

ENVISIONING KANAK INDEPENDENCE:
A COSMOPOLITAN FUTURE?

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how the notion of independence might be reconciled with a cosmopolitan view of the world through an examination of how the Kanak independence movement in New Caledonia has envisaged the place of the non-Kanak majority in a future independent nation-state. By exploring the political thought of the late independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou on Kanak identity and its connection to Kanak independence, I explore how the Kanak independence movement engaged with the critique that it was intrinsically racist and exclusive. Drawing on literature that criticises the overbearing weight of Western universalism in cosmopolitan discourse, I show how Kanak independence calls for a moral re-centring of the political community that undermines French claims of a monopoly on universalism. I argue that Kanak views of independence reaffirm the possibility of locally constructed cosmopolitanisms.

Keywords: Independence; indigenous; universalism; citizenship; cosmopolitanism

(Jean Chesneaux) How do you define Kanak independence, which is at the heart of the program of the Independence Front?

(Jean-Marie Tjibaou) We have to question the colonial legacy, the idea that the West came with the light, the civilisation. It is unthinkable. It would be 'racial' that the Kanak people might integrate other ethnicities, other peoples. Especially since from their perspective, the Caledonians don't want us. They don't accept Kanak independence, but a Caledonian independence has no meaning. Other peoples, who have another way of life, will be able to stay if they accept that we will direct the country, on the condition that they do not

put independence in danger. Putting aside those who are a danger, the others, if they accept the country and its mode of organisation, they can stay. It's their problem. In this way, we have to re-design the school programs in order to give a place to the Kanak way of life. (Bensa and Wittersheim 1996:118)

To speak of independence and cosmopolitanism in the same breath may seem a contradiction. At face value, independence reinforces the nation-state as the ideal mode of emancipation for the individual. In this way, the indigenous Kanak² independence movement in New Caledonia is often criticised for representing a form of ethno-cultural nationalism that excludes the majority non-Kanak population. Both France and New Caledonia, by virtue of being a part of France, are cast as cosmopolitan entities in which cultural pluralism can thrive, while Kanak independence is presumed to involve the imposition of one group to the exclusion of others.

This article explores how Kanak independence leaders attempt to present indigenous self-determination in a cosmopolitan way by the removal of the predominant 'ethnic' conceptions associated with identity and articulating a means by which other communities may enter into a 'common destiny'. In this process, France loses its claim as the sole guarantor of universal values. Drawing on theories of cosmopolitanism across a number of disciplines, I employ Richard Werbner's (2008) emphasis on the need for a 'moral re-centring' as a useful conceptual tool to explore the New Caledonian dilemma.

After briefly tracing the rise of the Kanak independence movement during the 1970s, particular attention is paid to the political philosophy of the late Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou concerning the reconciliation of a Kanak right to independence and the construction of common political community with the non-Kanak population. In providing a general overview of debates within the independence movement concerning the implications of Kanak independence for the non-Kanak populations, particularly in debates on the electoral body for a referendum, this paper notes but for reasons of space cannot fully detail, the internal fractures within the independence movement itself—characterised by competing ideologies and geographical contexts (see Mohamed-Gaillard 2008:77–87).

Special attention has been paid to Tjibaou, not only due to the contemporary relevance of his thought in New Caledonia and beyond, but because of his historical role leading the independence movement during the formative years of the 1980s against a backdrop of political violence. More than any other, and

from within the kaleidoscope of views within the independence movement (see Chappell 2013 for a detailed discussion), I argue that Tjibaou encapsulated the importance of reviving Kanak identity, albeit in a way that sought to emphasise its dynamic and evolving nature.

Despite ongoing debates since the 1998 Noumea Accord over the scope of citizenship, political rights, and the place of custom in New Caledonian society, this article contends that Kanak identity and sovereignty can constitute the foundation of a new political community rather than the traditional republican language of French citizenship. The New Caledonian case reinforces the importance of moving beyond Western individualism as a necessary precondition for manifesting a cosmopolitan world.

The Pacific world is commonly perceived as far removed from the more salient images associated with cosmopolitanism, whether they are border crossings, rapid transport, foreign restaurants and migrant communities. Rather, as Epeli Hau'ofa (2008: 31) noted, the Pacific is typically viewed as 'islands in a far sea', consisting of small, isolated and vulnerable islands in a huge expanse of ocean. This is certainly the case in Melanesia too, where, in spite of its unparalleled cultural and linguistic diversity, its peoples are often perceived as isolated and static (Hirsch 2008: 197–198). Such societies are often overly portrayed as inwardly focused and fertile ground for the rise of 'ethnic tensions' or tribalism. The alleged tendency of such societies to produce identity-based violence puts them at odds with more commonplace images of cosmopolitanism.

After a century of violence supposedly in the name of the 'nation', following on the heels of wars in the name of religious ideology, there is a great deal of wariness expressed towards identity politics in general. Advocates of cosmopolitanism generally arise in response to such identitarian tendencies. Nussbaum (1994) argues that a 'citizen of the world' must recognise that she is first a human being, rather than being solely defined by one's place within a social or cultural group. In order to illustrate this, Nussbaum draws upon the image of cosmopolitanism evoked by the Stoics, where the individual is surrounded by a number of concentric circles that represent the various forms of moral community we found ourselves in. Hierocles considered 'our task as citizens of the world will be to 'draw the circles somehow towards the centre', making all human beings more like our fellow city dwellers' (1994: 3). Nussbaum argues that cosmopolitanism does not imply an abandoning of our roots, whatever they may be, but that the moral and political world should reflect our shared humanity.

