of this work has analyzed the shift in language ideologies in ways that reevaluate “possessive individualistic” performances of self (see Kulick 1997 on linguistic dimensions of *bikhed* – bigheaded, willfulness—in Gapun).

engage in practices of excessive consumption and violence (ie: drinking heavily, smoking marijuana, committing robbery, rape, and murder) (Kulick 1993; Dinnen 2001; Wardlow 2006; Goddard 2005). Raskols willfully ignore reciprocal obligations to their communities and disembed themselves from networks of exchange and kin. As a result of their alienation from the relations that constitute them as “dividual persons”—a raskol’s spirits may be “fractured into multiple selves (Sykes 1999: 64). Karen Sykes provides a memorable case study from New Ireland, where popular belief holds that a raskols’ excessively consumptive behavior causes their “selves” to fly loose of their bodies, a horrifying prospect inextricably associated with the conditions of modernity.⁵²

La Crise de la Jeunesse: Moral Panic in New Caledonia

As the phenomenon of raskolism in Papua New Guinea helps illustrate, in contexts of rapid social change, young people give form to anxieties surrounding modernity (c.f. Cohen 1972). At the same time, panics over endangered and dangerous youth may reflect more than just generational tensions exacerbated by “social acceleration.” In Melanesia and beyond, these narratives may also be entangled with issues of state power and political control or build on racialized colonial discourses of disordered native subjectivity. As Andrew Lattas and Knut Rio (2011:12) argue:

⁵² Other types of individuals who become disembedded from kinship and exchange relations through their engagement with modernity inspire similar narratives of “spirit deaths” as well as stories of their return as ghost-like spectres. For example, see Holly Wardlow’s discussion of Huli “passenger woman” (prostitutes or other physically and sexually mobile women) (Wardlow 2006).

Throughout Melanesia, such perceptions of a moral crisis have led to the frequent proclamation of states of emergency, which have been almost transformed into a normal technique of government (Agamben 2005). States of exceptionality have become unexceptional. Helping to produce these proclaimed emergencies are reworked contemporary versions of colonial racial stereotypes concerning pigheaded natives whom it is difficult to civilize and govern.

Such an “emergency” now shapes public discourse in New Caledonia.

Handwringing over “*la crise de la jeunesse*”—the youth crisis—has blossomed into a widespread moral panic centered primarily on Nouméa’s growing population of *Kanak de quartier* (“city Kanak”—literally “Kanak from the neighborhood”). As the referendum on independence from France approaches, reports on the “explosion of delinquency” among Kanak youth have become increasingly frenzied and apocalyptic in tone. Nearly every day, *Les Nouvelles* and the nightly news on *NC Ière* feature sordid accounts of *délits* committed by alcohol and cannabis addled school dropouts “with no respect.” A quick search for the terms “jeune” and “délinquant” in *Les Nouvelles’* web archive yields 770 articles—131 published just during last year (2012).⁵³ These news pieces warn of youths who roam the streets of Nouméa

⁵³ One of the most blantly anti-Kanak examples of this genre is an article published in *Les Nouvelles* on March 3rd, 2012 entitled: “*Les deux drapeaux ont aggravé la délinquance*” [“The two flags (ie: the official recognition of the Kanak flag alongside the French flag) have worsened delinquency”]. According to Nouméa’s Police Commissioner, “The statistics show that delinquency has consistently decreased in Nouméa, but this trend reversed starting in mid-2010...there is a link between the explosion in the rise in delinquency and the Kanak flag.” The article also claims, “The Haussariat itself has reported that there has been a ‘change of mentality’ in young offenders, who now seem to act with ‘a sense of impunity’ and ‘racial hatred.’” As is normally the case, the online comment section for this article (on *Les Nouvelles* website, www.lnc.nc), provides a good sense of the panic (and racism) characteristic of *Les Nouvelles* (largely white, French) online readership. A commenter posting under the user name “Pandanus” claims Kanak culture is, “*une société où tout est permis, la violence, le vol, l’agression, etc*” [A society where everything is permitted, violence, theft, aggression, etc].

organized in small gangs, vandalizing property, committing assaults, menacing tourists, perpetrating "home jackings" and stealing cars.



Fig. 4.1. From *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 14/7/2012, “*Les délinquants en insécurité*” Photo credit: *Thierry Perron*

Within such narratives, the word “delinquent” is synonymous with “young Kanak man.” Racialized discourse in contemporary New Caledonia is indirect, constructed through implication and allusion. While “delinquent” is code for “Kanak youth,” the term “Calédonian” almost always alludes to a white European—Caldoche—born or raised in New Caledonia. The following excerpt from a recent

Another poster, “domi13” writes: “If the flag hasn’t made delinquency worse, it’s definitely contributed to it. Lots of idle youths already thought that believing in Kanaky allowed them to do anything...the law doesn’t know what to do with them, either, since they’re mostly (legal) minors; the parents have long since abandoned any of their responsibilities as authority figures and parents; the customary authorities are also outdated and ineffective... We can only protect ourselves so that nothing happens to us physically or materially” (comment section, www.lnc.nc/article/pays/les-deux-drapeaux-ont-aggrave-la-delinquance, accessed 1/15/13).

newspaper article is representative of a genre. When dealing with race, loyalist-run daily *Les Nouvelles* assumes its readership will be able to connect most of the dots themselves:

Instead of penal sanctions, a group of young delinquents between the ages of 17 and 18 are enrolled this week in a citizenship workshop. The objective is to remind them of their cultural and republican values [...] A cap pulled over the head for one, a Kanaky t-shirt for another and a jacket with a portrait of Bob Marley for the third, these young recidivists have committed thefts, home-jackings, or have smoked cannabis to kill boredom. The conversation, in a sometimes moralizing tone, was despite everything, constructive. “You commit crimes because you’re bored? There are so many things you could do to make money. You know how much fish costs at the market in Nouméa? 800 CFP a kilo. A big fish, that’s 5,000 CFP and it’s not cannabis! You catch 100 fish, that’s 500,000 CFP, half a million! And that’s for a day’s work, while the crap you do could cost you ten years in prison,” says Miguel, a Calédonian and a gendarme with the Dumbéa brigade who is also a youth anti-drug counselor in schools.

-“A Workshop to Open Dialogue,” *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, Feb. 9, 2012

Here, the author provides a vivid description of a stereotypical Kanak youth (knit cap, Kanaky t-shirt, Bob Marley jacket), without ever explicitly stating that the delinquents participating in the workshop are Kanak. We aren’t told that “Miguel,” the gendarme who reminds the Kanak of their “republican and cultural values” by admonishing them to “put in a day’s work” catching fish instead of smoking weed, is a white Caldoche, but because he is referred to as “a Calédonian,” we know he is.

“Caledonians” must live with the constant threat posed by “delinquents.” In 2009, Gaël Yanno, *député* (parliamentary representative) for New Caledonia told the national government in Paris:

The primary concern of Calédonians, particularly the inhabitants of Greater Nouméa, is public safety (*l’insécurité*). In 2008, the number of burglaries increased 7% in one year while the number of car thefts, and the theft of tires

rose more than 50% in the same period... These statistics contradict those of metropolitan France, where delinquency has decreased. Today, Nouméans live in fear of being burgled or having their car stolen. The sale of firearms for self-defense has increased at an unprecedented rate..." [Yanno 2009]

Yanno concluded that, "the security of citizens is the state's responsibility;" implying that the national government should intervene in the *crise de la jeunesse* (presumably with military force). In 2009, the territorial government had already taken steps to address the "constant threat" posed by urban Kanak youth, installing an expansive network of surveillance cameras around central Nouméa. The government has also passed increasingly strict laws controlling the sale and consumption of alcohol, specifically targeting the Kanak population.⁵⁴ The fear that many white Nouméans feel towards Kanak youth is palpable. In Centre-Ville, I regularly noticed white people crossing the street to avoid passing groups of Kanak youth. During dinner at the house of a couple from metropolitan France (my husband's partners in a language exchange), I was told that if I wanted to avoid trouble, I should avoid the bus station and parking lots because "that's where all the Kanak boys hang out."

Kanak Groups and "Youth Crisis" Discourse

The discourse of the "youth crisis," in which all urban Kanak youth are stigmatized as delinquents until proven otherwise, is not necessarily limited to the

⁵⁴ In November 2012 the territorial government raised taxes 20% on alcohol and tobacco. New laws also prohibit the sale of alcohol after 12 noon and limit individuals to the equivalent of 500 grams of alcohol per purchase (see http://www.lemonde.fr/sante/article/2012/11/30/la-nouvelle-caledonie-lance-un-plan-choc-contre-le-tabac-l-alcool-et-le-cannabis_1798209_1651302.html). There are obvious parallels here to the "Intervention" in Australia.

media or loyalist political circles. Kanak customary leaders also construct urban youth as a posing a particular social threat. In 2008, the Kanak Customary Senate announced that, “addressing increasing delinquency among Kanak youth,” specifically “*a part of the youth*, those who live in an urban milieu” was now amongst its top priorities (Boanemoui 2008). The Senate issued a 109-page report in March 2009 entitled, “The place of Kanak youth in contemporary society and means for combatting against the marginalization of a part of the youth” (*La place du jeune kanak dans la société contemporaine et les moyens de lutter contre la marginalisation d’une partie de la jeunesse*). The report makes it clear that urban Kanak are the “part” of the youth concerned. The report’s introduction characterizes the space of “*le quartier*” as generating social disorder:

The difference between a well-integrated youth and a marginalized youth in decline can be measured by the time spent in *le quartier*. [For the young person] To integrate himself, *le quartier* is a living space, the frame of reference within which he is lodged. For the marginalized, it is stagnant space: he is as uncomfortable in his home as he is at school and for him, the common, neutral space of *le quartier* represents a space of freedom, of the recognition of identity...this can generate violent behaviors. [Sénat 2009]

Unlike the racialized fearmongering of loyalist politicians and the media, the Customary Senate report is far more attentive to the structural inequalities (school failure, etc.) that contribute to the problems faced by Kanak youth. However, the report is still premised on the idea that urban Kanak youth are necessarily *different* than their rural counterparts as a result of living in the spaces of the city. There is still an assumption that “delinquency” can be traced to urban life.

In June 2010, based on the findings of this report, the Customary Senate organized the first *Congrès de la Jeunesse Kanak* (Kanak Youth Congress). The event's theme was *Ta Parole!* ("Your turn to speak!"), and the several hundred young Kanak people present repeatedly steered the conversation towards the topic of delinquency—specifically, their frustration with the Senate's use of the term. A young woman raised her hand to speak during a question and answer session and addressed the panel of customary senators sitting in front of the audience thusly:

When one says delinquent—because for a while now we've started to always hear people talking about young people as delinquents... You too, you elders, you're also delinquents! Because to be delinquent, it isn't a question of age. You also sometimes drink in public places... mostly you, Mr. Senator... no, no, I'm kidding. But seriously, delinquency doesn't have an age. The old, the young, sometimes we get off track and cross the line, we break the law.⁵⁵

Her statement provoked a series of increasingly animated commentary from the audience of young people present. A man in his twenties, originally from Lifou, but living in Nouméa, had these thoughts to add:

There isn't a youth crisis—if there is a crisis, then it is all of our society that is in crisis, it's not just youth. When the minister [of Overseas Territories] came [to visit New Caledonia], the high commissioner said [to him] that the delinquents were in Nouméa. I assure you that there aren't delinquents. The word delinquent is manufactured by people who want to say that there are delinquents. But that's not it at all [...] We are all the children of someone. I am worthy of my father. Those who tell you that you are delinquents are even more delinquent than you.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This sassy and sarcastic comment was pretty surprising coming from a young woman. I was never able to find out who she was and where she was from (which might have given me some hint as to why she felt so comfortable using a mode of address not characteristic of most Kanak women (particularly young women speaking to older men).

⁵⁶ I underline some parts of quotes from interviews and participant observation in this chapter in order to draw attention to points I want to explore in particular detail.

His comment raises an important point—the discourse of the “youth crisis” actually *does* “manufacture” delinquents—by positioning young, urban Kanak as necessarily delinquent subjects. At issue here is not whether Kanak youth can be accurately framed as a population “in crisis.” By any measure, Kanak youth *are* in a critical situation. The unemployment rate among Kanak youth is 38% (compared to 9% for “European New Caledonians” and 7% for métros). Only 34% of Kanak obtain a baccalauréat degree (compared to 79% for métros, 67% for “European Caledonians,” and 49% for Polynesians) (Inserm 2008).⁵⁷ Yet the discourse of the youth crisis does nothing to address these statistics, or to ameliorate the profound structural inequalities that produced them. Instead, the “youth crisis” discourse *reproduces* these structural inequalities. This is true even when it is taken up by other Kanak.

As I will argue throughout this chapter, the discourse of the *crise de la jeunesse* has become a pernicious tool that works to disenfranchise Kanak youth—especially urban Kanak youth. The moral panic sparked by this discourse is premised not only on the assumption that “city Kanak” are radically different from Kanak still living *en tribu*; but also that today’s young people represent a profound rupture in Kanak society. Conversations on the “youth crisis” frame contemporary Kanak youth as fundamentally different from earlier generations of Kanak—as having “no cultural references” and being “lost between tradition and modernity.” These representations have very real political stakes. In depicting Kanak youth as disordered cultural

⁵⁷ Two more notable statistics: 20% of young Kanak men have been hit by a cop and 28% have been arrested. Ninety percent of those incarcerated in New Caledonia’s *Camp Est* Jail are Kanak, half of which are under age 25 (Anaya/ United Nations 2011).

subjects, the “youth crisis” discourse undermines their claims to an “authentic” indigenous identity. In many cases, the “delinquency” of Kanak youth is cited as proof that the decolonization of New Caledonia is a failed project. As Bianca Henin, the New Caledonian leader of the Front National party told *Les Nouvelles* on May 2, 2009:

After ten years of the [Nouméa] Accord, where do we see the benefits from this process of decolonization that’s underway? In these bands of hooligans, eyes red from alcohol and cannabis, who threaten tourists, or smash up and burn cars?

Versions of this same discourse, echoed on a larger level, extend beyond youth to paint *all* Kanak as a dysfunctional population, unable to navigate modernity without the guiding hand of France. In a January 13th, 2010 interview with *Les Nouvelles*, Jacques Lafleur, the long-time head of the loyalist government argued that “the Melanesian world” remained incompatible with the exigencies of modern statehood and thus the Kanak were “not yet ready for independence.” He explained:

New Caledonia needs France and more time before it will be ready to be independent...[if New Caledonia accesses independence in 2014] very bad things will come to pass. We must not lose sight of the fact that the Melanesian world is very disparate. They speak different languages...and cultivate old rivalries inherited from the times of tribal wars and sustained by oral tradition. If France pulls out, all of this will resurface.

Ultimately, the discourse of the “youth crisis” threatens to consolidate the hegemony of the French state in New Caledonia by disqualifying the Kanak as future citizens of an independent nation. This is achieved through the pathologization of urban Kanak youth, especially their relationships with time and space.

Modernity and the Disordered Indigenous Subject: Kanak Youth as Schizophrenics

Within “youth crisis” discourse, the “city Kanak,” or *Kanak de quartier* is usually paired with its foil, the supposedly less troubled, more stable, *Kanak de la tribu*, or “village/tribal Kanak.” In these oppositions, Kanak youth living *en tribu* are represented as still rooted in Kanak *coutume*, and as having a clearly defined, stable identity, while *Kanak de quartier* are categorized as having lost their landmarks or reference points. Unable to navigate either the “traditional” Kanak or “modern” French worlds, the prototypical *Kanak de quartier* may suffer a sort of “schizophrenic” confusion of identity.

The figure of the “schizophrenic”—an urban Kanak youth with a fractured, divided subjectivity—is well represented in New Caledonian popular media. It is even a central feature of New Caledonia’s first locally produced television show, the popular comedy series *Chez Nadette*. Each of *Chez Nadette*’s 10-minute episodes take place in a Nouméa *chinois* (the local term for a bodega, a business almost exclusively operated in New Caledonia by Chinese people). None of the show’s writers are Kanak, but the cast is meant to be representative of all of the “types” of people found in Nouméa. Characters include a country bumpkin with a thick Caldoche accent, a nerdy *fonctionnaire* (civil servant), a long-haired “surfer dude” from France, a jolly Wallisian *fa’afafine*, two Kanak girls and Chinese store owner Nadette (whose face we never see—the show is shot from her perspective, so only her long fake nails and dramatically gesticulating hands are ever in frame). The two Kanak girls are twins—

both played by the same actress. One of the girls—Joséphine—is characterized as a stereotypical *Kanak de la tribu*—she is painfully shy, modest, and always wears a *robe mission*. Her sister, Joana, is “her exact opposite”—a fun-loving, free-spirited Kanak who wears Western clothes and loves to party. Character profiles from the show’s website describe the sisters thusly:

Joséphine: Joséphine arrived in Nouméa only a few weeks ago, with her grandmother and her twin sister, Joana. Her grandmother had to go to the hospital, and the three of them live together in Centre-Ville, not far from the hospital. Joséphine is naturally timid and doesn’t dare speak. She always worries she is in the way, but she won’t hesitate to raise hell, and she handles herself brilliantly when she is angry. She only dreams of one thing—returning to Maré.

Joana: Twin sister of Joséphine and her exact opposite. Joana loves the city, going out to clubs, wearing crazy outfits and colored wigs. A real firecracker, and very liberated, she is a ray of sunshine, good humor...and clumsiness. She refuses to be bored and would do anything to have fun—even if that means throwing a carnival in Nadette’s store.



Fig. 4.2. Images of Joséphine and Joana from the *Chez Nadette* promotional website.

As we see from the characters of Joséphine and Joana, *Chez Nadette*, one of the most widely watched television programs in New Caledonia, represents urban Kanak youth as “divided selves” in perhaps the most literal way possible—one actress playing two characters with “opposite personalities.” One character embodies tradition and *tribu*, the other, urban modernity. Never the twain shall meet.

Délinquant? Qu'est-ce que c'est?

During my fieldwork, I met with several civil servants to get a sense of the government’s approach towards youth delinquency, especially in Nouméa. One of these employees was Stéphane, responsible for the *Contrat d’agglomération* (the social policy and urban planning contract between the national and regional governments) for the northeast section of Nouméa. This area included the “rough” neighborhoods of Rivière-Salée, Normandie, the 6ème and the 7ème—all majority Kanak, and all considered centers of youth delinquency and crime. Stéphane had been working in this position since 2007, before which he had been employed as a social worker in the city. He had spent much of his adult life in New Caledonia, but his family was originally from the north of France.

As we sat in his overly air-conditioned office in central Nouméa during an antipodean summer heat wave, Stéphane went through a list of the major projects currently in progress under the *contrat d’agglomération*. Today, he said, his office’s primary concern is expanding and improving services and programming for youth.

The main reason the city government had recently upped their commitment to youth programming, Stéphane continued, was:

Because there is a scourge plaguing the Caledonian population—school failure. What I mean is that you have a phenomenon that occurs fairly frequently, which is that when there is the life trajectory of a child is not going well, when there are different degrees of neglect, there are repercussions on an educational level. You start to miss school for one week, two weeks... If there isn't a framework in place you can quickly be out on the street.

In order to prevent young school dropouts from becoming delinquents, it was necessary to bring them back within the fold of “civic life” by attracting them with city-sponsored music, sports or career programs. This, according to Stéphane, would work “to restore their motivation and reconnect them to a life project.” Stéphane then offered his own social analysis of the “phenomenon of delinquency” his office was working so hard to prevent. His explanation points to many of the assumptions underlying broader discourses on urbanization, cultural change and the disordered subjectivity of Kanak youth:

Most of young dropouts, that starts in middle school. Sometimes the signs start even earlier, like in primary school. [...] In Normandie [a neighborhood in the northeast of the city] there are sometimes youths who are practically SDF [*sans domicile fixe*, homeless] in their own neighborhood. These are youths of sixteen years, they don't have any more teeth, they sleep outdoors. They are in neglectful families [*familles abandonniques*], which is to say that the families no longer have the psychological and material means to support the child. These are the children known to social services, to the police, the judiciary services, because they are in a free spin [*roue libre*], they no longer have any social or cultural references.

In this case, we're hit with the phenomenon of delinquency. We're in a period with a high rate of employment, so it's not a problem of there being enough jobs, it's a cultural problem—not in the ethnic sense of the term, but in terms of

lifestyle. I was just talking about internal migration... Like all the cities in the world, Nouméa is experiencing its rural exodus, this is to say that there are people living *en tribu* with a rural way of life who find themselves in an urban milieu. In an urban way of life... there are plenty of competencies... savoir-faire to acquire in order to know how to live an urban lifestyle. One is no longer dependent on the land, one is dependent on a salary. It's not the same thing anymore. In the city, you need to have a budget, to count your money at the end of the month, to know how to pay water and electricity bills, etc. You need to know how to organize yourself for school, for this or for that. So many people are lost with regards to this. In the city, life is lived between four walls, the relationship with space changes. This provokes many difficulties adapting on psychological and cultural levels... in terms of relationships between people. It provokes a kind of stress and a sort of usury of other people.

As Stéphane elaborates, delinquency results from a “cultural problem.” He is careful to specify that he doesn't mean culture in an “ethnic” sense, but “in terms of lifestyle.” This is worth unpacking because it connects quite clearly to French republican conceptions of what it means to *have* culture. Within a republican framework, culture *isn't* something that connects to or emerges from an ethnic identity, it is not primordial. It's mutable, changeable—culture is a lifestyle choice. But as Stéphane formulates it, a “Kanak lifestyle” is fundamentally incompatible with an “urban lifestyle.” To live in the city, one must realize that he is “no longer dependent on the land.” He must “count money and have a budget and pay bills”—to think in a calculating and rational manner (something which Stéphane seems to assume Kanak have no experience with before coming to Nouméa, even though Kanak have been participating in the cash economy for well over seventy years, and everyone must pay for their most of their food, their clothing, their electricity and phone service, even *en tribu*). Stéphane adds that Kanak have to learn to “organize themselves” for

school and “this and that.”⁵⁸ This seems to belie the belief that, *en tribu*, Kanak people live outside of the structures and constraints of modernity; that a “traditional” culture does not require a self-regulating, disciplined, “organized” self. In the city life must be lived “between four walls”—as opposed to the spatiality that Stéphane imagines exists *en tribu*, in “nature.”

Successfully adopting an urban *habitus* requires crafting a new self, developing a new form of subjectivity. Kanak youth—and their families—have great difficulty becoming the type of people that the city requires. The landmarks (*repères*) that served as guides for lives lived *en tribu* (“in a Kanak lifestyle”), have left them ill-prepared for urban life. As a result, in Stéphane’s view, young urban Kanak have no means by which to orient themselves and their actions in the world, to project themselves forward coherently in time and space.

When things reach this point, Stéphane explains, a Kanak youth’s relationship to the surrounding world, already dysfunctional, becomes pathological, delusional—a threat to “the population”:

[...] So, I’ve explained to you how the life trajectory of a child could turn towards delinquency—it’s a phenomenon that’s becoming more and more aggravated, now there are more and more youths who are more and more violent. In 2009, we had a youth who was killed, whose head was crushed with a rock. This is no longer a problem of behavior or psychology. Now we’re talking about psychiatry. There are really youth at such a level of abandon that they have very grave psychological disorders... We’re talking about schizophrenia. They are unstuck from reality. They’re no longer aware of what’s around them. In Rivière-Salée, there are maybe a dozen youths... they no

⁵⁸ Without tackling the larger problems with this a statement, I’ll at least note that schooling is compulsory through age sixteen in *all* (even rural) parts of New Caledonia.

longer have any perception of a life that they could make for themselves. It's all or nothing. There are no longer any reference points.

In the face of these young people, you have the population, which is in a way the victim of these youths, who wreck havoc and destruction in the neighborhood.

The logical endpoint of delinquency is schizophrenia—the condition of being “unstuck” from reality, misperceiving one's own identity, being incapable of locating oneself in the world.⁵⁹ A lack of “reference points” makes it impossible for delinquents to *imagine possible futures for themselves*. This is a central aspect of the discourse of Kanak delinquency—the idea that Kanak youth suffer from a sort of disordered temporality. They are out of phase with themselves and out of phase with the country they live in. I will continue to explore the issue of temporal frames later on in this chapter.

Dressed Natives and Disordered Dividuals

Stéphane's views on the psychiatric troubles of urban Kanak youth—shared by others I spoke with who worked in government and social services—closely parallel the discourses on disordered native subjectivity evinced in other colonial contexts. According to Taussig (1987:87), natives in the colonial situation were frequently imagined to suffer from a “mysterious displacement” from their new surroundings, as

⁵⁹ If anything, one could argue that this discourse *itself* creates a Batesonian “double-bind” that might lead to “schizophrenic youth.” As Salaün (2009:80) maintains, Kanak “youth are victims of a double-stigmatization that simultaneously denounces them as incapable of inserting themselves into the modern world and as allegedly refusing to perpetuate Kanak culture.” Bateson theorized that individuals trapped in double-bind situations were likely to develop “schizophrenia-like” symptoms.

unable to adapt to change on their own.⁶⁰ For example, Meghan Vaughan and Randall Packard have suggested that “dressed”—“decultured” or “modernized”—natives were greater sources of anxiety for British colonial administrators in Africa than rural, “pure” natives not yet exposed to the evils of civilization (Packard 1989:48; Vaughan 1991:101). In Africa, these discourses were undergirded by a “deeply felt colonial fear”—expressed even more anxiously beginning in the 1930s, as colonies experienced the first inklings of independence movements—“that the 'disintegration' of the 'traditional' structures of African societies was endangering social control, that ...urbanization contained...the seeds of disaffection” (Vaughan 1991:109).

In his seminal article on the discourse of the “dressed native” in Africa, Packard (1989:687) describes how the frequent evocation of the “healthy life” enjoyed by rural indigenes was made:

...In the face of the stark reality of rural impoverishment and disease, represented not only a massive act of denial, but more important, a means of legitimating policy choices that served specific sets of social and economic interests within white society, at the continued expense of African workers and their families.

⁶⁰ One of the most powerful accounts of the “pathologized indigenous subject” remains that provided by Frantz Fanon (who was himself both a practicing psychiatrist and a French colonial subject). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes how the white gaze “annihilates” the colonized person, and results in a “complete dissolution of subjectivity:”

I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other forced me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I de-manded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (1967:109).

Fanon’s work, of course served different ends than the work of colonial psychiatrists, whose portraits of disordered and divided indigenous subjectivities helped replicate colonial structures of power. Fanon presents the condition of the “pathologized” colonial subject as the basis for creating new, liberatory identities, remedying the psychological harm perpetrated by colonialism and ultimately destroying the structures of colonialism themselves.

Rural Africans—like *Kanak de la tribu* in New Caledonia—were depicted as stable and secure in their identities, while “acculturated,” urban natives were seen as suffering from disease and psychiatric disorder. For colonial administrators, the image of the “dressed native” served as proof that urban Africans were maladjusted to the ways of Western civilization.

In many ways, the discourse of the “dressed native” in colonial Africa maps neatly on to the *crise de la jeunesse* in New Caledonia. Compare this statement by the director of medical services in the then British colony of Kenya, made in 1963, with Stéphane’s comments during our interview:

The African in his rural setting is strictly bound by tribal patterns of behavior, beliefs and customs. He is an integral part of his community and his thinking tends to be communal...with the transposition to the towns he forsakes the communal life for an individualistic life, unsupported by tribal rules and regulations... Furthermore, he is abandoning ingrained centuries of agricultural and pastoral tradition and learning the technical skills of an industrial world quite strange to him. [Fendell 1963:78; in Packard 1989:700]

We see the same notion of “ingrained” indigenous *habitus* as incompatible with urban life that Stéphane expressed in his description of the “cultural problem” Kanak face while adapting to life in Nouméa.

A perception of the indigenous subject as poorly bounded, as inseparable not only from the larger social whole but also the surrounding natural environment, is also echoed in the New Caledonian context. In 1953, British psychiatrist J.C. Carothers—“around whom grew something of an East African ‘school’ of psychiatry”—published his tome *The African Mind* (Vaughan 1991:110). The book is devoted to lengthy descriptions of the “ancient cultural modes of the African.” These cultural modes were

supposedly typified, “first and foremost, by the importance of magic, by the lack of a clear distinction between 'subject and object', and a resulting lack of 'personal integration' in individual Africans” (*ibid.* 111).

If anything, the belief in an indigenous confusion between “subject and object,” was even more prevalent in colonial Melanesia, a region that would later give birth to the anthropological concept of “dividual personhood.” In Papua New Guinea for example, colonial administrators viewed cargo cults, not as indigenous struggles for recognition or autonomy, but as evidence of natives’ insufficient “individualization” and their resulting inability to cope with change. During the 1919 Vailala Movement (known by colonial administrators as the “Vailala Madness”), Lattas (1992:5) describes government officials’ belief that:

The superiority of the white race lies in the act of being self-possessed, whilst the inferiority and madness of natives lies in their inability to be self-possessed, that is in their continual tendency to lose themselves in uncontrolled mimesis. The native is imitation, he is permeable to the outside, he lacks sufficient powers of self-constitution.

This closely mirrors how Kanak subjectivity was understood by the French in New Caledonia. Colonial psychiatry in New Caledonia was based largely around the writings of anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt (whose 1947 ethnography *Do Kamo* provided the central inspiration for Stathern’s theorization of “the dividual” in *The Gender of the Gift*). Leenhardt (1944:5-8), described the “mythical character” of Kanak thought (*pensée mythique*), and described the Kanak person as

[U]ndetermined, enveloped by nature. He does not spread out into nature, he is invaded by it. It is through nature that he knows himself... There are no distances between people and things; the object adheres to the subject;

unexpected participations transpire in a world that the eye, still unaccustomed to grasping in all its depth, only sees in two-dimensions...[Kanak] Man is ignorant of his own existence, he cannot grasp it.

Leenhardt is a complicated figure.⁶¹ On the one hand, he acted as a powerful defender of the Kanak people against colonial oppression and abuse. He was deeply engaged with the communities in which he worked. James Clifford (1982) has famously characterized Leenhardt as having practiced a sort of post-colonial, reflexive anthropology *avant la lettre*. Indeed, Leenhardt's ethnological work was thoughtful, nuanced and groundbreaking for its time. However, Leenhardt also frequently indulged in primitivizing and exoticizing discourses nearly identical to those employed by colonial authorities (ie: describing Kanak as living entirely within a "mythic plane" or as evolutionarily "very close to neanderthals"). Moreover, Leenhardt's ethnology relies on extremely reductionist (and sometimes inaccurate) representations of Kanak ontology and belief. Though these representations serve as excellent heuristic devices in Leenhardt's philosophical musings on "primitive mentality," they were less useful as descriptions of real people in the world. Yet, as with the work of many anthropologists, Leenhardt's oeuvre (or very simplified versions of it) entered into popular and scientific discourses. Even today, it continues to shape clinical approaches to "Kanak psychology" in New Caledonia.

As French ethnologist and clinical psychologist Yoram Mouchenik (2001) shows, contemporary ethnopsychiatry in New Caledonia is heavily inspired by

⁶¹ The EHESS recently published an edited collection addressing Leenhardt's complicated legacy (Naepels & Salomon 2007).

Leenhardt's notion of *la pensée mythique* Kanak. Several recent studies propose that Kanak—especially those living *outside* of “traditional environments”—are particularly susceptible schizophrenia and other forms of psychosis because of their “ontological permeability.” A 1991 “statistical study of mental illnesses in New Caledonia,” published in the journal *Annales médico-psychologiques* claims:

Europeans [in New Caledonia] are hospitalized for depressive symptoms, suicide attempts or neurotic disorders. On the contrary, Melanesians are mainly hospitalized for acute and chronic psychotic states. [Poinso & Védié 1991:663]

Stéphane's contention that urban life causes Kanak youth to “lose their frame of reference” and “become unstuck from reality” clearly draws on similar assumptions about Kanak subjectivity. If one believes that traditional patterns of “mythic thought,” make it impossible for the Kanak subject to fully separate from his “surroundings,” it is no surprise that living in Nouméa—thoroughly “non-Kanak” surroundings—would lead to disordered and divided selves—the “schizophrenia” and temporal confusion that Stéphane and others attribute to delinquent youth.

Being Kanak is in your guts. And in your relationships.

The youth crisis discourse is structured on a presumed opposition between the city and Kanak culture. It assumes that indigenous identities cannot thrive in Nouméa—a modern, French, settler space. As Stéphane parsed it for me—Kanak and urban “lifestyles” are irreconcilable, and the “explosion of youth delinquency” is an inevitable result of the rural exodus of Kanak into Nouméa. It goes unquestioned, even by members of the Kanak customary senate, that the city transforms indigenous

subjectivity—mutating authentic, rooted *Kanak de la tribu* (village Kanak) into disordered, delinquent *Kanak de quartier* (city Kanak). Yet the young people I knew rejected this duality between “city Kanak” and “village Kanak.” In their minds, neither category was particularly socially relevant or meaningful and the dichotomy between the two was false. Even my friends who had been born and raised entirely in Nouméa, in neighborhoods like Montravail, Tindu or Rivière-Salée, refused to identify themselves as “city Kanak.” I was initially surprised by the widespread refusal of the “city Kanak” label. I began to wonder if there were *any* circumstances under which my friends would brand another young person as a “city Kanak.” If none of my friends were “city Kanak,” who *was*? How exactly were people locating Kanak identity?

The first person I directly posed these questions to was my friend Florenda, the 27-year-old *animatrice* of the *maison du quartier* in Nouméa’s Vallée des Colons neighborhood. Over Nescafé and powdered milk in the *maison*’s communal kitchen, Florenda, declared: “*D’être Kanak, c’est dans tes entrailles*—Being Kanak is in your guts, your bowels. City Kanak? *Kanak de la tribu*? That difference doesn’t exist.” She knew this first hand, she said, and she began to explain by narrating her life trajectory for me. She was born in Houaïlou, on the northeast coast, but she moved to Nouméa shortly after. Her family moved around between several neighborhoods in Nouméa during her early childhood, sometimes living with other extended kin. When Florenda was in *collège* (middle school), her father couldn’t pay the rent on their apartment in *Baie de L’Orpheninat*, so they moved to the *Squat de Tuband* (a squat in the southeast of the city). Eventually the family was given subsidized housing in Pierre Lenquette (a

housing project in the neighborhood of Montravel). But Florenda decided to move back to the squat to live with a boyfriend. She added, somewhat sheepishly, that like a growing number of young people in Nouméa, she could understand but not fluently speak her native language (Ajië).⁶²

Florenda stressed that despite being raised in Nouméa, she was not a “city Kanak.” Her family regularly returned to their *tribu* in Houaïlou during her school vacations and her mother taught her “everything” about Kanak culture. She mentioned that she also missed school whenever they needed to participate in marriages and *deuils* (customary funerals and mourning ceremonies) back in Houaïlou. In her words, she had been “*bien accompagné dans la coutume,*” well accompanied in learning custom. Florenda was not alone in her arguments. Many young people I spoke with were quite emphatic that being a “city Kanak” didn’t necessarily have anything to do with living in Nouméa.

I found instead that most young people seemed to locate Kanak identity in particular styles of behavior and ways of relating to others. A “city Kanak” was someone who rejected these modes of sociality. Later on during my conversation with Florenda, we were joined by her boyfriend Jean-Philippe, originally from Hienghène,

⁶² Though the number of Kanak youth in Nouméa with only passive (or no) competency in a vernacular language has increased over the past decade, the great majority of Kanak youth (including urban Kanak youth) are still able to both speak and understand their native tongues. The fact that Kanak languages are now offered in schools (as a result of the Nouméa Accord), may stem a trend towards decreased linguistic competency among Kanak youth. There is some interesting (but limited) work on language ideology in New Caledonia. See for example: Barnèche 2005; Vernaudon and Filloi 2004; Salaün and Vernaudon 2007.

about an hour's drive north of her village of Houailou.⁶³ He also had strong views on the issue, which he explained this way: “*Kanak de la ville sont ceux avec qu'on a pas grandi...ceux qui n'ont pas fait du travail avec toi*” [city Kanak are those who you didn't grow up with...those who didn't do work with you]. Florenda nodded her head in agreement and Jean-Philippe continued:

Maybe they came back for the occasional marriage or *deuil*, but they don't come back enough to share the same experience of being in a generation with you. Because growing up *dans la tribu*, there is work you do with the others in the same generation group as you. You all go work in the fields together, you all make the food for marriages and *événements coutumières* [custom events] together. You experience this work together. The ones who have been in the city the whole time have not shared this with you, and they aren't really part of your social group in the same way, never understand the things the way you do. There are different sorts of work to be done. And there is a sort of pride about doing this work.

Jean-Philippe's point—that doing *travail coutumière*, custom work—together weaves people into a group and prevents them from ever really being “city Kanak,” was echoed by several other people I spoke with. It wasn't necessarily *being* in Nouméa that made one a “city Kanak”—it was not participating in the shared experience of custom work—a form of labor that socializes young people into particularly Kanak patterns of relationality.

La coutume—as it shapes a particularly Kanak form of relationality—is not bound to the space of the village.⁶⁴ I asked Jean-Philippe to tell me more about the

⁶³ Though it isn't necessarily pertinent to my discussion, I should probably mention that Jean-Philippe (Tjiabou) is one of Jean-Marie Tjibaou's sons.

⁶⁴ Custom events in general are no longer contained to the spaces of *la tribu*. Today marriages and *deuils* are frequently held in Nouméa (often at the original Kanak Cultural Center building, *Ko we Kara*, located just outside of Nouméa on the side of a major highway overpass). Even when the main event is being held back *en tribu*, the complicated series of

“pride” he said young people should experience when assuming the responsibilities of a customary role and identity. As he saw it, a young person only becomes a “city Kanak” when he or she is “ashamed” to work—to fulfill customary obligations—in front of others. For example, at a marriage, young people are saddled with most of the manual labor—washing dishes, cooking, getting water, clearing brush and other tasks. In Jean-Philippe’s view, refusing to engage in this work meant that a youth was a *mec de Nouméa*—a Nouméa guy. In rejecting *la coutume*, a young person would be dismissing the responsibilities of his own identity.

Florenda picked up Jean-Philippe’s argument and added:

To participate in *la coutume* you can always be how I was like—just resting seated, watching or listening from the side. But there are young people who are even ashamed to sit and listen. *Qui a honte d’être assis*. These would be city Kanak. Young people who will not go voluntarily to learn.

Jean-Philippe agreed that you could no longer claim to be *Kanak de la tribu* if you felt “ashamed” to remain seated and listen during the long customary discourses that accompany marriages, *deuils* and other ritualized occasions.

Following the *Chemin Kanak*

Most people I spoke with held similar views to Florenda and Jean-Philippe.

They felt that remaining a *Kanak de la tribu*—and in some senses, being Kanak—was based in a willingness to take up the work required by *la coutume* as it pertained their

custom exchanges that precede it are held wherever the implicated parties are located. *La coutume* must follow specific paths, but these paths are mobile and travel with the nodes to which they are connected.

identity and relationships with others. This meant acknowledging and acting with respect to one's position within particular networks of kinship and hierarchy—following what is often called the *chemin Kanak*—the correct, Kanak pathway through customary webs of social relations. My friend Eric Tidjine (father of three of the boys in the music group *Extreme*) explained it to me this way: “There is a pathway to follow. The “White pathway” is easier. For young people, saying you’re a *Kanak de quartier*, it’s kind of a way to flee reality. You might say that to get out of your responsibilities.” By “responsibility,” Eric not only meant the “work” that Jean-Philippe and Florenda had detailed, but also the responsibility of enacting one’s particular position within the social world.⁶⁵ Each individual holds certain rights connected to the place—both geographic and social—that he or she occupies (or more accurately, *emerged*) from. Accordingly, one must follow a certain “itinerary” when moving through social and geographic space (which are ultimately indissociable). Based on the journey of an ancestor, these itineraries connect each individual to specific locations and persons. Kanak managed to follow these ancestral itineraries

⁶⁵ In some senses, this social “work” was even *more* important for young people who had been born and raised in Nouméa—instead of migrating later in their childhoods. Youth who had not spent long periods of time living *en tribu* were less familiar with certain types of labor—planting yams, clearing fields, building *cases*—and there *was* a certain feeling of embarrassment about their lack of skills in these areas, compared to those who had stayed *en tribu*. As Basile Citre and Jo Streeter explain in the magazine *Pourquoi Pas* (Sept 1991:38): “Culturally [young people who have grown up in Nouméa], have lost traditional knowledge that they could not have learned in school and they find themselves uncomfortable in front of other youth who left school rather early and stayed in *la tribu*. This is one of the reasons that can explain why some youth flee when faced with work in *la tribu*. It’s not that they don’t want to work, but it’s simply that they are ashamed of not fully being able to do these tasks and having to admit the gaps in their knowledge of their own culture.”

even during *L'indigénat*, when they were displaced from their own lands and sequestered on reservations. As Alban Bensa (1990:17) describes:

One sometime sees young people passing from one reserve to another to go honor the rights that they hold in a site that was a stage in the itinerary of their ancestors. The mobility of groups is an ancient phenomenon due to the fragility of Kanak institutions, each domestic unity having the tendency of reinforcing its autonomy by distancing itself... The system of lineage names internal to each clan constitutes a sort of stable, hierarchical network across which individuals circulate according to rules of parentage and residence

Even today, every Kanak person continues to be located in very specific ways within a web of relationships. This web consists both of ties to immediate kin as well as the more widely dispersed ancestral itineraries described by Bensa.

In Nouméa, young people remain embedded in this web. They are surrounded by aunts, uncles and cousins and other members of their extended family and clan group. Christine Hamelin (2000: 346) writes:

Though quite large, Nouméa quickly gives one the feeling of being in a small town where everyone knows each other, and what might be called “Kanak Nouméa” is a world where mutual acquaintanceship is even higher since the places inhabited and frequented by Kanak are ethnically and spatially segregated.

The density of relationships, and above all the presence of numerous extended family in the city, permits the exercise of a certain social surveillance, definitely more diffuse than in rural zones, but nevertheless constant.

As my friends explained, relating to others in way that reflected one’s customary relationship and relative position—following the itinerary of the *chemin Kanak*—was a fundamental aspect of what it meant to be Kanak (and what it meant to maintain a Kanak identity in an urban environment). Even in Nouméa, as Hamelin notes, the

density of the Kanak social world exerts significant pressure on youth to behave in ways that appropriately reflect their identity.

Bensa describes Kanak identity as mobile, or constituted by a “spiderweb of relations,” the ancestral itineraries of clans that can stretch over long distances. Today, Nouméa has been integrated into these traditional circuits of movement and displacement. Though many Kanak youth now draw a major part of their identity from residence in a neighborhood or even a particular housing project in Nouméa, places like Montravel, Riverstar or Village de Gaïacs are only single nodes in a larger network of places to which young people trace their belonging and draw their identity. Their relationship to these places is maintained and reproduced through their social relationships, by following the *chemin Kanak*. For example, Kanak youth now use graffiti tags in ways that simultaneously index their connection to both customary areas and city neighborhoods. The tags follow a standard formula, each identifying its creator in with coded *verlan* slang listing a nested series of place names: the name of a customary area, a *tribu*, followed by clan name and an individual nickname.⁶⁶ In this way, tags index Kanak persons by making reference to networks of Kanak places and indelibly mark out indigenous presence in the built environment of Nouméa. Recently, tags have begun to feature the names of neighborhoods and housing projects in the city, in lieu of islands or tribal areas of origin. As young people appropriate the spaces of Nouméa, the city becomes as much a site of belonging—and a source of identity—

⁶⁶ Verlan is a French argot and a major feature of youth and subcultural language practices. It features the inversion and transposition of syllables in a word to create a new slang world. For example, the word verlan is an inversion of the syllables in *l'envers* (the inverse).

as the *tribu*. The *tribu* and city are not opposites, but part of a unified “spiderweb of relations” in which young people locate themselves.



Fig. 4.3. Graffiti tags on a wall in the Vallée du Tir neighborhood. The red arrow points to a tag that identifies its maker using three names: *Xtrem*—meaning the extreme northern region of the Grand Terre, in the Hoot-ma-whaap customary area, followed by a *Bondjé*, an individual nickname, and then *Rebls*, slang for Montravel, one of the largest, almost exclusively Kanak public housing projects in Nouméa (Photo by author).

Ybal Khan: An “Original Kanak Man” in the City

A similar understanding of the relationship between the city and the *tribu* is referenced in many of the lyrics of Kanak rapper Ybal Khan. Ybal (real name Drawilo Drawilo—Ybal Khan is *verlan* for “*cannibale*”) is from the *tribu* de Hunöj on Lifou island, but grew up in the neighborhood of Rivière-Salée. He released his

second full-length album, “Petit Kanak,” in 2010, when I was in New Caledonia.⁶⁷

The album’s cover features a photo-shopped picture of Ybal standing at convergence between “the city” (high rise buildings and pavement) and “*the tribu*” (*cases* and palm trees). Importantly perhaps, the same sky stretches over both halves of the picture.

Ybal, also known as OKM (Original Kanak Man), calls his music “*rap identitaire*,” and is one of the most outspoken young cultural producers I met during my fieldwork. In a 2009 interview, a journalist from *Les Nouvelles* asked him what his thoughts were on the “situation in *les quartiers*.” He responded:

It’s true that it’s a bit of a mess. But it’s not necessary to add to it. It’s said that it’s dangerous [*c’est chaud*] in Vallée-du-Tir, in Rivière-Salée or in Montravel...Me, I go there often and I haven’t had any worries. You must not denigrate the youth of the *quartiers* too much. [Les Nouvelles 2009]



Fig. 4.4. Cover art for Ybal Khan’s 2010 album *Petit Kanak* (used with permission of artist).

⁶⁷ The title plays with the meaning of the words *petit kanak*—originally a patronizing term of address for a Kanak person (similar to calling an African American “boy” in pre-civil rights America).

