CONTESTED IDENTITY:

The media and independence in New Caledonia during the 1980s

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

May 1996
I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree in the same or other form to any other University.

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Alaine Chanter                     Date
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This thesis analyses the discursive struggle in the New Caledonian media over the question of independence during the period of most acute conflict during the 1980s. It seeks to demonstrate that the discursive struggle was central to the political struggle, particularly in its emphasis on the development of discourses on identity which authorised particular forms of political engagement. Colonial discourses in New Caledonia provided a well tested armory of identifications of the territory’s indigenous people which were mobilised in the anti-independence media, particularly the territory’s monopoly daily newspaper *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*. The thesis attempts to demonstrate how these identifications connoted, in effect, the non-existence of Kanaks through a denial of a ‘Kanak’ identity: Melanesians who identified themselves as Kanaks and took a pro-independence stance were not recognised within the colonial identity constructions of ‘Caledonian’ and ‘Melanesian’, and their claims to constitute a ‘people’ were vociferously denied. They existed within colonial discourses as a human absence, and were therefore considered to have no rightful claim on Caledonian political life. In the face of such identifications, the pro-independence movement articulated in its media notions of ‘Kanakness’ and the ‘Kanak people’ which sought to hyper-valorise their identity as human and rightful.

It is argued that an analysis of media discourses requires consideration of the type of institutional constraints operating within the media institutions from within which these discourses emerge. The thesis therefore analyses the major constraints operating within *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* and the two major pro-independence media organisations, ‘Kanaky’s first newspaper’ *Bwenando* and ‘Kanaky’s first radio station’ Radio Djildo.

As an overarching concern, the thesis attempts to work through and apply different theoretical approaches relevant to the analysis of media reporting in situations of heightened political contestation, negotiating through aspects of neo-Marxist and post-structuralist approaches. It assesses the relevance of the notion of ‘ideological effect’ as an analytical tool in assessing the effects of power produced by particular discourse, concluding that some theoretical notion concerned with elucidating the differential effects of power is required.
GLOSSARY

**Broussards**  White settlers living in the interior

**DOM-TOM**  Département d’Outre-mer; Territoire d’Outre-mer

**EDIPOP**  Les éditions populaires

**FI**  Front Indépendantiste (Independence Front)

**FLNKS**  Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front)

**FN(NC)**  Front National (Nouvelle-Calédonie) (National Front - New Caledonia)

**FNSC**  Fédération pour une nouvelle société calédonienne (Federation for a New Caledonian Society)

**FR3**  France régions 3

**LKS**  Libération Kanake Socialiste (Kanak Socialist Liberation)

**Matignon and Oudinot accords**  Political settlement reached between the French Socialist government, the FLNKS and the RPCR in August 1988

**métis**  mixed race

**ORTF**  Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision de France

**PALIKA**  Parti de Libération Kanake (Kanak Liberation Party)

**PNC**  Parti National Calédonien (Caledonian National Party)

**PSK**  Parti Socialiste Kanak (Kanak Socialist Party)

**PS-NC**  Parti Socialiste - Nouvelle-Calédonie (Socialist Party - New Caledonia)

**RFO**  Radio France Outre-mer

**RPCR**  Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (Assembly for Caledonia within the French Republic)

**RPR**  Rassemblement pour la République (Assembly for the French Republic)

**RRB**  Radio Rhytme Bleu

**SLN**  Société Le Nickel

**UC**  Union Calédonienne (Caledonian Union)

**UPM**  Union Progressiste Multiracialee/Mélanésienne (Progressive Multiracial/Melanesian Union)

**USTKE**  Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs Kanaks et Exploités (United Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers)
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INTRODUCTION

During much of the 1980s, New Caledonia was embroiled in political turmoil over the question of independence. The increasing forcefulness of the political demands of pro-independence groups, in coalition after late 1984 as the Front de Libération National Kanak et Socialist (FLNKS - Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front), was met with a concerted response from opponents of independence. The ensuing turmoil precipitated a polarisation of the territory’s population over the issue of its political future. To the extent that there had come to be some commonality of experience between the primarily European community which opposed independence and the primarily Melanesian community which advocated it, as a result of decades of difficult but necessary co-existence, these faded into insignificance in the face of the seeming enormity of the political divide that was developing. In late 1984, an event occurred which symbolised this rupture. A group of Kanaks, most of whom were returning from a political meeting in the east coast town of Hienghène, were ambushed and slaughtered by a group of mixed-race settlers who considered themselves European. After the event, there was general concurrence among the families of the dead, as well as among the assassins, that the victims and their killers had been, prior to the escalation of the Kanak political insurrection, friends. That friendship could so readily turn to the will to violent annihilation must call into question the qualities and characteristics of that initial friendship. But, equally, it attests to the ascendancy of a political culture grounded in the will to assert difference rather than explore commonality between the opposed political groups, if only as a means to authorise the many acts of political aggression initiated by both groups, of which the Hienghène massacre was amongst the worst.

The level of political agitation in the territory over the issue of independence was such that most aspects of people’s lives were affected. People therefore had an

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1 Barbançon has written of a mimesis between the European and Melanesian communities in New Caledonia which, he argues, was disrupted by the massive influx of immigrants into the territory in the 1960s and 1970s. He has written: ‘Between Kanaks and Caledonians, relations haven’t always been as severed or as simplistic as today. History has of course known from the outset confrontations and fights...But History is also made of reunions, marriages, festivities. If the differences are flagrant in reality, a number of similarities exist. Even if these similarities aren’t apparent for a superficial or passing observer, they are nonetheless profound’ (1992:22).

2 I use the term ‘Kanak’ when I am referring to pro-independence Melanesians, unless otherwise indicated.
immediate experiential basis for the opinions which they formed. But these in turn
were strongly influenced by, what Said has termed, the ‘communities of
interpretation’ to which these people belonged (Said, 1981:41). They brought with
them a set of understandings which directed their reading of events -
understandings which were expressive of their socio-cultural location in New
Caledonian society and their personal histories, and which were in turn expressed
through discourse.\(^3\) Also making sense of the often chaotic and tumultuous political
events and developments during this period were the territory’s media. Different
sense was, of course, made by the different media, depending on whether these
media opposed or supported independence, or, in a couple of rare instances,
attempted to tread a middle line. The narratives which these media developed
sought to authorise certain readings and delegitimise others. Indeed, a reading of
the territory’s press over this decade makes it difficult to escape the conclusion that
the force of the media’s political engagement served to deepen the political divide.

In a world deemed post-colonial by many, the political crisis in New Caledonia can
be read as either anachronistic or a testimony to the peremptory nature of such a
description.\(^4\) For those engaging in the political struggle in New Caledonia, there
was certainly nothing anachronistic about their situation, as colonialism in modern
guise remained the structuring principle around which most aspects of people’s lives
were organised. This is not to argue that the emphasis within post-colonial writing
on colonialism as a vision whose full realisation was always marred by the actuality
of complex and difficult engagements is not of relevance to New Caledonia. There,
the project of colonialism was as much muddied by the complications of

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\(^3\) In the thesis I follow Stuart Hall’s definition of discourse as ‘sets of ready-made and preconstituted
“experiencings” displayed and arranged through language’ (Hall cited in Purvis and Hunt, 1993:485).
This definition is further discussed in chapter 2.

\(^4\) Anne McClintoch is critical of the application of the seemingly totalising term ‘post-colonialism’ to an
analysis of the complexity of the changing world order. She writes: ‘My misgivings...are not about the
theoretical substance of ‘post-colonial theory’, much of which I greatly admire. Rather, I wish to
question the orientation of the emerging discipline and its concomitant theories and curricula changes,
around a singular, monolithic term, organised around a binary axis of time rather than power, and
which, in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism, runs the risk of obscuring the
continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power’ (1994:294). Vijay Mishra and Bob
Hodge, in their discussion of one of the seminal post-colonial theory texts, *The Empire Writes Back*
(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989), argue that what emerges in this book, which focuses primarily on
post-colonial literature, ‘is the fact that we are really talking about not one “post-colonialism” but many
postcolonials. When we drop the hyphen, and effectively use “postcolonialism” as an always
present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural
combination through the imposition of imperial structures of power, we can begin to see those aspects
of the argument of [The Empire Writes Back] which could be profitably extended. This form of
“postcolonialism” is not “post-” something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of
engagement as it was elsewhere. However, post-colonialism’s concern to render more nuanced an understanding of the experiences of colonialism has led to an emphasis on research into arenas of political and cultural mediation and negotiation in formerly colonised territories and the emergence and significance of hybrid forms, and a lessening of the emphasis on consideration of the continuing existence of colonial divides. The research emphasis therefore seems to have shifted away from consideration of issues of political crisis.

Within media studies, the decisive influence of theoretical perspectives developed in industrialised Western societies has had a similar bearing on the orientation of research. The heavy emphasis in most of this work on the analysis of the media’s functioning in sustaining the hegemonic nature of social formations raises questions regarding its relevance to the analysis of a political context in which broad societal hegemony did not exist. The incorporation in media studies of concerns and concepts developed within post-structuralism has been highly fruitful in adding new dimensions to the analysis of the processes of social reproduction but, once again, an emphasis on the functioning of the media in situations of political struggle is not particularly prevalent in this work. Very largely, therefore, contemporary theoretical orientations appear to have bypassed the New Caledonian ‘anachronism’. How, therefore, do we study today the media’s functioning in situations of acute political contestation? One theoretical concept, which was central to such concerns in the past, was that of ideology. The media were conceived of as sites of ideological struggle between contending political forces. But the notion of ideology, in particular, has fallen into theoretical disrepute. In the face, therefore, of the rejection within much contemporary theory of concepts which might have been used in the past to facilitate media analysis, what is left? Alternatively, is there relevance in the new concepts developed within post-structuralism, and indeed post-colonialism, despite their different emphases? The thesis begins with an exploration of what I believe to be some of the more intractable dilemmas, and opportunities, raised by contemporary theoretical developments for an analysis of the engagement of the media in the political struggle over independence in New Caledonia.

The choice of New Caledonia as a case study on the functioning of the media in a situation of political crisis is, I believe, propitious, for at least two important reasons.
There are practical advantages in studying New Caledonia from Australia. The territory's proximity to Australia has resulted in the development of good collections of material on New Caledonia in Australian libraries. These include some newspaper collections. Moreover, there is expertise on New Caledonia within the Australian research community. In addition, the relatively small size of the territory's media meant that I was able to at least sight, if not delve into more fully, almost all copies of all publications produced in the territory during the 1980s, as well as a significant sampling of prior publications, and to gather material on all the audio-visual media. I was therefore able to get an appreciation for the totality of the media's discursive terrain and to view the manner in which pro- and anti-independence media discourses developed within and against each other. What was happening in the media was a struggle over representation - a struggle over the right to render meaningful the myriad of events which were deemed significant to the political future of the territory. In engaging in this struggle the media was not merely reflecting or expressing differing views already developed within the opposed political communities, but was rather, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, centrally implicated in their production.

The theoretical trajectory

When I conceived of this thesis, I was particularly taken by the seeming relevance of Gramsci's ideas on ideological hegemony to an analysis of the role which the media appeared to be playing in New Caledonia in the political struggle around independence. Gramsci's argument that political struggles were first and foremost ideological struggles seemed to offer a plausible explanation for why political groupings in the territory were so interested in using the existing media, or in establishing their own media, to propagate their views. For Gramsci, the objective of political groups was to forge a functioning consensus around their own positions (or indeed preserve their pre-existing consensus in the face of contestation), the
attainment of this political consensus being described by Gramsci as a situation of ‘ideological hegemony’.

Because of the seeming relevance of Gramsci’s ideas to my reading of the media in New Caledonia, I had intended to reserve a large place in my thesis for the concept of ideology and to describe the struggle which I observed within and between the media as an ‘ideological struggle’. I wanted to argue, in keeping with Gramsci, that the analysis of this ‘ideological struggle’ was critical to the analysis of the political struggle in general. This argument was born out of my concern at the time that not enough attention was being directed within mainstream political science to the importance of ideology in political analysis.

Some time later, after having done the bulk of my empirical work, I returned to my reading on theory and began to read work in cultural studies influenced by post-structuralism. I discovered that this literature had abandoned the concept of ideology, considering it antithetical to its major concerns. Foucault appeared to summarise the main lines of this post-structuralist critique. For Foucault, the concept of ideology was difficult to sustain on three grounds: firstly, it presupposed the existence of a ‘true’ discourse against which other discourses could be assessed as ideological; secondly, ideology was epistemologically grounded in a theory of economic determinism; and, finally, the concept of ideology presupposed some notion of a unified subject (1984:60). All of these presumptions were major areas of critique and exploration within post-structuralism.

In the face of such a critique, I sought out more contemporary writing on ideology to see how theorists had responded and found that, essentially, the responses diverged down two separate tracks. One response acknowledged the insights of post-structuralism and discarded the term as epistemologically flawed. This was the finding of Michèle Barrett in her book *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (1991). Having begun researching the book with the objective of defending ideology, she ended up writing a book which argued that the concept of ideology should be discarded in favour of what she described as the more analytically coherent term ‘discourse’. The other response was to stick doggedly to the term, but to shift it to an ‘effect’ of discourse so that one now talked about ‘ideological effects’. This shift appeared to provide a means of distinguishing between the terms
‘ideology’ and ‘discourse’, terms which had become increasingly blurred in a lot of cultural studies work.

In essence, this literature argued that a discourse became ideological when it could be shown that it sustained relations of domination. While I had little problem with this argument, I was left with the question of what to call discourse which undermines these relations of domination. The literature seemed to suggest that such discourse was non-ideological, a position which I considered dangerously close to the suggestion that it constituted the truth and one which I found difficult to sustain when I tried to apply it to my reading of the New Caledonian media.

While I might readily be persuaded that the racist discourses of anti-independence groups, in their attempts to sustain the unequal power relations engendered by the experiences of colonialism in New Caledonia, were ideological, it would be difficult to consider the discourses of pro-independence groups as non-ideological, even if I agreed that their essential aim was to undermine domination. The heavy mobilisation in these discourses of Marxist tropes and their grounding in structuralist global analysis suggests that it would be dangerous to argue that they were non-ideological, particularly given the contemporary criticism of structuralist models, both theoretically and politically. One conclusion was that both pro- and anti-independence discourses might be described as ideological and that ideological discourse might better be conceived of as discourse used to either sustain or undermine dominative relations of power. Ideological discourse would be, in other words, discourse which is linked to shifts in power.

The post-structuralist retort to this position was inescapable. A central argument within post-structuralism is that discourse is the means through which power is projected. Discourse is power within this conceptualisation. This view on the relationship between discourse and power renders problematic the definition of ideological discourse given above, for under it, all discourse becomes ideological. Ideology thus becomes meaningless, or at least worthless as a separate tool of

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7 Foucault wrote, for example, of the relationship between different discursive formations or knowledges, and power: ‘We should admit...that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not at the same time pre-suppose and constitute power relations’ (Foucault, cited in Patton, 1987:232).
analysis. Why not throw it away, as does Barrett, and use the term discourse instead?

By doing so I could avoid having to differentiate between pro- and anti-independence discourse, simply describing each as versions, mobilised in pursuit of the perceived interests of those articulating them in the power struggle. It meant that I didn’t have to engage in discussion of the relative truthfulness of the various versions. As I said at the conclusion of a seminar where I presented my material on the political discourses in the New Caledonian daily, *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, the question within post-structuralism was not ‘how could the newspaper have been so wrong?’ in its reporting, but rather ‘what relations of power are sustained by its version of the “true”?’ This question presupposed that I have some means for describing the relations of power in New Caledonian society in order to discuss how discourse relates to them.

However, there are difficulties in the manner in which power is conceptualised within post-structuralism. The Marxist and neo-Marxist conceptualisation of power views it as being possessed by classes, groups and institutions. It is, as Wetherell and Potter put it, personalised. The post-structuralist conception of power, on the other hands, as expressed, for example, in the work of Foucault, views power as dislocated. It is not personally or collectively possessed (Wetherell & Potter, 1991:79-85). Foucault develops his view of power by contrasting it with what he terms the sovereign or judicial conception of power implicit in much Marxist and neo-Marxist writing. The presumption behind this notion of power, he argues, is that it is repressive, but for Foucault:

> the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspects of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power...If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply that it doesn’t weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, cited in Wetherell & Potter, 1992:83).
Wetherell and Potter join with other Marxist critics in arguing that this conceptualisation of power, which views it as a type of directionless network running through society, loses sight of the continuing existence of power inequities. As Said writes of Foucault’s conceptualisation:

power can be made analogous neither to a spider’s web without the spider nor to a smoothly functioning flow diagram; a great deal of power remains in such coarse items as the relationship and tensions between rulers and ruled, wealth and privilege, monopolies of coercion, and the central state apparatus. In understandably wishing to avoid the crude notion that power is unmediated domination, Foucault more or less eliminates the central dialectic of opposed forces that still underlies modern society, despite the apparently perfected methods of ‘technotronic’ control and seemingly nonideological efficiency that seem to govern everything (1984:221)

Perhaps another way of conceptualising power within post-structuralism would be to view power as a discourse. My reading of New Caledonian media texts confirmed that there were competing discourses on the nature of power relations in the territory. Anti-independence groups argued that power resided in a handful of Kanak terrorists manipulated by international socialism while pro-independence groups argued that it was vested in a local bourgeois elite with links to international capital and the French state. Although one analysis might seem slightly more plausible than the other, to try to cut a line through these versions and come up with a more ‘objective’ view on power would seem antithetical to the post-structuralist method.

Having reached the conclusion that both theoretical orientations had their limitations in explaining the New Caledonian situation, I resolved to draw on the most useful perspectives offered by each while acknowledging, but not attempting to reconcile, their differences. What follows, therefore, is a discussion of the key theoretical perspectives I have applied in my analysis of the New Caledonian media.

Theoretical perspectives

Relations of power in New Caledonia are complex and contested. However, I believe it is possible to talk about a certain directionality of dominative power which colonialism has entrained. Such a view on power enables consideration of the
potential implications of particular discourses; to assess, in other words, the potential ideological effects of particular discourses by looking at the extent to which they are likely to either sustain or undermine relations of domination.

Why retain a place for such a concept of ideological effect in my thesis? Essentially I do so because I want to be able to differentiate between the effects of power of different discourses. I find it difficult to argue against the statement that all discourse produces effects of power. The experiences of colonialism have touched almost every aspect (if not every aspect) of life in New Caledonia and relations of power in most contexts have been irrevocably changed as a consequence. It is therefore possible to argue that all discourse in New Caledonia could be analysed for its ideological effects. For example, it would be possible, and indeed fascinating, to study the manner in which gender power relations have altered through the experience of colonialism and how these changes are expressed in discourse. Even more seemingly benign discourses, such as those of greeting in public spaces (*Comment allez-vous?*; *Ça va?*; handshakes; kisses et cetera) could be analysed for the manner in which they engage with colonial power relations.

But it seems to me that the potential ideological effects of some of these discourses are greater than others. For example, the implications for power relations of a white man in a formal context greeting a Melanesian whom he does not know with *‘Comment allez-vous?’*, a standard greeting, are a bit more difficult to tease out than when the greeting is *‘Comment va-tu?’*, an expression used in situations of informality, or when greeting children or subordinates. By treating all these discourses as just discourse and not attempting to distinguish between them, we are, in a sense, invalidating the analytical usefulness of the term itself, just as those who argue against the term ‘ideology’ argue that it is analytically useless because it is undifferentiated.

I also think that there is another order of effect, and that relates not only to the effect on individuals but also to the potential collective effects of certain discourses. This potential is powerfully effectuated in most contemporary societies by the media which disperses discourses simultaneously throughout the communities of readers, listeners and viewers engaging with these media. I believe that discourses articulated within the media do engage forcefully with relations of power, and that a
similar belief on the part of the parties to the struggle has precipitated their efforts to mobilise the media in order to either maintain or shift these power relations. In arguing that the media is powerful, I am not suggesting that the effects of media discourses are necessarily predictable or easy to gauge, nor am I suggesting that the media acts alone in effecting influence. I hope that the following chapters will amply demonstrate that my understanding of the media situates the various institutions which it comprises within a complex social and historical context. I also hope that in my discussion of the ideological effects of discourse it will be clear that I posit these as potential or likely effects based on my analysis of the socio-historical context in which they emerge and the relationship of these discourses to other discourses which appear to be more dominant or less dominant in New Caledonian society. The arguments which I advance in this regard are based on my considered reflection and not on a presumption that I can state with certainty what the effects of discourse are.

As a result of all these deliberations, I have chosen to reserve a place for the notion of ideology in my thesis, but one which is much more modest and more tentative than that originally conceived. I discuss ideological effect when it seems to me that a strong argument can be made that a particular discourse is likely to have impacted significantly on relations of power and domination. In doing so, however, I remain influenced by aspects of the post-structuralism. Firstly, the post-structuralist critique of grand teleological theory has left me far less certain that the impact of colonialism in New Caledonian society could be described in any simple terms. For this reason, throughout this thesis I try to avoid talking about ‘colonialism’ and instead refer to ‘the experiences of colonialism’ as a means to highlight that these experiences were diverse and the product of contestation and negotiation, albeit from within a new context of relations of force. Secondly, my difficulty in accepting that a differentiation could be made between anti-independence discourse and pro-independence discourse, based on the former being considered ‘ideological’ and the latter ‘non-ideological’, derives from my scepticism that the truth claims of one form of discourse are more self-evident than the other. This scepticism has been fostered by my reading of Foucault, but its foundations were already there in my reading of Gramsci’s writing on ‘common sense’ and its subsequent exploration in cultural studies. Finally, my interest in the relevance of post-structuralist notions of ‘the subject’ and the processes of ‘subjectification’ to the political struggle in New
Caledonia will be reflected throughout the central chapters of this thesis.\(^6\) In my reading of the New Caledonian press it became increasingly apparent to me that a central aspect of the struggle over independence was a struggle over identity, with the concern being to stake a claim over who could be considered rightful participants in the political process and who therefore could rightfully participate in determining the future of the territory. The experiences of colonialism were highly influential in foregrounding identity and the subject in the political struggle. Not only did colonialism engender new subjects and establish the institutional bases of new processes of identification, it also sought to eradicate, or at least fundamentally alter, the old. The insecurity of identity within the colonial context made the very issue of identity central to the political struggle. The result was a struggle over identity, a struggle over the meaning which could be legitimately derived from being ‘Caledonian', 'loyalist', ‘Melanesian’ or ‘Kanak'.

This insecurity of identity is evident in the overtness with which identity comes to be asserted in periods of acute political tension. This was particularly evident in letters to the editor published in *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* during the mid-1980s. These evince a near obsession with the assertion of identity, as the signature to letters in one edition illustrates. These were signed: ‘An FLNKS kanak activist'; ‘A French Australian/Caledonian and proud of all that'; ‘A Caledonian who holds on to staying that way, hoping that in the last instance she can become an American citizen rather than finding herself under the Soviet yoke through the intermediary of Gaddafi, long live France and long live Reagan'; ‘A Wallisian proud to be so'; ‘Broussards (Bushman)-settlers, but real ones', and finally:

At 18 years of age, a victim of socialism

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\(^6\) A key argument within post-structuralism is that identity is constructed through discourse and is fragmented: that is, each individual is the site of multiple identities or subjectivities, each of which is constituted in discourse. Perhaps Foucault’s most powerful discussion of power relates to its effect in constituting individuals as subjects. In ‘The Subject and Power’, Foucault describes this form of power which ‘applies itself to immediate everyday life [and] which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (1982:212). Foucault is interested in the various ‘modes of objectification of the subject’ (Rabinow, 1991:7). One of the key modes he describes is that of ‘dividing practices’. These are practices through which populations become objectified, divided up, categorised and named: ‘In this process of social objectification and categorisation, human beings are given both a social and a personal identity’ (ibid:8). My discussion of the subject in the thesis draws on this view of the subject as constituted through discourse and through ‘dividing practices’ initiated through discourse.
A former prisoner of war
A veteran of Indochina
A proud Frenchman since 1922
An anti-indépendantiste
An anti-communist and anti-socialist
A proud French Caledonian (*Les Nouvelles*, 12/2/85)

Clearly, identity had become vital to the political struggle over independence.

The struggle over identity was closely linked to the issue of power. Not only was it played out through the affirmation of particular identity formations, but it also involved discourses which sought to delegitimate or denigrate the Other. Bourdieu argues that such struggles over identity constitute the essence of political action which:

> aims to make or unmake groups - and, by the same token, the collective actions they can undertake to transform the social world in accordance with their interests - by producing, reproducing or destroying the representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others (1991:127).

To the extent to which these discourses on identity impacted on relations of power and domination, they might, I argue, be described as ideological. Indeed, perhaps one of the primary means through which ideological discourse operates is through the construction and reconstruction of subjects with the implications which these formations hold for our construction of the Other.

**Contested identity**

The 1992 edition of a history textbook, prepared by the New Caledonian Society of Historical Studies (*Société d’Etudes Historiques de Nouvelle-Calédonie*) and intended for use in high schools in the territory, includes a brief section on ‘the inhabitants of New Caledonia’ who are categorised as: 1. Autochthones; 2. Europeans; 3. Polynesians; 4. Indonesians; 5. Vietnamese; 6. Others (*New Caledonian Society of Historical Studies, 1992:121-2*). These categories are mostly congruent with those employed in the territory’s census, except that the textbook amalgamates the territory’s Wallisian and Tahitian inhabitants under the heading ‘Polynesians’ and includes ni-Vanuatu residents under ‘Others’.9 A further and quite

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9 The 1989 census divided the population into the following ‘ethnic groups’ (the relative sizes of each group in percentages, as determined by the 1989 census, is in brackets): Europeans (33.6%),
striking difference is the use of the seemingly antiquated term ‘Autochthones’ instead of the census category ‘Melanesians’, although ‘Melanesian’ is used once in the accompanying text. Pro-independence leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, once commented that this awkward term began to be used following the granting of voting rights to Melanesians. It corresponded with the creation of a new identification for Melanesians as political subjects whose allegiance was now coveted, and was meant as a more neutral designation in comparison with the prior terms of ‘Kanak’ and ‘indigène’. For Tjibaou: ‘We became “authocthones” in 1951 when there was a need to gather people together, nobody was quite sure what to call them’ (Bwenando, 29/9/87). The ostensibly more neutral connotation of the term ‘Autochthones’ may explain its mobilisation in the textbook. But this seeming will to neutrality is betrayed by the texts accompanying each category. Here we are presented with a stark evolutionist taxonomy which structures each category of inhabitant within a strict hierarchy of difference. For example, we read under the heading ‘Autochthones’:

About 73,000 today (49% of the total population), an increase, but after what an evolution! Epidemics made this number decrease to 17,000 as recently as 1925; certain thought the population was about to become extinct. New hygiene, the efforts of the Administration and the Missions, the creation of medical services in the bush, have reestablished the balance. Melanesians are more and more integrated in modern life while staying very attached to their custom and to their tribes (Société d’Etudes Historiques de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1992:121).

One striking feature of this description is the manner in which ‘Autochthones’ are objectified as inert and passive, prey to the calamity of ‘epidemics’, whose origins are notably omitted in the text, and saved by colonial beneficence, thanks to which they have been able to ‘evolve’. This ‘evolution’ is linked to the notion of ‘integration’ into ‘modern life’, a state of existence which is presented as uncontentious and, indeed, universal. For the ‘Autochthon’, therefore, their will and ability to accede to ‘modern life’ is a product of colonisation, without which they would have not only slumbered in their original state but perhaps ceased to exist. Other categories of inhabitants fare much better when assessed against their own abilities to accede to ‘modern life’. ‘Polynesians’ are described as ‘a sought-after workforce’ who ‘adapt easily to industrial life’ while Vietnamese are described as

Indonesians (3.2%), Melanesians (44.8%), Ni-Vanuatu (1%), Tahitians (2.9%), Vietnamese (1.5%), Wallisians (8.6%), Other asiatics (0.4%); Others and non-declared (4%) (INSEE, 1989).
'very evolved', many having ‘turned towards trades and commerce’. The ‘Indonesians’ are ‘at every evolutionary stage, from the old person in a turban to the modern young girl’. Of the major groups, only ‘Europeans’ escape reference to their standing in this evolutionary hierarchy, although the text suggests that the growth in the ‘European’ population corresponded with a growth in economic activity in the territory (ibid). This lack of reference to the evolutionary stage of ‘Europeans’ attests, of course, to their existence at the pinnacle of this discourse’s evolutionary, developmentalist hierarchy, and therefore their standing as the benchmark against which all other categories are to be assessed.

We might find it scandalous that a contemporary history textbook intended for wide use in secondary institutions in the territory still draws on nineteenth century evolutionist taxonomies to delineate between racial groups. The racism implicit in the construction of such a hierarchical taxonomy appears stark, primarily because the tropes which it employs are so antiquated and so seemingly ignorant of more contemporary, and more discursively sophisticated, forms of racism. In this starkness, however, the notion of identity as discursively constructed becomes apparent in a way which is not always the case when analysing new forms of racist discourse which resonate more closely with contemporary tropes. In these highly synoptic paragraphs on the ‘inhabitants of the territory’ we have, out of the myriad of possibilities of explication, an ordered creation. These identities are not presented as chaotic expressions of difference, but rather specific entities whose differences are ordered around a cohering principle, that of the evolutionary, developmentalist discourse referred to above. Students are encouraged to ‘learn’ from the narratives on identity constructed in this text, and in doing so they learn not only about others but also about themselves. Indeed, this example illustrates how, through discourse, identity becomes relational. Students learn about themselves in relation to others. In the textbook, these others are presented explicitly to the students in a manner which encourages immediate comparison. In the media texts considered in this thesis, the comparison is most often implicit in the discourses on identity which they develop. The anti-independence media's persistent denigration of pro-independence Kanaks carried with it an implicit valorisation of those, primarily Europeans, who opposed them, just as the Kanak denigration of settlers, the ‘Caldoches’, implied a valorisation of Kanak identity and culture.
It is this notion of the interconnectedness of discourses on identity which I seek to stress in this thesis. Nicholas Thomas insists that ‘self-representation never takes place in isolation ... it is frequently oppositional or reactive’ (Thomas, 1994:213). We might assume that in situations of acute political struggle, the reactive character of identity constructions would be particularly evident as political groups seek to assert their legitimacy in the face of contestation from opponents. This appears to have been the case during the period of most acute political struggle in New Caledonia during the 1980s. The claim to political legitimacy was contested differently in the pro- and anti-independence media. Within the main anti-independence publication, the daily Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, considerable discursive effort was vested in constructing the identity of the ‘true Caledonian’ in response to the articulation of a discourse of ‘the people’ within the pro-independence movement. This discourse of ‘the people’ drew on internationalist notions of ‘the people’ as the original inhabitants of a territory. ‘The people’ was a historically constituted entity which was geographically grounded in its place of origin, the ‘imaginative geography’ (Said, 1978) which the pro-independence movement came to term, after late 1984, ‘Kanaky’. The discourse of ‘the people’ acquired significant political legitimacy through its articulation in United Nations documents which proclaimed the rights of ‘the people’, thus historically and geographically constituted, to self-determination. The anti-independence media vociferously contested this assertion of ‘peoplehood’ by Kanaks, refuting their claim to be the original occupants of the territory and their cultural and racial coherence. The extremist right-wing publication Corail claimed that Kanaks were merely ‘those who had eaten their predecessors and captured their women’ (Corail, 22/1/82). But the refuting of Kanak claims to ‘peoplehood’ was also forged through the articulation of an alternative identity, the ‘true Caledonian’, which matched that of ‘the people’ in its exclusionary implications. The ‘true Caledonian’ was a subjectivity but, like ‘the people’, it had its grounding in an imaginative geography designated as ‘la Calédonie profonde’ or sometimes the ‘true Caledonia’. This was 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 perfect order. Kanaks were not ‘true Caledonians’ just as they could not, within anti-independence discourse, constitute a ‘people’ or reside in the ‘true Caledonia’. They constituted, in a very powerful sense, a human absence in anti-independence discourses of identity.
The Kanak assertion of ‘peoplehood’ was itself a response to the denial of national identity which was inherent to the colonial project\textsuperscript{10} in New Caledonia as elsewhere. The claim to constitute a people was not just a claim to an identity; it was a claim to a privileged identity which conferred on those thus constituted special rights. The centrality of the struggle over identity in the broader political struggle was evident in the demands within the nascent pro-independence movement for a recognition of ‘Kanak’ identity. Until the early 1970s, ‘Kanak’ was used as a term of denigration; its appropriation by young activist Melanesians at this time appears to have drawn its inspiration from the corresponding appropriation of ‘négre’ by African activists within the \textit{Négritude} movement in Paris some time earlier. There was a need to give historical, cultural and experiential substance to the Kanak identity which had been gutted of affirmative meaning through the functioning of a type of ‘Manichean allegory’ (JanMohamed, 1985) through which the mere reference to the term ‘Kanak’ signified a range of negative and damning connotations. The quest to assert an identity remained a dominant theme in the pro-independence media throughout the 1980s. It is evident not only in the content of the publications and radio programs - for example, the prevalence of historical contextualisation and the frequent use of personal testimonies - but also in certain stylistic features, such as the use of narrative to heighten the effect of an omnipresence of ‘Kanak eyes’, observing and recording the actions of their political enemies. But, beyond these discursive and stylistic features, the will to create a Kanak media was itself a powerful claim to existence in the face of the relative absence of Kanak voices in the territory’s major media. The Kanak media was, therefore, in its existence, its

\textsuperscript{10} My use here of the term ‘project’ draws on Thomas’s discussion of the notion of colonialism as a ‘project’. Viewing colonialism thus, he argues, assists in avoiding ‘any polarisation of material and ideal aspects of colonial (and anti-colonial) endeavours. A project is neither a strictly discursive entity nor an exclusively practical one: because it is a willed creation of historically situated actors it also has roots and ramifications which were not or are not apparent to those involved. And a project is not narrowly instrumental: the actors no doubt have intentions, aims and aspirations, but these presuppose a particular imagination of the social situation, with its history and projected future, and a diagnosis of what is lacking, that can be rectified by intervention, by conservation, by bullets or by welfare. This imagination exists in relation to something to be acted upon - an indigenous population, a subordinate class, a topographic space - and in tension with competing colonial projects, yet is also a self-fashioning exercise, that makes the maker as much as it does the made. And projects are of course often projected rather than realised: because of their confrontations with indigenous interests, alternate civilising missions and their internal inconsistencies, colonial interventions are frequently deflected, or enacted farcically and incompletely’ (1994:106). Thomas notes that an emphasis on colonial discourse theory can have the result, in analyses of colonialism, of effacing the agency of colonial actors, just as an emphasis on colonial agents can result in an inadequate consideration of the significance of the discursive context in which they operate. Viewing colonialism as a ‘project’, he argues, can help to reconcile the place of discourse and agency in analyses of colonialism (ibid:105). This will to reconcile discourse and agency is also a central concern in this thesis and has resulted in my drawing on some of the theoretical concepts developed by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and is reflected in my emphasis on discursive strategy which is discussed later in this introduction.
styles and its discourses, moulded by the drive to prove Kanak existence, and to prove a type of existence which found expression in its different stylistic and discursive orientations.

Thomas has argued that, while it is important to acknowledge that the affirmation of identity is central to the pursuit of nationalist objectives:

... it also seems crucial to recognise political contest within a national (or tribal) population, contest that is manifest not only in the process of selecting aspects of past heritage or present custom that are to be privileged in the construction of ethnic identity, but also in radical rejections of what is local and traditional (1994:214).

While Thomas is primarily interested here in considering objectifications of identity in traditions and customs, his more general attention to the existence of divergences and contests over identity within nationalist movements in the Pacific is evident in the expressions of identity in the Kanak media. In some instances, the assertion of existence found expression in essentialist notions of a Kanak past which authorised the people’s claim to the right to self-determination, while in others the past offered only a foundational basis for the development of an identity which was being forged in the process of political struggle. These conflicting articulations frequently co-resided in pro-independence publications, suggesting a certain instability in articulations of Kanak identity. This instability reflected political differences within the movement between those who sought a more exclusionary independence for Kanaks, in which Kanaky would be an independent nation structured around Kanak institutions, and those favouring a more inclusive, transcultural view of independence in which all those who sought to reside in an independent Kanaky would acquire ‘Kanak’ nationality. But the frequency of the shifts within publications between these articulations and permutations of them suggests that something more than political difference was generating this instability; it suggests that strategic considerations were frequently a primary factor in particular mobilisations and their permutations. This emphasis on the strategic use of discourse implies that the ‘instability’ in discourses on Kanak identity may, in effect, be highly

11 These articulations resulted in different attitudes towards culture and tradition. Within the former, culture and tradition authorised ‘Kanak’ identity while in the latter their significance receded in the face of the exigencies of the political struggle through which identity was being forged. This ambivalence towards tradition is particularly evident among those groups within the pro-independence movement most influenced by Marxist discourse, in particular the Parti de Liberation Kanak (PALIKA), for which ‘Kanak’ identity derives very largely from the structural position of ‘Kanaks’ as the oppressed within the capitalist system and links ‘Kanak’ identity with the identity of the proletariat in general.
advantageous in allowing for a variety of strategic interventions in a discursive field in which meaning was continuously shifting under the weight of challenge.

**Discourse and strategy**

Contending articulations of identity also existed within anti-independence discourses. The reader of *Les Nouvelles* was required, for example, to negotiate an array of articulations of Caledonian and Melanesian identity, many of which were mobilised concurrently and some of which were oppositional. For example, ‘Caledonian’ signified being non-Melanesian in many instances, but articulations of ‘Caledonian’ as Melanesian also appeared in *Les Nouvelles*. In instances, these differences may have resulted from the mobilisation of more antiquated discourses on identity, such as appears to have been the case in the use of ‘Autochthon’ referred to above, and the use of ‘Caledonian’ as Melanesian, which dates from the earliest period of colonisation.  But even in such instances, there are strategic reasons why archaic forms are revitalised. The incidence of concurrent articulations along with the frequency of discursive shifts in identity constructions are so prevalent, particularly in anti-independence discourse, that some understanding of the functioning of discourse which goes beyond the seemingly monolithic and static connotations encompassed in such notions as ‘colonial’ or indeed ‘anti-colonial’ discourse seems particularly warranted. Articulations of identity changed constantly, and these changes were effected, it appears, for rhetorical ends, because it was perceived, for example, that previous constructions had been effectively appropriated by political opponents, or that challenges to these constructions had been rhetorically decisive, or that certain constructions had crumbled under the weight of their own contradictions. This discursive jostling evident in the New Caledonian press suggests the need for an understanding of the strategic functioning of discourse, and this is a central focus in Pierre Bourdieu’s work on language and power.