In some ways a response to Nussbaum, Appiah (2006) recognises the importance of individual embeddedness in various layers of social and cultural context. The problem with Nussbaum's argument is that it is predicated on a largely individualist conception of human belonging. Appiah therefore argues in favour of what he describes as *cosmopolitan patriotism*, which implies not only an obligation to others beyond our more immediate circles – whatever they may be – but that we 'take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance' (2006: xv). In other words, it is not possible to value another person without first recognising and appreciating the values that they hold. Kendall, Skrbis and Woodward (2009: 4) similarly argue that an appreciation of the local is a necessary pre-condition of an 'effective cosmopolitanism'. Accordingly, Appiah describes the *cosmopolitan patriot* as someone who:

Can enter the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people (Appiah 1997: 618).

The question therefore becomes is it possible for everyone to be a cosmopolitan and at all times and places? Here the cosmopolitanism literature melds considerably with that of 'globalisation'. The increasing movement of peoples in response to neoliberal capitalism, facilitated by faster transport and telecommunications technology, has made 'mixing' between peoples far easier. As such, cosmopolitanism is often seen as the 'positive face' of globalisation, removing some of the imagined barriers between different peoples of the world (Kendall, Skrbis and Woodward 2009: 2). More and more people are travelling for holidays or work, eating different kinds of food, and consuming products from around the world. However, mobility does not necessarily result in cosmopolitanism. Indeed, globalisation is capable of achieving the opposite. Consider, for instance, the resurgence of the extreme right political parties in Europe in response to the 'new wave' of refugees and migrants from the Middle East. Another common critique of globalisation is that it actually leads to less diversity and greater uniformity in terms of our consumption and habits, whether it be eating McDonalds, speaking English or watching Hollywood movies. Calhoun's (2003) critique of cosmopolitanism argues in favour of separating the cosmopolitan project from neoliberalism so that it does not become another form of Western imperialism.

In comparison with political philosophers, social and cultural anthropologists

have generally been more attentive in grounding cosmopolitanism in context. According to Pnina Werbner (2008:6), social anthropologists have taken up the perceived Western bias in cosmopolitan literature by descending below the level of the state. Drawing on Appiah's concept of *rooted cosmopolitanism*, described as 'the multiple layers and roots that underpin identifications', Werbner argues that scholars must be wary of the imperialist tendencies of the new cosmopolitan literature that obscures the experiences of post-colonial states. In a similar way to Calhoun, this requires viewing cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon that is not restricted to the middle and upper class with the means to travel or dine in fancy restaurants, but to look for its 'working class' and 'demotic' manifestations (Werbner 2008:11). This task entails examining how the post-colonial states that have been arbitrarily created by colonial powers have gone about the task of working out how to live together despite the ethnic divisions that exist within them.

One example of this can be seen in the work of Richard Werbner on ethnicity and nationhood in post-colonial Botswana. Despite agreeing in principle with Appiah's liberal theory, Werbner (2008) argues that his theory does not go far enough concerning its social viability in particular contexts. In order to overcome this problem, he encourages the generation of a *public cosmopolitanism*, which inheres three aspects. First, there is an element of 'daring' in which state and non-state actors encourage the crossing of frontiers beyond ethnic communities. Next is a 'moral re-centring' in which 'the far has to be brought morally near, but without obliterating the many circles of difference. Finally, he notes, the 'restless construction, re-construction and transcending of difference' (2008:179).

In considering the peculiar case of New Caledonia, a territory of France located in the Pacific Ocean and some twenty thousand kilometres from Paris, the notion of moral re-centring is a significant one in light of the tendency to treat indigenous Kanak identity as simply 'one among many' within France. Moral re-centring therefore requires removing the notion that France alone is capable of producing a cosmopolitan form of nationalism and allow new forms that are centred on Kanak identity and opening up towards the different communities that live there. Importantly, this moral re-centring exercise must be dynamic in nature. Reflecting on both the lives and thought of Epeli Hau'ofa and the Kanak independence leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, James Clifford drew attention to the lives of both of these men and how it shaped their own 'indigenous cosmopolitan visions' (Clifford 2009:240).

Countering the static and dependent view of Pacific peoples, Epeli Hau'ofa

(2008: 32) provided a different vision of the region as a ‘sea of islands’, painting a past that includes the astounding feats of oceanic navigation, trade and cultural links between Pacific peoples. Such feats were underlined by impressive cosmologies through which the Pacific Islanders saw their universe in anything but restricted terms. This was not conjured out of thin air but grounded in his own life experience as a Tongan who grew up in Papua New Guinea, the son of travelling missionaries. Drawing on the life of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, lived between his ancestral home of Hienghène and the capital Noumea, typifying the coming and going of Kanak lives, James Clifford’s conception of ‘indigenous articulations’ stresses the need to present indigenous identity as rooted but never fixed (Clifford 2001: 471). Both Hau’ofa and Tjibaou highlight how cosmopolitanism can be grounded in the lives and histories of Pacific islanders, rather than as an inherent product of Western rights’ frameworks.