In *Petit Kanak*'s title track, Ybal exhorts Kanak youth to be "proud of their identity," Whether they "grew up in the *tribu* or in the urban jungle." Throughout the song, Ybal articulates a clear vision of the fundamental unity of all Kanak youth and their shared future:

*Little Kanak, don't pay attention to those who diss you
You'll make it, even if they wanna push you into the void
You're in your own home, even if some think otherwise
You're what you are and your name attaches you to the land.
I'm telling you to be proud of your identity
Stay the same and affirm yourself by spitting the truth.
[...]*

*Besides, your only real masters are your father and mother
The family is sacred and they'll always be your compass
If you wander without reason, get back on track fast
Avoid screwing around or the cops will be on your ass
And if you're the victim of academic failure and you don't understand
Don't blame yourself, cause you're not the only one
I know that adapting yourself is not easy
This system isn't ours and it takes us for morons
I advise you to open up books and drink up knowledge
Seek to understand this world by beginning with your own history.
[...]*

*Whether you grew up in the tribu or in the urban jungle
The problems are the same because nothing is easy
I lay down a passage for all our brothers in exile
From the Grand Terre to the islands, my message I carry
And bit by bit my words become force
But you're free to do what you want
Me, I speak for us, for that one day everything will be better
For that one day we will make it through this and one day we'll be strong
And I hope to see that day before I die
I've come to blow up the score but nothing amuses me
when I think of our dead leaders, I blame the system
but what is written is written and I'm not doing anything but saying it
We must go forward, so prepare your future*

*Little Kanak, we're the same despite our differences
And despite our divergences lets be proof of our own intelligence
[...]*

*Little Kanak, hear my voice cause I hear your cries
And if you tell me Kanaky I will tell you unity
Little kanak, I'm like you, just one Kanak among so many others
Remember just that, I fight for our people⁶⁸*

Ybal appeals to *all* Kanak as “just one Kanak among so many others,” interpellating young listeners into a single indigenous body politic.

The Generational Dynamics of the City/Tribu Opposition

In her work on Nouméa’s squats, anthropologist Dorothee Dussy presents a convincing argument against binary oppositions of the city and *la tribu*. Dussy writes:

The fictive opposition between the urban world and the rural world (an opposition that, along with others, forms the basis of ethnology) leads us to think that in arriving to the city, all is thrown into disorder, everything changes, that the migrants are totally left to fend for themselves, as uprooted people. In a context of recent migration and of very strong urban mobility [...] one observes the opposite, that Kanak social practices are maintained in Nouméa. [Dussy 2006: 14]

Yet this “fictive opposition between the urban world and the rural world” continues to scaffold youth crisis discourse. It also increasingly structures how older Kanak—customary elders and the parents of my friends—envisage the younger generation. I saw this clearly demonstrated for me at the inaugural *Congrès de la Jeunesse Kanak* (Kanak Youth Congress), in 2010. During the two-day event, the Customary Senate grouped young people into delegations based on customary area. Instead of sitting

⁶⁸ My own translation.

with others from their same customary region, young people living in Nouméa were separated out and instructed to sit in a group for “*les jeunes de quartier*.” Several girls I knew from Rivière-Salée and Montravail complained about being segregated in a group for “city Kanak” while their cousins (who lived in Lifou) sat in a group with other people from their home village. As one of the girls put it, “They think we’re just *filles de la ville*. It’s crap.” In her view, splitting up the delegates according to the logic of *tribu* vs. Nouméa was socially arbitrary. You couldn’t assume that living in Nouméa automatically made someone a different type of person.

It was clear that the customary senators felt differently. Though Kanak youth may agree with Ybal Khan that even in the city “You’re in your own home/ You’re what you are and your name attaches you to the land,” their parents’ generation is far less sanguine about the persistence of Kanak identity in Nouméa. This is in part because they do not locate Kanak identity within the same framework as their children. I want to argue that the ways Kanak youth understand Kanak identity are largely an effect of their generational position—as I will explore throughout the rest of this chapter. The young people I worked with were all almost all born after “The Events” and grew up in an era shaped by the Matignon and Nouméa Accords. Though these accords fell short of culturally and politically “rebalancing” New Caledonia, they helped spur massive immigration from rural villages into Nouméa (which remained overwhelmingly white until the 1990s). Today, most young people have spent at least some time living or going to school in Nouméa (whether or not they live there permanently). Even those who remain *en tribu* see Nouméa as forming “part of

the daily horizon” (Hamelin 2000:352). For this generation, Kanak identity remains tethered to the land—to *la tribu*—but the rope is long. Unlike many of their parents, they do not see a fundamental opposition between being Kanak and living in a city. Instead, they locate Kanak identity in the maintenance of a particular mode of sociality. As Hamelin explains, “Generally speaking, the relationship between city and *tribu*, at least for the first generation of urbanized Kanak, is not posed in terms of choices that have to be made, but in terms of relations to conserve” (Hamelin 2000: 354).

I want to make it clear that I am not denying that urbanization has led to cultural changes in New Caledonia. As Florenda and Jean-Philippe explained, young people raised in Nouméa *do* lack some of the cultural competencies of their parents and grandparents. They may not know how to plant yams, trap fruit bats or build a *case*. They may not know where to sit during the ritual discourses at the closing ceremonies of a *deuil* and they may even not speak their own language fluently. Growing up in a city rather than *la tribu* clearly affects how young people are socialized and what kind of cultural practices they acquire. What I am arguing is that these changes, while significant, are not necessarily evidence of a radical break with Kanak culture. The narrative of rupture, disorder and temporal confusion—as crystallized in the discourse of youth crisis—comes largely from outside Kanak culture, and is propagated by the media and government. “The assimilation of the words ‘*jeunesse kanak*’ and ‘*délinquance*,’” as one astute participant at the *Congrès de*

la Jeunesse proposed, “is a result of the enduring colonial attitudes (*esprit colonial*) in this country.”

Along these lines, I argue that New Caledonian discourse of youth crisis—particularly in its suggestion that Kanak youth “misperceive” the past and “cannot project themselves in to the future”—is firmly rooted in republican and colonial ideology. While Kanak youth perceive colonialism in the *present* tense—most European New Caledonians understand it in the *past*. In representations produced by the French government and the dominant sector, colonization *ended* in 1988 with the Matignon Accord (or at the very latest, with the Nouméa Accord in 1998). Within this view, contemporary Kanak youth are a *post-colonial* generation. This is why the marginalization of Kanak in Nouméa is framed by Stéphane and others as evidence of “a cultural problem,” and the angry claims of Kanak youth are interpreted as proof of pathology, not legitimate protest.

French Colonialism, Temporal Transposition and the *Crise de la Jeunesse*

France has had a difficult time assimilating its colonial history with its commitment to republican constructions of national identity and universal human rights. Immigrants and colonial subjects have been largely excluded from French textbook histories since the Third Republic and the study of colonialism was not part of university-level history curricula until the 1990s (see Noiriel 1996; Savarèse 2000). In February 2005, the French government even passed a law requiring that school

curricula acknowledge the “positive role of France overseas.” As LaForcade (2006:227) explains, framing national identity in terms of colonialism is

[H]orrifying to the republican mindset; not only because of its racial undertones, which run counter to the myth of colorblind universality, but also because it represents national identity in a manner that blurs the boundaries between master and slave, colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed.

France’s governance rests on what Achille Mbembe (in Stoler 2011:129) calls “the logos and pathos of a racial state honed in a history of empire,” yet this history remains sequestered on the fringes of its national narrative. As Kristin Ross asserts, a separation of modern France and colonialism, the “keeping of two stories apart,” is “another name for forgetting one of the stories or for relegating it to a different time frame” (1996: 8-9). As Stoler maintains, dominant French discourses frame the nation’s imperial histories as

[F]inished acts that can be relegated to the *passé composé* (past tense). There was wrong done; we all live with regrets—beginning and end of story. Regrets themselves can be soothing and safe.

I believe this focus on temporal framing is a useful way to understand the contemporary experiences of postcolonial (and still colonial) French subjects. For example, a growing body of scholarship draws direct connections between the widespread stigmatization of immigrant youth in metropolitan France, and their representation as threats to national cohesion, and France’s “temporally confused” relationship with its colonial past. By locating colonialism in the *passé composé*, France “denies history, refuses responsibility, and disavows any ongoing financial or ethical responsibilities toward former colonial subjects” (Wilder 2011:60). Instead, the

suffering and social marginalization of immigrants is blamed on their “pathological investment in the past,” and their refusal to “integrate” themselves into contemporary French society in order to “work for a new future” (ibid:59). Violence in the *banlieues* is seen as “the result of an inevitable clash between mainstream French values and “backwards” immigrant traditions (Terrio 2009:78). In this way, immigrants, *rather than the French state*, are depicted as “temporally confused.” Nicolas Sarkozy exemplified this attitude in his speeches and public policies.⁶⁹ For example, in 2006, after three weeks of rioting in France following the accidental deaths of two French boys of North African ancestry, Sarkozy opined:

Those who, instead of struggling to earn a living, prefer to look in the folds of history for an imaginary debt that France would have contracted with them and that, in their eyes, it has not yet settled, those who prefer to inflame the one-upmanship of memories, to demand a compensation that nobody could give them, rather than to seek to integrate themselves through effort and work, those who do not love France, those who demand everything from it without wanting to give it anything, I tell them that they are not obligated to remain on national territory.⁷⁰

As Stoler (2011: 156) argues, we must assess “the resilient forms in which the material and psychic structures of colonial relations remain both vividly tactile to some in the present and to others, events relegated to the *passé composé*.” What I want to argue

⁶⁹ Sarkozy gave a particularly infamous speech in front of a group of Senegalese elites and scholars at Cheikh Anta Diop University on July 26, 2007, in which he expressed similar views on the “temporal confusion” of France’s postcolonial subjects. Sarkozy claimed that “The tragedy of Africa is that the African has not fully entered into history ... They have never really launched themselves into the future.” He added that traditionally, Africans “only knew the eternal renewal of time, marked by the endless repetition of the same gestures and the same words.” And that “In this realm of fancy ... there is neither room for human endeavour nor the idea of progress.”

⁷⁰ Translation from Boubacar Boris Diop, "Le discours inacceptable de Nicolas Sarkozy," http://www.rewmi.com/Le-discours-inacceptable-de-Nicolas-Sarkozy-par-Boubacar-Boris-Diop_a3409.html

here is that in New Caledonia, these “resilient forms” manifest themselves in the *crise de la jeunesse*. The discourses surrounding Kanak delinquency are both premised on and reinforced by the same “temporal confusion” demonstrated in Sarkozy’s speeches. What is perhaps even more remarkable in this case, is that the Kanak are *not* postcolonial immigrants in metropolitan France. They are the indigenous people of New Caledonia, and the French are immigrants. As Kanak sociologist John Passa, points out, no space in New Caledonia is “neutral, since the Kanak the relationship with the land is primordial. Kanak are not Magrébins’ (in Lévy & Zeoula 2009:77).⁷¹ Yet settler colonialism reframes time and space in such a way that New Caledonia becomes French republican territory while the Kanak are made into anomalous, unintegrated others, “looking in the folds of history for an imaginary debt.”

Kanak Youth and the Misrecognition of Historical Context

Perhaps I should not have been surprised when Stéphane (the director of urban planning and social policy in Nouméa), drew a direct parallel between delinquency among immigrant populations in metropolitan France and the New Caledonian *crise de la jeunesse*. In Stéphane’s estimation, Kanak youth suffered because their difference had not been successfully “integrated” into the urban *habitus* required by life in Nouméa. Instead of living in the present and looking towards the future, young people refused to stop looking backwards, to “cultural habits” and memories that no

⁷¹ “Rien n’est neutre, par exemple pour le Kanak l’appartenance à la terre est primordiale. Les Kanak ne sont pas des Magrébins.”

longer serve them. “Radicalized” Kanak youth were engaging in a “war of memories” promoting hate against New Caledonia’s non-Indigenous population. Stéphane detailed his concerns:

In the 80s, when France initiated the immigration of many people without taking into account their culture, without teaching them French, putting them into ghettos...At one moment or another, we pay the price. If these people feel that they are not integrated in a country, they will retract into their own cultural habits and radicalize. That’s what’s happening with the whole headscarf situation in Metropolitan France right now.

Here [in New Caledonia], we have in some ways the same phenomena. There are two phenomena. Already, we are in the midst of building a society on a civil war [*les Événements*]. There are two paths that have been widening since this civil war. There is the protocol of the Nouméa accords, a map for constructing a society that is also based on the memory of war. That’s to say, starting from this collective memory of *Les Evenements*, we want to say “never again.” Now, we have to build together. We’re trying to erase the effects of colonization. This is the story of catching up, of development, of ‘*si y a pas toi, y a pas moi*’ [‘Without you, there is no me’].⁷² We are on the path of the memory of the war. We remember in order to not remake the same mistakes. There is another path, which is the war of memories. There is still this socio-cultural mindset that continues to feed this hatred towards colonization and the notion of “*les sales blancs, les Babylones*” [“dirty whites, Babylons”],⁷³ all of this anti-capitalism rhetoric. The “noble savage” who is a martyr, the “original Kanak.” Here, the worry is that this that this mindset radicalizes people. Young people with very little schooling absorb these ideas like a sponge. All territories that experience poverty are fertile ground for radical ideologies. In developing countries, who comes to power? It’s petty tyrants. They cultivate hate against others.

In Stéphane’s view, this “mindset”—a refusal to acknowledge that colonialism is something of the past, that its effects are “being erased”—leads Kanak youth to misrecognize socio-historical context. As a result, their way of relating with others is

⁷² The expression ‘*si y a pas toi, y a pas moi*’ was made famous in New Caledonia by the late Kanak entertainer Kiki Karé, following the 1998 Nouméa Accord’s call for a ‘common destiny.’

⁷³ “Babylons” in the Rastafarian sense of the term, meaning members of a corrupt, materialist, White-dominated Western culture.”

out of sync. In this way, the marginalization of Kanak youth emerges from a confused orientation to New Caledonia's "national teleology." Stéphane continued:

The problem, it's that way of thinking is completely anachronistic considering everything that has now come to pass in New Caledonia. When I was working as a social worker, there were these young, freshly-trained Caledonians faced with these squatters.⁷⁴ The squatters yelled at them, "we don't want people from the city government, dirty colonizers"... There was a Melanesian with me, there was a girl from la brousse [a Caldoche]. The squatters didn't understand that we were also *enfants du pays* [children of this country, countrymen]. It is as if now I am dealing with a young German Nazi.

There are lots of young people like this, who are disconnected from what is happening around them, and this is a serious issue, because the more and more Nouméa grows, the greater the level of requirements to find a job, it's going to be necessary to know more and more what's going on in this country, and these young people will feel increasingly marginalized, on the sidelines. For 2014, there is this path, where there is a desire to construct this country, and another more radical way, which is anachronistic... which continues to be based on a radical discourse built upon historical foundations that hardly exist anymore.

Essentially, Stéphane is arguing that Kanak youth suffer because they are not successfully adapting to *change*. They continue to peg their hopes on the idea of "Kanaky"—a "radical discourse" that Stéphane considers to be "anachronistic." His view relies on a particular construction of the events that frame Kanak youth as a generation. Today's Kanak youth were born after The Events, or are too young to remember them clearly. As Stéphane sees it, The Matignon and Nouméa Accords created a *rupture* between "the time of The Events" and the socio-historical context of today. The "radical discourse" of an independent Kanaky reflects a time before the

⁷⁴ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the term "Calédonian" is almost always used to signify Caldoche. Stéphane's use of the term "Melanesian," in place of Kanak, is also notable. I often found that loyalists avoided using "Kanak" specifically because it elides ethnic and political identities.

Accord “rebalanced” New Caledonia—by institutionalizing the “promotion” of Kanak culture, granting increased territorial autonomy in certain areas of governance, offering improved access to education and employment. This is a bit like saying that Kevin Rudd’s 2008 apology to Aboriginal Australians *erased* the effects of settler colonialism. As has been plainly made clear by the continuing struggles of Kanak people and numerous reports issued by the UN Commission on Indigenous People’s rights, colonialism is ongoing in New Caledonia and so are its effects (Anaya/United Nations 2011). Stéphane’s view—that Kanak youth are marginalized as a result of lack of socio-historical references—forms the basis for much of the government’s anti-delinquency policies. Yet the political and cultural desires of Kanak youth are not the result of an asynchronous relationship to New Caledonia. On the contrary, these subjectivities emerge from this generation’s very *specific location* in historical time.

Stéphane inadvertently highlighted this truth towards the end of our meeting. He described how the Mayor’s and High Commissioner’s offices had agreed to hold meetings with youth representatives in order to better understand their demands. He complained:

In a practical manner, on the ground, working with youth, it’s hard. They say “Yeah, there’s nothing, you do nothing, the mayor, the city government does nothing.” We say, “Ok, if there’s nothing, let’s sit down, what do you want?”... They want everything right away. For the city government, that’s impossible!... At the same time these are these youth who want things right away... they are lacking cultural references, historical references, they’re lacking everything, they construct themselves with these very fragile things... There was a group of these young people who went to the Haussariat [the offices of the High Commissioner]. The Haussaie is the representative of the state in Calédonie. The youths said, “there isn’t this, there isn’t that,” they went down their list.

At this point, according to Stéphane, one of the young people did something that clearly indicated his deeply disordered, politically confused relationship to New Caledonia's history:

In front of the Haussaire, there was picture of the handshake between Jacques Lafleur and Jean-Marie Tjibaou, it's a symbol, and one of these youths said, "That's bullshit." They have too many...they swallow all these political concepts without digesting them in any critical way, and as a result they're totally out of step with their own country. So, Monsieur le Haussaire said, "Okay, if that's shit, well then what are you going to contribute?"...This group of youths was all from Rivière-Salée. I don't think the Haussaire had any idea how wide the gulf is [between them and us]...

For Stéphane and the Haussaire, the photo of Lafleur and Tjibaou's *poignée de mains* unambiguously symbolizes of the "end of colonialism"—it marks the signing of the Matignon Accord and the birth of New Caledonia's "common destiny." The dismissal of the picture as "bullshit" served as stark proof of the "gulf" between "them" (Kanak youth who don't correctly understand the relationship between the past, present and future) and "us" (white French men who do). What Stéphane and the Haussaire presumably *didn't* know was that this young man's reaction was in fact provoked by a very clear *recognition* of his location in history, which I discuss in the following section.

Thinking about Darewa: Generations and the Embodiment of History

Stéphane didn't remember the names of the young men at the Haussairiat meeting. When I later learned who they were, it turned out I knew all four of them

(two of them quite well). They were Hassan, Goti, Johan and Darewa.⁷⁵ Darewa was the one who had called the image of Lafleur and Tjibaou's handshake "bullshit." Stéphane's account of the meeting was the first of four versions I would eventually encounter. I later spoke separately with both Hassan and Darewa to learn their version of what happened. I also found out that *Les Nouvelles* had published an article about the meeting the day after it took place, and I was curious to learn the paper's spin on the event. *Les Nouvelles* retold the encounter between Darewa and the Haussaire this way:

[...] The youths from Rivière-Salée were able to bring up the subjects closest to their hearts: the lack of entertainment and educational opportunities in the neighborhood, the lack of infrastructure, or decrepit infrastructure, the lack of programs to raise awareness amongst young people about various problems like drugs or sexuality, the lack of safety or even more so what they saw as the abuse of power by police officers. "They arrived with a load of problems, big and small," explained the Haussaire. "Much of it doesn't fall under my jurisdiction, but it gave me an idea of their mindset. I told them, don't be confused about where you are, I'm not the good Lord above!"

Darewa, 22 years, is the most rebellious of the four. At the end of the meeting, when the discussion became more light-hearted, the Haussaire evoked the symbol found in the *Accords de Matignon* room [in the Haussariat]. When he pointed out the photo of the handshake [between Tjibaou and Lafleur], Darewa exclaimed, "That's bullshit!" "You have no right to say that!" replied the Haussaire. They then launched into a discussion of the *Événements* and the construction of the *destin commun* [common destiny]. "At the end, it got a little heated," the youths admitted as they exited the meeting. "It took me certain moment to maintain my calm," acknowledged the Haussaire. [Wibert 2009]

Les Nouvelles' account largely replicates Stéphane's—though it also gives us a better idea of how the Haussaire supposedly reacted. Hassan, Goti, Johan and Darewa are

⁷⁵ Hassan is the founder and leader of the hip-hop dance group Résurrection, one of the *associations* with which I spent the most time.

represented as being amusingly naive. The demands they make of the Haussaire are so ridiculous the boys must be “confused about where they are.” Who do they think the Haussaire is, God? Their skewed vision of the world is confirmed when Darewa—the “rebellious” one—issues his colorful assessment of the historical handshake. The shocked Haussaire castigates Darewa, claiming he has “no right” to say such things. The outburst provokes a lecture on the past (*les Événements*) and its relationship to the future (*le destin commun*)—a teleology these youths clearly misapprehend. For Stéphane, the Haussaire and *Les Nouvelles*’ largely white European audience, any reasonable person could never *misrecognize* the handshake between Tjibaou and Lafleur as “bullshit.”



Fig. 4.5. The famous “*poignée de mains*” photo (Photo: Government of New Caledonia).

But it is Stéphane, the Haussaire and *Les Nouvelles* who are guilty of *misrecognition*. They see Darewa’s reaction to the handshake photo as typical of his

generation—disordered, deculturated Kanak youth who don't understand their socio-historical context, who are on a path that is “anachronistic...which continues to be based on a radical discourse built upon historical foundations that hardly exist anymore” (in the words of Stéphane). This is not who Darewa is. Darewa is the son of Alphonse Dianou. On April 22, 1988, when Darewa was a small baby, his father, a former student at a Roman Catholic Seminary in Fiji, led a group of FLNKS militants who took gendarmes hostage and held them in a cave in the village of Gossanah. After the two weeks of negotiations that followed (while Ouvéa was occupied by hundreds of French special forces), Dianou and FLNKS agreed to release the hostages. But President Chirac was facing re-election and decided it was politically necessary to take a firm stance against anti-government “insurrections.” The army stormed the cave in Gossanah on May 5th, killing Darewa's father and eighteen other Kanak during what is now known as the “Ouvéa Massacre.” Autopsies later showed that many of those killed had been executed after surrendering. Darewa's father, who had been severely injured by a gunshot to his leg, was left to bleed out, and died several hours later. Contrary to what Stéphane, the Haussaire and *Les Nouvelles* may have assumed, Darewa intimately understands the history of New Caledonia.

The Ouvéa Massacre is what prompted Jean-Marie Tjibaou to agree to the stipulations of the Matignon Accords the following year, effectively giving up the possibility of independence in the near future. The signing of the Accord by Tjibaou and Loyalist leader Jacques Lafleur was immortalized by the photo of their handshake, taken shortly afterwards. Many Kanak felt that Tjibaou sacrificed far too much by

signing the Accord, that he had sold them out. Those who had been injured or whose kin members and friends had been murdered by the French army in Ouvéa a mere year before were particularly bitter. Amongst them was Darewa's father's friend—Djubeally Wea—who had been shot at Gossanah but survived. A year later, Wea would assassinate Tjibaou during a ceremony marking the anniversary of the massacre in Ouvéa.

For Darewa, the handshake between Tjibaou and Lafleur—a symbol of the Matignon Accords and the end of open independence struggle—represents a renunciation of the future—a renunciation of what his father died for. It signifies a denial of the ongoing abjection of the Kanak people and the continuing legacy of settler colonialism in New Caledonia. Darewa does in fact “have the right” to call “bullshit.” And he did so not because he is disconnected from the history of New Caledonia, but because he *embodies* this history. Darewa thinks and acts as he does *because*—not despite—socio-historical context.

At another point during my fieldwork, I attended a colloquia on “Sovereignty and Constitutional Law in New Caledonia” with Darewa and a number of other young Kanak activists. The speakers at the conference—nearly all white Metropolitan legal scholars—debated how a “New Caledonian citizenship” could be reconciled with the French constitution. They spoke in academic tones about the relationship between identity and the state, about voting rights, about the “integration of difference,” while Darewa shifted restlessly in his seat. Finally, during a question and answer period, Darewa stood up without raising his hand and announced in a loud voice:

You talk to us about peace, about rights and the law but you came here and you burned and you killed. *Ici c'est Kanaky*. This is Kanaky and you have to get this in your head!

His comment caused an uncomfortable stir in the room, and the flustered panel of academics in the front of the lecture hall quickly tried to move on to another topic.

Darewa and his friends left the colloquia shortly afterwards, and I joined them as they passed around a blunt in their car, which they jokingly called a “diplomatic vehicle,” because it was covered in Kanak flags. Darewa was still riled up; his hands shook as he worked the lighter. “*C'est pas tout le monde qui pourrait prendre la parole comme j'ai fait tout à l'heure*. Not everyone could have spoken like I did just then,” he said. “*J'étais placé de dire des choses comme ça*. I was positioned to say things like that. If it was someone else, they would have had to speak differently. *J'avais le droit à la parole*. I had the right to speak.”

Darewa was referencing the fact that he was Alphonse Dianou's son—and that all the Kanak people at the colloquia would have been aware of how his identity located him within a set of social relationships and histories. Based on his *locatedness*, Darewa possessed particular rights and responsibilities. He embodies history in a way that allows him to speak for a particular future. Though Darewa is an exceptional figure—he is also emblematic of his generation—in a way that Stéphane and the Haussaire do not recognize—and the discourse of youth crisis does not acknowledge. Kanak youth are not “out of sync” with their country. They are not temporally or culturally unmoored. They have the *right* to make claims on certain types of futures—

on Kanaky—*because* of their cultural location, because of their embeddedness within a history.



Fig. 4.6. Darewa takes control of the microphone during the celebrations following the raising of the Kanak flag on July 17th, 2010. His identity —the son of Alphonse Dianou—gave him the right to *prendre la parole*. He was the only young person to do so. During his comments he walked over to touch the portraits of two other slain martyrs to the independence movement—Eloi Macharo and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné (photo, top right). Afterwards he was joined by his friend Lou Lou (also from Ouvéa), and they sang “*Kanaky mon Pays*” (the independence anthem written by Tjibaou), beating out the rhythm on a *paquet des feuilles* (traditional percussion instrument made of bound leaves). Photo by author.

A Problem of Generations

The remainder of this chapter considers how the manner in which youth locate Kanak identity—and the claims they feel this identity gives them on the future—emerges from what Karl Mannheim calls the “problem of generations” (1972 [1952]). Mannheim’s theory of generations is essentially a theory of social change (Laufer and Bengston 1974), with generations as the agents of change. According to Mannheim, generations, especially those radicalized by historical or cultural trauma, could transform society by challenging customary thought and offering new political and cultural visions (Edmunds and Turner 2002: 561). Contemporary Kanak youth are a generation sandwiched between the end of violence of *les Événements* and the uncertainty of an upcoming independence referendum, shaped by rapid urbanization and social change and—importantly—a shift in the relationship between “the cultural” and “the political” initiated by the Matignon and Nouméa Accords. As Mannheim argued, the relationship between history and social generation is a “symbiotic and dialectical one, whereby individuals both constitute historical configurations and are constituted historically by them” (Pilcher 1994: 490).

Mannheim’s framework for understanding the social constitution of generations has already been taken up in interesting ways in New Caledonia by French anthropologist Christine Demmer (2002). In her doctoral thesis, Demmer looked at the generational confrontations in a small village near Canala (on the east coast of the Grand Terre), in the mid-1980s, during *Les Événements*. She argues that these confrontations resulted from fundamental, generationally-based differences in the

conception of Kanak identity. In short, a dialectical relationship between historical events and social structures had led the younger generation to locate Kanak identity within different frameworks than their parents and grandparents. This led them to articulate particular types of political claims on the future in New Caledonia.

Demmer explains that during the 1950s and 1960s, after the end of the *l'indigénat* and *cantonnement*, the nascent Kanak nationalist movement focused its efforts on the integration of Kanak into the market economy and political life, and the rebalancing of power between the European and indigenous population. Long forced to remain on their reservations, Kanak began moving around the territory—and to Nouméa—to seek employment and educational opportunities. However, in 1985, the “Fabius-Pisani Plan”—which mandated the decentralization of the territorial government and the creation of three regional administrative bodies—spurred a major shift in indigenous political strategy and led to the emergence of what Demmer (2003:14) calls, “a new temporality of Kanak nationalism” and the first “attempt to concretely apply the principle of Kanak sovereignty:”

This policy management framework, intended to close the economic gap [between the Kanak and the European population], gave Kanak in the independantist regions (the North and Loyalty Islands) the means to manage a larger budget than they were accustomed to by themselves for the first time. FLNKS saw in this statute an opportunity to establish a Kanak and socialist independence (*l'Indépendance Kanake et socialiste*). FLNKS leaders enjoined the inhabitants of the *tribus* (the former reserves) to engage in small-scale agricultural cooperative entrepreneurship to combine the market economy with endogenous modes of production. [*ibid.* 2003:7]

In this way, the political implications of the Fabius Pisani plan acted to re-anchor Kanak identity *back* in the space of the *tribu/reserve* (while the end of the *indigénat*

regime forty years earlier had initially enabled Kanak to locate indigenous identity *outside* of the spaces of the reserve). In part because of the creation of regions, Demmer explains, those who came of age during *les Événements* came to understand Kanak identity as being essentially bound to the *tribu*. Accordingly, they saw Kanak sovereignty as being closely connected to the maintenance of rural lifeways as methods of disentanglement from French economic hegemony. *However*, their parents and grandparents—who had experienced life during the *indigénat*, when Kanak were legally sequestered on reservations—did not share this identificatory logic. For them, the *tribu* itself was fundamentally tied to colonial oppression. Consequently, unlike their children and grandchildren, they did *not* see life on the *tribu* as the core of indigenous identity. They certainly did not see remaining on the *tribu* as vital to indigenous sovereignty. Instead, according to Demmer, these older generations located Kanak identity in non-market exchanges of yams and other food crops and the maintenance of customary social hierarchies.

Demmer's contention—that a specific configuration of historical and social circumstances produced the very particular form Kanak nationalism took during *les Événements*—closely parallels the arguments made in this chapter. As I have shown, the manner in which contemporary urban youth locate Kanak identity is the product of their particular “generational site.” In Mannheim's theorization, “generational sites” or “locations” emerge from the dialectical relationship between historical and social time. A generational site “refers to the opportunities that are presented to a particular generation as a result of the constellation of factors that were present at its

inception...A generational location is a cluster of opportunities or life chances that constitute the ‘fate’ of a generation” (Edmunds and Turner 2002: 8-10). In this way, individuals and groups are “fixed in qualitatively quite different subjective eras...and each generation has a distinctive historical consciousness” (Pilcher 1994:490).

Because of their “generational location,” Kanak youth don’t make the same necessary connections between being Kanak and living *en tribu* that their parents—the generation analyzed by Demmer—do. Like Florenda, Jean-Philippe and other friends explained to me, a person could grow up in Nouméa, hardly ever returning to the *tribu*, and be as fully, “authentically Kanak” as someone who had spent his or her entire life there. Unlike young people during 1980s, those born *after* the *les Événements* and the Matignon Accords are more likely to situate Kanak identity within particular styles of behavior and ways of relating to others. In their understanding, the *chemin kanak* connects individuals within a network of social relations that tethers them to both *tribu* and city.

Mannheim also argued that under certain conditions, a generation’s location could “create a potent generational consciousness or ideology of political change that is sufficient to bring about significant social change” (Edmunds & Turner 2002: 17). Age groups can thus become “the carriers of intellectual and organizational alternatives to the status quo...bringing about social change through collective generational organization” (*ibid.* 8). In short, under the right circumstances, a generation can become a social movement. Bourdieu (1979: vii-viii; cf. Bourdieu 1984) makes a similar argument concerning what he calls a generation’s “particular

structure of objective possibilities.” Bourdieu maintains that a group’s “temporal dispositions are what structure...social transformation, their hopes for the future, the objective chance of creating it” (1979:2). So far in this chapter, I have explored how the “temporal dispositions” of Kanak youth might structure “their hopes for the future.” Now I want to turn to what Bourdieu calls the “objective chances” this generation has of actually creating such a future. Are Kanak youth poised to become part of a social movement? Do they have the revolutionary consciousness to transform transform the settler colonial structures continuing to shape life in New Caledonia? Or is the marginalization and stigmatization faced by this generation—especially urban youth—such that they do not possess the material, psychological and cultural resources necessary to create the future to which they would lay claim? As Bourdieu argues:

Those who have no future before them...are unlikely to form the individual project of bringing about their future, or to work for the coming of a new collective future...In the absence of reasonable expectations all that is left is daydream and utopia. [*ibid.* viii]

Is Kanaky 2014 only a messianic imaginary? Or do young people “have sufficient control over their present to undertake to reappropriate the future” (*ibid.* viii)?

Bourdieu’s idea of “objective chances” (a theory, it may be worth noting, that was developed in a French settler colonial context) gives us some purchase on a question with no easy answer. Though *some* urban Kanak youth *do* have the forms of capital (in the Bourdieuan sense) necessary “to transform the world...[by] transcending the

present,” others may be part of what Bourdieu calls a subproletariat—“without the means to implement their hopes” (*ibid.* 70).

A Kanak Subproletariat? Failed Customary Adoptions and Messianic Imaginaries

It happened most of the afternoons I came to teach my English class at the *maison de quartier* in Montravel. A young man—sometimes the same young man—in his late teens or early twenties, usually wearing dirty clothes, no shoes, and reeking of alcohol and marijuana, would start screaming. Obscenities, random invectives, sometimes coherent, in a mix of French, Drehu, Nengone, sometimes Ajië. “*Non, mais ça fait chier salaud! ...Wanamatcha!Avale mes couilles grosse pute, hein?! Nique la France!*” Sometimes there would be two young men, stumbling drunk, and sometimes they would throw their empty wine bottles on the asphalt outside the classroom and computer lab, sending clouds of broken glass flying into the air like glitter. These boys all lived in the Pierre Lequette housing project or the nearby squat, usually with a number of extended family members. None of them had jobs. Most of them were well-known “problems.”

The staff of the *maison de quartier*—all women, almost always led by Adèle, the outspoken *animatrice* from Ouvéa—would carefully try to calm them down and draw them away from the building. But the boys were always furious—and usually obliterated past the reach of reason. Their eyes—red and watery from the weed and booze—looked right past Adèle as she harangued them. I’m sure most of the boys

were blacked out during these encounters, and their rage seemed like the only emotion sharp enough to pierce through their stupor. Eventually they would stop screaming and look vaguely contrite. Adèle would offer them something from the kitchen. Finally they would stagger out of the building to pass out under the shade of a tree by the bus stop or return to drinking in the soccer field behind the *maison*.

One afternoon, after kicking out a cherub-faced, dreadlocked seventeen-year old who punched a hole through the fiberglass wall of the computer lab, Adèle went outside to smoke a cigarette and calm her nerves. I followed as she dropped down to sit on the concrete steps of the *maison*. Her *robe mission* unfurled into a heap beside her and she sighed as she took a long drag. “*Ces mômes*” she said, looking down at the ground, “*tout cela me fait mal au coeur. C’est pas vraiment de leur faute. C’est la coutume qui les a échoué.*” These kids. All of this makes me sick to my heart. It’s not really their fault...*la coutume* failed them. “What do you mean?” I asked, “How is *coutume* involved exactly?” Adèle explained that the boy who had, moments ago, put his fist through the wall in a drunken rage, was a “failed customary adoption.” “Almost all of these delinquents,” she said, “*les misérables* that harass the *maison de quartier*, they are *enfants donnés* (“children who have been given”). But *les liens, le chemin correct*—the bonds, the correct path—has not been maintained.”

Adèle went on to provide me with her analysis of the situation, one that would later be corroborated by several other sources. In her view, urbanization, cultural

change and economic and social marginalization had disrupted the deep-rooted Kanak system of customary adoption. In Kanak society, adoption allows for the creation or rebalancing of alliances. A lineage that “gives” a woman for marriage will in turn be “given” a child for adoption. An elder brother will adopt the first child of his sister to ensure the “return of blood” into his clan. Clan identity is transferred through the matriline and a lineage’s “blood” is embodied and transmitted by women, not men. This is why a maternal uncle—who share’s the same blood as his sister—is seen as a child’s “customary father” (rather than his “actual” biological father). Joseph Streeter explains:⁷⁶

Often, people will say of traditional Kanak society: “you sell women.” We don’t sell them, it is a custom, to pay for the blood (*pour payer le sang*). Girls are taken as wives in another clan. This clan will come to seek a girl and will also give the price for blood. This is to say that they come to make offerings for the children that will be born later... We are not like a kite that has broken free from its string. The functions of traditional society are still active. For example, I don’t have a sister, but I have two female cousins who were given to be my sisters, so that I could position myself as an uncle. I have two nephews who are the children of my customary sisters (*soeurs coutumières*). I fulfill my function as if I had a sister. And these nephews respect me, even though their mother does not have the same blood as me as she is my cousin. There is always this solution to remedy the lack (*pour pallier le manque*). [Streeter 2004:22]

Adoption is also used by Kanak to “integrate marginalized individuals, such as the children of child mothers, children born out of wedlock, or *métis*” into clan lineages (ADRAF 2013). Adoptive parents transmit land rights (and all other rights) to the

⁷⁶ Joseph Streeter, who passed away in 2012, was an authority on traditional law and custom. The Streeter family is from Lifou, though their family name comes from Britain. Joseph Streeter’s great-great-great grandfather was an English sandalwood trader who shipwrecked in Lifou and married a local woman.

adoptee, as they would to a biological child. According to Wacquant and Pillon (1984:32), “Adoption is a mechanism for rebalancing the distribution of productive and reproductive forces of a group.” As one of Wacquant and Pillon’s young informant quipped, “Why make children, if not to give them?” Wacquant and Pillon argue that this comment illustrates “a fundamental aspect of Melanesian social practice—that persons, like things, only attain their full value from exchanges in which they *allow for the establishment of relationships*” (*ibid.* 34, italics mine). Yet it is essential that the *chemin coutumière*—the customary path or bond—established through the gift of a child is maintained through further exchanges between groups. The identity (and rights) of an adoptee depends on the continued recognition (through exchange) of the mutual debt established through his or her own adoption.

Today however, Adèle explained to me, there are many cases where *les liens coutumières* established through a customary adoption are not properly maintained. She listed several possible reasons why. First, with urbanization, young people are increasingly entering into relationships with people from outside the areas with which their clan has traditionally maintained alliances. The social and economic marginalization of Kanak youth and the disruption of traditional family living arrangements in Nouméa has also resulted in far more children being born to very young and unmarried mothers. The equally young fathers only very rarely assume any responsibility. Traditionally speaking, since the child is not part of the father’s own clan lineage, he has no customary obligations in this regard. In such a situation, the child of a young, un-wed girl might be adopted by her clan, most likely by her

maternal uncle. However, in many such cases, these children may be “mistreated as they get older” or “disowned:”

...[B]ecause the uncles are a little lost these days, they don't understand blood. They prefer their own child to the detriment of the child he has adopted...today many of these children are rejected, because, as one says, they are “children of the street” (*enfants de la rue*). [Streeter 2004:21]

At the same time, throughout New Caledonia, but especially in the Grand Terre, there are numerous *chefferies* embroiled in disputes over land rights and chiefly succession. Such disputes often occur in cases where a *chef* or *petit-chef* leaves the *tribu* to work or serve in political office in Nouméa. The *chef*'s physical absence makes it more difficult for him to adequately *garder les liens* (maintain the relationships) with both his customary subjects and his land (ie: by participating in ritual occasions and customary exchanges, or gardening and maintaining yam gardens, etc.). This can lead to serious discord *between* clans and create major power vacuums *within* clans. As a result, the relations of exchange necessary to produce and maintain an adoptee's customary identity may fall into disrepair or be severed entirely.

All of the situations described above are what Adèle was referring to when she told me that the problems of the *délinquants* and *misérables* who vandalized the *maison de quartier* were “not their own fault, but the fault of *la coutume*.” Most of these youths had been customarily adopted, but the sources of their identities had not been preserved. Their birth clans and adoptive clans did not continue to honor the mutual debts established by the adoption. As a result, their access to the *chemin kanak* had been effectively obstructed. They had no secure location within the “spiderweb of

relations” that constitutes Kanak subjectivity, and, most devastatingly, they had no rights to land. As Hnassil Duhnara explains, “A Kanak will not say that the land belongs to him, he will say that he belongs to the land...[if he]...loses his place within his family, he also loses his name, his clan; his identity is what links him to his land, and without this land he is nothing” (2008:68).⁷⁷ In short, a young person who is a “failed customary adoption,” has no cultural capital within *either* the French or Kanak systems (or as Bourdieu would call them, fields of power). In this respect, “failed customary adoptions” are similar to the communities in pre-independence Algeria that Bourdieu termed a subproletariat—groups “stigmatized and marginalized by both French colonialism and the construction of an Algerian national identity” (Calhoun 2006:1404).

Bourdieu contrasts the mindset of the Algerian subproletariat—“uprooted demoralized masses” with a “disposition to revolt”—with the “revolutionary dispositions of organized workers” (the proletariat) (1979:viii). He argues that “labour migration and integration into the larger state market...stripped peasant *habitués* of their efficacy,” leading to their transformation into an underclass (Calhoun 2006:1406). Class is Bourdieu’s central analytic category and he maintains that Algerians’ “relations with the objective and collective future” are “the product of a definite type of economic situation.” Moreover, he claims, “class condition is able to

⁷⁷ Hnassil is originally from Maré Island and works as a social worker in Nouméa, where I interviewed him at his office. Given his position as both a relatively young Kanak person and a French-trained clinical social worker, he had many interesting insights on the difficulties faced by Kanak youth. He expressed frustration that official protocols for dealing with young people “in crisis” usually completely ignored (or contravened) Kanak cultural practice. This quote is from his masters thesis.

structure the whole experience of social subjects, not least their economic experience” (Bourdieu 1979:2).

Though the theories on “temporal dispositions” and “objectives chances” that Bourdieu draws out of this analysis are useful for understanding the situation of Kanak youth, class does not work well as an analytic category in the New Caledonian context. This is because, unlike the Algerians, the Kanak were never transformed into a colonial proletariat. The Kanak were purposefully *excluded* from the market economy through the end of WWII (and afterwards). Class condition and economic capital are not, in this sense, the best frames for analyzing how “the experience of [Kanak] social subjects” has been structured. The entire Kanak population remains more or less marginalized in terms of their access to economic capital. I argue that youth who are “failed customary adoptions” might be seen as a sort of Bourdieuan subproletariat not because they don’t have access to economic forms of capital (a condition shared by most Kanak), but because they are unable to strategically mobilize cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital.⁷⁸

It is no coincidence that a great deal of Kanak youth’s political activism manifests itself in the form of cultural production. Because of the historical legacy of French settler colonialism in New Caledonia, “culture” is one of the few political resources available to Kanak.⁷⁹ Nearly all the youths I worked with in *associations*

⁷⁸ Of course, Bourdieu also recognizes cultural, social and symbolic capital as “fundamental social powers,” but he highlights the primacy of economic capital throughout his oeuvre. He asserts that economic capital, “in its various kinds” is the type of capital “most capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit” on its holder (Bourdieu 1987:3-4).

⁷⁹ Even though, as I explain in the following two chapters, hegemonic republican *politiques*

made explicit connections between their work as cultural producers and the creation of a particular sort of political future. This is at least partly due to their particular generational location. But it is also because most of these young people still have the resources necessary to construct themselves as Kanak, even in a city, even in a period of rapid cultural change and profound political uncertainty. Though ongoing settler hegemony makes it difficult for young people to escape marginalization as “disordered subjects” and “delinquents,” they are still able to locate themselves within what they consider to be Kanak frameworks for making sense of the present and thinking about the future.

But for those who have been blocked from these frameworks—such as youth from “failed customary adoptions”—projecting oneself into the future is a much harder task. These youth cry “Kanyak 2014!” and write it in markers and paint all over the surfaces of Nouméa, but what will they do when the independence referendum goes to a vote? What will they do if it does not pass? As Bourdieu (1979: 63) argued in the case of Algerian subproletariat:

This realistic aiming at the future (*l'avenir*) is only accessible to those who have the means to confront the present and to look for ways of beginning to implement their hopes, instead of giving way to resigned surrender or to the magical impatience of those who are too crushed by the present to be able to look to anything other than a utopian future (*un futur*), an immediate, magical negation of the present.

I want to argue that this group of Kanak youth (many of whom are “failed customary adoptions) is in many ways like the Algerian “landless peasants, farm workers,

culturelles often block the mobilization culture as a political resource in New Caledonia.

journeymen and casual laborers” who Bourdieu argued would, “readily give ear to any eschatological prophecy that breaks with the routine of everyday existence and holds out, even if it means a radical transformation of society, the promise of again finding a place in the world” (*ibid.* 70). For young people like the boys who stumbled drunk into the Montravel *maison de quartier* every afternoon, breaking bottles and yelling “*Nique la France!*” Kanaky may be more of an “immediate, magical negation of the present,” than a political claim on the future.

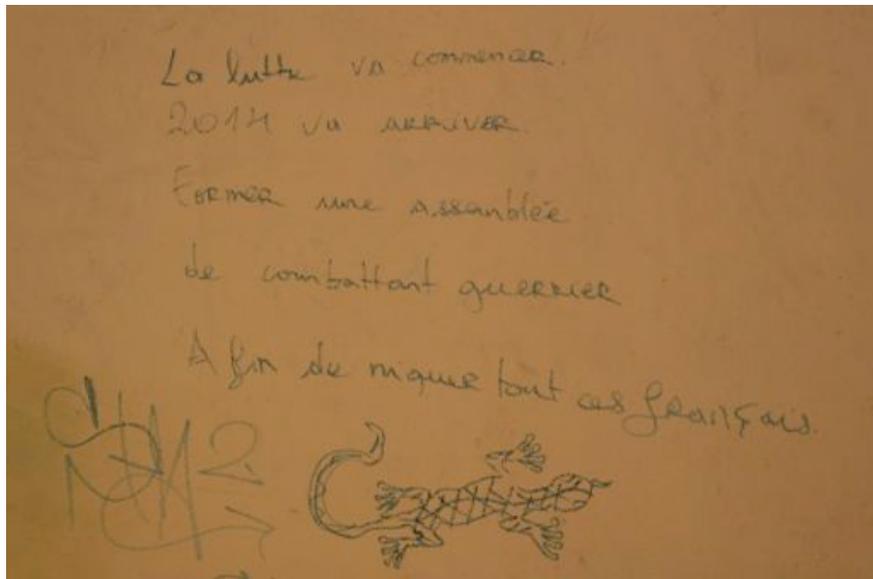


Fig. 4.7. Graffiti from near my apartment in Nouméa. It reads (roughly): “The struggle will begin/ 2014 will arrive/ Form an assembly of warrior combatants/ To finally fuck all these French”

Yet as I have explored throughout this chapter, I believe that *most* Kanak youth are positioned in a way that makes them capable of transforming the conditions under which they live. Young people like Florenda, Hassan and Darewa are not “in crisis.” Despite the representations of the *crise de la jeunesse* discourse, these young people

are not “temporally confused.” They are anchored within social relationships and histories, and they see themselves as having particular rights and responsibilities based on their locatedness. Bourdieu (*ibid.* 93) claims that, “revolt against the present situation cannot be aimed towards rational explicit ends until the economic conditions for the formation of a rational consciousness of those ends are fulfilled.” I would argue that the legacy of settler colonialism in New Caledonia is such that the necessary “conditions” Bourdieu speaks of are primarily *social* and *symbolic*, rather than economic. Taking this into account, I strongly suspect that the current generation of Kanak youth is coming of age during a time when the “prevailing order [in New Caledonia] contains the potentiality of its own disappearance and so produces agents capable of making its own disappearance their project (*ibid.* 94).” Part of this “prevailing order” is the *association de loi 1901*, which I explore in the next chapter.