The pursuit of an understanding of the strategic functioning of discourse is fraught with difficulty, primarily because the notion of strategy implies an agent intentionally advancing its interests through the pursuit of strategies. The notion of strategy

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12 For example, ‘Anthropology has showed how the New Caledonian, in his physical structure, his skeleton and his muscles, has details which remind us of those of the Neanderthal man...’ (Leenhardt, cited in Bensa, 1988:188).
therefore appears at odds with the post-structuralist mistrust of the existence of a primordial individual subject or agent and its repudiation of the concept of intentionality. Nonetheless, I believe it is possible to talk, as Bourdieu does, of strategy and interests without presuming that these derive from an essentialised subject. We can accept that the individual is the intersection of a collection of competing subjectivities constructed through discourse. Associated with these subject positions are differing intentions. Just as the subjects are historically constituted, so too are the intentions which they pursue and the strategies which they devise to advance these intentions. A person calling herself ‘Caledonian’, ‘Melanesian’ and ‘woman’ strategically uses discourse in the pursuit of her perceived interests under each of these subjectivities, but this does not imply that these interests transcend the constructed nature of these categories.

The work of Bourdieu is very much structured around the language of interests and strategy (Bourdieu, 1977). The individual for Bourdieu is always strategically engaged in optimising her capital in the range of fields in which she operates. Bourdieu designates a range of fields - the economic, political and cultural fields for example - with varying degrees of interchangeability between the types of capital which can be exchanged within these fields. Bourdieu’s theories are particularly relevant to this thesis because of the importance he places on language in this process of strategically operating in the various fields. There is a certain hyper-functionalism in Bourdieu’s ontology which I find worrisome. The notion that we operate invariably to optimise our capital in all the fields in which we operate seems too constraining an explanation for the diversity of human behaviour. Nonetheless, the image of strategic discursive jostling which his theory of practice suggests seems to fit with the type of discursive behaviour evidenced in the New Caledonian press, particularly Les Nouvelles.

One particularly poignant illustration of the strategic mobilisation of identity was the emergence in 1986 of a discourse on métissage (inter-racial union). This discourse emerged in association with the dismissal of charges against the seven settlers accused of perpetrating the Hienghène massacre. The settlers considered themselves ‘European’ despite most being descendant from interracial unions between white settlers and Melanesian women, which was evident in their skin tone
and other physical characteristics. Their palpable métissage was seized upon by the anti-independence media, their defence lawyers and the settlers themselves as proof that the massacre had not been born of racial hatred but was rather a desperate act performed in response to the extremist political terror waged by FLNKS activists in the Hienghène valley where the settlers resided. In advancing the identity of these settlers as ‘métis’ to vindicate their brutal act, a discourse on métissage was elaborated which integrally linked this identity to la Calédonie profonde. The physical harmony of this imagining was matched by a sociological equilibrium exemplified in métissage. The organicism of this blending of nature and society expressed in la Calédonie profonde was a powerful image which enabled this imaginative geography to be equated with ‘the Good’ while the Manichean depiction of those who sought to disrupt this harmony portrayed them as bad and evil. It therefore lent authorisation to an act of brutality which horrified even many who opposed independence. The pro-independence movement also sought an understanding of the massacre in the identity of the settler métis. For the prosecution lawyers, the massacre was an act of allegiance to the ‘European’ identity by settlers whose notions of selfhood had been rendered particularly fragile by the heightened insurrectionary activity. Their physical characteristics as métis and their demonstrable cultural hybridity rendered their claim to be ‘European’ contestable by those less touched by Melanesian racial or cultural influence. The massacre was, they argued, a desperate attempt to prove their Europeanness and reject their Melanesianness, which had become a difficult legacy in the very tense political context. The prosecution therefore sought in its arguments to give concrete expression to the polysemous nature of identity and the potential which multiple identification entrains for immersion in painful contradictions, exacerbated for the settler métis in New Caledonia by the Kanak insurrection.

**Dilemmatic discourse**

A focus on colonial or anti-colonial discourse is instructive in pointing to the commonality of symbolic and linguistic borrowings across these discourses, but it can be detrimental in masking the tensions and contradictions which exist within and between them. Colonial or anti-colonial discourses are, in effect, discursive networks made up, as de Bolla argues, ‘of a number of discrete discourses which

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13 This issue is discussed in a published conversation between Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton
interact, sometimes without hostility, at other times with considerable violence, with each other’ (de Bolla cited in Thomas, 1994:50). There is a need to point to the heterogeneity of colonial discourse when considering its strategic functioning, because the tensions and contradictions within this network point to the possibility of discursive openings which can be seized upon and exploited by political opponents. Discursive heterogeneity is an inevitable aspect of colonialism because of the diversity of experiences encompassed within the new relationships of power brought about by colonial conquest, which implies that openings for contestation and subversion are also inherent in the colonial project. But, rather than merely viewing these tensions and contradictions as inevitable by-products of the experiences of colonialism, it is also possible to view them as rhetorically efficacious in allowing for a degree of argumentative flexibility not otherwise available to strategic actors operating within a monolithic discursive network. There is rhetorical benefit, for example, in having ‘Caledonian’ mean European in some or most contexts, Melanesian in others, and in also allowing for an inclusive categorisation of ‘Caledonian’ which applies to all inhabitants of the territory in yet another context. This flexibility relates not only to ostensibly contradictory constructions of identity but also to other colonial discourses which are in tension or contradiction. Because I wish to stress not only the perils but also the rhetorical benefits of discursive contradictions, I use the term ‘dilemmatic’ discourse rather than ‘contradictory’ discourse. The term ‘contradiction’ within Marxist political discourse, for example, invokes a teleology which suggests that our aim is to resolve these contradictions in order to reach higher modes of understanding. I have enormous sympathy for the position that we should aim to develop what Gramsci termed ‘good sense’, a critical understanding which seeks as far as possible to resolve contradictions, and I hope that this thesis reflects this quest. However, it is also clear to me that, in the way we talk and write, particularly in situations of contestation, we mobilise and develop discourses in ways which do not seek to be reconciled. We tend to apportion particular discourses to particular subjects and bunch discourses together to avoid obvious clashes, all the while attempting to enhance our linguistic intervention in the fields in which we are operating. In the various permutations on Kanak identity articulated within pro-independence publications we can see the shifts between inclusive and exclusive representations as often corresponding with different strategic considerations, just as different articulations of ‘the people’ within anti-
independence publications were mobilised on the basis of their perceived rhetorical
efficacy. The rhetorical efficacy of cordonning off dilemmatic discourse is also
evident in other anti-independence discourses. In *Les Nouvelles* and other anti-
independence publications, a discourse on the necessity for continued affiliation
with France co-resided with a discourse which expressed hostility towards France
for decades of political and economic neglect of the territory. In my reading of the
daily newspaper, there was very little attempt to reconcile these two discourses
Rather, they were mobilised separately, the discourse of affiliation occurring most
frequently in response to the pro-independence discourse on Kanak independence
and the discourse on abandon being articulated when the objective was criticism of
the French Socialist government’s response to the Kanak insurgency.

In this thesis, I have avoided attempting to reconcile dilemmatic discourses, despite
the more than occasional temptation to stitch together a coherent narrative out of
the dilemmas I perceived. The temptation to sort through the tensions in order to
explain what, for example, the pro-independence movement ‘really’ meant by Kanak
independence, in the face of the at times perplexing array of articulations, would
undermine my concern to stress the significance of discursive dilemmas. The
differing articulations point not only to the existence of different imaginings of Kanak
independence, with at times considerable tension between them; they also point to
openings for contestation by political opponents. But, most importantly, readers
drawing on the media to make sense of the political turmoil around them had to
contend with these discursive dilemmas; they did not have a higher authority
making sense of the dilemmas for them. Indeed, for many, the media was itself this
higher authority which created meaning around events through its work in
categorising, ordering and framing.

Exposing dilemmatic discourse rather than attempting to reconcile it is central to this
thesis because my concern is to glean what media audiences understood of the
political situation through their reading of the territory’s media.14 Their

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14 I have chosen to not include consideration of the metropolitan French press in this study. There
was, firstly, a need to limit the empirical scope of the thesis. Including metropolitan French
publications would have required a lesser consideration of local publications. Secondly, the influence
of the daily French press on the political situation in the territory was scant because of the very small
numbers of daily newspapers flown into the territory (they arrive three days later anyway). Only a
handful of copies of *Le Figaro, France Soir, Le Monde* and *Liberation* are ordered for the complete
territory. Several of these go to consulates and only a couple to news stands. Some daily
publications, for example *Le Monde, Le Figaro and Liberation*, are available for public reading at the
understanding was not forged solely through engagement with media discourses. As historically and socially located actors they were bearers of discourse and derived meaning through their engagement with a range of institutions, not only the media. But the significance of the media in describing and explaining events should not be underestimated. Indeed, Stuart Hall has argued that it is the media, *par excellence*, which performs this function in modern times (1985:67). Clearly, as I have argued, a further study could ascertain the complexity of interpretations which historically and socially located actors derive from engagement with media discourses in all their heterogeneity. But this does not negate my belief that certain plausible readings can nonetheless be advanced, and that their identification is greatly assisted by a focus on discourse as a dynamic phenomenon. In the counter-discourses developed within the pro- and anti-independence media, we can often glean central readings of the discourses being countered. For example, one persistent reading of the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde* in the pro-independence press, articulated particularly in relation to the Hienghène massacre, was that Kanaks were considered by Europeans as an animal-like sub-species. The acquittal of the settler *métis* was taken by the pro-independence press as a signal that the hunting of Kanaks was now officially sanctioned. Perhaps this was a polemical response which bore an uncertain relationship to the more nuanced readings by those less politically engaged. But there is considerable evidence to suggest that similar readings were shared, and authorised events which contributed to the political crisis in the territory. Similarly, within the anti-independence movement, the large participation of protesters in a succession of demonstrations organised by political groups ranging from conservative to extremist suggested that the interpretation within the anti-independence press that the discourse of Kanak independence was racist was shared by many. In the speeches of politicians and

Bernheim Library. *Les Nouvelles* would frequently republish articles from the metropolitan press. However, these mostly did not relate to political issues. In addition, *Les Nouvelles* would sometimes critique articles written in the metropolitan press, such as its criticism of *Le Monde*s articles which ostensibly revealed that two of the Kanak hostage takers in the Ouvéa incident had been murdered after their capture. In contrast, there is an avid readership for weekly magazines. For example, during the 1980s, between 2,600 and 2,800 copies of *Paris Match* were imported weekly, 1,200 of *Le Point*, 600 - 700 of *L'Express* and under 500 copies of *Le Figaro* magazine. These were the metropolitan magazines which were most frequently read in the territory during this period (interview, Marie-Claire Viratelle, Nouvelles Messageries Calédoniennes de Presse, 23/4/94). All are conservative publications whose articles were almost invariably opposed to the independence struggle. As an extreme example, Roger Holiindre wrote on New Caledonia for *Paris Match* in the early to mid-1980s. He was later elected to the French parliament as a National Front Deputy. These weekly publications contributed significantly to the discursive struggle, but almost always in support of local anti-independence discourses. It should be remembered therefore, in my discussion of the local anti-independence media in the territory, that the discursive positions which they developed were reinforced by the popularity of a weekly metropolitan press in the territory.
others addressing these gatherings, such readings were advanced and greeted with apparent enthusiasm by the crowds. There were, in other words, many indications that the types of readings of events articulated within the contending media in the territory were seized upon, if not already shared, by readers empathetic to the political orientations of the different publications. A focus on oppositional discourse therefore provides insights into the more publicly dominant readings of discourse which, through their expression in the media, come to be shared by many political partisans.

**Discourse and institutions**

When assessing the political functioning of the media, one fruitful line of enquiry has been to explore the instrumentalist links between the media and political and economic interests. The presumption behind this research orientation is that structures of ownership and control influence discursive output. A further line of enquiry has been to consider the professional and social practices within media institutions from which media products emerge. The quest is to explain how socially and historically located agents (journalists and other media workers) work towards producing a particular range of delimited meanings (Hall, 1985:68). What is required, therefore, is an understanding of the politico-economic location of media institutions, and of the professional and social practices within these institutions through which discourse is produced. Here, Bourdieu’s work is once again relevant. He is interested in explaining the complex and dynamic interrelationships between institutional mechanisms, social practices, and the actions of wilful human agents in order to explain social reproduction. His theory of practice seeks, in other words, to analyse how relatively predictable outcomes emerge from complex institutional and social settings. To this end, Bourdieu is adamant that the analysis of discourse necessitates attention to the institutional mechanisms which delimit these discourses, warning that: ‘Any analysis of ideologies, in the narrow sense of “legitimating discourses”, which fails to include an analysis of the corresponding institutional mechanisms is liable to be no more than a contribution to the efficacy of those ideologies’ (Bourdieu, 1977:184).

John B. Thompson’s work on television broadcasting in Britain is perhaps the most relevant example of the application of the type of institutional analysis urged by
Bourdieu. In his book *Ideology and Modern Culture* (1990), Thompson outlines his approach to the analysis of mass communication which he terms, following Ricouer, ‘depth hermeneutics’. The depth hermeneutic approach involves three phases, the first of which is an analysis of the socio-historic and institutional context of the production and reception of media discourse. This is followed by the second phase, discourse analysis, and then the third, interpretation. Investigation into the socio-historical and institutional contexts requires consideration of such features as the institutional organisation of producers and of transmission networks; patterns of ownership and control; the techniques and technologies employed in production and transmission; the routine and practical procedures followed by television personnel; and the aims of producers and programmers (Thompson, 1988:374). This kind of research, he argues:

...would help to illuminate the rules, procedures and assumptions implicit in the production process, including assumptions about the audience and its needs, interests and abilities. These rules, procedures and assumptions are part of the social conditions and codes which media personnel draw upon and implement in producing particular programmes (ibid:375).

Thompson’s discussion of the need to consider socio-historical and institutional factors is apt, but the question of how one goes about undertaking this research is problematic. Thompson argues that empirical, including documentary, research and other more contextual, interpretive approaches are appropriate. Indeed, his examination of British television contains considerable empirical detail deriving from documentary research, questionnaires and interviews. In his blending of empirical research and interpretive analysis, Thompson’s methodology echoes that of Bourdieu, and he, like Bourdieu, tends to bracket off questioning of the authority of the empirical research upon which his interpretation is significantly based.

The central problem is: how is one to conceive of and study media institutions? From one perspective they can be read as sites of practical engagement, a view which opens them up to empirical techniques of observation and recording. But, from another perspective, media institutions are themselves, as Laclau and Mouffe say of institutions more generally, discursive articulations (1985:107). Within this view, the practice of practical engagement in media institutions is a product of the discursive constraints operating within institutions, with constraints being understood in the Foucauldian sense as both inhibiting and enabling. Kanak
journalists, for example, were required to negotiate through a range of discursive pressures which had to do not only with the bearing of notions of professionalism, objectivity, truth and professional comportment on their work, but also with such notions as political militancy, ‘Kanakness’, and a critique of truth. As the chapter on the Kanak media illustrates, Kanak journalists negotiated strategically and dilemmatically through these discursive pressures. Within the Kanak media as elsewhere, these discursive constraints promoted certain types of behaviour and the production of certain types of products, and de-emphasised others. What becomes interesting therefore is not so much a description of these behaviours and products, but rather a consideration of the constraints - the discourses in other words - from within which they arise.
Institutions and the double imperative

The dilemmas which arise from these different perspectives on institutions are very relevant to the consideration of media institutions in this thesis. It seems to me that the post-structuralist concern to analyse discourse, when put to the task of institutional analysis, is most readily turned towards deconstruction - pulling apart the discursive constructions of institutions which other people have developed. But, in the case of New Caledonia, very little has been written on the contemporary media, and it is essentially I whom am constructing these institutions for the readers of this thesis. The problem thus becomes how to pursue an approach which emphasises deconstruction when the task at hand requires construction.

Following Derrida, David Campbell has advocated a process of critique which resists bipolar demarcations, such as that suggested by the notions of deconstruction versus construction, describing this mode of analysis as the ‘double imperative’. This double imperative:

resists in its operation the reduction of our thought and action to the positions of either/or, for/against, by foregrounding the necessary interdependence of (supposed) opposites upon one another, and the traces of each that marks the other (1995:20).

Campbell’s urging of such a mode of critique is evocative of Stuart Hall’s advocacy of a mode of discourse analysis that moves between deconstruction and reconstruction. Although Campbell and Hall are not directly concerned with institutions, their advocacy of this double movement has relevance, I believe, to the analysis of institutions. In constructing it is important to be constantly vigilant of the possibilities of deconstruction, of critiquing that which is presented as construction. Moreover, it is important that the manner in which institutions are constructed for readers highlights these constructions as provisional, pointing to them as arguable constructions which result from considerable reflection, but never as reified ‘truth’.

Although very little in-depth work has been published on the media in New Caledonia, most books on New Caledonian politics contain references to some media, and I draw on this material to varying degrees in my construction of the

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15 See Wetherell and Potter for a discussion of Hall’s advocacy of this approach (1992:86-87).
I have attempted to do so in a spirit akin to that which underpins the notion of the ‘double imperative’, to deploy what Said has described as a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (1994:308) in my selection of material. What results is a provisional construction which I present to others (as indeed to myself) as a possible site for deconstruction. However, this material forms only a small portion of that which I used in this thesis. Most of my understanding of the territory’s media came to me through the stories told to me by people who were working inside and outside the media, and through my reading of the media itself. In most instances, therefore, I did not have ‘authoritative’ documentation to refer to, merely the self-interested accounts of others. This reliance on these stories made me very much aware that my understanding of the territory’s media was being developed through discourse. This is not to argue, of course, that ‘authoritative’ accounts are outside of discourse but rather to point out that, in the forcefulness of their arguments, an awareness of the provisional, discursive nature of such accounts is sometimes lost.

My task therefore became that of analysing these discourses for what they told me about the types of constraints operating within media institutions. For example, in my discussions on the Kanak media with supporters and opponents, I was frequently told that newspapers were not a Kanak ‘thing’. This was a discourse on the oral nature of Kanak society and culture which seemed to be mobilised to demonstrate that Kanaks were not culturally equipped to engage in the production of written media. In the thesis I try to demonstrate the power of this discourse in structuring the style and content of most Kanak media. The seeming obsession within some Kanak media with ‘professionalism’ is, I believe, rendered far more understandable through an awareness of this discursive constraint. In addition, I was very grateful to have an opportunity to spend time with journalists working at Les Nouvelles and to work with journalists at the Kanak radio station, Radio Djiido. This experience was invaluable in exposing me to the discourses which journalists themselves mobilised about their work and which told me something of the nature of the discursive constraints within which they operated.

Four monographs have been written on the New Caledonian media and there is an entry on the media in the New Caledonian encyclopedia (Godard:242-257). The texts are: Georges Coquilhat’s work on the nineteenth century press in New Caledonia (1987); Ismet Kurtovich’s thesis on the reporting on the N’Goye affair in Les Nouvelles Caledoniennes (1980) and his content analysis comparing 1967 and 1977 editions of La France Australe; and, Michael Spencer’s chapter on media reporting in France and New Caledonia on the political events in the territory during the mid-1980s (1988).
This access to *Les Nouvelles* and Radio Djïido was exceptional. Aside from the assistance given to me by these two organisations, I had great difficulty in being able to meet with people working in other media institutions, despite having approached each organisation for assistance. People refused to meet with me or failed to turn up at agreed meeting times, or in a vaguer sense became inaccessible (for example, they were never in their offices when I rang and their staff were unaware of their whereabouts). Through my persistent and failed attempts to contact many people I became aware that the frustrations of my fieldwork were perhaps expressive of a much broader phenomenon in New Caledonian society - the will to control discourse. In a very modest way, my experiences seemed to illustrate that discourse was perceived by these people as powerful, so powerful, in fact, that its control through the ultimate strategy of silence was considered warranted by those I sought to approach. This heightened concern with discourse was probably accentuated by the tense political circumstances existing in the territory during my first period of fieldwork in 1989, but my difficulties in meeting with people continued during my second period of fieldwork in 1994. Indeed, as the first chapter seeks to illustrate, recognition of a relationship between the control of discourse and political power has been a feature of colonialist relations in New Caledonia since annexation, expressed particularly through the strategies of political and economic interests to control the colony’s media.

**The purpose and structure of the thesis**

I am concerned in the thesis with the dynamic and strategic functioning of media discourses relevant to the independence struggle during its, to date, most acute phase. One of my major interests is the manner in which media discourses permutated as a result of discursive contestation from oppositional media and their client groups. The central part of the thesis is therefore organised around discussion of the main political groupings of media during the period from the early 1980s to the signing of the Matignon and Oudinot accords in 1988, which resulted in the worst of the hostilities ceasing. Prior to this, in chapters 1 and 2, I attempt to contextualise this discussion both historically and theoretically. Chapter 1 provides a historical overview of the media’s engagement with politics since annexation, concluding with a discussion of the political functioning of the major media institutions in the territory during the 1980s. Chapter 2 elaborates on some of the
theoretical issues raised in the introduction and concludes with a discussion of conceptual and methodological issues in discourse analysis. These chapters pave the way for the more detailed discussion of media institutions and discourses during the period under consideration. Chapters 3 to 5 discuss the anti-independence media. Chapter 3 analyses institutional practices in Les Nouvelles and considers how the paper’s resolute opposition to independence is expressed both stylistically and discursively, while chapter 4 analyses more closely the shifting discourses of identity in Les Nouvelles. Chapter 5 discusses the construction in more extremist anti-independence publications of a ‘loyalist’ identity and considers how this identity is given substance through the discourses articulated in these publications. The thesis then considers the anti-independence media, beginning with a discussion in chapter 6 of the main anti-independence media institutions and the discourses around independence which they develop, and a more detailed consideration in chapter 7 of the shifting notions of identity within these media. Chapter 8 concludes the analysis of media institutions in the territory by exploring institutional practices and the shifting nature of political influence in state broadcasting during the 1980s. The final chapter analyses the manner in which different media reported on a series of incidents and events related to the Hienghène massacre, with a view to highlighting the contested nature of media constructions and the significance of struggles over identity to the broader political struggle over independence.

In general, the major contentions of the thesis are that:

- the structure of the New Caledonian media in the 1980s remained heavily influenced by the relations of power which had developed through the experiences of colonialism;

- the New Caledonian media did not merely reflect the political crisis occurring within New Caledonian society but were centrally implicated in the production of this crisis; and,

- the discursive struggle over identity was integral to the political struggle over independence through the authorisation which it gave to particular identity formations and therefore to particular forms of engagement in the political struggle.
It is my hope that the material presented in this thesis underscores the centrality of discursive struggle to political struggle, a point argued in much contemporary cultural theory, and one which is increasingly informing other areas of enquiry.
In 1989 I travelled with two *Les Nouvelles* journalists on an assignment to a coastal area north of Noumea. The journalists had been sent to interview an oyster farmer about his recently established operation. One of the journalists was a young metropolitan French woman who was working for the paper on exchange for a short period. At the conclusion of the interview and inspection of the facilities, the oyster farmer asked the journalist how much he owed her. She assured him that the service was free. Later she commented to me that she had been very surprised to encounter this question frequently while working in the territory.

It is tempting to read this vignette as expressive of the legacy of colonial relations in New Caledonia. The metropolitan journalist's presence in the territory, working on the daily French language newspaper, was a product of colonialism enabled by the imposition of French political, economic and cultural practices on the indigenous inhabitants and the emergence of new institutions, among them a French language press. But, in it, we can also glimpse some of the differences and distances which separate France from her colony, themselves deriving from the different relations of power established and perpetuated in the territory by the colonial power. The crudeness of the oyster farmer's question was suggestive of a context in which the media - an institution considered in France, as in most liberal democratic societies, to be characteristic of a functional civil society - was itself subject to relations of power which bore little resemblance to those implicit in the discourse of the media as the fourth estate, which presents the media as engaging in public debate from a vantage point untainted by undue economic or political influence. Indeed, the type of *modus operandi* suggested by the oyster farmer's question presents the media as almost indistinguishable from other colonial institutions which have developed within a context of power presided over by the colonial administration and maintained by a class of comprador politico-economic elite.¹ Within this discourse, the mass audience media is, as one pro-independence publication put it, embroiled in 'colonial tutelage' (*Combat Ouvrier*, 1/5/94).

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¹ The oyster farmer's question was congruent with comments which I had heard repeatedly from business people in Noumea on the power of an economic elite in the territory to determine the fate of their businesses. Several people recounted that in order to operate successfully they were required to make payments to certain businessmen or to comply with certain proscriptions on their operations determined by these businessmen. Others described how businesses had failed because they had fallen foul of these business interests.
Just as the discourse of the media as the fourth estate shifts attention from the complexities and complicity of the media's engagement with political and economic interests, so too the discourse of the media as a colonial institution tends to obscure the complexities of the media's engagement with, and attempted disengagement from, colonial authority. In contemporary times, the territory’s state radio and television service provides probably the clearest example of engagement, while the emergence of a pro-independence media attests to the concertedness of attempts to disengage. Between these exists, within and between media institutions, a complexity of mediations. But colonialism nonetheless constituted the politico-economic and cultural context within which the institution of the media per se emerged within the territory, and the territory's media, whether apologetic or oppositional, bear the mark of this difficult engagement.

The media and politics in the early colony

The relationship between the exercise of political power and the control of discourse was expressed in the early colony in both the proliferation of a lively press and in administrative attempts to control it. The emergence of this press in the nineteenth century attested to the will of early settlers to create local institutions which gave voice to their interests in the face of a powerful colonial administration. The vituperation with which the early press criticised the administration suggests that the absence of democratic institutions in the early colony was experienced sorely by many settlers. Prior to the promulgation in 1881 of metropolitan press laws which granted considerable press freedom, the colony’s newspapers were subject to a variety of means of administrative control, including the requirement of an authorisation to publish, the submission of newspapers to the administration prior to publication enabling the censorship of articles ‘that tended to inflame the passions born of all kinds of controversy relating to the authority’s acts’ (Bulletin Officiel de la Marine, 1876:370 cited in Coquilhat, 1987:51), and the suspension of newspapers after repeated warnings (Coquilhat, 1987:51-7). Indeed, Coquilhat writes of this period that ‘the New Caledonian press existed without there being any other law than that of the goodwill of the governor’ (Coquilhat, 1987:51). The suspension, however, of some publications after censorship suggests that there were either problems in the censorship process or difficulties in bringing to bear the full force of
censorship in a colony where the administration sought to foster the longer term compliance of ‘free settlers’ to colonial rule (ibid:29-33). The publication of clandestine pamphlets also meant that there was a section of the media which escaped official censorship (ibid:52).

The 1881 metropolitan press laws, which resulted from a lengthy struggle over press freedom in France, were introduced in New Caledonia without the consent of the then governor. These laws essentially removed official censorship and the possibilities of suspension, exposing media proprietors instead to legal sanctions for defamation and other transgressions (ibid:56). This new legislative context precipitated new strategies of administrative control which relied increasingly on the not inconsiderable economic leverage available to the administration to effect a more compliant press. One means was the granting of contracts for the publication of official documentation. Coquilhat writes that the transfer of this contract resulted in the demise of at least one prominent publication (ibid:93).

But, increasingly, there emerged a new phenomenon in media control which was to mark the industry in New Caledonia well into the twentieth century. This was the intervention of business and industrial capital in the colony’s newspaper industry, and the collusion of these business interests with the administration in effecting

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2 One publication which was suspended following censorship was Les Petites Affiches. During the second half of 1876 and throughout 1877 the paper was published with, at times, blanked out columns. The paper was subsequently suspended for a month in November 1877 over an article critical of the Banque de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, and received a subsequent suspension for two months (Coquilhat, 1987:29-32). In order to secure the continued publication of a newspaper, the owner, Joseph Bouillaud, changed the paper’s name to La Nouvelle-Calédonie, which became increasingly strident in its attacks against the administration and the clergy and in its advocacy of republican ideals. In particular, in 1879 La Nouvelle-Calédonie campaigned for the establishment of democratic institutions and the appointment of a civil governor, a delegate, a general council and an elected municipal council for Noumea. This was established later in that year (Coquilhat, 1987:29-33).

3 In 1879 Paul Locamus published illegally La Reforme. La Reforme followed on from Locamus’ prior publications, Le Courier Illustre and La Revue Illustre de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. La Revue contained articles which were critical of, amongst others, the missionaries and the penitentiary administration (Coquilhat, 1987:39-41). Locamus had successful defamation suits brought against him for having, according to O'Reilly, ‘ridicule[d] all that [was] most respected in the colony, governor, military command, priests, sailors and magistrates’ (O'Reilly, 1955:306).

4 Coquilhat writes that the governor Courbet’s opposition was based on his conviction that the colony was not yet ready to benefit from such press liberalism. This argument was congruent with that of the Minister of the Navy and Colonies Jauréguiberry who wrote in a report to the President that the press had been irresponsible in working ‘almost solely to frustrate the local authorities through the bureaucrats...and to inflame the European population against the indigènes at the moment when they were rebelling. In addition, a secret collaboration had occurred between individuals deprived of their civic rights because of unlawful actions’ (Report dated 30 June 1880, cited in Coquilhat, 1987:53).

5 The legislation allowed for court-ordered seizures of publications on the grounds that they contain ‘provocation to commit criminal acts, acts of rebellion, “outrages to proper morals”, or exposure of private lives’ (Freiberg, 1981:163).
ownership changes. Coquilhat writes that in 1884 the first civil governor in the
colony, Pallu de La Barrière, sought the assistance of two local businesses to buy
shares in the printery of one critical publication, *La Néo-Calédonien*, in order to
quash the paper's repeated criticism of the clergy and himself (ibid:62-5). The
editor of this publication, Julien Bernier, who left following these changes, wrote that
the newspaper now belonged:

> to an element that no longer allows it to continue its former politics: the
enemy has entered the camp ... the independent organ ... has become
enslaved by a clique ... and this revolution condemns it to be fatally clerical.
To be convinced one has only to look at the following names: Messrs
Casadebaig, Pelletier, Servet, Blanc and Blanchot, who are all more or less
confirmed in clericalism; and Messrs Dubuisson, Pelatan, Imhaus, Alcide,
Desmazures, Cudenet and Morgan, who are all associated with the Nickel.
(cited in O'Reilly, 1955:304).

Bernier's comment suggests that, in the face of a burgeoning critical press which
railed against the colonial politico-economic elite, and whose competence in this
regard was strengthened by the participation of communards liberated from
confinement on the Isle of Pines, the administration could increasingly rely on the
assistance of commercial interests in its will to intervene in the production of media
discourse. Perhaps the most concerted response from industrial capital to the
escalating critique mounted against it was the creation in 1889, largely by the nickel
mining company Le Société Le Nickel (SLN), of *La France Australe*, described by its
adversaries as 'a vast enterprise defending the privileges of the “big companies”;
that is, the Nickel society and its satellites’ (*Le Colon*, 3 August 1889, cited in
Coquilhat, 1987:81). Although the *France Australe* claimed that it would minimise
its engagement in political debate, the paper quickly engaged vociferously in the
debates on church and state, republicanism and the monarchy, demonstrating in the
process that its loyalty to particular governors could waver. Initially a strong
supporter of Governor Feuillet, the paper subsequently became critical of his
policies (ibid:107-111).

Elsewhere in the world, a similar demise in a radical polemical press was being
brought about through the involvement of industrial capital in the newspaper
industry. These changes were driven by technological advances in printing and the
concurrent expansion of consumer markets. From this economic imperative emerged a new type of press - coined the 'penny press' because of the cheapness of the publications and their reliance on advertising for revenue - and a new style of journalistic writing aimed at maximising market share through an avoidance of polemics and a shift towards 'objectivity' (Curran, 1983). The transition from the polemical to the 'objective' in journalism was more decisive in the Anglo-Saxon world than it was in France where a culture of journalism emerged which sought to retain some vestiges of polemical journalism through the creation of mass circulation party political publications.

The *France Australe* appeared to emulate aspects of the penny press in its publication of classifieds and advertisements on the front page and in its cost of only five centimes, but the rationale behind these stylistic and financial choices appears to have differed considerably from those driving such changes elsewhere (*France Australe*, 26/8/89). The absence of a sizeable mass market in New Caledonia meant that there was no imperative to achieve economies of scale through the adoption of modern printing technology, and no move to such technology took place until well into the post-war period. *Pacific Islands Monthly* editor R. R. Robinson expressed considerable amazement at discovering during a trip to New Caledonia in the 1950s that the *France Australe* was still being hand typeset (*PIM*, December 1954). Rather, the SLN's will to become involved in the colony's media through the creation of the *France Australe* appears to have been precipitated by its perceived need to influence a discursive context which was becoming highly volatile and, among certain groups, hostile to the increasingly entrenched influence of a newly emergent comprador class.

The continuation of a polemical style of journalism in New Caledonia well after the demise of such a style of journalism elsewhere in the mass circulation press probably owes much to the absence of technological imperatives to change. But it also attests to the different political and economic characteristics of a colony in which the potential for the arbitrary exercise of power was forever present and not infrequently realised. Given the entrenchment of a politico-economic elite in the twentieth century and the tardy and uncertain introduction of structures of

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6For example, Eugène Mourot had been a journalist in France before being deported in 1872. O'Reilly commented that he was 'the most famous journalist' in the colony who 'fiercely defends his ideas. The mission, J. Bernier, the administration are his bêtes noires' (O'Reilly, 1980:189).
democratic governance, it is perhaps little wonder that journalism in New Caledonia failed to make the types of stylistic and conceptual transitions effected in France and even more starkly elsewhere.

In the early twentieth century, several republican newspapers were published which were either closely affiliated to political groupings or were party publications. But the party political press could not survive the economic and political exigencies of the Depression and war years, and during this period there remained only the bi-weekly *Le Bulletin du Commerce*, founded in 1899 by Henri Legras, and the daily *France Australe*. In the post-war period a populist polemical press re-emerged, most notably with the commencement in 1947 of Pierre-Hubert Jeason's roneotyped *Le Calédonien*, described by O'Reilly as a 'Fighting paper, full of local polemics and proletarian demands' (O'Reilly, 1955:319). But the period from 1933 onwards, when the *France Australe* became the monopoly mass circulation daily publication, witnessed the emergence of a new form of journalistic practice which continued into the 1960s and in some instances beyond. The *France Australe* had triumphed over its adversaries due largely to its considerable financial backing from the SLN and, in the twentieth century, the large trading company Ballande. During the war years the newspaper's content was heavily regulated by the administration, although there appears to have been no suggestion that the paper did not comply willingly with wartime censorship. However, in the post-war period the publication responded

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7 Melanesians were granted French citizenship in 1946 and the Régime d'Indigénat, which had severely proscribed Melanesian civil rights and freedom of activity and movement, was abolished. In 1956, New Caledonia was granted considerable political autonomy through the application of the *loi cadre* (framework law) in the colony. A conservative backlash from the territory's politico-economic elite, and the moving of nuclear testing to the Pacific, resulted in the responsibilities granted under the *loi cadre* being annulled and the enactment of a new statute in 1963 which resulted in the local government resuming its role as essentially a consultative body (Henningham, 1992:49-56; Spencer, Ward and Connell, 1988:10).

8 For example, in 1906 the Comité Républicain de la Nouvelle-Calédonie began publishing *Le Républicain*. The newspaper sought to perform the function of a 'mainstream' daily, providing extracts from French newspapers, local and metropolitan news, shipping news etc, but O'Reilly writes that 'its activity is essentially political: electoral propaganda, the fight against "reactionary forces", anti-clerical and pro-Masonic' (O'Reilly, 1955:315). Between 1909 and 1911 a weekly publication appeared, *La République néo-calédonienne*, which claimed to be the 'organ of the Caledonian youth and workers' (O'Reilly, 1955:316). Between 1923 and 1933, the RépublicainsDemocrats published the daily *La Democrate de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et dépendences*. It contained frequent articles from metropolitan left newspapers and campaigned against certain commercial interests, particularly Ballande, the SLN and the Banque de l'Indochine (O'Reilly 1955:317).

9 Brou writes that the first article to be censored in the press was in the *Bulletin du Commerce* on 18 October 1939 (1976:64). Censorship ended on 1 September 1945 (Bordier, 1987:84). From 1942, the *France Australe* was reduced to half a page, but began publishing a full page on 1 January 1946 and two pages (i.e. four pages of text) on 20 May 1946 (Bordier, 1987:60). In April 1948 there was a paper crisis and the *France Australe* appeared again on only half a page until August (Bordier, 1990:41).
very little to the discursive freedoms available to it. There appears to have been considerable congruence between the discursive objectives of the owners of the *France Australe* and those of the administration during this period. The administration's desire to control media discourse was embraced by the *France Australe* which by the 1960s had become, according to the *Mémorial Calédonien*, 'a bit in the image of a closed society and finally quite lacking in curiosity. Everything that could trouble such a society is carefully avoided and particular care is taken not to stir up any large political or social question' (Godard, vol. 7, 246). During this period at least, it appeared that the power of financial capital had succeeded quite spectacularly in controlling the discursive sphere in a manner which was probably only coveted by the administration, caught as it was within the vortex of contradictory tendencies, between the will to control discourse and the need to foster compliance amongst settlers with the colonial system through allowing the emergence of some vestiges of a functioning public sphere. Commercial interests had supplanted the administration as the shapers of public discourse in those areas of the media vulnerable to commercial pressure. With the eventual introduction of modern printing technologies in the 1970s and 1980s, the greater cost of publication rendered newspapers more prone to the types of financial pressures which influential commercial interests could wield, and it increasingly became economic factors which regulated industry participation. These economic factors were not, of course, unrelated to colonialism, as certain industries prospered in large part because they were shielded from competition by the colonial administration. As Myriam Dornoy has argued: 'A small number of people dominate the economy and intermarriage has consolidated the unity of the “fifty families”. Their staunchly conservative outlook is mainly explained by the determination to retain privileges and fortunes acquired in the process of colonisation' (1984:60).

**The 'unspoken' in the mass circulation media**

Throughout the many years during which the *France Australe* was the monopoly daily publication, those in New Caledonia who relied on the daily press for information about political events were particularly impoverished. At a time when radio, and later television, access was limited and programming heavily controlled by the state, we might assume that the dearth of coverage of local events in the *France Australe* was sorely felt by the community. Several weekly publications
Barbançon's discussion of a culture of the 'unspoken' in New Caledonian society may provide some insight into the editorial policies of the *France Australe* during its period of monopoly publication (Barbançon, 1992). Barbançon describes 'the unspoken' in New Caledonian society as 'a real institution, an unavoidable constant' (ibid:9). This constant is, he argues, pervasive:

All New Caledonia has always functioned like that. Since forever, this predisposition of the mind to hide painful past moments has reigned in this country, and those who dare lift the dark veil thrown on the memories are sacrilegious (ibid).