One of the key features of New Caledonian society that distinguishes it from its Melanesian neighbours is the ethnic diversity of the territory’s population (Table 1), resulting from its history as a settler colony of France since its annexation in 1853 and subsequent migration from the Metropole and the French territories of the Pacific: Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia. Today, the

Table 1. *Evolution of the Population of New Caledonia by Community of Belonging*

Community of Belonging	1963	1969	1976	1983	1989	1996	2009	2014
<i>Kanak</i>	41 190	46 200	55 598	61 870	73 598	86 788	99 078	104 958
<i>European</i>	33 355	41 268	50 757	53 974	55 085	67 151	71 721	73 199
<i>Wallisian/ Futunian</i>			9 571	12 174	14 186	17 763	21 262	21 926
<i>Tahitian</i>			6 391	5 570	4 750	5 171	4 985	5 608
<i>Indonesian</i>			5 111	5 319	5 191	5 003	3 985	3 858
<i>Vietnamese</i>			1 943	2 381	2 461	2 822	2 357	2 506
<i>Ni-Vanuatu</i>			1 050	1 212	1 683	2 244	2 327	2 568
<i>Others</i>	11 974	13 111	2 812	2 868	7 219	9 984	39 865	54 143
<i>Several communities</i>							20 398	23 007
Total	86 159	100 579	133 233	145 368	164 173	196 836	245 580	268 767

Source : INSEE-ISEE – *Recensements de la population*, available at: <http://www.isee.nc/population/recensement/communautes>

Wallisian and Futunian communities constitute roughly 9% of the entire population. As Lorenzo Veracini (2010: 3) notes, one of the dilemmas arising out of the settler colonial past is the blurred boundary between the migrant and settler, where the mode of coming and their aspirations are just as important as their numbers. In this way, New Caledonia constitutes both a part of France yet one that is distinguishable by virtue of not only its peculiar *sui generis* status but because of its history as a penal settlement, where certain populations were forced to leave France or a different homeland and come to New Caledonia, and thereafter re-build their lives (Merle 1995: 22).

As a result of their relatively marginal demographic position, the Kanak independence movement and its claim of a right to self-determination for the Kanak people is often portrayed by loyalist parties as exclusionary of the non-Kanak communities living in the territory. The classical conception of French nationhood emphasises the importance of French identity to maintaining a peaceful existence between the different ethnic communities, rooted in the understanding of France as a political community arising from the 'daily plebiscite' of citizens (Renan 1882). This is contrasted with nationalisms that stem from a sense of primordial connectedness often through ethnicity or language (Brubaker 1992). French citizenship is consequently considered in universal terms, a political space within which individuals are able to live out their various identities. However, this French republican tradition equally depends on the suppression of these identities in the public and political sphere (Muller 1991).

As the long-running debates in France show, including whether or not to accept various forms of religious expression in schools or even in public places, and the teaching of regional languages, this strong form of republicanism struggles to allow the recognition of non-secular forms of collective identity. In France, these principles have underlined the government ban on the collection of ethnic data for the census (Schnapper 2008). However, in New Caledonia, data on ethnicity is important in order to measure the success of social and economic 'rebalancing' policies. In 2003, the French President Jacques Chirac temporarily suspended the holding of the census because of his opposition to the inclusion of questions on ethnicity. In his response to one journalist on the question during his visit to the country, Chirac stated 'you are French, and there are French people of all ethnic origins' (Maclellan 2010: 5). These are indeed questions as old as the Republic itself, especially in the *Outre-mer*³, where French citizenship operates on top of strong, local identities and cultural institutions.

Underlining opposition to independence is a belief that decolonisation is possible without it, predicated on the assumption that people are free to determine their own destiny while remaining part of France (Chappell 1999). Such a view stems from colonial mentalities of the civilising mission that cast French rule in paternalistic terms as preparing the indigenous populations to govern themselves. These strongly shaped the post-war vision pronounced by Charles de Gaulle at Brazzaville, enshrined in the 1946 Constitution, which spoke of the 'traditional mission of France' to 'lead its peoples of whom it has taken responsibility to the freedom of administering themselves'. Jacques Lafleur, the late, long-time leader of the loyalist party *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République* (RPCR), often emphasised France's universalist conception of nationhood by contrasting New Caledonia with its independent Melanesian neighbours. This was especially the case following the independence of Vanuatu in 1980 when hundreds of French settlers were forced to depart the country after French support for secessionist movements, which Lafleur cast as a sign of what awaited Europeans in New Caledonia should Kanak independence occur (Kotra 2009:113).

As Table 1 shows, by 1975 census the proportion of the Kanak population had fallen to just 41%. Although various French government policies had encouraged migration since the end of the war, by the 1970s, it had become a key political strategy aimed at subduing the emerging independence movement. In 1972, the French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer wrote to his Secretary of State for the Overseas Xavier Deniau:

New Caledonia, colony of settlement, although destined to be a multiracial melting pot, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory where a developed country may send its nationals... In the short and medium term, the massive emigration of French citizens must allow the avoidance of the danger of the indigenous independentist cause through the maintaining and improving of the numerical balance of the communities. In the long-term, the indigenous nationalist cause will be only avoided if the non-indigenous communities represent a democratic majority mass (Besset 1988:78).