- Chapter 5 -

**NICHES AND HANDLES:
ASSOCIATIONS AND INDIGENEITY IN A FRENCH SETTLER STATE**

Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

...
Article 3. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.

- *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, 1789

I wait for the day when it will say Kanak on my *carte d'identité*.

If I am “Caledonian,” I have to put all of my Kanak identity behind’.

- Participant in Kanak Youth Congress, *Tribu de Bangou*,
June 3, 2010

According to Frederick Cooper, colonial history “reminds us that in the most oppressive of political systems, people found not just niches in which to hide and fend for themselves, but handles by which the system could be moved” (Cooper 2005:242). Settler colonialism—dependent not just on the oppression, but the elimination of native societies—can make such ‘niches’ even more elusive. Yet indigenous peoples have not only managed to articulate and defend their cultures and identities in the cracks and fissures of settler colonial structures. They have, as Cooper puts it, found

handles to move the system; to make claims about sovereignty and the future, to resist and reshape states and to reformulate the meaning of citizenship. Cultural production is a key arena for such struggles, and scholars have examined and theorized the political impact of indigenous cultural activism, particularly in Latin America and in Anglo-Saxon settler states like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. Yet, as French republican settler colony, the relationships between difference, citizenship, and sovereignty in New Caledonia are configured in ways that do not map well onto Latin American or Anglo-Saxon settler state contexts. A settler-colonial project that sought to transform New Caledonia into a French republican space produced distinctive ‘niches’ in which the Kanak have had to construct and defend their identity as indigenous people. At the same time, French republican modes of governance also provide different materials with which to build “handles”—to resist and subvert state hegemony.

In this chapter, I examine how Kanak youth have created such a handle through their involvement in *associations loi de 1901*. I argue that the social world of cultural production organized within these groups has led to the emergence of an indigenous counter-public sphere, one that deeply “unsettles” settler-colonial society in New Caledonia. These developments raise several contradictions, which I will explore. In France the *association loi de 1901* is imagined to be a “school of democracy,” meant to foster normative modes of civic engagement and a strong, unified Republican public sphere (Hamidi 2010). Yet in their engagement with *associations*, Kanak youth are actively subverting the cultural and political hegemony of French settler society

and asserting their difference as indigenous peoples. *Associations* have been transformed into assemblages— cobbled together from indigenous and French cultural forms— through which to assert alternative, Kanak modes of citizenship and make claims on the future of New Caledonia. In strategically engaging with the French “associative sphere,” Kanak have been able to carve out a space in which to assert indigenous identities that are otherwise blocked by Republican structures of governance. In the music and dance groups organized as *associations*, young people work to produce and deploy “culture” in ways that contradict and exceed “culture” as imagined by the French *politiques culturelles*. My goal in this chapter is to show what the Kanak use of *associations* reveals about the particular problems of articulating indigeneity in a French settler state.

Associations as Frameworks for Anchoring Uncertain Lives

As previous chapters have described, the reservation system in New Caledonia helped to feed a settler illusion that Kanak society—and Kanak culture—did not exist (Bensa 1995). This “settler illusion” undergirds a continuing lack of intercultural communication between Kanak and non-Kanak in New Caledonia. Kanak have been forced to adapt themselves to a dominant settler society that is wholly French, while white settlers remain largely indifferent to and uneducated about Kanak culture, language and beliefs. Though Kanak—at 40.3% of the population—are the territory’s largest ethnic group, New Caledonia is anything but “bicultural.” A contrast can be drawn between New Caledonia and the neighboring settler state of New Zealand,

which, despite having an indigenous Maori population of roughly 14%, adopted an official policy of biculturalism in the wake of the Waitangi Tribunal. As I argue here, the absence of bicultural policy in New Caledonia can be traced to a republican model of citizenship that frames the visibility of cultural difference in the public sphere as a threat to national cohesion.

Taking into account the republican approach to cultural difference, the 1998 Nouméa Accord seems to present an paradox when it calls for the “recognition of Kanak sovereignty” and the “promotion of Kanak culture” as *part of* the construction of a “shared common destiny” (see Appendices). Yet loyalists have had no problems resolving this ostensible impasse, which they have done by translating the Nouméa Accord’s call for a “shared common destiny” into thoroughly republican citizenship-building initiatives. In these initiatives, Kanak are generally positioned as one of many subcultural groups encompassed by a larger, pluri-ethnic “Caledonian culture” (which is then imagined as a regional variant of French culture, similarly to Breton or Provençal cultures). In the official discourses espoused in New Caledonian school curricula, government-sponsored cultural programming and the annual “Day of Citizenship,” the Nouméa Accord is represented as being fundamentally about the recognition of a shared “Caledonian” identity rather than the rights of Kanak, as indigenous people, to an independent nation.

However, as Éric Wittersheim argues, the “loyalist defense of a ‘pluri-ethnic’ Caledonian identity” is like “grafting the ideology of the melting pot onto a situation more closely resembling apartheid” (2006:130). Indeed, my interlocutors imagined the

Nouméa Accord as promising anything *but* a continuation of the republican status quo. Instead, they perceive the Accord's call for the creation of a "new citizenship" as auguring a radical reordering of power. They share a deeply held feeling that *something* is going to happen *soon* that will profoundly change what it means to be indigenous in New Caledonia. At the same time as they look towards the future, these young people face increasingly difficult circumstances in the present. As Kanak youth negotiate the difficulties of life in *Nouméa la blanche*, they also struggle with the discursive violence of the "youth crisis" discourse described in the previous chapter. Though they may not be the "schizophrenic," temporally unmoored subjects depicted in these discourses, young people *do* struggle to find frameworks in which to orient themselves as Kanak persons in Nouméa and imagine a meaningful future. For a substantial number of Kanak youth, *associations* provide this framework.

Officially mandated in France by *La loi du 1er juillet 1901*, *associations loi de 1901* (henceforth referred to simply as associations) provide a way for individuals to voluntarily organize based on shared interests—in anything ranging from Breton heritage and the defense of cheeses made with raw milk to anti-racism and social justice—to meet regularly and receive funding from the French State. In 2002, one out of every two French citizens 15 years or older belonged to at least one association (INSEE 2002). Membership in associations is equally widespread in New Caledonia, especially among youth. In part because of their popularity among young people, *associations* have also become a major site of Kanak cultural production—located outside more formal structures for the "promotion of Kanak culture" (such as the

Tjibaou Cultural Center), all of which are products of the Matignon and Nouméa Accords. The overwhelming majority of indigenous music and dance groups are officially registered as *associations*. For youth in Nouméa, *associations* serve as a vital anchor, a way to locate oneself in the alienating “flow” of life in Nouméa. Participating in a band or a dance group allows young people to think of themselves as actors, as meaningful participants in social world in which they may be otherwise marginalized. As my friend Florenda explained:

Being part of an association...a music or dance group...they [young people] finally find themselves again. They breathe like they are back in their village, even if they're still in Nouméa.

As I will argue, Kanak youth are not only finding a space to “breathe” within associations, but a new space from which to *speak*—to intervene in the public sphere, to express new ways of being both Kanak and modern and make claims on the future. In doing so they contest settler state structures that have worked to eliminate indigenous presence in New Caledonia in ways that reconfigure, rather than reproduce citizenship. Yet given the intended purpose of the *association loi de 1901* as a mechanism for mediating between the individual and the state, its role in “unsettling” the official public sphere poses a number of interesting contradictions, which I explore here.

Public Spheres, Republican Public Spheres, Counterpublic Spheres

In Habermas’s seminal theorization, the public sphere is mediating discursive space between the family (the private sphere) and the state, where individuals and

groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and form public opinion on the common good. The public sphere is distinct from the official economy, and is instead a “market place of ideas,” where political participation is achieved through the medium of discourse (Habermas 1989). For Habermas, this collective discourse “about the nature of the public good and the directions of state action” has great emancipatory potential. In effect, “the nature, organization and opportunities for discourse” on politically significant topics in the public sphere can be structured so that “class and status inequalities might not be an insuperable barrier to political participation” (ibid). In this sense, the public sphere surpasses individual particularities (of economic, social or cultural status) and connects civil society to the state, “by focusing on a notion of public good as distinct from private interest.” As this part of his argument suggests, Habermas’s public sphere is *essentially* a republican public sphere. According to Craig Calhoun, Habermas’s work draws heavily on Rousseau, Tocqueville, Comte, and Durkheim; French philosophes who “developed an ever-stronger account of the autonomy of the social (resisting not only the claims of the state but the Cartesian postulate of the primacy of the individual subject)” (2001:1897).

The concept of a “counter public” emerged largely as feminist critique of Habermas’ work. Feminist scholars argue that Habermas fails to acknowledge that the “official public sphere” in fact rested on, and indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions (of women, ethnic and racial minorities, non-heterosexuals). As Nancy Fraser (1991:58) explains, “at one level, the idea of the

public sphere designated an institutional mechanism for "rationalizing" political domination by rendering states accountable to (some of) the citizenry." Drawing on Gramsci, Habermas's critics contend that the emergence of the "bourgeois public sphere" actually marked a "shift from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression" (Eley 1992). Thus, rather than a utopian space of egalitarian, democratic discourse, "the official public sphere... was—indeed, *is*—the prime institutional site for the construction of the consent that defines the new, hegemonic mode of domination" (Fraser 1990:62). Because Habermas ignores this important point, his critics argue, he also ignores the simultaneous existence of multiple publics, in which counter-hegemonic discourses are invented and circulated. In a widely-cited paper on "Rethinking the Public Sphere" (1990), Nancy Fraser proposes that we call these other publics:

[S]ubaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. [67]

Numerous commentators, especially those working within feminist or queer theoretical frameworks, have built and expanded on Fraser's arguments. Within this body of scholarship, Michael Warner's (2005) work is perhaps most-broadly cited. Warner is particularly interested in the relationship between state sovereignty, identification, and the emergence of counterpublics. He sees the, "The projection of a

public...[as] a new, creative, and distinctively modern mode of power” (108). A counterpublic, then:

[Is] a scene where a dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and in doing so finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as public. [*ibid.* 112]

This conflict is an “engine for social mutation,” and Warner asserts that “participation in a counterpublic is one of the ways by which it’s members identities are formed and transformed” (121). Ultimately, Warner concedes, counterpublics can be “said to be social movements when they acquire agency in relation to the state” (124). This is what is now happening within *associations* in New Caledonia. But in order make this argument, I must first trace out a brief history of the association in France in order to examine its *conventional* role in republican civil society.

Republicanism and the Ascendency of the *Association de loi 1901*

In 1830, when Alexis de Tocqueville characterized voluntary associations as “schools of democracy,” he was speaking from his experiences in the United States, where he marveled at the robust “associational spirit” of American society.

Tocqueville drew a direct comparison between the United States and his homeland, France, which had a “weak associative tradition.” Scholars have pointed to the irony that while America is now “bowling alone,” contemporary France is entering “a new age of participation” based on associative forms of engagement within civil society’ (Putnam 2000; Barthelémy 2000). In 2011, there were roughly 1.2 million active associations in France (*Associations* 2012). Within contemporary French republican

thought, associations are seen as “providing a space for the practice of citizenship” and as “necessary agents for the implementation of state actions” (Waters 2003:60; Boitard 2001:5). France’s initially “weak associative tradition,” *and* its current associational “boom” stem from an enduring tension between the universalizing and particularizing imperatives of republican citizenship. This tension produced a gap in the structure of republican nation; a “poorly defined intermediary space between society and the state” that associations help to reconcile (Querrien 2001:4). It is because associations were introduced to address an aporia in Republican thought that Kanak have been able to use them in ways that subvert the state’s hegemony.

According to Phillippe Poirrier, “The basis for the specificity of French cultural history is the place of the State in the construction of the nation” (Poirrier 1996:117). In contrast to England (and most countries in Europe), the French State preceded the French nation. In France, as Rogers Brubaker explains, “an action of state (the French Revolution and its aftermath) created (the possibility of) the modern nation” (Brubaker 1992:35). The revolutionary abolition of ancien régime corporatism shaped the republican ideal of an unmediated relationship between individuals and the state.⁸⁰ As political philosopher Toussaint Guiraudet wrote in 1789, “The nation is not made up of orders; it is an aggregation of individuals. The constitution recognises only one corporation, that of all Frenchmen together” (in Rosanvallon 1998:87). As the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Men and the Citizen* states, “No body nor individual may

⁸⁰ This is in contrast to Anglo-Saxon countries, where, generally speaking, political culture remains centered on the idea of a self-governing society, largely autonomous from the state.

exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.” Since associations are intermediary structures premised on particular, rather than universal interests, revolutionary republicans saw them as threats to national sovereignty and the equality of citizens. Accordingly, through the nineteenth-century, an “anti-associationalist” French state harassed, controlled, or at best tolerated associations.

In recognizing “only all Frenchmen together,” republicanism relies on the concept of an “abstract universal citizen,” equal and commensurable with all other citizens. As Rosanvallon, shows, achieving the universal representation of citizens on which the republican project hinged required that the state find some way to “make the nation visible so that form and coherence could be given to an assemblage of equal individuals” (ibid). Furthermore, if intermediary groups between individuals and the state are forbidden, can the social ties necessary to connect citizens to a national “moral community” emerge? The republican “crisis of representation” reached its apex in the Third Republic. Rapid industrialization and a series of political crises (including the 1871 Paris Commune), led to fears of “social disintegration” and calls for a “revival of citizenship” (Barthelémy 2000:15). Weakened social cohesion constituted a powerful argument for the official recognition of intermediary groups, one that was spearheaded by the nascent discipline of sociology. Émile Durkheim dedicated his entire preface to the 1901 second-edition of *The Division of Labor in Society* to a polemic on the role of “professional groups” and “corporative organization” in the ‘constitution of moral forces in contemporary societies.’ In Durkheim’s view:

The state is too remote from individuals, its connections with them too superficial and irregular, to be able to penetrate the depths of their consciousness and socialise them from within... a nation cannot be maintained unless, between the state and individuals, a whole range of secondary groups are interposed. [Durkheim 2008:liv]

The arguments of Durkheim and other sociologists entered into policy debates and “imposed themselves almost as a new ideology,” known in *fin de siècle* France as *solidarisme* (Rosanvallon 1996:112). If “individualism was everywhere in revolutionary legislation,” by the *fin de siècle* “the association is everywhere, in mores, in aspirations, in laws” (Durguit 1885, in Rosanvallon 1998:118). Following protracted debates in parliament, intermediary bodies were officially reintroduced into French law by the *loi du 1er juillet 1901*. The legislation defines associations broadly as a contract by which two or more people put together their knowledge or their activity, with “another purpose than profit” (Article 1). Notably however, the law also forbids associations that seek to “violate the integrity of the national territory and the republican form of government” (Article 3).

Born from a compromise between the particular and universalist strains of republican thought, the French approach to associations continues to be distinctive. First, relative to other countries, the development of the associative sector in France has taken place, “in the shadow of the State, under its protection, its legal control and above all under its financial tutelage” (Worms 1999:118). In contrast to Anglo-saxon countries, where associations are important sites of grassroots activism, the legitimization of associations in France does not take place “from below,” but “from above” (Barthelémy 2000). As sociologist François Boitard explains:

The French state, accustomed to centralizing methods and concerned with *laïcité*, orients the nature and function of associations, which were made very early on to serve as a “school of democracy”, to meet the form of the republican State and, later, serve as a relay for its policy.⁸¹

Though associations originated in France to serve as intermediary structures *between* the state and individuals, the French state continues to enact its sovereignty in the associative sphere.

The social philosophies of *solidarisme* (as espoused by Durkheim and other early French sociologists) also underlie the distinctive French approach to associations. Drawing on the concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity, French policy stresses the “contractual” character of associations implied by their artificiality relative to earlier forms of sociality. As Rosanvallon explains, the equality and autonomy required by democracy make legitimate:

Only those forms of the social which result from a voluntary contract that establishes an [artificial] relationship between people, a relationship whose artificiality ensures its remove from the constraints determined by nature or imposed by history. [1998:113]

Though there are many associations in France based on shared regional identity—often called *amicales*—organizations premised on “primordial” differences like race, ethnicity or indigenous identity pose problems for the republican model of social integration.⁸² As François Lionnet, describes, ethnically or racially based associations,

⁸¹ *Laïcité*, or republican secularism, refers to the strict separation of church and state. Unlike the secularism guaranteed by the first amendment in the United States, French policies regarding *laïcité* also bar religious conduct in public places or by public servants.

⁸² *Amicales* are also used by rural immigrants in France to maintain community connections in cities like Paris and Lyon. For an example, see Susan Carol Rogers’ (1991) study *Shaping Modern Times in Rural France: The Transformation and Reproduction of an Aveyronnais Community*.

“despite being part of the ordinary fabric of democratic practice in the Anglo-Saxon world...[are seen in France as]...engaging in forms of identity politics that go against the most fundamental ideals of the nation” (2008:1505).

Associative structures help shape the public spaces in civil society, and France views “the bracketing off of cultural difference in the public sphere as fundamental because it guarantees that individuals will be treated equally” (*ibid.*). In the classical republican model of citizenship

[T]he nation is defined by its ambition to transcend particular affiliations – biological, historical, economic, social, religious, or cultural – through citizenship, to define the citizen as an abstract individual, without identification and without particular qualifications. [Schnapper 1994:49]

Within this framework, the demands of indigenous and other minority peoples for recognition and the right to difference are seen as “eroding the bonds of citizenship,” since they do not serve the “general interest” (Laborde 2001:720). The French government’s decision to ban Islamic headscarves stems from the same republican hostility towards the visibility of cultural difference in the public sphere, part of what Farhad Khosrokhavar calls the “specific violence of abstract universalism.”⁸³

Republicanism “blocks the use of cultural differences as the bases of collective mobilization and political claims-making in the public sphere” (Wacquant 2008:193).

However, in the case of New Caledonia, it is *precisely* difference—in this case Kanak identity—that young people in *associations* are using as a basis for mobilizing and making claims. How is this possible? In many ways associations embody the

⁸³ For more on the headscarf debate in France see Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Bowen 2007; Boubekeur 2004; and Wallach 2007.

enduring ambiguities and tensions—the niches—in the republican project. By officially recognizing the need for intermediary groups and the expression of particular interests in the public sphere, France attempted to resolve a conflict created by the dual imperatives of French republicanism to universalize and to particularize simultaneously (Wilder 2005). In effect, the same conflict that gave rise to the association has allowed it to become a space for the assertion of Kanak identities that are otherwise suppressed by the republican citizenship.

“Breathing like they are back in their village”: Associations in Nouméa

This section explores how associations are actually used by Kanak youth in Nouméa. Though I begin with a broad discussion of how one goes about forming and registering an association, and what types of associations exist, I will ultimately focus on three specific groups officially incorporated as *associations loi 1901*—two musical groups and a hip-hop dance troupe. Fieldwork with these groups allowed me to understand how the structure of the association is mobilized by young people. It did not take much time for me to realize that the groups I was working with were *not* serving as mechanisms for shaping individual citizen subjects of the French nation. Instead I discovered that the youth within these groups were articulating alternative models of subjectivity centered on links to place, attachment to particular practices and embeddedness in various networks of social relationships. They were laboring to “have culture” in ways that the French state would not otherwise permit. In so doing, I

argue, they (and other Kanak youth like them) are shaping a counter-public sphere that deeply unsettles French settler society in New Caledonia.

Creating an Association

The *Bureau des Associations* is a single room inside a building filled with other state offices, across the street from the *Haut-Commissariat*. I was already familiar with the location, since it also houses the territorial immigration office, where I spent hours sorting through arcane French bureaucracy to secure *cartes de séjours* for myself and my husband. The *bureau* is staffed by only four people, and each of the three times I visited I was helped by an exceedingly cheerful Wallisian lady named Palatina. I explained to her that I was interested in associations because they didn't formally exist in the United States, and that I was doing a research project on Kanak youth in associations that focused on "culture." I was hoping that she could tell me what steps groups had to take to become official, state-recognized associations, and how many associations were registered in Nouméa. "Ah yes," Palatina responded, "Young people are always creating associations, the young men especially. I think it's a good way for them to get girls! You have your association, you get a little money from the state to fund your events... maybe you hold a dance, or things like this. It's very popular." I laughed and asked if there were any other reasons she thought Kanak youth might be especially enthusiastic about associations. Palatina thought for a second and replied, "Well, you know, for us too, for Wallisian people, there are also a lot of Wallisian associations. I think it is a very Oceanian thing, to organize this way,

so that everyone can be together. Also, many of these groups, one of the things they will list as a purpose when they register is “prevention of delinquency”...so I think it also important in this way, especially for the Oceanians. That is why there are so many associations *en milieu urbain*—to keep communities together. And of course, if you form an association, you can get *subventions* [grants/subsidies] from the government.”

Apart from Palatina’s observation on the use of associations as a pickup technique, her explanation confirmed several of my theories about why Nouméa and the South Province had so many more associations than the Loyalties or *la brousse*. Associations seemed to work as a vaguely “Oceanian” way to organize in a “non-Oceanian” city, while also gaining access to money for activities that would otherwise be ineligible for state funding. What surprised me however—especially given my own experiences with French bureaucracy—was how easy it actually was to create an association. One need only fill out a three page form “for the declaration of an association” (included in appendices) indicating the name and purpose of the association along with a permanent mailing group and the names and signatures of at least two of the group’s governing officers (ie: president, vice-president, treasurer). Also required is a draft of the association’s “constitution,” which also lists the purpose of the group in addition to the roles and duties of its officers. The constitution is also meant to contain whatever rules a group may have agreed upon regarding the frequency of its meetings, the responsibilities of members and the election or dismissal of governing officers. This constitution must also be signed by at least two people. The declaration form and constitution must be filed with the *Bureau des associations*,

which will issue a receipt of acknowledgement within the following five days. After receiving this receipt, the prospective association must pay a small fee to publish a statement of their association's creation in the *Journal Officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (JONC). When these steps have been completed, the association can register for a RIDET (*Répertoire d'identification des entreprises et des établissements*), essentially a government tax code used to keep track of associations that enables groups to receive state funding.⁸⁴

Rather using their own words to describe the purpose of their group, prospective associations must choose up to three "purposes" from list of predetermined codes. The numeric codes make it possible to categorize and run statistics on registered associations. There are 30 "parent themes" codes, for example:

- 002000 *clubs, cercles de réflexion*
- 003000 *défense des droits fondamentaux*
- 004000 *justice*
- 005000 *information communication*
- 006000 *culture, pratiques d'activités artistiques, pratiques culturelles*
- 007000 *clubs de loisirs, relations*
- 09000 *action socioculturelle*
- 010000 *préservation du patrimoine*
- 011000 *sports, activités de plein air*
- 013000 *chasse pêche*
- 014000 *amicales, groupements affinitaires, groupements d'entraide (hors défense de droits fondamentaux)*
- 015000 *education formation*
- 017000 *santé*
- 018000 *services et établissements médico-sociaux*
- 019000 *interventions sociales*

⁸⁴ For more information on this process, visit: <http://www.nouvelle-caledonie.gouv.fr/site/Vos-demarches/Associations>

Each of these “parent themes” contains up to 20 sub-theme options, in order for a group to further specify the nature of its activities.⁸⁵ Since I was primarily interested in associations focused on cultural production, especially neighborhood and youth associations, I asked Palatina if she could use the database to find associations listed under five particular “parent themes”: 006000 *culture, pratiques d’activités artistiques, pratiques culturelles*, 09000 *action socioculturelle*, 01000 *préservation du patrimoine* [preservation of patrimony], 014000 *amicales, groupements affinitaires, groupements d’entraide (hors défense de droits fondamentaux)* [*amicales*, affinity groups, mutual aid groups (outside of the defense of fundamental rights)], and 019000 *interventions sociales*. When Palatina pulled the list up on her screen, it was clear that all five of these categories contained groups with similar descriptions and purposes. As I will discuss in the next section, this is because Kanak bands and dance groups organized as associations (almost exclusively) categorize themselves either as *tribu*-based *amicales* or *quartier*-based *interventions sociales*. In both cases, a group generally specifies their purposes further by picking sub-themes like “cultural education,” “the prevention of youth delinquency” and the “insertion of young people” (into civil society). There wasn’t necessarily a big difference between the genres of the groups that came up under each of the five codes I chose, because any

⁸⁵ For instance, there are 13 sub-themes under parent theme “006000 Culture, cultural and artistic activities, cultural practices.” There are: “libraries, game libraries, music libraries, video libraries;” “written expression, literature and poetry;” “graphic arts, comic strips, painting, sculpture, architecture;” “photography, cinema;” “choral singing, music;” “dance;” “folklore;” “theater, puppets, circus, various performing arts;” crafts, manual work, *bricolage*;” “scientific and technical hobbies;” “the promotion of art and artists;” “languages, dialects, patois;” and “street arts.”

group could easily be classed under multiple different categories (it just depended on the choice made by whoever filled out the declaration form).

In April 2010, when Palatina printed the records out for me, there were 112 active associations registered under the code for *actions socioculturelles*, 182 under the code for *interventions sociales*, and 80 under *amicales* in the Grand Nouméa region alone (in addition to several hundred associations registered under other “parent themes” unrelated to my project, as well as the associations registered elsewhere in the South Province, outside of Grand Nouméa).⁸⁶ In the following sections, I discuss three of these associations—groups I worked with closely during my fieldwork—in detail. Along the way, I also address how the activities and organization of these three groups fit within a broader “sociology” of “*la vie associative*” in Nouméa.

Blue Hau

Like most associations organized by Kanak youth, the band Blue Hau does not have an official roster. It consists instead of (usually) ten core musicians, with up to ten more peripheral members, all *Iaai* speakers originally from the *tribu* of Hwadrilla on Ouvéa Island. The group’s name references the colors used to represent Hwadrilla in sporting events and customary festivals: blue and white (*hau* in *Iaai*). The band’s core members—8 young men and 2 women—range in age from thirteen to twenty-eight.

⁸⁶ Interestingly, there were far fewer groups that had chosen to register using the “purpose codes” for “Preservation of patrimony” and “Culture, cultural and artistic activities, cultural practices.” None of these groups appeared to be *associations de tribu*, so I don’t discuss them further here. I do think it is notable that no Kanak associations describe their cultural activities as focused on the “preservation of patrimony” (I explore this issue more in the next chapter).

Some of the peripheral participants are considerably older, in their forties and fifties. Though Blue Hau has produced two albums and is primarily known for the traditional Ouvéan string band music it regularly performs at *kermesses*,⁸⁷ festivals and weddings, the group's overarching function is that of an *association de tribu* (tribal village association) for members of the *tribu* of Hwadrilla living in Nouméa. Blue Hau's large size is fairly common for a music group formed with the additional purpose of functioning as an *association du tribu*. When these groups perform, there will often be twenty people on stage: the guitarists trying not to knock their fret boards together and the drummer all but invisible behind three synthesizers, his own drum kit and half of his extended family. The minimum number of people in Blue Hau at any one performance, for instance, is eleven: one person on bamboo percussion, one on drums, one on bass, one on ukelele, two guitars, two keyboards, one "main voice," and two "back-up singers" (see Fig. 5.1. below).

When I interviewed Michel Kaquea, the director of *animation culturelle* for Nouméa's *quartiers*, he expressed frustration with groups like Blue Hau, even though he understood, as a Kanak person also from the Loyalty Islands, why they were so overcrowded. Kaquea is in charge of managing the facilities and scheduling for Nouméa's eight *maisons municipales de musique* (in the Tindu, Montravel, Magenta, Rivière-Salée, Vallée du Tir, Saint Quentin, Artigue and Tuband *quartiers*). He serves as the boss of all of the *maison's animateurs* (including Kazi Bolo), and organizes the

⁸⁷ Fairs organized by *tribus* or church groups to raise money. Usually *kermesses* will feature a few locally known bands, *brochettes* and other homemade food items for sale.

city's annual *fête de la musique*. Kaquea explained that for groups like Blue Hau, the primary goal was bringing kin together in Nouméa:

There are more groups every year, because of the rural exodus to Nouméa. Now there are almost too many groups for all of them to schedule rehearsal time in the *maisons de musiques*. When people arrive [in Nouméa] they need something cheap or something free to do together. At the *maisons* you can use the equipment there, so you might not even need to buy a guitar or a keyboard. These bands are part of a mission to "*faire avancer la tribu*" [to advance the *tribu*, to move the *tribu* forward]. That is why they have way too many people in them. As you see, Blue Hau is practically everyone in the *tribu* of Hwadrilla!

Apparently Kaquea had recently tried to book Blue Hau to play one of the monthly *café-concerts* organized by the city, but he had been unable to get the group to reduce itself to five people (the maximum that could reasonably fit on the stage).

Kaquea also told me that several of Blue Hau's members were from Hwadrilla's chiefly clan, which he said was relatively common for bands that also functioned as *associations de tribu*. For instance, he noted, the extremely popular Kaneka group *Mexem*, from the *tribu* of Druelu, in Lifou, includes the son of the *grand chef* of the Customary District of Gaïca, Chope Zeoula. As Kaquea explained, "It's a good base for a band to have someone from the *chefferie*...*La présence du fils du grand chef sur la scène, c'est très fort... Le groupe est supporté, d'être avec le grand chef* [The presence of the grand chief's son on the stage is very strong. The group is supported, being with the *grand chef*]. Still, as far as Blue Hau and most other groups were concerned, Kaquea concluded, "They are too many people. They need to decide. What do they want to do? Advance the *tribu*? Or advance their musical work?"

bamboo - OUKANE Alexandre
 Cousin germain
 batterie - NIGOTE Jacob
 neveu
 bass - ADJOUHGNIOPE Louis
 Cousin germain
 ukelele - ADJOUHGNIOPE Lese
 Cousin germain
 guitar 1 - ADJOUHGNIOPE Joseph.
 Cousin germain
 guitar 2 - GNIPATE Siko
 Cousin / beau-frère
 clavier 1 - GNIPATE Marc
 Cousin / beau frère
 clavier 2 - GNIPATE Atrik
 neveu
 voix - GNIPATE Jesse
 neveu
 choriste #1 - ADJOUHGNIOPE BISSO
 Choriste #2 - GNIPATE BEO

Fig. 5.1. A list of the “regular” members of Blue Hau (not including the 4 or 5 additional individuals who frequently perform with the band at shows). Cousins who are not listed as “*cousins germains*” [first cousins] are second cross cousins (which is why they are also in-laws. Kanak traditionally practice bilateral cross-cousin marriage). This was written by Lacheret/Haudra, (Lesse’s much older cousin, one of the two founders of the group), from his perspective. The Nigote (or Gniygotr) clan is the clan of the *petit chef* in Hwadrilla, and the Adjouhgniope clan is the “arms” of Gniygotr clan (its protector).

According to the Office of Associations, *associations de tribu* make up nearly thirty percent of *all* incorporated associations in Nouméa and more than half of the associations registered under the rubric of *amicale de personnes originaires d'une même région* (a club of people from the same region). Like Michel Kaqea noted, as migration from rural villages in the northern Grand Terre and Loyalty Islands has increased, the creation of *associations de tribu* has become a key strategy for the maintenance of social ties and customary networks in Nouméa. Organizing as an association eases the difficulties encountered by Kanak migrants in their efforts to preserve community social cohesion in an urban environment. Though Nouméa's Kanak population is concentrated in the city's peripheral neighborhoods and squats, families and individuals are assigned to government housing projects. For this reason, migrants from the same villages are not necessarily clustered in the same neighborhood. As Lesse from Blue Hau also explained:

Most of us...most Kanak in Nouméa,...live in *des logements sociaux* [public housing]. They [the apartments] are too small to have people over. People who come to New Caledonia from far away have houses with big yards to invite people over to get together. We—who are in our own country—only have little apartments.

In addition to cramped living arrangements, many Kanak, especially young people—do not have access to cars. This means that a trip to see a cousin or auntie may entail an hour or more on Nouméa's meandering municipal bus system or hitchhiking. Associations provide the structure—and in most cases, government funding—necessary to bring geographically dispersed members of the same tribe or clan

together on a regular basis in order to focus on activities—in many cases music-making—as a group.

Despite their official status as *amicales régionales*, these associations are built on indigenous modes of sociality that distinguish them in important ways from the many *amicales bretonnes* or *amicales provençales* of France. The musicians in Blue Hau, for example, are not merely former residents of the same region, they are kin. The group brings together families from two clans from the *tribu* of Hwadrilla (the Gniygotr and Adjouhgniope clans) united by historical (and mythic) relations of exchange and intermarriage. Blue Hau even listed the aggregation of clan members as one of their official purposes when they registered their association with the *bureau des associations*. Most of the other groups registered (or cross-registered) as *amicales* have done the same. In fact, according to the database printouts given to me by Palatina, even a sizable percentage the associations *not* registered as *amicales* but listed under the code for “*Actions Socioculturelles*” or “*Interventions Sociales*” also appear to function as *associations de tribu*. By closely reading the descriptions that each group had provided it they registered, I was able to determine that 26 of the 182 associations in *Grand Nouméa* ostensibly devoted to “*Interventions Sociales*” and 19 of the 112 associations geared towards “*Actions Socioculturelles*,” clearly functioned as *associations de tribu*.

The following descriptions of associations’ purposes (translated from French) are representative of a genre:

Association GA IHNIM

Purpose: To regroup the Thidjine, Selefen, Juni, Dounezek, Wassa and Hnagan clans for socio-educative and cultural activities and to promote the opening of relationships with other allied clans.

Clanic Association: Triji de Bethela

Purpose: To bring together families in the clan living in Nouméa. Support for families and children in school and to accentuate familial and customary relationships in Nouméa.

Association Gayulaz Nouméa-AGZ

Purpose: To bring together people from the *tribu* of Nang, to propose actions for tribal organization and guidance for young people.

Clan Api Iwe

Purpose: To assemble the different families in the clan around communal activities, to organize cultural, athletic and economic activities for the clan, to organize soirées to reinforce the cohesion of the family and to unify people around custom.

Association Drehutoka

Purpose: To bring together the population of Lifou and Tiga to work on major future social projects.

Unlike the membership of an average French *amicale*, the clans in the descriptions above are not merely from the same place, they are *of* the same place. As I detailed in earlier chapters, a Kanak clan is a descent group connected to a single founding ancestor. Recognizing and reproducing the customary bonds linking a clan together is profoundly important both for the perpetuation of the social group and the persons that comprise it. Kanak tradition understands the individual self as constituted by the network of social relations within which he or she is located. The ongoing maintenance of these relations, primarily through the medium of exchange, is fundamental to the production and reproduction of Kanak persons—and thus Kanak society. An individual's particular relational location determines his or her role and

responsibilities within the group and corresponds to a clan name (used today as a family name) connected to an actual geographic place.



Fig. 5.2. CD cover art featuring the group, all kin members from the *tribu* of Hwadrilla, on Ouvéa Island. Photo Credit: Blue Hau

As I explored in Chapter 3, this way of structuring identity is harder to maintain in Nouméa. Young people are severed from kinship networks and struggle to navigate urban sociality. As Jacob, the 25 year old drummer in Blue Hau, described:

In the *tribu*, you are free. Here in the city, there are instructions and rules to follow that are not ours. Young people don't know how to be and feel ashamed. Many people get lost, they can't find their place...[they don't] know what their role...their future is. But, in the group...Blue Hau allows us to continue the ambience of life *en tribu* in the city.

In this sense, *associations* can help Kanak youth locate themselves in the ‘flow’ of urban modernity by re-anchoring them within indigenous frameworks of identity.

SCÈNE TRADITIONNEL

BLUE HAU
Le retour du traditionnel

Blue Hau est un groupe de bédouans. Tout l'été, ces musiciens originaires d'Ouvéa, ont sillonné les fêtes et les foires des îles et de la grande terre pour faire connaître et promouvoir leur premier album entièrement réalisé en autoproduction aux studios Skatoble.

Au départ de leur aventure, un projet musical original de nos jours : repropoiser le répertoire traditionnel afin de le faire connaître aux jeunes. Une dynamique concrétisée par l'arrivée dans le groupe de trois vieux maîtres de la musique Iwi, Jakob Horigone (Batterie), Joseph Adjohngone (guitare) et Marc Grogone au ukulele, issus de l'ancienne formation Lakon Iwi.

Sur ce premier album sorti en novembre 2009, Blue Hau propose une sélection de reprises de vieux morceaux dont certains datent des années 70. Un son qui fait la part belle aux cordes avec notamment la présence du ukule.

Le public ne s'y est pas trompé puisque l'opus a rencontré le succès dès sa sortie. Mais le groupe ne soigne pas que ses enregistrements, les prestations live valent

aussi le détour, car là aussi, les musiciens ont su s'insérer. On retrouve notamment à leurs côtés, Biso aux chœurs (la première femme kanak à avoir sorti un album solo) mais également Genevive qui, du haut de ses 14 ans, fait son apprentissage des pinches. Le traditionnel obtiendrait-il de nouveaux lajeurs génération?

On air
Blue Hau, Anya Bwibwib, non 09

On stage
20 mars 17h - Café concert du CCT

Fig. 5.3. “Blue Hau: The Return of Traditional.” A short feature on Blue Hau in the March/April/May 2010 issue of *Endemix*, a magazine produced by the government funded Poemart (Pôle Export de la Musique et des Arts de Nouvelle-Calédonie).

The indigenization of *associations* goes beyond the fact that they are being used to aggregate people from the same tribe and maintain kinship networks in the city. The internal social dynamics of Blue Hau and other groups are also bound up in traditional concepts of relationality. For example, though Lesse, 28, the de facto leader of the

band, is almost the same age as the drummer Jacob, Lesse is Jacob's classificatory maternal uncle. In Kanak society (as in many other Melanesian cultures), a mother's brother has distinctive ritual and social obligations to his sister's offspring. The bond between maternal uncle and nephew "implies equivalence and reciprocity," and overt conflict between the two is avoided at all costs (Douglas 1982:383; Leenhardt 1930; Leenhardt 1937). As Leenhardt (unfortunately not avoiding tired tropes of Kanak savagery) commented in 1930:

A nephew always has an ally in his kanya [maternal uncle]. A remarkable affection like an organic solidarity unites those who issue from the same totem through maternal life, and it is in this restricted domain that is found the tenderness which is so curiously opposed to cruelty in the Melanesian character. [1930:208-9]

In band rehearsals, Jacob had a tendency towards distraction. But when Jacob disregarded the tempo set by Lesse or missed an entrance, Lesse rarely asserted his role as bandleader in order to chastise him, as he would with other band members. After I had sat in on several band rehearsals (but before I had determined everyone's kinship linkages), I asked the normally hardline Lesse why he kept letting Jacob off the hook. Lesse looked at me like the answer should be perfectly obvious, and explained that he was technically Jacob's maternal uncle, and so he "must not yell at him" and should try to "treat him gently so that he has what he wants."

As I spent more time with Blue Hau I found that many of the interactions between group members were grounded in ideas about proper conduct both with respect to kinship relations and positioning within clan hierarchy. The material realities of life in Nouméa do not favor, or even permit this way of being and relating

to others. Government housing splits up families and clans according to the bureaucratic logic of the French welfare state. Republican law prevents expressions of overt cultural difference in the public sphere. Yet in the space created by the association, the young people in Blue Hau are able to, in Jacob's words, "continue the ambience of life *en tribu* in the city." Associations help maintain indigenous modes of sociality and personhood threatened by urbanization and the exigencies of republican citizenship. Though associations are firmly embedded in the structures of the settler state, the practices of Kanak youth within these groups create the possibility for contestation of the dominant social order in New Caledonia (de Certeau 1984).⁸⁸

Résurrection

As associations allow for the perpetuation of indigenous identity, they also allow for its reformulation. The hip-hop dance group *Résurrection* is registered with government as an association engaged in "*interventions sociales*." Though it isn't coded as an *amicale*, *Résurrection*, like Blue Hau, is also organized to regroup people from the same region. In this case however, the "region" from which group members

⁸⁸ Although Blue Hau enjoyed performing for all types of spectators, and found it especially meaningful to play at events organized by the city or by the Tjibaou Center, the audience that mattered most to them was the *tribu de Hwadrilla* itself. Again, the social frame most important to the *association* was a Kanak one. I also interviewed members of the band *Korboys*, which is also an *association de jeunesse* from the *tribu* of Mebuet, in Maré (part of the customary district of Guahama, where Nidoish Nasseleine is *grand chef*). When I asked *Korboys* lead singer Jules Guanere what kind of audience the group thinks about when it writes its songs he replied, "*Notre première public, c'est les gens du Maré. D'abord partager avec des gens de chez moi. Si tu ne fais pas un concert à Maré tu es rien.*" [Our first public is the people of Maré. First share with the people from home. If you don't do a concert in Maré, you're nothing].

hail is not a *tribu*, but Rivière-Salée: a lower class, largely Kanak neighborhood in the northern part of Nouméa. *Résurrection* practices on a concrete “*plateau de danse*” at the graffiti-covered Rivière-Salée *maison de quartier*, located adjacent to a ripe-smelling municipal sewage treatment plant. Nearly all *Résurrection*’s dancers grew up in Nouméa. They come from different custom areas and language groups, and most have never spent an extended period of time—outside of school holidays or major events like weddings and funerals— in their *tribus* of origin. Traditional kin networks and customary hierarchies are no longer the primary references by which they locate themselves. Yet the members of *Résurrection* view their involvement with hip-hop dance as evidence of continuity, not rupture with Kanak tradition. Though no one in the group sees hip-hop as a “traditionally Kanak” cultural expression, they frame their engagement with the form as part of a particularly Kanak way of being urban.

Echoing remarks made by several other members in the group, Antoine “Coco” Xulue, twenty-five, characterized hip-hop dance as serving a parallel function to traditional Kanak dance forms:

Before, we would dance to show our strength and our identity to our enemies...
In dance now, it is the same thing, we show our identity, our skills.

Résurrection is only one of dozens of hip-hop “crews” that have sprung up in the past five years in the peripheral, mostly indigenous neighborhoods of Nouméa. Most of these crews are strongly associated with particular *quartiers*. In accounting for the enormous and relatively sudden popularity of hip-hop dance, young people I spoke

with described dance crews as the new collective reference points for urban Kanak.

Echoing similar comments made by members in Blue Hau, Coco told me:

Kanak are drawn to belonging to a dance crew. Because we don't live in the village...there isn't the same framework here...Nouméa is not a Kanak place...in a dance crew, you have a place, you have an identity. You can be yourself...many of us would be delinquents if we weren't dancers.

In this sense, though membership in *Résurrection* is based on the thoroughly modern logic of neighborhood co-residence, much like Blue Hau, the group provides a structure and the means to reaffirm an identity made meaningful by its place in a network of social relations, a way to “be themselves.”⁸⁹

The media often depict the group's neighborhood of Rivière-Salée as the epicenter of Nouméa's “youth crisis.” The members of *Résurrection* complain about the stigma attached to their neighborhood. In their view, neither the French government or Kanak customary authorities recognize or try to understand the views of Kanak youth growing up in Nouméa.⁹⁰ How was their generation supposed to

⁸⁹ Many members in the group also unofficially served as the *grands frères* (big brothers) of younger members, looking out for their welfare in the same way that older siblings are traditionally expected to do for their younger brothers and sisters. The group's success attracted legions of younger boys from the neighborhood who would sit around and watch practices. Eventually Hassan and the other leaders formed “*Résurrection Junior*,” so that the younger children could learn how to dance. Since *Résurrection* has been around for eight years, some of the kids originally in “*Résurrection Junior*,” have grown older and are now in the main group.

⁹⁰ The issue of gender in these dance groups is something I hope to explore in later work. Though there are no girls in *Résurrection*, many of the other “crews” in Nouméa feature young women as central members. The other dance group I spent the most time with was UBC (“Urban Breaker Crew”), based out of the *quartier* of Magenta. Three of the group's ten dancers are girls. Breakdancing requires a certain physicality that is counter to how gender roles are traditionally embodied in Kanak society. Though many of the female dancers I knew comported themselves in more traditionally “modest” ways when they were “off-stage;” *during* performances, they were completely transformed (ie: spinning on their backs with their

project themselves into the future when there was no room for their voices and their hopes in the present? In this regard, Pash, 23, criticized the numerous recent events organized by Kanak political and customary leaders around the “problem of Kanak youth:”

The customary senate is asking for the words of youth, but they should at least go out and buy a CD. Because when a young Kanak makes a CD, in the music, there are complaints, words...or in hip hop dance...this is Kanak identity...On the walls, in all the country, what they call graffiti, do they ever read this graffiti? It's the words of Kanak youth. Instead of repainting the wall, they should read it.

For Pash, Kanak customary authorities marginalize Kanak youth by refusing to recognize their “urban” or “modern” cultural productions as legitimate expressions of Kanak identity. While the loyalist government attributes youth delinquency to deficiencies in Kanak culture, Kanak leaders see “delinquents” as deficiently Kanak.

Résurrection's founder Hassan Xulue (Coco's younger brother) became one of my closest friends in New Caledonia. Though he was only twenty when I met him, Hassan was essentially one of the most important community leaders in Rivière-Salée. Moreover, he had (almost) single-handedly transformed hip-hop from a cultural expression that authorities associated with youth delinquency to an activity now generously supported by state funds. Hassan considers his work with *Résurrection* as part of a broader mission to continue the labors of his father, Pierre Xulue, a man who had been deeply involved in the 1980s independence struggle. Pierre Xulue met

legs spread wide, making lots of physical contact with their fellow male dancers, doing backflips, etc.). Cultural production is definitely a key arena for the transformation of traditional Kanak gender roles, particularly for this generation.