Barbançon finds evidence for the ‘unspoken’ in his encounters with Kanaks and non-Kanaks whose 'approach to the past leads them to the same conclusion' (ibid), and also in his own reticence in writing about his country, New Caledonia. But the ‘unspoken’ described by Barbançon can also be seen in a journalistic culture which was most acutely manifest in the *France Australe* during the 1950s and 1960s, but which recurred during the 1980s in state broadcasting and *Les Nouvelles*, particularly after the newspaper changed ownership in 1987. This culture is expressive of colonial relations, as is the culture of polemicism. But in the culture of 'the unspoken' we have a particularly acute expression of the power of discourse and its potential ideological effects. ‘The unspoken' points to the failure of hegemony in colonial society, the corollary of this failure being the need to engage in the most extreme strategy of discursive control - silence. Within this precarious discursive context there emerged in the 1970s new publications which sought to give expression to the rights of Melanesians to self-affirmation and independence. Indeed, it might be said that up until this time, and with a few notable exceptions,

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10 There were during this period several weekly or periodical publications. These included: *Le Calédonien*, *L'Avenir Calédonien*, the weekly *Le Journal Calédonien* and *La Voix du Cagou*, as well as the bi-weekly *Le Bulletin du Commerce*. Several of these publications engaged in critical reflection on the administration and certain commercial and industrial interests, and were widely read.
sympathetic discussion of Melanesian demands for political and economic rights constituted one of the greatest 'unspokens' in the colony's media.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11}In 1927 and 1928, the \textit{Bulletin du Commerce}, which was widely read by settlers in the interior, began publishing articles written by Pierre Bergés which were sympathetic towards Melanesians. Bergés was a rich planter-rancher from La Foa and for many years its Mayor, and later worked with Maurice Lenormand in the Union Calédonien (Association pour la Fondation d'un Institut Kanak d'Histoire Moderne: 54-5). In 1937, the paper broached the question of indigenous political rights with the question: 'will the \textit{indigènes} have their political rights?'. The response was, 'warning, it's premature' (ibid:59). Brou's comment in footnote eight suggests that discussion of Melanesian political rights featured in Jeanson's \textit{Le Calédonien}. In addition, the Union Calédonien began publishing in 1954 \textit{L'Avenir Calédonien} which discussed indigenous issues, although at this stage, \textit{L'Avenir} was more concerned with a populist leftist critique of capital and demands for greater political autonomy in the territory. Also, since 1893 religious bi-lingual publications (French and indigenous language) had been published, initially in the Loyalty islands and later in Houailou (O'Reilly, 1955:311 & 316). See also footnote on page 192.
The nascent pro-independence media

To argue that a polemical style of journalism persisted in New Caledonia is not, of course, to specify the nature of this polemic, except to point to the general tendency towards a populist discourse against the power exercised by the administration and dominant commercial and industrial interests. It also tells us little of the political objectives pursued by the various media. Populist discourse can, after all, be mobilised towards quite antithetical political ends as the contemporary advocacy by ultra-conservative groups of citizen initiated referenda suggests. In the post-war period, the emergence of the Union Calédonien (UC) in 1951, initially as a movement and later as a party, and its immediate and subsequent electoral success, attested to the growing strength of populist sentiment in the colony which, through the UC, was channelled into demands for greater political autonomy. The UC publication *L’Avenir Calédonien* gave voice to these demands and was joined for a brief period between 1973 and 1975 by the weekly *La Voix du Cagou*. *L’Avenir Calédonien* also gave some prominence to demands for Melanesian ‘advancement’, particularly after the election in 1964 of the first Melanesian Senator Roch Pidjot, but the UC’s quest to broaden its electoral support within the European community led the issues of Melanesian disadvantage and indigenous rights to be generally subsumed within a more populist appeal to the rights of the disadvantaged in general, no matter what their racial origin.

The first publications to foreground Melanesian political demands were news sheets produced by Melanesian political movements which sought to advance indigenous rights and assert and explore Melanesian identity. These groups appropriated the hitherto derogatory term of ‘Canaque’ or ‘Kanak’, to affirm this identity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *Foulards Rouge* produced the roneotyped *Le Reveil Canaque*, the title of which was then used by the Union Multiraciale de Nouvelle-

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12 Henningham writes: ‘The UC burst onto the political scene in the elections, in July 1951, for New Caledonia’s deputy to the French Parliament. The European community had failed to appreciate the implications of the enfranchisement of the great majority of the Melanesians. Many European electors did not bother to vote. Moreover, the conservative vote was split when two right-wing candidates ran. Only Maurice Lenormand, who was drafted at a late hour as the UC’s candidate, paid attention to Melanesian interests in his election promises’ (Henningham, 1992:50).

13 Alain Bernut began publishing *La Voix du Cagou* in 1967 following the purchase of his prior publication, *Le Journal Calédonien* by Henri Lafleur. An article in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* comments that *La Voix du Cagou* was the organ of Bernut’s party in the Territorial Assembly, the Popular Caledonian Movement, and began publication upon Bernut’s election in July 1967 (*PIM*, October 1975:28). The *Mémorial Calédonien* comments that the newspaper ‘equally played the role of a safety valve for those who were hooked on systematic criticism’ (Godard, vol. 7, 251).
Calédonie in 1972, under the editorship of a young Caledonian doctor, Jean-Paul Caillard (Association pour la Fondation d’un Institut Kanak D’Histoire Moderne:81). In addition, several political news sheets in indigenous languages (it was and remains illegal to produce an indigenous language publication without an accompanying French translation) were distributed.\(^{15}\) Caillard subsequently published in 1975 Les Calédoniens, a leftist newspaper which supported Kanak protest and independence and which gave prominence to sympathetic discussions of Melanesian culture and disadvantage. Financial pressures led to the paper’s closure in 1976. An article in \textit{PIM} cited the paper’s claim that its printers had been subject to ‘the worst pressure from their advertising clients as well as from our gubernatorial super-prefect’, adding that ‘needless to say the paper carried no advertising. This kind of outspoken comment doesn’t attract them’ (\textit{PIM}, October 1975). Such commercial pressure would be again used, most visibly, over a decade later in ensuring the closure of \textit{Le Journal de la Nouvelle-Calédonie}, popularly know as the ‘Journal Bleu’.\(^{16}\) Other pro-independence groups moved to create their own publications. In 1975 a breakaway group from the Union Multiraciale de Nouvelle-Calédonie, the Union Progressiste Multiraciale, began publishing \textit{L’Avant Garde}. In 1976 the newly formed Parti de Libération Kanak (PALIKA) began publishing \textit{Le Kanak}, and the title \textit{Le Reveil Kanak} (note: no longer ‘Canaque’)\(^{17}\) was resumed in the news sheet of the Liberation Kanak Socialist (LKS) party which broke away from the PALIKA in 1981.

\textbf{The media and the issue of independence in the 1980s}

The emergence of formal demands for independence from 1975 met with concerted opposition from the daily newspapers, \textit{Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes} and the \textit{France Australe}. The latter’s opposition was more muted, perhaps because its editors were seeking, at this time quite desperately, to enhance the paper’s dwindling market share and believed that this could be achieved through some product differentiation. But it may also have been that the organisation, not long awoken from its ‘unspoken’ slumber, was professionally ill-equipped to match its competitor’s

\(^{14}\) For a discussion of the UC’s origins and early policies see Henningham, 1992:48-61.
\(^{15}\) Jean-Pierre Detex cites Titiquadji from Maré and Andimado of the Groupe 68 political movement (interview 12/5/94).
\(^{16}\) The newspaper was coined the ‘Journal Bleu’ because of its incorporation of blue in its mast in contrast to \textit{Les Nouvelles’} use of red.
\(^{17}\) For a discussion of the evolution of the term ‘Canaque’ see chapter 6.
A populist polemic which presented demands for independence as racist and ideologically inspired by outside agitators. The closure of the *France Australe* in 1979 left *Les Nouvelles* as the monopoly mass circulation publication in the territory. Its resolute stance against independence and its denigration of pro-independence Kanaks was to become increasingly aggressive as the following decade progressed.

Prior to the election of Socialist President François Mitterrand in 1981, the territory’s state radio and television services manifest a similarly resolute opposition to independence, achieved largely through the denial of access to radio and television to Kanak or European pro-independence politicians. State control over broadcasting in New Caledonia in the post-war period had fostered a highly racist professional culture in the organisation which resulted in journalists readily embracing the directive that they not interview Kanaks. In addition, in 1980 a weekly publication entitled *Corail* appeared which increasingly came to manifest extremist opposition to pro-independence politicians, mobilising neo-fascist discourse, some of which was read by pro-independence groups as inciting violence against pro-independence politicians and resulting in the assassination in September 1981 of UC Secretary General Pierre Declercq. *Corail* was established by Daniel Tardieu, who had arrived in the territory after the Second World War and was reputed to have been a Nazi collaborator. Tardieu’s departure from the territory in 1981 resulted in Gérard Lacourrège assuming editorial control of the publication. Lacourrège, a former paratrooper in north Africa, had similarly arrived in the territory after the war and engaged in a range of journalistic activities.

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18 Tardieu had arrived in New Caledonia in 1946, married a local woman, Pauline Poulain, and bought a local printery, the Imprimeries Réunies de Nouméa, renaming it the Imprimerie Nouvelle. Tardieu’s parents had owned a printery in central France, explaining perhaps the direction in which he channelled his professional energies after arriving in New Caledonia, but there was nonetheless considerable speculation as to the reasons for his arrival in the first place. One former conservative politician described it as an arrival ‘from nowhere’ which had generated considerable suspicion in the Noumea business community at the time. Certainly, suspicion dogged Tardieu’s lengthy involvement in the territory’s printing and media activities. Allegations shortly after his arrival that he had been involved in pro-Vichy activities and the rounding up of Jews in France were revived with his involvement in the establishment of *Corail*. These allegations became more public following the publication in the *Union Calédonienne* weekly, *L’Avenir Calédonien*, of an article published in the French Socialist Party weekly, *L’Unité*, in which Tardieu was described as a former member of the Collaboration group and one of the leaders of the Clermont-Ferrand militia, allegations which were strenuously denied in *Corail* (*L’Avenir Calédonien*, 22/4/82; *Corail*, 30/4/82).

19 Gérard Lacourrège was among those Algerian-born ‘Pieds Noirs’ who arrived in the territory in the early 1960s following France’s withdrawal from Algeria (Bobin, 1991). Bobin suggests that Lacourrège was one of the ‘hardline extremists amongst the Pieds Noirs and the Metropolitans (notably the retired army officers)’ who ‘played a decisive role in the anti-independence offensive of the 1980s’ (ibid). Tardieu and Lacourrège had worked together on the weekly *Journal Calédonien*, owned by Tardieu, which appeared in 1964. Tardieu argues that the decision to publish *Corail* was largely at the behest of Lacourrège who deemed it important that a publication express a range of views which he...
Under Lacourrège, the extremist tone of the publication mounted, and its affiliation to extremist political groups became clear with the publication, shortly before its closure, of advertising for the newly created New Caledonian National Front [FN(NC)]. The magazine was forced to close following a succession of successful defamation suits against it, largely from pro-independence politicians and activists. A few months later, in January 1985, a new extreme-right publication *Combat Calédonien* appeared under the editorship of a metropolitan French journalist and novelist Alain Camille writing under the pen name of ADG, who had worked for the right-wing metropolitan newspaper *Minute* and who had arrived in the territory in 1982. Camille was a member of the FN(NC) committee although he argued that *Combat Calédonien* was not a party publication but rather reflected the views of a much broader section of the anti-independence community. In December 1985 *Combat* was similarly forced to close under the weight of successful defamation suits.

The press legislation of 1881 had provided the legislative framework within which the pro-independence movement and others could apply some economic leverage to achieve changes to the media industry, and this leverage was used effectively, particularly in securing the rapid demise of *Combat Calédonien*. Anti-independence groups also had recourse to such legislative intervention and brought defamation considered inadequately represented in the existing media (*Corail*, 15/5/80). In interview, Tardieu distances himself from involvement in the publication and cites his departure from the territory for Tahiti in early 1982 following which Lacourrège replaced him as Director of the publication. Tardieu’s wish to distance himself from the early publication, and his decision to leave the territory, may have related to accusations that the paper had been implicated in the assassination of UC Secretary General Pierre Declercq in September 1981. European supporters of independence in the territory, among them Pierre Declercq, were a major target of *Corail*. One article described Declercq and two other Europeans, UC militant Jean-Pierre Deteix and Parti Socialiste Calédonien politician Jacques Violette, as ‘European renegades recently arrived in the country to create confusion in the mind and in politics’, and elsewhere as ‘criminals … who have created here anti-White racism’ (*Corail*, 5/11/81) while another referred generally to the ‘a pile of impassioned radicals, most recently arrived from metropolitan France, therefore irresponsible’ (*Corail*, 15/1/81 & 26/2/81). Declercq in particular was a target in the months prior to his assassination. An article published two months before he was killed mocked his concern with the extent to which settlers were armed and the activities of the army in the bush, and concluded ominously: ‘If the [armed settlers] are so numerous and so trigger-happy, how is it that Declercq is still alive?’ (*Corail*, 23/7/81). In the face of *Corail*’s comments on Declercq and his subsequent assassination, Tardieu and his publication were accused of fascism and inciting violence (*Corail*, 2/10/81). *Corail* claimed that one pro-independence publication commented that demonstrators at a rally had called for the banning of *Corail* and the arrest of Tardieu (cited in *Corail*, 16/10/81). *Corail* replied with a long article in which it sought to refute these claims admitting that: ‘Certainly, the sentence that implicates us could appear today sadly premonitory’, but adds that: ‘We read it personally as an established fact of the Caledonian reality on 23 July 1981: THE FREE CIRCULATION OF MEN AND IDEAS’ (*Corail*, 2/10/81). In the face of these, and no doubt other subsequent pressures, Tardieu may have decided it a propitious time to leave the territory.

*Camille came to New Caledonia for a seven month period in 1982-3 to write a novel on the territory. During this period he wrote a weekly column for *Corail*. He returned to the territory less than two years later and commenced *Combat Calédonien*.}
suits against the pro-independence media (Hnalaine Uregei interview, 10/5/94). In general, however, the anti-independence media was more financially resilient than its pro-independence counterpart, in large part because of its ability to attract advertising revenue. *Corail* published advertising from its inception and its advertisers included some large commercial businesses in the territory. *Combat Calédonien* began publishing advertisements only seven months into its existence following the payment of 500,000 CFP in damages and interest for what it decried somewhat facetiously was only the printing of 'an error in the first name of a public servant' (*Combat Calédonien*, 5/7/85). ADG wrote that advertising had become a financial necessity; however, his preference had been that the magazine not carry advertisements to ensure its complete independence (ibid). However, the evidence that *Combat* and *Corail* could carry advertisements at all indicates that there was general support for the existence of these publications by commercial interests. Such support was never forthcoming to even mildly leftist publications.

The existence during the 1980s of an array of pro-independence party newspapers and news sheets provided some discursive counterpoint to the forceful public presence of anti-independence discourse, but most of these publications were very circumscribed in their circulation, being read primarily by party adherents. In July

*Corail*’s relentless personal crusades against European independence supporters and others were its ultimate downfall. By October 1983, *Corail* reported that it had paid more than 3 million CFP in damages resulting from defamation suits brought against it, and Lacourrège had already been condemned to 15 days in prison for defamation against Deteix (*Corail*, 14/10/83). Announcing the paper’s closure, Lacourrège claimed he had made 221 appearances before the courts, had been convicted on almost every charge possible under the press law, and had paid more than six million CFP in damages, interest and legal costs, describing himself as ‘the most condemned journalist in France’ (*Corail*, 29/6/84). *Corail*’s far-right successor, *Combat Calédonien*, also bore the brunt of judicial action, but did so much earlier into its existence. Shortly after it commenced, ADG decried the level of police and judicial intervention in the operation of the paper (*Combat Calédonien*, 29/3/85). A week later, he advised his readership that ‘THE SCANDAL CONTINUES’ and outlined more fully the nature of this intervention: ‘Still more searches, an incessant volley of summonses, of questioning, of police pestering, to which, by the way, I have decided to no longer respond other than in writing, here or in *Minute*, which still welcomes me and gratefully so’ (*Combat*, 3/4/85). *Combat*’s vituperation against Edgard Pisani, described on one occasion as ‘Edgard-the-bad’ and as ‘Pisani pox’ on one front cover, precipitated the police and judicial crackdown on the paper (*Combat*, 8/3/85 & 10/5/85). Pisani himself brought defamation charges against *Combat Calédonien* following the publication of an open letter to Pisani written by ADG (*Combat Calédonien*, 12/7/85 & 9/8/85). Moreover, he threatened legislation to control the press as part of the legislative package being developed to enable the establishment of the Fabius regions (the division of the territory into political regions under the Fabius statute) in late 1985. Camille’s departure from the territory in late 1985 and the consequent closure of the publication in its then form averted any need which may have been felt in the administration to legislatively intervene.

*Corail* carried advertisements for local shops, car dealers, construction companies, restaurants, cigarette companies and travel agencies. The volume of advertising appears to have dropped off somewhat as the magazine’s militancy escalated. *Combat Calédonien* carried advertising for several of the businesses or companies that had advertised in *Corail*; for example, Sitec, Groupement Berton and Le Saint Hubert.
1980 a group of pro-independence Europeans and Kanaks began publishing a monthly pro-independence newspaper, *La Tribune du Pacifique*, which sought to address itself more broadly across the political groupings within the then pro-independence umbrella organisation, the Front Indépendantiste (FI). Financial pressures resulted in the paper’s closure in July 1981. Another pro-independence publication, *La Nouvelle Presse*, appeared briefly in August and September 1981, produced by pro-independence activists and ex-workers from a recently defunct daily, *La Presse Calédonienne*. *La Presse* had been created as a centrist publication in competition with *Les Nouvelles* by members of the centrist political party the Fédération Pour une Nouvelle Société Calédonienne (FNSC), and was first published on 27 May 1980. *La Presse* sought to position itself as a mainstream daily publication covering the full range of news and entertainment topics available in *Les Nouvelles*. However, in its news coverage it clearly favoured the presentation of centrist political views, evident, for example, in its sympathetic treatment of the Dijoud plan for land redistribution, in the prominence which it afforded the views of centrist local politicians such as New Caledonian Senator Lionel Cherrier and FNSC Territorial Counsellors Jean-Pierre Aifa and Gaston Morlet, and in its muted support for Giscard d’Estaing in the 1981 Presidential elections. The scantness of advertising in the newspaper resulted in severe financial problems which secured the closure of the paper on, or shortly after, 30 June 1981, the date of the last edition of the paper held in the archives of the Bernheim Library in Noumea. The deteriorating finances of the paper had resulted in workers not being paid for some time, and several of these workers occupied the workplace to protest over the moneys owing them. These workers were joined by two European pro-independence activists, Marc Coulon and Jean-Lois Dion, in the publication of *La Nouvelle Presse* (Coulon interview, 18/4/94). Another European activist, Christian Nègre, later joined Coulon and Dion in the two edition publication of *L’Evenement*, published with the agreement of the FI immediately following the political realignment which resulted in the FI assuming government in July 1982.

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23 Copies of the July 1980 - July 1981 editions of *La Tribune* are held in Bernheim Library. The last edition refers to an ‘Extraordinary General Meeting on Saturday 1 August at the offices of the newspaper’. Presumably the decision was taken at this meeting to cease publication.

24 This support positioned *La Presse* among the more conservative elements within the FNSC, and may have resulted in political turmoil within the publication, alluded to in *Corail*, where it is stated that a M. Tillon assumed control from the hitherto director M. Guaitella (11/6/81). For an example of its muted support for d’Estaing, see *La Presse*, 11/5/81.

25 There is, however, no reference in this edition to the imminent closure of the paper.

26 I was unable to find any copies of *La Nouvelle Presse* in the newspaper archives of the Bernheim Library or the Territorial Archives of New Caledonia.
Coulon argues that the purpose of *L’Evenement* was to showcase the new government, its members and its proposed program (ibid).27

There was one other attempt in 1981 to establish a competitor to *Les Nouvelles*, initiated, curiously, by one of the owners of *Les Nouvelles*, Roger Brissaud, purportedly after a disagreement between Brissaud and his partner Jean-Paul Leyraud over Brissaud’s desire to publish *Les Nouvelles* in colour. Brissaud used a *Les Nouvelles* journalist, Jean Noel Feraud, as publication editor for *Nouméa Journal*, but poor advertising and sales revenue led to the paper’s very rapid closure only a month after its commencement.28 By the period, therefore, of most acute insurrectionary activity in the territory in late 1984 and throughout much of 1985, media discourse in the territory’s mass circulation press was very much dominated by anti-independence sentiments. All attempts to mount publications which countered or even tempered the virulence of *Les Nouvelles*, *Corail*, and later *Combat Calédonien*’s opposition to independence had failed.

The commitment given by the new French Socialist government in 1981 that state broadcasting in the territory would allow access to pro-independence voices had resulted in a considerable change in radio and television news in the territory in allowing the views of pro-independence politicians to be heard. This change was persistently decried by *Corail* and *Combat Calédonien* in most editions of these publications.29 But the weight of conservatism in the state broadcasting

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27 Coulon commented that the paper was called *L’Evenement* because the assumption of government by the pro-independence movement after the FNSC, which held the balance of power in the Territorial Assembly, withdrew its support for the RPCR and instead formed an alliance with the FI, was ‘an event, a sacred event even’ (interview, 18/4/94).

28 Copies of *Nouméa Journal* for January 1981 are held in the Territorial Archives. *Corail* considered the newspaper to be left-wing, remarking on its closure that ‘Certainly, the independence and leftist circles in the territory will have lost a friend, but that’s all, and that’s very little’ (*Corail*, 5/3/81).

29 RFO (called prior to 1983 FR3) was the primary target of *Corail* and *Combat Calédonien*’s media criticism. *Corail* followed quite closely the changes in organisational structure and personnel at FR3 in both Noumea and Paris following the election of Mitterrand as President in 1981. Initially, *Corail* deplored the ‘nothingness of the TV and radio programs that, since 10 May, the French have had to suffer’ and criticised the promotion of two Melanesians, ‘Walles Cotra’ and ‘Joseph Chayet’ (sic), to more senior reporting positions, arguing that they were not adequately skilled (*Corail*, 12/3/82). But increasingly, criticism hinged on what was considered to be the disproportional representation of socio-communist and pro-independence opinion on state broadcasting. One writer, Michel Perrin, described FR3 as a distorting mirror, ‘not gleaming with objectivity’ (*Corail*, 22/10/82). ‘Walles Cotra’ was described as an ‘pro-independence lackey’ and *Corail* deplored the appointment of what it described as a ‘new communist management’ at RFO Paris (*Corail*, 18/1/83). The change in name to Radio France Outre-mer (RFO) in January 1983 resulted in one writer, RPCR politician George Faure, coining the name ‘Radio France Occupée par les socialococos’ for the service, which was described shortly after as a ‘Marxist service’ (*Corail*, 4/2/83 & 18/3/83). Michel Perrin decried the lack of air-time given to the views of the ‘two thirds of the population who wish to remain French’ and described RFO
organisation was difficult to shift and the pro-independence movement remained dissatisfied with the coverage afforded pro-independence political demands on Radio France Outre-mer (RFO) services, choosing by late 1984 to boycott RFO in keeping with its decision to withdraw from the territory’s institutions, setting up instead parallel institutions and declaring the establishment, in December 1984, of a provisional government of Kanaky.  

The lack of tolerance among anti-independence political groups of RFO’s airing of pro-independence discourse precipitated a move by the dominant conservative political party in the territory, the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), to take over a radio station, Radio Rhythme Bleu (RRB), in order to give full vent to the views of the party’s main political exponents, primarily New Caledonian Deputy and RPCR President Jacques Lafleur and Melanesian RPCR Senator Dick Ukeiwé.  

as an ‘gross propaganda instrument at the service of a racist, xenophobic ideology devoid of credibility’, coining a new name for the service, ‘Radio Fortement Orientée’ (Corail, 29/4/83).  

In the thick of the insurrection, blockades had been established by pro- and anti-independence activists throughout the territory making circulation almost impossible. Many telephone lines were cut rendering the work of journalists and communication between groups of FLNKS activists very difficult. Perhaps ironically, the FLNKS was reliant during this period on state radio for news of the progress of the agitation of activist groups throughout the territory, as it was during the Ouvéa crisis in April and May 1988.  

Radio Rhythme Bleu began broadcasting in January 1982 as a ‘free radio’ service in the wake of the proliferation of such radio services in France following Mitterrand’s election as President. Its beginnings were somewhat episodic with periods of test broadcasting being followed by periods of shut-down due to financial and managerial difficulties. In 1985, the station’s equipment was bought by a new association with very close political links with the RPCR, its director being Christian Prost. The programming of the station changed from a sole emphasis on music and leisure programming to the inclusion of more extensive news and information services. Prost hired several journalists from Radio Alouette in Brittany which was linked to the Republican Party and the UDF, amongst them Elizabeth Nouar, a long-time acquaintance, who progressively took over from Prost as station manager after her arrival in February 1985 (L’Hebdo, 18/8/88). Nouar argues that the prior incarnation of RRB was very unsuccessful because it primarily played music at a time of political unrest when people wanted information about the unfolding political events (interview, 23/10/89). Under the new management structure, news bulletins and other information programs such as commentaries and interviews were included in the programming. As a mark of their political orientation, these new services were met with acclaim by Combat Calédonien (Combat Calédonien, 8/3/85). Much of the programming on RRB was oriented towards the encouragement of a mass audience. The result was that little distinguished RRB’s entertainment programs from those offered by state-run radio RFO or, indeed, the commercial radio service in the territory NRJ. In its news services, too, RRB emulated much of the stylistic features of its initially sole competitor, RFO, scheduling several news bulletins throughout the day with main bulletins of 15 - 20 minutes duration in the early morning, at lunchtime and in the late afternoon. Nouar commented that journalists at RRB had the ‘professional concern to separate facts from commentary’, but RRB provoked the ire of the pro-independence movement not only for its commentary, but also for its choice of ‘facts’, the order in which these were presented in the news, and the types of discourses mobilised in their presentation. Although it was not possible to get access to archival tapes, RRB’s mandate to express the views of the RPCR’s leadership suggests that the discourses which it mobilised were very close to those of RPCR politicians in Les Nouvelles and of the paper itself after 1985. Indeed, the independence movement made little differentiation between the discourses developed across the loyalist media and Les Nouvelles. Bwenando described the ‘Nouvelles Coloniales’ and RRB as the ‘rubbish press [sic]’ and decried what they described as their systematic inciting of violence against the independence movement (Bwenando, 12/11/85). Nouar
which conservative political groups, and in particular the RPCR, viewed the control of mass audience media as crucial to the maintenance of their political and economic dominance. When RRB began broadcasting in early 1985 there was hardly a torrent, and perhaps not even a trickle, of sympathy for the pro-independence movement in the mass audience media. But the discursive openings created by RFO’s editorial policies under the Socialist administration seem to have been considered by Lafleur and other conservatives as highly seditious, meriting a concerted counter-response. This was initiated by the creation of RRB, and continued through the RPCR’s role in securing in January 1987 a change in ownership of Les Nouvelles which ensured that the paper was more consistently sympathetic to RPCR and metropolitan RPR politics, and the subsequent creation in ownership of Les Nouvelles which ensured that the paper was more consistently sympathetic to RPCR and metropolitan RPR politics, and the subsequent creation in

commented that one of the first concerns of the news service in 1985 was to ‘give voice to all those who lived and suffered the évenements’, adding that ‘one shouldn’t get used to lawlessness, one should denounce it, and we did all we could in that regard’ (Les Nouvelles Hebdo, 18/8/88). Those ‘suffering the events’ were, of course, those who opposed independence and who were presented within this discourse as victims of violent, senseless aggression. One incident which demonstrated the extent to which RRB would step out of its ‘mainstream’ guise and actively engage in mobilising loyalist protest was the station’s rebroadcasting of an RPCR call to gather in the central Noumean Place des Cocotiers on 8 May 1985 (Les Nouvelles, 9/5/85). The gathering was urged as a show of force in support of loyalists who had attacked an illegal pro-independence demonstration and forced demonstrators back to the UC’s headquarters in a Noumea suburb near the town centre. Riot police managed to keep the loyalists from taking the headquarters by force, but in the incident one Kanak was killed and several other Kanaks and loyalists were injured (Connell, 1987:352). Following this violence, Bwenando decried the RPCR’s role in ‘organising and leading, through RRB, many Kanak chases as well as murders and attempted murders like on 8 May’ (Bwenando, 31/10/85). RRB was used extensively by the RPCR leadership to campaign for RPCR politicians in the various electoral contests which occurred after 1985 and in rallying participation in the RPCR demonstrations organised during this period. Lafleur and RPCR politicians accorded privileged access for interviews to RRB. For example, in the lead-up to the March 1986 national elections, the RPCR organised a press conference for Lafleur at RRB to which some other media (but not Bwenando or Radio Djiido) were invited.

Dissatisfaction within the RPCR over the coverage given to the communiques of pro-independence groups by Les Nouvelles and FR3, and the at times critical reporting of the RPCR in Les Nouvelles, had been mounting prior to 1984. RPCR politician, Georges Faure, articulated much of this dissatisfaction in an article published in Corail in early 1983. Faure argued that, in comparison with the space given to independence groups, the RPCR was virtually ignored in Les Nouvelles (Corail, 4/2/83). He then anticipated the type of response that Les Nouvelles’ journalists would give to such an assertion: ‘To that, Les Nouvelles could respond that we make less noise...that they hear from us less...that we (ultimately) haven’t got anything to say...and that they have to please their clients: the important policies of the RPCR don’t sell...except exceptionally...perhaps their journalists don’t appreciate the RPCR...that’s their right...it’s a matter of obedience...’ (Corail, 4/2/83). Faure’s comments were not particularly novel. Les Nouvelles had commented on several occasions on the RPCR’s seeming inability to mount an effective political response and had characterised Lafleur as politically ineffectual in being unable to cut a policy line in the face of the different political tendencies within the RPCR, particularly over the issues of the departmentalisation of the territory and land reform (see for example, Les Nouvelles, 5, 7 & 11/6/82). Communiques from the RPCR were certainly less prolific than those from political groupings to its left and right, reflecting the party’s difficulty in developing a consensual position. However, those characteristics for which Les Nouvelles criticised the RPCR were probably its major strength. As McCallum (1992) has observed, the party operated best as a party of reaction to the policies advanced by others and, in particular, the pro-independence movement. The party’s seeming inability or unwillingness to cut a proactive policy line could be equally expressed as an ability to affirm the validity of the various constituent groupings within the party and to therefore provide cohesion. Within this party context, and within the territory’s political
This response followed the return to power in 1986 of a conservative government in France which resulted in RFO once again opposing consistently and strenuously the pro-independence movement. By 1988, the prevalence of anti-independence discourse in the territory's mass audience media had reached unprecedented proportions and the FLNKS was once again boycotting this media. This time, however, the pro-independence movement had recourse to its own media: the initially weekly and later bi-monthly publication *Bwenando*, which had commenced in July 1985, and the FLNKS radio station, Radio Djiido.

### Kanak media

The perceived futility within the pro-independence movement of attempting to use the anti-independence media to give exposure to its demands and arguments had...
resulted, as we have seen, in a strategy of withdrawal. This strategy was comprehensible in the light of the political engagement of the existing mass circulation media. But there was recognition within the movement that such a strategy could only be provisional and that, politically, the movement could not persist in vacating the media terrain, a view espoused by the Parti Socialiste - Nouvelle-Calédonie as early as 1982:

It’s cunning to think that you can suppress colonialism and promote socialism without the participation, or at least the support, of the PEOPLE, AND THIS REQUIRES MASTERY OVER THE MEANS OF MASS COMMUNICATION, LET’S SEIZE IT! (Corail, 26/2/82)35

Despite the urgency suggested in this exhortation, it was only after the escalation of conflict in late 1984 and early 1985 that the FLNKS moved urgently to establish a Kanak newspaper and radio station (Hnalaiïne Uregei, interview, 10/5/94). Bwenando was first published on 11 July 1985 and Djiido began broadcasting a few months later on 25 September 1985, a day replete with bitter symbolism for the pro-independence movement, the anniversary of the annexation of New Caledonia by France. Both media were greeted with considerable enthusiasm by sympathetic readers and listeners whose comments, published in Bwenando, often suggested a type of cathartic engagement. As one Bwenando reader commented: ‘You are wonderful, you bring me something very important that I’ve been waiting for a long time. You are the light of the past, present and future. You are the sun that warms up the heart of my people, who have suffered for so long, been mistreated, exploited, colonised. In everybody’s eyes, you are the truth’ (2/1/86). In addition, Djiido’s extensive use of Afro-American inspired music was very popular among young Kanaks. Bwenando and Djiido ran into financial difficulties early in their operation, and the response of the FLNKS to these problems illustrated some of the apparent paradoxes in the pro-independence movement’s attitude towards the creation and sustenance of its own media. Bwenando and Djiido formed part of the FLNKS’s move to create parallel institutions in the educational, cultural and informational spheres. Their sub-titles, ‘Kanaky’s first newspaper’ and ‘Kanaky’s first radio’ suggested that the fate of these media was integrally bound to that of ‘Kanaky’. Notwithstanding this, the FLNKS provided little financial backing for either

35 Drawing ostensibly pro-independence quotes from an extreme-right publication is perilous. However, this quote is akin to views which I encountered frequently among pro-independence activists interested in the media.
service, resulting in Bwenando ceasing to appear after July 1989 and Djiido’s resort to advertising in 1989 in order to secure its financial viability. Many within the FLNKS argue that the lack of financial support, for Bwenando in particular, related to political tensions within the FLNKS and the disapprobation of conservatives within the movement over Bwenando’s leftist discourse and its airing of tensions within the FLNKS in its editorial comments and readers’ letters. This view suggests that the FLNKS’s engagement with its own media demonstrated that the will to control the production of discourse was not confined to anti-independence politics.

Djiido’s resort to seeking advertising in 1989, and its modest success in doing so, was expressive of both the different political context in the territory after the signing of the Matignon and Oudinot accords and the programming policy pursued by Djiido’s management, which stressed ‘professionalism’ over activism, with the result that most of Djiido’s programming differed little from that of its competitors.

Mass circulation press and state and commercial intervention

Prior to 1988, as I have argued, the lack of commercial support for publications which were not resolutely opposed to independence had been highly effective in securing the preponderance of anti-independence discourse in the territory’s commercial media. Probably the starkest illustration of the success of this means of control can be seen in the closure in May 1986, after only three months publication, of the ‘Journal Bleu’.

Bwenando described the ‘Journal Bleu’ as the property of ‘Ravel’ and ‘Fabius’, Bill Ravel being a New Caledonian industrialist with extensive interests in transport, and Laurent Fabius, the then French Socialist Prime Minister. Frédéric Bobin, a young metropolitan journalist who had been working in New Caledonia had been hired in late 1985 by the ‘Journal Bleu’s’ editor, Jean-Paul Besset, to recruit an editorial team for the paper. According to Bobin, the French Socialist government had become increasingly concerned with the political reporting in Les Nouvelles, and had been urging the establishment of a competitor. Besset had worked for Prime Minister Fabius in his press office, and was liaising with a local businessman, Jean-François Bijon, whose task it was to gather financial backers for the publication. Ravel’s financial involvement in the paper is unclear. Bobin says that, following
Bijon’s failure to secure additional finance, a loan from the Socialist government enabled the paper to commence. Despite this political connection, the paper was to be, according to Besset, unbiased and informative:

We are starting a daily because there isn’t one here. Democracy, especially with the problems which the Territory is experiencing, cannot function without information...Les Nouvelles is a journal of opinion which interprets events in a grossly partial manner. In fact, Les Nouvelles is violently opposed to the FLNKS and even on occasion comes out against the RPCR, which it accuses of taking too soft a line. It prefers parties of the extreme right, such as the Front Calédonien (Canberra Kanaky Bulletin, 12/85 - 3/86:12).

For Bobin, the objective of the editorial team was to produce a popular newspaper which would not be considered ‘indépendantiste’ but which gave particular focus to the regions and to issues of Kanak development, an objective expressed in the content of the newspaper and reflected in Bwenando’s description of the paper as ‘excellent’ (11/4/86). A month into publication, a front page editorial, attributed to Bijon, reported on what was described as the paper’s positive impact but made reference to an ‘advertising boycott’, ostensibly evident in the fact that few advertisers have been able to show their support for the new daily’. The editorial continued:

Yet our distribution is important [the editorial cited 5,300 copies sold daily] and the buying power of our readers is high. In addition, it is in the interests of the major advertisers to encourage press pluralism that creates price competition and favours and encourages quality advertising. While waiting for a change in attitude, those who are loyal to us have already realised returns from publicity in our columns.

The editorial concluded by assuring readers that the paper was not ‘a simple electoral instrument’ and would continue despite the conservative victory in the French parliamentary elections which had just taken place (Journal Bleu, 19/3/86).

The advertising ‘boycott’ escalated, with the result that the last weeks’ editions contained almost no advertisements. In the final editorial, Bijon wished the readership ‘Au revoir!’ and avowed in a self-deprecating manner that:

The failure of the paper is...a personal failure that I have to assume alone. Because of the meagre financial resources I was able to assemble at the beginning, I knew that economic strangulation had to happen sooner or later. But my hope was to be able to convince enough advertisers, financiers,
politicians, bankers, that the Journal, once created, didn’t have to die. Obviously I wasn’t convincing enough. (Journal Bleu, 28/5/86).

Despite Bijon assuming culpability for the newspaper’s failure, the more endemic causes were readily suggested in his farewell. The near total absence of commercial support for the publication might be seen to be attributable to, not so much a lack of persuasiveness on Bijon’s part as the superior persuasiveness of members of the territory’s politico-economic elite whose extensive and interwoven financial and commercial interests in the territory enabled the exertion of considerable pressure on business to comply with their will to ensure the newspaper’s demise.

The example of the ‘Journal Bleu’ demonstrated one of the means through which the state could attempt to intervene in the discursive terrain, in a legislative context which mostly precluded direct political intervention. It also demonstrated the tensions between the territory’s comprador class and the French state under Socialist government. The manner in which Les Nouvelles changed ownership shortly afterwards suggests that the election of a conservative government had precipitated a significant reconciliation. Les Nouvelles’ new publications director, Henri Morny, commented that the French media entrepreneur Robert Hersant had been invited by Jacques Lafleur, through the intermediary of the then Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, to investigate the possibility of establishing a competitor to Les Nouvelles (Morny interview, 2/11/89). In the event, Hersant bought Les Nouvelles. The import of Lafleur’s ‘invitation’ is rendered particularly significant by reference to the fate of the ‘Journal Bleu’. The ‘invitation’ signified consent, without which it was very unlikely that a competitor would ever succeed.

The response of the French government to the Ouvéa crisis demonstrated that the French state was not legislatively powerless to intervene to control the media. The declaration of a ‘state of emergency’ on Ouvéa, after gendarmes were seized as hostages by Kanaks, enabled the military to prohibit the presence of journalists on the islands.\footnote{Freiberg writes that: ‘the French state explicitly reserves unto itself the right of defining “exceptional states of affairs”, during which press freedoms can be suspended. During a legally declared state of war or emergency, all freedom of the press recognised by common law is suspended, and the executive branch and especially the military authorities have full authority to forbid publication, censor content, and seize publications. The law calls for a return to normal press law at the end of the exceptional state’ (Freiberg, 1981:163).} In addition, regular press conferences at the High Commission were
cancelled with journalists being told, according to Les Nouvelles, that they would be convened when the High Commissioner ‘feels the need’ (Les Nouvelles, 3/5/88). During the crisis, therefore, the only information available derived from the administration and military, and initially from Radio Djiido which was in contact with the pro-independence radio station on the island of Lifou, Radio Kenu, until this station was seized by the military and its equipment smashed (Les Nouvelles, 3/5/88). The National Press Federation conveyed to the French government its concern at the ‘difficulties encountered by journalists in the exercise of their functions on the island of Ouvéa in New Caledonia’ and demanded ‘that public authorities do what is necessary to protect in every circumstance the right of the public to information’ (Les Nouvelles, 29/4/88). The Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories, Bernard Pons, appeared unmoved, responding that: ‘When the lives of these gendarmes are no longer in jeopardy, the press will be able to do its work’ (Les Nouvelles, 26/4/88). Pons’s suggestion here that the media blackout was somehow anomalous should be met with some caution for, as Freiberg has argued, the significance of such periods of acute media control is greatly heightened by the broad political significance of the events to which they relate ‘because it is precisely during crises that freedom of the press becomes meaningful’. He continues: ‘If, during moments of uncertainty and heightened conflict, differing opinions ... cannot be expressed, then the formal freedom of the press during uneventful times means considerably less’ (Freiberg, 1981:180).