This demographic inferiority of the Kanak has rendered issues surrounding settlement and migration crucial, with the possibility to shift the balance of power between pro-independence and loyalist parties. Accusations of French colonisation do not simply refer to institutional or economic forms of power between the metropole and New Caledonia, but what the independence movement considers the deliberate strategy of colonising the territory through

migration from France. Therefore, the question of decolonisation cannot be understood without first considering the migration issue.

Following New Caledonia's integration into the Republic in 1946, and the extension of French citizenship to the territory's indigenous population, New Caledonia's post-war political landscape was largely dominated by the *Union Calédonienne* (UC), which originated in Catholic and Protestant church-based political movements (Trépiéd 2010). Enjoying the overwhelming support of the growing indigenous electorate, it rose to power under the leadership of Maurice Lenormand, a metropolitan who had moved to New Caledonia in 1934 and married a woman from Lifou. The party's motto 'two colours, one people' underlined the party's membership across the ethnic divide. Lenormand was particularly opposed to the monopolies of the 'big families' in the local economy, gaining the support of a considerable number of *petits colons** or *broussards** and members of the territory's unions (Trépiéd 2010: 254). The UC's push for strong autonomy brought it into frequent conflict with the increasingly assertive French state, often leading to tension between the UC-dominated Territorial Assembly and the state-appointed governor. Much to the anger of Lenormand and the UC, the French government abolished the autonomy of the territory between 1963 and 1969, including most notably authority over the nickel-mining sector. The opposition of state and settler interests to UC-led reforms ultimately set the stage for increasing frustration within the indigenous population.

Anti-French sentiment largely took the form of an anti-colonial movement, mostly born out of Kanak and non-Kanak student groups who had returned from France where they had been involved in the large student protest movements opposing the Algerian War (1954–1962) and later the riots of May 1968 (Chappell 2010: 55). Drawing on the anti-colonial thought and cultural resistance in the works of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre and Léopold Senghor, these students began advocating an end to French imperialism in New Caledonia. Such groups included the *Foulards Rouges* (Red Scarves) and *Groupe 1878*, the name of which was inspired by the rebellion of Chief Ataï against the colonial government in that year, and included notable figures such as Déwé Gorodey, Nidoish Naisseline, Foté Trolue and Elie Poigoune. The adoption of the word *Kanak* resembled the usage of the concept of *négritude* in post-colonial African writing, derived from the Polynesian word *kanaka* for 'man', written in French and expressed in a derogatory sense as *canaque*. Its adoption in the English form 'Kanak' symbolised both the existence of their identity but equally its assertion in the political context (Bensa 1995: 6; Chappell 2010: 55). However, the popularity of these groups among the rest of the

Kanak remained minimal due largely to their criticism of customary chiefs and the churches, two pillars of the UC political culture, and their advocacy of a Marxist struggle. In 1976, these movements formed the *Parti de Libération Kanak* (PALIKA), which framed the independence struggle in class terms.

The political landscape in New Caledonia shifted dramatically in 1977, when the UC split after its membership threw their support behind independence. A year later, it called for IKS: a socialist, kanak independence. This sudden shift resulted in the departure of most of the party's European adherents. Also in 1977, Jacques Lafleur formed the RPCR in response to the UC's pro-independence stance. By this period, New Caledonia was divided not only on the question of independence but also for the most part along ethnic lines. In 1979, a number of pro-independence parties including the UC and some elements of PALIKA formed together the *Front Indépendantist* (FI), which in 1984 became the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS).

Prior to this, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, like a number of other future leaders of the UC, had spent several years studying in Lyon with the intent on becoming a priest. In 1971, Tjibaou left his ecclesiastical training in order to undertake a political vocation. His work centred primarily around working with Kanak youth, whom he realised faced an increasingly difficult task in reconciling their connection to the clan, custom and the land, as more and more left for Noumea and the towns in search of paid employment. But they were equally marginalised in an educational and social system in which they were rendered largely invisible.

Tjibaou's objective of enabling the clans to reclaim ownership over their own identity led to his organisation of the Melanesia 2000 festival on 3–5 September 1975. Thousands of people from clans around New Caledonia gathered in Noumea for the event, in an unprecedented display of dance, song, storytelling and theatre. This living and breathing inventory that stemmed from the identities of Kanak people was described by Tjibaou as *patrimoine**; though this was always conceived in dynamic and future-oriented ways rather than simply past-bound (Mokaddem 2005: 14). The 'culminating point' of the festival was the theatrical performance of *Téa Kanaké*, recounting the story of Kanak origins, the arrival of the colonisers and final reconciliation, yet reversing the power relations by having all the characters played by Kanak men (Brown 2008). Clifford notes that the decision to host the event in Noumea, the bastion of French identity in New Caledonia, pointed to not only the Kanak presence but also that its identity was not restricted to the *tribu* (2009: 471). However, certain Kanaks, above all the Group 1878, criticised the event as a folklorisation

of Kanak culture that would enable it to be consumed and commodified by Europeans (Trolue and Cahie 1995: 154–155; Brown 2008).