Hassan's mother (a Motu woman from Papua New Guinea), when he was sent by FLNKS to Papua New Guinea to study at the University of Papua New Guinea (they later separated, after having seven children together). Shortly before Tjibaou's assassination, Hassan's mother and father both traveled to Libya, where Pierre Xulue and a handful of other FLNKS militants trained with Gaddafi's army (much to the horror of the French government). Hassan was named after a Muslim liberation leader his father encountered during this trip.⁹¹ As Hassan told me:

I can never be as great a man as my father. I don't even compare us. It is not my place to talk about *Les Événements*. *Je n'ai pas la droit de parole. Mais nous sommes dans dans une vague qui suit nos parents. Ils ont subi les événements* [I don't have the right/authority to speak. But we are in a wave following our parents. They suffered "The Events"]. And now there has been an exodus from the islands, from the north, to Nouméa, for work. And there are kids who have grown up in *le quartier*. They have all sorts of problems, maybe at home, or at school, or with alcohol. *Résurrection* started dancing and performing and they [these kids] see us and they want to learn more. They ask, oh how do you do this or that. And we've danced a little bit all over now, in all the different neighborhoods, around the territory. And now authorities see that hip-hop is a way for young people in the *quartiers* to integrate into society. This wouldn't have been possible if we hadn't registered as an association. Because we're officially recognized that way....that's how we can receive [state] money.

⁹¹ I was never able to figure out exactly who this "Muslim Liberation leader" was, but I was told he was Malaysian. While Pierre Xulue and other Kanak were in Libya, Gaddafi was also helping to train "insurgents" from other third world countries. Surprisingly little has been written about this strange chapter of New Caledonia's history. However, Australian journalist Nic Maclellan is currently working on a research project related to the FLNKS militants' time in Libya (personal communication).

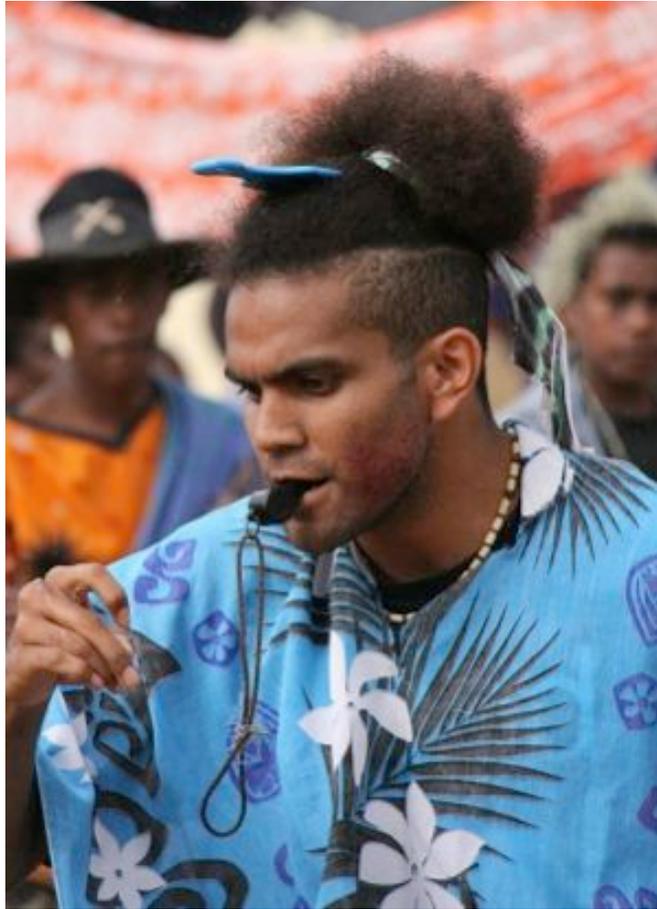


Fig. 5.4. Hassan (used with permission from Hassan Xulue).

Hassan also told me he had chosen to name the group “Résurrection” because it’s mission was to help “rebirth” Kanak identity for young people in Rivière-Salée.⁹²

Hassan believes that by helping young people affirm and assert their identity as Kanak, *Résurrection* is involved in a broader political movement that follows his father’s legacy:⁹³

⁹² The other meaning behind the name “Résurrection” is related to the *quartier*. The group’s nickname is RSC, which stands both for “Résurrection” and “Rivière-Salée Crew.”

⁹³ While I was in Nouméa, Hassan traveled back to his Siloam—his father’s natal *tribu*, in the Wetr district of Lifou—for a month during school holidays. When he returned he said that his

Kanak youth have a lot of ideas but don't know how to express themselves. Because of customary rules, but also because of the French system, we have difficulty. Hip-hop is a tool. It is a supportive tool. A modern tool that we can use, while still keeping the Kanak part. Through this we, the new generation...young Kanak from the city, we're trying to valorize Kanak culture, to project ourselves in to the future. The government and customary institutions are doing nothing to advance things. Young people have to do things for ourselves.

Through their status as an *association loi 1901*, Résurrection has received funding and support from the New Caledonian government and the city of Nouméa. The government paid for the group to travel to New Zealand in 2008 to perform in a hip-hop festival. In 2010, after they won New Caledonia's "Battle of the Year" (BOTY) breakdance competition, the state financed the group's trip to Montpellier, France, where they represented New Caledonia at the BOTY international competition. It was the first time any of the group had ever been to metropolitan France. During the event, when several dancers wore t-shirts featuring the Kanak flag and the words "Kanaky 2014," they were chastised and forced to change by their government-appointed chaperone (a young Caldoche employee from New Caledonia's *Direction de la Culture*). Perfectly distilling the republican philosophy on the assertion of "particular interest" in the public sphere, she firmly told Résurrection that their participation in the competition must only be "cultural, not political."

"energy had been restored" and that he now knew "his ancestors were with him in this project [leading *Résurrection*]." While speaking to customary elders in Lifou, Hassan had apparently learned that the *tribu* of Siloam was the location of a mythical land feature where certain ancestral spirits returned to be reincarnated—or *resurrected*. Hassan told me he was now sure that his work with *Résurrection* had been supported and driven by his ancestors.



Fig. 5.5. Résurrection performing in *BOTY 2010 Nouvelle-Calédonie*.

But for the members of Résurrection, Kanak identity is *both* cultural and political. In “valorizing and projecting Kanak identity into the future,” the group also lays claim to a particular vision of post-referendum, post-Nouméa Accords New Caledonia. Aided by the structure of the association, they have articulated a Kanak identity that enables them to negotiate the disjunctions of cultural change and urban marginalization in a settler society. At the same time, as the incident in Montpellier

illustrates, this expression of Kanak identity unsettles the universalistic logic of Republican citizenship and remains out of step with the territory's official "*politiques culturelles*."

Extreme

The last association I will discuss similarly troubles the underlying structures of the settler state in New Caledonia. Extreme is a band, so named because each of its nine teenage members hails from the *tribu* of Titch, near Poum, at the "extreme north" of the Grand Terre. Though the group was not formed as an *association de tribu* (or registered as an *amicale*), Extreme was created as part of an effort to regroup kin in Nouméa. All of the band members are close cousins, and three of the musicians—including the group's youngest member, a thirteen-year-old—are brothers. The band's de-facto manager is Eric Wendo Tidjine, 48, biological father of two boys in the group, adopted father of one, and uncle to everyone else. Eric and I became good friends during my time in Nouméa, and my husband and I spent several days with his family *en tribu* at Titch. I also traveled with Extreme during the two week long Festival of Melanesian Arts, in September 2010 (an experience I describe in the next chapter).⁹⁴

⁹⁴ I think in part because I was good friends with their dad, I was never quite as close with the boys in Extreme as I was with the young people in both Blue Hau and Résurrection. I was a (young-looking) 27-year-old during my fieldwork. This turned out to be a fairly ideal situation, as far as my own "fieldworker subjectivity" was concerned. I was young enough that teenagers felt comfortable "just hanging out" with me, but old enough that people their parent's age engaged me as an adult. I don't think this would have been the case if I hadn't been married.

Eric worked as an education specialist for *L'Association pour la Protection de l'Enfant et de la Jeunesse en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (APEJ) [Association for the Protection of Children and Youth], part of the Provincial Government. I had already sat in on two or three of Extreme's rehearsals before Eric and I were able to meet in his office at APEJ to conduct a sit down interview. When I asked Eric to tell me a bit about how Extreme became an association, I did not expect the detailed life narrative I received in response.

Eric told me that the Tidjine clan (also spelled Tijin) are the clan of the *grand chefferie* for the Nelema customary region, which, in addition to the *tribu* of Titch, includes the entire area immediately surrounding Poum and several smaller islands off the coast (Baaba, Yenghabene, and Taanlo). Despite occupying an important position in his *tribu*, Eric spent his childhood in Nouméa, in Logicoop, a neighborhood adjacent to Tindu. At this time (the 1970s), there were few Kanak in the city, and Eric's family was the only Kanak family in his neighborhood. He has many vivid memories of *Les Événements*. He was between 20 and 25 years old during the "worst parts." Eric told me he "lost 3 or 4 years of his life." However, because he had experienced this difficult time, he told me:

Along with the rest of my generation, we really know what history was, really know what was lost, what was gained. What Kanak identity is. *Qui je suis, d'ou je viens*. Who I am, where I come from.

After *Les Événements*, Eric traveled to France to complete studies for a DEFA degree (*Diplôme d'Etat relatif aux fonctions de l'animation*). After he returned to New

Caledonia, married and started a family, Eric moved his wife and children back north to Titch, and started working for the *Mairie* [mayor's office/townhall] in the *commune* of Poum. He has three sons, Elia, Nico and Daniel. Eric also acts as a father to a third child, Jacques, adopted from a "family in great difficulty" that he encountered during his work with APEJ. Although this wasn't technically a customary adoption, Eric maintains *liens coutumières* with Jacques' family (who are from Maré).

Three years before I met Eric, in 2007, his wife was killed in a terrible car accident when her car was side swiped by a truck and rolled off one of Poum's narrow, steeply embanked roads into a ditch. During our interview, Eric's voice started to quaver as when he reached this point in his story. He composed himself for a moment and continued:

After that, I had to leave Poum and go back to Nouméa...to clear my mind. It was too hard to around the memories...to have to drive past where she was killed everyday. My sons were very traumatized too. In a way, the music group began because I needed to help my family on an emotional level. They needed an activity...a way to work through our grief.

So the family moved back to Nouméa, where they joined up with the family of Eric's cousin, Pady Bouavoua, also from Titch. Despite being Eric's cousin, Pady belongs to a clan that has long been in conflict with the Tidjine. As Eric explained it to me, there are only two clans in Titch: the Tidjine and the Bouaouva. The Bouaouva clan has the *petit chefferie* of Titch, but the Tidjine hold the *grand chefferie* of the entire customary region surrounding Poum, in which Titch is located.⁹⁵ As a result, there is a long

⁹⁵ Apparently, Eric himself was asked to assume the role of *chef* but turned it down because it

history, extending to before the colonial era, of (sometimes violent) power struggles between the two clans over prestige and land. Today however, Eric explained, the Bouavoua and Tidjine have been united by a “*deuil partagé*” [a shared grief]. Apparently, around the same time Eric’s wife was killed, the Bouavoua clan also suffered great losses in a car accident.⁹⁶ Pady Bouavoua’s sister died and two of Pady’s own sons, twins, were seriously injured. One twin now has what Eric referred to as “a wooden foot” (a very simple prosthetic limb), and the other boy is partially paralyzed and confined to a wheel chair. Today, both of the twins (along with Pady’s third son) play with Eric’s sons in Extreme. As a band, Eric told me, “two clans, long separated along customary lines are brought together by music and our shared mourning.” He added:

Tous que je fait, il y a des liens. Musique, c’est un support pour récréer les liens. Pour le renouvellement des liens. Enfin, c’est ça le groupe. [Everything I do,

would mean he would have to stop most of his other work with APEJ and in *associations*.
⁹⁶ The number of motor vehicle fatalities in New Caledonia is extremely high. In 2012, for example, there were 456 car accidents in which people were hurt and 47 in which people were killed (55 people total). When one considers that the population of New Caledonia is only around 225,000 people and most residents do not even own cars, this is a pretty staggering number. There are several reasons behind these statistics. Many of the roads in New Caledonia are in rural areas and run along the side of steep cliffs (without guard rails). Additionally, obtaining a drivers’ license is prohibitively expensive and can only be done in Nouméa and Koné; so many people (especially Kanak people) drive without licenses and sometimes without learning local rules and regulations about right of way, etc. Finally, there is an enormous amount of drunk driving. Part of the reason for this is that the government has outlawed the purchase of alcohol after 3pm on weekends and holidays. This has created a booming black market. If people want to buy alcohol during the weekend (usually after having already consumed some at a wedding or party), they will get in a car and drive, inebriated, sometimes as far as 40 km on narrow, steep rural roads, to obtain black market booze (usually from a private residence). Consequently 55% of fatal car accidents in New Caledonia occur Friday through Sunday; 57% of which happen at night. (Statistics from: http://www.dittt.gouv.nc/portal/page/portal/dittt/securite_routiere/actualites_sr1, accessed 4/12/13).

there are relationships/connections. Music is a medium for recreating relationships. For the renewal of relationships. That is Extreme].

The name of Extreme's first album is "*Sourire Volée*" [Stolen Smile]. The lyrics of the title track address the losses suffered—"the smiles stolen from"—both families.

Eric and Pady got Extreme off the ground and completed the paperwork to register it as an association. During the following two years, as the boys grew older, they more or less took the reins over from their fathers. I asked Eric why he thought the group remained so important to his sons. As he saw it:

I think the group functions as a way to research identity [*une moyenne de recherche d'identité*] for the boys. There are many young people who cry "Kanaky! Kanaky!" but have no idea what they are talking about. There is no base [*Il n'y a pas de base*]. This is, I think, largely because they did not live through *les Événements*. I see these kids yelling "Kanaky! Kanaky!" with their dreads and their Ché Guevara shirts and their Bob Marley reggae and all this talk about "*la lutte*" [the fight/struggle]. And I want to say to them... I have said to some of them... Yes, that's great, *la lutte*! But that's *la lutte* of Jamaica, and the cultural identity of Jamaica. You are not Jamaican, and that isn't our history, or our struggle.

Being in this group has really guided, organized [*encadré*] my sons. All three of them have passed *le bac* [gotten a highschool diploma]. But they are still normal young people. They drink, they do bad things sometimes. But music has been like a therapy for them. It helped them learn to express themselves. It taught them about their identity, inspired them to research it and communicate it to other young people.

The band has experienced something of a whirlwind success. After a year of rehearsing every week in *maisons des musiques*, Extreme recorded a *Sourire Volé* and received invitations to play at several village festivals and municipally organized events in Nouméa. Though their music, an upbeat mix of zouk and kaneka, is made for dancing, most of Extreme's songs have strong social messages. When I interviewed

the boys in the group separately, they seemed to share many of the same views as (their father/uncle) Eric.



Fig. 5.6. Extreme at the Festival of Melanesian Arts in Ouvéa (photo by author).

According to 20-year-old Elia, who composes most of the band’s songs, part of Extreme’s mission is to help other young Kanak people “discover the history of our country” (particularly *Les Evénements*):

The events of this country, 1984 to 1988...we, I was born in 1989...we didn’t experience that...this whole period...I remember my father telling us the story of the unrest...even if we weren’t even born then we have our own say on the events. Because people died during the events, it’s important to us. So we tell the true story because at school nobody ever told us about these historical events.

In their music, the group addresses the erasure of indigenous struggle and settler-state violence from the dominant historical narrative in New Caledonia. In school curricula,

the media and elsewhere, the government trumpets the Nouméa Accords' call for a "common destiny," and emphasizes the need for citizens to 'move past' their differences in order to forge a unified, multicultural "Caledonian" society. As recent debates over the screening of a movie based on the Ouvéa massacre in Nouméa indicate, many believe that acknowledging French violence during "The Events" should be avoided on the grounds that it harms social cohesion by "reopening wounds that have already healed."⁹⁷ In Elia's view, however, recognizing "the true story" of The Events is the *only* way his generation will be able to understand their identity as Kanak in order to unite for the future of their country. Elia's brother, Nico explained that the group had chosen to sing all of their songs in French, rather than their local language of Nelema:

So that they are accessible to everyone...and so young people especially can understand their messages. Our songs are about hope and about creating an opening for young Kanak.

⁹⁷ Ciné City, Nouméa's only movie theater, refused to screen the 2011 film *L'Ordre et la Morale*, directed by Mathieu Kassovitz. The theater is owned by the Hicksons, a prominent Caldoche family. Owner Douglas Hickson, claimed the film was a 'cartoonish depiction that reopens wounds that have already healed.' He added, 'we are an entertainment company, while this film is a polemic. Our theater is not the appropriate place to present it'. In <http://next.liberation.fr/cinema/01012367005-les-neo-caledoniens-prises-du-film-sur-ouvea>, last accessed 11 Aug 2012). See also Nic Maclellan, "Remembering the Ouvéa Massacre", *Islands Business*, December 2011.



Fig. 5.7. Extreme performs the song ‘5 mai, 1988,’ about the events of the Ouvéa Massacre, with Daniel Tidjine (a little boy) on lead vocals. Photo by Eric Dell’ Erba.

During the previous year, Extreme had been invited to perform at a *kermesse* in Ouvéa. While the boys were there, some local youths took them to visit *la grotte* [the cave] where FLNKS militants held gendarmes hostage in 1988 (and where 19 of these young men were ultimately killed by the French military). Elia was extremely moved by the experience and decided to write a song about the massacre. Several months later, Extreme traveled back to Ouvéa to give a concert and debuted the new song, entitled “5 Mai 1988” (the date of the massacre). The band’s youngest member (pre-pubescent and very shy) Daniel Tidjine sings lead vocals. Elia described this concert for me:

It was incredible. Everyone was very emotional, very moved. No other groups had ever written a song about this event, and here we were, this group of youth, all the way from Poum.

Now “5 Mai 1988” is the most popular song on Extreme’s debut album. When the band plays concerts in Nouméa, hundreds of teenagers sway and wave their lighters in the air as little Daniel Tidjine sings:

*The fifth of May, in eighty-eight, 19 brothers were killed
In Iaaï (Ouvéa Island), land of lies
Kanak, remember this history that haunts us in the calm of night
Don’t forget the truth, it has been too deformed.*

*Gossanah, it’s the tragic history of a whole people
We have suffered far too much
Assassinated, this mission transformed into a massacre.*

Extreme uses their music to interpellate Kanak youth as a political entity. In calling for “Kanak to remember...the tragic history of a whole people,” Extreme asserts a counter-narrative that resists dominant settler accounts suppressing histories of state violence and organized indigenous resistance. All of this takes place within an association recognized and supported by the French state.

Associations and the Construction of an Indigenous Counter Public Sphere

Drawing on the examples of Blue Hau, Résurrection and Extreme, I argue that what is happening within associations in New Caledonia is the construction of an indigenous counter-public sphere. While French settler society excludes the participation of Kanak *cum* Kanak in the public sphere, Kanak youth have built a

“counter civil-society” of voluntary associations based on indigenous logics. In this sense, the Kanak use of associations bears many similarities to counter publics developed in other contexts, described in work like Mary Ryan’s (1990) influential study of political participation among nineteenth-century American women. Ryan argues that despite being excluded from the official public sphere, elite 19th century bourgeois women were able to access the public sphere by “building a counter-civil society of alternative woman-only voluntary associations,” including philanthropic and moral reform societies; in some respects, these associations mimicked the all-male societies built by these women’s fathers and grandfathers; yet in other respects the women were innovating, since they creatively used the heretofore quintessentially “private” idioms of domesticity and motherhood precisely as springboards for ‘public activity.’”

According to Fraser (1990:68), counter publics like the one described by Ryan have a “dual character”:

On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides.

Following Fraser, I argue that Kanak have innovated the form of the French association to open new spaces for the assertion of indigenous sovereignty. They have challenged Republican principles of citizenship by linking indigenous Kanak rights to the “universal,” rather than “particular” good. In this sense, the engagement of Kanak

youth in associations acts to change the shape of citizenship and nature of the nation in New Caledonia.

As Fortun et al. suggest, “Indigeneity should be understood as what the state disavows – as what the state will not or cannot say” (2010:231). Kanak youth are using associations in ways that force the French state to “avow” indigenous identity in the public sphere. In the process, they have challenged the hegemonic norms of citizenship in New Caledonia. The situation faced by the Kanak is similar in many ways to indigenous peoples the world over. However, the role played by associations in the articulation of indigenous identities reveals the extent to which the “indigenous category” in New Caledonia emerges from a configuration of citizenship, nation and sovereignty and a socio-political context (with Kanak as the largest ethnic group and the real possibility of eventual independence)—that sets New Caledonia apart from other settler states.⁹⁸ Kanak do not view their rights as structured on the same binary between “tribal sovereignty and individual citizenship that has delimited identity

⁹⁸ It also sets New Caledonia apart in very clear ways from the rest of Melanesia. However, most work on “nationalism” and “the State” in Melanesia tends to ignore New Caledonia completely. In his conclusion to the oft-cited 1997 volume on “Nation Making” in Melanesia (edited by Robert Foster), John Kelly (256) writes, “‘The State’ in the Pacific has not been quite the same autonomous centralizing historical force that it has been, say, in France.” Apparently it is not even worth a footnote mentioning that there is an archipelago in Melanesia that is politically “part of” France. The proliferation of associations in New Caledonia constitutes a robust civil society that is also “absent” in Melanesian states. As Edward Lipuma (48), argues earlier in the same volume, “...[I]n the reality...the entire notion of civil society is as Chatterjee eloquently argues, Eurocentric in an important way: there is no space or allowance for “community.” This concept of civil society has no space of regionalism, ethnicity, and the other factors that determine nation-making in the Pacific.” In New Caledonia we see quite the contrary: that “Eurocentric” civil society has been enthusiastically appropriated by Melanesian Kanak in ways that explicitly *make space* for “regionalism and ethnicity.”

politics,” as Jessica Cattelino (2010) has described in the context of the United States. They do not want to claim differentiated, simultaneous rights as Kanak and French citizens as part of a “nation within a nation” relationship to France, in the way that Thomas Biolosi (2005) and Carole Blackburn (2009) argue some indigenous groups seek in the USA and Canada. Nor is Kanak citizenship a form of what Renato Rosaldo (1994) calls “cultural citizenship;” Kanak do not seek to remain culturally different while belonging to French New Caledonian society.

Instead, I argue that the assertion of Kanak indigeneity acts to restructure civil society in New Caledonia and shift the meaning of citizenship for *all* New Caledonians (not just Kanak). This is because Kanak indigeneity has been formulated in the “niches” of a French Republican settler state; in spaces like the *association loi de 1901*. Unlike liberal multicultural Anglo-saxon settler states, the French republican state works to suppress certain assertions of difference in the public sphere. Kanak are not forced to render their difference commensurable in exchange for recognition – the French state does not consider cultural difference a legitimate basis for recognition claims. This is why the association has emerged as a space for the construction of an indigenous counter-public sphere. Though associations are intended to foster universalist values of Republican citizenship, they allow for the expression of particular interest in the public sphere. In this sense, associations continue to embody the same tension between the universal and particular that they were introduced to help resolve. As Silverstein (2004), drawing on Balibar (1991) argues:

[U]niversalism and particularism, and assimilation and difference, are not opposites but rather two sides of the same coin, and together *constitute the continual avowal and disavowal of difference that forms the basis of French national identity*. [in Fernando 2009:387, italics mine]

This vacillation between acceptance and rejection of difference—a niche that Kanak have transformed into a handle—also shapes New Caledonia’s cultural policy. In the following chapter I suggest that the divergences between normative French conceptions of associations and their actual use by Kanak points to a fundamentally different understanding of what it means to “have a culture” in the first place.

-Chapter 6 –

**CULTURE, COUTUME, KASTOM:
“HAVING CULTURE” IN NEW CALEDONIA**

*How can we promote an original expression of [Caledonian] culture in the sense that it would translate what Malraux calls ‘the soul of a people’?*⁹⁹

- Pacale Bernut-Bernut-Deplanque, Director of Culture for the South Province, New Caledonia

The Kanak are not Melanesians anymore. They have lost their culture.

- Abraham Alapi, a member of Papua New Guinea’s delegation to the 4th Festival of Melanesian Arts, held in New Caledonia

Les Européens nous ont empêché d’être.

-Jean-Marie Tjibaou, 1985¹⁰⁰

I was first introduced to Casimir Bolo by Eric Tidjine. Casimir (who went by Kazi) is the *animateur de la maison de municipale de musique* in Tindu (a *quartier* located far from the city center, at the end of the Ducos peninsula, past Nouméa’s “industrial zone”). *Extreme* practiced every Wednesday night at the Tindu *maison*, where Kazi managed the reservation schedule, plugged in equipment, tinkered with broken synthesizers and set sound levels. Kazi was originally from Lekiny, in the Faga

⁹⁹ From Bernut-Bernut-Deplanque’s book, *L’identité culturelle calédonienne: construction possible ou utopie?* (2002:146)

¹⁰⁰ “Europeans prevented us from being.” cited in *La Présence Kanak* (1996).

Uvéa (Polynesian language) speaking, northernmost part of Ouvéa island.¹⁰¹ After Eric gave me Kazi's phone number, I tried to call and schedule a meeting with him, but he never had enough phone credit to speak with me. Eventually I just decided to show up in Tindu and see if I could find him. I was successful. And after we got to talking, Kazi and I clicked immediately, in large part because he had a long term fascination with America. After Kazi finished grilling me about Obama, 9/11 and Texas, he would launch into rambling narratives about his life, the neighborhood and *la lutte* Kanak.¹⁰² I ended up taking the 45-minute bus ride from my apartment in Centre-Ville out to Tindu nearly every week, just to meet and chat with Kazi about nothing in particular. We would sit talking for a couple of hours on metal folding chairs in the stuffy soundproof-foam-covered rehearsal room, while Kazi hand-rolled cigarettes with nicotine stained fingers.

One day Kazi and got to talking about how hardly any Kaneka¹⁰³ bands had horn sections, because brass instruments were too expensive for Kanak to buy ("only the army and the music conservatory have them," he said). I mentioned that I played

¹⁰¹ He also turned out to be my friend Nico Bolo's uncle. Nico is mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation.

¹⁰² There seems to be a strange fascination with Texas in New Caledonia that crosses all ethnic boundaries. Consequently, American country music is very popular with both Kanak and Caldoche people (though Kanak interest seems to have waned somewhat as Kaneka and reggae have grown in importance). My husband and I were regularly entertained by a daily show on radio station "Océane FM," that often came on while we were driving in our beat up Peugeot Clio. The hour-long program was entirely devoted to American country music, and featured an announcer who spoke French in a burlesqued Texan accent (surprisingly, such a thing is possible).

¹⁰³ Kaneka emerged as the first "Kanak" genre of popular music during the indigenous political struggle of the 1980s. It combines traditional Kanak rhythmic structures with influences from reggae and Western pop music.

trombone, and that I had actually brought my instrument to New Caledonia with me. Kazi's eyes widened. "What if you taught me how to play trombone? We could apply to the city for money to buy some brass instruments for the *maison de musique*," he said. "You could lead workshops for *les jeunes du quartier* and then, when you left, I could continue teaching them. It would be so good for *les jeunes*. They'll advance in their musical projects, *dans leurs projets de vie*, in their life projects," he explained excitedly. "And also," he said, "we will show that, Kaneka music...that Kanak culture...is strong with young people...*même nos jeunes dans la ville blanche, dans les quartiers populaires*. Even our youth in 'the white city,' in the working class neighborhoods."

I loved the plan and I really hoped we would be able to make it happen. Kazi had been so helpful and kind to me since we met, and I felt like getting these instruments for the *quartier* was a way to give something back to him. So our weekly visits turned into trombone lessons (and I tried not to wince whenever Kazi put his lips on my mouth piece after spitting brown chewing tobacco juice in the cup he kept around to ash his cigarettes). We worked together to write a grant proposal to the city government for funding for an "*Atelier d'Initiation aux Cuivres à la Maison de Musique de Tindu*" (an "Introductory Workshop for Horns at the Tindu Maison de Musique"), for youth ages ten to fourteen. We asked for money to purchase four trombones, four trumpets and two saxophones (I told Kazi the saxophone was a reed instrument, and I had no idea how to teach him to play it, but he was undeterred).



Fig. 6.1. Casimir and me (on July 17th, 2010, the day the Kanak flag was raised).

Before I met with Nouméa’s deputy head of “culture and festivals” to discuss our final proposal, I had a preliminary meeting with the administrators of Nouméa’s state-funded *Conservatoire de Musique*. Kazi didn’t want to attend either of these meetings and told me he thought it would be better if I went alone. *C’est mieux présenté comme ça*. “It’s better presented that way,” he said. I got the sense that he felt profoundly uncomfortable (or embarrassed) about the prospect of going to government offices. So I went alone to meet with director Jean-Pierre Cabée and assistant director Bruno Zanchetta in their offices in the beautifully renovated conservatory building in Nouméa’s *Quartier Latin*. Like many state employees in New Caledonia, both men were *Zoreilles* (metropolitan French).

After I explained the fundamentals of the plan Kazi and I had developed for the brass workshop, Monsieur Cabée nodded slowly and tapped his fingers on the table. He cleared his throat and began to explain to me, as an (apparently ignorant) outsider, what was wrong with Kanak music in New Caledonia:

You're right. They definitely do need horns. This would allow Kaneka music to progress I think. The Kanak went from the Neolithic to the modern times with no steps in between... Kaneka music, it's all keyboard, drums, guitar [mimes "plunking" motion on invisible keyboard]. It's sad really, you can put out one, two... maybe three albums, then what is there left to do? Because it all sounds the same. There are few Kanak who understand that it's necessary to move, to change [*qu'il faut bouger*].

Cabée went on to explain the government's plan for "developing music" in the territory. In 2004 New Caledonia began the "*Cadre Avenir*" project, which pays for select Kanak musicians to train as music instructors in Poitiers, France. Cabée specified, "most Kanak, they may be even be very good musicians, but almost none of them know how to read music, or knows theory." Since the project's inception, only nine Kanak have been trained. Nevertheless, Cabée and Zanchetta described *Cadre Avenir* as an important success for the country:

This project is part of the larger post-Matignon, post-Nouméa Accords effort to decentralize, to rebalance the North and South Province, the whites and Kanaks... You know, it's a universal thing, they are doing the same thing in South Africa, for example... Or... also in the United States! [He grew increasingly animated with this realization]. You have Obama, he is also a product of this *rééquilibrage*. *D'une change de regard*. Of this rebalancing, of a change in perspective. We are in the process of leaving a colonial system. It's just like in the United States, with British colonialism.¹⁰⁴ But you see... culture is such an important part of this. This is why the state funds such things as *Cadre Avenir*. Cultural policy is essential in the construction of a common Caledonian citizenship!

¹⁰⁴ Clearly he was somewhat confused about certain chronologies in American history.

Kazi and I never got the money for the horns.

Understanding what exactly people mean when they talk about “culture” in New Caledonia can be quite difficult. Depending on one’s interlocutor, the term “culture” may signify widely contradictory things. For example, returning to my meeting with the administrators of the Music Conservatory, what did the director mean when he told me that, “culture is such an important part...of leaving the colonial system”? I am fairly certain that he was deploying the concept of “culture” differently than Kazi or most of my other Kanak friends generally do. France tends to see culture as the domain of the State, which provides most of the funding for *la vie culturelle* in France.¹⁰⁵ Philippe Poirrier writes:

That which founds the originality of the French model, it seems to me, beyond the considerable evolution and changing emphases of the last two centuries, is the idea, widely shared, that public cultural policy participates in the construction of the Republic and of democracy. [Poirrier 2002:13]

In France, “culture” thus functions as a vital building block of Republican solidarity and social cohesion. Culture “animates civic life.” Everyone is free to “have culture,” but cultural differences must not divide *polis*. In this sense, as Beth Epstein

¹⁰⁵ This is of course, in great contrast with the United States. As Sally Price (2007, citing Shattuck 2005) writes: “the closest thing the United States has come to establishing a federal agency for culture has been its sponsorship of the National Endowment of the Arts” but that the total budget for that agency comes to only “about one-tenth of the Italian government’s contribution to major opera houses.”

(2011:142) explains, culture in France is like “any other hobby or interest,” that gives people a reason to come together:

“Having culture” gives people a way to be *inclu* [included]. It allows people opportunity to leave the sealed off worlds of their particular communities...and share with others the ‘richness’ of what they have to offer in a public forum. *Culture here becomes defined by its outer signs.* [Epstein 1998:286, emphasis mine]

When I asked Kanak people what “having Kanak culture” means (which I did often), the answers they gave me did not resemble this “French model.” Most people responded with some form of the statement: “Kanak culture is *la coutume*.” When I asked for further elaboration I got answers like, “*la coutume ne se dit pas, on vit la coutume*” [*la coutume* is not what is said, one lives *la coutume*]. Or as Billy Wapotro, former director of the *Alliance Scholaire de l’église évangélique* (Protestant School Alliance) told me, “*C’est quoi la culture Kanak? C’est la célébration de liens*” [What is Kanak culture? It’s the celebration of relationships]. Generally speaking, Kanak use *la coutume* in a manner roughly equivalent to the pan-Melanesian pidgin term *kastom*.¹⁰⁶ In Anglophone Melanesia, *kastom* is used to refer to specific bodies of local indigenous knowledge and practice. At the same time, *kastom* is also a rhetorical trope. As Lissant Bolton (1999:1) writes, “*kastom* is...a flexible term used to denote a

¹⁰⁶ I do actually think that Kanak conceive of and deploy *la coutume* in ways that differ in small but important ways from the connotations of the Melanesian pidgin term *kastom* in Anglophone Melanesia. This is something I hope to explore in much greater depth in future work. My guess would be that the differences in use and content between the two terms relates to the legacy of French colonial policies regarding the role of culture in political claims-making. I have some sense that Kanak people do sometimes talk about *la coutume* in ways that seem inflected by French constructs of *patrimoine*, for example. Yet as concepts, *la coutume* and *kastom* are still very closely related. For the purposes of my argument here, it is both valid and useful to treat them as mostly analogous in meaning.

category of knowledge and practice, the content of the category is left largely undefined” (cf. Jolly 1994; Keesing 1982; Lindstrom and White 1993; Geismar 2003). Throughout Melanesia, *kastom* is constructed both as a source of national unity and a “legitimate expression of local difference” (Bolton 1999:52). Melanesians all have *kastom*, which makes them different from Westerners (in particular their former colonial rulers), and thus serves as “a rallying cry to evoke a distinctive non-European national identity” (Tonkison 1982:306). Yet each island, each cultural group, has its own unique *kastom*. In emphasizing “unity in diversity” *kastom* ideology (and *la coutume*) ironically shares important elements with Republican notions of culture.¹⁰⁷ Fundamental differences remain, however. In Anglophone Melanesia, *kastom* discourse is not necessarily separated from political discourse. Indeed, *kastom* rhetoric often explicitly functions as political rhetoric (Rousseau 2004).¹⁰⁸ This has certainly been the case in New Caledonia, where a festival celebrating *la coutume* Kanak—*Melanesia 2000*—effectively marked the beginning of an organized political movement for Kanak independence (as I will explore shortly).

During our meeting, the conservatory director told me, “cultural policy is essential in the construction of a common Caledonian citizenship.” Indeed, the

¹⁰⁷ In this way, *la coutume*—and in fact, the notion of “Kanak identity” itself—have very similar functions to *kastom*. There are real cultural differences between Kanak groups (and Kanak still speak 28 different indigenous languages). Yet as anticolonial sentiment grew during the 1960s onwards, these groups were united by the notion that, unlike European settlers, they all had *coutume*, and thus, a shared cultural and political identity (as the Kanak people).

¹⁰⁸ In early literature on cargo cults (in some ways the first iteration of *kastom* discourse), many scholars analyzed cargo cult movements as proto-political sovereignty movements (see Guiart 1951; Lawrence 1964; Worsley 1968).

Nouméa Accord declares that, “Kanak culture must be developed and enhanced through artistic training courses and in the media.” Along these lines, the March/April/May 2013 issue of *Endemix* (a government-funded magazine on arts and culture in New Caledonia) calls cultural policy, “[a] vector of social cohesion, mirror of the country’s identity and aspirations, element in the amelioration of quality of life, pivot of public policies” (Lehoux 2013:36) Moreover, *Endemix* claims, “at the moment when New Caledonia is in search of its common destiny, cultural policies [*politiques culturelles*] have a major role to play” (*ibid.*). Yet, if Euro-Caledonians and Kanak have fundamentally contradictory understandings of what “having a culture” even means, how can “cultural policy” be used to “construct a common destiny”? In an effort to probe this question, this chapter explores post-Nouméa Accord *politiques culturelles* [cultural policies] in New Caledonia in an effort to reveal what is “lost in translation” when shifting between indigenous and settler notions “culture.” I focus in particular on cultural festivals because of the decisive role that these events (as well public reactions to these events) have played in New Caledonia’s recent socio-political history. The chapter closes by examining a series of incidents at the 2010 Festival of Melanesian Arts, during which the disjuncture between Kanak and French notions of culture emerged in stark relief.

Politiques Culturelles: Culture not Politics

When I interviewed the acting head of Nouméa’s Service of Culture and Festivals, the first thing he told me was that if really wanted to understand cultural

policy in New Caledonia I should read a recent book written by his colleague, Pascale Bernut-Deplanque.¹⁰⁹ Bernut-Deplanque, he explained, was a true expert. She was Caldoche, born and raised in New Caledonia. Currently, she was acting director of the South Province’s Cultural Service, a position she had taken after serving at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Paris. I followed his advice and got my hands on a copy of the book in question, entitled, “*L’identité culturelle calédonienne : construction possible ou utopie?*” (*Calédonian Cultural Identity: Possible Construction or Utopia?*). In it, Bernut-Deplanque lays out a blueprint for cultural policy in post-Nouméa Accords New Caledonia. Supporting her arguments with copious citations to liberal political philosophers like Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, Bernut-Deplanque emphasizes the need “to create a culture that is uniquely Caledonian” and not just “French culture, which is internationally recognized” or a “‘Western model’ that is out of step with the cultural environment” (Bernut-Deplanque 2002:146). Yet there are several hints that Bernut-Deplanque may not be able to step outside French republican notions of culture herself. At one point, she asks, “How can we promote an original [Caledonian] cultural expression in the sense that it would translate what Malraux calls ‘the soul of a people’” (*ibid.*). If anything, André Malraux is *the* embodiment of a French-republican approach to “culture”—not

¹⁰⁹ It is worth noting here that only *two* of New Caledonia’s major cultural institutions (*le Mouv*, a music venue and training space for young musicians in Rivière-Salée; and the North Province Cultural Center in Koné) are headed by Kanak. All the rest—the La Foa Socio-cultural Center, the Paita *Dock Socioculturelle*, the Montdore Cultural Center, the Bibliothèque Bernheim, Nouméa’s *Centre D’Art*, the Dumbéa Cultural Center, The Rex (a cultural space for youth in downtown Nouméa) and *even* the Tjibaou Culture Center—employ Euro-Calédonians as cultural directors.

an alternative to it. The first director of the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs (created in 1959), Malraux aimed “to integrate...cultural policies within Gaullist ideals of reorganizing and reshaping French society through the state” (Ingram 2011:6).

Bernut-Deplanque’s book vividly reveals the extent to which discourses on “cultural policy” in New Caledonia remain firmly entrenched in republican ideology (and have not shifted post-Nouméa Accord). Throughout, Bernut-Deplanque asserts that the construction of a New Caledonian “common destiny” demands *politiques culturelles* that depart from the Republican status quo. Yet she premises her entire argument on thoroughly French assumptions of what it means to “have culture.” For instance, Bernut-Deplanque (2002:64) claims that “*la vie culturelle* [cultural life] was almost inexistent before the Nouméa Accords.” For whom was it inexistent? Bernut-Deplanque seems to imply that prior to the Nouméa Accords, New Caledonia did not have well-organized, state-run institutions for the “promotion and development of culture” or an official territorial “cultural policy” (as it does today). It is highly unlikely that Kanak believe “cultural life” was inexistent before 1998.

Tellingly, Bernut-Deplanque does *not* use the word “indigenous” to describe the position of the Kanak vis-à-vis the rest of New Caledonia’s population.¹¹⁰ In her

¹¹⁰ She also argues that the “imposition of Kanak identity” has “highlighted the marginalization of Caldoche culture” (111). And that, “If it seems that today Kanak, by way of a cultural and political affirmation, have succeeded in inverting the relationship of force, it is not the same case for the Caldoches, who continue to suffer from a negative identity” (37). In this sense, the recognition of indigenous Kanak identity as carrying with it certain unique rights diminishes the rights of “other groups” in New Caledonia. In the classically republican paradigm, “particular interests” can only threaten “the general interest.”

thinking, Kanak identity is important, but the Kanak are just “one of many groups in New Caledonia.” In order to construct a “common Caledonian citizenship,” she argues, we cannot privilege any one culture over another. As she explains, “the idea of a Caledonian citizenship must lead to the emergence of a national consciousness that will make a place for collective identities while guaranteeing the freedom of a multifaceted individual identity” (175). This leads Bernut-Deplanque to conclude her book by affirming:

The problem [of *politiques culturelles* in light of the need to construct a common citizenship] cannot be posed in terms of majority and minority, in terms of the right of soil and the right of blood. The right to difference and the respect of democratic principles and the rights of men remain the only conditions for a possible co-existence. [175]

In other words, culture in New Caledonia should act “as a medium for transcending the particular interests of specific groups” (Ingram 2011:xxi). Culture should, “allow people the opportunity to leave the sealed off worlds of their particular communities...and share with others the ‘richness’ of what they have to offer in a public forum” (Epstein 1998:287). Or, as Robert Bertram, former high-ranking civil servant in New Caledonia and author of a recent tome on “political bipolarization” in the territory claims:

It is well-known that it’s starting with the plural that one derives the singular, and not the other way around. Through difference, one becomes oneself. The more one knows oneself the more one knows the other. This original and constructive approach enables the valorization and development of Kanak culture. [Bertram 2012:432]¹¹¹

¹¹¹ This notion of “finding oneself in the other” also seems to me to be particularly French in some ways. For instance, the slogan of the Quai Branly museum is ““*L’Autre en soi*” et “*le Monde en soi*” [“the other in the self” and “the world in the self”]. This idea—that

“Recognizing the other” in order to become a better citizen is all well and good, but as Bernut-Deplanque argues, offering “special recognition” to a “minority” based on “the right of soil and the right of blood” flies in the face of “democratic principles and the rights of men.” In other words, cultural policy should “recognize and promote” Kanak culture—but only as it should *all* “Caledonian cultures.” Displays of Kanak “cultural difference” are acceptable, and should even be celebrated—as long as they are in the interest of “co-existence” and integration into a political whole.

Republican Cultural Politics and The Tjibaou Cultural Center

Though Bernut-Deplanque presents her arguments as progressive, liberal solutions to the “problem of cultural difference” in New Caledonia, they are in many senses reinscriptions of French republicanism. The state-funded “recognition, development and promotion” of Kanak culture in New Caledonia does not involve “culture” as conceived of and deployed by Kanak, but “culture” *à la française*. The Tjibaou Cultural Center serves an excellent example of the hegemonic structures undergirding New Caledonia’s post-Nouméa Accord *politiques culturelles*. The gleaming, ultra-modern, Renzo Piano-designed center is in every sense a French museum.¹¹² Bernice Murphy (2002:81) describes it as “an astonishing monument to

experiencing the other allows one to *become* one’s self—also seems inflected by universalism, the idea that the world’s “cultural heritage” belongs equally to “all mankind,” and should be universally accessible by all.

¹¹² Though the the Tjibaou Center was created as a result of the 1988 Matignon Accords, a shift towards greater recognition of Kanak culture coincides with broader “decentralization” policies enacted around the same time in Metropolitan France. Under the administration of

French political and cultural self-interpretation at the end of the twentieth century.”

The Tjibaou Center presents a version of Kanak identity emptied of any political content. As Australian historian Peter Brown (1998:36) contends, the institutional narrative produced both within the Tjibaou Center’s publications and exhibits evokes Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s legacy in a way that replaces “Tjibaou the politician calling for independence” with an image of Tjibaou as “*the promoter of his culture*” (emphasis mine). Similarly, Alban Bensa argues that the French state envisions Tjibaou Center as a “monument” that should “materialize and glorify Kanak culture while simply placing it alongside other cultures” (2002:300). Bensa notes that Kanak are less interested in using a cultural center to “exhibit” their culture along side other cultures (ie: as Bernut-Deplanque would encourage) than they are in participating in cultural

President François Mitterand, and Cultural Minister Jack Lang, French cultural policy entered a post-Jacobin era, during which the monolithic cultural centrism of the French State came under intense scrutiny. The Mitterand/Lang administration supported policies explicitly directed towards recognizing and “developing” regional cultures while at the same time politically integrating them at a national level (Lebovics 2005). As Bensa (2002:300) and others have argued, France “grants the Kanak people the status of a regional culture within the French Republic, at the very most.” During *Les Événements* and directly afterwards (continuing through today), French journalists and politicians repeatedly compared New Caledonia to “other areas of France” with strong senses of “regional culture”, such as Brittany, Occitan or Alsace. As Karis Muller (1991:292) argues, the French Right “prefer to see [Kanak] ‘custom’ as a quaint folkloric survival like Breton dances or sugared almonds at baptisms.” For these reasons, in addition to the Tjibaou Center’s institutional “Frenchness,” it seems reasonable to interpret the center as ideologically tied to France’s national “decentralization” efforts. It is also worth noting that the Tjibaou Center is often described as one of President Mitterand’s *grands travaux*, along with Arche de la Défense, the pyramid at the Louvre and the Bibliothèque National, which bears his name. Consequently, it is difficult for me to see the Tjibaou Center as contributing in any significant way to Kanak political emancipation and autonomy. If anything, I believe the Tjibaou Center may work to further reinscribe New Caledonia as “French.” For a more detailed exploration of this Tjibaou Center as a French institution, consult my MA thesis “*At the Center of it All?: The Centre Culturel Jean Marie-Tjibaou and Negotiations of Contemporary Kanak Culture in New Caledonia*” (LeFevre 2008).

exchange. Though Kanak feel that their “culture has less to do with showing than with sharing,” the Tjibaou Center takes a largely “show case” approach to culture.