A transformation occurred in the territory’s media following the signing of the Matignon and Oudinot accords. Media which had hitherto spared almost no opportunity to excoriate political opponents began mobilising discourses which were notable for their moderation of tone.37 After the national referendum on the accords in November 1988 and throughout 1989, criticism of the accords, or the main signatories to the accords (the Socialist government, the FLNKS and the RPCR), was almost non-existent in most of the territory’s mass audience media. It appeared that the culture of the ‘unspoken’ manifest itself in this silence, attesting to the fragility of the political settlement arrived at in the accords, and to the efficacy with which the state and commercial interests could influence decisively the public discursive terrain.

37 This change was particularly noticeable in Les Nouvelles’ treatment of FLNKS leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou. See Les Nouvelles, 1/7/88.
The struggle over media control in New Caledonia suggests that political groups were aware of the power of media discourse to bear significantly on their political objectives. The view that media discourse is an active agent in producing political and social outcomes has been most fully developed in what has come to be termed, in mass communication research, the critical paradigm. Considerable theoretical and methodological shifts have occurred within this research orientation deriving largely from the influence of contemporary French critical theory in cultural studies research in the mid to late 1980s. Perhaps one of the biggest shifts has been in the rejection of ‘ideology’ and the favouring of ‘discourse’ as the organising concept around which media critique has been engaged. Ideology’s chequered career within cultural studies is reflective of the shift from neo-Marxist cultural theory to post-structuralist and postmodern theoretical perspectives. Under this influence, the term ‘ideology’ was, as Zizek writes, ‘in considerable disrepute’ (1994: cover). However, Zizek notes that there has been a sudden revival in grappling with the question of ideology and exploring its continuing relevance within social and cultural theory and political practice. In a sense, this revival constitutes a new ‘rediscovery of ideology’, almost 20 years after Stuart Hall proclaimed the original ‘rediscovery’ in what he considered in the late 1970s to be the ashes of pluralist-behaviourist media research (Hall, 1985).

The vicissitudes of ideology

In an influential article published in 1985, Stuart Hall argued that the efficacy of critiques of the work of earlier ‘end of ideology’ theorists had led to a ‘rediscovery of ideology’. Within mass communication research, these theories had underpinned what had been termed a ‘pluralist paradigm’ which viewed the media as reflective or expressive of a broad, pre-existing societal consensus fashioned out of the cohesive workings of democratic institutions. Hall argued that the emergence of social protest movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and the consistency of their marginalisation in the media, focused attention on the media’s role in forging, rather than merely reflecting, consensus accounts of the world and, in the process, delegitimating alternative accounts as ‘deviant’. This insight infused, he argued, the critical paradigm, and attention turned to the media’s role in fashioning consensus;
in ‘winning ... a universal validity and legitimacy for accounts of the world which are partial and particular, and [in] grounding ... these particular constructions in the taken-for-grantedness of “the real”’. This process was indeed, he argued, ‘the characteristic and defining mechanism of “the ideological”’ (Hall, 1985:65).

Hall’s ‘rediscovery’ was, however, short-lived. By the mid-1980s, ideology had become, according to some, ‘the central problem of English Marxism since the seventies’ (Higgins, 1986:113). Ideology was therefore once again under siege, this time from theorists generally acknowledged to be working within the critical tradition. Foucault’s critique of the concept of ideology points to the main lines of criticism:

The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of for three reasons. The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth...The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of the subject. Third, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc. For these three reasons, I think that this is a notion that cannot be used without circumspection (1991:60).

Michèle Barrett argues that Foucault’s critique of ideology is here as elsewhere an implicit critique of Marxism (Barrett, 1991:vii). Certainly, Foucault’s concern with ideology relates to central tendencies within Marxist theory. His reference to ideology standing in opposition to the truth refers to an understanding within Marxism of ideology as a distorted view of objective reality, which is understood to be the material basis of society. Similarly, his reference to ideology occupying a secondary position relates to an economistic notion within Marxism that the superstructural realm is determined by the economic base of society almost as an after-the-event phenomenon. Within this view, change occurs through the working out of the forces of production, and ideology therefore has no efficacy of its own; it is a passive, reflective phenomenon. Finally, Foucault’s reference to ideology referring to ‘something of the order of the subject’ alludes to the relatively unproblematised notion of subjectivity within Marxist writing, the subject being

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1 It is important to note that Foucault’s critique is of a particular form of Marxism - termed ‘orthodox’ or ‘vulgar’ Marxism by some - which owes as much to the ossification of Marxism under the influence of Soviet dogma as to the writings of Marx himself. See for example, Milner, 1993:23-32. Larrain (1979) has convincingly demonstrated that Marx viewed the relationship of ideology to the economy as considerably more nuanced than represented under this schema.
conceived of in this work in class terms and coming to an awareness of his or her essentialised subjectivity through class struggle.2

Foucault’s summary critique neatly points to some of the major limitations of orthodox Marxist analysis for cultural studies. Many who have attempted to go beyond these limitations to develop a fuller appreciation of the dialectical relationship between the material basis of society and the realm of culture and ideology have drawn on Gramsci’s writings, and in particular his notion of ideological or cultural hegemony, to circumvent the types of problems raised by Foucault.3 One tendency among these theorists has been to abandon the use of the term ‘ideology’. Barrett, for example, after exploring the development in Marxist theory of such issues as the existence of objective reality, subjectivity and determinism, through analysing the work of Gramsci, Althusser and Laclau and Mouffe, concludes by advising against the use of ‘ideology’ as an analytical term, arguing that it is: ‘Better, perhaps, that we oblige ourselves to think with new and

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2 Elsewhere, Foucault has written on this subject: ‘As regards Marxism, I’m not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology. Indeed I wonder whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn’t be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what troubles me with these analyses which prioritise ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize upon’ (Foucault, cited in Purvis and Hunt, 1993:488).

3 Such theorists include Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and Raymond Williams (1977). See also the work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies under Stuart Hall. In particular, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds) (1982) Resistance through Rituals: Youth sub-cultures in post-war Britain. Milner (1993) has argued of Raymond Williams’s work that there is an incompatibility in Williams’ earlier work between his concern with the notion of culture as a shared phenomenon and the notion of culture as irredeemably marked by class. He says that Williams provisionally resolved this contradiction through his discovery of the work of Gramsci and, in particular, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. In hegemony he considered that he had found a means to resolve the ostensible contradictions he perceived between the notion of a shared culture and that of the class basis of particular cultural forms. Williams argued: ““Hegemony” goes beyond “culture”...in its insistence on relating the “whole social process” to specific distributions of power and influence...Gramsci therefore introduces the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognised as a whole process. It is in just this recognition of the wholeness of the process that the concept of “hegemony” goes beyond “ideology”. What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organised by specific dominant meanings and values...It sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living - not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole subsistence of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of “ideology”, nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as “manipulation” or “indoctrination”. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of our living - our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values - constitutive and constituting - which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a “culture”, but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes’ (Williams, cited in Milner, 1993:55-6).
more precise concepts rather than mobilising the dubious resonances of the old’ (1991:168). Barrett prefers to work within a Foucauldian framework which favours the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ over ‘ideology’ (ibid). Richard Johnson expresses similar concern with the term, choosing instead to privilege the notions of ‘culture’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘subjectivity’, and using “ideology” or better “ideological” sparingly, always adjectivally and at the end of an argument, not at the beginning!’ (1986, footnote 9:308-9).

There are, however, those who continue to wave the flag for ideology while acknowledging its difficulties. The development of the notion of ideology which they attempt responds to some of the critiques from within post-structuralism and postmodernism. This response has been mounted by those who adhere to what has been termed the ‘critical view of ideology’ and those who follow the ‘sociological view’. Although the epistemological bases of each of these views differs considerably, their responses have been similar.

**The critical view of ideology**

Foucault’s comment that ideology ‘always stands in virtual opposition to something which is supposed to count as truth’ refers to the view of ideology which has been termed the critical, negative or epistemological view (Larrain, 1979; Thompson, 1984; Purvis and Hunt, 1993; Barrett, 1991). It is argued that this is the view most closely tied to key passages in Marx’s writing. Ideology is portrayed as a necessary deception or mystification - a ‘false consciousness’ - through which a person’s understanding of social reality is distorted (Larrain, 1979:14). Barrett argues that it is also an ‘epistemological’ usage of the term in that the distorted view is presumed to be distinguishable from an accurate view which is objective knowledge or science (1991:19), a view espoused most forcefully by Althusser for whom ideology stood in opposition to science (Larrain, 1979:196).4

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4 Barrett mocks Althusser’s claim that scientific knowledge can be gleaned from ideology through a method which he terms ‘theoretical practice’, which Barrett describes as a pretentious way of saying sitting thinking (Barrett, 1991:36). For Althusser, Marxism, as a theoretical schema resulting from considerable theoretical practice, is accorded scientific status and socialism is considered a scientific concept. Larrain argues that Althusser considered that Marxist science has two characteristic methodological features: ‘the reduction of the phenomenon to the essence; and the consideration of that essence as a totality in which the “internal connections” of all phenomena are linked’ (Larrain, 1979:196).
The validity of claiming a rigid juxtaposition between ideology and science - which in Althusser’s conception is the juxtaposition of distorted, ideological understandings and undistorted, accurate knowledge, or, in short, truth - has been convincingly refuted, not only from within postmodernism but also from those theorists who continue to see some validity in working within the critical conceptualisation of ideology. Postmodernism refutes the existence of totalising theories and the notion of human rationality which presupposes the existence of a fixed subject. It therefore rejects the claim to truth which is itself a totalising concept grounded in the presumption that it is attainable through reason. Faced with such challenges, many former Althusserians have moved to a more relativist or conventionalist position which acknowledges the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of attaining objective knowledge (Barrett, 1991:39-41). This move was encouraged by what has been termed the ‘linguistic turn in modern social theory’ (Purvis and Hunt, 1993:474) which, through structuralism and later post-structuralism, came to consider the means through which language and discourse not only conveyed but also constituted social experience.5 Purvis and Hunt argue that most writers who claim a place for a critical conceptualisation of ideology have moved to a position of ‘soft realism’. It is soft ‘in that it readily accepts the typical postmodernist claim that knowledge claims can never be verified and that there is no vantage point external to discourse from which truth-claims can be validated’. On the other hand, it is realist in the insistence ‘that there is a non-discursive realm that can be known even though that knowledge can never be more than fallible, always liable to be displaced by some “better” account’ (1993:476-7).

Barrett has described John B. Thompson as ‘the most sophisticated contemporary exponent of the critical theory tradition as it applies to ideology’ (Barrett, 1991, footnote 15:185). Thompson positions his work as ‘a plea for, as well as a reformulation and a defence of, a critical conception of ideology’ (Thompson,

5 The emphasis on language and discourse derived from a confluence of theoretical influences during the 1950s and 1960s which came to be known of as ‘structuralism’ and which was best exemplified by the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, the revival of Sassurean semiology led most prominently during this period by Roland Barthes, Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge and Althusser’s structural Marxism (Milner, 1993:72-5). The linguistic, or more specifically discursive, turn in the social sciences was further consolidated with the rise during the late 1960s and early 1970s of a body of work designated as post-structuralist which, while acknowledging the significance of language and discourse in social being, took exception to structuralism’s claims to scientificity. Milner distinguishes three types of post-structuralism: literary deconstruction exemplified in the work of Jacques Derrida, Foucault’s middle-period writing on knowledge-power relations and semiotic reconstructions of Freudian psychoanalysis initiated by Jacques Lacan. Each form took exception to
1984:4). He argues that only the critical view of ideology is capable of addressing the issues which emerge from contemporary analyses of the functioning of language in the social world, for these point to the multifarious ways in which language intersects with the nourishment, preservation and enrichment of power (ibid:2). It is, he argues, only the critical view of ideology which preserves the ‘connection between the concept of ideology and the critique of domination, a connection which was certainly part (if not all) of Marx’s conception of ideology’ (ibid:76). The centrality of this concern with domination is reflected in his definition of ideology as ‘the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination’ (ibid:4).

Thompson’s claim that only the critical conception preserves the link with domination refers to the view within Marxism that ideology is essentially a ruling class phenomenon; that is, that it is the propagation of ideas which serve to sustain class inequality. Thompson recognises the capital-wage labour relationship as the fundamental axis along which ‘systematically asymmetrical relations’ are secured in capitalist societies (ibid:13). However, he also accepts the existence of other relations of domination between nation states and ethnic groupings, and in relation to gender, which are not reducible to class dimensions (ibid:130). This broader view of relations of domination leads Thompson to argue that ‘ideology is essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power’ (ibid:4), rather than to a more dedicated Marxist definition of the sustenance of class relations.

Thompson addresses the difficult epistemological issues raised by the critical view of ideology and, in particular, the underlying presumption raised by his definition of a form of meaning or signification which is non-ideological - which does not sustain asymmetrical relations of power - and which is therefore, within his own conceptualisation, true. He draws on Habermas’s work on ideal speech situations to discuss the types of formal discursive conditions under which not only the truth but also the justice of a statement might be ascertained. He concludes that, under idealised conditions in which systematically asymmetrical relations were temporarily

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the structuralist notion that meaning could be pinned down. Indeed, in the extreme Derridean case, it was argued that there was no reality outside of discourse (ibid:73-4).

6 Thompson comments that Giddens makes this point forcefully in A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. (Thompson, 1984, footnote 86:319). It is also a central point made by Laclau and Mouffe whose work is considered by some as pointing to the limitations of Marxist analysis and representing perhaps the most significant rupture with Marxism (Barrett, 1991:61-80).
suspended, it might be possible to ascertain the qualities of a statement (ibid:142-3). Thompson anticipates the postmodernist retort to his arguments, making an impassioned plea for the need to hold on to truth and justice, if only as limiting notions, by arguing that: ‘A limiting notion is not irrelevant for being a limit: it is a goal which can be approximated and which, in the process of approximation, can call our attention to certain factors at the expense of others’ (ibid:145). Thompson wants to hold on to the possibility of truth as a guard against what he perceives to be a nihilistic relativism in which political action loses its raison d’être because it can no longer be guided by a superior logic, a view sustained, he believes, by the alternative sociological view of ideology.

The sociological view of ideology

In developing his critical conception of ideology, Thompson rejects those conceptions which he terms ‘neutral’, but which others term ‘sociological’ (Barrett, 1991) or ‘positive’ (Larrain, 1979), which conceive of ideology not as some form of mystification tied to dominant interests but as more general systems of thought, belief or symbolic practices. Thompson argues that this conception loses the link between ideology and domination:

No attempt is made, on the basis of this conception, to distinguish between the kinds of action or projects which ideology animates; ideology is present in every political programme irrespective of whether the programme is directed towards the preservation or transformation of the social order (ibid:4).

The distinction made by Thompson between the ‘critical’ and ‘neutral’ views of ideology had been previously identified by Larrain (1979). He argued that Lenin, Lukács and Gramsci had developed a ‘historicist’ conception of ideology which diverged fundamentally from Marx’s critical view. The historicist view avoids the epistemological dilemma associated with the notion of mystification by inescapably grounding consciousness in historical processes and thereby refuting the notion that there exists an ahistorical truth. (Larrain, 1979:41-4). It also avoids one of the other major problems associated with the idea of mystification. The idea of ideology as mystification renders those who are the recipients of ideology particularly powerless. Mystification tends to connote a wilful manipulation and distortion of ideas which are then projected onto passive individuals. Crude theories of false
consciousness conceive of those perpetuating the mystification as the ruling class who, through their ownership of the means of mental production, are able to successfully propagate dominant ruling class ideologies and thereby maintain social control. But this notion that we are passive recipients of other people’s ideologies has come under considerable criticism. As Eccleshall (cited in Mansfield, 1984)) has commented: ‘Ordinary people are unlikely to be bewitched by fairytales spun out of the fertile imaginations of capitalist hobgoblins’.

The alternative ‘neutral’ or ‘sociological’ view is grounded in a different understanding of the relationship between social reality and consciousness which its advocates argue is a more correct reading of Marx’s distinction between essence and appearance. Under this view, ideology is not, as the critical perspective would have it, ideas which distort the essence (reality). Rather, it is reality which always presents itself in a distorted fashion. Ideology thus becomes a reflection of reality in its phenomenal form, the distortion being in the way reality presents itself rather than in merely distorted ideas about reality (Hage, 1989:36-43). Marx’s notion of fetishism is key here. He argues that the way reality presents itself masks the true nature of social relations just as the way a commodity presents itself as a thing to which one attaches a value masks the complex relations of production and exploitation which underpin its production (ibid). As Larrain comments:

I ideology negates the inverted character of social relations; it takes an aspect of reality, the appearances, and gives them an autonomy and independence which they do not actually have. In this sense ideology fetishizes the world of appearances (1979:58).

The ‘sociological’ view does not, therefore, conceive of people as dupes. Rather, it preserves more fully Giddens’ ‘theorem of “knowledgeability” - that we are all purposeful, knowledgeable agents who have reasons for what we do’ while recognising that social processes ‘work “behind our backs”, affecting what we do in ways of which we are unaware’ (1981:16). Within the sociological view, people are socially and historically located actors who attempt to make sense of their world, but are able to do so only partially because of the partiality of the experiences and social practices in which they are immersed. These partial understandings are ideological; they have force, however, because they ‘make sense to, and [do] not contradict the practical/meaningful world of the subjects who adopt or produce them’ (Hage, 1989:43-4). Sayer’s notion of ‘practical adequacy’ is relevant here.
Persuasive ideological accounts are those, he argues, which are ‘practically adequate in the face of the knowing subject’ (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:31).

The sociological view therefore locates ideology in specific experiences and practices and upholds the notion of people as thinking, wilful subjects who attempt to make sense of their world, which always appears to them in distorted ways. The distortion derives from both the inversion which exists in appearances and the partiality of the practices in which subjects are engaged. However, intrinsic to each of these distortions is the further ‘complication’ of language, described by Mills as a ‘sticky-layer’ between the world and ourselves (Mills, cited in Wetherell and Potter, 1992:62). It is through language that we attempt to apprehend our material and social world and understand our own place in it. These external and internal understandings are structured in language through discourse, defined by Hall as ‘sets of ready-made and preconstituted “experiencings” displayed and arranged through language’ (Hall, cited in Purvis and Hunt, 1993:485). As Purvis and Hunt write:

> What the concept tries to capture is that people live and experience within discourse in the sense that discourses impose frameworks which limit what can be experienced or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said and done. Each discourse allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said. Discourses thus provide specific and distinguishable mediums through which communicative action takes place (ibid).

As discourse is totally constitutive and there is no means of apprehending reality except through discourse, it follows that there can be no privileged vantage point from which truth can be ascertained; ‘no versionless reality’ (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:63). Wetherell and Potter are careful, however, to argue against the view that there is nothing outside of discourse. They cite the example of colonialism which, they argue, was not just a discursive phenomenon. It involved unmistakable physical phenomena such as the movement of people and the establishment of institutions. ‘These things are not just words - but they are not separable from words either’ (ibid).

**The sociological view and journalistic practice**
The sociological view has, I believe, considerable relevance to the material being studied in this thesis, particularly in understanding the role of journalists in the production of politically engaged discourse. The critical view would tend to view journalists as the producers of false consciousness or mystification - the producers, in other words, of the ideas which dupe those who engage with them. It posits journalists as either passive scribes in the propagation of the dominant discourse of others, or as themselves so duped by this discourse that they reproduce it unthinkingly. While neither explanation is totally fanciful, the sociological view achieves, I believe, important shifts in emphasis.

Within the sociological view, journalists can be seen as wilful agents who attempt to make sense of the political events surrounding them, but who do so according to the partiality of their experiences and practical engagement, and according to their discursive legacy. It is the commonality of their experiences and discursive baggage which contributes to the production of delimited discourses, not the conjuring of false ideas which emanate from elsewhere. This view on journalistic practice helps to explain how, for example, journalists at Les Nouvelles could argue with conviction that their accounts of the political situation were totally objective. These journalists did not feel dictated to by management’s editorial ‘line’. They believed that their work was the product of their own reasoning, but this reasoning was, of course, partial. In the presentation of this reasoning as universal, it could be argued that they were engaged in the propagation of ideology.

**Discourse and ideology**

Despite the benefits in reconciling wilful human practice with the production of ideology, problems with the sociological view remain, one of the more significant being the difficulty of developing a functional differentiation between the notion of ideology which it produces, and discourse. Hall’s definition of discourse as privileging certain ‘experiencings’ - certain values, beliefs, practices and subjectivities over others - is akin to the understanding of ideology developed within the sociological view. Indeed, Purvis and Hunt point to the tendency to a conflation of the terms in Stuart Hall’s work (1993:496) This definitional similarity is accentuated when one considers the relationship between power and ideology and
discourse thus defined. The sociological view sees ideology as the projection of the interests of particular groups within which a core set of experiencings are shared, and the attempt to present these interests as universal. Ideology is thus linked to power - the power to project certain experiencings over others\(^8\) - leading to a definition of ideology as the projection of power through discourse. But if, as the post-structuralists would have it, discourse is power, then what is there to distinguish between ideology and discourse?\(^9\) Doesn’t this render all discourse ideological?\(^10\)

The force of this logic has led, as I have argued, to a conflating of the terms in much cultural studies work. However, there are those who feel frustrated at this state of affairs, because of its effect of undermining the possibility of differentiating between the effects of power produced by different discourses. As Richard Johnson has commented: ‘It may be that all our knowledge of the world is ‘ideological’ more or less, rendered partial by the operation of interest and power. But I still want to be able to make discriminations between knowledges or forms of subjectivity, and see them as more or less ‘ideological’ (Johnson, 1986, footnote 9:308-9).

**Discourse versus ideology**

Johnson’s use of the adjectival ‘ideological’ points to a prevalent response among those seeking to retain a place for ‘ideology’ as distinct from ‘discourse’. Within this work, ideology has been shifted to an effect of discourse, with discourse being the medium and ideology the outcome. This shift has been traversed by proponents of ideology in the sociological and critical schools. Wetherell and Potter, in their discussion of racism, argue, for example, that it is very difficult to determine in advance whether a discourse is ideological or not from a reading of the discourse

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\(^7\) Such a differentiation exists within the critical view, ideology being that discourse which sustains relations of domination.

\(^8\) Here, the difference with the critical view of ideology is that within the critical view ideology is seen as the projection through discourse of the power only of dominant groups in society, not the projection of power of interests in general, no matter what their location within hierarchies of power.

\(^9\) Foucault has written that discourse ‘is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized’ (Foucault, cited in Purvis and Hunt, 1993:488).

\(^10\) One important differentiation between the notions of power inherent in the sociological view of ideology and discourse theory is that, within the sociological view, power is linked to interests whereas, within discourse theory, power is diffuse. As Purvis and Hunt argue: ‘Ideology...implies the existence of some link between “interests” and “forms of consciousness”’...[whereas] the concept of “discourse” remains self-consciously neutral or sceptical about whether discourse as a form of existence is connected with elements, such as are invoked by notions of interest, that are external to the discursive content of lived experience’ (1993:476).
itself. They use the example of biological essentialism which, while most commonly used in support of racist practices, can also be mobilised in support of anti-racist practices. Rather than concentrate on the propositional claims of discourse, attention should be turned, they argue, towards the practices which this discourse serves to sustain. Moreover, this shift to the notion of ideology as an effect is, according to Wetherell and Potter, congruent with the shift away from the notion of ideology as mystification:

The specification of these [propositional] claims makes sense if ideology is defined as false representation, but it seems to us to be largely wasted effort and, indeed, given the pace at which racism is currently changing, leads to a theory and method which would need constant revising...Given this flexibility of the enemy, and the way debates move on, it seems sensible not to commit oneself to one exclusive characterisation of racist claims. There is a danger of being silenced when racist discourse continues to oppress but no longer meets the main characteristics of social scientific definitions of racism (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:71-2).

The shift to the notion of ideology as an effect also focuses attention on the variability of effects which any discourse may produce. The notion that ideology exists within discourse tended to presuppose that those engaging with ideological discourse assumed its ideological underpinning. This presupposition was inherent, as we have seen, in the notion of mystification and false consciousness, whereby the dominated classes assumed uncritically ruling class ideology. The shift to ideology as an effect opens up the possibility that discourse may not achieve the desired effect; that it may, in other words, be rejected and lead to the development of counter-discourses. It therefore problematises the effects of discourse and necessitates an analysis of the reception of discourse before any claim as to the ideological effect of discourse can be made.

There is much to commend this shift away from consideration of the propositional claims of discourse to the notion of ideology as an effect. Opposed political groups in New Caledonia frequently mobilised similar propositional claims to justify their positions, evident in the prevalence of accusations from both groups that the other was racist. Moreover, it was apparent that both pro- and anti-independence groups were decidedly unsuccessful in mystifying their political opponents through the mobilisation of discourse. But the view of ideology as an effect entrains methodological problems. One implication of this view within media studies is that
an assessment of the ideological effect of discourse can be made only after detailed audience research, undertaken through such established techniques as interviews, surveys, group discussions and participant observation. The benefits of marrying audience research with institutional and discourse analysis are evident in David Morley’s excellent work on the British current affairs program, *Nationwide* (1980). But in a political context replete with animosity, suspicion, cultural difference and closed political structures, such as existed in New Caledonia during the 1980s and into the 1990s, the possibility of accessing audiences in the manner required for such research was extremely remote. In addition, as Morley’s two-volume work suggests, the additional work required for such audience research, were it possible, would probably merit a second thesis.

I believe, however, that a lack of audience research does not necessitate the complete abandonment of the notion of ideological effect. Although it is important to recognise heterogeneity in readings of texts, and to be ever mindful of the manner in which texts are negotiated, arguments can still be mounted as to the plausibility of some readings over others on the basis of knowledge of socio-economic and political circumstances (Mills, 1991:54). Moreover, we are helped in this task by considering broad sociological phenomena such as mass protest, the prevalence of insurrection or election results. While these phenomena certainly tell us very little of the nuances of individually negotiated meanings, they suggests that readings emerged which were, in some sense, broadly consensual, and it is on this basis that some comments on the ideological effects of discourse might be possible.

There is, however, another, more fundamental problem with the notion of ideology as an effect. Despite the different epistemologies of the critical and sociological views, those who adhere to these views, and who have chosen to move to the notion of ideology as an effect, end up with surprisingly similar definitions of the ideological. John B. Thompson’s quest to maintain the critical linkage between ideology and domination is reflected in his definition of ideology as ‘meaning which serves to establish or sustain relations of domination’. Proponents of the sociological view appear to arrive at a similar point. Purvis and Hunt write that ‘what makes some discourses ideological is their connection with systems of domination’ (1993:497), while Wetherell and Potter define racist discourse as ‘discourse (of any
content) which has the effect of establishing, sustaining and reinforcing oppressive power relations’ (1992:70).

What is striking in these definitions, as in the works from which they derive, is the relative silence regarding the status of discourses which seek to challenge or undermine relations of domination. Are these ideological? Thompson acknowledges the practical impossibility of attaining truth, and the sociological view rejects the notion of true and false consciousness. So, if these discourses are not ideological and not truth, how are they to be described? Thompson is the only one to attempt such a description, suggesting, almost as an aside, that such discourse might be called ‘contestatory symbolic forms’ or ‘incipient forms of the critique of ideology’ (1990:68).

This manner of conceiving of oppositional discourse seems grossly inadequate for the purpose of this thesis. It appears to belittle the effects of power produced by oppositional discourses and to presuppose their failure in challenging domination. A definition which gave credence to the potential power of oppositional discourse would view ideological discourse as discourse which serves not only to establish or sustain but also to shift or undermine relations of domination. This more inclusive definition of ideological discourse does, however, bring us back to the issue of whether a functional differentiation can be made between ideology and discourse. What is the difference between the effect of power of discourse and the effect of power of ideological discourse? Perhaps one response would be to attempt to differentiate between power and domination with a view to deeming ideological those discourses which sustain or undermine only certain forms of dominative

11 Purvis and Hunt’s definition of ideology as discourses which are connected with systems of domination appears somewhat ambiguous. It could include discourses which seek to undermine domination. However, elsewhere in their article they talk about the ‘directionality of ideology’. Drawing on Althusser’s notion of the interpellation or hailing subjects through discourse, they argue that their definition of ideology retains and moves into central prominence ‘a key feature of the critical thrust of Marx’s account, namely, its focus on the way in which the interpellation of subject positions operates systematically to reinforce and reproduce dominant social relations - it is this that we have described as the directionality of ideology theory’ (1993:497). This quote and the examples of ideological effect which they use in their article suggests to me that their definition is akin to Thompson’s in confining ideological discourse to discourse which sustains relations of domination.

12 In advancing a definition of ideology as discourse which served to sustain or undermine relations of domination, Thompson would argue that we have lapsed into an inclusive definition of ideology where ideology is akin to politics in general and the notion of domination is lost. But to argue that there are various ideological discourses in competition with one another in a social formation is not to deny that this formation is structured in dominance (Althusser, 1971), and that there are greater structural obstacles to the subversion of some ideological positions than others. This was, I believe, one of the greatest contributions arising from Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’.
power relations, assuming, as Foucault does, that there are other types of relations of power (Foucault, 1980:119). But, if it is the case that the experiences of colonialism have touched most, if not all, aspects of existence in New Caledonia, fundamentally altering relations of power by introducing new structures of domination, then it might be argued that few relations of power have escaped the dominative imperative of colonialism.

My response to these dilemmas is to concede, as Johnson does, that all discourse is probably ideological, but to argue nonetheless that the effects of power of certain discourses are stronger than those of others (Johnson, 1986, footnote 9:308-9). When I discuss media discourses in the thesis, I do so with the understanding that these discourses entail effects of power, and tend therefore not to refer to these discourses as ideological. Indeed, it probably goes without saying that those discourses which I single out for discussion are chosen for what I believe is their salience in the political struggle around independence. However, it is, I believe, useful to retain the notion of ideological effect, if only as a rhetorical means of drawing the reader’s attention to the particularly forceful effects which certain discourses may entrain. The Kanak discourse of ‘the people’ and the European discourse of ‘la Calédonie profonde’ were, I believe, two particularly powerful discourses, and I discuss therefore to the force of their potential ideological effects. In general, however, I have tended to base my analysis on the notion of discourse, which is itself, of course, far from unproblematic.

**Discourse**

There are differences in the manner in which discourse is conceived of - and in the questions which one asks when analysing discourse - between those working within a broadly neo-Marxist framework and those working from a more dedicated Foucauldian perspective. Perhaps the essential difference could be expressed as a view of discourse as a product of social forces within the neo-Marxist perspective, compared with the more Foucauldian view of discourse as the very producer of these social forces. The former tends to see discourse as expressive of the interests of historically constituted agents, and therefore an expression of what is already constituted in society, whereas the latter views discourse as the means

13 See also Anthony Giddens discussion of the different forms of power (1981:49-68).
through which agents and groups, and indeed society itself, are constituted (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:79-87).

The concern in Foucault’s work with the manner in which discourse constitutes subjects and groups through its functioning in categorising, ordering, and naming individuals reflects his rejection of the crudeness of notions of subjectivity within much Marxist theory. At one point Foucault even described the aim of his work as the creation of a history ‘of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’ (Foucault, 1982:208). For Foucault, the issue is not the projection of power through discourse by pre-existent subjects or the projection of power onto pre-existent consciousnesses, but rather the power in discourse to create subjects and consciousness (Foucault, 1980:102;118). Contrary to the Marxist account which sees power as vested in groups whose actions are guided, if only implicitly, by totalising narratives, Foucault views power as expressed through knowledge and as fragmented - dispersed throughout social practices, rituals and institutions (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:83-5).

Foucault’s critique of the treatment of subjectivity in Marxism and his own work on the subject have been highly influential in the manner in which discourse is conceptualised and analysed\textsuperscript{14}, and this influence is reflected in this thesis, particularly in those sections where I analyse the shifting subject positions constructed through media discourses. The manner in which social actors were named, categorised and ordered in these discourses produced new subjectivities, such as ‘Kanak’ and ‘loyalist’, which constituted significant departures from former subjectivities and set in train a range of institutional and ritualistic consequences. However, these subjectivities did not emerge in a historical or social vacuum. They were expressive of the experiences of colonialism in New Caledonia, just as they drew their authority from struggles over decolonisation elsewhere. These experiences were expressed in discourse, with the result that there existed a discursive backdrop to the emergence of these new subjectivities. The ‘Kanak’ and ‘loyalist’ identities therefore had an experiential and discursive history which is important in understanding their intended meanings. Similarly, the post-war discourse of pluri-ethnicity, inscribed in the UC’s slogan ‘Two colours; a single

\textsuperscript{14} Barrett concurs with Foucault’s view on the poverty of Marxist theorising on subjectivity describing this area as ‘a massive lacuna in Marxism, and one which not only has had its effects in terms of a
people’, and enacted through a range of personal and institutional practices such as the incorporation of Melanesians into local politics, was itself the product of a colonial struggle in which European domination had been secured and European systems of representation had been imposed. Having achieved its prominent status, the discourse of pluri-ethnicity was a powerful force in subsequent struggles over independence.

This view of discourse as both historically constituted and constitutive suggests a mode of discourse analysis which combines neo-Marxist and Foucauldian approaches. Discourse is constituted by agents who are socially, historically and discursively located. However, discourse has an effectiveness of its own which can transcend its origins, and this is particularly the case, as Foucault argues, in the manner in which discourse constitutes subjects, in the process reconstituting the social. I therefore seek to discuss what discourse is expressive of, as well as what it expresses, pointing to the many instances in which the intentionality behind discourse is not reflected in the readings which emerge.15

**Interpretive repertoires**

Wetherell and Potter argue that Foucault’s treatment of discourse tends to de-emphasise discourse as social practice favouring instead a view of discourses as:

potential causal agents in their own right, with the process of interest being the work of one (abstract) discourse on another (abstract) discourse, or the propositions or ‘statements’ of that discourse working smoothly and automatically to produce objects and subjects (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:90).

This thesis, like Wetherell and Potter’s work, is very much concerned with the instantiated use of discourse in social practice, and this is one of the reasons why, following Wetherell and Potter, I have preferred in some instances to use the term ‘interpretive repertoire’ rather than ‘discourse’. By interpretive repertoires, Wetherell

15 This view on discourse as constituted and constitutive is advanced by Wetherell and Potter who draw on the work of Stuart Hall to argue the need ‘to combine, alternate and intertwine genealogical and ideological modes of analysis...We see, therefore, discourse analysis as necessarily involving a double movement. A satisfactory account of a piece of discursive material must, in our view, move backwards and forwards between what could be described as the “established” and “constitutive” aspects of discourse’ (1992:86).
and Potter mean ‘broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images. In more structuralist language we can talk of these things as systems of signification’ (ibid). For Wetherell and Potter, talking about interpretive repertoires focuses attention on the content of discourse in a way that the term ‘discourse’ tends not to, particularly within the Foucauldian usage. The notion of interpretive repertoires draws attention to the interpretive resources - the terms, descriptions, images and arguments - available to the enunciator in the mobilisation of discourse. These resources constitute, as Wetherell and Potter put it, ‘an available choreography of interpretive moves - like the moves of an ice dancer, say - from which particular ones can be selected in a way that fits most effectively in the context’ (ibid:92).

My inclination to use, in instances, the notions of interpretive repertoires and resources rather than discourses derives from my engagement with political discourses in New Caledonia. In discussions with residents in the territory, I was struck by the similarity of the terms, concepts, metaphors and examples used in the mobilisation of discourse. The frequency with which I heard from anti-independence advocates, for example, such statements as ‘Kanaks are savages’, ‘New Caledonia would be nothing without France’, ‘if it weren’t for the French, Kanaks would be tearing each other apart; look at their disagreements about land’, ‘if you give Kanaks something they destroy it’ et cetera, suggested to me the existence of a reservoir of statements, metaphors and examples from which combinations were chosen according to the context and flow of conversation. These statements were presented as self-validating cliches (ibid:91) whose power was enhanced by their pervasive mobilisation.

These perceptions of New Caledonian political discourse interested me in Wetherell and Potter’s notions of interpretive repertoires and resources. I found the focus in these terms on the content of discourse useful when undertaking my analysis because they made me think about why certain mobilisations appeared to be particularly persuasive. My attention was drawn to those interpretive resources which appear to have attained the status of common sense, so that their mobilisation was considered to render a discourse beyond contention. I came to see discourse as a type of bricolage and to view the rhetorical efficacy of certain discourses as the result of a particularly propitious assemblage of resources.
Moreover, my concern with dilemmatic discourse was aided by this focus on the existence of a range of interpretive resources from which combinations were selected. The mobilisation of certain combinations over others in particular rhetorical contexts pointed to the dilemmas inherent in other combinations. The notion of interpretive repertoires therefore focuses attention on discourse as strategic and dynamic, emerging and changing within a context of contestation.
CHAPTER THREE - LES NOUVELLES CALEDONIENNES

Journalists at Les Nouvelles operated within a variety of constraints which shaped the production of the newspaper’s text. These constraints were textual, political, economic and personal (Mills, 1991:68). They derived from the structures of ownership and control of the newspaper, institutional and professional practices which gave rise to regularities in the types of stories covered and their stylistic presentation, and the notions of professionalism and news values held by journalists. The production of Les Nouvelles was also constrained by the personal dispositions of journalists, where these dispositions are understood not as innate or arbitrary but rather, as Bourdieu (1977) argues, the product of complex economic and social influences. ¹ Journalists were also bearers of discourses which pre-existed them, and the meanings which they ascribed to events were guided by these discourses. They were not free agents in the development of meanings, but rather, as Foucault has argued of the role of authors in general, they constituted the ‘principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning’ (Foucault, 1991b:118).² The discursive legacy which journalists brought to their work served, in other words, to delimit the media discourses which they mobilised.

Sarah Mills has argued that: ‘Each colonial relation develops narrative and descriptive techniques particular to its setting and history, which draw on a range of discursive practices’ (1991:87). Journalists at Les Nouvelles had available to them a range of colonial discourses which were more or less expressive of the particularity of the experiences of colonialism in New Caledonia and they negotiated between these discourses in their production of media texts. Sometimes these discourses were in tension: for example, journalists at Les Nouvelles vested considerable effort in opposing independence through the mobilisation of discourses which were unequivocally colonial, but they also mobilised discourses which sought to distance New Caledonia from its colonial relationship with France. The existence

¹ Bourdieu (1977) argues that the decisive period of influence in the development of dispositions is early childhood during which time the family and schooling are the key influences in determining the manner in which individuals subsequently engage in the variety of fields in which they operate. His notion of dispositions therefore suggests that journalists brought to their work a set of socially constructed orientations which bore on their production of media texts.