Tjibaou described *Téa Kanaké* as the myth that recounts the creation of the world, man and the clans (Bensa and Wittersheim 1996: 47–48). It is both the first-born and what is considered the *parole* or ‘the spoken Word’, which governs the place of each person within the clan*, as well as the relationship between the person and the natural world. The first-born is also considered as the ‘central pole of the *grande case**’, the dwelling place of the chief who is the repository of the spoken word. In this way, the Kanak individual was intrinsically tied to the rest of the clan through the word, and in turn to the land. Through a public display of Kanak culture, Tjibaou was able to present a critique of French colonisation for its devastating impacts on their identity, especially through the regime’s forced removal of people from certain parts of the mainland and the arbitrary selection of chiefs.

As the centre of power and the spoken word, the *grande case* became a lens through which Kanak sovereignty and independence is envisaged. Joel Pipite (2003) explains how the right to welcome and the right to land have become an integral aspect of the claims associated with the politics of Kanak identity. The right to welcome was conducted by the host clan to the ‘foreigner’, usually a clan that had been displaced either by tribal wars or through natural disasters (Naepels 1998: 174–175). The host clan could welcome them and usually granted them specified lands as long as they respected custom and the authority of the chief. Through the various customs associated with the ‘right to welcome’, a particular understanding of the relationship between the welcoming clan and the welcomed could be made.

According to Pipite, this did not necessarily result in fixed social status or roles. It was possible for welcomed clans to integrate into the host clan either through marriage or in a variety of other ways. The removal of clans from their lands under the *indigénat* regime between 1887 and 1946 and the selection of ‘administrative chiefs’ by the colonial state greatly impacted these rituals of welcoming, creating competing powers within the clan between the customary and appointed chiefs and through the imposition of the ‘right to welcome’ by placing particular clans together on the same land (Pipite 2003: 206). As a result, customary authorities today are calling for greater focus on the history of colonisation so that genealogical claims concerning land and title might be lent greater credence, though this is recognisably difficult at a legal level (Pipite 2003: 201).

In re-centring the political world in Kanak terms, signified by the presence of the *grande case*, independence did not signify autonomy and freedom from others, but rather as Tjibaou described, being able to ‘choose one’s interdependencies’. Local philosopher Hamid Mokaddem (2010) describes this as an ongoing reformulation of the Western concept of sovereignty from the perspective of the Kanak world (see also Morrison 2014). This not only provided a foundation to the right to Kanak self-determination but equally re-cast the basis for relations between New Caledonia’s communities by placing Kanak identity at its centre.

The implications of a ‘right to independence’ for the non-Kanak communities emerged as a central theme of political discourse in the 1980s. It constituted the primary concern at a meeting organised by the French Secretary for the Overseas Departments and Territories, George Lemoine, and the leaders of the FI, the newly formed centrist party the *Fédération pour une nouvelle société* (FNSC) and the RPCR, at Nainville-les-Roches, France, from 8–12 July, 1983. The roundtable produced a declaration that was agreed to by the FI and the FNSC, which recognised for the first time the *fait colonial** that needed to be overcome through the affirmation of the Melanesian civilisation on an equal basis, the inherent right of the Kanak people to independence through a process of self-determination that respected the French Constitution, and a self-determination process that would allow for independence as well as other options (Barbançon 2008: 44–45).

For the FI, it was clear that unless certain restrictions were made to the local electorate, the vote for independence stood no chance of succeeding because of sentiment for independence being largely restricted to the Kanak community. The FNSC had argued that those people who had lived in New Caledonia for a long period of time, for some several generations, have made the land their home and should therefore not be excluded. As one of its members stated:

France placed us in shackles and banned us from returning, and what to say to Taieb Aifa whose father was transported to Caledonia because of French colonisation? How can we be colonisers? What do we say to the Vietnamese descended from the Chan Dang, and of those ... exploited Malabar, Indonesian or Japanese labourers? (Barbançon 2008: 44).

The FI and the FNSC agreed that any act of self-determination could not result in the exclusion of those who had become firmly implanted in New Caledonia, termed the *victims de l’histoire* (‘victims of history’). By using the noun ‘victims’

the FI considered the descendants of those who had arrived as part of French colonisation, either as convict or free settlers, or as indentured labourers in the case of the Javanese and Tonkinois, because they did not necessarily choose in coming to New Caledonia. Following this line of reasoning, the FI argued that self-determination would be open to persons who had at least one of their parents born in New Caledonia (*Assemblée Nationale*, 28 May 1984: 2728). The final document was rejected by the RPCR on the grounds that it opposed any right to independence for the Kanak people alone, and equally objected to the label of victims of history. The leader of the RPCR, Jacques Lafleur sardonically declared: 'what a surprise to learn that we will be 'accepted', we, Caledonians, because we are victims of history. And how ironic is it to see the relief shown by certain, relieved, puppets to be finally 'recognised'. What satisfaction, what glory?' (*LNC*, 29 July 1983). Georges Lemoine suggested that such a concept was ambiguous, stating that it could refer to groups like the *pieds noirs*: French Algerians, who had been forced to leave Algeria following its independence in 1962 (*LNC*, 18 November 1983).