One need only compare the Tjibaou Center with its ni-Vanuatu analog—the Vanuatu Cultural Center—to reveal the extent to which it draws on a French—not Melanesian— notions of “culture” (see for example, Bolton 1994; Regenvanu 1999; Geismar and Tilly 2003; Geismar and Mohns 2011; Rousseau 2011).¹¹³ Though the Vanuatu Cultural Center employs many of the same museological strategies as “Western” institutions, its approach to “displaying culture” is strongly structured by indigenous ni-Vanuatu ideas about identities, objects and sociality. The Cultural Center also runs a number of important projects involving local communities as “cultural researchers,” such as the fieldworkers project and the young peoples project. In what may be its greatest divergence from the Tjibaou Center’s approach to culture, the Vanuatu Cultural Center treats material objects as “embedded in social relations that can be endlessly reproduced as can social practice.” As Geismar and Tilley (2003:180) describe:

...[K]astom, both material and immaterial, is activated in a sphere that negotiates relations between the public and the private, between local and national contexts, between people of the place and people from other places (including foreigners), using an *indigenous language of entitlement* in relation to generic museum technologies of object management. [emphasis mine]

In very few aspects does the Tjibaou Center—or New Caledonia’s overall *politique culturelle*—reflect “indigenous languages of entitlement” or treat cultural objects and

¹¹³ Along these lines, recent scholarship on France’s Quai Branly Museum is also illustrative. See for example, Price 2007; de L’Estoile 2010; Lebovics 2009.

performances as embedded in social relations.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, *la coutume* Kanak is *not* “democratic” or “universal.” Each Kanak individual is positioned in very specific ways and holds unique rights depending on his or her gender, clan identity, age and embeddedness in a network of relationships he or she has created, nurtured and maintains. Individuals *do not* all have the same rights and entitlements to “culture,” and the structures that exist for managing these rights and entitlements are inherently “political” in nature.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, “culture,” in the French sense, “animates” civic life, but the “merely cultural” can be (and must be) disimbricated from other social spheres.¹¹⁶ This is why the associations decribed in the previous chapter directly

¹¹⁴ In this sense, the Tjibaou Center does not differ much from state-funded museums in metropolitan France, where rigorous adherence to the principles of *laïcité* blocks any one group from being granted particular “entitlements.” Sally Price (2007:142) describes participating in a special inaugural tour for anthropologists and museum professionals at Paris’ Quai Branly Museum, during which French participants voiced objections to the growing international trend of including more “native” perspectives and practices in museum design: “Anglophone curators from Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu led the argument in favor of respecting the native beliefs and practices, calling on examples from both their own experience and that of Indian groups in Canada and the United States... Te Papa director said that before objects were loaned they would be blessed by Maori elders, speaker from Vanuatu said that separate paths for women and men were replicated in museum setting, even when exhibit went to Switzerland. All of this was met with stupefaction and outrage by French participants in the session including anthropologists. Several women protested that they were not Melanesians, and so were not about to restrict their behavior according to Melanesian sexism. And the principle of *laïcité* was invoked as a reason not to condone the practice of religion—any religion—in a state museum.”

¹¹⁵ The literature on copy right and intellectual property is extremely helpful for understanding the types of conflict indigenous systems post to liberal Western notions of property and the commons (ie: Coombe 1998; Bendix 2009). Geismar’s (2013) study of the interplay and conflict between Indigeneity and Western notions of property within the frames of New Zealand (a settler state) and Vanuatu (a postcolonial Melanesian country) is particularly germane here. For example, Geismar argues that property regimes in New Zealand have been in some sense “indigenized” by Maori activism, political and legal claims. I think French Republican culture policies would make a similar “indigenization” far more complicated in New Caledonia.

¹¹⁶ In this sense, I’m arguing that dominant French notions of “culture” parallel Raymond

contravene some of the fundamental suppositions of the republican project. The young people involved in these groups are engaging in an activity for which the Kanak have long been criticized by loyalists and French authorities—they are “mixing culture and politics.”

The contention that, “*il ne faut pas mélanger la culture [ou l’art] et la politique,*” was something I heard numerous times from Euro-Caledonians, particularly those working in government-funded cultural agencies. This statement is emblematic of French republican *politiques culturelles* and leaves very little space for assertions of indigenous sovereignty—since such assertions are fundamentally premised on the interrelatedness of cultural and political identities and rights. In New Caledonia, one of the sites in which these conflicts play out most clearly is cultural festivals.

Cultural Festivals and Conflict in New Caledonia: A (Brief) History

Cultural festivals have long caused dissention in New Caledonia, perhaps because they make visible—in a way few other events do—the tensions between indigenous and settler frames of culture and sociality. The Kanak independence movement had its beginnings in “Melanesia 2000,” a cultural festival organized in 1975 by Jean-Marie Tjibaou. In a text entitled “*Pourquoi un festival Mélanésien?*” (included in the festival program), Tjibaou explains that Melanesia 2000 is aimed at

Williams’ (1983:xviii) description of “culture” as moral project in European history. In William’s theorization, “culture”—as articulated by English writers from the 18th through 20th centuries—emerges as part of a project to protect a separate and quasi-sacred realm whose elements are defined in opposition from the alienation and aesthetic degradation wreaked by the rapid expansion of capitalism.

addressing the “refusal to recognize Kanak culture” in New Caledonia. As Tjibaou states, “In effect, I allow myself to dream that in the year 2000, the cultural profile of New Caledonia will include as many elements from Melanesian culture as it does from European culture” (in Missotte 1995:66-67). As Tjibaou had hoped, Melanesia 2000 was clearly a success. In the eyes of many Kanak, the festival’s greatest accomplishment was to “*Faire comprendre qu’un peuple existe*” [make (Euro-Caledonians) understand that *a People exists*] (Cawidrone et al. 1995, emphasis mine). The festival used performances of Kanak cultural difference to signify that Kanak were not just one variety of “Caledonians,” but a *People*, with sovereign rights.¹¹⁷

On the twentieth anniversary of Melanesia 2000, in 1995, *La Journal de la société des Océanistes* devoted a special issue to a retrospective of the event, featuring interviews with several of the figures who had been involved in organizing the festival. One of the most interesting pieces in this issue is an interview with Joseph Cahie (who was 25 during the festival and later became an active FLNKS militant during *Les Événements*) and Fote Trolue (another future FLNKS militant who was initially opposed to festival). Regardless of its success, Melanesia 2000 incited criticism from both Kanak and Euro-Caledonians. In many ways, the concerns posed by Kanak amounted to a trenchant critique the republican *politiques culturelles*. As Fote Trolue explains:

My instinct at first was to be against the festival...while the State is supporting this event, its going to be more in *the logic of the State* than in the *cultural logic*

¹¹⁷ Melanesia 2000, like all major cultural festivals in New Caledonia, was primarily funded by the French state.

of a population beginning to reclaim its independence. We said be careful to not hand over our culture to a State that has a rationale, but certainly not a rationale of decolonization. [in Bertram 2012:49-50, emphasis mine]

Euro-Caledonian complaints predictably centered on the fact that the festival “mixed culture and politics” and “only focused on the Kanak.” According to Joseph Cahie:

They [some Euro-Caledonians] contested [Melanesia 2000] and said, “We’re French and we have our place here, why is it always the Kanak?” That’s the problem of New Caledonia, those on the right always react by saying: why the Kanak?

In the epoch following Melanesia 2000, there was something political in my approach because I said, to speak about the Kanak, of the culture of the Kanak, of the richness of our dances and the polyphony of our songs, it’s a manner of affirming ourselves as having a Kanak identity, and the fact is that the [political] right at the time were against this manifestation and they said, “why them and not us? We are also the inhabitants of New Caledonia?” [Trolue and Cahie 1995:157]

In response to Cahie’s comments, Fote Trolue elaborates:

We’ve persisted too much in this erroneous approach of wanting to separate the cultural from the political. I believe that we have to display this link. If not, people will want to believe that...[culture]...is a refuge of humanist values, and that could end up “folklorizing” [Kanak culture] *because one forgets that we are in the cultural and in the political at the same time: culture lives itself. Culture is carried in us.* In the political process we must follow this path. We must not say: that is political, that is cultural; if we do we condemn culture. From the very beginning we understood that the cultural is a springboard for political identity. [emphasis mine]

In the years leading up to open civil conflict during the independence movement, Kanak participation in cultural festivals raised the hackles of Euro-Caledonians several more times. In 1980, a scandal erupted over a theatrical piece created by the Kanak delegation for the 3rd Pacific Arts Festival, held in Port Moresby. The piece, performed by elaborately costumed Kanak actors and dancers, recounted the story of

the first contact between Kanak and Europeans and the ensuing hardships faced by Kanak during the colonial period (disease, the destruction of cultural practices, the 1878 revolt, etc.) followed by the eventual triumph of the Kanak in “a future in which the Melanesians will be able to choose their mode of developing their culture.” Before the festival, daily newspaper *Corail* published an editorial entitled “*La France va être bafouée à Port-Moresby*” (France is going to be ridiculed in Port-Moresby). The piece claimed:

The theme of the Melanesian people’s presentation, seen by several officials is, without any doubt, the finest of all historical betrayals that we have known in these past years, after one hundred thirty years of French presence.

Facing a tribunal of representatives of the South Pacific, united for the occasion of this Festival in Port Moresby, the Australian and New Zealand governments, television channels that will sell their productions to numerous countries around the world.

A racial and anti-white theme, a veritable indictment of the French presence, will be offered to thousands of people... We pose the question to the officials responsible, as well as the government and the Territorial Assembly. Do they ignore the greatest *racist farce being prepared with public funds?* [*Corail* 6/12/80, emphasis mine]

Despite the vocal objections of many, the show went on in Port Moresby, mostly as planned.¹¹⁸ Four years later, in 1984, the 4th Festival of Melanesian Arts was set to take place in New Caledonia in early November. The timing of the festival coincided

¹¹⁸ During my research in the Territorial Archives, I found a letter sent to the Haut-Commissariat by a man named Bernard Deumie (presumably one of the officials who accompanied the delegation in Port Moresby). In his letter, sent on July 22, 1980 (about two weeks after the festival ended), Deumie informs the High Commissioner:

The quality of the Caledonian presentations was at a good level and the theatrical piece obviously did not cause any negative reactions on the part of our neighbors. On the other hand, *I was surprised to note that the National Maori Theater of New Zealand presented a piece on a theme that was absolutely identical to ours, but infinitely more brutal and violent in its critique of their country.* [emphasis mine]

with the escalation of tensions between Kanak independentists and the government.

Many Kanak were against holding the festival at all. As Jean-Marie Tjibou explained in an interview with *Les Nouvelles*:

Those who are of the opinion that the festival should not be held say: We are in the process of reclaiming independence and we're going to go to the Festival to offer France the opportunity to restore its prestige by making Kanak dance? [*Les Nouvelles* 10/11/1984]

This perspective was clearly not one that the most of Euro-Caledonians understood or respected. The following week, *Les Nouvelles* published an editorial proclaiming, “Oh poor Arts Festival, how life is menacing you! There are those who want to transform you into a political platform for independence” (*Les Nouvelles*, 10/17/1984).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ The editorial then takes an allegorical approach, invoking as a symbol two *cases* already assembled in Nouméa in preparation for the festival as a symbol for Kanak dependency on France: “The two *cases* that have already been built for the festival...they are supposed to be purely Melanesian and built with ancient methods and exclusively traditional materials...But it was French steel from the *métropole* that made them much more solid...In any case, we are obliged to see this as a symbol: if for these little *cases* the West has made an important contribution, isn't this proof that the famous ‘*grand case canaque*’ can only be solidly build with French help and the participation?” I hope to explore the conflicts over cultural festivals in New Caledonia in greater depth in an article. I found a wealth of related materials—newspaper articles, correspondence, formally confidential government documents, handwritten notes made from Jean-Marie Tjibou—in New Caledonia’s territorial archives.

LES NOUVELLES

CALEDONIENNES

N° 409 Mercredi 10 octobre 1984

34, RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE TEL: 27.25.84 BP 179
Nouméa - Nouvelle Calédonie

Extincteurs
Société
ESQAL
Tel. 28.41.41

**IL FAUT CHOISIR DIT
LA MAIRIE DE NOUMEA**

FESTIVAL OU POLITIQUE!

**LES ORGANISATEURS DOIVENT SE
DECIDER AVANT LE 20 OCTOBRE**

UN DOUBLE POUR QUATE

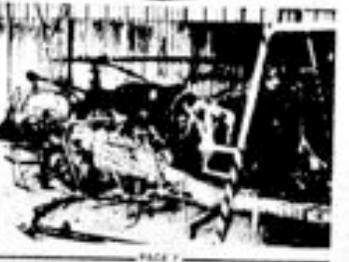


mais bien peu y croyaient

LA MANIF DES TOUBIBS



AUTOPSIE D'UNE ALOUETTE



**LEMOINE
MARDI?**

**LE RICLET
DE
L'AFFREUX
3030**

Mercredi 10 Octobre
Et oui, vous pouvez pas
vous imaginer à quel point
c'est compliqué de procéder
au tirage au sort de la liste
de 18000 noms. On peut
demander aux citoyens la
SUITE PAGE 10

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Parfait état.
450 000 francs.
Garantie 3 ans/60 000 km
et plus d'années.

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Fig. 6.2. *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 10/10/84. "You must choose, says the Mayor of Nouméa: Festival or Politics! The organizers must decide before the 20th of October." The festival was eventually cancelled.

Ultimately, the festival was canceled—at the very last minute, after some delegations had already begun their journeys to New Caledonia (from far away locations like Kiribati and Saipan). By the end of that same month, open violence erupted between independentists and the government. On November 18th, FLNKS boycotted the territorial elections and smashed ballot boxes around the country. On December 1st, Jean-Marie Tjibaou raised the Kanak flag for the first time at the FLNKS congress in Mont-Dore and declared the formation of the “provisional government of the Socialist Republic of Kanaky.” Four days later, on December 5th, Loyalists gunned down ten Kanak (including two of Tjibaou’s brothers) in the “Hienghène massacre.” The violence continued apace until the signing of the Matignon Accords in 1988, and Tjibaou’s assassination in 1989.

A Melanesian Arts Festival *à la française*

Dominant discourses depict the Nouméa Accord as having initiated “a process of decolonization” and a major shift in power relations between the Kanak and Euro-Caledonian communities. If this were indeed so, one could also reasonably expect to see a changes in New Caledonia’s approach to cultural festivals (as well as in the types of reactions such events elicit from the public). Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. Several aspects of the 4th Festival of Melanesian Arts, held during my fieldwork in September 2010, revealed exactly how little dominant settler discourses

on the appropriate “role” of Kanak culture have changed in the last thirty years.¹²⁰ Though the Melanesian Arts Festival (held every four years) is an initiative of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, most of the funding for the event comes from the country serving as host.¹²¹ At the 2010 Festival, the French state spent lavishly. I heard many people comment that the extraordinary amount of funding devoted to the festival was clearly intended to display France’s power and largesse. Indeed the delegations from Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Vanuatu were dazzled not only by the design of the festival’s promotional materials, the quality of the food they were served, the proliferation of hi-tech lighting, stage and sound equipment, and the air-conditioned coach buses we traveled in, but also by New Caledonia’s infrastructure in general. France appeared as a benign, benevolent presence.

I traveled as a volunteer with one of the Festival’s four “*pirogues*,” and found myself in the unexpected position of serving as a translator between the Kanak and Anglophone Melanesians.¹²² None of the Kanak in our group (which included the

¹²⁰ I plan to present a much more considered analysis of the 2010 Festival of Melanesian Arts in a future publication.

¹²¹ The inaugural Festival of Melanesian Arts was organized in 1995 by the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). The MSG is an intra-governmental trade federation founded in 1983 and formalized under international law in 2007. In the 2007 “Agreement Establishing The Melanesian Spearhead Group,” the group articulates its purpose in this way: “The purpose of the MSG is to promote and strengthen intermembership trade, exchange of Melanesian cultures, traditions and values, sovereign equality, economic and technical cooperation between states and the alignment of policies in order to further MSG members’ shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.”

¹²² Participants at the festival—members of five delegations of nearly 100 people each from New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands—were split amongst four groups (referred to as *pirogues*, or canoes, in keeping with the Pacific theme). All of the participants began the festival together during the 3-day opening at Koné and then followed different itineraries for six days before uniting again at in Nouméa for the festival’s

band Extreme) could speak English. None of the artists from Papua New Guinea, the Solomons or Fiji could speak French.¹²³ There were a handful of French speakers among the ni-Vanuatu group, but they could also speak Bislama, which enabled them to communicate easily with Tok Pisin and Solomon Islands Pidgin speakers. I spent much of the festival relaying messages between Kanak and the other Melanesian participants. I sensed the intense frustration of my friends in Extreme, who badly wanted to be able to talk with young people from the other countries, but had no other way communicate than with smiles, hand gestures and their own music.

One of the results of this linguistic impasse was that the Anglophone Melanesian delegates experienced much of the festival—and New Caledonia—without any framing or explanation from actual Kanak people. This led them to draw unsettling interpretations of the things they witnessed, starting with the festival’s extravagant opening ceremony. Set on an enormous proscenium stage decked out with hundreds of thousands of dollars of lighting equipment and rigging, the opening ceremony functioned as both stagecraft and statecraft, projecting a glittering, megawatt image of a French New Caledonia. Acrobats tumbled from above, wrapped in silk-scarves.

closing ceremonies. One *pirogue* traveled to three different communities in the North Province, one traveled to three communities in the South Province, another returned to Nouméa and remained at the Tjibaou Center, and the fourth—which I traveled with—went to all three Loyalty Islands.

¹²³ In general, the ni-Vanuatu delegates seemed to have a much clearer idea about the situation of Kanak people in New Caledonia. Many Kanak have been to Vanuatu (it’s only an hour-long flight from Nouméa to Port Vila and costs about the same as flying to one of the Loyalty Islands). There is a sizable community of ni-Vanuatu people living in the Grand Nouméa area. I even attended a large “Vanuatu Day” festival in Mont Dore organized to celebrate Vanuatu’s thirtieth anniversary of independence. Moreover, the now widespread Kava-drinking culture and explosion of *nakamals* in New Caledonia is directly due to ni-Vanuatu cultural influences (all of the kava in New Caledonia is also imported from Vanuatu).

Break-dancers “krumped” on top of a huge mining truck that drove onto the stage, while neon strobelights cast kinetic shadows on a huge painted scrim. At the end of the piece, a gigantic fiberglass nautilus shell descended over the stage, accompanied by fireworks.



Fig. 6.3. Program for the Festival (this image—figures designed to look like a Kanak bamboo carvings riding flying *pirogues* over the iconic rock formations of Hienghène, flanked by some sort of spectral humpback whale —was featured on all of the festival’s promotional materials).

If this was a “shock and awe” campaign to convince visiting Melanesians of the “Frenchness” of New Caledonia, it was apparently quite effective. In conversations with members of the Solomons and Papua New Guinea delegations the morning after, I was told how sad it was “that the Kanak had lost their culture and *kastom*” and that the “Kanak are no longer really Melanesian.” I responded with assurances that the Kanak were indeed Melanesian, and that there were many very strong Kanak customs that I hoped they would be able to experience when we flew to the Loyalty Islands the next day. They seemed unconvinced. Particularly doubtful was an older man from Papua New Guinea named Abraham, who had had an impressive traditional facial tattoo, and turned out to be the head of the New Ireland tourist bureau. He stuck close by me for the following two days, lecturing me about “real Melanesian *kastom*” (and why it was clear the Kanak no longer had any). Abraham summed up the confusion felt by many of the Anglophone Melanesian delegates when he asked me, “Does Kanak just refer to the Black people? Or also the white people who have lived here for a long time?”

I told Eric (the father of the boys in Extreme) what Abraham and the others were saying and he was (predictably) upset. Concerning the opening ceremony, Eric told me:

It was very good, yes. It was very pretty. But it there wasn't much about the ceremony that was Kanak...really reflected our Melanesian identity. I think it is very good that they should show that we have young people who are good dancers, who do hip-hop dance, who can do whatever kind of dance as good as anyone anywhere else in the world, in France or the United States. But it is true that the ceremony...It would have been better to show another face of New Caledonia. *C'était plus organisé pour les blancs, ça c'est claire.*

I was curious if Eric knew any more particulars about how the festival had been organized within local communities.¹²⁴ To what extent had local people and customary authorities been involved? Eric told me he had heard a lot of grumbling from people from the customary areas around Koné (the site of the festival opening). It seemed like the festival had been planned in a very top-down institutional fashion, with instructions being issued to local leaders from “on high” (the organizing committee and the Tjibaou Center/ADCK). As Eric explained, the organizers had not followed the *chemin coutumière* (customary path):

They didn't go through the right people, the people who hold the position of ambassadors between customary areas. Everything was also done too last minute. You see, in order to do the *coutume* (custom offerings) necessary for an event like this, where we are welcoming our brothers from all over Melanesia, people need to be able to be told a whole year...two years...before, so they can plant yams...so they can plant the yams they need for events in their *tribu*, but then plant others for *la coutume* at the festival. If you know there is going to be a big wedding, the wedding of the chief's son, for example, you plan for that, you plant your yam fields the year before so you will have enough yams ready to harvest. The Tjibaou center didn't work with communities to do this. It wasn't organized *coutumièrement*. *C'était dans la logique des blancs. On n'a pas suivi le chemin coutumière.* [It was in the logic of white people. They didn't follow the “customary path”]

Eric concluded that Abraham and the others would never have thought the Kanak “we no longer Melanesians,” if the Festival had been organized in a more appropriate manner. “When Tjibaou organized Melanesia 2000,” Eric said, “he had to start

¹²⁴ The Tjibaou Center had a central role in the organization of the festival, so in this sense there was lots of “Kanak” input, but only on a vague institutional level. I was shocked some of the things we were told by Tjibaou Center staff during a training session for volunteers before the start of the festival. The director of the Center told us not to give alcohol to people from any of the other delegations, “because they don't know how to drink in Papua New Guinea or the Solomons. They will become violent.”

preparing...following that [customary] path...two, three years before the Festival even happened.” He concluded that the territorial government had clearly wanted to present an image of New Caledonia as “*un pays multiculturel. Pas un pays Kanak*” [a multicultural country. Not a Kanak country]. Eric added that he also thought organizers had misappropriated the Tjibaou quote that served as the festival’s slogan: “*Notre avenir est devant nous*” [Our future is in front of us]. The way the festival had been organized, Eric said, glumly, made it clear that the “future” they imagined to be “in front of us,” was not Kanaky.

After we left Koné and traveled to Lifou, the first of the Loyalty Islands on our itinerary, the impressions left on Abraham and the other Anglophone Melanesian delegates seemed to shift somewhat. We arrived in Lifou around 5pm, just as people were starting to get hungry for dinner. But instead of immediately heading to the middle school dormitories where we would be staying to deposit our luggage and eat, we were told that we needed to go to all three of Lifou’s *chefferies* (Wetr, Gaïca and Lössi) in order to *faire la coutume*. This was following traditional Kanak protocol, in which guests (without malign intentions) are expected introduce themselves and present a gift in order to be welcomed onto the land by the *chef*. The process of doing this in all three districts took almost four hours. We drove on a coach bus between each *chefferie*, from Hnathalo, to Drueulu, all the way down to Luengöni in the south. At each stop, all fifty of us removed our shoes, ducked under a low hanging carved door lintel and shuffled in to the *chefferie*’s *grand case*. Every time, a leader from each country’s delegation was told to present a *coutume* (using an object of some sort

from their country) and make a speech. This was followed in each occasion by a counter-gift from the *chefferie* and a long speech by the “voice” of the chief (translated for the rest of the delegation by the only other English-speaking member of our *pirogue*, a young Kanak man originally from Lifou who had studied in Australia).¹²⁵

During our (very late) dinner that night, I sat with Abraham and asked him what he thought about what he had just experienced. With some excitement, he told me that he had been wrong:

The Kanak are definitely still Melanesians. It was so good to see their *kastom*. I recognized much of my own people’s ways in how they did things. I hope the rest of the festival is more like this. In Koné, there were all white people. I thought, “This is not Melanesia! Where am I?” This is definitely a strange place. But here I feel like now we are seeing how the Kanak people really are.

Another thing Abraham and many of the other Anglophone Melanesians apparently didn’t realize before arriving in Lifou was that there was an active Kanak independence movement. This shocked me. But thinking it over, I realized there was absolutely nothing during the Festival opening in Koné that revealed that there was any Kanak resistance to French rule. There were plenty of Kanak flags, and many Kanak artists even incorporated flags into their performances, but without anyone explicitly explaining the current socio-political situation to the visiting Melanesian groups, how could they understand (unless they already knew beforehand)? For

¹²⁵ Loyalty islanders, similarly to some Polynesian peoples, have something like a “speaking chief,” in this case the highest-ranking member of a clan with the hereditary role of serving as mouthpiece for the chief. Though the three district chiefs mingled and interacted with festival participants during the festival itself, they sat silently and merely accepted to *coutume* during each of these ceremonial welcomes.

instance, when Extreme performed “le 5 mai” (their song about the Ouvéa Massacre) in Koné, anyone who didn’t speak French could only have appreciated its melody (not its blatant political message). What Abraham and the others noticed in Koné was the expensive sound equipment, the break-dancers, the fireworks and the brand new buildings and impressive infrastructure. As an older Kanak man I interviewed once told me, “Do you know why New Caledonia has such nice roads? *C’est pour cacher la misère* [it’s to hide the misery].”

When we arrived in Lifou (before starting our trek to all three *chefferies*), one of the first things we passed while leaving the airport was a huge sign, written with spray paint on cloth, reading (in English): “Welcome Melanesian Brothers! Kanaky Free 2014!” This was the first thing most of the people from Papua New Guinea and the Solomons had ever heard about *la lutte* Kanak and the upcoming independence referendum. Later on, I learned that several of the Euro-New Caledonian members of our delegation found the sign upsetting. One woman, *un professeur* (high school teacher) in her forties who was acting as chaperone for a dance group made up of Kanak girls (her students at a Nouméa high school), was particularly put off. After breakfast during our second day in Lifou, before leaving for the festival grounds, Eric and I chatted and drank coffee at a picnic table. I was telling him about how crazy it was that Abraham hadn’t understood that “Kanak” referred only to the indigenous Melanesian people of New Caledonia, not white settlers. *La Prof*, who had presumably overheard us say something about race, sat down next to Eric and inserted herself into our conversation:

Oh yes, it is really too bad. When we arrived in Lifou, all those signs about “Independence 2014,” and all of that. And there was also a young person yelling “Kanaky!” with true violence, real anger. You know, I just can’t agree with these things. I mean, what would tourists who have just arrived here think? It’s really confusing the point of the festival...It’s mixing it with politics and that’s really not what it’s about. It’s about all Caledonians together. Not different races. That’s what I thought the meaning of Tjibaou’s phrase [the festival’s slogan: “Our future is ahead of us”] was about. New Caledonia isn’t only the Kanak.¹²⁶

Eric plainly tried as hard as he could to respond politely, but only managed to grunt “*Hein...j’suis pas sûr*” [Huh...I’m not sure], grab his coffee cup and head back inside the dormitory cafeteria. When we debriefed later that day, Eric was clearly still fuming, but his anger seemed less intense than his utter frustration. As I knew by now, Kanak are constantly confronted with these arguments. The woman’s comments were nearly identical to the responses of right-wing loyalists after the 1975 “Melanesia 2000” festival...and the 1980 Pacific Arts Festival and the lead up to the 1984 Pacific Arts Festival (ie: We live here too, why is it always about the Kanak? Don’t mix up culture and politics! Kanak independence is anti-white and racist!). Eric moaned:

It’s the Festival of *MELANESIAN* Arts! What does she think? Of course it’s supposed to be about the Kanak. To make the festival be about the Kanak is not racist. Does she have a Melanesian culture? In Nouméa, during “Tahitian Week,” it’s all Tahitian. *This* is about Melanesia! And we are Melanesian people in Kanaky. Our country. This is an important opportunity to show who we are to our Melanesian brothers...to show that we are in a struggle against colonialism, that we are still in the time of colonialism here.

¹²⁶ Along the same lines, there were complaints from some groups—particularly the Caldoche *Fondation des Pionnières*—about the small number of non-Kanak artists selected for the delegation. A year before the Festival was held, the *Fondation* noted in one of their newsletters that the Festival would be “an occasion for the *Fondation* to demand that the festival highlight those Caledonian artists who are inspired by Kanak art in their work” (*Pionnières* 2009:4).

Eric's frustration highlighted for me, once again, the unique obstacles republican settler ideology poses to assertions of indigenous identity.



Fig. 6.4. Local boys examine enormous yams presented by the *chefferie* of Guahama as part of a *coutume* gift to the visiting festival delegation.



Fig. 6.5. ni-Vanuatu women from Maewo Island demonstrate a traditional cooking technique to a Kanak crowd in Lifou.



Fig. 6.6. Members of the "*Pirogue des Iles*" pose for a portrait in front of the *grand case* (the *case* of the chief) in Hnathalo, Lifou.

Our time in Lifou transformed the views of Abraham and other Anglophone Melanesians who had originally doubted the “Melanesian-ess” of their Kanak hosts. It still was not clear though, if Abraham or anyone else fully understood Kanak’s ongoing political and cultural struggle against the French state. I think this finally changed when we traveled to Ouvéa. The festival grounds in Ouvéa were in Hwadrilla, a short walk away from the *mémorial des 19* (the memorial to the 19 young Kanak men killed during the Ouvéa Massacre). On our last day there, Eric told me that he was taking the boys in Extreme to visit the memorial, and that I could come along if I wanted. Abraham was standing next to me at the time, and decided to join us. He had no idea who the “19” were. While we bush-wacked through the field between the dormitory and the memorial site, I tried to give Abraham a quick summary of the memorial’s context. We arrived before I could finish, and stood in front of a long concrete wall, backlit by the beginnings of an idyllic sunset. On the wall were nineteen plaques, each with the name, *tribu*, birth and death date (May 5, 1988), of the nineteen young martyrs to the Kanak independence struggle. Previous visitors had left conch shells, flowers and bolts of cloth, which floated about like brightly colored flags in the evening wind.

Eric asked if I would take a photo of all the boys in Extreme posing in front of the memorial [fig.7.6.]. Abraham stood nearby, understanding the somberness of the occasion, but looking confused. Eric noticed and told me, “Please, if I explain what the monument is for, can you translate it for him?” Of course, I said. So Eric started to

explain the story of the massacre, beginning with a brief history French colonization in New Caledonia and ending a year after the massacre itself, when Jean-Marie Tjibaou was assassinated (right near the spot where we now all stood). I did my best to simultaneously translate into English, but I did a mediocre job at best.

When Eric was done, Abraham walked over and shook his hand. He was clearly moved. He asked me if I could translate something for Eric and the boys in Extreme. Sure, I said, beginning to feel a little emotionally overwhelmed myself. Abraham said that he hadn't understood the Kanak people until this moment, standing here in front of this memorial, listening to Eric's story. He did not realize the struggle of the Kanak people to keep their *kastom*. "The Australians colonized us [in Papua New Guinea], but they never tried to interfere with our culture," he said.¹²⁷ "I did not realize how much Kanak have suffered to protect your *kastom*. You are our brothers." Abraham explained that he was going to ask the organizers in charge of our group if he could take everyone to see the memorial and learn the story before we left, and added that he also wanted to "make a customary offering" at the memorial. Eric nodded his head, and the two men shook hands again. "Thank you," Eric said in English.

It was not until Abraham learned about the ongoing political struggle of the Kanak people that he fully saw them as fellow "Melanesian brothers." Up until this point, the *political content* of Kanak culture had been obscured by a cultural festival

¹²⁷ Abraham's statement definitely oversimplifies the actual history of colonialism in Papua New Guinea, but it does highlight his realization of the significant differences in approach between Anglo-saxon and French colonialisms.



Fig. 6.7. Members of the band *Extreme* at the memorial to the 19 Kanak killed in the 1988 Ouvéa Massacre. They visited while in Ouvéa as part of the delegation of artists for the 2010 Melanesian Arts Festival.

that was, in most ways, thoroughly French. *Kastom* had been made invisible by the trappings of *la culture*.

Conclusion

After visting all three Loyalty Islands, our *piroque* returned to Nouméa for the festival's closing ceremony. The Territorial Government had worked with organizers to arrange for the closing of the festival to coincide with New Caledonia's "Citizenship Day," on September 24th. That morning, all five delegations donned their national costume and joined festival volunteers and local notables to march in a parade starting at the Baie de l'Orphelinat and ending at the *Place du Mwâ Kââ*. When we arrived at *Mwâ Kââ*, we joined a large crowd already gathered there and stood (under the glare of a very hot midday sun) while territorial president Philippe Gomès gave a lengthy speech about, "building a New Caledonian citizenship for the future."¹²⁸ Gomès called for the "rejection of racism," which he referred to as "a mortal poison for Caledonian society" (in *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 9/25/2010).

It is difficult not to interpret the government's decision to combine the end of the Melanesian Arts Festival with "Citizenship Day," as part of an ongoing effort to frame Kanak culture as "just one way of being Caledonian (and French)." Indeed, as loyalist politician (and former deputy of Jacques Lafleur's RPCR party) Pierre Brétengnier proclaimed in a speech entitled "Plural Identities and the Common Destiny" about a month after the festival (on November 2nd, 2010):

¹²⁸ Of course this speech was not translated into English for the benefit of the rest of the delegations, who stood around and stared blankly for thirty minutes while Gomès pontificated.

We are in a new stage that is emerging: that of plural identities, which could be combined as follows: Kanaks are Melanesians, but Melanesians of Caledonia, Wallisians are Wallisians but from Caledonia, and even Asians and other Caledonians who may be from other regions of France or elsewhere but are all fully Caledonian, sharing a common environment and, increasingly, a common way of life that distinguishes us from other French.

It is the responsibility of all ethnicities of Caledonians, but this time with a free and deliberate choice, to ask to France to live with us these plural identities, as it did recognize and promote the Kanak identity.

Brétegnier's speech exemplifies loyalist interpretations of the Nouméa Accord's "common destiny." As Brétegnier's explains, Kanak are "*Melanesian* Caledonians," and all "Caledonians" are "*Caledonian* French" (distinguished by their "shared Caledonian cultural heritage" from "other French"). Within this model, *even* The Festival of *Melanesian* Arts can be instrumentalized in ways that subvert Kanak sovereignty claims based on a *Melanesian* cultural identity. Throughout the festival, organizers had clearly tried to project a politically neutral image of Kanak culture. As Epstein argues, French *politiques culturelles* envision cultural festivals as "contributing to a larger logic of intergration" (Epstein 1988).



Fig. 6.8. Maire-Claude Tjibaou and Déwé Gorodey (outside of frame, on right) walking alongside a man carrying both the Kanak and French flags at the head a parade celebrating both “Citizenship Day” and the closing of the 4th Festival of Melanesian Arts (author’s photo).

A dominant understanding of the festival as an “integrationalist” project was further illustrated by a minor scandal that erupted immediately following the closing/ “Citizenship Day” celebrations. During the parade to the *Mwâ Kââ*, several members of New Caledonian’s delegation enthusiastically waved Kanak flags. At the head of the parade, Marie-Claude Tjibaou (Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s widow) and Déwé Gorodey (the independentist territorial vice-president) marched on either side of a delegate who held a long piece of bamboo with both the Kanak and French flags attached.

Commenters on *Les Nouvelles*' website were "outraged" that organizers would allow delegates to represent New Caledonia with a "political flag" that had "no place at a cultural festival." Others were offended that the Kanak flag had been placed *above* the French flag on the makeshift bamboo pole at the front of the parade. Nevermind that this was the Festival of *Melanesian Arts*, and that one could assume that even people against the official recognition of the flag might at least accept it as a legitimate symbol of Kanak people. Yet this is where the Festival of Melanesian Arts chafed against French *politiques culturelles*. The premise of the festival required that Kanak people be recognized *as Melanesians*—who fundamentally differ from "other Caledonians" because of the *cultural* connections they share with other Melanesians. The Festival of Melanesian Arts was founded by the Melanesian Spearhead Group to promote and share "culture" as imagined within a Melanesian ideology of *kastom*, not French republican *politique culturelle*. Holding the festival in New Caledonia—forcing it to fit within the niches of the French republican system—laid bare the powerful hegemony of a French notion of "culture." Though the Nouméa Accord specifically identifies the "recognition and promotion" of Kanak culture as central to the construction of a "common destiny," republican settler colonial structures continue to define what "culture" means in New Caledonia. According to André Malraux, France's first Minister for Cultural Affairs, "Culture is the sum of all the forms of art, of love, and of thought, which, in the course of centuries, have enabled man to be less enslaved" (1949). Ironically, in New Caledonia, "culture" has not enabled the Kanak

to become “less enslaved.” Instead, as I hope this chapter has shown, “culture” poses some of the greatest obstacles to the Kanak’s emancipation.

-Chapter 7-

THE HEGEMONIC MÉTIS STATE?
REPRESENTING AND DISAVOWING DIFFERENCE



Fig. 7.1. An impromptu parade from the Haussaire to the Place du Mwâ Kââ, following the Kanak flag raising, 7/17/2010 (photo by author).

Kanaky est en train de naître !

En 1853, notre pays a vu flotter à Balade le drapeau tricolore qui a enlevé à Kanaky sa souveraineté. Aujourd'hui, nous relevons le défi, et nous levons ce drapeau. Le vert, symbole de Kanaky, le vert du pays kanak. Le rouge, symbole de la lutte du peuple kanak, symbole de notre unité, de l'unité du FLNKS, du projet d'unité avec tous ceux qui accepteront la République de Kanaky. Le bleu de la souveraineté. Le soleil est aujourd'hui au rendez-vous, même s'il n'a pas été toujours au rendez-vous de l'histoire du peuple kanak. Merci au soleil ! Merci à nos ancêtres d'être là !

...Je dirais que le plus dur n'est peut-être pas de mourir ; le plus dur c'est de rester vivant et de se sentir étranger à son propre pays, de sentir que son pays meurt, de sentir que l'on est dans l'impuissance de relever le défi et de faire flotter à nouveau notre revendication de la reconquête de la souveraineté de Kanaky.

- Jean- Marie Tjibaou, 12/1/1984, during the first unveiling of the Kanak Flag¹²⁹

¹²⁹ “Kanaky is being born! In 1853, our country saw the raising of the French flag that would kidnap Kanaky’s sovereignty. Today, we accept the challenge, and we raise this flag. The

Colonization is rape by the state, pure in all its barbarity, but above all it's a crime against humanity when one does not want to assume responsibility. Their "common destiny," it's only the deception of a rapist who remains unpunished and wants to absolve his crime by proposing marriage to his victim as reparation.

- Text of banner carried by UTSKE (Union des Travailleurs Socialistes, Kanaks et Exploités), during a march in Nouméa on May Day, 2010

Every week, I had a standing appointment to come over to Hassan's house in Rivère-Salée and help him with his English. Hassan lived together with his mother, Adèle (originally from Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea), his two sisters, three brothers, a cousin and a baby nephew, but he was lucky enough to have a small room in the house with a desk and a bed to himself. His mother thought it was especially important since Hassan was studying for his BTS degree (an associates degree in community development and cultural programming). During our first lessons, I used ESL materials I'd found online to go over verb conjugation and vocabulary. Not surprisingly, this approach proved to be pretty boring. Hassan, who I often forgot was a full eight years younger than me, quickly lost interest and tried to shift my attention to more interesting topics, like American hip-hop culture. As the founder of the dance group *Résurrection*, he was obsessed with hip-hop and R&B from the late 1990s,

green, symbol of Kanaky, the green of Kanak land. The red, symbol of the struggle of the Kanak people, symbol of our unity, the unity of FLNKS, of the project of unity with those who will accept the Republic of Kanaky. The blue of sovereignty. The sun is meeting us today, even if it has not always met the Kanak people during our history. Thank you, sun! Thank you to our ancestors for being here!

I would say that the hardest thing is not to die; the hardest thing is to remain living while feeling like a stranger in your own country, to feel your country die, to feel that one is powerless to face this challenge and to fly, once again, the flag proclaiming our reconquest of Kanak sovereignty."

when I was in high school (a time-lag likely due to the enduring French “bubble” that isolates New Caledonia from anglophone, and even regional Melanesian pop-culture). *Résurrection* set much of its choreography to tracks by artists like Busta Rhymes, Missy Elliot and Mase. “Do you know what they’re saying in any of the songs?” I asked. “No, not really,” Hassan admitted. “Mostly, I just love the beats, but I’d definitely like to know what the lyrics mean too.” Congratulating myself for my pedagogical epiphany, I put down the grammar worksheets and got out my laptop. We spent the rest of the evening watching music videos on Youtube. I worked with Hassan to translate the lyrics into French, pointing out new vocabulary.

“The rapper who has the best flow,” Hassan told me authoritatively, “Is definitely Bizzy Bone, from Bone Thugs-n-Harmony” (a popular 1990s group known for super fast, gatling gun-style delivery). “Okay, well, we can try one of their songs, but it might be too fast for *me* to even understand what they’re saying in English!” we laughed and I cued up a Bone Thugs video. Hassan watched, transfixed, as the group laid down rapid-fire rhymes, while grinding with girls at a rowdy house party. I was nodding my head along with the beat when Hassan interjected, “Il y a trop de métissage aux États-Unis. C’est fou.” *There’s so much métissage in the United States. It’s crazy.* Huh? I had no idea what he meant. He paused the video and pointed out a light-skinned black woman dancing on top of a countertop. “Comme elle,” he explained.

“What do you mean exactly? I don’t think that she probably calls herself *métisse*, she’s a light-skinned black girl. “Really?” Hassan looked doubtful. I added, “I

mean, I don't know how she identifies personally, but I don't think anyone in the United States would look at her and say she wasn't Black."¹³⁰ He pressed play, moved the video forward a few frames and paused again. "Mais, attends." *But wait.* He pointed to a dancer with much darker-skin than the previous girl. "If *she* [the first girl] is black, than what about her?" "Well, I mean, she's black too. She's just darker skinned," I tried to explain. Hassan furrowed his brow.

We gave up on the English lesson and continued to talk about *métissage*—a topic I had wanted to broach with Hassan for sometime. I had been in New Caledonia for eight months at this point, and I still had difficulty wrapping my mind around local racial categories. For instance, though he was Melanesian, Hassan was technically only half Kanak, on his father's side, and he was also fairly light-skinned. This had no bearing on his fervent identification with Kanak culture and the Kanak independence movement. Hassan also regularly participated in *coutume* events back in Siloam, his father's *tribu* on Lifou island. "What is it like for *métis* people in New Caledonia," I asked. "Like you actually, Hassan. You could say you're *métis*. Do you think things are different for *métis* people?" Hassan reflected for a moment and responded:

Yes, well, I think they can be. If you are lighter-skinned, for example, people might think you're someone who knows about things, that you're smart and that you can get by well in *le monde blanc* (the white world). But Kanak will think that maybe you have no *connaissance culturelle* (cultural knowledge). Someone will ask you to help build a *case* or work in the fields or plant yams and if you're light-skinned they might assume that you don't know what you're doing.

¹³⁰ I fully recognize my own relatively unnuanced approach to race here, but given that Hassan himself was a very light-skinned Kanak person (who in fact was *métis* Kanak/PNG), I was taken aback by his assessment).

You can't hack it. It's going to be too hard for you. But if you're really Kanak looking, really black, then they think they can count on you.

I asked Hassan if he thought people treated him differently than his brother Coco, who has the same parents, but much darker skin. Hassan paused and thought for a second. "No. I mean...I don't know. Coco inherited my mom's dark skin, but I inherited her personality." Since I had never heard Hassan refer to either himself or Coco as *métis*, I asked him if he thought there really *was* a "*métisse* identity" in New Caledonia. "Oui, il y a pleins de gens métis ici," he replied. There are plenty of *métis* people. I pushed him a bit. "Yeah, I mean I know there are lots of people who have mixed racial heritage, but do you know anyone, who if you asked them 'What are you?' they would say, first off, that they were *métis*?"

No. I mean, people are *métis*, but it's not really an identity, you know? People get their identity from the identity of the father, or whatever parent they are closer too, or take after more. Like, for example, you'll see a Kanak/Wallisian *métisse* whose Dad is Kanak, and he'll be all dressed like a Kanak and act like a Kanak. You see a Kanak/Wallisian *métisse* whose dad is Wallisian and whose mom is Kanak, and he'll be all big and Wallisian and drive a big truck with a big sound system.¹³¹ It depends on how you were raised, in what culture.

Hassan scribbled on his grammar worksheet and added, "Still...there is too much *métissage* in New Caledonia today. Nothing is clear anymore."

¹³¹ Wallisians in New Caledonia are known for their fondness for souped up pickup trucks with high-end sound systems. On weekend nights, impromptu gatherings in parking lots and roundabouts, with a half dozen Wallisian guys drinking beers around a pickup truck blasting Zouk music are a common sight.

Race and Social Categories in New Caledonia

It was a long time before I felt that I fully understood Hassan's theories on identity. I was particularly flummoxed by his apparent anxiety about *métissage*. I had never seen any of the young people I knew challenge another person's Kanak identity based on their skin color. In fact, I was constantly surprised by the wide range of phenotypes among the Kanak youth I spent time with. While many were stereotypically "Melanesian-looking," others clearly had biologically mixed ancestry. My friend Nico from Ouvéa, for example, had light bronze skin and reddish hair, while his uncle, Kazi was very dark-skinned. One of the youngest boys in *Résurrection* had such light skin and straight hair that I initially assumed he was Indonesian (he was Kanak). None of these individuals were *métis*. They all identified as Kanak, and it seemed everyone else perceived them as such. Hassan told me that in the New Caledonian context, being *métis*, "isn't really an identity." Instead, who you are "depends on how you were raised, in what culture." If there *was* no *métis* social category, if culture—not phenotype—was what made one Kanak, then what did Hassan mean when he said, "there is too much *métissage* in New Caledonia today...Nothing is clear anymore?"

Starting with his question, this chapter examines indigenous and settler epistemologies of identity in New Caledonia. How is identity constructed—how do social categories work both to include and exclude? In a settler colony supposedly in the process of constructing a "shared common destiny," what are the connections between race, culture, citizenship and nationality? What forms of belonging are seen

as legitimate bases for the assertion of sovereign claims? By whom? The social and discursive role of *métissage* is central to these questions. As Emmanuelle Saada (2002:364) notes, the *métis* category, like all other social categories:

Has been the object of constant definition and redefinition by multiple actors. The specificity of this process is that the category applies to a population perceived as a “product” of the colonial situation—thus calling into question what it meant to be “French,” “European,” “White” or “indigenous.”