² Foucault continues: ‘the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction (Foucault, 1991b:119).
of these competing discourses points to the heterogeneous nature of colonial discourse and its dilemmatic qualities, the existence of which provided openings to political opponents for contestation and subversion.³

The origins of *Les Nouvelles*

Throughout most of the 1980s, *Les Nouvelles* was the monopoly daily newspaper in New Caledonia. It carried news and extensive commentary on the unfolding political crisis around independence and played a central role in opposing the escalating push for independence. Its circulation during this period, usually around 15,000 but rising to over 20,000 at the height of the insurrection (Godard:253; Ventrillon interview, 12/12/90), meant that it reached most European households in Noumea and the interior of the main island (Ventrillon interview, 12/12/90). The extent of the paper’s Melanesian readership over the period is unknown, as management claims that no audience survey has ever been undertaken. It is generally believed, however, that the Melanesian readership was small, but proportionally larger in Noumea than the interior.

*Les Nouvelles* was established in 1971 by Roger Brissaud and Jean-Paul Leyraud. Brissaud was a French journalist who had worked at Radio Saigon and Radio Tahiti prior to creating the Tahitian newspaper, *Les Nouvelles*, in 1961 (*Presence*, no. 14-5, 4/89 & 1/90). A young New Caledonian journalist, Edouard Ventrillon, who had worked briefly for the *France Australe*, joined *Les Nouvelles* in Tahiti. It was essentially here that Ventrillon received his training, and his skills were recognised by Brissaud who appointed Ventrillon as Chief Editor in the late 1960s. Brissaud sought to establish business activities in New Caledonia and was introduced to Jean-Paul Leyraud, who came from a very influential family (members of this family had been the local directors of a very powerful trading group in the pre-war period, the Société Havraise Calédonienne [O’Reilly, 1980:242] and who himself had

³ One of the distinguishing features of *Les Nouvelles* was the frequency of its verbatim publication of communiques from political groups, particularly anti-independence groups but also pro-independence groups. This practice raises the question of the extent to which I can describe these texts as forming part of *Les Nouvelles*’ discourses surrounding the issue of independence. It is my contention that these texts ‘change’ as a result of their publication in *Les Nouvelles*. Indeed, the newspaper might be conceived of as performing the function of Bourdieu’s ‘auctor’. Bourdieu writes of the ‘auctor’: ‘Even when he merely states with authority what is already the case, even when he contents himself with asserting what is, the auctor produces a change in what is: by virtue of the fact that he states things with authority, that is, in front of and in the name of everyone, publicly and officially, he saves them
extensive business interests in the territory, including a printing firm. At the time of the establishment of Les Nouvelles, speculation was rife within the Noumea political community as to the actual source of the considerable sum of money required to establish the paper. Rumour had it that this was ‘Paris money’ which had come to New Caledonia via Brissaud in Tahiti. This was fuelled by further rumours over the soundness of Leyraud’s financial position.\textsuperscript{4}

Les Nouvelles was set up in competition with the aging and ossified France Australe which had held, as we have seen, a monopoly over the distribution of daily written news for several decades and was widely regarded as the de facto organ of the territory’s nickel giant, the Société le Nickel (SLN). With its contemporary format and hitherto unprecedented breadth of local coverage, Les Nouvelles quickly attracted readers from the France Australe. Advertisers followed, attracted by cut price advertising rates. Despite moves by the France Australe to update its format and to increase its local coverage, the paper remained a financial drain on the SLN and was closed in 1979.

Brissaud had appointed Ventrillon as chief editor of his New Caledonian newspaper, and Ventrillon appears to have played a very large part in successfully positioning Les Nouvelles in the market. The business relationship between Brissaud and Leyraud was problematic from the outset. Several interviewees commented that the equal partnership which they had created left open the question of who was really in charge, suggesting that the directions of both partners were at times conflicting.

The strong alliance between Ventrillon and Brissaud, described by one commentator as quasi-familial, appears to have side-lined Leyraud into administrative functions, primarily the paper’s distribution and printing. The conflict came to a head, as we have seen, over the issue of publishing the paper in colour, and resulted in Brissaud publishing the Noumea Journal in competition with Les

\textsuperscript{4} The importance of rumour in the New Caledonian political context owes much to the closed nature of political structures in the territory. The lack of structures of democratic governance in the colony/territory during most of the post-war period fostered extensive speculation within the Noumea based political community on political and economic relationships and developments (as well as many other topics). The rumour of ‘Paris money’ entering the territory to undermine the France Australe itself had colonial connotations in its reinforcing of the notion that all things which occurred in the territory did so at the behest of ‘Paris’. The importance of rumour to New Caledonian politics was officialised with the commencement in 1985 of an irregular column in Les Nouvelles entitled ‘Caledonian Rumours’. Les Nouvelles said that the title was taken from the suggestion of the press
Nouvelles, while remaining managing director of Les Nouvelles. It is alleged that Leyraud accused Brissaud of acting improperly and assumed control of Les Nouvelles from 1981. Brissaud’s primary involvement from that time onwards appears to have been that of writing the daily satirical column ‘Le Billet de L’Affreux Jojo’. 5

Ventrillon’s involvement was also crucial to the paper’s success because he personified a set of dispositions which derived from the bourgeois social class in which he grew up and which some would describe as ‘typically Caledonian’ or ‘Caldoche’. Bobin (1991) argues that the Caldoche identity is strongly individualistic and populist. Ventrillon was both: he had a strong personality and a strong sense of mistrust of authority. In interview, these characteristics are apparent. He imparts his opinions liberally, is extremely harsh in his criticisms and very bold in the topics he broaches. Shortly after the paper opened, Roland Chartier, a journalist trained in France who had migrated to New Caledonia in the late 1960s, joined Ventrillon as assistant chief editor at the paper. Chartier could almost be describing Ventrillon when he wrote in Les Nouvelles of Caledonians’ ‘way of plain speaking and of ferociously defending their liberties by drawing on lived experience’ (Chartier, Les Nouvelles, 6/3/80). Ventrillon’s editorials were direct, forcefully opinionated and frequently adopted a tone of moral outrage. On the day prior to the March 1973 legislative elections, a front page editorial (concluding on the back page) signed Edouard Ventrillon began:

Tomorrow, Sunday 4 March, the first round of the 1973 legislative elections will take place. In metropolitan France, as in Caledonia, the stakes are high. On the one hand, the socio-communist threat, on the other that of autonomy, accompanied by the threat, proffered by Maurice Lenormand, from the Melanesian Liberation Front. A common thread, in metropolitan France as in Caledonia; the risk of adventure, ruin and totalitarianism.

The editorial sketches out an interpretive repertoire which, in many respects, established the terrain on which the paper’s opposition to independence was later articulated. Ventrillon continued:

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5 The material which I present in this paragraph was conveyed to me by several interviewees who claimed to have information on the events to which I refer. All wished to remain confidential and their names are therefore withheld from the text. Much of the material I gathered on Les Nouvelles came from journalists and other commentators who wished to remain anonymous. This material is therefore not referenced.
And, if Lenormand were sincere and honest, he could only admit that a majority, that the majority of this territory chooses its future with France and not with those who never brought anything else to the country but hatred, compromises, mates and even racism. A racism that shamelessly tries to make the Melanesian ethnic group revolt against ethnic Europeans (Les Nouvelles, 3/3/73).

Ventrillon claims that his editorial policy was to 'talk about everything, to say everything' (interview, 26/4/94). Certainly, in comparison with the silence of the France Australe on most local affairs, Les Nouvelles did open up aspects of life in Noumea to the scrutiny of the daily press. The comparison was most stark during a two-month strike by workers at the SLN only a couple of months after Les Nouvelles began. The France Australe made no mention of the strike whereas Les Nouvelles brought daily news on its progress (ibid). This situation was particularly illustrative of the difficulty of sustaining a strictly instrumentalist view of the relationship between the media and business - one which posits a direct relationship between media discourses and the interests of those who own and control the media. In this instance, the SLN, as owner of the France Australe, chose to channel its information on the strike to Ventrillon at Les Nouvelles rather than have it published in its own paper because, as the then publicity manager for the SLN, Remy Le Goff, commented, 'nobody would believe us if we published it in the France Australe' (Le Goff interview, 22/4/94).

Ventrillon’s claim that Les Nouvelles would ‘say everything’ could be interpreted, in part, as a claim that the paper would speak the truth. For Ventrillon, this ‘truth’ was readily available in a realm of objective reality which was accessibly by journalists who had only to observe and transcribe their observations in the newspaper. ‘Truth’ was, in other words, phenomenologically attainable. This notion of ‘truth’, prevalent within journalism, masks the complex processes through which those things which constitute ‘everything’ come to be singled out as worthy objects of description and then described. It masks, in other words, the notion that ‘everything’ is, in effect, a construct which is both identified and transcribed through discourse. As such, ‘everything’ becomes a version, as pro-independence activists, highly critical of the paper’s reporting on Melanesian and independence issues, were wont to point out:

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6 Le Goff claims that he was later given instructions from the management of the SLN to surreptitiously ensure the demise of the France Australe. Ventrillon disputes this arguing that the SLN made several
Do you remember the KAMOUDA, N’GOYE, DAYE, KUTU matters...each time the Kanak is humiliated, pointed at, insulted, his claims belittled, his words ignored or deformed. Each time the murderers were looked upon with understanding, supported, pardoned. That was their principle, and they called that above all else, 'information on everything and for everyone' (L’Avenir Calédonien, no. 998, July 1989, emphasis in original).?

Local news coverage in Les Nouvelles

The claim to 'say everything' was therefore a claim to establish a new 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1991:74) in the territory. In effect, the 'everything' on which the paper reported related primarily to events taking place within the Noumea community and, during periods of relative political calm, concentrated on accident, crime, judicial and 'human interest' stories. The emphasis given in Les Nouvelles to reporting on local events was, nonetheless, somewhat revolutionary. As Ismet Kurtovich showed in his content analysis of editions of the France Australe published in 1967, reporting on local affairs occupied only one per cent of news space whereas 32 per cent of available news space was devoted to reporting on international affairs (thesis, undated, title not available). Les Nouvelles reversed this imbalance: it privileged local news at the expense of international news, and particularly news on politics in France. The small amount of international news in the paper tended to cover ‘soft’ topics such as the life of the famous, the marvels of technological development and crime stories, a development which Kurtovich (speaking of the France Australe which had made a similar trajectory in its reporting on international news in the effort to compete with Les Nouvelles) described as dangerous and ‘caught up in the mesh of simplicity’ (undated thesis:E5). Articles from Les Nouvelles' correspondents in Paris were episodic and most frequently related to New Caledonian issues; for example, debates in the National Assembly or

attempts during the 1970s to reinvigorate the paper, even opening an afternoon paper, Noumea Soir. The paper's demise was, he argued, the result of effective competition from Les Nouvelles.

7 The pro-independence and extreme-right press in the territory frequently used emphasis in its text through capitalisation, bolding and underlining. Unless otherwise stated, the emphasis in quotations is in the original.

8 This privileging of international news reflected the SLN's orientation towards export markets compared with Les Nouvelles' greater orientation towards servicing the needs of local commercial capital.

9 A small amount of international news was contained in most editions under a variety of different banners. Wire service news briefs were frequently printed on the back page under the banner '24 Hours'. In addition, articles from such conservative metropolitan publications as France Soir, Le Figaro and Paris-Match were sometimes reprinted under the banners 'A glance at the news' and 'Across the press', but their episodic nature tended to suggest that they were as much 'fillers' as there to broaden the informational base of the paper.

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Senator on New Caledonia or the visit of New Caledonian delegations to France.\textsuperscript{10} Ironically, during the 1970s, ‘L'Affreux Jojo’ contained the most sustained commentary on French politics, privileging populist analyses of the machinations of the French political elite and criticism of left politics.

Kurtovich writes of the \textit{France Australe} during the 1960s that the avoidance of local news and the privileging of international news corresponds with an important psychological trait of colonialism, ‘the mistrust of oneself and its corollary, the valorisation of the exterior, in order to reassure and impress the colonised’ (1991:192). Franz Fanon and Paulo Freire describe similar psychological traits and, in particular, the colonial bourgeoisie’s mimicry of the intellectual and cultural models of the colonial power (Fanon, 1967, Freire, 1982). If these are familiar characteristics of colonialism, what then can we say of the fetishism of locality characteristic of \textit{Les Nouvelles}? Does it constitute a denial of the colonial?

It could be argued that the fetishism of locality merely constituted a more efficient means of propagating colonial discourse. The application of colonial interpretive repertoires to local issues could be seen as a means of facilitating the appropriation of these repertoires, thereby enhancing a process of self-colonisation. The part played by the settler population in perpetuating the conditions of their colonial existence was argued often enough by pro-independence activists during the 1980s, and there is indeed merit in this argument. While the mobilisation of racist discourses in \textit{France Australe}’s reporting on ‘Third World’ issues perpetuated colonial discourse, the mobilisation of similar racist discourses in \textit{Les Nouvelles} towards the indigenous Melanesian population also perpetuated colonial discourse, but did so in a manner which was no less pernicious and certainly far more accessible. But to argue that the fetishism of locality in \textit{Les Nouvelles} merely constituted a new way of perpetuating colonial discourse would be to miss the new discursive elements which arise as the result of this different focus. The emphasis on local events enabled the articulation of local discourses which had developed as a result of the particularities of the colonial experience in New Caledonia. One of the more dominant of these expressed hostility towards France for what was perceived to be decades of neglect interspersed with instances of incompetent and uncaring intervention in local politics. The emphasis on local news therefore

\textsuperscript{10} Major metropolitan news stories would sometimes feature in \textit{Les Nouvelles}; for example, the death
resulted in discursive ambiguities and openings in the discourses surrounding independence, and these were exploited to varying degrees by pro-independence activists during the 1980s. Realisation of the dangers inherent in this ambiguity were perhaps a significant reason behind the paper's shift back to a reinclusion of news from France after its purchase by the Hersant group in early 1987.

**Journalistic practice and politics at Les Nouvelles**

Initially, the team at Les Nouvelles was very small, comprising three or four journalists, including Ventrillon and Chartier. During the 1970s the team gradually expanded to include, in 1975, six journalists working to Ventrillon and Chartier and, in 1980, 10. During the 1980s, aside from Ventrillon, only one journalist at Les Nouvelles, Henri Le Pot, was born in New Caledonia. Le Pot undertook studies in journalism in France prior to returning to New Caledonia to begin work at Les Nouvelles in the mid-1970s (Henri Le Pot interview, 26/4/94). The remaining men had migrated to New Caledonia, primarily during the 1960s and early 1970s. Most were untrained, but three at least, René Sintes, Marcel Lepecheoux and Jean-Noel Feraud, had received some basic training, having worked for the France Australe.

Ventrillon argues that a strongly established professional hierarchy did not exist at the paper and that its success was largely the result of effective teamwork, a view shared by Chartier (Ventrillon interview, 26/4/94; Chartier interview, 21/4/94). Certainly, the nostalgia evident in the comments of all the journalists with whom I spoke suggests that the editorial structures of Les Nouvelles during this period differed significantly from those established after the change in ownership. There does appear to have been significant involvement of journalists in decisions concerning the editorial direction of the paper. The day would begin with an editorial meeting during which journalists nominated, or were nominated, to follow stories. Ventrillon claims that they were nominated on the basis of competence or interest (interview, 26/4/94). Journalists would write their stories and these would then be submitted to either Ventrillon or Chartier for sub-editing. Ventrillon says that he only ever changed articles where they were unclear, incorrect or defamatory (ibid). Any proposed changes would be discussed with the journalist who would either accept the changes as written or rewrite the sections in question. A further

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of Georges Pompidou (Les Nouvelles, 4/4/74), but these were very infrequent.
meeting would take place at the close of the day during which the team would discuss their work, decide on what would be incorporated in the paper and discuss the main headlines. Ventrillon, Chartier and others stressed that this was a collective task whereby journalists suggested possibilities and collective decisions were made. Editorials written by Ventrillon and Chartier would also be discussed at the meeting and occasionally the team would collectively write an editorial (ibid; Le Pot interview, 26/4/94). Initially, editorials written by Ventrillon and Chartier were published unsigned, or signed collectively as ‘Les Nouvelles’. However, as the political climate became more volatile, several journalists objected to the collective attribution of certain editorials written by either Ventrillon or Chartier, and requested that these articles be attributed to their authors (Le Pot interview, 26/4/94). One suspects that work with Les Nouvelles was somewhat less harmonious than the recollections of the journalists would suggest. One journalist described Ventrillon as a ‘grand abuser’. Chartier commented that, while he and Ventrillon got along well together and had a great deal of respect for one another, they often had animated arguments over issues (Chartier interview, 21/4/94). He argued that they were complementary in many respects, and cited the manner in which they handled staff, suggesting that Chartier may have had to smooth over ruffles generated by Ventrillon’s quick temper and tongue. All this suggests that the evening meetings may have been less consultative and more coercive than the journalists’ recollections would suggest. Certainly, the journalists’ recollections are relational: they have been structured in the context of their feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement following the paper’s change in ownership in 1987.

The practice of attribution is helpful in providing an insight into the limits of consent within the journalistic team.11 But, in effect, very few attributed editorials appeared and in some instances where they did it is difficult to ascertain why they were the subject of dissent, as they seem unremarkable in relation to other editorials. One of the first instances of attribution was the forceful editorial on the March 1973 legislative elections referred to above, in which Ventrillon cautioned against a vote

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11 I use the term ‘consent’ rather than ‘consensus’ because ‘consent’ tends to connote agreement to proceed in a certain proposed manner rather than collective agreement with the views expressed. We could imagine the scenario at the evening meetings in which individual journalists may not wholeheartedly agree with the views expressed but nonetheless consent to their publication, perhaps because they may have felt intimidated by Ventrillon’s position and his forceful personality. One questions, however, whether such a person could have sustained a long period of involvement in the cut and thrust of the paper. Ventrillon appears to be someone who never shied away from conflict and who even enjoyed it.
for the UC autonomist candidate, Roch Pidjot. It is perhaps not surprising that this
may have been an issue which divided the journalistic team. These elections took
place two years prior to the first official demand for independence and, although the
argument had been well advanced that a vote for autonomy was tantamount to
abandonment to the inevitability of independence, the discourse around autonomy
was not yet, and indeed never fully became, closed around this reading. At the time
of Ventrillon’s editorial, there was still considerable support for autonomy from within
the European population. As the Union Progressiste Multiraciale argued in a
communique, extracts of which were published in Les Nouvelles: ‘There are
conservative autonomists just as there are conservative anti-autonomists’ (4/2/75).
Many Europeans who supported autonomy and were members of the UC,
abandoned this position, and their membership, once the UC declared its support
for independence in 1977 (Henningham, 1992:68). The dissent within the
journalistic team may have indicated that some support for autonomy existed there.
Alternatively, in a more liberal-democratic tradition, journalists may merely have
taken exception to Ventrillon’s uncompromising condemnation of all those who
dared to support autonomist views.

A further example of attribution was the practice, engaged in at least twice, of
printing side-by-side editorials attributed one to Ventrillon and the other to Chartier,
presenting different views on the same topic. Ventrillon and Chartier’s editorial
styles were very different and increasingly their political views on independence
diverged. Chartier’s style was less direct and his language more sophisticated,
reflecting his middle-class metropolitan French background, in comparison to
Ventrillon’s frequent resort to idiom and cliche. By the mid-1980s, Chartier’s
political views had shifted towards support for independence whereas Ventrillon’s
had remained stridently opposed to independence. Following the presentation of
the ‘Pisani plan’ for the political future of the territory, developed by the then high
commissioner and special envoy, Edgard Pisani, and outlined in a television
address on 8 January 1985, Ventrillon and Chartier both wrote separate
commentaries on the plan, with Ventrillon commenting that the proposals were
bizarre and disappointing and Chartier expressing qualified support for the

12 For the UPM, ‘political progress entails managing one’s affairs, with the common good in mind and
within the legal framework of the French Republic’ (Les Nouvelles, 4/2/75).
proposals as a ‘first step’ (9/1/85). Finally, René Sintes, acknowledged by his peers as being one of the more liberal journalists working at the paper, wrote an editorial on the Kanak insurrection of late 1984 and early 1985 in which he commented that some people were coming around to support independence as a way to achieve peace and outlined possibilities for a negotiated settlement (24/11/84). He received death threats following the publication of the article (Helen Fraser interview, 14/12/90).

There were, however, nuances in articles on political issues which were not attributed. This was particularly the case in the early 1980s and, while we may suspect Chartier’s involvement in a considerable number of these, we cannot be certain that he was their author. In many respects, these nuances reflected tensions within the anti-independence RPCR, between those who sought greater autonomy from France and those who sought greater integration with France through the departmentalisation of the territory. Many of these tensions became crystallised around the issue of land reform, proposed in a plan by the conservative Minister for the DOM-TOM, Paul Dijoud, in 1979 (Ward, 1982:32-49, Ovington, 1988:106-124).

There is some evidence to suggest that the Les Nouvelles’ team supported the amended land reform legislation which came before the Territorial Assembly in May 1980. Dijoud’s May visit is described in an editorial as ‘A step towards detente’ among European and Melanesian communities in the bush (27/5/80). The editorial argues that Dijoud has a large part to play in mobilising the community around the ‘widely shared hope that the political divisions can be softened in the interests of ensuring a harmonious development for all ethnic groups’ (27/5/80) and calls on local politicians to ‘silence their quarrels to enable them to follow the momentum heralded by the Minister, not for himself, but for Caledonia’ (27/5/80). In addition, the generous coverage given to FNSC meetings and communiques suggests that there may have been some sympathy for more centrist views within the editorial team. Ventrillon himself may have been vacillating during this period. In an editorial attributed to Ventrillon which appeared in early 1982, he responded to the call for ‘Caledonian independence’ from a new political grouping, the Parti National Calédonien (PNC), in a manner which seemed uncharacteristically moderate.

13 Chartier also wrote an editorial entitled ‘A paradox that can be useful’ which discussed different
Ventrillon argued that the PNC risked gathering together all those ‘who don’t want to be chucked out of this country that is theirs, for the exclusive benefit of an ethnic group with whom they thought they could get on’. He argued that the creation of the PNC was an understandable, if misguided, response to Kanak nationalism which sought ‘an exclusively Kanak Caledonia with, for non-Kanaks, only the right to live under the Kanak yoke’. The editorial concluded with the rhetorical question: ‘Is it utopian, is it realisable? The future will tell, but in any case it will be the consequence in this country of the socialist government’s policies’ (11/1/82).

Another indication of some toleration within the editorial team towards some form of independence for New Caledonia came just prior to the announcement of the Pisani plan in January 1985. Rumours published in the French weekly *Nouvel Observateur* that Pisani was planning to grant sovereignty to the Kanak people and then have France rent back a region which included Noumea on the west coast, ‘Hong Kong style’, met with a favourable response in the paper (5/1/85). Within this scenario, Noumea would become a ‘free port’ which, *Les Nouvelles* described, in a slightly tongue in cheek manner, as synonymous with an Eldorado (5/1/85). On the day of Pisani’s address, an editorial commented on these rumours that: ‘The little that we know (but do we really know it) from what he is going to propose seems original and even seductive. But is it really the definitive solution for our problems?’. The editorial went on to argue that independence would not necessarily solve the ethnic problems in New Caledonia and that independence-in-association would offer no guarantee of protection for non-Kanaks, as the experience of Algeria demonstrated, but concluded: ‘So, if ever Mr Pisani’s proposal envisages independence, he will have to be very persuasive and convincing and his project will also have to be really, very, very original’ (7/1/85). As mentioned above, Ventrillon was ultimately disappointed with the plan. A considerable escalation of violence in the territory followed its release, precipitated by the killing of a young European settler, and this irrevocably damaged the possibility of a period of reflective consideration of the plan sought by Pisani, and plunged the territory into further political crisis. From this period onwards, perhaps corresponding also with Chartier’s voluntary side-lining, the paper’s opposition to independence became more unequivocal. Increasingly, *Les Nouvelles* depicted the FLNKS insurrection as racist and mindless. The paper argued that loyalist populations have never taught

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14 Earlier, in December 1984, *Les Nouvelles* had urged the RPCR to meet with Pisani, to try to find some common ground over the political future of the territory (17/12/84).
hatred to their children, unlike Kanak indépendantistes (27/4/85). Commenting on two youths detained over the murder of a European school teacher, the paper could not contain its condemnation of the pro-independence movement: ‘These two youth, today in prison, are children of the FLNKS. Hatred and racism have been instilled in them. How could we speak to them of reason? But, let’s move on’ (ibid).

Increasingly Les Nouvelles commented on what it perceived to be lassitude and disarray within the FLNKS, and added fuel to any existing tensions by arguing that the militantism of the movement resulted from the UC having been marginalised by the more radical constituent groups (23/3/86). The paper welcomed the prospect of the election of a conservative government at the 1986 French national elections arguing that ‘It will be good when these five years of socialist blows end’, but cautioned that this was ‘not reason enough to believe in fairies’ (22/3/86).

If there is any validity in the claims of team involvement in the paper’s editorial orientation, then it must be assumed that the team members were active participants in the development of this political position. In a telling comment, Ventrillon claimed that he did not have to intervene to change the emphasis in articles as ‘the team understood each other. We tried to be objective, honest’ (Ventrillon interview, 26/4/94). If one of the major reasons behind the success of Les Nouvelles was its teamwork, then it would appear that Ventrillon had been largely instrumental in this success in his employing people who were predisposed towards an antipathy to independence. But also crucial to the team’s cohesion was the development of a shared sense of professional ethics and a common understanding of newsworthiness and news values. At Les Nouvelles, these were largely acquired ‘on the job’, which may explain the somewhat idiosyncratic mix of universalistic claims and opinion which characterised the professional discourses of journalists at Les Nouvelles.

Professional ethics and news values

The overwhelming majority of journalists working at Les Nouvelles had received little or no prior training in journalism and it was therefore the task of Ventrillon, and

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15 An article on the FLNKS decision to boycott the 1986 Presidential election argues that the decision was taken against the wishes of Tjibaou and that it demonstrates that Tjibaou is president of the FLNKS because he adapts, not because he imposes. The article concludes by arguing that the FLNKS' candidate, Mitterrand, would lose anyway and that: ‘Faced with this risk, the “passive boycott” is very convenient, isn’t it?’ (17/2/86).
to a lesser extent Chartier, to develop these people professionally. The manner in which they were trained reflected the particularities of journalism in New Caledonia. On the one hand, as discussed in chapter one, the historical development of a mainstream ‘objective’ media, emerging at the beginning of the century in most Western nations due to the changing economics of the industry, had not been realised in New Caledonia because of its distinctive economic and political circumstances. The result of this divergence in media development was the residual prominence of a polemic press in New Caledonia compared with the turn to more ‘objective’ forms of media writing elsewhere. In addition, the colonial political relations in New Caledonia constituted a formidable backdrop to work as a journalist. The traditional hold over information dissemination by the politico-economic elite in the territory, reflected in the ‘unspoken’ of the *France Australe*, rendered the practicing of any form of investigative journalism, usually considered by journalists as important in the pursuit of more objective forms of reporting, particularly difficult. The paper experienced the brunt of these pressures early in the piece. Journalists recall the actions taken by established economic and political interests to sabotage the publication. Advertisers were allegedly threatened with reprisals if they used *Les Nouvelles* and one journalist commented that contractors were paid to sabotage equipment arriving at the docks for the new paper.

These recollections of a new competitor struggling against an established monopoly publication supported by powerful economic interests in the territory seem to sit uneasily with Dornoy’s comment that Brissaud and Ventrillon ‘basically represented the interests of the conservative European population’ and therefore that social grouping from within which these powerful economic interests derived (Dornoy, 1984:234). If the paper represented conservative colonial interests, why did it generate so much opposition from these interests? To the extent that opposition existed, it reflected the obsession with control which more than a century of colonialism had engendered in the politico-economic elite. As Barbançon commented in reference to the current deputy to the national parliament, Jacques Lafleur:

16 Freiberg writes that French legislation prohibiting the publication of any judicial, government or military information that hasn’t been cleared for publication ‘practically eliminates the legal possibility of doing “investigative reporting” in the American style’ (1981:165).
17 The survival of *Les Nouvelles* suggests that either the will was not sufficiently strong or the means not well enough established by vested politico-economic interests to ensure the demise of the newspaper in the manner that was later achieved with other publications, the ‘Journal Bleu’ in particular.
The Deputy and his men...inherited their fortune, and if they have prospered from it, it is because they find themselves in a colonial situation in which they control all the economic, fiscal, political and media power. Faced with real capitalist and liberal competition, they would have been swept away (1992:59).

The pressures experienced by journalists in this early period accentuated their perception of their role as that of broadening out the informational sphere and engaging in objective and unbiased reporting. A 1974 editorial entitled ‘On Freedom of the Press’ articulated a classical republican discourse on press freedom arguing that press freedom was ‘indispensable for democracy’ and a ‘corollary and expression of liberty’. In reference, no doubt, to pressures which journalists had been experiencing, the editorial referred to those who are ‘too inclined to consider journalists as pen pushers’ and argued that ‘too many people consider the press as merely a means to privilege their own commercial, political or ideological ambitions’. Behind newspapers, the editorial continued, were managers and journalists ‘who try and make the truth known, and who express it with as much independence as possible’. The discourse on press freedom did, however, evince a particularly French position on the role of opinion in press freedom, arguing that newspapers were not only a means of exchange between people but also a ‘reflection of opinion and a constitutive element in this opinion’ (26/11/74). From the outset, therefore, journalists at *Les Nouvelles* understood their professional role as one of marrying truth and opinion. While this core understanding of the truthfulness of opinion distinguishes French journalistic practices from those of Anglo-Saxon countries, there is little doubt that the manner in which journalists translated this notion of professional ethics into practice in New Caledonia resulted in a style of journalism which was far more polemical than most offerings in the metropolitan French press. The practical implication of this notion of professional ethics was that journalists at *Les Nouvelles* were allowed, and even encouraged, to incorporate ‘opinion’ into their articles. Ventrillon commented that this blending of ‘facts’ and ‘opinion’ sometimes caused problems, as some of the less able journalists would present ‘opinion’ as ‘fact’, a distortion which Ventrillon says he would have to sort out in the sub-editing process. Ventrillon counselled his journalists to establish the ‘facts’ first and to then write a commentary - don’t mix the two’. Ventrillon commented that in instances where journalists were not present at particular incidents, the paper used information received from the administration and the gendarmerie as the ‘facts’.
These, Ventrillon commented, were 'never particularly contested' (Ventrillon interview, 26/4/94). During the height of the insurrection in late 1984 and early 1985, Les Nouvelles usually had a couple of journalists sent from Noumea to cover incidents in the interior (one usually covered the east coast and the other the west coast of the main island). Frequently, these journalists were not present at major incidents, in part because such incidents were occurring simultaneously throughout the countryside, and also because the movement of Les Nouvelles' journalists was frequently restricted by pro-independence activists hostile towards the paper’s reporting on the independence issue. A few days after the November 1984 territorial elections, the paper commented that the information it was presenting to readers resulted from a compilation of the information sent by journalists and information gleaned from phone calls with 'broussards', white settlers living in the bush (22/11/84). On at least one occasion, Sintes reported that information received by the newspaper had been incorrect, the town hall at Ponérihouen had not been ransacked (20/11/84). This type of follow-up was a rarity, because of the magnitude of the insurrection and the credence given to the settlers' accounts by the Les Nouvelles journalists. Almost no attempt was made to glean information from pro-independence groups. In general, Les Nouvelles' journalists did not attend FLNKS press conferences and they were sometimes restricted in their movements by virtue of not being issued with an FLNKS media pass (Franck Magdoeuf interview, 20/4/94). This lack of information did not, however, stop speculation in Les Nouvelles as to the movement's strategy (see, for example, 12/1/83, 31/7/84, 17/2/86).

In their production of media texts, journalists at Les Nouvelles were required to negotiate through the discursive and practical dilemmas thrown up by their ostensible adherence to both the notion of objectivity and that of the presentation of

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18 René Sintes primarily covered incidents on the east cost during this period, frequently in the company of the Australian journalist Helen Fraser. Fraser writes that she was able on at least one occasion to secure access to particular regions for Sintes by arguing with pro-independence activists that they should not engage in the same tactics as the right in restricting access to journalists (1990:112). Fraser's credibility within the pro-independence movement appears to have facilitated Sintes' access, and his reporting did present a more nuanced appreciation of the unfolding events. In particular, in one article, Sintes pointed to the tactical efficacy of the FLNKS' strategy of road blocks, in that while military efforts were engaged in clearing these road blocks, activists would be constructing another one a kilometre down the road (Les Nouvelles, 24/11/84). This argument countered the right's contention that the FLNKS insurrection could be stopped by greater military intervention and that it was only the laxity of the Socialist administration which was allowing the insurrection to drag on.

19 Franck Magdoeuf was the AFP correspondant in Noumea in 1989. I would like to thank him for all his assistance during my second period of fieldwork.
opinion in reporting. That this task of negotiation was fraught with difficulty is evident in Ventrillon’s comment that he was required to ‘correct’ journalists’ copy in instances where he believed an inadequate demarcation had been made. In effect, Ventrillon was merely bringing to bear his own dispositions in his sorting out of ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’. Journalists were considerably assisted in marrying the two by the prevalence of anti-independence sentiment in Noumea, where they primarily worked. The prevalence of this sentiment constituted a type of ‘structure of feeling’ (Raymond Williams, 1977), through which there could emerge an armory of ‘facts’ which formed the interpretive resources available in the construction of anti-independence discourse. The strength of this ‘structure of feeling’ meant that these ‘facts’ could assume the taken-for-grantedness of the ‘real’. Thus, information passed on from the military or broussards could assume the status of ‘fact’ because it resonated with the prevailing anti-independence sentiment in Noumea.

The notion of ‘facts’ was problematic at another level. The idea that journalists’ immediate engagement with events rendered irrefutable the status of their accounts as ‘fact’ also requires challenging. The trouble with this argument is that so-called ‘eyewitness’ accounts of a range of incidents consistently diverged. In some instances, such as the violent confrontation between Melanesians and gendarmes at Koindé, during which two gendarmes were killed, accounts of the progression of events differed. We might argue that the versions were reconstructed after the event to discredit the other party, and such practices probably took place. But the problem also arises because individuals, and their collective social groups, read events in different ways according, as Bourdieu would argue, to their habitus, but also according to their own discursive contexts which structure their readings. As a simple example, a parade of gendarmes is more likely to connote security for white settlers and fear for Melanesians. The responses of each of these groups is therefore likely to differ and, in turn, to be interpreted differently by those witnessing the scene. The scene then has to be transcribed, and this occurs, of course, through discourse, which objectifies, names, categorises and subjectifies in ways which are not neutral. All this implies that the ‘eyewitness’ account, even when it is

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20 See for example Les Nouvelles account on 11/1/83 compared with the account published in L’Avenir of 19/1/83.
21 For example, the FLNKS argued that the settlers accused in the Hienghène massacre had fabricated aspects of their evidence, such as the accusation that the Kanaks had torched the house of a neighbour (Bwenando, November 1986).
that of a seemingly disinterested observer trained in notions of objective journalism, is problematic.

Journalists at *Les Nouvelles* had recourse to other arguments in their attempts to reconcile their claim to objective journalism with their licence to advance opinion. The definition of objective journalism which they advanced reflected the colonial setting in which most of them had been trained. Their work was objective, they argued, because the paper was independent of any political or economic group. One senior journalist described the paper as a ‘dinosaur’ in that, unlike the overwhelming majority of newspapers published elsewhere in the world, it was editorially independent of its proprietors and ‘owed nothing to anyone’ (Le Pot interview, 26/4/94). The relative independence of the editorial team under Ventrillon certainly distinguished *Les Nouvelles* from the *France Australe*, and we can understand how journalists would view the paper’s operation as something of an aberration in a colonial setting in which information had been, and was still in many respects, tightly controlled. But Ventrillon’s tight reign over the paper, and the apparent concurrence within most of the journalistic team with the editorial orientation of the paper, rendered *Les Nouvelles* nonetheless expressive of the habitus which Ventrillon and other journalists personified. While in the operational sense the paper was a relatively free agent, in its discourses it was nonetheless expressive of a conservative, populist and racist vision of Caledonia which remained resolutely tied to France.

**Les Nouvelles and political parties**

Ventrillon and other journalists commented that the team was cognisant of the paper’s monopoly position and therefore bore the responsibility of giving voice to the views of pro-independence groups (Ventrillon interview, 12/12/90). This they did primarily through the publication of communiques from the FLNKS, from constituent political groupings within the FLNKS, and other independence groups such as the LKS and the OPAO (Parti Fédéral Kanak d’Opao). Ventrillon and others cite the example of Machoro’s visits to the offices of *Les Nouvelles* to present Ventrillon with communiques. Ventrillon commented that he would read the communiques in Machoro’s presence and tell him whether he would publish them, the only reason for
rejection being that they contained defamatory material. Ventrillon said: ‘He knew I’d publish them. He also knew I’d do a commentary’ (interview, 26/4/94).

The extent to which the publication of these communiques assisted in the promotion of the pro-independence position is questionable. Their incorporation within a sea of antithetical discourses always ran the risk of rendering them as parody. For example, when Tjibaou’s claim that only the Kanak people have the right to self-determination is placed in the context of a prolonged and relentless discourse which positions such claims as racist, it may be argued that its inclusion serves only to illustrate the contentions of the latter. In a type of Marcusean repressive tolerance, pluralism serves paradoxically to reinforce dominant interpretive repertoires through illustration, but also through their effect in ostensibly underscoring the democratic underpinning of media and political systems, and thereby their claim to objectivity (Marcuse, 1968).

Journalists also refuted claims that the paper flattered the RPCR and cited examples of criticism towards the party and its leader Jacques Lafleur. The most critical commentary was evident following the breakdown in negotiations between the RPCR and the FNCL in June 1982 which resulted in the independence movement assuming government. Articles criticised the RPCR and its lack of willingness to negotiate with the FNCL and criticised Lafleur for his unwillingness to articulate a clear political line (5 & 7/6/82). Aside from these examples, criticism of the RPCR and Lafleur were rare, rendering somewhat exaggerated Ventrillon’s claim that: ‘My position was simple: I was against independence and therefore criticised the indépendantistes. But one criticises one’s friends even more’ (interview, 26/4/94). An indication that the criticism of the RPCR was somewhat out of the ordinary was contained in an editorial which responded to readers’ criticisms that the paper ‘had been too severe in its criticism of the RPCR and Jacques Lafleur and, by the same token, too kind to the FNCL’. The editorial stressed that the paper was independent of all political pressures and that ‘the editorial staff is free to make its own decisions and comments either in politics or any other field’, adding that ‘this is generally done collectively’. The writers argued that their intention was not to ‘give a present’ to the FNCL and acknowledged the broad representativeness of the RPCR and its political importance:
Yes, the RPCR is an important movement, but it is also a grouping of diverse tendencies, moreover well representative of Caledonian opinions. But, in tearing itself apart, it is weakening and discrediting itself. To not say and draw attention to this wouldn’t be helpful to it, and wouldn’t be in the interests of the population that it represents (11/6/82).