Lemoine's proposed reforms to New Caledonia's status were delivered to the National Assembly in June 1984, where he outlined a proposed state-territory relationship in which self-determination could lead to several different outcomes, including independence. Moreover, Lemoine sought to institute a second chamber that would represent the customary authorities, reflecting the Nainville commitment to recognising the 'equality of Melanesian civilisation and the manifestation of its representativity through custom in the institutions still to be defined' (*Sénat de la République Française, Procès-verbal*, 10 July 1985: 2126). However, a referendum on independence would not occur until 1989, provoking a heated response from the FLNKS who had insisted on a more immediate referendum in which only the Kanak and the victims of history would be able to participate.

Despite Lemoine's attempts to find a solution that would be agreed to by the two sides, in the end, neither side really supported the 'Lemoine Statute'. Recognition of Kanak identity and the notion of victims of history remained contested and unable to be translated into an agreed restriction of the right to vote. The FLNKS restriction of voting rights to those with at least one parent born on the territory was rejected both by the State and the RPCR, which prompted the FLNKS to boycott the 1984 territorial elections and on 1 December to declare the creation of the Provisional Government of Kanaky. Failure to obtain agreement on voting rights and other demands prompted a boycott of a referendum organised by the Chirac government in 1987, where the vote was restricted to those with three years residency.

The Nainville-les-Roches declaration and the failure of the Lemoine Statue prompted the FLNKS to codify their political and social project, resulting in the FLNKS Charter. The Charter identified eight features and claims associated with Kanak independence which reinforced Kanak primacy and sovereignty that would then subsequently open up to the welcoming of the other non-Kanak communities. This would be further evident in the redaction of a FLNKS Constitution in January 1987 that was submitted to the United Nations, in which the Kanak nation was described as ‘constituting a national and pluri-ethnic community, free, united and sovereign, founded on the solidarity of its diverse elements’ (FLNKS 1987).

Both Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene did not live to see the fruits of their labour. Despite the strong objections of a number of elements within the FLNKS and dissident elements that existed outside the front, Tjibaou and Yeiwene, along with Jacques Lafleur, came to the negotiating table in early 1988, signing the Matignon-Oudinot Accords between June and August 1988 (Mohamed-Gaillard 2008: 77). While attending a ceremony in Gosannah, Ouvéa on 4 May 1989, in commemoration of the nineteen Kanak who had been killed by a French military assault after the group had taken sixteen gendarmes hostage, Tjibaou and Yeiwene were shot dead by Djubelly Wéa, a local independentist militant deeply disillusioned and angered by the signing of the Accords. The 1988 agreements delayed a referendum on independence for a period of ten years, focusing instead on the social and economic re-balancing of the territory, undertaken through the creation of three provinces (North, Islands and the South), giving the pro-independence parties political control in two of the three – the North and the Islands – where the Kanak population was dominant.

As 1998 approached, both sides eventually agreed that the referendum would divide the population and potentially unleash more violence. The Noumea Accord, signed on 5 May 1998 by leaders of the FLNKS and the RPCR and the French government, and approved by 72% of the population, endowed New Caledonia with its own unique status in the French Constitution (Titre XIII – Articles 76 and 77). The referendum on independence was once again put off until 2018, during which time the French government has been obliged to irreversibly transfer certain powers to New Caledonia’s local government, reflecting the institution of a ‘shared sovereignty’ arrangement with France.

The language of the Preamble to the Accord⁴ speaks to many of the controversies of the 1980s surrounding legitimacy and belonging. It begins by recognising that the ‘land was not empty’ and the presence of people ‘known as Kanaks’, whose identity is shaped by an inextricable connection to land. Bearing some

inspiration from the notion of victims of history, the text describes colonisation as ‘part of a broad historical movement’ in which there were ‘shadows... even if they were not devoid of light’. Colonisation is described as having

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 for them equates to a recognition of its sovereignty, prior to the forging of a new sovereignty, shared in a common destiny (Section 3, Preamble to the Noumea Accord).

The Preamble equally places a strong relationship between the notions of common destiny and citizenship: ‘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 creation of citizenship has proven to be the most controversial aspect of the Accord, restricting the right to vote in provincial elections and constituting the basis for measures aimed at protecting local employment, especially after a decision in 2007 to impose a stricter interpretation of the Accord in line with the demands of the FLNKS. As a result, only persons who have arrived in New Caledonia by 1998 are eligible to participate in the provincial elections as citizens of New Caledonia. Opponents to these restrictions have argued that they contravene the rights of French citizenship, guaranteed under French, European and international law (MacLellan 2010: 2; Chauchat 2012a). The FLNKS has nevertheless maintained that such a restriction is a necessary measure in order for decolonisation to take place, by ensuring that those who participate in local politics are invested in the country’s future. A separate electoral list has been instituted for the referendum on self-determination, open to persons who have resided in New Caledonia since 1994.

Reflecting on the life and thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, James Clifford (2001) draws attention to the evolving place of the Kanak people and the connection of the clans with their ancestral lands in light of shifting social and economic factors. These have occurred at a number of levels: rapid rates of urbanisation to both Nouméa and Koné, the creation of a small Kanak middle class particularly in the public service, greater educational and vocational achievements and many others. In spite of the ongoing contestation over Kanak independence, Kanak sovereignty has manifested itself in less obvious ways, reflecting the totality of the vision of Kanak independence espoused by the likes of Tjibaou and which has now been developed further since his death.