Throughout the French empire, “the *métis* question became a meeting place for a wide variety of anxieties about colonial society...and the definition of citizenship” (Saada 2012:3). What are we to make then of *métissage*’s place—or, perhaps more accurately, *displacement*—in New Caledonia? I pushed Hassan to tell me more about his views on *métissage* because, at least according to the historical and ethnographic literature, “there *has been no* real social and cultural *métissage* in New Caledonia...there is *nothing* like a *métis* category” [emphasis mine] (Bensa 1995:121; see also Merle 1995; Léblic 2007; Mokaddem 2002). Unlike nearly every other French colony, “the reality of *métissage* [in New Caledonia] was socially denied to the point that it led to the complete absence of a juridical category specific to *métis*” (Coquelet 2004:187). This makes the territory unique, not only within the French Empire but also, in some ways, Melanesia. Though there are no real *métis* or creole social categories elsewhere in Melanesian region, almost every other Melanesian country has a creole *lingua franca*.¹³² There is no equivalent hybrid language in New Caledonia.¹³³ As Mokaddem

¹³² For example: Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, Solomons Pidgin, Bislama in Vanuatu and Logat Papua in West Papua (an Indonesian/Papuan creole slang). Though these languages are

(2004:46) writes, New Caledonian society remains “dual in nature.”¹³⁴ Its “communities coexist but do not occupy the same social space. Any fusion remains a fiction” (Mokaddem 2002:537).

Today however, *métis* identity is increasingly promoted and celebrated in both popular and political discourse. Loyalist political parties in particular trumpet New Caledonia’s “long history of *métissage*” and the territory’s “shared Caledonian culture.” What are we to make of this strangely deferred emergence of *métis* identity? Does the contemporary celebration of New Caledonian *métissage* actually map onto social reality? As David Theo Goldberg (1993:81) argues, “Race assumes its significance (in both senses) in terms of prevailing social and epistemological conditions of the time, yet simultaneously bears with it sedimentary traces of past

often referred to colloquially as “pidgins,” they are technically creoles. Though there are Fijian dialects of both English and Hindi, there is no longer a Fijian creole.

¹³⁵ I should note two exceptions: First, in the late 1800s, while blackbirding was still common (the kidnapping and coerced labor of islanders on sugar cane plantations in Queensland), some Kanak, mainly men, spoke an English-based Melanesian creole. Second: there *is* one French-based creole in New Caledonia, known as Tayo, but it is used by a very small community of native speakers (under 2000) in the village of Saint-Louis, not far from Nouméa. From the 1860s onwards, Saint-Louis was a Marist Mission. The mission school and seminary there attracted hundreds of Kanak from many different regions who spoke mutually unintelligible languages. Additionally, the Marists ran a sugar plantation that employed these Kanak, along with contract laborers from Vanuatu, French Polynesia, Réunion island in the Indian Ocean, India, Malaysia, Java and elsewhere. By the 1920s, Tayo had emerged as a stable creole language for inter-ethnic communication. This situation—Kanak working in a plantation setting, in contact with numerous other communities—is almost totally unique within New Caledonia (as I mentioned previously, and will continue to explore in this chapter, Kanak were largely kept totally separate from the settler population). This probably explains why no creole languages other than Tayo developed, and why the Tayo-speaking community remains so small. There is only one book-length study on Tayo: Sabine Ehrhart’s *Le créole français de St-Louis (le tayo) en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (1993).

¹³⁴ By dual, Mokaddem and I mean Kanak/*colon*. The category “Kanak” is not unitary—certainly not linguistically. There continue to be 28 indigenous Kanak languages in New Caledonia, and there were originally even more.

significations.” In New Caledonia, the discourse on *métissage* bears many “traces of past significations” indeed. Though scholars sometimes frame *métissage* as a liberal or revolutionary social project, the recent promotion of *métissage* in New Caledonia works to maintain the settler status quo. Ultimately, the *métis* category is structured on the same binary representations of Kanak savagery versus settler civilization discussed in Part I of this dissertation. I want to argue that Hassan’s anxieties about *métissage* and his feeling that that “nothing is clear anymore,” are a reaction, in part, to the hegemonic function *métissage* in dominant discourse. According to Thomas Holt (2001), we should ask, “What work does race do? What effects does race have?” This chapter asks how race works to reproduce settler colonial power relationships in New Caledonia, delegitimizing Kanak claims to sovereignty based on indigenous identity and difference. It is a profoundly ironic twist—while sovereignty was initially denied to Kanak on the basis of what France considered to be unassimilable cultural and racial difference, it is now a purported *lack* of difference that stymies Kanak claims.

“Two Chairs and no in Between”: White Kanaks and Black *Colons*

According to Octave Togna, Kanak independence activist and former director of the ADCK (Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture):

There are black Kanak and white Kanak...The *métis* belongs to one cultural current or another...There are two chairs, there is no in between. We sit in one or the other...There is no culture *métissée*. [in Edo 2006:95]

However, biological *métissage* between Kanak and non-Oceanic outsiders began well over one hundred fifty years ago, prior to the French *prise de possession*, when

British, Irish and Australian beachcombers, sandalwood traders and whalers frequented the territory, sometimes sleeping with native women and occasionally even staying on to live there.¹³⁵ Today, as I observed during my own fieldwork, many Kanak people and Caldoche people appear to be mixed race. Yet as I will investigate throughout this chapter, phenotype does not determine racial categorization in New Caledonia.

According to Isabelle Merle, whose book *Expériences coloniales: La Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1853-1920* (1995), remains the most comprehensive social history of New Caledonia:

Un enfant métis très foncé de peau, élevé hors de la tribu par son père européen et sa mère mélanésienne se considère, et il est considéré, comme un blanc. [...] En cas d'échec ou de mésentente, on saura lui rappeler ses origines kanaks, révélant ainsi un racisme de peau généralement latent mais toujours présent. À l'inverse, un enfant métis et de teint pâle, élevé en tribu par sa mère mélanésienne se rattache à un clan, à la coutume et à la culture Kanak. Il est alors kanak sans aucune doute. Au début du [20^{ème}] siècle, il entre inéluctablement dans la catégorie des indigènes bien qu'il soit parfois physiquement plus blanc que le colon métis du voisinage. [Merle 1995:366]¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Prior to European contact there had already been extensive mixing between Kanak and islanders from the southern part of the Vanuatu archipelago, Tonga and Wallis and Futuna via both trade networks and shipwrecks. The historical legacy of mixing between Anglo mariners and Kanak is still quite visible today. For example, there are several Kanak families in Lifou who have maintained Anglo surnames from this period (ie: the Streeter, Forest, & Wright families).

¹³⁶ A *métis* child with very dark skin, raised outside of the *tribu* by his European father and Kanak mother considers himself, and is considered, as white. In the case of a failure or a dispute, one will remind him of his Kanak origins, thus revealing a racism based on skin color that is generally latent but still present. On the other hand, a *métis* child with very pale skin, raised *en tribu* by his melanesian mother, belongs to a clan, to *la coutume* and to Kanak culture. He is thus Kanak, without any doubt. At the beginning of the [20th] century, there inevitably enters into the Indigenous category individuals who are sometimes physically whiter than neighboring *métis colons*.

Merle's explanation suggests an important connection between settler racism towards Kanak—as a *cultural group*—and the non-emergence of a *métis* social category in New Caledonia (despite extensive biological *métissage*). It also reveals a settler desire to “deny *métissage* by only recognizing two categories of persons, *indigènes* and whites” (Coquelet 2005:188). In some ways, *métissage* was similarly denied in Algeria, France's other historical settler colony. According to Saada, Algeria also had no substantive “*métis* problem,” because the French understood Algerians—as “the product of Latin elements”—to be racially similar. Of course, the French still saw themselves as being of superior stock, but Algerian/French *métis* were considered to be a “harmonious mixture” of such “closely related races,” that they did not really count as products of miscegenation. As I will analyze further, the *opposite* case was true in New Caledonia. The absence of a so-called “*métis* problem” in New Caledonia, was due not to imagined similarity between colonizer and colonized, but radical, incommensurable difference. The French saw themselves separated from the Kanak by unfathomable evolutionary and racial distance.

Earlier in this dissertation, I explored the emergence and ongoing effects of colonial representations of Kanak as “cannibal savages.” Kanak were purportedly “too far from civilization, morally as well as temporally, for any worthwhile productive intercourse to occur” (Brown 2005:207). From D'Entrecasteaux and D'Urville onwards, the Kanak were considered to be among the most “degraded” of all peoples found in the Pacific. French scholars compared and classified the “diverse populations under French dominion,” finding that, “If the colonized—always and everywhere—

were considered as inferiors, there were...those who were more inferior than others”

(Bensa 1988:1990):

On this gradiometer of degradation, the Kanak occupied one of the lowest positions in the overseas French empire. Augustin Bernard, who produced two geographic studies at the end of the 19th century, one on Algeria, the other on New Caledonia, thus made a striking distinction: “Berbers and Annamites [Cochin Chinese] are not savages, they are only, in some regards, barbarians, which is quite different. [...] Prevented from being nomads by the configuration of the island and the absence of livestock, it is evident that the Canaques are nonetheless in a much inferior state than that of the nomads of Arabia or the Maghreb.” [Bernard 1894:298, in *ibid.*]

This strict colonial hierarchy of races “translated into a fractured body of colonial law. Legislators...[sought] to adapt the law to the degree of civilization attained by each population (Saada 2012:111). Indeed, as I detailed earlier, Kanak’s place on the “bottom of the evolutionary ladder” legitimated the French declaration of *terra nullius*, the legal denial of Kanak land rights and ultimately the imposition of the juridical regimes of the *code indigénat* and *cantonnement*. These legal frameworks are anomalous within French colonial history. They were feasible *only* because France imagined the Kanak as *unassimilable* others, barely human at all—beyond the reach of France’s civilizing mission. In New Caledonia’s settler colonial legal regime indigenous identity had no “property value” (Harris 1992). A claim made to indigenous status could not result in access to land or resources as it might have in other French colonies, such as Tahiti (as discussed in Part I) or earlier on in French

Canada, where, “some habitants saw the acquisition of land as one of the benefits of marriage to native women” (Spear 2012).¹³⁷

The only land Kanak had any rights to *qua* Kanak were the reservations onto which they had been forcibly relocated and sequestered. France denounced similar systems of indigenous reserves in the United States, Canada and South Africa as the “marque de l’extreme violence que les “anglo-saxons” exercent à l’encontre des peuples “primitives” qu’ils soumettent” [a mark of the extreme violence that anglo-saxons exercise against the “primitive peoples” under their domination”] (Merle 1998:100). Yet their conviction that the Kanak were “on their way to extinction” provided the French with the ideological justification necessary to adopt an otherwise suspect anglo-saxon approach. On the reserves, the Kanak could live out their dying days in peace, protected from the modern settler society to which they were thought to be incapable of adapting.¹³⁸ The reservation system substantially restricted physical interaction between the Kanak and settler populations (although, as I will discuss in some length further on, some biological mixing continued regardless, particularly in the rural areas in the island’s north).¹³⁹ The reserves were over-crowded parcels of

¹³⁷ Which gave rise to the *métis* or Michif people, recognized as an aboriginal group in Canada.

¹³⁸ This is in some ways comparable to Australia’s approach to Aboriginal people at the turn of the century through the 1940s, when the government’s official policy was geared towards “smoothing the pillow of a dying race.”

¹³⁹ It’s worth noting too that this arrangement also contrasts sharply with situations found elsewhere in the French Empire, especially in older colonies with slave-based plantation economies, such as Sainte Domingue, Mauritius or the Antilles. Though the French saw Africans as racially inferior, colonists in plantation colonies lived in close contact with slaves, intimately sharing space and resources. Literature on créole identity has privileged the

land, with essentially no French-supported education, agricultural or health services. Throughout *cantonnement* the Kanak population was ravaged by alcoholism, disease and desperation. Yet, at the same time, the reserves created a sort of hermetically sealed-off cultural space where Kanak culture, “sheltered” from whites, turned in on itself rather than mingling and merging with the culture of surrounding settlers to create *métis* social forms. Joël Dauphiné points specifically to “geographic reasons why a *métis* group never emerged in New Caledonia.” The separation of Kanak, and the fact that:

...[T]he number of Europeans installed in New Caledonia did not surpass several thousand people [during the first 60 years of colonization]...[meant that] the Kanaks could maintain or reconstitute for themselves, on their reserves, the minimum of social cohesion that would allow them to conserve their identity while waiting for better days. [1996:222]

Internal Racial Hierarchies: “Polynesian” Loyalty Islanders

Scholars working within the growing field of critical race studies have argued that racializing logics and trajectories very rarely (if ever) assume a binary form. Atvar Brah (1996:186, in Kaunui 2008:20) refers to “differential racialization,” or “processes of relational multi-locationality within and across formations of power marked by one form of racism with another, and with other modes of differentiation.” Even where racial formations appear to be “dual in nature,” as in New Caledonia, Brah suggests we should explore “how different racialized groups are positioned differently *vis-à-vis* one another” (*ibid.* 15). Oftentimes racial logics reproduce

plantation as a “contact zone of cross-fertilization,” and the spatial and cultural circumstances of plantation-based colonies led to extensive biological, cultural and linguistic *métissage*.

themselves in an almost fractal manner, creating internal divisions and hierarchies within what may otherwise function as a “singular” racial category. In fact, exactly such a situation existed in New Caledonia, where colonial discourse positioned Loyalty Islanders as “more evolved” than Kanak from the Grand Terre. Adrian Muckle (2012:12) explains:

In combination with a pre-annexation history that contrasted markedly with that of the mainland (as a result of extensive Loyalty Islander participation in the labour trade and the earlier take-up of Christianity), the presumption of the ‘Polynesian-ness’ of the Loyalty Islands would become a central element in the French administrative assumption of their cultural, political and social advance over the mainland. The generally positive appraisals of Loyalty Islanders and the contrasting negative assessments of mainlanders – deemed more ‘Melanesian’, savage and intractable than their more ‘Polynesian’, compliant and evolved neighbors – are thoroughly inscribed in New Caledonia’s colonial archives and representations of Kanak. To colonial administrators...Loyalty Islanders were the epitome of what could be achieved by Kanak on the Grande terre.

In this way D’Urville’s Melanesia/Polynesia typology had direct effects on the differential racialization of the Kanak population.

In a 1917 study on “The People and Language of Lifu, Loyalty Islands,” published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Sidney H. Ray noted that, “the natives of the Loyalty Group appeared...to be more intelligent, more active and enterprising, and better voyagers than those of New Caledonia [meaning the Grande Terre] (252). Replicating, nearly exactly, the racialized descriptions of early European explorers, Ray also notes that Loyalty island women more beautiful and better-treated than their counterparts on the Grand Terre. This, of course, was due to the “Polynesian influence:”

The family in Lifu is a little better constituted than in New Caledonia. The woman is less isolated from her husband and relegated to less inferior work. He suggests that this is perhaps explained by the influence of the manners of the yellow race (i.e., Polynesians) brought in and mitigating the customs of the primitive inhabitants. [254]

The differential racialization of Loyalty Islanders and Kanak from the Grand Terre had very real implications for the treatment of these groups under colonial law. In the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s, as Muckle (2012:13) explains, administrative distinctions were introduced between the Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands and “usually justified in terms of racial difference, or ‘the degree of civilization’ that Loyalty Islanders had reached, and on occasion the ideology of protection.” This is well illustrated by a note Muckle (*ibid.* 14) cites from a 1919 commentary on the “juridical condition of the natives in New Caledonia:”

The population of the Loyalty islands, which is of Maorie [sic] origin and which is reputed to be more open to our customs, *has been better treated’ than that of the mainland.* [Emphasis mine]¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Even if they were supposedly “less savage” than Kanak from the Grand Terre, Loyalty Islanders were still quite firmly categorized as “primitives” and “cannibals” within colonial accounts. According to Rev. James Sleight, a missionary in the Loyalty Islands, “the Lifuans were feeble in intellectual powers, and, in fact, thought of little besides food and women. A mere coincidence or sequence of events was regarded as cause and effect, design or result whether for good or evil. There was little speculation as to the causes of things, the usual reply to queries as to the makers of flowers or birds, etc., was, ‘our old men.’ These were the highest intelligences they knew” (Ray 1917:252). Loyalty Islanders were also believed to practice cannibalism, not out of revenge or religious belief, but simply for the “pleasure of eating human flesh as an article of food.” Another missionary, Dr. Samuel MacFarlane claimed, “On Lifu the natives were exceedingly fond of human flesh. The chiefs were despotic and ordered their subjects to be clubbed and cooked at their pleasure. I have heard the natives speak of a time of severe famine when those men who had the greatest number of wives and children were considered to have the most food. Famines, no doubt, arose at times from natural causes, but most frequently from desolating wars, when plantations were destroyed. Sometimes the famine makers were ordered to cause a famine in order that the male population might live for awhile on human flesh. The dead were often exhumed to be cooked and eaten : and sometimes when a native was dying with plenty of flesh on his bones, some of those standing by would be rejoicing at the prospect of a feast, and arranging to steal the body” (in Ray 1917:261). In

The most significant difference between the colonial treatment of Loyalty Islanders and Kanak from the Grand Terre was the extent of land alienation faced by each population. As raised coral atolls, the Loyalty Islands were much less useful to France for settlement or agricultural development than the fertile Grand Terre. However, geography alone cannot explain the stark differences in land tenure policy. In 1899, the government issued an edict forbidding the sale of land, the creation of concessions or the granting of mining permits on either of the three Loyalty Islands. But as Muckle (*ibid.* 15) notes, “local legislation also entrenched a host of more quotidian differences” as well:

The 1882 labour regulations, for example, offered Loyalty Islanders greater protection than they offered Kanak from the Grande Terre. In 1884 the wages paid to teachers were to be higher in the Loyalty Islands because of differences between the ‘races’, and in 1900 the Leprosy Commission agreed upon the need for two separate central leprosariums on the Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands; the two populations were not to be mixed: “It seems necessary, given that the canaques of New Caledonia and those of the Loyalty Islands are of different races and morals, to not intern them in the same place.”

Ultimately, the differential racialization of Loyalty Islanders and Kanak from the Grand Terre had important ramifications for the granting of sovereign rights. In 1913, the colonial General Counsel debated a plan to establish tribal courts. Those hostile to the idea wondered whether Kanak had “the higher faculties necessary” for the impartial administration of justice. However, “they allowed that their concerns related primarily to the Grande Terre and that ‘it may be quite a different matter for the

this way, even though they were imagined to be similar to Polynesians, Loyalty Islanders were still subject the most derogatory, dehumanizing elements of the “Melanesian” racial typification.

natives of the Loyalty group” (Muckle 2012:14). Regarding the two populations, the General Counsel concluded:

The latter [the Loyalty Islanders] are of a different race and in constant progress. Without going to the other extreme, it could be advantageous to give them a status that takes into account both that which is good in their significantly better traditions and the evidence of social progress. [*ibid.*]

Muckle suggests that, given the frequency of such remarks and the administrative distinctions that *were* introduced between the Loyalties and Grand Terre populations:

It is significant that (and certainly worth further exploring why) the incipient administrative reification of a Melanesia–Polynesia divide was not carried to its logical extreme with each being accorded different [legal] statuses. [*ibid.*]

He concludes however that “the differences were not perhaps as important as they were imagined to be.” By this, I take it Muckle means that the differences between the two groups were not as important to the *Kanak themselves* as the French imagined them to be. On this point, I would certainly agree. However, the separate juridical regimes enacted in the Loyalty Islands and the Grand Terre *made socially real racial differences that did not originally exist*.

As a result of their more rarified position within colonial racial hierarchies, Loyalty Islanders were spared some of the worst violences of settler colonialism. They did not lose their land and were able to maintain most of their indigenous structures of governance (which were, of course, tied to the land). They had access to far better education and medical care.¹⁴¹ This history has visible effects in the present day. The

¹⁴¹ I should note that Loyalty Islanders’ access to better education was at least partially due to the fact that the islands were largely missionized by the protestant London Missionary Society (unlike the Grande Terre, which was primarily missionized by French Marist *Société de la*

first Kanak to receive a baccalaureate (the equivalent of a high school diploma), was an Ouvéa islander, Boniface Ounou, in 1961. The majority of Kanak now pursuing post-baccalaureate education are Loyalty Islanders. Most of the Kanak employed in civil-service positions are Loyalty Islanders. Muckle (2012:14) writes:

Notwithstanding the different economic, cultural and historical experiences of Kanak on the Loyalty Islands and the mainland, the two populations have not formed any distinct ethnic grouping and the language of ethnic difference is rarely mobilized by the people in question.¹⁴²

I would argue that the situation is a bit more complicated than Muckle suggests. First, I think it is a bit disingenuous to assume we can separate “the different economic, cultural and historical experiences of Kanak on the Loyalty Islands and the mainland,” from the colonial racial hierarchies that made these different experiences possible. And it seems historically shortsighted to suggest that these racial hierarchies, as hegemonic structures, were not taken up in any way by the populations made subject to them.

In my own experience, it is not uncommon to hear Kanak make ethnic or racially based distinctions between people from the Loyalty Islands and the Grand Terre. The most common genre of comments—usually made by Kanak from the Grand Terre—make reference to the privileged economic and social position of Loyalty Islanders

foi). The LMS immediately set about developing orthographies for each of the four Loyalty Islands languages as well as Bible translations. This greatly increased literacy rates amongst Loyalty Islanders. At the same time, the missionary orthographies helped preserve native languages. This history is one of the reasons that Drehu (the language of Lifou) is now the most widely-spoken Kanak language in New Caledonia.

¹⁴² On this point, Muckle additionally cites Bronwen Douglas’s (1998:73-80) discussion of the inaugural meeting of a council of high chiefs in the early 1980s, in which Douglas “notes the different tone and degree of self-confidence of Loyalty Islanders in relation to mainlanders, but there is nothing to suggest that this was in any way expressed in ethnic or racial terms.”

and their supposed sense of entitlement and noblesse oblige. There are certainly some bad feelings that most of the government jobs occupied by Kanak in Nouméa and much of the Provincial Government are held by Loyalty Islanders.¹⁴³ From the perspective of some, Loyalty Islanders are essentially *nouveau arrives*, immigrants who take jobs, land and power away from Kanak on the Grand Terre. They make money in Nouméa and bring it back to their *tribus*, reaping benefits from the Grand Terre without being rooted in, or giving back to the land and people there—hence the mildly pejorative term for Loyalty Islanders, *planche à voiles* [windsurfers]. On the other hand, some Loyalty Islanders denigrate Kanak from the Grand Terre as uneducated, culturally backwards and in a direct echo of the racialized discourse discussed earlier, “savages” (Mokaddem 2007:16).

The distinctions drawn by Kanak between Loyalty Islanders and people from the Grand Terre are not necessarily mean-spirited—though they often draw on assumed phenotypical differences. I once had an entirely unplanned and very lively discussion with Hassan and most of the rest of the dancers in *Résurrection* about the differences

¹⁴³ This brief anecdote offers some idea of the degree to which Loyalty Islanders are assumed to hold all the top jobs in New Caledonia: Just prior to my arrival in Nouméa there had been a scandal at the Territorial Archives, during which that institution’s longtime director—respected Caldoche historian and author Ismet Kurtovitch—was forced to resign. The official reason given was that Kurtovitch had not obtained the advanced archival science degree required to occupy the post, but the actual circumstances appear far murkier (the man who ultimately replaced Kurtovitch worked under him at the archives and had gone on a hunger strike (!) to protest the fact that Kurtovitch did not have the “proper credentials” for his post). I discussed the details of the scandal with my friend Eleanor, then the head librarian of the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, headquartered in Nouméa, and her colleague, a ni-Vanuatu woman. When I asked Eleanor the name of the man who protested and subsequently replaced Kurtovitch, she said didn’t know for sure, but she thought he was from Lifou. Her ni-Vanuatu colleague immediately interjected: “Of course, if anyone is Kanak and has a good job they’re from the islands. *C’est évident.*”

between islanders and people from the Grand Terre. Hassan (an islander himself) told me that people from the Loyalty Islands “have more open faces and are always smiling.” While those from the Grand Terre have “scary, mean faces” (all the boys cracked up at this comment, even those from the Grand Terre). Loyalty Islanders, he continued, were “more welcoming” and “better musicians” while people from the Grand Terre were “tough and quiet.” The stereotypes referenced here by Hassan clearly have at least some genealogical connection to European representations of Polynesians as “happy, smiling and dancing” and Melanesians as “sullen and aggressive.” However, the rest of the observations made by Hassan and the group were of a different nature. They told me that you can “always tell if a *mec* [dude] in Nouméa is from the Islands or the Grande Terre by the way he dresses:”

Young people from the [Loyalty] islands, they always wear clothes of a more “hip hop style,” like maybe a sports jersey, or t-shirt, maybe a baseball cap. It’s like, a relaxed and cool style. A dude from the Grande Terre, he’ll always be hiding with a hoody pulled up over his head like this [miming walking with slumped shoulders]. Or a Rasta man with the dreads.

I think it is significant that (for the most part) young people were more likely to point out differences between Loyalty Islanders and people from the Grand Terre that were rooted in behavior, attitude, food, clothing and music preferences, rather than biology or primordial essence. Though the distinctions Kanak make between Loyalty Islanders and people from the Grand Terre do bear traces of the racist logics imposed by the

settler colonial state, Kanak do not fully deploy these logics in their own systems of reckoning identity.¹⁴⁴

Frequently, when making generalizations about either Loyalty Islanders or people from the Grand Terre, both youth and older Kanak would emphatically point to the differential historical effects of colonialism in each region. As Gaston, the *animateur de la maison de musique* in the Vallée-du-Tir neighborhood (originally from Maré) told me, “in the islands, we were only missionized. The Grand Terre was colonized. *Ils sont beaucoup plus traumatisés* [they are much more traumatized].” In this way, though they may take up some elements of racialized colonial discourse, Kanak are far more likely to see whatever differences that might exist between Loyalty Islanders and people from the Grand Terre as results of historical circumstance, rather than innate. People also framed the differences between the Islands and Grand Terre using metaphors based on relation or complementarity.

¹⁴⁴ Returning to the anecdote that opened this chapter, I want to acknowledge that Hassan did make clear that Kanak people *notice* and *remark on* skin color *but* he directly connected this to assumptions one might make about someone’s *cultural knowledge* based on phenotype (ie: “If you’re light-skinned, maybe you don’t know how to build a case, if you’re really black, you probably do”). People might make these assumptions upon meeting someone new, but their suppositions would be immediately overridden as soon as the person in question demonstrated that they did, in fact, possess requisite Kanak cultural knowledge (at which point their skin color would become mostly irrelevant).

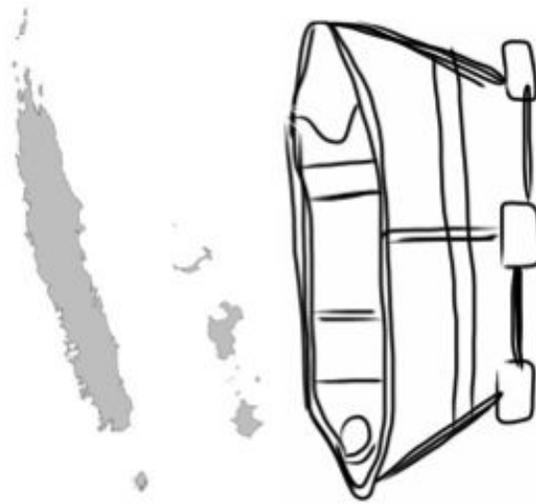


Fig. 7.2. New Caledonia (the Grand Terre and Loyalty Islands) as a *pirogue*.

Hassan told me that New Caledonia is like a pirogue (an outrigger canoe). The Grande Terre is the main hull and the Loyalties are the floats, or outriggers. Each element has a different purpose, but the boat would not be seaworthy without all of them lashed together, working in concert. They are mutually dependent on each other for their identity and strength. Hamid Mokaddem (2007:16) maintains that the distinctions Loyalty Islanders and people from the Grand Terre draw between each other are “a narcissism of minor differences, tempered by relations of exchange (marriage customs and others) and Kanak nationalism.” Both Mokaddem’s observation and Hassan’s pirogue metaphor point to an indigenous Melanesian epistemology of identity—one based on substance, exchange and relationality. As I explore in the following section, a Kanak logic of relatedness likely played an even more important role in the absence of a *métis* social category than the juridical effects of settler colonial racialization alone.

Indigenous Epistemologies of Identity in New Caledonia

In Barth's (1969) seminal work on ethnic groups and boundaries, he sets aside "pelagic islands"—the Pacific—as a "special case." Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (1990) propose that, "indigenous Oceanic identifications," are not grounded in models of racial or ethnic difference, as frequently the case in the West, "but rather charted looser genealogical plots of relations between persons and places" (in Jolly 2007:100).

Margaret Jolly also notes:

Although...[Oceanic models of identity] celebrated the inherent connection between people and place, they embraced the place of ocean as much as land, and valorized motivated movement and navigation as much as the process of settlement and dwelling. Ancestral Oceanic epistemologies of person and place valorised both "roots and routes," and their dialogical relationships.

As I have explored in preceding chapters, Kanak theories of personhood, place and identity closely match Linnekin, Poyer and Jolly's descriptions of "oceanic models."

A mutual imbrication of person, place, "roots and routes" is why Bensa (1990:14) refers to Kanak identities as "itineraries:"

A Kanak genealogy gives the name of a person's father, the brothers of the father, of his grandfather, of the brothers of the grandfather, etc. Eventually, beyond that, the name of his great-grandfather; and then the succession of "mounds," or the habitat sites of his great-grandfather dating all the way back to those occupied by the founding ancestor of his clan. Genealogy branches out on a map.

According to Alan Howard (1990), "Oceanic models" of identity also assume that a person's vital substance is transmitted genealogically but "is supplanted by the food from which one gains sustenance" (Kaunau 2008:51). Yams are a central

example of this within Kanak culture (as they are in many other Melanesian cultures). Yams are one of the principal items used in *échanges coutumiers* (custom exchanges). The harvest cycle of the yam also shapes the temporality of social life and structures the traditional Kanak calendar. Kanak understand yams as constituted from the same substances as persons, particularly the substances transmitted through the paternal clan line. In this sense, a yam is analogous to a child. It is a clan's progeny, evidence of a group's reproductive force and substance that will in turn give force and substance to those who consume it. In eating the yams grown by a clan, or on the land of a clan, one consumes—and thus incorporates into oneself—that clan's substance and identity. Because of the role they play in exchanges used to forge and consolidate social relations, yams also symbolize the power and reproductive capacity of a group. As Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1978:62) explained:

Totally charged with symbols, the yam has a cultural value: noble offering, symbol of virility, of honor. The yam offered at the altar symbolizes all of the country, with the chiefs, the elders, the ancestors, the children and everything that makes this country live. The yam accompanies the shell string currencies, the mats and the fiber skirts that constitute the bulk of wealth exchanged at a marriage or a mourning ceremony that seals the alliance between clans...the yam is carried with the same delicacy as a child.¹⁴⁵

Tjibaou's description points to yet another common element in "Oceanic identifications"—the idea that a person's identity, rather than being static and innate, is the product of a specific "relational history." Kehaulani Kauanui (2008:51)

¹⁴⁵ Original: Toute chargée de symboles, l'igname a une valeur culturelle: offrande noble, symbole de la virilité, de l'honneur. L'igname offerte à l'autel symbolise tout le pays avec les chefs, les vieux, les ancêtres, les enfants et tout ce qui fait vivre cette contrée. L'igname accompagnée de la monnaie de cordelettes de coquillages, de la natte et de la jupe de fibres constitue l'essentiel des richesses échangées pour un mariage ou un deuil et qui scelle l'alliance entre les clans...l'igname est portée avec la même délicatesse qu'un enfant.

describes “relational history” as a mode of genealogical reckoning that, “is always partial and shifting depending on one’s current set of relationships and perspectives...[Sets of relationships] are contingent and allow for mobility because they are not overly determined by one’s birth.”

In her book *Hawaiian Blood* (2008), Kauanui explains why this “Oceanic notion” of relational history renders the United State’s use of a 50-percent blood quantum rule to determine “Hawaiianness” incompatible with Kanaka maoli systems of reckoning identity. Kauanui contends that blood quantum reduces Hawaiians to a racial minority, “thereby reinforcing a system of white racial privilege bound to property ownership.” She shows how the logic of blood quantum has had profound affects on cultural definitions of indigeneity, “undermining more inclusive Kanaka Maoli notions of kinship and belonging.” While blood quantum classification is based on *exclusionary* racial criteria, Kauanui maintains that genealogy “is a Hawaiian form of world enlargement” (ibid:12). Though some might “assume genealogy is a proxy for race,” she argues, “blood quantum racial classification is used as a *proxy for ancestry*, with destructive political consequences for indigenous peoples” (ibid.5, emphasis mine). Ultimately, Kauanui concludes, the use of blood quantum to “measure” Indigeneity acts to subvert the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

As a settler colony, Hawaii offers several important points of comparison with New Caledonia. Perhaps the most obvious point of convergence is that Kanak genealogy is also a form of “world enlargement,” though not necessarily in exactly the same way as it is for Hawaiians. Without overly reifying the Melanesian/Polynesian

distinction I have spent so much time deconstructing, I would argue that *some* of the differences between the Hawaiian and the New Caledonian contexts arise from the fact that Kanak are a culturally Melanesian, rather than Polynesian people. Though Kanak did not (and do not) conceive of “blood” in the same way as Europeans; blood—as a *transferrable substance*—is far more primary to Kanak epistemologies of identity than Kauanui describes for Hawaiians (and for Polynesian peoples generally speaking).

Race and Melanesian Personhood: Substances and Containers

Marilyn Strathern’s arguments on “Melanesian personhood” have been cited, critiqued, used and abused by anthropologists working in almost every subfield. They remain useful for unpacking Kanak models of identity.¹⁴⁶ For in Melanesia, according to Strathern, one does not lose what they “give away”—it continues to circulate as a detached part of them. The Melanesian social world does not “assume a unitary identification between people as subjects and the product of their activity” (Strathern 1988:140). Work is the product of one’s own mind—but its effects, or products, are only made visible in the context of social relationships with others. In gift exchange, *social relationships* are the *objects* of people’s dealings with each other (171). In the West, work is understood to produce things; but in Melanesia, Strathern argues, “work

¹⁴⁶ I’ll also note, once again, that Maurice Leenhardt’s ethnography of the Kanak was central to Strathern’s formulation of “Melanesian personhood” in the first place.

appears to produce relations, to give the orientation of a person's activities value in the regard of a differentiated other" (177).

Along these lines, "world enlargement" in the Kanak context means the expansion of social networks and *the production of persons* through gift exchange—of "objects" like trade items, yams and other food, shell currency, fiber skirts and mats—but also "subjects" like women (through marriages) and children (through "customary adoptions"). Through these exchanges, "itineraries" (persons and identities) are created and reproduced. Within this system of social logic, racialized conceptions of identity—as innate, unchanging and *undetachable*—make little sense. This is probably one of the most important reasons that a *métis* social group never emerged in New Caledonia. According to Kanak epistemology, human beings—of whatever form and phenotype—can be *made* into Kanak persons through exchange and participation in *la coutume*. As Nidoïsh Nasseline, the *grand chef* of Maré and head of the LKS (*Libération Kanak Socialiste*) political party emphasized in 1982, during a debate in the New Caledonian territorial assembly:

...In Lifou there exist people who are racially different, there are blonds with blue eyes in the *tribu* of Luengoni who claim they are Kanak, that's to say that in Lifou, there are white people, *métisses* or Kanaks who refer to the same culture, the same values. This is why it is of paramount importance to our discussion that we distinguish the notion of culture from that of race. [in Mokaddem 2002:537]

As in Hawaii, where the racialized logic of blood quantum has subverted Hawaiian sovereignty, the French conception of Kanak identity as an exclusionary "racial" identity has been an impediment to the Kanak independence struggle.

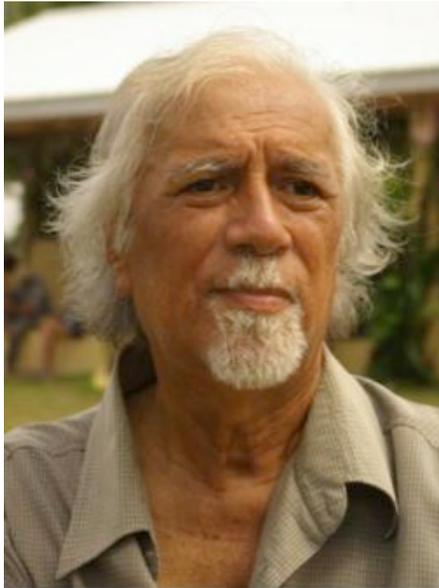


Fig. 7.3. Grand Chef Nidoïsh Naisseline of Maré, who, like many Kanak, is phenotypically, but not culturally *métis* (photo *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*).

Hamid Mokaddem highlights the centrality of “world enlargement”—exchange and *la coutume*—in both the production of Kanak identity and the absence of a *métis* social category (2002:537):

Biological *métissage* does not lead to a cultural *métissage*...Skin color...is not a pertinent criteria for establishing an individual’s belonging to a community. This latter aspect is very overlooked [in New Caledonia] and may seem paradoxical. The Kanak community identifies itself through cultural practices in which *métissage* is not conceived in biological terms but according to identification with a group. Despite linguistic and cultural variants, Kanak groups all conjure up their structures of exchange—those designated by the vague term *coutume*—between maternal and paternal clans. In this context, the welcome of outside clans by the “custodians of the land” [autochthonous, landowning clans] gives the foreigners a status and rank within the balance of the groups. Thus the concept of “blood” fits into a set of rules and practices that

identify an individual with a matrilineal or patrilineal group... The concept of race has no relevance for understanding Kanak cultural identity.¹⁴⁷

Significantly, Mokaddem also mentions the importance of “blood” as part of “the rules and practices that identify an individual.” This is not “blood” as imagined by the blood quantum rules employed by the US government in Hawaii.¹⁴⁸ This is “blood” *as substance in a Melanesian sense*. In Melanesian theories of personhood, identity does not “belong to men or women...it adheres to substance” (Strathern 1988:105). The attributes of substances—like blood—are transferable between persons. As

Mokaddem (2002:17) explains for the Kanak:

Blood, vital fluid that circulates in the bodies of individuals, does not belong [does not come from] the biological father. It is the property of the maternal line. That which determines the color of the skin is secondary.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Original: Le métissage biologique n'induit pas un métissage culturel... la couleur de peau... n'est pas un critère pertinent quant à l'appartenance d'un individu à une communauté. Ce dernier aspect est très occulté et peut paraître paradoxal. La communauté kanak... s'identifie dans des pratiques culturelles où le métissage n'est pas conçu en termes biologiques mais en fonction de l'identification au groupe. En effet, malgré les variantes linguistiques et culturelles, les micro-sociétés kanak scandent leur structure des échanges — ce qui est désigné par le terme flou de coutume — entre clans maternels et paternels. Dans cette perspective, l'accueil des clans allochtones par les clans gardiens de la terre confère à l'étranger un statut et un rang dans l'équilibre des groupes. Ainsi, le concept de « sang » s'inscrit dans un ensemble de règles et de pratiques qui identifient l'individu à un groupe matrilineaire ou patrilineaire... le concept de race n'a aucune pertinence pour comprendre l'identité culturelle kanak.

¹⁴⁸ Nor is it “blood as a metaphor for culture and culture as a metaphor for blood” as Circe Sturm (2002) argues in the case of Cherokee social classification. In the Cherokee context (which may be comparable to situations experienced by other Native American groups), “race and culture are conflated... so that each can stand for the other,”... meaning, for example, “that a cultural specialist or traditionalist is perceived and characterized as having a high degree of blood” (141).

¹⁴⁹ This certainly doesn't mean that skin color was seen as “unimportant” elsewhere in Melanesia. In fact, in Papua New Guinea especially (but Vanuatu and the Solomons as well), white skin is highly significant and “good to think with” (see Bashkow 2006). This is certainly something worth pursuing further, but my guess is that the ongoing power relationships of settler colonialism in New Caledonia prevented “whiteness” from gaining the symbolic weight

Traditionally, if a child injures himself and bleeds, he must beg the pardon of his maternal uncle, as *the uncle* endowed the child with the blood that he has spilt. While the maternal line provides the *substance* of identity—bestowing children energy and life force through the transfer of blood—the paternal line provides the *container* for this life force, by giving children social status through name and land. If one considers that (during the colonial era at least) most biologically mixed children were the product of a Kanak mother and a European father, it becomes clear why these children were unproblematically considered Kanak—they had Kanak blood through the maternal line.

Moreover, a child with a European mother¹⁵⁰—or even a child with *no* Kanak parents—would be considered Kanak if he or she grows up as part of a Kanak family and clan. As Emmanuel Kasarherou (in Edo 2006:60), explains:

Two logics co-exist in Kanak culture: blood and name: the mother is the blood and the father the name. Generally, if your father is Kanak and your mother is not, you are Kanak because you have the clan. If your father is not Kanak and your mother is, it is your blood which gives you your identity. Usually, the *métis* is identified as a clan member from the blood of his mother's family if his father is non-Kanak or unknown. And if a child has no blood from the clan, he can be given the name of the clan as well as a personal name, for example, a grandfather's name, he is treated as a member, because he has gained the identity of the clan by which he was adopted.

In this way, if an individual does not have a Kanak identity by virtue of *substance* (blood transmitted through the maternal line), they can be given a Kanak identity

it did in Papua New Guinea, where white people were far fewer in number, were normally not there to settler permanently and were almost always the source of material goods.

¹⁵⁰ This was very rare during colonial times but is more common today.

through the attribution of a *container*—a clan name and genealogy. Furthermore children acquire substance through *nurture*—being socialized as a Kanak person, participating in gift, exchanges, custom ceremonies,¹⁵¹ and consuming yams grown by the clan (cf. Biersack 1982; Herdt 1987; Bamford 2004; Hirsch 2001).¹⁵²

Raising Frenchmen in “Soul and Character”

In their overview of cultural identity and ethnicity in the Pacific, Linnekin and Poyer (1990:8) refer to “Melanesian” modes of identity construction as “Lamarckian” (as opposed to “Darwinian”), meaning that they locate identity in acquired cultural practices, behaviors and preferences as much as in biological descent. The Kanak’s

¹⁵¹ For instance, Isabelle Léblic (2005:56) has describes how Kanak from Ponérihouen (the east coast of the Grand Terre) have long used the *Dui - Bai* system of “dual exogamy” to incorporate outsiders—both white and *métis*—into clan lineages. All of the ten clans in the Païci customary region are divided into two non-localized groups—either *Dui* or *Bai*. Each group is believed to be the descendants of the son of the first man. Ideally, a member of the *Dui* group should marry a cross cousin from the *Bai* group (and vice versa). Léblic recounts a ceremony she witnessed by which a *métis* family was inserted into this network of alliances. As she argues, “This insertion is no longer one that involves *métissage*. This reminds us that in New Caledonia, though biological *métissage* definitely exists as the product of mixed unions, this has nothing to do with the social or cultural level. One is Kanak or one is Caldoche, depending on the social milieu in which one is raised and with which one establishes regular bonds of alliance.”

¹⁵² During our conversations, young people made comments to me that suggested this model of identity remains very much in use today. Simane, a young hip-hop dancer from Lifou of mixed heritage (his paternal grandfather was a Black American serviceman stationed in New Caledonia during WWII and his maternal grandmother was a Torres Straights islander) is a good example of this. He describes himself as a “racially mixed Kanak,” and told me that people get their identity from “where they were born and the people they grew up with.” Simane also argued “everyone is *métisse*. It’s the things you experience that make up who you are” [*On est tous métisse. C’est ce qu’on traverse que nous construisons*]. On the other hand, Wesh, another hip-hop dancer whose father is Tahitian and whose mother is Kanak, told me he was *not* Kanak because, “I don’t have Kanak tastes. I don’t eat Kanak food very often. I don’t really like kaneka or reggae music and I like dressing in American hip-hop style.” Wesh cited his tastes and behavior as fundamental components of his identity and made no mention of his biologically mixed parentage.

“Lamarckian” model of identity goes along way towards explaining why mixed-race children raised in an indigenous cultural milieu could be identified unproblematically as Kanak. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, most Caldoche people in New Caledonia are also of mixed biological heritage. How did mixed-raced children raised in “the white world” become French? Here, New Caledonia’s racial formation reveals a surprising twist: the French *also* drew on “Lamarckian” notions of identity. As Caldoche writer Jean-Pierre Devillers (1992:237) explains:

It necessary to note that there is considerable biological *métissage* but that cultural *métissage* is inexistent. Me, I have black cousins who say, and I feel bad that it often makes me laugh, “We, the whites...” but they’re correct to say that because they have always been raised in a European milieu, they reason like Europeans, they have European interests; they are absolutely not Canaques.

Such “Lamarckian” notions endure among the Caldoches in New Caledonia.¹⁵³ Even today, as Isabelle Merle contends, “belonging to the white work or the Kanak world is linked *to the culture to which one is attached* and the living place where each person resides” (1995:365, emphasis mine).

This theory of identity *was not* unique to settlers in New Caledonia. In her brilliant study on the place of mixed raced individuals in the French empire, Emmanuelle Saada (2012:36) demonstrates that, throughout the 19th and early 20th-century French empire, views on *métissage* were profoundly shaped on “popular neo-Lamarckian understanding[s] of environment in which racial and national essences could be secured or altered by the physical, psychological, climatic and moral

¹⁵³ I would suspect that more recently arrived people from Metropolitan France would not share this view. In speaking with “métros,” it frequently became clear to me that they were quite confused by the “black” “white” people in the Caldoche communities.

surroundings in which one lived” (Stoler 1995:138). This school of thought was closely tied to turn of the century French republicanism:

In Indochina, Madagascar and Africa, colonial notables tried to reclassify *métis* by taking them away from their mothers and placing them in special institutions where they could “grow up French in soul and character.” Techniques for “training” souls and bodies were based on a view of the individual as a product of the combined influence of “heredity” and “environment.” [Saada 2012:67]

Around the French empire, state and philanthropist-funded orphanages for “the protection of *métis* children” worked to provide their charges with “a veritable sentimental education to instill a love of France” (81). In 1917, the program for one such institution, the *Société de la protection de l’enfance* in Cambodia, explained:

...There is in principle nothing to prevent us from gradually allowing the Asiatic element to atrophy and developing only the white side of *these virgin natures, devoid of ingrained penchants and habits*. The entire purpose of our program is to make “French souls”...Our duty as Frenchmen is...to turn these de facto Frenchmen into Frenchmen in soul and character. [in Saada 2012:80, emphasis mine]

The goal of “turning *métis* into Frenchmen” pertained only to bastards—children not recognized by their French fathers. In fact, “the relatively few children born from the legitimate union of a colonial male and a native female where not a problem, indeed they were rarely referred to as *métis* all” (ibid:36). As a colonial administrator pronounced in a 1940 Indochinese publication on “children’s protection:”

I will say nothing of children of mixed race who are raised entirely and appropriately by a French father in a French setting with French upbringing and education. They are whatever upbringing and education make of them. They are French. [*ibid.* 20]

The notion that (unrecognized) mixed race children had to be “made into members of the French race” is premised on an association between “race” and

“citizenship” that “contradicts the most basic representations of the French ‘social contract,’ characterized, since the Revolution by the irrelevance of ‘origin’ for participation in the public sphere” (*ibid.*1). At the same time, the conflation of race and culture in colonial *métis* policy—in which race, far from being “erased from the cultural field of colonial administration or public opinion, is central to the production of knowledge and governance”—is actually *very* French (Saada 2002:366). As I explored earlier, the rigorously inclusive universalism promised by French republican citizenship *depends* on racialized categories and exclusions. In this vein, Saada (*ibid.* 385) draws a connection between the colonial desire to make *métis* “fully French,” and contemporary French debates over immigration and difference:

...[The] much remarked upon need for complete “assimilation” immediately generates its own political paradox – a familiar one for contemporary observers of French debates on affirmative action. Policies of active integration require that the state define its targets, but this need for categories that differentiate among groups undermines the basic equality that French citizenship is supposed to convey.