This lack of any direct affiliation with any political grouping or large commercial interest appears to have been implicit to journalists’ claims to report objectively. Their professional schema seems to have assumed that this lack of political and commercial affiliation would almost automatically ensure an objective approach to issues. It is, as I have argued, comprehensible historically as a response to the tight control exercised by commercial interests over the output of the France Australe and other media. However, objectivity thus defined, left unchallenged the range of practices employed by journalists in their rendering of events. It shifted attention away from the manner in which these institutional and professional practices structured the types of discourses which they produced.

**Objectivity and narrative in Les Nouvelles**

Within the Australian press, objective journalism is thought to be achieved by including a range of views on issues within articles. The journalist becomes, in a sense, a mediator between competing ideas which she or he presents to readers in a manner which does not attempt reconciliation. Many critiques have been levelled at this understanding of objective journalistic practice. They range from questioning the comprehensiveness of the views presented to epistemological critiques of notions of objectivity and truth. What is fascinating about this notion of objectivity in the context of Les Nouvelles is that it was almost never practised. I found very few examples in the period prior to the Matignon accords where an article on the question of independence or related issues was structured around what in Australia would be considered a relatively objective presentation of anti- and pro-independence views. Overwhelmingly, articles consisted of a presentation of anti-independence views, with albeit some acknowledgment at times of variations within this general position, but no attempt is made to express pro-independence views as legitimate. This manner of constructing articles privileges a particular style of

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22 Many of the relevant issues are discussed in Eldridge, 1993.
23 Roland Chartier’s articles on the round-table discussions at Nainville-les-Roches contain consideration of different political perspectives (*Les Nouvelles*, July 1983). Another example is an
writing based on a fairly strict narrative structure. The narrativity is particularly
evident in articles which report on physical events: clashes between gendarmes
and Melanesians, such as those which occurred at Koindé in January 1983 and the
particularly violent encounter in Poindimié in 1988 (Les Nouvelles, 23/2/88), anti-
independence demonstrations (for example, 27/2/85), and the recounting of events
in judicial trials.24 We assume from the discourses in the stories that the narrative
is constructed out of the accounts of participants and witnesses hostile to Kanak
political demands. But what is striking about these narratives is the extent to which
these different voices are masked in the story by the narrator. Some of the
implications of this masking can be seen from a consideration of the following
element.

The series of violent events described by Les Nouvelles as the ‘Koindé ambush’
provides a striking example of this use of narrativity. The physical clash between
gendarmes and Melanesians from Koindé had been precipitated by a long dispute
between the owner of a nearby sawmill and the Koindé tribe over the pollution of
their water supply by waste emanating from the mill. After several failed attempts at
resolution of the problem, Melanesians from Koindé set up barricades to prohibit the
use of mill equipment, including trucks and bulldozers, bringing the operations of the
mill to a standstill. The violence occurred as gendarmes were assisting the mill
owner, M. Barbou, to reclaim his equipment. The events as recounted by Les
Nouvelles continue in the following narrative:

The forestry and sawmill equipment was loaded, then the convoy started at
12. 17 pm heading for the valley. It was when it arrived at the tribe that the
incident erupted. At this place, the road is very windy and the valley is very deep making it
impossible to see a long way ahead. The first gendarme vehicles found
themselves suddenly blocked by a tree trunk lying across the road. They
had to stop and pull over to let the bulldozer pass. This quickly freed the
way, but during this time the first attack took place in the form of the throwing
of stones, burning sticks and other diverse projectiles. The gendarmes then
used tear gas and the calm seemed to return. The first gendarme vehicles
started going, followed by those of M. Barbou, and it was then that the shots
rang out. Several people hidden in the houses or in the bush fired almost at
the same time. Buck shots and bullet holes were noted on the vehicles. M.

24 See, for example, Les Nouvelles’ reporting on the trial of two Kanaks accused of having murdered
Jean-Marie Sagarné. The paper chose to feature the prosecution’s narrative on events. Very little
attention is given to the trial itself (26/3/87).
Carnicelli, who was in the first truck next to his brother, who was driving, was hit by a projectile coming from behind. (Les Nouvelles, 11/1/83).

The detail and the precision of the chronology are striking in this account. What is equally striking is that at no place in the story or its introduction is the reader given an idea of where the information came from. It could have come from M. Barbou, M. Carnicelli, one or more of the gendarmes, the journalist if she or he was there, or some other unnamed participant or witness. The distance travelled by the convoy suggests that the information came from one or more of the participants, but we cannot be sure of this. But, if the story came from more than one witness or participant, as is most likely, how does it come to have such comprehensiveness and coherence?

Hayden White has written of the means through which texts come to acquire the type of cohesion presented in this account. For White:

> the capacity to envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning requires a metaphysical principle by which to translate difference into similarity. In other words, it requires a ‘subject’ common to all the referents of the various sentences that register events as having occurred (quoted in Mills, 1991:74).

This subject is the narrator who is the principle of unification. But, in the Koindé account, the narrator’s presence is masked. A space is created for the narrator who chooses not to declare his or her presence. It is thus the reader who is lured into this space as the principle of unification of the text. We, as readers, occupy this space because of the appeal of narrativity which we can comprehend, according to White, ‘by recognising the extent to which it makes the real desirable, makes the real into an object of desire, and does so by its imposition, upon events that are represented as real, of the formal coherency that stories possess’ (White, 1987:21).

In his writing on historical narratives, White compares the narrative form with two alternative ways of rendering history, the annal and the chronology. He argues that what prohibited the annalist and the chronologist from writing historical narratives was their ‘absence of any consciousness of a social centre’. White continues: ‘All this suggests to me that Hegel was right when he opined that a genuinely historical account had to display not only a certain form, namely the narrative, but also a certain content, namely, a politico-social order’ (White, 1987:11). This politicosocial
order lends authority to the metaphysical subject created in narrative. Therefore, when we are drawn into the narrative to occupy the position of subject, we become authorised, validated and legitimated by this politicosocial order and we, in turn, authorise it. Therefore, in filling the space created by the absence of the narrator, if even for only the short time it takes to read the text, we collude with the text’s politicosocial order. This collusion is an implicit authorisation of the interpretive repertoires from which the text emerges. The use of narrative in Les Nouvelles is therefore a powerful stylistic device in achieving the reader’s identification with the discourses presented in the text.

**News values and newsworthiness**

One commentator argued of Les Nouvelles during the 1970s that management’s objective was to ‘run a high circulation paper that could grab the major advertising contracts and thereby choke the other newspapers out of existence and leave the political coverage to ORTF TV and radio’. While political coverage was not left to TV and radio, Brissaud, Leyraud and Ventrillon were certainly concerned to ensure the commercial viability and later commercial success of the paper. This concern is evident in Ventrillon’s facetious retort to criticism of the paper’s political orientation:

> I make no pretence of producing an intelligent journal...If there are Nouvelles in all the garbage buckets of Noumea, I am happy. The sole interest of a journal is to prevent vegetable peelings from sticking to the bottom of garbage tins (*Canberra Kanaky Bulletin* No. 6, December-March 1986).

This commercial focus was apparent in both the style and content of the paper. Les Nouvelles’ style was similar to that of the tabloid press in many countries. During the 1970s, the paper’s emphasis on local news was mostly devoted to accidents, particularly car crashes, crime, judicial proceedings and ‘human interest stories’ about social events, the life of the famous, et cetera. Sport also featured prominently in the paper, particularly, and not surprisingly, in the Monday editions where over a quarter of the paper could be devoted to weekend sport. As Ventrillon commented, ‘These stories make a paper work’ (interview, 26/4/94). With the escalating political tensions, the paper devoted increasing amounts of space to political issues, but it reverted readily to its emphasis on accidents and crime once it deemed that the worst of the tensions were on the wane.
Headlines and photos featured prominently in *Les Nouvelles*. Indeed, most front pages of *Les Nouvelles* contained only headlines and photos, throwing to the story situated later in the paper. This stylistic feature immediately distinguished *Les Nouvelles* from its competitor, the *France Australe*. Up until the 1960s, the front page of the *France Australe* was very dense, containing the commencement of several articles each headed by a small headline. For example, the front page of the 7 October 1963 edition included the headline and beginning of 15 articles. It was only in the years prior to the commencement of *Les Nouvelles* that the *France Australe* moved to a front page devoted almost solely to headlines and photos with only a small volume of text. Although the number of headlines was reduced, a similar font size used for each headline rendered the page somewhat dense. What distinguished *Les Nouvelles* from the *France Australe* during the 1970s was the dominance of a main headline on its front page, a dominance achieved both by the use of font size and strategic positioning on the page. Most main headings occupied between 25 and 50 percent of the available space on the front page excluding the mast and advertising space. Three to five additional headlines appeared on the first page, but these were visually subsidiary and did not, therefore, detract from the prominence of the main headline.

Headlines were not only stylistically important in attracting readers’ attention; they were also used editorially to direct, in a particularly forceful manner, the reading of the article (or articles) to which they referred. As a collective practice, the headlines reveal the extent to which the journalistic team was at least willing to sanction a very forceful opposition to independence and Kanak demands. Ventrillon, however, had a particular knack in devising headlines which reflected his populism. He cites two example which he argued have become renowned. The first, ‘CRACK, BOOM, HUE’ referred to the chorus line of a popular French song, and was used on the front page to refer to photos of accidents (Figure 3.1). The second, ‘THE TIME OF THE LOPETTES’ used the Caledonian term ‘lopettes’, meaning ‘cowards’, to refer

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25 Regularly, a beginning section of ‘L’Affreux Jojo’ was printed on the front page, but sometimes only the banner appeared and at other times there was no reference. The appearance of text on the front page did not seem to relate to the significance of the events discussed in the column suggesting that L’Affreux Jojo was used as a type of space filler after the mast, headlines, photos, text and advertisements had been placed. Progressively, less and less text appeared on the front page. During the 1980s the instances of text on the front page (aside from that of ‘L’Affreux Jojo’) was extremely rare. Its placement suggested that the paper had a particular message to convey to its readers and we might assume that most readers, aware of this rarity, would take the time to read what appeared.
to what *Les Nouvelles* considered the French administration’s unwillingness to intervene to restore calm to the territory.

Ventrillon’s knack often resulted from his ready resort to slang, argot or idiom in headlines. Bourdieu has argued that the use of these forms is:

> the product of the pursuit of distinction in a dominated market. It is one of the ways in which those individuals - especially men - who are poorly endowed with economic and cultural capital are able to distinguish themselves from what they regard as weak and effeminate’ (Bourdieu, 1991:22).

Certainly, Ventrillon’s use of local idiom might be seen as a strategy of empowerment in a colonial situation which had rendered New Caledonia a dominated market. The mobilisation of the term ‘lopettes’ in the context of a critique of the French administration was a strategic attempt to distinguish the paper, and readers who identified with this idiom, as strong by contrast with the alleged cowardice of the administration.
Figure 3.1: Les Nouvelles, 12/6/84
Apart from populist characteristics, the headlines in *Les Nouvelles* display other distinctive stylistic features. Frequently the headline comprised a small narrative in which a problematic was synoptically established and resolved. This feature is apparent in the headlines surrounding the events leading up to the call for independence by the Melanesian politician Yann Céléné Uregei in 1975. Following the refusal of French President Giscard D'Estaing to meet with Uregei's delegation, the headline reads: 'Without waiting for the decisive day of Monday; THE AUTONOMISTS SLAM THE DOOR; They leave the delegation and will return to Noumea on Saturday' (*Les Nouvelles*, 6/6/75). The narrative structure of this headline is striking. It renders the series of events referred to in the headline cohesive and therefore strongly directs the reading of these events around the interpretive repertoire which the headline establishes. By establishing a narrative causality between the events, the context is created where the autonomists can be criticised for rupturing this causality. This rupture of sequence by the group connotes petulance, and this connotation is further reinforced by the trope, 'slamming the door'. Following Uregei's call for independence, the headline reads: 'After the President of the Assembly adopts an anti-French position; DISAGREE M. UREGEI!' (25/6/75). Once again, a problematic is established and a response delivered. The lack of a subject who 'disagrees' provides a discursive space for the reader to assume this position and therefore the interpretive repertoire established in the headline.

The narrative is enabled by the structuring of headlines around two, but mostly three, statements. For example, the wounding of a girl travelling in a school bus to Thio in early 1985 elicited: People from Saint-Philippo have wounded a 10 year-old girl; AND THAT, IS IT NOT CRIMINAL?; In Thio, the violence has never really stopped' (21/2/85). Similarly, the front page headline on the day prior to the 1984 territorial elections, boycotted by the FLNKS, read: 'Tomorrow, the territorial elections; GO AND VOTE!; out of duty and to defend liberty (17/11/84). The May 1983 visit of French Secretary of State for the DOM-TOM, Georges Lemoine, which precipitated pro- and anti-independence demonstrations in Noumea, led to: 'LEMOINE FACED WITH THE REALITY; 30,000 PRO-FRENCH, 5,000 INDEPENDANTISTES' (19/5/83). 26 And, on the visit of three conservative French

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26 The headline was accompanied by a large photo of the 'pro-French' rally which accentuated the amplitude of the crowd, and a smaller photo of the indépendantiste rally, showing a crowd of people
politicians to New Caledonia prior to the 1986 national elections the headline declared: 'Leotard, Chinard et Medecin; SIX MONTHS TO HOLD OUT; appeal to the courage of Caledonians and for the arraignment of the government’ (23/8/85). The narrative structure enables a closure in the reading of these headlines around the interpretive repertoires which they express. For example, the headline on Lemoine’s visit draws on a discourse which establishes an equivalence between numbers and legitimacy, thereby rendering the pro-independence rally not only relatively inconsequential but also illegitimate.

On a few notable occasions, the headlines evinced considerable moderation, such as when the pro-independence leader Eloi Machoro was killed by military marksmen. A photo of a dead Machoro being carried from a military helicopter on a stretcher was accompanied by the headline 'THE DEATH OF MACHORO' (14/1/85). The general euphoria among the anti-independence population in Noumea at the news of his killing, which could easily have spilled over into acts of aggression, may have cautioned Les Nouvelles against a more provocative headline. The paper did occasionally caution the loyalist population against engaging in aggressive behaviour. Alternatively, the paper’s moderation in this instance may have reflected an assumption that there was no need to direct the manner in which most readers would respond to the news of Machoro’s death. The moderation in this instance contrasts significantly with the paper's reporting on Machoro during 1984. As Secretary General of the UC during this period, Machoro wrote most communiques published in Les Nouvelles and was the main speaker at UC and FI press conferences. Les Nouvelles concentrated much of its criticism of the pro-independence movement on the personality of Machoro. Following a press conference in which Machoro announced that the movement would boycott the 1984 territorial elections, the paper’s headlines read, 'MACHORO-THE-THREAT; But how sitting in the central park. The caption commented that a better photo of the indépendantiste rally was not possible because trees were in the way.

While the headline appears to have been a paraphrase of comments made by the politicians at a rally the evening before, its ambiguous presentation in the headline suggests that it was a position also advanced by Les Nouvelles.

Tjibaou anticipated Les Nouvelles’ belittling of the FI rally on the basis of its inferior numbers. He told the rally: ‘They are perhaps 40,000, you, you are perhaps only 2,000, but you are the people. Geneologically, you descend from the trees, the stones, the pines, and the coconut palms. The indigenous legitimacy is inside you, it is in the belly of the Kanak land, it won’t leave the Kanak land’ (Les Nouvelles, 19/5/83).

For example, on 22/7/82 an editorial commented: ‘Since everything is known in Noumea because everyone talks, without it being necessary to listen behind doors, the over-excitement is gaining ground and becomes a breeding ground for desires suddenly presented as threats. A bit more moderation and cool-headedness would certainly help the Republic and Caledonia’.

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far will the UC go to stop the vote?’ (13/9/84). The hyphens in this headline were presumably meant to imply that the threat was both the boycott and Machoro himself. At one point, Machoro protested in a letter to the paper at the personal attention directed at him when the positions which he advocated in press conferences were arrived at collectively (22/9/84). In the editorial accompanying the headline, Les Nouvelles elaborated on this ‘threat’:

Eloi Machoro now and then has the knack for saying tough things in an even tone. We can question the significance or the implications of the thinly veiled threats pronounced by him at yesterday morning’s press conference. Stressing the idea of the active boycott of the elections, he did say in this regard that his party had examined all the polling booths, and he did affirm on several occasions that the elections wouldn’t take place. But, on top of the physical threat comes the moral threat that any Melanesian who votes would be a traitor to the Kanak people. A curious conception of democracy, one could say, but one which is inscribed in the logic of the Kanak indépendantistes according to whom reason and truth is theirs only (13/9/84).

The editorial concentrated on ‘the threat’ to the elections rather than on Machoro-as-the-threat. As with many headlines in the paper, the accompanying editorial was less belligerent than its heading.

**Photography and politics**

Photography was also used strategically in Les Nouvelles to political ends. Photos of Kanak politicians appeared rarely in the paper, whereas anti-independence politicians, both European and Melanesian, featured predominantly. Mug shots of detained Melanesians appear more than occasionally, as do photos of Melanesians in police detention. These photos of Kanak ‘criminals’ contrast starkly with photographs of anti-independence Melanesians. These tend to depict Melanesians in various joyous, even euphoric, scenes, leading demonstrations, greeting the then Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, at the airport, embracing the Minister for the DOM-TOM, Bernard Pons, and carrying him and his wife on their shoulders et cetera.  

Photography’s illusion of verisimilitude provided a powerful means through which the gaze of readers of Les Nouvelles was consistently directed from a partisan position. During the various clashes between Kanaks and the military, the

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30 See for example, 18/9/87, 27/2/88 & the November 1987 magazine, ‘La Nouvelle-Calédonie 1987’.
photographer’s position, usually behind the military or at least on the military’s side of the clash, meant that the photos showed the backs of some military and the front of Kanaks on the other side. This positioning of the camera also positions the reader both physically and discursively in a partisan position in the text. A discursive space is created for the reader who is drawn into filling this space in the reading of the text. But the reading derived from this positioning is sometimes less closed than these examples would suggest. The famous photo of Machoro poised to chop the ballot box in a polling booth provides an example of this (19/11/84) (Figure 3.2). The photo was taken by a woman who worked as a secretary at the local town hall in Canala and who was working at the polling booth that day. She was an occasional correspondent for Les Nouvelles. The photo is taken from the position of a polling booth attendant, who we might assume would have been quite fearful at being faced by an axe-wielding Machoro. Indeed, the photo was used in media around the world to illustrate, amongst other things, the violence of the FLNKS election boycott. But this immediate reading of fear is belied by the expressions on the faces of the other polling attendants appearing in the right of the photo. They look genuinely relaxed, even nonchalant, and certainly unperturbed, rendering somewhat ambiguous the reading that can be inferred from this photographic text.

Perhaps the best example of the manner in which camera position structures our involvement in the text is the photo of Dominique Canon being released from prison (24/7/82). Canon was convicted for the 1981 assassination of the hostile Secretary General of the UC, Pierre Declercq. Canon’s arrest precipitated a

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31 See, for example, the photos of the ‘Thio picnic’ (18/2/85). A variation on this positioning of the camera appears on the front page of the 27/12/84 edition. Here, the photographer is behind a line of ‘loyalists’ who are pushing up against a cordon of military personnel. The reader is incorporated into this text on the side of the loyalists, in keeping with the editorial position generally advanced in the paper.
Figures 3.2 and 3.3: *Les Nouvelles*, 19/11/84 and 24/7/82
response from the anti-independence community and a support committee was established to lobby for his release. This committee received considerable publicity from *Les Nouvelles*, which published, at times daily, news on its progress. The photo depicts a smiling Canon with his arm outstretched towards the camera (Figure 3.3). We infer from the photo that he is about to shake someone’s hand, and the proximity of his hand to the camera lens suggests that the hand he is about to shake is that of the journalist taking the photo. But, because we are structured into the text in the position of the camera, Canon is, in effect, shaking our hand. He is thanking us for our assistance in securing his release from prison. Willingly or otherwise we are structured into this text in a highly involved position. The positions structured for us in the photographic texts in *Les Nouvelles* are therefore powerful attempts to draw us into the unfolding events from a highly politicised perspective which, in the case of *Les Nouvelles*, was increasingly opposed to the prospect of independence.

The *fait divers* and interpretive repertoires in *Les Nouvelles*

Michael Spencer has argued that the *fait divers*, which he and others (Freiberg, 1981:213) translate as the ‘human interest story’, is the characteristic genre in *Les Nouvelles*, and he views the interpretive repertoires which give rise to this form of reporting as inherently conservative. Within this genre:

‘Chance’, ‘fate’, ‘destiny’ (usually malicious) supplant social or historical cause-and-effect relationships, while any kind of coherent historical process is denied in favour of ‘eternity’ (eg the eternity of universal emotions such as love, hate, jealousy). The universe presented in the *fait divers* is fragmented, bizarre, unmotivated...things just happen to individuals, and there is no room for the play of social or class forces (1988:177).

One is immediately struck by the relevance of Spencer's description of the *fait divers* to the treatment of certain categories of stories in *Les Nouvelles*, particularly crime stories, car crashes, fires and domestic and sexual violence. Reporting on judicial proceedings also tends to favour this interpretive orientation. The trial of a Melanesian accused of having attacked his mother and chopping off her hand in a fit of rage precipitates the front page headline: ‘Flight of madness: ALL THAT FOR A SNAIL IN THE SOUP!; Two years prison for having cut off his mother's hand’ (14/6/84). Similarly, a violent incident between two Melanesian groups results in the
front page headline: ‘SEA SNAILS PROVOKE A TRIBAL BRAWL; Two huts burnt, a hand cut; five wounded by tamioc and sabre blows (27/2/86). In both incidents the precipitating incident is depicted as trivial and unmotivated and the resulting violence excessive and irrational. The fact that this type of reporting almost always involved aggressive acts between Melanesians both derived from and reinforced the racist interpretive repertoires of Melanesians as savages (Bensa, 1988). Indeed, in Les Nouvelles, the genre of the fait divers becomes almost a shorthand code for underscoring ostensible Melanesian deviance and savagery. Although most crime reporting did not refer to the racial origins of the perpetrators, it was assumed that most aggressive acts were perpetrated by Melanesians. This assumption derives from the discourses on Melanesian deviance, but also from the practice of specifying that a crime was perpetrated by Europeans on the seemingly rare occasions that such crimes were reported on (for example, see 5/6/82). The paper’s emphasis on the fait divers therefore becomes a powerful device in propagating racist discourse and undermining the legitimacy of Kanak demands for independence.32

Ventrillon readily acknowledges the importance of the fait divers to the paper. After all, he says: ‘Journalism is the fait divers. Faits divers sell a paper’ (interview, 26/4/94).33 The view that the fait divers is the natural order of the paper is underscored by the manner in which the paper returns to this genre following periods of acute political crisis. Two headlines in particular stand out as illustrative of this phenomenon. In early 1985, following weeks of political crisis in the territory and the overwhelming dominance of political stories in the paper, readers awoke to the headline: ‘While diving near the lighthouse; MAULED BY A SHARK; The ‘tiger’ suddenly sprang up from the bottom’ (28/1/85). Again, following the near political paroxysm of the Ouvéa crisis in 1988, once again reflected in extensive and

32 Most of the fait divers in Les Nouvelles were written by Marcel Lepecheoux, who was primarily a photographer.
33 The car crash receives a surfeit of attention. Indeed, during the 1970s, most editions featured at least one car crash story, mostly accompanied by photos (eg. ‘Right into the safety rail; The driver is only wounded’ (5/3/73)). Frequently, the Monday edition would be devoid of any directly political stories, perhaps due to the lack of political events on the weekend except when there were political conferences, and the skeleton Sunday staff. (See for example, the edition of Monday, 18/12/72. This sixteen page edition contains articles on car accidents, a pop show at the town hall, Father Christmas, various accidents and thefts, cinema, radio, television, comics and nine pages of sport. Sport was a mainstay of the paper, the early editions of the paper containing at least two and frequently more pages of local and international sport. See also the edition of Monday 2/9/74 which contained on its front page the following headlines: ‘Rugby: The ASLN beaten 19 to 9; 3 000 francs stolen at Ducos; Art and Culture - Melanesians at Nouville are introduced to mime; 2,500 hours of work for this $1.78m aircraft carrier; Cycling - taking off at 120 km from the finish, Jean-Jacques Bonnard’.)
The installation of an aerial mast was defective: KILLED BY THE TELEVISION; Calixta (3 1/2 years) was electrocuted in the rain’ (29/6/88). In both instances, the political climate in the territory remained fluid, rendering somewhat incongruous the appearance of these headlines at these times. But we can speculate as to their likely effects. Their appearance seemed to signify that the political situation was under control. In the first instance, the Pisani plan was all but defeated and, in the second, the political response to the Ouvéa crisis appeared to be being channelled effectively towards an agreed non-aggression pact. The headlines signified the return of doxa or, as Bourdieu argues, the ‘silence of doxa’ implicit in the strategic triumph of the orthodox, anti-independence position (Bourdieu, 1991:131).

The emergence of the *fait divers* in journalism in France after the Second World War corresponded with the rapid modernisation of French society and the rise of a consumer culture (Ross, 1995). Consumerism’s elevation of commodities as objects of desire, and its eliding of the processes through which these objects come into being, had their corollary in the new treatment given to events in the media. Within the genre of the *fait divers*, events were presented as essentially alien objects of pleasurable consumption. Indeed, this notion of alienness – expressed in the tendency to present events as unpredictable and bizarre – is the key to the possibility of pleasurable consumption, in that events can be read without a notion of personal involvement, and therefore culpability, in their unfolding. Kristen Ross also points to a correspondence between French modernisation and the most rapid period of French decolonisation in Asia and Africa, a correspondence which she argues was not incidental. She describes how the techniques of social control perfected in the colonies were applied to the task of modernisation in France. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre, she argues that the declining French empire precipitated a shift from the colonisation of the Third World to the ‘colonisation of everyday life’ (Lefebvre cited in Ross, 1995:77), expressed in the rapidity with which a consumer culture, modelled on the American experience earlier in the century, was orchestrated in France (Ross, 1995:71-122).

The success of *Les Nouvelles* in the early 1970s attested to the inroads of modernisation in New Caledonia, greatly precipitated by the ‘boom’ years of the 1960s when a heavy international demand for nickel resulted in a massive upturn in
economic activity in the territory, substantial migration and a considerable extension of wealth (Barbançon, 1992:33-40). Les Nouvelles embraced this new culture with the paper’s emphasis on the everyday (and ‘everything’) and, above all, its faits divers. In this sense, Ventrillon was right to concede the centrality of the fait divers to the success of the newspaper, for the fait divers exemplified these new cultural influences. As a cultural expression, the fait divers was more a way of looking at all events than merely a description of certain types of events, a view which calls into question the adequacy of its translation as ‘human interest story’. As Ventrillon said: 'My style of journalism, it’s to say everything ... It’s not really a question of content, it’s a question of form. There is a way of presenting things' (interview, 26/4/94). Les Nouvelles sometimes took exception to the manner in which pro-independence activists sought to present events as politically motivated rather than as ‘simple’ faits divers. The paper argued, for example, that the shooting of a youth at Tontouta was only a ‘stupid fait divers’ used as a pretext for an independence march (23/6/82). Similarly, another incident was described as a ‘stupid fait divers turned into a political event by the distillers of hatred’ (13/5/83). This reference to the notion of a ‘stupid’ fait divers is fascinating for its implicit devaluing of the general significance of the most prevalent form of journalism employed in the newspaper. But the argument that the events were insignificant was itself highly political. As Freiberg has argued, the presentation of events as faits divers obscures consideration of the reasons behind these events, presenting them instead as individualistic, ahistorical and episodic, and therefore beyond reason or understanding (1984:216-219). It therefore delegitimizes those readings of events, prevalent within the pro-independence movement, grounded in structural and historical explanations, as indeed it delegitimizes the events themselves.

Spencer agrees that the genre of the fait divers not only privileged particular story categories (such as crimes and car crashes) but also permeated reporting on significant political events. He argues that the paper is forced by the world-view which it adopts to render such events as the assassination of the independence leader Eloi Machoro as faits divers. It tells the reader 'what happened', but 'it never attempts to answer the question: why did it happen?' (1988:189). This argument requires challenging as the paper does argue explicitly why events occurred. The

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34 Spencer adds, somewhat ironically, that the reason for this focus lies perhaps in the fact that everyone already knew why the events had happened. But, as he notes, there were enough competing versions around to require some further investigation or elaboration (1988:189).
insurrectional activity waged by the FLNKS during the period from 1984 to 1986 is repeatedly blamed on the laxity of the French Socialist government and its high commissioners in New Caledonia, Jacques Roynette and Edgard Pisani. In its editorials, letters and articles, the paper gives repeated voice to this argument. An editorial two days after what the paper describes as the ‘Hienghène shooting’ lamented the killings but commented that:

In effect, it took a good ten days for the inhabitants of Caledonia, weary of these exactions, abandoned to themselves by the inoperative forces of order, to come to organise themselves to the point of Hienghène...But, does [Tjibaou’s subsequent call for calm] suffice to efface the responsibility of both the FLNKS and the state in the flaming of violence that has stopped so dramatically? (7/12/84).

Around the same time, the paper published a letter which accused the French Socialist government ‘of complicity with the minority, criminal, indépendantiste fraction in aiding it, through non-intervention, to accomplish the daily innumerable heinous crimes of the last 15 days’ (3/12/84).

Of course, this discourse of wilful abandon falls well short of a comprehensive explanation of the insurrectionary activity during late 1984 and 1985. On the one hand, it does little to elucidate the reasons behind the laxity of the Socialist government; on the other, it says very little of the reasons behind the FLNKS activities reported in the paper. But, although such explanations were not all articulated in any one article, reasons are nonetheless available to the reader in the interpretive repertoires sketched on a daily basis in Les Nouvelles: the Socialist government's laxity derives from a collusion between it and the FLNKS, which itself stems from the Socialist government's doctrinaire belief that New Caledonia should be independent. Elsewhere it is argued that the more communist elements in the Socialist government are seeking an independent New Caledonia as a means to set the territory adrift and have it enfeebled so that it can drift into the hands of the communists, with Gadaffi at their head (see for example, 27 & 29/9/84; 25/7/87). Alternatively, the weakness of the government is viewed as ineptness and confusion. The FLNKS, on the other hand, is presented as a collection of terrorists and extremists, who have been indoctrinated by alien doctrines and led by outsiders to destabilise the political order.
Dilemmatic discourse

The sheer volume of space devoted to the development and articulation of these discourses in *Les Nouvelles* seemingly renders them all-encompassing and inescapable. But the various interpretive resources drawn on to sustain these positions were not always mutually sustaining. Discursive tensions arose as a result of the particularities of the colonial experience in New Caledonia. The discourse of abandon, referred to above, drew on interpretive resources grounded in the early experiences of colonialism and in particular the acute disappointment experienced by early settlers in the unresponsiveness of the colonial administration to their political and economic demands. The slow pace at which the colony developed prior to the Second World War and the growing polarisation in wealth and privilege between the ‘economic oligarchy’ and the remainder of the white population resulted in sentiments of hostility which had not abated in the post-war period (Barbançon, 1992:108-116).

Those who opposed independence had to contend with this interpretive repertoire. Opposition to independence, and its corollary in the articulation of a closer affiliation with the mother country, sat uneasily with the colonial experience of difference. This difference was signalled discursively in a range of constructs. Local, and indeed metropolitan French, discourses referred to New Caledonia as a ‘country’ as frequently as they used the term ‘territory’. Settlers referred to ‘France’ over there and ‘New Caledonia’ here, rather than use the term considered more politically ‘correct’ within loyalist circles of ‘*metropole*’. The discursive habits of decades were hard to shift, primarily because they articulated palpable experiential differences. Discursively, anti-independence politicians and *Les Nouvelles* might have been able to approximate a certain homogeneity in their racist discourses on Kanak militantism, but the inevitable moment the issue of the French administration’s involvement or culpability in the political situation was raised, the discourses became dilemmatic. A populist hostility towards local politicians added a

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35 Jacqueline Sénès has written of the conservatism and anti-authoritarianism of the Caldoches which often translates into an animosity towards French bureaucrats. According to Sénès: ‘The opinion of this little country will be absolutely intractable towards a bureaucrat who is a bit odd or a plan of action too authoritarian. In the 1900 of Governor Feuillet, in the 1940 of the authoritarian Admiral d’Argenlieu, in the 1985 of the solitary Edgard Pisani, the Caledonia of the so-called “Caldoches will absolutely refuse all orders”’ (Sénès, 1985:165).

36 I was severely chided by a National Front politician for using the term ‘France’ in my discussions and was told that I should be using the term ‘*metropole*’.
further layer of complication to this discursive labyrinth. Under the heading, 'Land reform; in spite of the popular condemnation; THE ASSEMBLY SUPPORTED THE BILL', a journalist writing in *Les Nouvelles* described the scene in the Territorial Assembly during the 1980 debate on the land reform Bill. The journalist commented that the *indépendantistes* were frequently booed during the debate but, at the same time, when *indépendantiste* politicians attacked land reform or the French government, they were applauded. But, the journalist concluded, 'an even sadder sight, [was that the crowd] also insulted the elected representatives’ (3/9/80). It is difficult to read this scene in a manner which reconciles its various components. The audience was strategically intervening in the discursive context in a manner which engaged with the discourses being articulated at any one time. Each of their interventions, such as the booing of the *indépendantistes* or the French government, or the journalist's dismay that people in positions of authority were being denigrated, was comprehensible historically, but the totality was ultimately dilemmatic.

Wetherell and Potter, in their analysis of racist discourse in New Zealand, point to the dilemmatic discourses in Pakeha New Zealander talk on race relations. In general, they show that these discursive dilemmas remain unreconciled, or inadequately reconciled (1992:198). The tensions between discourses also remain unresolved in *Les Nouvelles*. The paper argued against independence, against the French government, and against local politicians and the local administration, but seldom were these discourses articulated concurrently. Some rhetorical resolution of these dilemmas was made possible after the election of Socialist President Mitterrand in 1981. It could then be argued that the political crisis was the result of socialism, seen as a perversion of French political life, as an editorial in early 1984 indicated:

> it is no longer possible to be confident after [the Socialist government’s] behaviour. The credibility of the so-called institutional guarantors has dissolved into betrayal and abandon. The ones who pay the price aren't the political adversaries. They are the brave people, that anonymously but laboriously woven tissue that is the people. Thank you, Mr Socialists! (27/1/84).

Discourses articulating a more general populist contempt for politics also remained after Mitterrand's election. In a 1983 editorial, *Les Nouvelles* condemned both
conservative and Socialist politicians and administrators who had been involved since the late 1970s in New Caledonian politics:

From Christian Nucci to Jacques Roynette, as from Dijoud to Lemoine, even forgetting Emmanuelli, the promises, assurances, guarantees, consolations have been nothing but deception. These men have been or are representatives of the Republic, of the State, of France. Their public responsibility hasn’t succeeded in dissolving in them the foulness that all political action feeds on (23/9/83).

A small number of otherwise conservative members of the New Caledonian political elite sought to resolve this contradiction between the discourses on independence and French politics by openly advocating independence. In early 1982, a veteran local politician of European descent, Georges Chatenay, announced the formation of a new Parti National Calédonien (PNC). Chatenay’s party advocated a ‘Caledonian independence’ which he distinguished from the Kanak independence demanded by the pro-independence movement. In a letter to Les Nouvelles, Chatenay argued that France had ‘sufficiently proved, across all the successive governments of the Republic, that the best ministerial envoys are, mostly, like hell paved with good intentions’ and added:

Independence can only be for everyone, no matter what their label, otherwise it would risk appearing racist, vengeful, a source of hatred and confrontation, a ferment of division or brutality and injustices, and this, even in the clans...Independence, because it is between us and by us Caledonians, that the structures, the mentality and the proper means should be put in place to make the misunderstandings disappear. And, because, it is precisely here, and not in Paris, that the common and complementary values are found. We have become big enough, Canaques and Caldoches, to not be dragged along by anyone else’s analysis of the situation, not in relation to the manner in which we should broach the problems that concern the country, nor to the modes of progress from now on (Les Nouvelles, 9/1/82).

In its introduction to Chatenay’s letter, the paper commented that:

Today, as we are governed by men who seem to be more socialist than French, more and more Caledonians are coming to think that it might be better to distance oneself from a government that hasn’t obtained a majority of the votes in this country (Les Nouvelles, 9/1/82).

To be socialist was therefore, according to Les Nouvelles, to be in some ways ‘un-French’, the presence of a socialist president and government robbing the country
of its core authenticity. This comment suggests that France was, for Les Nouvelles, a metaphor for a conservative politico-economic program as much as it was an object of cultural attachment. The paper’s support for such a program became intertwined with the issue of independence but was never totally subsumed within it, as the paper’s equivocal response to Chatenay’s advocacy of a ‘Caledonian independence’ indicated.

Evidence that Ventrillon’s ‘Caledonian-ness’ rendered the PNC’s platform alluring to him came in a subsequent editorial attributed to him in which he commented on the party’s creation and its advocacy of independence. Ventrillon argued that Chatenay’s position represented the views of those who ‘have fewer and fewer illusions about the Socialist government’s intentions towards us, and who, being Caledonian above all else, don’t want to be chucked out of this country that is theirs, for the exclusive benefit of an ethnic group with whom they thought they could get on’. It was, he added, comprehensible, and he concluded in an uncharacteristically equivocal manner: ‘Is it utopian, is it realisable? The future will tell, but in any case it will be the consequence of the Socialist government’s policies in this country’ (11/1/82).

The discursive openings created by this dilemmatic co-existence always constituted a potential threat to the anti-independence position, even if the escalating political tensions in the territory had ensured that Chatenay’s initiative was short-lived. Faced with these discursive openings, the new management, which took over

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37 A letter from a broussarde appearing on the same page is published with the explanation that: ‘If we accept to publish the following letter, it is because it summarises perfectly the opinions which have been transmitted to us over the weekend either in the form of a few scribbled words or with a complicated style compared to this letter which explains more clearly the same opinion. All this indicates that part of the national electorate traditionally pro-France is in the process of swinging and ready to attempt an independence adventure rather than to suffer the blunders of the Socialist government’. The ‘broussarde’ congratulated the ‘handful of courageous men who did what many men and women were hoping and waiting for a long time: brave men for having dared to defy all those crooks, this rotten administration, this colonial power, and for having created this party for the independence of Caledonia. Hold out a hand to this Canaque who is so close to us, this man with whom we have always lived, rubbed shoulders with, that’s where our future is, our happiness with him’ (Les Nouvelles, 11/1/82).