The most obvious example has been the dominance of pro-independence political parties over the North and Islands provincial governments since the 1988 agreement, enabling greater control over social and economic decision-making in the region, most notably concerning the exploitation of nickel. Indeed, the 1998 Noumea Accord was preceded by an agreement, known as the Bercy Accord, to cede the controlling stake of the Koniambo massif, majority owned by the French state-owned company Eramet, to the *Société Minière du Sud Pacifique* (SMSP), 51% owned by the North Province and 49% by the Canadian mining giant Falconbridge. In the period since, ownership of land and resources has enabled the Kanak population to make some of their own choices. The late Raphael Pidjot, who had been heavily involved in the expansion of the North Province government's ownership of SMSP, speaking soon after the Noumea Accord, highlighted the 'double constraint' facing Kanak society:

To be emancipated within their own environment and to ease their way into globalisation, while at risk of being further marginalised. This gamble is complex, for the homogenisation of values systems on a global level imposes itself on everybody and everywhere. Every society that succumbs to state welfare or to external dependence is destined for failure; all the more so, those who master their economic levers and negotiate their interdependencies is a society in the making (Mokaddem 2012:161).

Reflecting on the meaning of independence in the time elapsed since Tjibaou's death just prior to the Noumea Accord, the former UC president François Burck criticised certain partisans of independence for envisioning their world as a circle, with the Kanak at the middle, rather than as an ellipse with two middle points: 'in our world today, the centres of 'specificity' are necessarily confronted by those of universality and globalisation' (1997: 4).

Though the Matignon-Oudinot Accords recognized eight customary regions in New Caledonia, the Noumea Accord represented the first institutionalization of custom through the creation of a Customary Senate. Each region is represented by two customary leaders in order to speak on issues concerning Kanak land and identity matters. Although the Senate describes itself as the 'second institution of the country alongside the Congress', its remit is consultative only. Arguably its most significant efforts have gone in the direction of codifying a set of values that define the Kanak people, resulting in the publication of the *Charter of the Kanak People* in mid-2014. This document enumerates a lengthy list of core values and customs central to the identity of the Kanak people, including one's name, the spoken word, the link to the land, genea-

logical speech and the Kanak path that provides a means by which the clans can communicate with one another. In Section 6, the text uses the language of sovereignty as the basis from which other peoples are welcomed: ‘It must exercise its welcoming and hospitality rights in conditions fitting to the system of values and the basic principles of custom’.

The Senate has been equally central in the development of customary law for persons of customary status – i.e. the Kanak – in New Caledonia. This has resulted in the institution of customary courts and expanded the roles of customary assessors already introduced in 1982 to judge in civil matters (See Leca 2014). In many ways, customary law is an evolving concept in theory and in practice, but is considered an essential aspect of decolonization. Some scholars, as well as sections of the Kanak community, have criticized its essentialism of Kanak identity through custom rather than allowing for the multiple expressions for persons considered Kanak, and have argued that it is more the product of foreign jurists than the Kanak people themselves (Godin and Passa 2014). Its supporters have argued that developing a body of evolving, codified customary law is considered to be an important step in the development of a legal alterity.

Reflecting the precarious co-existence of a Kanak right to self-determination and the construction of a common destiny, the New Caledonian government commissioned the building of a large totem pole, known as the *Mwâ Kâ*, in the Moselle Bay area at the heart of Noumea on 24 September 2003, marking one hundred and fifty years since France’s annexation of the territory (MacLellan 2005). As Morrison shows, it appealed to Tjibaou’s vision for Melanesia 2000 as a symbol of Kanak identity in the heart of Noumea (Morrison 2014: 42–44; Carteron 2012). The *Mwâ Kâ* literally means the ‘big house in the language of Drubéa-Kaponé in the south of New Caledonia, and referred to the central pole of the *grande case* of the High Chief under which the other ethnic communities of New Caledonia could share in a common destiny; an expression of the ‘right to welcome’ possessed by the first occupants of the land. The 24th of September was subsequently re-baptised as ‘Citizenship Day’, rather than as a day celebrating the French *prise de possession* and which had been equally viewed as a day of Kanak mourning by the independence movement. The *Mwâ Kâ* remains a symbol of a vision of the common destiny that is predicated not on the rights and duties of French citizenship, but through the welcome being extended from the *grande case* to the other peoples living on New Caledonia.

But the *Mwâ Kâ* is equally a contested space, not only between Kanak and non-Kanak but for the Kanak population itself. On Citizenship Day 2012, the

collective *Comité 150 ans*, which was formed in 2003 in order to draw attention to the Kanak presence in Noumea, organised the construction of nine *cases* (traditional Kanak dwellings) on a parking lot in the centre of Noumea, located right next to the Place de *Mwâ Kâ*. The local mayor declared them to be an ‘illegal’ occupation of public space and ordered them to be dismantled, offering instead the possibility of another site – the Quai FED – located on the periphery of the town centre (Chauchat 2012b). Despite both the *Comité 150 ans* and the Customary Senate agreeing to remove the *cases*, a breakaway collective self-titled *tribu dans la ville* (Tribe in the town) refused, effectively creating an illegal sit-in protest. Lucienne Moréo-See, a member of the *tribu*, described the symbolic nature of the *cases*.