Laurent Dubois (2000:18) writes that, “the colonial history through which universalism has been merged with the particularistic exclusion of ‘others,’” is an important, overlooked aspect of the “genealogy of France’s Republican political culture.” Republican universalism has *always* been racialized (Balibar 1989; 2007). I will come back to this point later in the chapter, when I discuss the current promotion of “*métis*” identity in New Caledonia.

“These slaves of cannibals are the children of France”

Unlike the colonies on which Saada’s study is centered (primarily Indochina and West Africa), New Caledonia had no policy of removing *métis* children from Kanak mothers and placing them in institutions to transform them “into French men in soul and character.” In 1948, when France ordered colonial governors to report on organizations whose purpose was “to provide children of mixed blood with the material and moral assistance that their abandonment often requires,” the chief administrator of New Caledonia justified the absence of such an institution in the territory by explaining:

In New Caledonia, the fate of the *métis* is decided quite naturally on the basis of the environment in which they grow up...Because they are dispersed in many different settings in which they are perfectly assimilated, it is impossible to account them both for practical reasons and out of respect for privacy...if he [a *métis* child] has not remained in the reserve and if he has proved his civilization by adopting the white way of living, he is recognized as white. [in Saada 2012:31]

Métis did not thus constitute a “social problem,” as they did in elsewhere in the French empire. Consequently, Saada’s spends very little time on New Caledonia in her 2012 book, arguing only that the territory was similar Algeria, in that, “both were settler colonies, in which inheritance of the land played a central role in family life. Both colonizers and colonized had good reasons to keep the children born of their encounters” (32). Saada misses the point. Yes, both Algeria and New Caledonia were settler colonies—but, as I discussed in Chapter One, Algerians and Kanak were racialized in vastly different ways as colonial subjects. Contrary to what Saada argues, Kanak *could not* inherit land—unless one counts “collective rights” to the reservations

on which they were forced to live as an “inheritance.” There was no “property value” attached to Kanak identity. It is far more likely that Kanak did not abandon mixed race children because, as I have shown, Kanak did not use exclusionary categories like “race,” to determine Kanak identity.

The French considered Kanak to be incommensurably, radically different others, whose very presence on the land posed a threat to progress and civilization in a way the Algerians (also “the product of Latin elements”) never did. This was not *primarily* due to the Kanak’s skin color—but the ostensibly profound, irreconcilable temporal and cultural gulf between Kanak culture and “French civilization.”¹⁵⁴ As Alban Bensa

¹⁵⁴ Many (most?) Euro-Caledonians continue to believe that Kanak people live within a radically different, incommensurable ontological plane. During the Melanesian Arts Festival in 2010, I traveled with a delegation of about 40 artists from PNG, the Solomons, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia (the the opening ceremony was held in Kone over three days, then we travelled over a week to all three Loyalty Islands and finally back to Nouméa for the closing ceremony). There were about five volunteers traveling along with our group, most of whom were white Métros living in New Caledonia. One of them was René, s a literature professor at the university in Nouméa. I was taken aback by the fact that René would interact with the Kanak and other Melanesian delegates as if they were fellow human beings with some sort of shared understanding, only to later turn to me or one of the other white volunteers and pontificate on extraordinary alterity of Melanesian people. In Maré, after we had all been traveling together for a week, René sat down to have a coffee next to me and offered his musings on “the Melanesian character.” He explained that “Melanesians do not have the same concept of art as us” because their “*représentations mentales*” are completely different than ours. For instance, he explained, when Melanesians think of bread, they don’t imagine it in their heads the same way we do. “When we think of bread we think of *un objet longue, croustillant*” (a long and crusty object....in other words, a baguette, which in fact is *not* how I imagine bread, but I digress). Melanesians conceive of things only as either *samting nating* or *samting tru* (tok pisin, meaning in this case, “something of no account,” existing only as part of the material, surface, visible world; versus “something true,” existing as part of the hidden mystical world, an underlying, enduring truth or “really real” thing). He told me that he had traveled throughout Melanesia studying art (he was after all a literature professor with a doctoral degree), and had a very strong grasp of “their cultural patterns.” He added that radical Melanesian ontological difference was why the festival was so poorly organized in Maré. “Their entire conceptual schema is so different from the occidental world view,” he concluded.

argues, the French saw Kanak as *not having* any real culture, as “non-beings” and “human fossils destined to die” (1988:192-193). Because the repulsion felt towards the Kanak was primarily based on cultural, not phenotypical difference, it makes sense that mixed race children were not seen as posing a threat when raised in a “French milieu.” In the context of a settler colony, savagery was a threat to civilization. And savagery was embodied by the Kanak *culture*, not Kanak *race*. Mixed race children raised “within French civilization,” actually represented a success of the settler project—increasing the settler population while contributing to the “elimination of the native” (Wolfe 2006).

The specter of the “monstrous *métis*”—the mixed race individual as an unstable, atavistic, aberration of humanity—was largely absent in New Caledonia (cf: Stoler 1995; Blanckaert 2003). Instead it was the *Kanak themselves* who were viewed as monstrous aberrations, as matter out of time and place. This is vividly illustrated by early colonial ethnological reports, like the one published in the 1886 *Bulletins de la société d’anthropologie de Paris*. The author, Monsieur Léon Moncelon, a member of the *Conseil supérieur des colonies*, begins his report by confirming that the *métis* of the “white and indigenous race” are racially robust and “generally well constituted and intelligent.” The problem is that these children are “taken by their mothers to the native *tribus*” where they live, “unfortunately in the most adverse conditions” (1886:355). In the *tribus*, he explains, these “children of France” become the “slaves of those who give them their daily taro and yams.”

Moncelon laments that any French father could “abandon to suffering and deliver into savagery and vice the products of their own blood.” Though the French state “may not be permitted to force them [the fathers] to pay for their conduct,” Moncelon (361) deems it “profoundly immoral...*to abandon to the exploitation of the Canaques, children who are our own*” (emphasis mine):

[Can the] republican government witness this shameful spectacle without being moved? Can a civilized people see its children return, by its own fault, to the primitive life of cannibal natives?...Go find them in their huts, where they learn vice and hate, where they are the slaves of cannibals, these children of France; teach them to love their great and beautiful motherland, and *in making them men*, given them the share of the benefits of our civilization to which they are entitled. [Moncelon 1886:356-357, emphasis mine]

In Moncelon’s description, children raised as Kanak are not “men” but “savages.” Only in being socialized as French do they *acquire culture and become persons*. In order to further illustrate the Kanak’s remove from humanity, Moncelon recounts the following story:

On a plantation in the region, two white workers frequented a native woman ordinarily employed on the same crops. They abandoned her before she gave birth and when the infant came to term, she smashed the top of its skull with a stone. The poor little one was buried by the farmer himself in a corner of the plantation, where you can find him if you wished to prove the crime. We could ask what this woman could have been for her *métis* child, if, by intimidation, she could have been made to keep him. We could, in fact, tell you what led this Canaque to place herself beneath even the most vile and ferocious animals, who all care for and raise their own children. It is simply because the duties of motherhood hampered her enjoyment of the Canaque’s greatest pleasure: *le pilou*. [1886:60]¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ The *pilou* is the name of a type of Kanak dance, performed overnight or during the course of several days during certain ceremonial occasions. Within colonial discourse *les pilous* were imagined to be salacious, cannibalistic orgies. The dance was outlawed by missionaries and colonial administrators.

In Moncelon's arguments, *métis* children are the *French victims* of Kanak monstrosity. Kanak are worse than "the most vile and ferocious animals." They think nothing of infanticide if it means they can further indulge their love for depravity. Given that views like Moncelon's were widespread, it makes sense that *indigenous*—not *métis* subjectivity—was seen as posing a critical threat to settler society. This situation remains largely unchanged in contemporary New Caledonia. *Métis* identity is unproblematically encompassed—in fact *promoted*—by the republican state, while indigenous identity is positioned as a threat to civil society, equal rights and peace.

***Les Événements* and the Sudden Appearance of "Métis New Caledonians"**

After over a hundred years as a social "non-issue," *métissage* was abruptly pushed to the forefront of public discourse in the 1980s, during the height of *Les Événements*. The mobilization of "métis identity" by loyalist groups during this period illustrates how *métissage* became a powerful tool in both settler colonial and republican projects. Up until this point, cultural racism against the Kanak had acted to suppress the development of a *métis* social category. During *Les Événements*, the same racism led to the seemingly spontaneous appearance of *Métis* Caledonians, "indigenous to the land," and loyal to the French state. Nowhere was the hegemonic force of the *métissage* discourse more apparent than in the events surrounding the 1984 massacre of ten Kanak independence activists in Hienghène (briefly mentioned earlier, in Chapter 3).

On the evening of December 5th, 1984, a group of seventeen Kanak (including two of Jean-Marie Tjibaou's brothers), left an FLNKS (*Front de Libération Kanak et Socialiste*) meeting in the town of Hienghène, and travelled back to their *tribu*. Tiendanite, in two pick-up trucks. Before they made it home, they were forced to stop by a tree trunk that had been placed in the road. Immediately after they slowed to a halt, they were ambushed by a group of Caldoche snipers, who shot at them as they attempted to flee the trucks. Ten Kanak were killed and four were wounded. The massacre took place outside the house of a settler, Maurice Mitride, who became a suspect along with a group described by *Les Nouvelles* as a "clan of *métis*" (*Les Nouvelles*, 12/10/84). After fleeing Hienghène, these six men—Raoul Lapetite and four of his sons, Jess, José, Jacques and Jean-Claude, along with adopted Melanesian son Robert Sineimène—eventually surrendered to a judge and were flown to Nouméa where they were charged, along with Mitride, with pre-meditated murder.

In her unpublished dissertation (1996), Australian communications scholar Elaine Chanter explores the media's intense fixation on the mixed racial backgrounds of the murder suspects. *Les Nouvelles* in particular "gave prominence to the defense's argument that affinity of the perpetrators with Melanesian culture, and indeed that their Melanesian '*blood*' absolved them from any intention of killing the Kanaks" (Chanter 1996:274, emphasis mine). Chanter contends that arguments drawing on the suspects' mixed race heritage to prove their blamelessness constituted a discourse she calls "*la Calédonie Profonde*" (authentic Caledonia), a term that was used frequently by lawyers for the defense. The discourse of *la Calédonie Profonde* questioned the

legitimate “peoplehood” of the Kanak and their right to independence and refuted their claims to be the original inhabitants of the territory. It praised a more authentic alternative to the troublesome Kanak—the “true Caledonian,” who was, like Raoul Lapetite and his sons, *métis*. Ultimately, Chanter shows how the presentation of the suspects as *métis* “enabled the defense to appropriate key aspects of pro-independence discourse,” thereby undermining not only the prosecution’s argument but the entire premise of the Kanak political struggle (*ibid.* 281).

A central feature of the *Calédonie profonde* discourse was a depiction of the *métis* settlers’ unique harmony with nature. Chanter describes a series of photographs published in *Les Nouvelles* that picture Lapetite and his sons in a cleared field against a backdrop of majestic mountains. Drawing on the work of Bernard Smith, Chanter argues:

[This is a] colonial scene in the representation of domesticated space - the cut lawn and the cleared land - and there are no barriers between this domesticated space and nature. The natural is, in fact, a progression of the colonial; there is no tension between the two, only harmony. Colonialism has not only created domestic space; it has domesticated nature. The settler *métis* are in effect the personification of this harmony: colonial citizens who nominate themselves as ‘European’ but for whom, ‘all their life was the bush, deer, hunting, the mountains, dogs’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 2/10/86). [Chanter 1996:285]

While the *métis* settlers embodied a utopian settler vision—not just of possession, but *symbiosis* with territory—the increased militancy of area’s Kanak population threatened to destroy this order. Lapetite and his sons were described as having been “best friends” with the murdered Kanak until they were suddenly transformed into enemies “by independence propaganda.” The Kanak were represented as monstrous,

perversely duplicitous characters (in a clear echo of earlier colonial representations like Moncelon's ethnological report).

Les Nouvelles also published excerpts from a psychiatrist's report on Mitride, which described him as:

...[A] good son, good father, good husband, good worker, good citizen, good friend, attached to traditional values, to the land, to honor. He is moved, not by egotism nor by any low sentiment, and when he defends his own (*son bien*), he defends, above all else, the Good (*le Bien*). [Les Nouvelles, 10/20/87]

Chanter notes the repeated references to Mitride as "this citizen," and the link made between the massacre and "the Good." The article thus frames the massacre as a sort of act of "civic duty," an event in which "good citizens," "true Caledonians," were pushed to defend "'the gentle Hienghène valley' [from] the evil wreaked upon it by the unexpected political metamorphosis of the Kanak" (Chanter 1996:285). Chanter explains:

The "true Caledonian"...had its grounding in an imaginative geography designated as *la Calédonie profonde*...a place of unfettered natural and sociological harmony and serenity. Within it there was no place for those who, like Kanaks, sought to disrupt this order. Kanaks were not 'true Caledonians' just as they could not, within anti-independence discourse, constitute a "people" or reside in the "true Caledonia." [1996:15]

The murderers were merely good French men, "true Caledonians" who had been pushed too far.

Above all, the defense's argument centered around the notion that the existence of *métissage* made it impossible to present the Kanak and the settlers as "two communities in confrontation." At one point during the trial, a lawyer for the defense turned to the accused and exhorted the court room to: "Look at these 'white'

settlers!...Sineimène [Lapetite's adopted son] is almost blacker than Jean-Marie Tjibaou!" (*Les Nouvelles*, 10/30/87, in Chanter:287). Though the European community had largely ignored phenotype in the determination of identity throughout the entire colonial period, it suddenly came to the forefront as a way to prove that "the confrontation over independence was not racially based." *Métissage* ostensibly "attested to the intimacy of relationships forged between races, and the acceptance of *métis* as European demonstrated the racial tolerance in the territory" (*ibid.* 288). Most importantly, this rhetoric enabled loyalists to argue that *Kanak independence* was racist, an assertion that continues to be made by loyalists today.

In the end, an all white jury declared each of the accused "not guilty." In an article on the verdict, *Les Nouvelles* discussed Lapetite's return to his "ancestral home" in Hienghène, commenting that the proximity of the forest to his house was "propitious for a serene transition from incarceration to a life of freedom, for Raoul Lapetite above all, because he is a man of the earth, close to nature, trees, animals, which he has happily rediscovered" (*Les Nouvelles Caledoniennes*, 10/2/1986). In an earlier interview, Lapetite had also claimed he wanted to return to his land because: "It's sacred. We are part of the land" (*Les Nouvelles*, 2/10/86). As a "true Caledonian," Lapetite and the other accused *métis* did not just live on the land, they were *of* the land. The recognition of *métissage* thus allowed loyalists to "extend 'European' ancestry to pre-colonial times.... dissolving any disjuncture between the pre-colonial and the colonial" (Chanter 1996:290). Fixating on *métissage* as a socially meaningful phenomenon acted to *indigenize* the settlers and pathologize Kanak

independentists. The authenticity and rootedness of the *métis* made the Kanak “matter out of place” in their own home. In a triumph of settler colonial logic, public acknowledgement of *métissage* served not only to justify the continuing dispossession of indigenous people, but also the *dispossession of indigeneity itself*. *Métis* became “true Caledonians,” while the Kanak were made to appear culturally and temporally aberrant.

***Métissage* as a “Project of Disappearance”**

Within critical race theory, Kehaulani Kauanui argues, “land and indigeneity have been neglected in relation to the study of racial formations and the legal construction of race” (2008:10). Even though critical race theory has now expanded to include Latinos and Asian Americans in addition to African Americans, it still has “tended to offer a singular logic in explaining racial subordination to whites and the construction of whiteness” (*ibid.*). As Kauanui contends:

By failing to consider how the racialization of indigenous peoples, especially through the use of blood quantum classification, in particular follows what Andrea Smith would call a ‘genocidal logic’ (Smith 2006:28), rather than simply a logic of subordination or discrimination, critical race theory fails to consider how *whiteness constitutes a project of disappearance for Native peoples* rather than signifying privilege [as it does in the case of African Americans, cf: Cheryl Harris 1993]. [*ibid.* emphasis mine]

In the United States, and especially Hawaii, where Kauanui’s work primarily focuses, mixed racial family histories are evoked to “disqualify Natives who don’t measure up for entitlements and benefits.” Being identified as mixed race makes a Native person

“inauthentic,” which, Kauanui argues, “is both the desired outcome of assimilation and also a condition for dispossession.

Kauanui and other scholars like Andrea Smith (2010); Kimberly Tallbear (2003, 2009); Joanne Barker (2012) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2009, 2011) have made vital interventions into theories of racial formation by bringing together critical race theory with perspectives from critical indigeneity and settler colonial studies. Their work is extremely important and provides a framework for my own inquiry. However, these scholars all ground their theorizations within the liberal multicultural context of Anglo settler states. Though republican universalism is not *nearly* as race blind as it purports to be, the idea of using blood quantum to determine identity or citizenship status is *unthinkable* in France. Furthermore, in the French republican framework, proving oneself to be “biologically indigenous” does not guarantee specific “entitlements and benefits” as it does in the United States, Canada or Australia.¹⁵⁶

Indeed, as the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde* illustrates, racial formation in New Caledonia may actually grant *more* “authenticity” to biologically *métis* settlers than indigenous Kanak people. In a French republican settler state, identifying as *métis*

¹⁵⁶ I should note that, technically speaking, the Nouméa Accord placed some elements of special recognition not only on the Kanak, but also other citizens in New Caledonia. Namely, the Accord entailed special laws encouraging local employment and the “freezing” of the electoral body, so that only citizens who had been living in the territory for a certain period of time would be allowed to vote in territorial elections. Previously, anyone from metropolitan France, even if they had been resident in New Caledonia for a day, could vote in local elections. Given the influx of retired civil servants and French employees temporally stationed in New Caledonia and receiving hardship pay, the electoral balance had rapidly shifted away from pro-independence Kanak in favor of loyalist groups. The most important aspect of the new electoral laws instituted by the Nouméa Accord is that only those citizens who have lived in New Caledonia for *20 years* or longer may vote in the 2014 independence referendum.

potentially entails greater privileges than identifying as *either* “white” or “indigenous.” So while “whiteness is a project of disappearance” in Hawaii and other settler contexts, *métissage* is a project of disappearance in New Caledonia.

The hegemonic function of *métissage* is reinforced by a settler ideology of republican universalism. Through the recognition and promotion of *métissage*, the French state and loyalist government in New Caledonia reproduce racialized forms of social exclusion and deny Kanak rights to difference *while appearing as* champions of tolerance, anti-racist universalism and diversity. By imagining New Caledonia as a *pays métissé*, France absolves itself as a settler colonial power while perpetuating the structures of settler colonialism. The 1998 Nouméa Accords call for “the mistakes [of colonialism to be] recognized and the Kanak people’s confiscated identity restored, which equates in its mind with a recognition of its sovereignty, prior to the forging of a new sovereignty, shared in a common destiny.” Celebrating *métissage* allows French loyalists to argue that this common destiny already exists: that New Caledonia is a *métis* country with *métis* citizens and a venerable shared culture. These arguments completely ignore 160 years of settler colonial dispossession and the “racism of annihilation” (Bensa 1988) that justified seizure of Kanak lands, their removal onto reservations, and their nearly complete separation from settler society. As I have argued, this racism—based on the representation of Kanak as barely human, extreme cultural others—is also why years of biological *métissage* did not produce the social *métissage* that loyalist politicians are seeking to celebrate. *Métissage* offers Loyalist political parties a convenient rhetorical device for claiming that the Nouméa Accord

has already accomplished its goals. While the Accord was intended to put New Caledonia on the path towards decolonization; the rhetoric of *métissage* acts to reinscribe hegemonic republican values and frame Kanak independence—and indeed, even Kanak identity itself—as “racist” and counter to New Caledonia’s “common destiny.” Framing New Caledonia as a *pays métissé* is a key strategy by which “a number of key conservative politicians have attempted to move away from the commitments they made in signing the Noumea Accord” (MacLellan 2010:2).

The degree to which *métissage* now functions as a metonym (or a disguise) for republican universalism was vividly demonstrated during the events surrounding the French government’s official recognition of the Kanak flag. The flag-raising ceremony at the Haut Commissariat in Nouméa, the impromptu pro-independence parade and rally that immediately followed it and the seemingly endless debates afterwards in media and popular discourse foregrounded divergences between Kanak and Euro-Caledonian epistemologies of identity. The flag-raising also drew attention to conflicts between how each group envisaged relationships between different regimes of identification, such as nationality, citizenship and *communauté d’appartenance* (community of origin).

Raising Issues: *La Levée du Drapeau Kanak*

On July 17th, 2010, I woke up early to go to the Haut Commissariat with my video camera. A few days before, local authorities had announced that visiting French

Prime Minister François Fillon would preside over a ceremony there marking France's official recognition of the Kanak flag. I knew that the area around the Haut Commissariat—which was surrounded by an impressive wrought iron fence and pushed up onto a steep hill—would be packed with crowds, and I wanted to get close enough to film the historic event. When I arrived, the surrounding blocks were already overwhelmed by throngs of people—many shifting back and forth excitedly, carrying various sizes of Kanak flags, others wearing pained expressions and glancing nervously at the growing crowd. Gently pushing myself past a group of gendarmes posted on the corner, I made my way through the gate onto the grounds of the Haussariat. I eventually managed to find a spot only a few dozen meters from the two flag poles standing at center stage. The crowd closest to the action contained a veritable “who's who” of New Caledonian civic life: the President of the South Province and head of the loyalist RPCR parliamentary representative, Gaël Yanno; various members of the Kanak customary senate; and the High Commissioner himself, dressed in a retro-colonial starched-white uniform with gold-accented *képi*.

The ceremony began as soon as the Prime Minister Fillon entered the grounds, surrounded by guards and accompanied by respectful applause. Next, some of the notables present rose to make brief speeches behind a microphone podium. Julien Boanemoui, a *chef* from the Ajie-Aro customary region and then president of the Kanak customary senate addressed Fillon directly in his remarks:

Monsieur Prime Minister, this flag that we present is a powerful symbol of recognition and hope for us all, but particularly for our youth, who will feel

from this moment on respected, worthy and taken into consideration. For the first time, our flag will fly officially, next to the flag of the Republic.

After the speeches ended, two men in traditional costume from the *Wé ce ca* dance group blew loudly on conch shells and all eyes turned towards the two flagpoles. In total silence, save for the chirping of birds, the *tricolore* and the Kanak flag rose slowly above the crowd, side by side, for the first time. When the flags reached their apex, a children's choir, their voices eager and clear, began to sing the Marseillaise: *Allons enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivée!...Aux armes citoyens, formez vos bataillons! Marchons, marchons! Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons.* Arise children of the fatherland, The day of glory has arrived!...To arms citizens! Form your battalions! March, march! Let impure blood water our furrows...

At the bottom of the hill, outside the fence, a group of a hundred or so Kanak—mostly young people—had assembled. Behind metal barriers and a line of gendarmes, they waved a motley sea of Kanak flags and printed cloth and chanted loudly: *Fillon au Mwâ Kâa! Fillon au Mwâ Kâa! Fillon au Mwâ Kâa!* Fillon to the Mwâ Kâa! Fillon to the Mwâ Kâa!¹⁵⁷ When the official ceremony had concluded and crowds began to exit the Haussariat grounds, the group held a Kanak flag on top of the compound's iron gate, forcing everyone who passed—including Fillon himself—to walk underneath it.

¹⁵⁷ The Mwâ Kâa is a large carved “totem pole” representing all eight Kanak customary regions. It was installed in Nouméa in 2003 and remains the only permanent symbol of Kanak identity in downtown Nouméa.



Fig. 7.4. The author and friends after the flag raising.



Fig. 7.5. Celebration near Mwâ Kâa after flag raising (photo by author).

For most Kanak people I knew, seeing the Kanak flag raised on a national edifice—in the presence of the French Prime Minister no less—was profoundly meaningful. The Nouméa Accords stipulate that New Caledonia must adopt a new “identity symbol” (along with an anthem, new currency designs and a national motto) by 2014, and many hoped that the flag raising meant the Kanak flag would come to permanently represent the territory. At the same time, as the president of the North Province, Paul Néaoutyine pointed out, the flag-raising wasn’t really the historical event the government was making it out to be, “since the Kanak- ruled North (and Islands) provinces had flown both flags together since 1988” (Chappell 2011:477). Indeed, some of my friends worried that the loyalist government’s decision to raise the flag was part of a strategy to further delay the question of actual independence while appearing to take Kanak claims seriously. They feared that the flag raising might not really represent change, but the maintenance of the status quo—the recognition of Kanak identity, but only as a regional *cultural* identity subsumed *within* French national identity. In fact, Pierre Frogier, the president of the South Province and the man responsible for the government’s decision to raise the flag, had speculated to *Les Nouvelles* that, “once raised, the Kanak flag would never come down, *and neither would the tricolore*; hence, the country would remain autonomous within, rather than becoming independent from, France” (*Les Nouvelles*, 7/10/2010; in Chappell 2011:47, emphasis mine).

Despite these concerns, even my most skeptical friends felt that the government’s decision to recognizing the Kanak flag as a “legitimate symbol” of New

Caledonia indicated a significant shift in France’s consideration of indigenous Kanak identity. But as debates over the flag continued in the following weeks, it became clear that *even* this might not actually be true—because loyalist politicians and the Euro-caledonian public appeared to evaluate the symbolic content of the flag as object and the flag raising as an event in totally different ways than the Kanak did. This disjunct ultimately stemmed from conflicting epistemologies of identity and representation—divergences that were clear starting with the flag raising ceremony itself. For instance: the choice to have a children’s choir sing the *Marseillaise* as the French *tricolore* and Kanak flag flew side by side, hints at the government’s understanding of Kanak identity and its representations as encompassed by French nationality.¹⁵⁸ The young voices enjoining the crowds, as “children of the fatherland,” to “arise” and “come to arms” did not give one the impression that the event we were witnessing was really about the long-awaited recognition of the legitimacy of an indigenous people, finally released from the yoke of French colonialism. Instead the flag raising, much like the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution critiqued by Laurent Dubois in the article *La République Métissée* (2000:20):

Placed the “multiculturalism” of France’s own history on display in a way that did not confront the broader structural contradictions of a system that has long celebrated its universalism and tolerance while maintaining structures of racial and economic exclusion.

¹⁵⁸ Though I fixated on the children singing the *Marseillaise*, the friends who watched my video recording of the event saw something else entirely. When the two flags reached the top of the poles, the Kanak flag floated vigorously in the breeze, while the French flag hung flaccidly. This was interpreted as visual evidence of ancestors; making their presence known by blowing on the flag—an auspicious sign of their blessing for the future nation of Kanaky. I was asked over and over for dvd copies of the clip by friends who wanted to be able to re-witness this moment, and the vision for the future they saw contained in it.

In this way, the loyalist government's "recognition" of the Kanak flag may be little different from the celebration of "*métissage*" of New Caledonian society— a Republican *legerdemain* by which the state points to difference while sweeping it under the rug with the same gesture.

Despite agreeing to let the Kanak flag fly alongside the French *tricolore* on public buildings and during ceremonial occasions, Pierre Frogier remains fervently anti-independence. As he told *Les Nouvelles* (2/10/10), "We would like the blue, white and red flag to continue to fly everywhere in New Caledonia, while France retains the authority over sovereignty. That has always been, remains and will always remain my political fight." Frogier added that although he knows, "that the independence supporters are very attached to their flag," Euro-Caledonians, "don't recognize their [Kanak] flag. It is for us a *symbol of division and exclusion*" (emphasis mine). Thus republican citizenship, symbolized by the French flag, is inclusive and unifying; while Kanak citizenship, Kanak sovereignty, and the Kanak flag, could only represent exclusion and social fragmentation. In Frogier's view, one can be a French citizen of Kanak origin, but not a Kanak citizen of French origin. The Kanak flag is not a "national symbol" like the *tricolore*, but an "identity symbol." Along the same lines, in another ceremony held at the provincial government a few days after the initial flag-raising, Frogier made a point to refer to the *tricolore* as a "*drapeau national, celui de la souveraineté de la France*" [the national flag, of the sovereignty of France] and the Kanak flag as the "*drapeau identitaire Kanak*" [the Kanak identity flag]. For Frogier

and other loyalists, French citizenship is based on “universal values” that Kanak culture does not contain. As Jean-Marie Tjibaou lamented in the 1980s, during the height of *Les Événements*:

If today I can share with a non-Kanak of this country that which I possess of French culture, it is impossible for him to share with me the universal element contained within my culture. [in Waddell 2008:11]

As reactions to the flag raising suggest, Tjibaou’s observation remains true today.

Though the Nouméa Accords may call for it, there can be no real “shared common destiny” in New Caledonia without reciprocity, just as there can be no real social *métissage*. Republican settler colonialism in New Caledonia continues to structure the relationship between the Euro-Caledonian and Kanak populations as one of domination, rather than reciprocity.

“Sharing in One Direction Only”

Though he works for the government (as the “Director of Culture, the Condition of Women and Citizenship”) Régis Vendegou had no compunctions about venting his frustrations to me, particularly regarding fellow government officials’ views on the Kanak flag. In addition to his position with the government, Vendegou is a customary chief from the Ile de Pins. As I sat in his office, he took a long swig of coffee, leaned in over his desk and launched into a long list of the things wrong with the loyalists’ approach towards the Kanak flag and the notion of “shared identity symbols” more broadly:

The idea of “shared identity symbols,” as stipulated in the Nouméa Accords? For the Kanak, what is a flag? It’s just a piece of cloth. We never had flags. And currency? Only in the Ajie-Aro region did they use “money” [shell currency], we exchanged yams and fish, depending on whether you were an ocean or land clan. And people didn’t have anthems to represent their “identity.” In some ways, isn’t adopting these things as “identity signs” already following the ways of the French or Western system? Living by their rules and accepting their culture?

They completely misunderstand the flag. The *flèche faitière* [roof carving] on the flag is already a symbol of welcome. If you see one in the distance you know, “Oh! There is a *case*!” You can tell by the symbols in the carving, who is the clan, what is their totem, their identity, and so on. So with the Kanak flag, everyone who sees the flag will look and know, “Here is a *case*. Here is Calédonie, *in the Pacific*.” But the whites don’t get it. They think having the symbol of the *flèche faitière* is somehow racist, because it must mean the country is only for Kanak. The whites talk of *partage* [sharing], but it’s only sharing in one direction—them towards us. They not only make up the rules, but they tell us how we have to follow them. They tell us how we must cut the cake, and then, they tell us, “actually now that you’ve cut it, you can only take a quarter of it.”

Many of the young people I knew had similar views. Holsh (a close friend of rapper Ybal Khan) told me, “As for the flag, what we are looking for is simple recognition. People will look at it and say, ‘Ah, we’re in Kanak country. It’s our country too, but first, it’s Kanak country.’” In the understanding of most Kanak youth, the special relationship Kanak have to country does not prohibit others from living on and sharing the land, as non-indigenous Caledonians have done for the last 170-odd years. However, the recognition of Kanak identity’s special connection to land—something Holsh and other young people see as represented by the Kanak flag, is key. Although the flag represents Kanak ties to the land, it does not represent a citizenship only

accessible to Kanak.¹⁵⁹ As the first article of the FLNKS constitution, presented by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1987 maintained, “The Kanak people are a free unified and sovereign national a pluri-ethnic community, based on the solidarity of its elements” (in Leblic, 2007:279).¹⁶⁰ Along the same lines, in 1983, Caldoche FLNKS activist Pierre Declerq (who was later assassinated loyalist sniper) explained:

The term Kanak does not designate an ethnicity, nor a race. The objective of a Kanak society signifies the construction of a multiracial people, fraternal and rooted in solidarity. This doesn't mean that the future society will be entirely Melanesian. *The right to difference will be respected but we will ensure that it*

¹⁵⁹ In discussing the flag, young people also cited the fundamental place of land within Kanak constructions of identity as one of the reasons they did not identify with the notion of *citoyenneté*, or citizenship, doggedly promoted in post-Nouméa Accords government discourse. Citizenship, *version française*, is seen by many young Kanak people as superficial form of identification, more of a bureaucratic assignation than a meaningful mode of attachment. One more than one occasion I was told, “Citizenship came from the outside. It is something that was imposed on us.” This is one alternative view of the meaning of citizenship proposed to me:

“The French idea of citizenship, it's ‘which Mairie (townhall/municipality) are you registered to vote?’ That's not my citizenship. My clan's ancestor—a lizard—sprung from the land in a specific location in Maré. That is where my citizenship is. It comes from the land.”

¹⁶⁰ The preamble of the 1987 FLNKS constitution also stresses the pluri-ethnic character of the future nation of Kanaky as well as the role of *la coutume*: “We the Kanak people, proud of our past and our ancestors who protested against oppression and gave their blood for the struggle for liberty, deeply attached to our traditions, setting up a free, united and sovereign national community, based on the solidarity of the elements of various origins which form it, we solemnly affirm that our custom expresses our main cultural values that our the basis of our social life; we also affirm that the clan, the organic element of the Kanak society, is the traditional owner of the lands according to the customary rules and in respect for the nation's own good; we set up the Kanak state which is a secular socio-democratic republic, where the national sovereignty belongs to the people who vote for it. The Custom works towards the expression of the popular sovereignty; we declare our support for the universal Declaration of the Rights of Man dated Dec 10th, 1948, and we guarantee the respect for individual and common liberties, the right to strike and union rights. Nobody can be subjected to the death penalty; we declare our support for the charter of the UN and we affirm that we shall spare no effort to reinforce the solidarity between the people and the states of the Pacific, and to cooperate with all nations; we affirm our refusal of nuclear weapons. This preamble had constitutional value.”

does not involve a relationship of...domination of one ethnicity over another.
[Emphasis mine]¹⁶¹

Declercq cannily identifies the relations of dominance cloaked with the republican promise of universalism. As Régis told me, “the whites talk of sharing, but it’s only sharing in one direction.”

Loyalists also described Kanak sovereignty as “racist” three years before the flag raising, after the government moved to pass legislation restricting the right to vote in local elections to those resident in New Caledonia for at least ten years. On that occasion, Pierre Frogier argued that restricting recent immigrants’ right to vote in New Caledonia “will install a de-facto apartheid...a kind of hereditary right to vote, *a right of blood as opposed to our accepted French principle of the right of soil*...No one has the right to re-write history” (*Agence France Presse*, 12/12/2006, emphasis mine). As Patrick Wolfe (2006:288) argues, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.” Loyalists like Frogier assume Kanak sovereignty must entail the same inescapable logic of territoriality—that Kanak independence would mean that all non-Kanak would be forced to leave the land. This is why they consider the Kanak flag, as a “symbol of New Caledonia,” to be racist and exclusionary. Yet this is not how Kanak epistemology constructs belonging and identity. Kanak sovereignty would not mean the severing of other groups’ relationships with land. The idea that Kanak sovereignty must necessarily *detract* from “universal rights” has been part of the

¹⁶¹ Le terme Kanak ne désigne pas une ethnie, ni une race. L’objectif d’une société kanak signifie la construction d’un peuple multiracial, solidaire et fraternel. Cela ne veut pas dire que la future société sera entièrement mélanésienne. Le droit à la différence sera respecté mais nous ferons en sorte que cela n’entraîne pas de rapport de...domination d’une ethnie sur l’autre.

arguments against Kanak independence from the very beginning. As François

Mitterrand said of Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1988:

[Mr. Tjibaou] is fighting for the independence of New Caledonia and, for him, New Caledonia means, first and foremost, the Kanak People. Maybe I am not doing justice to his thinking... But I do not believe that the historical precedence of the Kanak people on this land is an adequate basis for rights. History meets history: the New Caledonians of European origin have also, through their work, fashioned the soil, nurtured themselves on its fruits and put down deep roots. [In MokkaDEM 2004:41]

Granting rights based on the specificity of Kanak “roots” would, in Mitterrand’s view, require that settlers’ “roots to the land that has nurtured them” be torn out completely.¹⁶²

¹⁶²An even more insidious form of racism against Kanak involves a complete denial of Kanak indigeneity. It is claimed with surprising frequency that Kanak are *not* in fact the original inhabitants of New Caledonia. Instead, they are said to have arrived *after* either the “Negrito people” or the “Lapita People” (the “true” indigenous people of New Caledonia), who they subsequently “conquered and colonized.” If *métissage* discourse indigenizes settlers, than these arguments “settler-ize” the indigenous Kanak (and perform the same function of absolving settlers of responsibility for Kanak dispossession). In a recent issue of the quarterly *Revue Culturelle & Identitaire* of the *Fondation des Pionniers de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (a Caldoche cultural association), the group’s president, Raymond Guépy (scion of a well-known Caldoche family) laments recent events, including the Kanak flag-raising and violent conflict between Kanak at the airport in Maré over employee grievances and the cost of intra-island flights. Guépy writes: “Don’t forget that the Kanak need to create a common destiny (we have the events in Maré to remind us of that) because the myth of the Kanak people is a recent act relative to the history of asiatic and european civilizations. The Kanak themselves have a moment in their history when they colonized the Country, when it was already occupied by Austronesians, ‘the Negritos.’ Stop speaking about ‘History,’ it is necessary to examine it in a systematic and non-partial manner.” I also think it’s worth describing here the content of a Facebook conversation I had shortly after the Kanak flag raising (it’s all data!). Rapper Ybal Khan had posted on his page: “*Even if it changes almost nothing in our lives, it still makes me happy to see the flag of Kanaky flying in Nouméa! Even if it displeases Monsieur the Mayor!!! LOL*”). One of Ybal’s Facebook friends, a Métro who DJs in Noumeea under the name “Tarmak” (which is how he knows Ybal) responded: “*What I think people are most displeased about is the fact that the ‘Kanyak’ flag has a strong insurrectional connotation, outside the principles of the Nouméa Accord and the construction of a common destiny...*” Most likely procrastinating from writing fieldnotes, I decided to join the fray myself and responded to “Tarmak”: *Tarmak, if you are alleging that the Kanak flag has a ‘strong insurrectional*

Equating Kanak sovereignty (or an independent nation of Kanaky) with the expulsion of non-Kanak extends from of a notion of “blood” not present in Kanak forms of indigeneity or citizenship. Mitterand and Frogier’s comments are similar to critiques of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement as “neo-racist” and “discriminatory” (ie: Sharma 2010). But in the Kanak case, as in the Hawaiian case, as Dean Saranillo (nd:9) argues, “notions of indigeneity [are based on] an ‘expansive inclusivity,’ one that does not dissolve Indigenous difference and sovereignty, nor appropriate a blood logic that argues for...expulsion.” The situation in New Caledonia is unique, however, because opposition to Kanak sovereignty (as manifested in responses to the Kanak flag raising) draws not only on the “genocidal blood logics of settler colonialism” (Wolfe 2006), but also on what Farhad Khosrokhavar calls the “specific violence of abstract universalism,” as I explore below.

connotation, 'one could equally say that the French flag has a connotation of violence and colonialism,' to which Ybal Khan responded, "Tate isn't wrong!" Tarmak rejoined, "The French flag symbolizes the Revolution, colonialism arrived later. On the contrary, the FLNKS flag has been from the beginning a symbol of revolt...In fact if you go back further in history, the first people here were the Lapitas, they were colonized by the Kanak, who eradicated them." This discursive phenomenon, in which it is claimed that the Kanak are themselves settler colonialists, is worth exploring in more depth elsewhere.



Fig. 7.6. “Frogier, go fuck yourself with your Kanak flag.” On the main road near Koumac (a heavily Caldoche community) on the northwest coast of the Grand Terre (author’s photo).

Flags and Fears of “Communitarian Tendencies”

Though Frogier’s party, RPCR (*Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République*), supported the decision to raise the Kanak flag, most of the other major loyalist parties—especially *Calédonie ensemble*, led by former territorial president Philippe Gomès—expressed strong opposition to the resolution. In several communities with sizable Caldoche populations (including the town of La Foa, where Gomès is a former mayor), officials defied the territorial government by refusing to raise the Kanak flag at all. A group of politicians and other individuals opposed to the government’s official adoption of the flag as an identity symbol organized the *Collectif Pour un Drapeau Commun* [Collective for a Common Flag]. Over the next

two years, the Collective held meetings and rallies to protest the Kanak flag while lobbying for it to be replaced by a flag “in which *all* Caledonians would recognize themselves.” Current mayor of La Foa, and collective member Corinne Voisin declares (in *Les Nouvelles*, 4/12/11):

Pierre Frogier’s proposition to raise the FLNKS flag does not respect the Nouméa Accord and is a source of division. They [the government] didn’t organize any debates, as if one could just impose a flag on the population! Charles Pidjot and Louis Kotra Uregeï [the head of the independentist Union Calédonienne and Parti Travailleiste parties, respectively] have gone as far as to impose an ultimatum on mayors who have, democratically, refused to raise the flag. This is not democracy!

In Voisin’s view, the Kanak flag has been “imposed on the population” which it simultaneously works to divide.¹⁶³ The characterization of the Kanak flag as a “divisive” threat to democratic civil peace enabled the *Collectif pour un Drapeau Commun* to position itself as a crusader for “democracy,” “tolerance” and “equal rights.” The Collective’s activities were enthusiastically covered by *Les Nouvelles*, 4/12/11), which described one of its protest marches as “plusieurs couleurs pour un seul drapeau” [many colors for one single flag]:

[The march was] an honest success, if not a triumph. Whites were at least a half of those there, but communities of all origins were also represented. *La Brousse* [the “bush,” meaning the rural northwest regions of the Grand Terre where most Caldoche live] was definitely there, in all of its *métissage*.

Though *Les Nouvelles* mentions that the protest was mostly attended by whites, the newspaper makes sure to emphasize that the crowd was otherwise diverse and

¹⁶³ Voisin seems completely oblivious to the fact that the French flag was imposed on the Kanak against their will, in an act that has led to continuing structural divisions and inequalities between the Kanak and Euro-Caledonian populations.

represented New Caledonian *métissage*. Echoing the discourses surrounding the Hienghène massacre thirty years earlier, loyalist media use the “many colors” and “*métissage*” of people against the Kanak flag to preempt any arguments connecting opposition to the flag with a colonial history of racialized oppression.

On August 25th, 2010, the Collective organized a “town hall” style meeting held in an enormous rented-out ballroom in one of the tourist hotels near Anse Vata beach. I went along with a handful of Kanak friends. Of the three hundred plus people at the meeting, there were maybe ten Kanak. Amongst the sea of white faces in the ballroom were some very upset-looking people. The attendees appeared shell-shocked that the government had accepted the Kanak flag as legitimate symbol of New Caledonia. The decision, they said, did not reflect “the will of the people.” More importantly, it was dangerously counter to the notion of the “common destiny” described in the Nouméa Accord and ignored the “shared culture” of the “Caledonian People.” One woman vigorously waved her hand in the air as soon as the floor was opened for comments, and explained:

We must not mix-up nationality, citizenship, identity. These are not the same things. As for the question of the flag, in what register are we? We are not in the register of nationality, we have one: the French nationality. If Caledonians want to change it, they can do it, but later because there is a time for everything. Today, we are in the time of identity. But what identity? It doesn't concern individual identities, or multiple identities. It concerns the identity of the country, *de la Calédonie*... We talk a lot about differences, but who talks about what brings us together, who talks about what is shared in their lives, familial, emotional, professional sharing, between the village, *la tribu* and the city. Why can't a flag translate all that is in our veins, in our families, on our plates, this is to say all the cultures in this country and one Caledonian heart. It tells us also, this agreement, that the flag as an identity sign of the country must translate Kanak identity and the future shared between all... Today, Kanak identity is a

recognized identity and Kanak have reasons to be proud. But the Nouméa Accord is less explicit about other identities, or rather, how to combine them together, including Kanak identity, and interweave them... We do not want to anchor ourselves in this communitarian tendency that reduces us to our origins... We aren't asking the independentists to abandon their flag, we are telling them that they must not deny the reality of this country. Because it is a denial to want to raise this flag up to the rank of the country's flag. They are wrong. Because if the Kanak have never relinquished their culture, they have the culture, the tools, the men, the thought and the faith to recognize what we are saying. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, let us not forget that he lived so that Kanak identity would live today, but he died so that our country could live, strong, reconciled and proud. Jean-Marie Tjibaou is a Kanak, but one could say today that he is the martyr of all Caledonians... We have no right to be defeatist, because this combat for the *drapeau commun* is not a combat between Caledonians. It is the combat of Caledonians, of all Caledonians, for the truth of their country. Caledonians, we cannot kill the truth! [Underlined emphases mine]



Fig. 7.7. The meeting organized by the *Collectif pour un Drapeau Commun* (author's photo).