38 Chartier’s coverage of the July 1983 round-table discussions between New Caledonian pro- and anti-independence politicians and Secretary of State, Georges Lemoine, at Nainville-les-Roches in France provides another instance in which articles highlighted the cultural similarities between ostensibly antagonistic political groups in New Caledonia. But, in general, the discourses on independence and French politics co-existed dilemmatically, each relegated to independent mobilisation when the circumstances arose.
following the paper’s sale to the Hersant group in January 1987, engaged in new strategies to plug these discursive spaces. 39

**Hersant’s Les Nouvelles**

Following the success of the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) in the French legislative elections in 1986 and the election of Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister, Jacques Lafleur, who still harboured the desire to have greater control over the local informational sphere, approached Chirac to request that the French media ‘mogul’ Robert Hersant investigate the possibility of establishing a competitor to *Les Nouvelles*. When Hersant’s offside, Henri Morny, visited the territory he was instead able to persuade Leyraud to sell the newspaper. 40

Under Morny, editorial policies and management structures of *Les Nouvelles* changed dramatically, particularly in the role Morny and his new staff from France, and in particular editor-in-chief Henri Perron, played in its editorial direction. A system of strict management control was established. News-gathering was circumscribed by an array of directives which prescribed what journalists could write about. Some journalists claimed that the title page of each edition was faxed to Morny in Paris each evening before publication for his scrutiny and approval. Yet Morny stated that his interventions were less frequent:

> I do not intervene editorially on a daily basis, firstly because I am far away and also because the editorial section works well and I don’t want to bother them. It does happen that once or twice a month I pick up the phone to say that I think that more or less could have been done on a particular subject or that it could have been treated differently. But it is more at the level of ‘appreciation’ and advice (interview 2/11/89).

39 Another way that some tried to resolve the dilemma between abhorrence towards France’s policies on New Caledonia and resolute opposition to independence was to advocate becoming a state of the United States. During the mid-1980s a very strong Friends of America movement existed in the territory. The Friends of the United States Association was formed on 19 May 1984. One of the founding members commented that becoming American was ‘irreversible’ because it is the profound manifestation of a complete people without distinction on the basis of origin, desperately searching for its unity and for secure values that aren’t stolen from under it (*Les Nouvelles*, 9/4/85; see also Barbançon, 1992:28).

40 Ventrillon alleges that Leyraud had mismanaged the paper which was, as a consequence, in financial difficulty. Moreover, he alleges that the paper was considerably in arrears in its tax payments and that the deal to sell *Les Nouvelles* was mediated by the then High Commissioner, Montpezat, in exchange for legal clemency (Ventrillon interview, 26/4/94).
Ventrillon gives examples of the types of restrictions which journalists claimed prevailed at *Les Nouvelles*: on the first two days of his employment under the new owner he said he was given two directives not to publish stories, one relating to Hersant’s manoeuvring to establish a commercial television channel in France, the other concerning a dispute at the local Bernheim Library which later resulted in a month-long strike by employees. On the third day Ventrillon says that he left, and others, such as Henri Le Pot, followed suit (Ventrillon interview, 12/12/90; Le Pot interview, 26/4/94). Those who remained expressed considerable hostility regarding the constraints on their work.

Editorially, *Les Nouvelles* aligned itself very closely with the political program of the French RPR in the territory, rendering it virtually a public relations organ for the Chirac government. Barbançon commented that from this time onwards *Les Nouvelles* ‘ceased being “Caledonian” and became an instrument of propaganda. It didn’t hide it’ (1992:60). The relatively frequent visits of the new Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories, Bernard Pons, received extensive and unequivocally affirmative coverage. Pons’ first visit after the change in ownership set the tone. The photo accompanying the front page headline, ‘Bernard Pons’ week-end’, showed Pons and his wife being carried by a group of Melanesians, and was accompanied by the caption: ‘In Lifou, the Minister of the DOM-TOM was carried in triumph before returning to Noumea. Cries of joy, songs, hugs: never before has a minister received such a warm and friendly good-bye’ (Les Nouvelles, 9/2/87).

Pons’ obvious policy of avoiding visits to pro-independence communities ensured that the paper had ample opportunity to depict Pons and his wife in a range of quasi-intimate poses with Melanesian supporters. The paper’s first edition in colour appeared for Pons’ subsequent visit to New Caledonia in May 1987, the front page colour photo depicting Pons and a group of dignitaries walking across the tarmac immediately after his arrival (12/5/87). The symbiosis between the Chirac government and *Les Nouvelles* was symbolically affirmed by Pons becoming the paper’s editor-in-chief for a day (7/8/87).

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41 *Bwenando* claimed that Pons had been carried in triumph ‘by drunkards brought to Ouvéa by [Air Caledonia’s] ATR 42!’ (5/1/87), suggesting that the scene had been staged by the administration.

42 Reporting on Pons’ August visit to Maré included a photo of him sitting on the grass surrounded by Melanesian women, two of whom had arms around his shoulders and one of whom was leaning up against his legs (6/8/87).

43 *Les Nouvelles* described the scene of Pons’ assumption of editorial duties thus: ‘Very relaxed, [the Minister] directed the international press review and distributed the territorial news to “his” journalists for a day’ (7/8/87).
The paper also sought to develop a new interpretive repertoire for French politics and the local French administration. Editor-in-chief Henri Perron argued in an editorial that the time of the missionaries hasn’t passed. Now it is the:

...secular missionaries who come to bring the good republican word: senators, deputies, the reporter of this or that project, senior public servants who are the mouth piece of the state. They transmit, they translate the intentions of the government. They find the words that appease, words that bring peace, hope, liberty (28/3/87).

The rhetorical work in plugging the discursive space left by the tension in local discourses was further attempted by a far-right journalist and writer for Hersant’s Le Figaro, Thierry Desjardins, in his weekly comment in Les Nouvelles. For Desjardins, the longstanding tensions between France and New Caledonia were over. With the demise of the socialists, ‘happily, the sad page is turned, France has become France again, and everyone has rediscovered it’ (5/9/87).

The paper vested considerable effort in publicising the Chirac government’s 13 September referendum on independence, boycotted by the FLNKS. The government’s decision that only those adults resident in the territory for at least three years could vote, considered by it a concession to the demands of the pro-independence movement, resulted in the publication of a series of pro-forma letters in the paper which readers could cut out and send to the electoral commission to contest their exclusion from the roll (1, 7, 13 & 22/7/87). Over two weeks prior to the vote, the paper began publishing a full-page advertisement, the text of which read:

The 13 September.
To vote is to take your destiny between your thumb and your index finger.
Complementary space offered by Les Nouvelles for great national causes.

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44 This new articulation of an authentic France was accompanied by an increase in coverage of news of French politics and society in Les Nouvelles.
45 Early in the piece, Desjardins opined about the difficulty of devising a referendum question containing the word ‘independence’ because, he argued, many Caledonians would still equate the word with the experience of liberation following the first and second world wars. Desjardins argues that to be precise, the question should go something like this: ‘Do you want to become independent, that is to say, lose forever all liberty and plunge yourself into misery?’ (28/3/87).
46 The ad was reduced to less than half a page a few days prior to the referendum.
Despite the FLNKS directive that the referendum be boycotted, approximately 59 per cent of the adult population voted and, of these, 98.3 per cent voted, as Les Nouvelles put it, ‘for France’ (Les Nouvelles, 15/9/87). The paper argued that this result granted the RPCR:

the right finally to no longer have their determination to construct Caledonia contested. We have lost too much time, we have mobilised too much energy in warding off the mischief of the FLNKS and in dismantling the ideological mechanisms leading to hatred and violence (14/9/87).

The paper’s sycophantic behaviour towards the Chirac government was accompanied by an unabashed hostility towards the FLNKS. Its front page headlines illustrate the relentlessness with which the paper was used to articulate an interpretive repertoire implicitly hostile towards pro-independence activists. Some days, almost all news was bad for the FLNKS. On 29 April 1987, the five headlines on the front page read (in what to me appeared like descending order of visual importance): ‘He kills a gendarme; Faced with Canberra, Aborigines stir up the threat of independence; The Balny to the help of boat people; Tribal war in Papua; France suffers from a fall in the dollar’. There is also an increase in the insertion of editorial comment in articles signalled by the acronym ‘NDLR’ (note de la rédaction - editorial note). These comments appear most frequently in articles about the FLNKS. For example, the paper’s Paris correspondent, Marie-Laure Bernard, commented on aspects of Tjibaou’s discussion with Mitterrand at the Elysée that: ‘Tjibaou lied - his favourite weapon - and in this regard, nothing bothers him’ (12/12/87). Similarly, following the acquittal of the settlers accused in the Hienghène trial, a letter from the four prosecution lawyers to the senior legal representative in Noumea, complaining about the state of justice in New Caledonia, elicited the following response:

N.D.L.R. We know the slanted and blind positions of these four lawyers, who have never hesitated to present the guilty as victims. And it is they, who know nothing (or rather don’t want to know) about the real situation in New Caledonia, who intend to give a lesson to the Noumea judges (8/2/88).

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47 The headlines on the day following the referendum read: ‘Participation: 58.99 Per cent; YES TO THE FUTURE; taking refuge in abstention, the indépendantistes are clearly in retreat’ (14/9/87).
48 Four days after the referendum Chirac and Pons flew to New Caledonia in the Concorde for a ‘lightning visit’. In his speech of thanks, Jacques Lafleur also referred to France becoming France again. The front page of Les Nouvelles featured a striking picture of the Concorde in flight in blue sky (17/9/87).
Comment was also included without the signpost of an NDLR. For example, in an article following the Ouvéa crisis, reporting on FLNKS accusations that the military had assassinated at least three of the Kanak hostage takers after they were captured, the unnamed journalist commented: ‘So many gratuitous claims for, after all, it is the word of the accomplices of terrorists against that of the GIGN super-gendarmes’ (13/5/88).

The paper’s shift towards a more homogeneous colonial discourse directed towards an embracing of the mother country was enabled by the recruitment of new journalists from Hersant’s publications in France. This new discursive strategy also required that the paper cease publishing letters to the editor, for it was probably realised that few Caledonians could be as enamoured with French political life as the paper’s discourses would suggest. This strategy of discursive closure represented, in some respects, a return to the ‘unspoken’ of a previous era in New Caledonia’s media history.49

49 While the hostility of the paper towards pro-independence groups and activists must have been gratifying to many of the paper’s readers, and while many were highly supportive of the Chirac government’s repressive policies towards the Melanesian population, the lack of articulation of local discourses engendered a certain alienation among readers, reflected in an initially small, but increasing, demise in circulation (Ventrillon interview, 12/12/90).
CHAPTER FOUR - IDENTITY IN LES NOUVELLES

We have seen in the previous chapter that the discourses surrounding independence in Les Nouvelles were heterogeneous in many instances and that this heterogeneity reflected the historical particularities of colonialism in New Caledonia. The differences were particularly apparent in discourses concerning the practicality of New Caledonian political and administrative relations with France. These articulated a sense that the French government did not understand and did not care about the particularities of New Caledonian society and that it was being used as a type of social laboratory for French policy. This perceived lack of care translated into a deep sense of abandonment. These differences provided openings in the discursive struggle which were seized upon in differing degrees by political groups.

The change in ownership in early 1987 signalled a new, more forcefully anti-independence position in the paper and an attempt, by an editorial team increasingly hired in metropolitan France, to stop up these discursive openings. The paper’s increasing contempt for pro-independence activists was aimed at achieving their exclusion from the realm of legitimate political debate. Indeed, a large part of the rhetorical work done in Les Nouvelles was directed towards discursively constructing this group in a particularly racist, and therefore pernicious, way. But this effort was not only vested in the construction of the ‘Kanak’ identity. Other identities became the focus of discursive struggle in the pages of Les Nouvelles. To be ‘Caledonian’, ‘Melanesian’ or ‘Kanak’ signified in the discourses surrounding independence an interestedness in the struggle, but in a place which was forever shifting according to the relations of force at the time. Indeed, the fluidity of the subject positions constructed in Les Nouvelles highlights the contested nature of identity in New Caledonian society and the centrality of the process of subjection to the political struggle.

This fluidity was not simply a problem of disagreement on how best to categorise and describe the various agents in the independence struggle. The process of subjection was not simply a process of describing an empirically verifiable reality. Rather, as Foucault argues, it is one of the central means through which power is exercised and therefore came to be a central focus of the discursive struggle (Foucault, 1982). The discursive struggle over subjectivities was a struggle over
who could act as legitimate participants in determining the territory's future. It was, in effect, a struggle over who constituted the ‘real Caledonian’, the ‘real Melanesian’ and ultimately the ‘people’ whose right it was to participate in the political struggle. Increasingly, the debate sought to delimit the ‘real’, the ‘legitimate’ and the ‘true’ subject.

These subject positions correlated with a series of geographical entities whose existence, place and character were equally contested. While there might be considerable consensus over what constitutes the geographic territory of New Caledonia, the place designated as ‘Caledonia’ in discourses in Les Nouvelles enjoyed no such consensual meaning. To use Said’s evocative terminology, what was being constructed was an ‘imaginative geography’ which, in the face of contestation from alternative geographical imaginings, also became channelled towards the articulation of a ‘real’, a ‘profound’ and a ‘true’ Caledonia (Said, 1978). At stake was the demarcation of a space which could rightfully be claimed by the ‘true’ subject and from which others should and could be excluded.

Contemporary critical theory research has provided a means for understanding subject positions as discursive constructs which are organised into categories such as ‘nation’, ‘people’ and ‘ethnicity’. Foucault, for example, sought to uncover the discursive conditions and related institutional practices which made possible the development of different understandings of the self. While his work points to the multiple and changeable subject positions constituted through discourse, it is most oriented towards epochal shifts in subjectivity. Foucault is less concerned with the instability inherent in discursive formations particularly in periods of acute political struggle (Wetherell and Potter, 1992:90). In these contexts, as Said argues:

What we are dealing with here are in the very widest sense communities of interpretation, many of them at odds with one another, prepared in many instances literally to go to war with one another, all of them creating and revealing themselves and their interpretations as very central features of their existence. (Said, 1981: 41-2).

But even within these communities of interpretation there are at times simultaneously contested understandings and articulations of a range of subject positions. In New Caledonia, the attempt to advance a broadly consensual political position by those who supported or those who opposed independence resulted in
articulations of subjectivity which were, at times, dilemmatic. Thus, in the early 1980s, to be ‘Caledonian’ signified being ‘Melanesian’ to some and ‘non-Melanesian’ to others in the anti-independence movement. In many instances, the competing articulation of categories and subjectivities by those ostensibly on the same side of the political fence appears purposive and might presumably reflect their differing appreciations of what was required to optimise their strategic positioning in the political field at any point in time.

The ensuing analysis of the discursive construction of subjectivities in *Les Nouvelles* centres on the development of the key categories of ‘the people’, ‘Caledonian’ and ‘Melanesian’. However, implicit to this discursive work is the construction of not only subject positions but also models of inter-group relations and theories of social process and social influence (Wetherell and Potter 1992:149). As Wetherell and Potter argue, ‘the discursive act creates groups, interests, emotions, similarities and differences, a social landscape, an anthropology, a psychology of identity and even a geography’ (ibid:146). Each subjectivity exists in relation to these other constructs, whether articulated or not. For example, self-identification occurs not only through discourses about the self but also through discourses about the ‘Other’. Constructs such as ‘the people’ and ‘Caledonian’, as well as the imaginative geography of ‘Caledonia’, are therefore forged through the construction of this Other. They become what this Other is not. Indeed, as Balibar argues, it is this very process of differentiation between ‘us’ and the ‘Other’ which gives the ‘us’ its cohesion. Balibar, discussing the construction of the notion of ‘the people’ and drawing on the work of the German philosopher Fichte, puts it in terms of the manifest differences of the ‘foreigner’ divided from ‘us’ by ‘external frontiers’. In the construction of ‘the people’, ‘external frontiers have to be imagined constantly as a projection and protection of an internal collective personality’ (Balibar, 1991:95). External frontiers are therefore also ‘internal frontiers’.¹ Thus, in analysing the discursive means through which subjects are constructed it is necessary to move between the construction of different subjectivities in order to understand the collective field and the model of inter-group relations being developed. As a starting point, however, I consider the construction of perhaps the most contested subjectivity, ‘the people’.
Constructing ‘the people’

The notion of ‘the people’ came to the fore in New Caledonian politics in 1956 with the formal establishment of a political party, the Union Calédonien (UC), which had existed since the early 1950s as a political movement and had successfully fielded candidates in national and local elections. The UC adopted the banner ‘Two colours, a single people’, a slogan which Barbançon comments corresponded with the sociological reality of the country (1992:33). The movement was certainly electorally successful, which suggests that its discourses must have resonated with the dispositions of a sizeable number of voters. But it is more difficult to assess which sociological reality the banner ‘Two colours, a single people’ referred to. Firstly, the ‘two colours’, presumably white and black, left a further category which the UC acknowledged - that of ‘yellow’ - excluded. But the concept of polarisation inherent in the expression of ‘two colours’ resonated with the experiences of most ‘white’ and ‘black’ Caledonians in the pre-war period. The isolation of Melanesians on reserves, the establishment of a separate legal structure to regulate the Melanesian population and their almost total lack of any political rights within the colonial political system until 1946 (Henningham, 1992:51) had meant that there was a distinct politico-legal and experiential basis underlying the concept of ‘two colours’, no matter how many colours or shades some may argue existed in between. In the face of this system of demarcation, the notion of ‘one people’ appears somewhat troublesome. What were the conditions of existence which allowed it to resonate with such apparent force?

Henningham estimates that, at the time of the formation of the UC, two-thirds of the white settler population living on the main island were living at subsistence level (ibid:52). Their material existence was therefore akin to that of the Melanesian populations living on the reserves and there was considerable interaction between the populations which had produced, among other things, significant intermarriage. The UC sought to unite the interests of these poor white settlers with those of the

1 Ann Stoler applies Balibar’s discussion of Fichte’s notion of ‘interior frontiers’ in her discussion of métissage (1995:130). See also the discussion on métissage in chapter nine of this thesis.
2 The UC candidate, Maurice Lenormand was elected as New Caledonian deputy in the July 1951 elections, largely because the conservative vote was split between two candidates. As Dorny writes: ‘63 per cent of the electorate had cast anti-Lenormand votes but the simple majority voting system ensured his victory’ (1984:161). In the 1953 territorial elections the UC gained 15 seats out of 25 (ibid:164).
3 White referred to Europeans, black to Melanesians, and yellow to Asian immigrants.
Melanesian population. Two religious organisations established by the Catholic and Protestant missions, with the encouragement of the High Commissioner, had been behind the formation of the UC with the aim of encouraging the advancement of the Melanesian population and remedying the disadvantages of the poor. Dornoy and others have argued that the French administration initially encouraged the movement as a counter against more extremist (i.e. communist) ideas taking hold among the disaffected (Henningham, 1992:49; Dornoy, 1984:156;165; Barbançon, 1992:33).

‘The people’ was therefore a populist concept of appeal to the disadvantaged, but it was very much an entity in the creation. The UC’s declared aim in the first edition of its news sheet, *L’Avenir Calédonien*, was ‘to build a *new* Caledonia, freed of the economic feudal system by which it is stifled and enslaved; we want to give to all Caledonians, white, black or yellow, the possibility of a better life in their small country’ (*L’Avenir*, 11/9/54, cited in Henningham, 1992:50-1). UC leader, Maurice Lenormand, writing in this first edition, described the publication as ‘the paper of the Caledonian people ... Made for the defence of the Caledonian people’ and concluded that: ‘The people has to help itself and can only draw strength and victory from itself’ (*L’Avenir*, 11/9/54). Despite the similarity between this last statement and that of independence leaders during the thick of the political struggle during the 1980s, the referents of this and later statements diverged considerably.

In 1954, the Other against which ‘the people’ was being defined was the Noumea based bourgeoisie, what Lenormand called the ‘economic oligarchy’, and the SLN (Henningham, 1992:51). Towards France, the UC was still unequivocally affirmative:

> In fact, our action within the French community is closely linked to the destiny of France, to its strength and its weaknesses, to its influence and its independence. That’s why France, with its free and democratic institutions and its establishment of fraternity and social justice between all the French, is our biggest support (Precis and work of the 1st Congress of the UC Movement, Noumea, 12-13/5/56:28).

In its program the UC called for the defence of Melanesian traditions and certain aspects of traditional justice, but these defences were seen as a means to ‘insulate traditional culture and society from demoralising outside influences, so that
adaptation could proceed constructively and at a steady pace' (Henningham, 1992:53-4). The aim was ‘the fuller integration of Melanesians into New Caledonian society, not the assertion of a separate identity’ (ibid). ‘The people’ was therefore being constructed as a populist unity against privilege within the assimilationist model of integration into colonial institutions. The religious backing of the UC and the influence of religious discourse suggests a further reason for the resonance of the banner, ‘two colours, a single people’. The banner suggests an acceptance, and perhaps even a renunciation, of difference in the interests of acknowledging a higher truth - ‘a single people’. The notion of being equal before God could be applied to that of being equal before the ultimate earthly arbiter, the democratic, republican system.

This essentially reformist discourse of ‘the people’ contrasted with the emergence during the 1960s of a new internationalist discourse which linked the category of ‘the people’ with discourses of liberation, decolonisation and independence. The popularity in France and elsewhere of such writers as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Cesaire meant that the first Melanesian tertiary students were readily exposed to these discourses. The opening sentence of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in France in 1961, reads: ‘National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon’ (1967:27). The headings used to articulate the Kanak struggle from the early 1970s onwards were very much those of ‘nationhood’ and ‘the people’.

‘The people’ in this discourse is not a category of the future, something to be forged in the process of renouncing past divisions. It is rather a category of the past, grounded in an articulation of ‘the people’ as the ‘original people’, a pre-colonial construct imbued with apolitical authenticity. When used by Kanak activists in New Caledonia, the category of ‘the people’ was most often qualified, initially by the adjective ‘indigenous’ and later by that of ‘Kanak’, leaving open a discursive space for the existence of other ‘people’, a space which the independence movement sought to plug as the discursive struggle over key subjectivities heightened during the 1980s. But even though this notion of ‘the people’ claimed historical legitimacy, it too was a category in the process of construction, as those hostile to the

4 For example: ‘The Kanak People...needs..to take charge of its destiny and its own affairs’
independence struggle were wont to point out. According to a New Caledonian National Front (FN(NC)) communique:

No elder has ever mentioned in oral tradition the ‘Kanak people’. None of them ever talked about the ‘legitimacy of the Kanak people’ and even less about the ‘sovereignty of the Kanak people’, and that is for one simple reason: there has never been a Kanak people. The Melanesian populations...established themselves out of tribal conflicts and their own needs. The cement called itself progress and fraternity (FN(NC), cited in Les Nouvelles, 19/1/85).

The anteriority of the term ‘Kanak people’ may be an issue, but there is little doubt that the resonance of this categorisation for Kanaks was grounded in the past. Part of the conditions of existence of this discourse of ‘the people’ might be found in the sociological circumstances described above. The politico-legal systems of exclusion in the period prior to the Second World War lent credence to discourse of difference. But colonial discourses paved the way for some conception of unity in their designation of these peoples as ‘Melanesian’. In addition, the alienation of clans from their land and their cantonment on reserves cut across tribal lines and had resulted in people from different tribal groups residing together for almost a century (Mathieu, 1989:89-90). In this sense, colonialism structured a certain type of unity out of whatever existed before. The communal nature of traditional Kanak society and its emphasis on reciprocity and dialogue are also likely to have influenced the adoption of discourses of ‘the people’ whether in their reformist or historical forms. It would appear that many Kanaks interpreted the socialist influence behind the historical conceptualisation of ‘the people’ in terms of their communal tradition. Kanak society, they argued, was traditionally ‘socialist’.

The historical conceptualisation of ‘the people’ derived considerable legitimacy from its use in United Nations (UN) documents, in particular, UN resolution 1514 which declared the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination. The moves in the late 1970s by the independence movement to seek the reinscription of New Caledonia on the list of colonial territories subject to UN review coincided with an almost wholesale move to articulate their struggle in internationalist terms.

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5 For a discussion of notions of socialism in pro-independence discourse, see chapter 6.
6 Speaking at a demonstration marking the anniversary of French annexation of the territory on 24 September 1980, politician and independence activist André Gopéa addressed the demonstration on
1975, Kanak politician Yann Céléné Uregei was the first to officially call for independence but he did so on behalf of the ‘Caledonian people’ in their struggle for a ‘Caledonian nation’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 25/6/75). In 1980, the then secretary general of the UC, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, speaking to a bill before the Territorial Assembly which, for the first time, recognised clan ownership of land, described the bill as ‘a step in the process of restoring to the only legitimate people of the country, the indigenous people, the kanak nation’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 16/5/80, italics added). It appeared that the discursive transition within the independence movement had been well and truly effectuated. ‘The people’ now signified difference. Until the 1960s Melanesian difference had been discursively signalled by the use of the term of denigration ‘canaque’. By the early 1980s, independence leaders were arguing that the movement had appropriated this term precisely because it signified difference and therefore allowed Melanesians to constitute themselves as a ‘people’. Being recognised as ‘a people’, they argued, would pressure France into decolonising in conformity with the UN charter (*Les Nouvelles*, 9/12/82).

The ascendancy among pro-independence Melanesians of the conceptualisation of ‘the people’ as difference, rather than the former notion of ‘the people’ as a pluri-ethnic unity, is evident in the appearance of banners at pro-independence rallies which denounced ‘pluri-ethnic fraternity’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 25/9/80) and in the dropping of the term within the movement.

**Challenges to the internationalist notion of ‘the people’**

Bourdieu (1977) argues that the structure of any field is characterised by the relations of force which exist between agents or groups as a result of the acquisition of capital by these groups in the course of previous struggles. Those who possess the greatest capital seek to pursue strategies of conservation or orthodoxy while those who possess the least capital pursue strategies of subversion or heterodoxy. As Thompson writes of Bourdieu’s theory on linguistic markets: ‘By bringing what is undiscussed into the universe of discourse and hence criticism, heterodoxy impels the dominant agents or groups to step out of their silence and to produce a defensive discourse of orthodoxy’ (Thompson, 1984:49-50). By late 1980 the

the international aspects of the struggle and commented that the dossier prepared by the Independence Front for submission to the UN Decolonisation Committee was in the process of being translated (*Les Nouvelles*, 25/9/80).
discursive heterodoxy of the independence movement was about to precipitate a
counter move. Speaking at the UN, the anti-independence Melanesian politician
Dick Ukeiwé admitted that one reason for his trip to the UN was to explore what an
appropriate discursive counter might be. Ukeiwé commented:

One mustn’t change the language, but rather find one with an international
dimension and not only a local or regional one, because New Caledonia is
also part of the international order. I have to speak a language that is
appropriate to the place that New Caledonia should occupy in the
international rung. This trip enabled me to better assess and to advance
suggestions. But firstly, one must be vigilant and conserve (Les Nouvelles,
8/12/80).

We might speculate that Ukeiwé’s dispositions as a Melanesian made him more
sensitive to the lure of the historical discourse of ‘the people’ and that he, therefore,
sought in his visit a means to appropriate and incorporate aspects of the
internationalist discourse into the orthodox position. Certainly, from this time
onwards, the existing discourses of ‘the people’ began to mutate.

Within the anti-independence movement, the response revolved in part around an
articulation of ‘the people’ as those who opposed independence and did so most
vociferously. In 1982, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Institutions,
formed just prior to the formation of the alliance between the FI and the centrist
FNSC which was to bring the independence movement into government, published
a full-page notice in Les Nouvelles which ominously declared that: ‘the Caledonian
people is ready to show its determination’ (Les Nouvelles, 8/6/82). The text sets up
some equivalences and juxtapositions which assist in deciphering who ‘the people’
are. They exist in juxtaposition to ‘those in administrative and political offices’ who
are deciding the future of ‘the people’ which, in this context, presumably meant pro-
independence and centrist politicians. ‘The people’ included ‘Caledonians’ and,
more specifically, ‘those who work and pay taxes’, the inference being that ‘the
people’ was primarily white. As in the UC’s original usage, ‘the people’ in this
discourse was linked to a political program, but it was no longer that of the assault
on privilege but rather the opposition to independence. This articulation was most
clearly expressed in a full-page RPCR notice published in Les Nouvelles prior to the
visit of the French Secretary for Overseas Territories, Georges Lemoine, in May
1983. Calling for a large show of force at the demonstration planned for the day of
Lemoine’s arrival, the advertisement stated that the demonstration will show the
government once more ‘the determination of the Caledonian people in their entirety to oppose every possibility of independence or separatism’ (Les Nouvelles, 14/5/83). These articulations present ‘the people’ as already constituted; a latent force about to reveal its existence. In both instances, ‘the people’ is associated with either an impending or planned demonstration and this is an association which is not coincidental, for it was in the very act of the demonstration that this new articulation of ‘the people’ was being constituted. Bourdieu describes the ‘dialectic of manifestation or demonstration’ as a forceful means through which a hitherto subjective group becomes objectified and officialised:

...officialisation finds its fulfilment in demonstration, the typically magical (which does not mean ineffectual) act through which the practical group...makes itself visible and manifest, for other groups and for itself, and attests to its existence as a group that is known and recognised, laying a claim to institutionalisation (Bourdieu, 1991:224, italics in the original).

Bourdieu’s argument might provide an insight into Les Nouvelles’ obsession with publicising the numbers at anti-independence demonstrations and comparing these with the much smaller numbers at pro-independence demonstrations. At one level, this was a means to show the majority status of the anti-independence movement and therefore its legitimacy within the dominant republican discourse. However, what Les Nouvelles was also doing was officialising this discourse and in so doing constituting this version of ‘the people’.

In the face of these increasingly polarised discourses of ‘the people’, the centrist FNSC articulated an alternative discourse which presented the existence of two ‘peoples’, the ‘Canaque people’ and the ‘Caledonian people’ (Les Nouvelles, 12/1/83). This discourse suggested a dual historical legitimacy. That of the ‘Canaque people’ was perhaps more distant, but the ‘Caledonian people’ also had a history which dated from the beginnings of white colonisation. In the face of the seemingly exclusionary discourse of ‘the people’ articulated by the independence movement, the issue of the political legitimacy of the settler population, particularly those whose ancestors were born in New Caledonia, took on particular saliency at round-table discussions which took place in July 1983 between the major political groupings in the territory at Nainville-les-Roches in France. The official documentation from the meeting recognised the Kanaks’ ‘innate and active right to independence’ but also recognised the rights of settler groups with generational ties
to the territory. A new articulation of ‘the people’ was sketched in this document, the preamble to which stated: ‘In order to start the process of self-determination, we have to draw up a specific, decisive and evolving internal autonomy statute. But the process of self-determination will be the act of the Caledonian people in their entirety’ (Les Nouvelles, 11/7/83).

This articulation skillfully attempted a type of rapprochement between the internationalist discourse of ‘the people’ and the reformist discourse proposed by the UC almost 30 years earlier. The association of the term ‘self-determination’ with that of ‘the people’ evoked the elements of the UN resolution. The choice of the term ‘self-determination’ rather than the hitherto much advocated ‘referendum’ by anti-independence groups was crucial to this possibility of rapprochement. There was some ambiguity concerning precisely who this category of ‘the people in their entirety’ would include. The document referred to a new category, ‘victims of history’, to describe the white settler population with generational roots in the territory, and the documentation suggested that these people should rightfully be included in this conceptualisation of ‘the people’. But no precise demarcation was established between ‘victims of history’ and those Caledonians of European background who were not ‘victims’. The ratification of the document by the UC representatives at the meeting generated a great deal of opposition within the FLNKS (see Henningham, 1992:74) precisely because of the opening it afforded to this new conceptualisation of ‘the people’. The participation of ‘the people’ thus articulated in a referendum on independence was likely to lead to defeat for the pro-independence position. But the mobilisation of the term ‘self-determination’ and its marrying with a more inclusive definition of ‘the people’ was not alien to the interpretive repertoires of the UC, as we have seen. It is in this sense that the text of the meeting might be seen to be a very skilful attempt at appropriating the more radical internationalist discourse of ‘the people’ to more conservative ends.

Les Nouvelles took offence at this interpretive repertoire linking ‘the people’ with an electoral process which drew its interpretive sustenance from the republican ideals articulated during the French Revolution. For Les Nouvelles, the argument that self-determination would be ‘a matter for the Caledonian people’: ‘gives us the vague impression that we are already considered by the socialists as forming a people, in other words, not fully French citizens. It is a rather unpleasant impression, to tell
the truth’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 26/11/83). Here *Les Nouvelles* points to the ultimate peril for the anti-independence movement of contesting the terrain around the discursive construct of ‘the people’. No matter how inclusively or exclusively ‘the people’ was articulated in the context of New Caledonian politics, the concept still contained the residual signification of an organic entity which was different. This difference, I have argued, reflected the ambivalence of the colonial circumstances of New Caledonia and was therefore quite functional politically in the period prior to demands for independence. With the heightened political struggle, the discursive accentuation of difference became politically dangerous. Anti-independence leaders abandoned the term. In 1987, conservative French politician François Leotard addressing a rally in Noumea, declared to the crowd that ‘you are the most beautiful part of the French people’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 15/7/87). The term ‘community’ instead came to the fore, most notably in Mitterrand’s one-day visit to the territory in January 1985 (see *Les Nouvelles*, 22/1/85), to which one pro-independence leader cited in *Les Nouvelles* replied:

the Canaque [sic] people is the indigenous people of this country and therefore not a community like the others living in this country. There are communities of diverse ethnic origins, Wallisians, Europeans, Tahitians, and there is the Canaque people (*Les Nouvelles*, 22/1/85).

The abandonment of ‘the people’ to the pro-independence movement allowed anti-independence politicians to argue with greater rhetorical force that the notion of the ‘Kanak people’ distinguishable from all other ethnic groups or communities, and with a sole right to self-determination, was a racist conceptualisation of what Ukeiwé now referred to as the ‘extraordinary human mosaic’ of New Caledonian society (*Les Nouvelles*, 26/1/85). The evidence of the efficacy of this new discursive approach was the attempt within the pro-independence movement to articulate a new, more inclusive conceptualisation of the ‘Kanak people’. In the face of intensifying accusations of racism, the moderate political group Liberation Kanak Socialist (LKS) sought to give the term a ‘modern meaning’, ‘that of nationality and not ethnic group’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 11/12/86). The ‘Kanak people’ would be those who agree to live as citizens in an independent Kanaky, no matter what their racial origin. This attempt to articulate ‘the people’ as a future category of nationality appears to have lain fallow in the face of an ever increasing polarisation. The rhetorical strategy employed by anti-independence politicians shifted from one of attempting to appropriate ‘the people’ to one of challenging the historical and racial foundations
upon which the category of the ‘Kanak people’ was based. A large part of this work was done by Henri Perron, Les Nouvelles’ editor-in-chief who took over from Ventrillon after the purchase of the paper by the Hersant group. In an editorial in March 1987, Perron questioned the status of Melanesians as the ‘first occupants’ of the land, arguing that others had preceded them (‘A Vrai Dire’, 14/3/87; see also 10/9/87). In his editorials, Perron sought to reinvigorate the discourse of pluri-ethnicity as a counter to the claims of the ‘Kanak people’. There is a stark coherence in his writing around the conceptualisation of the ‘Kanak people’ as an ethnic group bonded to other ethnic groups by a strong sense of fraternity. In his discussion of a series of weekend sporting events, Perron laments that:

...those who cry from the roofs against French Caledonia; those who want the world to believe that Whites exploit Melanesians, that the tribes are confined to their reserves at gun point...they would have seen a white, black and yellow people, their hearts beating as one at the exploits of the heroes of the day. They would have seen a pluri-ethnic or multi-racial crowd play, run, dance, sing, share a meal of friendship, commune better in an immense leap of joy and fraternity (AVD, 2/5/87).

The metaphor of childhood friendship was also used to connote the depth of fraternity and pluri-ethnic tolerance which prevailed in New Caledonia. A front-page photo published in November 1987 showed two small girls, one presumably Melanesian and the other blond haired, sharing a bottle of drink with the caption ‘Childhood fraternity’. The photo is highly evocative of the 1908 Methodist mission postcard, discussed by Thomas (1994:130-1), entitled ‘A Study in Black and White’, which depicts a blond girl standing hand-in-hand with two black boys. The black boys are wearing only loin cloths while the girl is dressed in a frock and hat, but all are bare footed. In the Les Nouvelles’ photo, both girls are wearing ‘mission-dresses’, mostly worn by Melanesian women, which strengthens the connotation that contemporary fraternity has reached new heights of hybridity resulting from considerable cultural interaction and borrowing, and could no longer be viewed as a political phenomenon which imposes dominant social and cultural codes.

The rhetorical strategy of questioning the historical justification for the notion of the ‘Kanak people’ was accompanied by a strategy of questioning its racial coherence. Pons argued that Caledonians ‘form only a single community. The Kanak people don’t exist. There are only mixed-race’ (cited in Barbançon, 1992:113), adding that: ‘I am myself mixed-race and proud to be so’ (Les Nouvelles, 7/10/87). With no
historical or racial legitimacy, the ‘Kanak people’ constituted a non-identity within this discourse of ‘pluri-ethnic fraternity’. In effect, they no longer even constituted an ethnic group, for, as Balibar has argued, the presumption of some form of racial cohesion is usually required to establish ethnicity (Balibar, 1991:99-100).

**Being Caledonian in Caledonia**

The discursive construct of ‘the people’ in New Caledonia was a subjectivity with clear political origins and contemporary political efficacy. But it was also an avoidable subjectivity; those designated as ‘the people’ could be named in other terms, probably the most obvious of which was the term ‘Caledonian’. Being ‘Caledonian’ was also a political construct, deriving from the events of European discovery and colonisation, but its functionality as a general descriptive term for those living in New Caledonia rendered it less avoidable. The commonsense assumption that the subjectivity of ‘Caledonian’ would be less political and therefore less contested than, say, that of ‘the people’ was belied by the media discourses surrounding independence in *Les Nouvelles*. The discourse of being ‘Caledonian’ was a highly contested terrain with discursive strategies similar to those used in relation to ‘the people’. The frontiers of inclusion and exclusion shifted according to the perceived interests of the various agents articulating the subjectivity and the relations of force in the political field at any time. But, because anti-independence groups felt constrained to employ the term, a new logic of representation emerged. Once the terrain became muddied by contested representations, discursive energy went into articulating a new subjectivity, that of the ‘true Caledonian’. The geographical correlate of this ‘true Caledonian’ was an imaginary space described as the ‘true’ or ‘profound’ Caledonia. *Les Nouvelles* engaged actively in this articulation of the ‘true’ and therefore lent authority to the range of exclusions which this articulation implied.

The discourses in *Les Nouvelles* in the early 1980s suggest that there were at least three articulations of ‘Caledonian’ in circulation at the time. The first, most frequently advanced by those of European origin, juxtaposed ‘Caledonian’ with ‘Melanesian’. However, a letter published in *Les Nouvelles* in 1980 from a ‘Melanesian’ distinguished between ‘Caledonians’ and ‘Europeans’, suggesting that
the term ‘Caledonian’ among certain Melanesians designated the indigenous inhabitants of the territory (11/9/80). A third articulation advanced an inclusive definition of ‘Caledonian’ as in ‘All Caledonians, white and black’ (9/1/82), ‘the Caledonian population in its entirety’ and ‘half the Caledonians against the other half’ (8/6/82). This articulation was most frequently advanced by anti-independence politicians in formal contexts such as communiques and speeches; that is, in situations where discourses are most likely to be consciously governed by strategic considerations. It was also frequently advanced by the centrist FNSC which was dominated by politicians of European origin. The prevalence, however, of articulations which juxtaposed ‘Caledonian’ with ‘Melanesian’ brings into question the extent to which this inclusive definition was in general usage among the European population.