To remind each Caledonian, whether they are Kanak or not, of the place of the Kanak in Noumea of which the first of its preoccupations is in its urban planning, [Noumea being] the window of French urbanism in the Pacific, which chokes its town centre with buildings and concrete everywhere. We are in a cultural combat for the recognition of Kanak identity, it’s an act of conviction, of faith and of truth opposite history (*LNC*, 14 November 2012).

The *cases* were designed to welcome all people, showcasing Kanak art and handiwork, as well as offering food and drink to visitors. In one way, they strongly echoed the desire of Tjibaou for a Kanak symbol at the heart of Nouméa that was living and breathing and permitted contemporary forms of expression. However, before dawn on 13 November, bulldozers driven by masked individuals (to ensure their anonymity) and a team of riot police oversaw the removal of the *cases*, despite the objections of the members of *tribu dans la ville* present (*LNC*, 14 November 2012).

Historically, partisans of French sovereignty have argued that France alone is capable of facilitating a peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups living within New Caledonia. Independence, it is argued, would result in the Kanak people assuming a superior status to the non-Kanak. This article has argued that the Kanak independence movement has long undertaken a morally re-centring of New Caledonia away from France, permitting Kanak sovereignty to form the basis for a new social contract between the different identities affirmed in New Caledonia. By accepting Kanak sovereignty as the right to choose partners, the rights and duties of French citizenship can be displaced. At present, this is a vision that has, and is being put in place in various, contested ways, but is equally the subject of the future decisions concerning full sovereignty in 2018.

This article does not suggest that ‘full’ independence is necessary for a different form of cosmopolitanism, but simply that the universalism tied to French identity is not the sole means by which a culturally diverse society, such as New Caledonia, might come to live together. Tjibaou’s emphasis on sovereignty as the right to choose interdependencies approaches Appiah’s cosmopolitan view, which reconciles both the social world that makes us, and our individual freedom to navigate the world. This is not to deny that there have not been criticisms leveled at attempts by Kanaks to codify and ‘essentialise’ Kanak identity, further complicated by the very normal fact that in spite of institutions like the Customary Senate, the Kanak people are represented by a range of voices, including those that are neither for independence, nor recognize the legitimacy of the Customary Senate.

Moreover, the enduring controversy surrounding the right to vote illustrates that the right to welcome does not translate easily into determining who is and who is not a legitimate New Caledonian citizen. Whatever the people of Kanaky/New Caledonia decide in the nigh-approaching consultation on self-determination, it provides a fascinating example of how, despite cosmopolitanism’s appeal to the universal, it will inevitably be shaped by the valuing of these local circles.

NOTES

- 1 Scott Robertson is a PhD candidate in political science at the Australian National University, Canberra, where he is completing his doctoral research examining the contested notions of citizenship in New Caledonia and the construction of a sense of political community. His research equally engages with issues of self-determination, decolonisation and national identity in the Pacific region and the francophone world. Prior to the commencement of his PhD, Scott was an English language teacher at the University of New Caledonia in 2011 and 2012.
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- 2 Throughout the article I refer to the indigenous population of New Caledonia as Kanak, rather than Melanesian, which is preferred by some authors because of its depoliticised connotations. It is not intended to conflate the Kanak people with the independence movement, and I recognise that there are Kanak who are not supportive of the independence movement (See Bensa 1995: 6).
- 3 This and subsequent words marked with an ‘*’ are translated in the glossary at the end of the article.

- 4 The French text of the Noumea Accord can be found in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 27 May 1998, Available: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000555817>

GLOSSARY OF FRENCH TERMS (*denoted by an asterisk* in text*) – Translations by the author.

Term	Translation
<i>Outre-mer</i>	(Overseas) Refers in a general sense to the French overseas departments and territories (since 2003 referred to as <i>collectivités d'outre-mer</i>)
<i>Petit colons/ broussards</i>	A subjective description of European settlers who are primarily smaller landowners living in <i>la brousse</i> , or bush; i.e. the rural areas outside of Noumea, juxtaposed with the larger, more powerful pastoralists and the more metropolitan population of Noumea.
<i>Patrimoine</i>	(Patrimony) A term invoked by Tjibaou to describe the entire inventory from which identity arose, including the land on which they live. Take, for example, his usage here in describing a New Caledonian patrimony: 'Il faut que l'on sache comment les calédoniens cuisent les picots, les cuisses de veaux ou de cerfs, ou les roussettes, ils les font à la sauce tomate ou à la sauce au vin. Il faut que l'on le sache. Car c'est ça notre patrimoine culturel' (Mokaddem 2012 : 112)
<i>Clan</i>	Alban Bensa (1995: 31) describes the clan as a 'group of families who claim to be descended from a founding ancestor of a site from which the members of the clan have scattered according to a precise account'.
<i>Grande case</i>	Usually the traditional dwelling of the High Chief. Given the difficulty of translating this concept into English – the 'Great Hut' does not adequately reflect its importance – the French term has been maintained throughout the article.
<i>Fait colonial</i>	The colonial reality or the acknowledgement of the colonial past and the existential damage stemming from it, recognized for the first time by the French government at Nainville-les-Roches in 1983

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