While most Kanak think of their indigenous identity both as the grounds for sovereignty claims and the creation of a nation—represented by the Kanak flag—this woman instead understands Kanak identity as an “individual identity” or one of “multiple identities,” that does not represent “the truth of Caledonia.” The Kanak flag cannot represent “all that is in our veins, in our families, on our plates”—because those things are “Caledonian,” not Kanak. Moreover, she claims that Kanak identity has been “recognized” and colonial wrongs addressed—what about the “other identities” in New Calenodia? In her view, adopting the Kanak flag as a symbol of New Caledonia ignores the identities of other communities. A flag must represent a country, and a country cannot be made up of “multiple identities,” but must “combine them together...interweave them.” Recognizing the Kanak flag is, in this way, “anchor[ing] ourselves in this *communitarian tendency* that reduces us to our origins” (emphasis mine). As Rousseau (1762) argued, republican sovereignty is inalienable and indivisible: “A nation must express not the individual but the general will. The general will is made up not of the sum of all special interests, the common interest that unites them all.” As this woman’s comments (and many other similar ones at the meeting) made clear, it seemed impossible for the Euro-Caledonians attendees to reconcile indigenous sovereignty—premised on the notion of difference as the basis for rights—with republican sovereignty. Kanak claims, as represented by the Kanak

flag, could only be seen as posing a “communitarian” threat to civil cohesion, as detracting from *everyone’s* citizenship.¹⁶⁴

***Métissage*, “Shared Citizenship” and Reciprocity**

Debates over the flag raising continued to dominate both popular and media discourses up through the end of September, when New Caledonia holds its annual “Citizenship Day” celebrations. Given the already intense scrutiny now directed at the government regarding matters of “citizenship” and “shared identity,” officials seemed especially anxious to promote an image of New Caledonian unity. The government

¹⁶⁴ Bianca Henin, the head of New Caledonia’s Nation Front party, adopted an even stronger Republican viewpoint (not surprisingly). She also suggested that if the nation of Kanaky should ever come to be, the lives of Kanak who had not supported independence would be in direct danger. Here she is clearly drawing on the aftermath of the Algerian war, when thousands of *Harkis* (pro-French Algerians), were repatriated to France for their own safety. Needless to say, despite her fear mongering, the situation in New Caledonia is not analogous. However, parallels between Algeria and New Caledonia are frequently drawn by loyalists to conjure up the specter of an independent Kanak where all non-Kanak would be violently expelled. I include here the entirety of Henin’s comments, mostly just to illustrate how extreme some loyalist viewpoints are. Regardless, Henin received boisterous applause as soon as finished speaking and sat down: “I congratulate the mayors who have not raised the FLNKS flag because they are defending our future. We have always defended the *drapeau bleu, blanc, rouge* so that New Caledonia stays French. First because we are proud to be French, because it is our history because it is the three colors of our republic, because she has always helped us and above all always financed us... The Prime Minister of France has, for the first time in the French republic, dared to raise an independentist flag on an edifice of the French state. This will give ideas to the Corsicans... This Kanak flag is a scandalous drift away from the Nouméa Accord. A part of the Melanesians does not want it and we must protect them so that they don’t become the first target of Kanaky. All regions, whether Brittany or Polynesia, possess emblems that bring them together, and so, in order for our children to be proud of us tomorrow, as they raise their eyes and look to the north and the south of our little island, flag of peace, I am with you. Caledonian first and always French. Vive la *Calédonie Française*.” Even worse, the day the Kanak flag was raised, this was posted on the blog run by New Caledonian’s National Front Party: “Treachery! Traitor! There should be no “middle ground.” New Caledonia is a French territory and it should remain one...or become an independent country. But in the case of independence, this must be taken literally. In this case these barefoot beggars should not hope for a penny from the Métropole!”

distributed a twenty-four-page publication entitled *Les Cahiers de la Citoyenneté* (Citizenship Notebooks), printed in color on glossy broadsheet paper. Inside were a dozen short essays on “citizenship” written by elected officials, local writers and other notables, meant to represent a cross-section of the New Caledonian population. The manner in which these essays discuss citizenship points to the profound disjuncture between Kanak sovereignty claims and hegemonic, republican settler colonial ideologies. Ultimately, this disjuncture leads us back to the discussion of *métissage* that opened this chapter.

In his essay for the publication, “*La Citoyenneté calédonienne selon la Fondation des Pionniers*” (Caledonian Citizenship according to the Foundation of Pioneers), Bernard Song presents the view of the Foundation of Pioneers, an association formed to “defend the interests of Caledonians, by pointing out that the descendants of pioneers [Caldoches] have things to say about the management and evolution of their country.”¹⁶⁵ Song (who coincidentally is from a *métis* French/Chinese family), starts by noting that “citizenship and nationality do not necessarily coincide,” and that it is fully possible to have a New Caledonian “citizenship” while maintaining a French “nationality” (9). Citizenship, Song explains, “permits a subject to freely make the choice of his lifestyle.” However, he adds:

In a traditional social structure each individual’s place is predetermined at birth. Modern societies are contractual: identities, roles, social functions can constantly be redefined, while in traditional societies they are statutory.

¹⁶⁵ From their website: <http://www.fondationdespionniers.com/>

According to Song, Kanak identity “is determined at birth,” and as such, cannot act as the basis of a “modern society,” in which identities “can constantly be redefined.” He continues:

The construction of a citizenship must first of all welcome populations from a traditional world in evolution, by offering them a social model bearing human and universal values. [*ibid.*]

In this view, the Kanak must be “welcomed” as citizens on their own land.

Furthermore, since Kanak culture is still “in evolution” and provides no “social model bearing human and universal values,” a model must be “offered to them” (presumably by the Euro-Caledonian community). Here it is worth recalling Régis Vendegou’s comment that “the whites only share in one direction.”

Song goes on to describe how this New Caledonian citizenship could be constructed. First, in terms of access to training and employment, “citizens should have to meet certain criteria related to their social situation rather than their ethnic origin.” This is because, “the application of social rather than ethnic criteria draws on the pertinence of a demographic context where *métissage is obvious and the goal is the construction of a common destiny*” (emphasis mine). The existence of *métissage* in New Caledonia thereby makes the recognition or granting of any rights based on difference unnecessary. Next Song asserts that “citizenship is a social connection, meaning a certain, *modern mode* of relating between people from one’s country. The citizen is one who comports themselves in a certain fashion towards others, *with a certain respect for universal values*” (emphases mine). Having previously referred to the Kanak as a “traditional society” several times, Song seems to be insinuating here

that citizenship requires a “modern mode” of relating that is *unlike* the Kanak mode (whatever he imagines that to be). A citizen must have respect for “universal values” (which indigenous sovereignty claims contradict).

Song concludes his essay with more thoughts on the importance of “shared symbols” and “respect.” In order to construct a shared citizenship, he suggests, New Caledonia needs shared *lieux de memoire*. He proposes for example, “the monument marking the *prise de possession* in Pouébo, Ataï’s banyan tree in Sarraméa [where he was killed], battle fields from the 1878 revolt in Boulaparis and Goura Déva, the mining village at Tiébaghi, the Pilou mine in Poum and other privileged sites of memory.” Every single one of the sites Song lists are locations defined by settler colonialism. They each represent the dispossession of Kanak persons, lands and lives. Song seems completely oblivious to this, but notes:

Respect must not be passive. We must not just experience cultural diversity but valorize it and develop it as our original patrimony. We must encourage, and multiply the places, occasions and days like the ones organized at the Tjibaou Center. This allows one to learn about and understand other cultures, even if it requires effort and personal curiosity to go there.

In short, Kanak must accept the “universal values” contained within the French model of citizenship, and in return, Euro-Caledonians will make the effort to go to a museum.

Song’s missive on Caledonian citizenship illustrates the degree to which loyalist discourses on the “common destiny” and “*métissage*” are predicated on the maintenance of settler colonial structures of domination and the disavowal of difference rather than exchange or reciprocity. Loyalist claims that the Kanak flag and Kanak sovereignty are “racist,” “divisive” and “counter to the common destiny”

completely ignore and obscure ongoing structures of republican settler colonialism in New Caledonia. Settler colonialism—*not Kanak sovereignty*—is racist, divisive and counter to a New Caledonian common destiny. Settler colonialism has led to the profound economic and social marginalization of Kanak. This ongoing marginalization is why actual *métissage* remains non-existent in New Caledonia. By framing New Caledonia as a *pays métisée*, loyalists delegitimize Kanak sovereignty by undermining Kanak claims to indigeneity and difference. At the same time, *métissage* discourse works to *indigenize* settlers. Nothing, as Hassan told me, is clear anymore.

Just as there are different epistemologies of identity—ways of “making persons,” there are different theories of citizenship—ways of “making a People.” Perhaps the Kanak flag raising *could* represent a step towards creating Kanaky. I conclude here with an anecdote that suggests such a possibility. The week following the flag raising ceremony at the Haut Commissariat, Charly Pidjot, the head of FLNKS, appeared as a guest on local news talk show *Faut qu'on se parle* (broadcast on state-owned channel RFO). He responded to questions sent in by audience members, many of which expressed opposition to the Kanak flag as “racist.” One question in particular challenged the legitimacy of the Kanak flag based on the perceived illegitimacy of Kanak cultural difference. The questioner inquired: “Why, at this moment when we are speaking about identity symbols, do you use money instead of traditional Kanak exchange valuables in *la coutume*?”

The question references the fact that in the present day, Kanak often use paper money instead of traditional shell money or yams in custom exchanges. Its phrasing implies that Kanak are no longer manifesting the appropriate signifiers of difference necessary to claim rights and recognition based on an indigenous identity. Kanak are really just Caledonians like everybody else. This is the same logic employed in loyalist discourses on *métissage*: if all Caledonians are *métis*, then no one identity should be singled out and granted special rights. Yet just as racial phenotype does not equate with identity, objects—like paper money—acquire value and meaning through events, actions and the roles they play in relationships. Pidjot responded to the question in a way that linked a Kanak epistemology of identity with a theory of citizenship in a nascent Kanaky:

When we are speaking of *la coutume*, you can't really caricaturize it and say that we're using money instead of traditional exchange valuables. The traditional valuable is money and money is a traditional exchange object. It is more in the action, in the words that accompany it, which symbolize the event, the moment of reflection that one is in, that gives force to *la coutume*...

And I want to make this clear, because this gesture—there are ingredients one can put inside of it— and it can be enacted by any citizen of this country. Because...it is this particularity that means that... one could say that we are a *Peuple en devenir* [in the process of becoming a People], because we have these values.

If Pidjot is right, and all the groups in New Caledonia are “in the process of becoming a People,” this “becoming” was made possible by the struggles of many generations, within and against the structures of the French republican settler state, to create Kanaky.

- Conclusion -

***LA TRIBU DANS LA VILLE:*
IMAGINING SPACES OF EMPANCIATION IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE**

This dissertation has explored what it means to assert indigeneity in a French republican settler context. It has also examined how a generation is constituted and framed as a socio-political entity by historical events and certain ways of imagining the future. Drawing on their particular *situatedness*—within history, cultural logics, networks of relationships and settler state structures—Kanak youth have developed strategies for navigating the political and social uncertainty of life in Nouméa, and New Caledonia more broadly. I have argued that cultural production—and the creation and mobilization of cultural representations in general—is central to these strategies. In some ways, the social processes and networks of relationships surrounding cultural production enable young people to *produce themselves* as individuals, as indigenous citizens and as Kanak persons. I have framed cultural production as a form labor undertaken by Kanak youth to create space for indigenous sovereignty. Creating such a space is no small challenge in New Caledonia, where hegemonic republican and settler colonial ideologies *both* work to dispossess and efface indigenous presence and cultural difference. Both structures act in concert to undermine the political content of indigenous identity and its visibility in the public sphere. Yet the young people I worked with in Nouméa were finding ways to turn “niches” into “handles.” Whether within *associations de loi 1901*, or by other means, they are using the French settler state structures in order to resist, reshape and reimagine the form of the state itself. In

so doing, they are formulating distinctive visions of indigenous sovereignty and citizenship and making claims about the types of futures possible for Kanak people.

Kanak youth are engaged in a struggle to create Kanaky. They do so in the face of ongoing settler colonial dispossession. Several of these chapters have noted how Nouméa (*la ville blanche*, or “white city”) functions as a settler colonial space. For example, much of the discourse of the “youth crisis” is premised on an assumption that indigenous Kanak culture and identity are “incompatible” with urban life. As Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds (2010:11) write:

Settler cities were discursively narrated as spaces of progress, commerce and modernity—spaces of the highest stage of development in the Western historicizing narrative aggressively exclusive of Indigenous peoples...the creation of this space presupposed and functioned on the discursive production of an absence of Indigenous peoples.

Indeed, With its port, villas, cafés and épiceries, Nouméa resembles a small provincial capital on the Cote D’Azur, far more than a city in Melanesia. As Henri Lefebvre argues, spaces often obscure the conditions of their own production. The *Frenchness* of Nouméa has come to seem natural, inevitable. Settler colonialism reframes space in such a way that Nouméa (and all of New Caledonia) becomes French republican territory while the Kanak are made into anomalous, unintegrated “others.”

In this way, young people disrupt a settler colonial narrative simply by *being* Kanak persons in the Nouméa. As these chapters have shown, much of this generation derives a major part of their identity from residence in a neighborhood or even a particular housing project in Nouméa—places like Montravel, Tindu, Rivière-Salée or Pierre-Lenquette. Yet meaningfully, these urban locations are only single nodes in a

larger network of places—including the *tribu*—to which young people trace their belonging and draw their identity. They maintain and reproduce their connection to these places through their social relationships and their way of being in the world (for many of my interlocutors, participating in an association was part of this). Though Kanak youth are successfully negotiating an indigenous identity in Nouméa, it has been much harder to find ways to publically reclaim the city as indigenous space. An important attempt to do so took place almost two years after I left New Caledonia, in November 2012. I will describe what happened as a means of drawing out some concluding thoughts. Both the organization and failure of this effort—known as *la tribu dans la ville*—highlight some of the central arguments made in this dissertation.

The Matignon and Nouméa Accords launched New Caledonia’s current era of *politiques culturelles* and led to numerous government initiatives for the “recognition” and “promotion” of Kanak culture. Amongst these were plans for addressing the “absence of Kanak culture” in Nouméa. Yet for the most part, these projects did not involve “culture” as conceived of and deployed by Kanak, but “culture” *à la française* (as I explored in Chapters 5 & 6).¹⁶⁶ In contrast, the *tribu dans la ville* was anchored in a Kanak conception of culture and *la coutume*. The project framed “culture” as inextricably linked to politics and rights. Consequently, the *tribu* was not merely a representation, but a living embodiment of Kanak identity and practice. Though the *tribu dans la ville* projected a potent image of indigenous difference in a very public

¹⁶⁶ The erection of the Mwâ Kââ pole in 2003 is a notable exception to this.

space; it was also fundamentally about hospitality, forging connections, sharing stories and entering into relations of reciprocity.

A number of Kanak groups worked together to plan *la tribu dans la ville* (including *Association Jeunesse Kanaky Monde*, led by my friend Nico Bolo; and the *Comité 150 ans après*, which had also spearheaded the efforts to erect the Mwâ Kââ pole in Nouméa in 2003). Several other people I knew, including my friend Florenda, were also involved in the project from its beginning stages. Together, these groups lobbied the Maire de Nouméa for permission to build and install eight traditional *cases*, one for each of the Kanak customary areas—around the Place du Mwâ Kââ. Their goal was to construct the *tribu* in time for the 2012 *Journée de la Citoyenneté*. The plan was not met with enthusiasm. In a memo released in response to the group’s proposal, mayor of Nouméa Jean Lèques wrote: “There is already the Tjibaou Center, the Mwâ Kââ and the names of some roads, even if it is not that extensive...more importantly the name of the city itself is Kanak. Kanak culture is ubiquitous in our urban space, in contrast to what is too often claimed” (*Les Nouvelles* 10/8/2012).¹⁶⁷ After a contentious period of negotiations, the mayor’s office did finally approve the construction of the *tribu*—not in the *Place de Mwâ Kââ*, but in the adjacent Port-Moselle parking lot, just barely in time for “Citizenship Day.”

¹⁶⁷ The city’s “Director of Culture,” Christine Terrier further explained that, “As far as we know, at the arrival of the first European colonists, the peninsula of Nouméa did not have any permanent inhabitants, due to a lack of a fresh water source.” Even if there were no “permanent inhabitants” in Nouméa, this does not mean that the land was not “used” by the Kanak. Terrier invokes the same Lockean notions of property rights that were used to dispossess Kanak at the beginning of the colonial period.



Fig. 8.1. The *Tribu dans la ville* (photo: Thierry Kameremoin).

Starting several days before “Citizenship Day,” delegations from each of the eight customary areas traveled to assist those already in Nouméa with the construction of *cases* representing their home regions. Large numbers of Kanak youth showed up at the parking lot and labored over three days to thatch roofs and carve support poles (using traditional techniques they may not have otherwise learned growing up in the city). I watched videos and photos that my friends posted on Facebook and read coverage on *Les Nouvelles*’ online site. The excitement and sense of celebration surrounding the project was palpable. It was hard for me to look at photos of the completed *cases*—standing right in the center of Nouméa, in the big parking lot near *Baie de la Moselle*, where wealthy tourists moored private yachts—and not smile.¹⁶⁸

In addition to serving as a cultural exhibition and performance space, the *tribu* drew

¹⁶⁸ If you recall from the opening anecdote of Chapter 4, this is the same parking lot where I was with Kanak youth when they burned a French flag the night of July 17th, following the Kanak flag raising at the Haussariat.

crowds of young people, who continued to help with the construction and the maintenance of *cases*, as well as organize roundtable discussions and debates on social and political issues. Several bands and dance groups performed concerts there. Moreover, the *tribu* attracted hoards of cruise ship passengers and other tourists, who came to explore the *cases*, ask questions about Kanak culture and purchase handicrafts and carvings.¹⁶⁹

The *tribu dans la ville* remained in place for two weeks after *la Journée de la Citoyenneté*, after which point the city demanded it be taken down. Citing the project's success, as well as the *tribu*'s usefulness as a tourist attraction, the organizers asked the mayor's office to let it remain as a semi-permanent installation. When the Mayor refused, a collective formed to circulate a petition demanding that the *tribu* remain in place—it received 8,200 signatures (*Les Nouvelles* 9/28/2012).¹⁷⁰ The collective's president, Maryka Kapoeri explained to a reporter from New Caledonia's daily newspaper *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*:

In the Kanak spirit, one cannot just take apart a case like this. There is the spirit of our ancestors in these cases—look at the amount of work that all these young people have put in to their construction, the mayor should know that you can't just remove them like this. We should have expected this. It is like it was for the Mwâ Kâ. There is always the refusal of the authorities. This is why

¹⁶⁹ This may not seem like a big deal, but many tourists (particularly those who don't speak French), leave New Caledonia without ever learning anything about the Kanak—or even that there are still indigenous people living in New Caledonia! My husband worked as a guide for visitors from Australian cruise ships. He gave tours on a miniature train that drove to all the “main sites” in Nouméa. On several occasions Australians asked him questions along the lines of: “So all the natives here are extinct, then?” or “What were the indigenous people here called?”

¹⁷⁰ A counter-petition, entitled *Non à Kanaky Ici, C'est Nouvelle-Calédonie* (“No to Kanaky, This is New Caledonia”) circulated in support of the *cases* removal and received 2,700 signatures.

we are obligated to force things through so that they exist and so that our culture is represented in the space of the city.

The mayor's office responded by threatening legal action if the *cases* were not removed within the week. In a communiqué issued alongside this response, Jean Lèques explained that the *cases* did not have the necessary building permits, that they did not meet zoning and safety regulations, and finally, that they blocked 150 parking spaces. The government's reaction to the *tribu dans la ville* positioned indigenous place-making as “in the way”—irreconcilable with urban French modernity and its demands for permits, regulations and parking places. The assertion of Kanak culture—framed by Kanak logics rather than French *politiques culturelles*—was seen as threatening, not “animating” civic life.

Many of the young people who helped build the *tribu* pledged to guard it at night and rebuild any *cases* that the city dismantled. But just like the Kanak youth who drink beer at the bus station or breakdance in the *Place de Cocotiers*, they were regularly harassed and forced to leave by *gendarmes*. Ultimately, the *cases* remained up for 50 days. In the early morning hours of November 13th, the national police came to the parking lot with armored vehicles, accompanied by security personnel wearing balaclavas to hide their faces. The police shook the young people sleeping inside the *cases* awake and forced them to leave the site. Then, with the help of two large bulldozers, they demolished the *tribu*, flattening the carefully carved support poles and woven thatch roofs of all eight *cases* into the dusty pavement.

Back in Brooklyn, I had been following the events surrounding the *tribu dans la ville* avidly, especially since so many people I knew from my fieldwork were involved. I was almost positive that the city government would end up removing the *cases*, but I *never* thought that *this* would be how it they did it. Coming in at 5am with armed police and bulldozers seemed like a direct provocation. Since I was in the middle of writing this dissertation at the time, I was thinking a lot about representation and settler colonialism. I honestly couldn't have imagined a more brutally perfect representation of the ongoing settler colonial dispossession of Kanak—*especially* urban Kanak youth—than the image of a bulldozer pulverizing a *case* in downtown Nouméa. In a videotaped interview later that day, Mayor Jean-Leques justified his decision to destroy the *tribu*, stating to the press: “This land was not intended to have these *cases* on it. It's a parking lot and it will resume it's its *traditional purpose*” [emphasis mine]. Apparently the irony of this statement was lost on him.



Fig. 8.2. A Bulldozer destroys one of the *cases* in the *tribu dans la ville* (photo: Sylvain Gauchet).

I was honestly worried that this event might be the straw that broke the camel's back for Kanak youth in Nouméa. The government's decision to destroy the *tribu* in the way it did indicated very clearly that it did not respect Kanak youth, that it considered their efforts to make a space for themselves—a space for Kanak sovereignty—in Nouméa to literally be *in the way* of civic life. I feared that the most marginalized Kanak youths—those who were not solidly anchored within social relationships and histories, who struggled to imagine a meaningful future for

themselves—would lose hope in the one possibility that gave them an identity:

Kanaky 2014. I expected violence. There was none.

I better understood why once I saw a video of my friend Florenda Nirikani being interviewed by someone from the local online newsite Caledosphere.com. The video was made the afternoon of the *tribu*'s destruction. Florenda sits with a group of other young Kanak people on a curb outside the parking lot. Piles of wood and thatch from the crushed *cases* are visible in the background. Into the microphone held by an offscreen interviewer, Florenda recounts the events of that morning; her voice is hoarse and strained. I quote her comments here in their entirety:

They arrived at 5:09am. They parked all their cars. Then, starting at 5:15am, they entered, they shined their lights inside the *case de Nengone* [built by the *Nengone* (Maré) custom area], they starting knocking on top of the thatch, over where people were sleeping inside...And people started to wake up, they were asking, "What's going on?" And then we slowly exited and sat down on the ground. And after that...That's it...there started to be insults, and that's why I've lost my voice, because I calmed everyone down. I said, "We must respect these people who don't respect us." See, that's the issue. "We must respect the people who don't respect us, because for a long time they've done this to our elders. But us, our combat, the combat of the generation beneath the elders who are in politics, and all that today...For us, our combat is a combat of non-violence...and it is also a combat of consciousness...because afterwards, it's necessary that all the—like him. Come here, my son! Come! [*Florenda beckons to a little boy, who she then picks up and sits on her lap*]...There. Like him, and all the little ones like him, and those who are 4 years, 5, 8, up to 12 or 13-years-old, so that they know that today, for the first time, the Mayor of Nouméa chased the Kanak from they city. That is the truth. We must not lie to children. Here [*the tribu dans la ville*] we are in an educational space, where we are in the process of regaining our value. Because people are always saying, "Oh those little Kanak! [*petits Kanaks*, a mildly derogatory term]. They're little fuckers [*petits connards*]; they're always fucking shit up. That Kanak over there, this one over here!...Look at the space that we are forced to work in [*she gestures to the piles of debris left over from the destroyed cases*]. Because the *maisons de quartiers*, I am sorry to say, but they are spaces of

consumption. We consume, we drink up the budget, we do what we can to make sure people are sound asleep, and there is no emancipation.



Fig. 8.3. Florenda interviewed by online news site Caledosphere, after the destruction of *la tribu* (still taken from video posted on Caledosphere.com).

As Florenda says: “*Look at the space that we are forced to work in.*” This is the space created by the structures of a French republican settler state. It is an ideological and political space that constrains, obscures, prevents—*bulldozes*—assertations of Kanak indigeneity. It is a space that forces Kanak to “respect those who don’t respect them”—to respect French republican models of citizenship and *politiques culturelles* that position Kanak claims as racist, baseless or “against the rights of men.” At the same time, a French notion of “culture” is promoted and developed through generously funded *politiques culturelles*, in spaces like the *maisons de quartiers*, which Florenda calls “spaces of consumption.”

Yet Kanak still find ways to work inside this space, and in doing so, to unsettle it. This dissertation examined Kanak youth's involvement in associations as one of the key strategies employed in this struggle. To quote Florenda, both the associations I've described in these chapters and the *tribu dans la ville* function as "educational spaces" where Kanak youth "regain their value." They are spaces in which young people can produce an image of themselves that resists dominant representations of Kanak youth as *petits connards*, as delinquents or "schizophrenics." The government may have bulldozed the *tribu dans la ville*, but as Florenda hints, her generation will build new "spaces of emancipation" in its place. As the 2014 referendum approaches, Kanak youth continue to imagine—and create—Kanaky.

APPENDIX A

CRÉER UNE ASSOCIATION FORMALITES ET PIÈCES À FOURNIR

1. Remplir le formulaire **original** de déclaration préalable de l'association **signé par le/la président (e)** ;
2. Joindre un exemplaire **original** du procès-verbal de l'assemblée générale constitutive comportant au moins **2 signatures (président (e) / secrétaire)** ;
3. Joindre un exemplaire **original** des statuts arrêtés par l'assemblée générale signés par au moins 2 membres du bureau **(président (e) /secrétaire)**.

NB : Il est prudent de conserver plusieurs photocopies de ces documents pouvant être réclamés à l'occasion de démarches à faire auprès d'autres organismes (RIDET, imprimerie administrative, banque etc).

A DEPOSER ou ENVOYER AU
HAUT-COMMISSARIAT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DIRAG
BUREAU DES ASSOCIATIONS
ADRESSE : BP C.5 98848 NOUMÉA CEDEX
9 bis rue de la République – Nouméa

HORAIRE D'OUVERTURE AU PUBLIC : 7H45 à 12H15
- FERMÉ L'APRES-MIDI au public -

Pour tous renseignements complémentaires merci de contacter :

associations@souvelle-caledonie.gouv.fr
Tel : 23.03.38



**FORMULAIRE DE DÉCLARATION PRÉALABLE
DE CRÉATION D'ASSOCIATION**

Loi du 1^{er} juillet 2001, article 5

1/ NOM DE L'ASSOCIATION (1) :

Sigle (s'il existe) :

2/ SIÈGE SOCIAL :

BP : Code Postal : Téléphone:

Adresse de gestion de l'association (si différente du siège social):

BP : Code Postal : Téléphone: E-mail :

3/ OBJET DE L'ASSOCIATION (2) :

Objectif n°1 :

Objectif n°2 :

Objectif n°3 :

Objectif n°4 :

(1) Reproduire le titre exact de l'association, tel qu'il figure dans les statuts.
(2) Reproduire l'article des statuts relatif à l'objet ou au but de l'association.

4/ PERSONNE EN CHARGE DE L'ADMINISTRATION DE L'ASSOCIATION:

PRÉSIDENT (e) :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

VICE- PRÉSIDENT (e) :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

SECRETARE :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

SECRETARE-ADJOINT :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

TRÉSORIER(E) :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

TRÉSORIER(E)-ADJOINT :

M/Mme _____ né(e) à _____ le _____

de nationalité _____ domicilié(e) (préciser l'adresse physique du domicile)
_____, exerçant la profession de _____

Contact téléphonique : _____

A _____ le _____ 2012

Signature du/ds Président (e)

Secrétaire

Trésorier (e)

APPENDIX B

NOUMÉA ACCORD

Government of France, Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste and the
Rassemblement Pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR)

5 May 1998

Preamble

1. On 24 September 1853, when France claimed 'Grande Terre', which James Cook had named 'New Caledonia', it took possession of a territory in accordance with the conditions of international law, as recognised at that time by the nations of Europe and America. It did not establish legally formalised relations with the indigenous population. The treaties entered into with the customary authorities in 1854 and subsequent years did not represent balanced agreements but were, in fact, unilateral instruments.

This territory, however, was not empty.

Grande Terre and the outlying islands were inhabited by men and women now known as Kanaks. They had developed their own civilisation, with its traditions and languages, in which custom, which governed social and political life, prevailed. Their cultural and spiritual life was expressed through various forms of creativity.

The Kanak identity was based on a particular relationship with land. Each individual and each clan defined itself in terms of a specific link to a valley, a hill, the sea or a river estuary and carried in its memory the acceptance of other families on its land. The names attached by tradition to each element of the landscape and the taboos affecting some of these, as well as the customary ways, gave structure to space and exchanges.

2. The colonisation of New Caledonia occurred as part of a broad historical movement which saw the European countries impose their domination on the rest of the world. In the 19th and 20th centuries, many men and women came, either with the conviction that they were bringing progress, or inspired by their religious faith, or sent against their will or seeking a second chance in New Caledonia. They settled and started families there. They brought with them their ideals, knowledge, hopes, ambitions, illusions and contradictions.

Some of them, especially the cultured people, priests and pastors, doctors and engineers, administrators, soldiers and political leaders, looked differently upon the original inhabitants, showing greater understanding and genuine compassion.

Through their scientific and technical knowledge, the Territory's new communities participated in mining and agricultural activity, often under difficult circumstances and, with the help of the State, in the shaping of New Caledonia. Their determination and inventiveness made it possible to use resources and lay a foundation for development.

The relationship of New Caledonia with the distant motherland long remained marked by colonial dependency, a one-sided relationship and a refusal to recognise specific characteristics, from which the new communities, in their aspirations, also suffered.

3. The time has come to recognise the shadows of the colonial period, even if it was not devoid of light.

The impact of colonisation had a long-lasting traumatic effect on the original people. Some clans lost their names when they lost their land. Large-scale land colonisation caused considerable population movements, in which the Kanak clans saw their subsistence resources depleted and their places of memory lost. This process of dispossession engendered a loss of identity markers.

Kanak social organisation, even if its principles were recognised, was thus thrown into upheaval. Population movements damaged its fabric, while ignorance, or power strategies, all too often led to the negation of the legitimate authorities and the installation of leaders considered under custom to have no legitimacy, which aggravated the identity trauma.

At the same time, the Kanak artistic heritage was considered non-existent or looted. To this denial of the fundamental elements of the Kanak identity, were added restrictions on public freedoms and a lack of political rights, despite the fact that the Kanaks had paid a heavy toll in the defence of France, especially during the First World War.

The Kanaks were relegated to the geographical, economic and political fringes of their own country, which, in a proud people not without warrior traditions, could not but cause revolts, which were violently put down, aggravating resentment and misunderstanding.

Colonisation harmed the dignity of the Kanak people and deprived it of its identity. In this confrontation, some men and women lost their lives or their reasons for living. Much suffering resulted from it. These difficult times need to be remembered, the mistakes recognised and the Kanak people's confiscated identity restored, which equates in its mind with a recognition of its sovereignty, prior to the forging of a new sovereignty, shared in a common destiny.

4. Decolonisation is the way to rebuild a lasting social bond between the communities living in New Caledonia today, by enabling the Kanak people to establish new relations with France, reflecting the realities of our time.

Thorough their participation in the construction of New Caledonia, the communities living in the Territory have acquired a legitimacy to live there and to continue contributing to its development. They are essential for its social balance and the operation of its economy and social institutions. Although accession of Kanaks to positions of responsibility remains insufficient, and needs to be increased through proactive measures, it is also a fact that the participation of other communities in the life of the Territory is essential.

It is now necessary to start making provision for a citizenship of New Caledonia, enabling the original people to form a human community, asserting its common destiny, with the other men and women living there.

The size of New Caledonia and its economic and social balances do not make it possible to open the employment market widely, and justify action to protect local employment. The Matignon Accords, signed in June 1988, demonstrated the will of the inhabitants of New Caledonia to put violence and rejection behind them and tread the path of peace, solidarity and prosperity together.

Ten years on, a new process needs to commence, entailing the full recognition of the Kanak identity, as a pre-requisite for rebuilding a social contract between all the communities living in New Caledonia, and entailing shared sovereignty with France, in preparation for full sovereignty.

The past was the time of colonisation. The present is the time of sharing, through the achievement of a new balance. The future must be the time of an identity, in a common destiny.

France stands ready to accompany New Caledonia on that path.

5. The signatories of the Matignon Accords have therefore decided together to come to a negotiated agreement, based on consensus, which they will, jointly, call upon the inhabitants of New Caledonia to endorse.

This agreement specifies the political organisation of New Caledonia and the arrangements for its emancipation over a twenty-year period. Its implementation will require a Constitution Bill which the Government undertakes to draft for enactment by Parliament.

The full recognition of the Kanak identity requires customary law status and its links with the civil law status of persons governed by ordinary law to be defined, and provision to be made for the place of customary bodies in the institutions, particularly through the establishment of a Customary Senate; it requires the Kanak cultural heritage to be protected and enhanced and new legal and financial mechanisms to be introduced in response to representations based on the link with land, while facilitating land development, and identity symbols conveying the essential place of the Kanak identity in the accepted common destiny to be adopted.

The institutions of New Caledonia will reflect further progress towards sovereignty: some Congress Resolutions will be deemed to be laws and an elected Executive will draft and implement them.

During this period, signs will be given of the gradual recognition of a citizenship of New Caledonia, which must express the chosen common destiny and be able, after the end of the period, to become a nationality, should it be so decided.

The entitlement to vote in elections to New Caledonia's own local assemblies will be restricted to persons with a certain period of prior residence in New Caledonia. In order to take into account the limited size of the employment market, provision will be made to give priority access to local employment to persons residing on a long-term basis in New Caledonia.

The sharing of responsibilities between the State and New Caledonia will signify shared sovereignty. This will be a gradual process. Some powers will be transferred as soon as the new arrangements commence. Others will be transferred according to a set timetable, which the Congress will be able to modify, according to the principle of self-organisation. The transferred powers may not revert to the State, reflecting the principle of irreversibility governing these arrangements.

Throughout the period of implementation of the new arrangements, New Caledonia will enjoy the support of the State, in terms of technical assistance, training and the funding necessary to exercise the transferred powers and for economic and social development.

Commitments will be applied to multi-annual programmes. New Caledonia will participate in the capital and operation of the main development institutions in which the State is a partner.

At the end of a period of twenty years, the transfer to New Caledonia of the reserved powers, its achievement of full international responsibility status and the conversion of citizenship into nationality, will be voted upon by the people concerned. Their approval would mean full sovereignty for New Caledonia.

Policy document

1 The Kanak Identity

New Caledonia's political and social organisation must take the Kanak identity into account more fully.

1.1 The Special Civil Law Status

Some Kanaks have ordinary civil law status without having desired it.

The Special Civil Law Status is a source of legal insecurity and does not make it possible to respond appropriately to certain situations of modern life.

Consequently, the following policy has been set:

- the Special Civil Law Status will henceforth be called 'Customary Status'.
- any person entitled to Customary Status who may have renounced it or been deprived of it following such renunciation by his/her ancestors, or through marriage, or for any other reason (case of children whose births were registered in metropolitan France), will be able to recover it. The Constitutional Revision Act will authorise this exception under Article 75 of the Constitution.
- the rules pertaining to the Customary Status will be laid down by the institutions of New Caledonia, as set out hereafter.

- the Customary Status will make a distinction between property located in ‘Customary Land’ (new name for the Reserves), which, in the case of inheritance, will be transferred and allocated in accordance with the rules of custom, and property located outside Customary Land, which will be governed by the rules of ordinary law.

1.2 Customary Law and Bodies

1.2.1 The legal status of the ‘Palaver Record’ (which name may be changed) must be redefined, in order to give it full force of law, by determining its format and setting up an appeal process that will guard against subsequent disputes. The role of the Syndic des affaires coutumières (Recorder of Customary Affairs), at present held by the Gendarmerie, will be played by another agent, possibly a representative of the ‘commune’ or of the Customary Area.

The format of the Palaver Record will be defined by the Congress in consultation with the customary authorities (see below). The roll-call will take place before the Area Council and proceedings will be recorded by that council or the commune authorities.

1.2.2 The role of the Customary Areas will be enhanced, in particular by giving the Area Councils a say in clarifying and interpreting customary rules. Broadly speaking, New Caledonia’s spatial organisation will need to take more account of their existence. In particular, the boundaries of the communes should be able to take the Customary Areas’ boundaries into consideration.

1.2.3 The mode of recognition of the customary authorities will be specified in order to guarantee their legitimacy. It will be defined by New Caledonia’s customary authorities (see below). It will be notified to the Representative of the State and to New Caledonia’s Executive whose role will be confined to recording it. Their status will be specified.

1.2.4 The role of the customary authorities in the prevention of social ills and mediation in criminal sentencing will be acknowledged. Their role in respect of the latter will be included in the provisions of the legal instruments governing criminal procedure in New Caledonia.

The Customary authorities could be invited by the provincial assemblies or commune authorities to take part in the drafting of local assembly resolutions.

1.2.5 The Customary Council of New Caledonia will become a ‘Customary Senate’, consisting of sixteen members (two from each Customary Area), which it will be compulsory to consult on subjects relating to Kanak identity.

1.3 The Cultural Heritage

...

1.3.3 Languages

The Kanak languages, together with French, are languages of education and culture in New Caledonia. Their place in school curricula and in the media should therefore be increased and extensive consideration should be given to how to achieve this.

Scientific research and university courses on Kanak languages should be organised in New Caledonia. The Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations) will play a pivotal role in this regard. For these languages to gain their rightful place in primary and secondary schooling, a substantial effort will be put into training of trainers.

An Academy of Kanak Languages will be set up as a local public institution whose Board of Governors will consist of speakers of Kanak languages, appointed by agreement with the customary authorities. The Academy will set rules for usage and development of the Kanak languages.

1.3.4 Cultural development

Kanak culture must be developed and enhanced through artistic training courses and in the media. Copyright must be effectively protected.

1.3.5 Tjibaou Cultural Centre

The State undertakes to provide, on a long-term basis, the technical assistance and funds required for the Tjibaou Cultural Centre to be able to fully play its part as a centre for outreach by Kanak culture.

On all these matters pertaining to the cultural heritage, the State will propose that a specific agreement be entered into with New Caledonia.

1.4 Land

Every Kanak's identity is defined primarily with reference to an area of land.

The task and operations of the Agence de développement rural et d'aménagement foncier — ADRAF (Rural Development and Land Management Board) will have to be thoroughly reassessed. It will require sufficient resources for taking action in suburban areas. Measures accompanying land grants will need to be strengthened so as to facilitate the beneficiaries' establishment and development of the land.

Customary Land must be surveyed and registered so that customary rights over any piece of land can be clearly identified. New legal and financial instruments will be introduced to promote development on Customary Land, whose status must not act as an obstacle to economic development.

Land reform will be continued. Customary Land will consist of Reserve Land, the land assigned to groupements de droit particulier local — GDPL (groups governed by special local law provisions) and the land that will be assigned by ADRAF in response to representations based on the link to land. Thus, all land will henceforth be either Customary Land or land held under ordinary civil law.

Lease arrangements specifying relations between the customary owner and the developer of custom land will be defined by the Congress, in consultation with the Customary Senate. Any disputes will be dealt with by the ordinary law courts, with the assistance of customary assessors.

A survey of State land and land held by the Territory will be undertaken with a view to assigning these land areas to other local government entities or to customary owners or private owners, either in order to restore land rights or to enable developments of common interest to be carried out. The issue of the maritime zone will be considered in a similar spirit.

...

2 The Institutions

2.1 The Assemblies

2.1.1 The Provincial Assemblies will, respectively for the Loyalty Islands, Northern and South Provinces, consist of 7, 15 and 32 members who will also be members of the Congress, as well as of 7, 7 and 8 additional members, not members of the Congress, when the new institutions are set up. For subsequent terms, the Provincial Assemblies can, if they wish, reduce the number of members who are not Congress members.

2.1.2 The term of office of members of the Congress and of the Provincial Assemblies will be five years.

2.1.3 Some Congress Resolutions will be deemed to be laws of the country; the only way, therefore, that it will be possible to dispute them will be by submission before the Constitutional Council prior to their publication, by either the Representative of the State, or New Caledonia's Executive, or the President of a Provincial Assembly, or the President of the Congress or a third of the members of the Congress.

2.1.4 a) Draft laws of the country and draft resolutions will be referred to the Customary Senate whenever they concern the Kanak identity as defined in this document. When the draft submitted to it has the nature of a law of the country and concerns the Kanak identity, the Congress of New Caledonia will be required to re-examine it if it has not been endorsed by the Customary Senate. The Congress's vote will then be final.

b) New Caledonia's main economic and social institutions will be represented by an Economic and Social Council. It will be consulted on all Congress Resolutions of an economic or social nature. Its members will include representatives of the Customary Senate.

2.1.5 The boundaries of the Provinces and communes (municipal districts) should coincide, to ensure that every commune belongs to one Province only.

...

3 Devolution of powers

The powers held by the State will be transferred to New Caledonia in the following manner:

- some will be transferred at the start of implementation of the new political organisation;
- some will be transferred in subsequent stages;
- some will be shared between the State and New Caledonia;
- some, termed reserved powers, cannot be transferred until after the poll referred to in Section 5.

The Congress, subject to the approval of a qualified majority of three-fifths, will be able to request changes to be made in the provisional schedule for the transfer of powers, with the exception of the reserved powers.

Throughout this period, the State will contribute to the funding of the transferred powers. This financial contribution will be guaranteed by the Constitution Act.

3.1 The new powers devolved to New Caledonia

3.1.1 Powers to be transferred immediately

The principle of transfer will apply as soon as the institutions provided for in this Accord have been set up: this decision will be implemented during the Congress's first term, in respect of the following powers:

- the right to employment: New Caledonia, in conjunction with the State, will take measures designed to offer special guarantees for its inhabitants' right to employment. Regulations on the entry of persons not resident in New Caledonia will be reinforced.

For self-employed persons, the right to set up business could be restricted for persons not resident in New Caledonia.

Where salaried workers in the private sector and for the Territorial Public Service are concerned, local regulations will be drawn up with a view to giving territorial inhabitants preferential access to employment.

- Aliens' right to work;
- External trade, including import regulations and approval of foreign investments;
- External communications through postal and telecommunication services, except government communications and regulations governing radio frequencies;
- Navigation and international shipping services;
- External communications through air services when their only stop in France is New Caledonia and in compliance with the international commitments entered into by France;
- Exploration, exploitation, management and conservation of living and non-living natural resources of the Economic Zone;
- Fundamental principles for employment law;
- Fundamental principles for vocational training;
- Customary mediation in sentencing;
- Setting of penalties for breaches of the laws of the country;
- Rules for the administration of the Provinces;
- Curriculum content for primary schools, teacher training and inspection of teachers;
- the public maritime zone, transferred to the Provinces.

3.1.2 Powers to be transferred as a second stage

The following powers will be transferred, as an intermediate stage, to New Caledonia during the second and third Congress terms of office:

- Civil registration rules, within the framework of the existing legislation;
- Policing and security regulations for domestic air and sea traffic;
- Drawing up of rules and implementation of measures for civil defence. However, a system will be set up which will allow the State to take the measures required in the event of shortcomings.
- Accounting and financial regulations for Territorial local government entities and their public corporations;
- Civil and commercial law;
- Fundamental principles governing land ownership and real property rights;
- Legislation on delinquent and endangered children;
- Rules for administration of communes;
- Administrative control over local government entities and their public corporations;
- Secondary education;
- Regulations pertaining to private school teachers under contract.

3.2 The shared powers

3.2.1 International and regional relations

International relations remain the responsibility of the State. The latter will take New Caledonia's specific interests into account in international negotiations conducted by France and will associate it to the discussions.

New Caledonia will be entitled to become a member or associate member of certain international organisations, depending on their constitutions (Pacific international organisations, United Nations Organisation, UNESCO, ILO, etc.). The UN will be advised that New Caledonia's emancipation is under way.

New Caledonia will be entitled to have representation in countries of the Pacific region and with the above-mentioned organisations and in European Union.

It will be entitled to enter into agreements with these countries within its areas of responsibility.

It will be associated with the re-negotiation of the Europe-OCT Association Decision. Training will be initiated to prepare New Caledonians for exercising responsibilities in the sphere of international relations.

Relations between New Caledonia and the Territory of the Islands of Wallis and Futuna will be addressed in a separate agreement. The State's services will be organised separately in New Caledonia and in this Territory.

3.2.2 Aliens

The Executive of New Caledonia will be associated with the implementation of regulations regarding entry and length of stay of aliens.

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3.2.3 Broadcasting

The Executive will be consulted by the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel — CSA (French Broadcasting Authority) prior to any decision specifically concerning New Caledonia.

An agreement may be drawn up with New Caledonia to associate the latter with the CSA's broadcasting policies.

3.2.4 Law and order

The Executive will be informed by the Representative of the State of any measures taken.

3.2.5 Mining regulations

The State will devolve its powers with regard to fuel oils, potassium salts, nickel, chromium and cobalt to the Territory.

Responsibility for drafting regulations will be devolved to New Caledonia, responsibility for their implementation to the Provinces.

A Mining Council, consisting of representatives of the Provinces, whose meetings the Representative of the State will attend, will be consulted on draft Congress and Provincial Resolutions relating to mining matters. Should the Council not agree with the Resolution or the Representative of the State not be in favour, the final decision will be made by the Executive of New Caledonia.

3.2.6 International air services

The Executive will be associated with negotiations where responsibility has not been entirely devolved to New Caledonia.

3.2.7 Tertiary Education and Scientific Research

The State will associate the Executive with the preparation of contracts binding it to the research institutions working in New Caledonia and to the University, so that more appropriate consideration can be given to New Caledonia's specific requirements in the fields of higher education and research. New Caledonia will be entitled to enter into agreements on policy and objectives with these bodies.

...

5 Evolution of New Caledonia's political organisation

A poll will be held during the fourth (five-year) Congress term of office. The date of the poll will be set by the Congress in the course of the fourth term, by a qualified majority of three-fifths of its members.

If the Congress has not set such date by the end of the second-to-last year of this fourth term, the poll will be held, on a date set by the State, during the last year of the Congress term.

The poll will address devolution to New Caledonia of the reserved powers, access to international full responsibility status, and conversion of citizenship into nationality. If the electorate votes against these proposals, the Congress, if at least one third of its members, so request, will be entitled to arrange for a second poll to be held in the second year following the first poll. Should a majority again vote against, a further poll may be held using the same procedure and the same time-frame. Should no majority in favour again be recorded, the political partners would meet to consider the situation thus arising.

For such time as the polls have not been in favour of the new political organisation proposed, the political organisation set up by the 1998 Agreement will remain in force, at its latest stage of evolution, without there being any possibility of reversal, such 'irreversibility' being constitutionally guaranteed.

The result of the poll will apply comprehensively to New Caledonia as a whole. It will not be possible for one part of New Caledonia alone to achieve full sovereignty, or alone to retain different links with France, on the grounds that its results in the poll differed from the overall result.

The State acknowledges that it is appropriate that New Caledonia achieve complete emancipation at the end of this period.

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