The very presence of these competing discourses of ‘Caledonian’ suggests that there is no certainty that the term, when used as it frequently was in isolation from other subject positions or discursive clues, included Melanesians. Indeed, the manner in which the discourse was most frequently incorporated in the text suggested that ‘Caledonian’ equated with being non-Melanesian. For example, in his speech to the large crowd at an anti-independence rally, RPCR Counsellor Justin Guillemard commented that a television interview with Tjibaou ‘goes without saying, and every Caledonian now knows what’s awaiting them’, and then paid homage to ‘the courage and determination of our Melanesian brothers who fight at our sides’, concluding with: ‘Caledonians we were born, Caledonians we are by heart or adoption, Caledonians we will stay, Caledonians we will die, so that every Caledonian may live in Caledonia’ (Les Nouvelles, 28/6/82).

This discourse is at best ambiguous, but it and many other passages suggest that, historically, Melanesians did not rightfully claim a place as ‘Caledonians’ in the discourses of Europeans. This exclusion was increasingly problematic within the anti-independence movement as Melanesians became more prominent within it. Anti-independence political groups successfully advanced Melanesian candidates for election in an attempt to counter accusations that their opposition to independence was racist. They argued repeatedly that the struggle over independence was not between black and white but rather between those for and against France. Les Nouvelles assisted the anti-independence movement to
acquire significant symbolic capital from the presence of Melanesians in their ranks by photographing Melanesians at the front of rallies, meeting the Minister et cetera and by describing their activities in heroic terms. This political strategy of privileging the position of Melanesians within the anti-independence movement necessitated a new articulation of ‘Caledonian’ which incorporated Melanesians. Thus, Ukeiwé referred to ‘Caledonians of all origins’ (19/5/83) and others, wishing to refer to the white population used ‘European Caledonian’ which suggested the category ‘Melanesian Caledonian’ (9/1/85). But the possibility that pro-independence activists could be called ‘Melanesian Caledonians’, a possibility which was contested by the anti-independence movement, spurred new articulations. The communique of one far-right group referred to ‘French Caledonians, victims of their courage’ (22/4/85) which equated ‘Caledonian’ with a political position against independence, and Ukeiwé referred to ‘Caledonians in favour of France’ (26/1/85). As the political struggle escalated, local anti-independence politicians and Les Nouvelles sharpened the focus on this articulation by simply referring to ‘Caledonian’ as those against independence. The Mayor of Noumea and former RPCR deputy Roger Laroque declared that the ‘Caledonian population is exasperated’ at the state of insurrection in the territory (12/1/85).

Following the change in ownership at Les Nouvelles, the paper advanced this articulation in some key articles. One senior journalist, Marie-Laure Bernard, wrote from Paris on the results of the 1987 referendum on independence: ‘But yes, do Caledonians know what they want? They proved it again in a dazzling manner in front of the world last 13 September. THEY WANT TO STAY IN THE FRENCH UNION’ (23/11/87). This ‘Caledonian’ identity was therefore expressed through the process of lodging a vote ‘for France’.

The ‘true Caledonian’ and the ‘profound Caledonia’

One of the central and most compelling aspects of Foucault’s work is his detailed analysis of the historical, social, economic and ultimately discursive practices through which effects of truth are produced. Foucault is, as Rabinow argues, ‘highly suspicious of claims to universal truths’ (1991:4). According to Foucault:

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7 For example, a march ostensibly organised by anti-independence Melanesians in May 1983 resulted in the following front-page headlines in Les Nouvelles: ‘Melanesians have responded to the
truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced by multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power (Foucault in Wetherell and Potter, 1992:68).

Foucault explores the means through which effects of truth are produced in a range of academic and professional discourses and their subsequent implications for the manner in which populations and individuals are subjectified. For Foucault, the complex work behind effects of truth is masked by the seeming naturalness of the discourse, its taken-for-grantedness. Although there are fundamental epistemological, and consequently methodological, differences between Foucault’s work and Gramsci’s, Foucault’s notion of the ‘effects of truth’ and Gramsci’s notions of hegemony and common sense relate to similar phenomena. Under a state of hegemony, a seemingly natural but nonetheless constructed common sense prevails, but Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is far more open to contestation and is therefore far more provisional than Foucault’s effects of truth.  

The political instability in New Caledonia during the 1980s, reflected in the discursive struggle over key subjectivities, could be described in Gramscian terms as a struggle over ‘ideological hegemony’. The struggle was to produce an effect of truth over who could rightfully constitute ‘the people’, ‘Caledonians’ and ‘Melanesians’. The elusiveness of any consensual reading is apparent in the material which we have studied. But the will to lay claim to the ‘true’ was nonetheless apparent. What is interesting is the manner in which anti-independence politicians and Les Nouvelles, in the face of this crisis of hegemony, invested discursive effort in articulating a discourse of the ‘true’. From October 1984 onwards, the geographical imaginary of the ‘profound’, the ‘true’ and the ‘real Caledonia’ featured in anti-independence discourses and with it the emergence of a new subject, the ‘true Caledonian’.

*indépendantistes*; DECLARE THEMSELVES FRENCH; they had the courage to descend into the streets to say it’ (9/5/83).

It might be argued that Foucault’s effects of truth constitute more enduring discursive phenomena whereas Gramsci’s common sense concerns shifts of meaning within a prevailing truth. For example, debates in New Caledonia questioned, as we have seen, who should participate in the political process and to a certain extent what this political process should be, but the fundamental ‘truth’ of the inevitability of incorporation into a historically constituted world system as an entity which corresponded with certain geographical boundaries, and as ‘citizens’, was never challenged.
The discourse of the ‘true Caledonian’ in the ‘true Caledonia’ is much more nuanced than that of ‘Caledonian’ in that it does not reduce these categories merely to political or ethnic characteristics but rather deals more fully with sociological phenomena. The ‘true Caledonia’ is a type of landscape with a type of people which, together, produce a type of political orientation. The distancing of politics from the ‘true’ resonated with earlier interpretive repertoires based on libertarian notions of freedom as freedom from the state. These were expressed, as we have seen, in feelings of hostility towards Metropolitan and local politicians and politics. But we might speculate that the potential ideological effect of this articulation of the ‘true’ was to circumvent the feelings of alienation from the political process which the escalation of political conflict and the rarefaction of political discourse was engendering. People can identify more readily with people and places than they can with political debate. That these people and places engendered a political position was a ‘natural’ outcome of the types of characteristics which they displayed. This discourse of the true, which stressed social dimensions, also suggested modes of social interaction.

In September 1987, less than two weeks prior to the 13 September referendum, *Les Nouvelles* published a front-page photo of a New Caledonian landscape (Figure 4.1). An accompanying heading read, ‘The Caledonian serenity’ (4/9/87). It was a photo of a stretch of flat land with a mountain rising in the background and in the foreground a man surrounded by chooks, a deer and a dog. The caption indicated that this photo was taken at the property of the retired couple George Weiss and his wife near Koumac towards the centre of the main island of New Caledonia. It commented on the peacefulness and harmony of the scene, which, it suggested, reflected ‘la Calédonie profonde’. Moreover, the caption suggested that stumbling on such a serene scene had surprised the photographer. What does this photo tell us of ‘la Calédonie profonde’?

It is firstly a domesticated and a colonial scene. The land is cleared and the deer, which is not a native species but which has been imported since colonisation, grazes in its domesticated state. These marked traces of colonial conquest are presented as natural. Marie-Louise Pratt, in her work on travel writing, discusses
Figure 4.1: Les Nouvelles, 4/9/87
the frequency of the panorama in this genre of writing and suggests that ‘the fantasy of dominance ... [is] commonly built into this stance’. (Pratt quoted in Mills, 1991:78). Mills comments that this stance ‘recalls Foucault’s work on the panopticon’ (Mills, ibid), which Foucault considered the ultimate mechanism of control in its ability to allow one person to control the activity and behaviour of many. The ‘fantasy of dominance’ may also be seen to be inscribed in this scene of *la Calédonie profonde* which depicts the type of unfettered harmony which only complete domination can engender. The surprise occurrence of capturing this scene, referred to by the caption writer, enhances its naturalness by suggesting that it is pervasive. It is there to be had, but at the same time its pervasiveness is insufficiently noticed, precisely because it is so unremarkable, so natural.\(^9\) Pratt argues that the task of colonial discourse is to:

> incorporate a particular reality into a series of interlocking information orders - aesthetic, geographic, mineralogical, botanical, agricultural, economic, ecological, ethnographic, and so on. To the extent that it strives to efface itself, the invisible eye/I strives to make these informational orders natural, to find them there uncommanded, rather than assert them as the products/ producers of European knowledges or disciplines (Pratt quoted in Mills, 1991:79).

This particular ‘reality’ was also incorporated in the manner in which the inhabitants of this ‘profound Caledonia’ are described. In 1984, an article reported on Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories George Lemoine’s visit to a small remote farm in the mountains. An old woman of European descent, whose husband had died, lived on the farm with her two sons. They lived a poor subsistence lifestyle but professed to be happy. Lemoine was quoted as saying that ‘Caledonia, it’s this house, this old woman who had two children with a canaque’ (20/10/84). The simplicity and harmony evoked by this description were echoed in the accompanying photo. The family was not only in harmony with their physical environment but also with their sociological one, reflected in the fact that the woman had had ‘two children with a canaque’. The dream of ‘pluri-ethnic’ harmony was as implicit to this conception of *la Calédonie profonde* as was the dominance and domestication of the land, as is evident in Melanesian Senator Maurice Nénou’s profession to be ‘the voice of the true Caledonia, of this pluri-ethnic Caledonia about

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\(^9\) This notion that the scene is ‘there to be had’ is evocative of the conceptualisation of the *fait divers* in *Les Nouvelles*. Like the *la Calédonie profonde*, the *fait divers* exists in a realm of objective reality which is largely divorced from human engagement in its manufacture.
which some still think that two communities oppose each other’ (16/4/87). The articulation of the ‘true’ as solid, constant, reflective and unemotional recurs in this discourse. Ukeiwé, outlining his plan for the establishment of new political regions for the territory in the Territorial Assembly, described his propositions as ‘the echo that la Calédonie profonde sends to the incantations of the indépendantistes’ (27/3/85). Henri Perron, writing in his editorial column on Mitterrand’s opposition to the Chirac government’s policies towards New Caledonia, commented that ‘the true Caledonians showed no emotion, no animosity, no surprise either. Their opinion on the ideological colour of the host of the Elysée was established a long time ago’ (21/2/87). Violence also played no part in this description of the true Caledonia. Lafleur described Caledonia as a ‘common good’ and added that ‘we haven’t the right, neither this group nor that, to force ourself upon it by violence’ (30/4/88).

As Wetherell and Potter argue, the depiction of society as organic, such as occurs in the ‘profound’ or ‘true’ Caledonia, initially appears to present this society as curiously weightless and unenergised. But organic society is given force precisely because it signifies normativeness, continuity, stability, cohesion and orderliness. They discuss the manner in which these lay articulations of the social and processes of social influence correspond with dominant theories in sociology which depict society as an organic whole, united around shared values. The ascription of normativeness to this articulation of the social renders this society full of latent power. In their analysis of the discourses of Pakeha New Zealanders’ discourses on race relations, Wetherell and Potter argue that through this articulation: ‘an ideological trick is accomplished. Pakeha New Zealanders become inactive but legitimate, their power invisible and normative, while Maori groups become active and visibly energetic but, simultaneously, deviant’ (Wetherell and Potter, 1991:159). Those groups who disrupt the social order by producing ‘disintegrative tendencies’ are considered dysfunctional and the product of inadequate socialisation. They are therefore pathological; they have no rightful role to play in a healthy social or psychological order (ibid:158-161).

Adequate socialisation occurs through the process of assimilation which is inherent to the notion of pluri-ethnicity. Any claim to difference or separateness, and any rejection of the concept of pluri-ethnicity, earns within this conceptualisation the tag of deviancy and pathology. The ‘true Caledonia’ articulates a powerful schemata
from which all those who profess difference can be excluded. And, because their
difference confers not only social but psychological dysfunction, they can in some
senses be treated as less than human, as the following section seeks to illustrate.

**Indépendantistes, Melanesians and Kanaks**

The articulation of ‘Caledonians’ as those against independence raises the question
of how those who were not ‘Caledonians’ were categorised and described. It is
interesting to note that the discourses of anti-independence politicians published in
*Les Nouvelles* contain few references to pro-independence groups. The strategies
of discursive exclusion described above meant that there was little need, and
therefore little attempt, to officialise the Other. Where a reference could not be
avoided, it was usually made to the FLNKS. The author of the ‘Billet de l’Affreux
Jojo’ even uses the term ‘an FLNKS’ to describe an unknown pro-independence
activist rather than the term used more frequently in the paper of ‘*indépendantistes*’
(18/9/85). One implication of this categorisation was to stress the political nature of
opposition and therefore to suggest a lack of popular support. ‘*Indépendantistes*’
suggests a subjectivity whose very existence is viscerally tied to the fight for
independence. In contrast, ‘an FLNKS’ expresses a subjectivity moulded by a
political group rather than a program, and suggests that the deepest conviction of
those thus designated was towards the party rather than the ideas which the party
professed to represent.

Anti-independence politicians, and *Les Nouvelles*, developed a rich vocabulary of
deviancy to describe these FLNKS activists. In 1988, just prior to the Ouvéa crisis,
Lafleur posed the rhetorical question, ‘Who’s threatening whom?’, and replied: ‘It is
the revolutionaries, the terrorists, the struggle committees who refuse democracy’
declared that the trouble was being caused by ‘a band of mafiosos’ and added in an
extremely provocative and threatening manner: ‘what we are going to start is the
big cleansing. We’ve got it in for some people, notably the crooks. We’ve got a
surprise waiting for them, the chef’s surprise’ (20/4/88).

Articles and editorials written by *Les Nouvelles*’ journalists often used terminology
which was potentially less ideologically charged. The most frequently used
category was that of ‘indépendantistes’, but, as we have seen, the paper was not shy in drawing on the vocabulary of deviancy itself. Prior to 1984, the paper occasionally used the term ‘Melanesian’ to signify pro-independence activists, such as when it commented that the gendarmes had found the ‘Melanesians’ in Temala particularly aggressive (Les Nouvelles, 13/5/83). This mobilisation of ‘Melanesian’ to signify pro-independence activists was to become particularly contentious as the political struggle intensified and anti-independence Melanesians mobilised their symbolic power in the political field. A juxtaposition began to be established between ‘Melanesians’ and ‘indépendantistes’. During Georges Lemoine’s April 1984 visit to the interior of the main island, the front page headlines declared: ‘He wanted to find Melanesians; he found indépendantistes’, in reference to the cool reception which Lemoine received in pro-independence tribes (5/4/84). Corresponding with this juxtaposition there later emerged a geographical divide between what Les Nouvelles described as ‘the “good” and the “bad” side’ of the main island (6/5/88). At times ‘Kanak’ was juxtaposed with ‘Melanesian’, but the symbolic capital acquired through the deployment of the term by pro-independence activists was apparent in the paper’s general avoidance of it. Where this was not possible, as, for example, when quoting from a pro-independence leader’s comments on ‘Kanak independence’ at a press conference, the term was most frequently rendered as ‘Canaque’.10 There were even some attempts to appropriate ‘Canaque’ as an anti-independence subjectivity, perhaps best exemplified in Henri Perron’s description of ‘true Canaques’ as those who attended an anti-independence rally prior to the September 1987 referendum (12/9/87). ‘Kanaks’ were, however, implicitly present in anti-independence media discourse through the emergence during the mid-1980s of the term ‘non-Kanak’ to designate the immigrant population in the territory (see for example, 7/1/85; 6/10/86). This was a direct borrowing from pro-independence discourse and was probably adopted for its descriptive economy. However, it lent authority to the pro-independence discourse on the uniqueness of the Kanak presence which derived from the status of Kanaks as prior occupants of the territory, and which conferred on Kanaks special rights. The use of ‘non-Kanaks’ therefore constituted a significant opening to pro-independence discourse and an indication of the efficacy of the movement’s discursive strategies.

10 This led to some deft pieces of journalism with the terms ‘Melanesian’, ‘Canaque’ and ‘Kanak’ appearing in the same article depending on who and where the original deployment of the term came from.
The rhetorical strategies used to juxtapose ‘Melanesian’ with ‘indépendantistes’ or ‘Kanak’ sought to diminish the significance of the latter rather than compromise the former. Lafleur argued that the number of FLNKS activists was in fact very small and that the 1984 FLNKS boycott of the territorial elections deterred only 10 per cent of the population (20/11/84). A good indication of the rhetorical borrowings between RPCR politicians and journalists at Les Nouvelles was the manner in which this argument was subsequently fleshed out in an editorial in which it was argued that the FLNKS represented only 12 per cent of the total population, or about 25 per cent of the Melanesian population (21/12/84). Lafleur argued that the worst of the problems was the work of no more than 1,200 ‘troublemakers’ (21/11/84) egged on by outside ‘agitators and manipulators’ (24/2/88); Europeans ‘of the petty left-wing intellectual style dreaming of mythical revolutions’ (19/10/84). The FLNKS was presented as duplicitous, incompetent and corrupt. Writing from Paris on a television debate between representatives of the RPCR and the FLNKS, Sylvie Collin commented that viewers:

could appreciate the will to dialogue of one group, the discouraging intransigence and evasiveness of the other. Again and again, the RPCR delegates had to intervene in order to re-establish the truth, passed through the double canaque and socialist mincer (10/4/87).

The ‘double language’ of FLNKS leaders (3/8/87; 13/5/88) was contrasted with the ‘simple answers’ from DOM-TOM Minister Bernard Pons to the ‘simple questions’ put to him at a press conference (4/2/87). The dysfunction of the FLNKS was, according to Desjardins, apparent in ‘their incompetence, their nice cars, their popular kanaque schools and their economic and social fiascos’ (5/9/87). In contrast to the ‘true face of Caledonia’, which the paper argued was evident at a large anti-independence rally (10/9/87), the ‘true face’ of the FLNKS was evident in its reprisals against those who voted against independence in the September 1987 referendum (16/9/87) which included, according to Les Nouvelles, the beating up of a handicapped person for having voted in the referendum (25/9/87).

This discourse on the extremism and deviancy of the FLNKS led to the emergence of a further juxtaposition which came to the fore at key electoral moments. This contrasted the socially and psychologically dysfunctional ‘Kanak activist’ with the reasonable, well-adjusted ‘Melanesian’. This discourse on the ‘good Melanesian’ is
fascinating in pointing to the limits of Les Nouvelles’ ability to affirm a positive Melanesian identity. Journalists’ construction of such an identity drew on interpretive resources which could nonetheless be considered deeply offensive by many Melanesians. Moreover, women figure prominently in this discourse of the ‘good Melanesian’, in contrast to the dearth of representations of women in the political discourses of Les Nouvelles in general.

**The good Melanesian**

On the day prior to the 1984 territorial election, Les Nouvelles sought to distinguish between ‘types’ of Melanesians, certain of which:

rest attached to peaceful wisdom, others, disturbed by access to the modern world, allow themselves to be fascinated by egalitarian myths or Marxist claims. Still others refuse to abandon their right to vote, so preciously obtained after the war, and even the women dare interfere, sometimes saying that the men would do better to fight against alcoholism than to lose themselves in politics (17/11/84).

We can speculate that the strategy behind this more politically inclusive articulation of ‘Melanesian’ was to avoid alienation from Melanesian readers who could take umbrage at any implication that their political views rendered them in some way ‘non-Melanesian’. For most of the following two years, this politically inclusive articulation of ‘Melanesian’ was, as we have seen, not encouraged. Its re-emergence in 1987 corresponded with the movement towards the September referendum on independence and the 1988 parliamentary and presidential elections.

In early 1987 anti-independence politicians attempted to establish a distinction between ‘extremist’ leaders and those who had followed them during the thick of the insurrection in late 1984 and early 1985; a distinction which hinged on the notion of these followers as victims. Pons advised one group of Melanesians from Lifou:

Don’t allow yourselves to be misled and misused any longer. If a certain number of your brothers, among the most extremist, tried to lead you along a dangerous path, it is because they were intoxicated by Europeans who came to the Territory, members of the Revolutionary Communist League, animated by a Marxist idea, who wanted to impose an implacable dictatorship on your Territory...So I am calling you: in the coming weeks and months before the self-determination referendum, go forth, in all the Lifou tribes, preach the
good word, turn towards your brothers and sisters who were abused and say to them, you must wake up, open your eyes. You must come back to ground (9/2/87).

The vivid biblical tropes add force to the suggestion in this passage that those who had strayed could be redeemed. Some, however, were beyond redemption. The type of surreal deviancy attributed to these people, and evident in the following description of one activist, set them apart from other Melanesians, even those who had participated in insurrectionary activities. It was still possible to redeem these latter Melanesians. Following a violent clash between FLNKS activists and gendarmes over the site of a future hospital at Tieti near Poindimié, Les Nouvelles commented on those ostensibly responsible:

But one thing is certain: we are in the presence of individuals ready for anything. The group seems to be under the authority of Camille Maperi, 34 years old, a violent individual without scruples, implicated in several cases of theft, rape, attacks, as well as in several cases of shooting on the forces of order and probably in several other affairs. This person seems never to separate from his weapon, which makes him doubly dangerous. He showed this weekend that he doesn’t hesitate in using it (14/3/88).

Les Nouvelles argued that those whom the FLNKS claimed to represent were fed up with such deviancy, a fact demonstrated by the inability of the movement to mobilise its supporters. Referring to one rally the paper argued that: ‘The movement didn’t stir up the expected masses. Because the masses still have in mind the tragic events of 1984-1985 and their share of desolation, misery, suffering and uncertain tomorrows’ (24/8/87). Among those who did attend demonstrations:

visibly, their heart wasn’t in it, neither among the speakers nor the others. Nobody believed any more. The grand days of 1984 -1985 had finished shining, Pisani was no longer there, the forces of order had reassumed the instructions worthy of their function (Les Nouvelles, 18/4/88).

This strategy of distinguishing between activists and less active supporters enabled this latter group to be absolved from blame for their past involvements. Lafleur’s comment on the arrest of an alleged European ‘agitator’, Paul Naud, detained in relation to the violence at Tieti, exemplified this absolution:

11 It is important to note that these arguments derived a certain rhetorical force from broader political developments following the formation of a conservative government in France. The new government withheld funding from the newly created indépendantiste regions and repressive military strategies were pursued within Kanak tribes.
It is, for the whole of the Melanesian community, an insult to think that Melanesians, by themselves, are responsible for the Tieti incidents. If we had put a stop to the actions of such individuals as Mr Naud, and I could cite others, a lot of dramas would have been avoided in New Caledonia (27/2/88).  

This depiction of Melanesians as passive followers, easily led astray by ideologically driven foreign agitators, was, of course, deeply racist. This Melanesian had neither the dignity of the ‘noble savage’ nor the ‘wild man’ (White, 1978). He, or she, was the child of colonialism - dependent, incapable and lost. This infantilisation of the ‘good Melanesian’ gave rise to a prevalence of representations of Melanesian women and girls in this discourse, a collection of which were published in a special supplement to *Les Nouvelles* in November 1987. In these photos, Melanesian women and girls are depicted in a range of festive scenes associated with anti-independence demonstrations, the greeting of conservative French politicians at the airport or, as mentioned earlier, in a series of quasi-intimate scenes with Minister Pons during his visits to anti-independence tribes in the territory. One photo shows Pons seated on the ground surrounded by several Melanesian women, two of whom have an arm around Pons’ shoulders while a third is leaning up against his legs. The prevalence of representations of women in this discourse suggests that such women were considered exemplary ‘good Melanesians’, rendered such by their child-like enthusiasm, spontaneity and adoration. This infantilisation of women evokes one of the central tropes of colonial discourse which Thomas argues was important to both missionary propaganda and French assimilationist policy, but which also had more general application: the infantilisation of indigenous peoples (1994:133-4). The use of representations of women to mobilise this trope was possible because of their general absence in anti-independence media discourses. This absence meant that media images of Melanesian women had escaped the difficult political contestations which had occurred. Women could still constitute a realm of purity, moderation and bonhomie, and could thus, along with children, represent one of the last realms of the ‘good Melanesian’, well reconciled to the assimilationist imaginings of the French colonial project. That such representations were used to lure Melanesian votes by presenting what were considered to be

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12 Barbançon writes that Naud had the misfortune to be a member of the UC and to be white: ‘He was accused of being a traitor to his race and of having pushed the Kanaks to revolt, because they couldn’t admit that the French military had been taken by surprise by young Kanaks. A White brain had necessarily to conceive of this operation’ (1992:78).
positive representations of Melanesians attests to the prevalence of a deeply entrenched colonial mentality among journalists at *Les Nouvelles*. Not only could these images be read as colonising indigenous people, they can also be read as colonising women, thereby illustrating the congruence between dominative relations of power in two realms - the colonial and the sexual - which might hitherto have been considered separate.\(^{13}\)

**The non-existence of Kanaks**

With the appropriation of the category 'Melanesian' to the anti-independence position, the frontiers of exclusion for those who supported independence were pushed to their limits. Within the discourses in *Les Nouvelles*, these people were neither Caledonian nor Melanesian; they could not rightfully constitute themselves as ‘the people’ and had no legitimate place in Caledonia. This exclusion of Kanaks as legitimate human beings constitutes, Alban Bensa argues, a central component of racism in New Caledonia and explains the extremist forms which racism has taken historically and in recent years. Bensa has written that, within the French empire, the colonial phantasm of a complete disappearance of the colonised people was nowhere better embraced than in New Caledonia, and this, he argues, explains the zeal with which the theory of the imminent disappearance of the Kanak people was embraced in the territory (1988:190-1). This theory was: ‘less the product of an irrefutable total inquiry than an ideological extrapolation from sparse observations, treated as proof of the inescapable disappearance of the “inferior races”’ (Bensa, 1988:191). It was nonetheless, he argues, highly influential, for: ‘This ideology of the extinction of Melanesians defined the very particular form which racism took in this French colony, from 1853 to today: a racism of annihilation that only ever envisaged Kanaks as non-beings’ (1988:191).

Bensa’s argument that anti-Kanak racism in New Caledonia in the 1980s renewed the worst of the colonial fantasies of extinction which prevailed in the earliest decades of colonisation is borne out in the discourses on Kanak identity in *Les Nouvelles*. In these discourses Kanaks constituted non-beings in the sense that

\(^{13}\) Thomas has argued of eighteenth century contact between Europeans and indigenous people in the Pacific that perceptions of indigenous women often codified more general perceptions of their culture. His argument suggests that the representations of women in *Les Nouvelles* signified a broader view of Melanesian culture as still open to the possibility of an assimilationist imagining (Thomas, 1994:101-2).
their deviance disaffiliated them from any legitimate human subjectivity. As in the earliest times of colonisation, their status as non-beings authorised some of the worst acts of aggression against them, as exemplified in the Hienghène massacre. But in the 1980s, unlike the nineteenth century, Kanaks were better equipped to counter their discursive exclusion in anti-independence discourse.

What are the ideological effects of this strategy of exclusion?  If ideology is understood as the mobilisation of discourse to sustain or undermine relations of domination, then the exclusion of those who supported independence from any rightful claim to a politically legitimate subjectivity is clearly advantageous to those who sought to sustain existing relations of domination. In disaffiliating the Kanak Other, the discourses on subjectivity in *Les Nouvelles* were constituting those who opposed independence in a position of power as the only rightful subjects of the true Caledonia.

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14 One might ask where the ideological effects of this discourse on the non-existence of Kanaks were most felt, given that *Les Nouvelles* was not widely read within the Kanak community. The evolving interpretive repertoires articulated in *Les Nouvelles* were sustained by other media and therefore formed part of a more general discursive context which would have touched on the lives of many Melanesians, particularly those spending some time in Noumea. Being Melanesian meant negotiating through these various discourses on identity and developing one’s understanding of oneself as a consequence. But the greatest ideological effects were probably felt within the European community, the most avid readers of *Les Nouvelles*. 150
CHAPTER FIVE - EXTREME-RIGHT PUBLICATIONS AND ‘LOYALISM’

During the 1980s, the independence struggle reached into most aspects of public, and one suspects many aspects of private, interaction. In a sense, it became an articulating principle around which many discourses came to be organised. This is evident in the manner in which notions of identity changed. Whereas ‘Caledonian’ had once been an identity with a range of significations, by the mid-1980s, as we have seen, it had become in political and media discourse an expression of political affiliation to the anti-independence movement. Increasingly, people saw their identity as expressed through their stance on independence. This notion of selfhood was the result of considerable discursive effort, engaged in by the territory’s media and political groups, aimed at channelling the readings which people had of their political and social environment, and the events around them, towards some relevance to the question of independence. Thus, for example, the journalistic genre of the fait divers came to have, as we have seen, considerable political significance in ostensibly reinforcing Melanesian deviancy and therefore validating the thesis on the deviancy and corruption of the FLNKS. Perhaps the most extreme representation of visceral identification with the anti-independence struggle was the practice, which began in the mid-1980s, of painting faces and other parts of the body red, white and blue, for anti-independence demonstrations. This practice was officialised with the establishment by the loyalist radio station RRB of a competition for the best ‘costume’ at the September 1987 Rally for Freedom (Les Nouvelles, 10/9/87). Displays of the tricolour had been and remained prolific, but the practice of bodily adornment signified a new level of identification with the struggle over independence.

The rapidity with which the term ‘loyalist’ spread within the anti-independence movement and media from the time of its first usage in early 1985 suggests that this new identity corresponded well with the type of visceral engagement with the independence issue referred to above. To be ‘loyalist’ exemplified an unwavering attachment to France. It was a selfhood that found its ultimate expression in political struggle against independence. But ultimately it was a relatively narrow identity. The identity of ‘Caledonian’, even at the time when it was most closely equated with a stance against independence, always contained the possibility of
other historically produced readings. The ‘loyalist’ identity on the other hand, newly arrived in New Caledonia, seemed to entail far less ambiguity.

In practice, however, the ready usage of the term by the anti-independence media meant that ‘loyalism’ tended to be associated with the interpretive repertoires which these media articulated and developed. In their appropriation of the term, each of the media gave substance to this new identity so that it came to signify much more than a negative reflex to independence.

The emergence of loyalism

The ‘loyalist’ identity was introduced into New Caledonian political discourse during the most acute phase of political struggle in early 1985. The earliest reference I found to it was in a Les Nouvelles article which reported on Melanesian RPCR Senator Dick Ukeiwé’s address to the French Senate in which he referred to the conflict in New Caledonia between ‘loyalists’ and ‘separatists’ (Les Nouvelles, 26/1/85). From this time onwards, the frequency of its appearance in Les Nouvelles increased until, by 1987, following the change in ownership, it was the term almost invariably used to designate those who opposed independence.

However, the most frequent early use of ‘loyalist’ was in the extreme-right publication Combat Calédonien under the editorship of the metropolitan journalist ADG. An early edition of Combat refers to ‘loyalists, called “anti-indépendantistes”’, signalling its preference for the use of the former term (6/3/85). The state-owned broadcasting service RFO also began using the term in 1986 following the conservative victory in the French national elections. Les Nouvelles reported that the Chirac government had prohibited RFO’s use of the term ‘anti-indépendantiste’, demanding instead that ‘loyalist’ be used (Les Nouvelles, 7/5/87).1 This directive also suggests why Les Nouvelles would have used ‘loyalist’ after the 1987 change in ownership which resulted, as we have seen, in a very strong relationship between the paper’s ownership and management, newly arrived from France, and the Chirac government.

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1 Les Nouvelles reported that this information had been part of Socialist senator Melenchon’s speech during the French Senate debate on the 1987 referendum bill. Pons is reported to have responded that the term ‘loyalist’ reflected the reality of the situation in New Caledonia (Les Nouvelles, 7/5/87).
These insights into the introduction of ‘loyalism’ into the New Caledonian media suggest that the term was a metropolitan French import used primarily in publications directed by metropolitan journalists. The absence of ‘loyalism’ in the territory’s media prior to this period attests to the tensions in the relationship between France and the territory which rendered the loyalist signification of servility to the French legal and administrative system somewhat jarring. These tensions did not hold the same significance for someone like ADG, newly arrived from France. They also point to the reasons why Ukeiwé would strategically mobilise this classification in his Senate speech in order to reinforce those sentiments that united New Caledonia with France rather than those that divided them. Finally, the favouring of the notion of loyalism by the new conservative French government was in keeping with its strategy of depicting a more one-dimensional relationship with France aimed at closing the discursive openings arising as a result of the tensions in discourses on relations with France. Conservative Minister for Overseas Territories Bernard Pons argued that the term ‘loyalist’ reflected the reality of the relationship between the two countries (Les Nouvelles, 7/5/87). It was a ‘reality’, as we have seen, which the new conservative government was trying to forge.

Les Nouvelles’ occasional use of the term ‘loyalist’ prior to the change in ownership - and particularly prior to the 1986 defeat of the French Socialist government - accentuated the dilemmatic nature of the paper’s discourses on relations with France.² That Les Nouvelles mobilised this categorisation at all attests to the acuteness of anti-independence sentiment within the journalistic team and a perceived prescience of the term in expressing a depth of sentiment which it was felt other categorisations, such as ‘anti-indépendantiste’ or ‘French Caledonian’, were unable to convey. The dilemmas were partly solved with the election of a conservative government in that it then became easier for conservatives to argue the need for the maintenance of a close political relationship with France. During this period, Les Nouvelles reminded its readers that ‘loyalism’ signified the will to abide by French law, demonstrating that it was aware of the particular signification of ‘loyalism’ which distinguished it from the categories of anti-independence identity hitherto used (Les Nouvelles, 30/8/86). However, loyalism continued to sit uneasily with the lingering expressions of antagonism - or more precisely during this period,

² See Les Nouvelles of 11/2/85, 22/2/85, 10/5/85, 3/8/85 and 5/2/86.
caution - towards the French government. It nonetheless became integrated into the dilemmatic interpretive repertoires of *Les Nouvelles*.

‘Loyalist’ identity and the extreme-right press

*Les Nouvelles’* somewhat hesitant adoption of loyalty prior to 1986 contrasted with its avid usage in *Combat Calédonien*; but the differences in usage went beyond the frequency of appearance. The discourses developed within *Combat* constituted loyalism as a very different identity to that articulated in *Les Nouvelles*. *Combat* did not introduce these discourses to the territory. Many had already been mobilised and developed in *Corail* (Figure 5.1), largely through authors writing for both publications. Indeed, in many senses, *Combat* (Figure 5.2) was a discursive extension of *Corail*. Its loyalism was, in other words, predicated on the discursive contributions of its extreme-right predecessor. For this reason, discussion of the development of a ‘loyalist’ identity also requires consideration of discourses in *Corail*. For example, ADG, Lacourrège, Gilbert Monchanin and Didier Real. In many respects, *Corail* and *Combat Calédonien* might be considered more a continuum than two separate publications. There were certainly differences between the two publications, particularly in their stylistic features. *Corail* maintained more of a pictographic orientation on its colour front page with many editions featuring a bare-breasted young woman. *Corail* adopted more of a magazine format than did *Combat Calédonien*, even though the first years’ editions of *Corail* were in tabloid form. The publication included general information such as classifieds, airport arrivals and departures, tides, cinema programs, a television guide, a horoscope, and a significant number of advertisements from large and small firms. The publication also contained some magazine style articles on health, beauty, fitness et cetera. *Corail* therefore sought to position itself as both a ‘journal of opinion’ and as a leisure publication and appears to have been successful in reaching quite a sizeable audience through this market orientation. An early edition commented that the level of demand for the paper was higher than expected and that the paper stock had been exhausted, necessitating the use of different paper. By September 1983, *Corail* claimed a weekly circulation of 25,000 copies (*Corail*, 16/9/83). *Combat Calédonien* was more a political publication which only reluctantly began to include a couple of magazine-style features as a means to increase circulation following the payment of some fairly hefty defamation damages. One stylistic feature of the paper which distinguished it from *Corail* was its inclusion of political cartoons. A section appearing for the first few months, ‘Press Review…and Dark Designs’ took a quote, usually from either *Les Nouvelles* or RFO, but sometimes from French publications such as *Aspects de la France* and *Le Figaro*, and either depicted or parodied it in a manner in keeping with the interpretive repertoires developed in the publication. For example, a quote from RFO stating that ‘Edgard Pisani had the tall grass in Thio slashed so that the unruly brats (sic) can no longer hide to throw stones at cars’ (to which *Combat Calédonien* added, ‘...and scare the gendarmes’) was accompanied by a cartoon showing four Kanak babies playing in the tall grass with, respectively, a baton, a stick of dynamite, matches and a Molotov cocktail. The baby with the matches is about to light some spilled petrol and has already lit the wick of the molotov cocktail (8/3/85). The paper also included a cartoon strip, ‘Cause toujours...tu m’intéresse’ (a sarcastic rendering of ‘Keep talking....I’m interested’), which satirised current political events. The length of *Combat* was a little less than half that of *Corail* (23 pages compared with 43 pages in the later *Corail*) and its circulation was considerably smaller at around 4,000 copies, reflecting its more dedicated political focus. But, for all these differences, there is a sense in which *Combat Calédonien* could be seen as an extension of *Corail*, particularly in the interpretive repertoires developed in both publications. Their differences were as much a reflection of the evolving political situation as they were an indication of any difference in opinion on what an appropriate publication should be. *Combat*
At one level there were similarities in the discourses developed in *Combat* and *Corail*, and *Les Nouvelles*. *Corail* and *Combat* grounded much of their rhetoric in the type of populist discourse articulated in *Les Nouvelles*. They railed against the policies of the Socialist government in New Caledonia (see for example, *Corail*, 30/7/82), decried the humiliation of gendarmes at the hands of FLNKS militants in Thio and elsewhere (*Combat Calédonien*, 9/8/85), criticised the ineptitude of local politicians (*Corail*, 19/7/82 & 6/8/82), and argued persistently that the FLNKS demand for self-determination was racist and would lead to Europeans being thrown out of the territory (*Corail* 26/3/82 & 3/2/84). But at another level, their discourses were very different. Even in developing discourses which evoked those of *Les Nouvelles*, there were nuances which indicated the existence of a very different set of interpretive resources. For example, *Corail’s* editorial on the creation of Chatenay’s PNC begins with the observation that the ‘Caledonian political world is sliding towards independence’, a point also suggested in *Les Nouvelles*, but then goes on to explain this political turn in New Caledonia as a reaction to the demise of France ‘exacerbated by the aims of a guilt-ridden civilisation’:

In this big game of History’s dupes, the losers are branded. Locked in a despair which the Machiavellian socialist power, marvellously incarnated in its local representative, has played a part in anchoring in their hearts, by making them doubt the will of France, the castaways of confidence hold on to what they consider their last hope. Rotten, it only sustains them for as long as it takes to achieve their fate, which will throw them on the bank where the wrecks of all previous disasters came to die (*Corail*, 5/2/82).

*Calédonien* was more strident and aggressive in tone, but so too was the political climate during the period of its publication in 1985. The tolerance of centrist political views in some early articles in *Corail*, evident for example in an interview with the centrist politician and New Caledonian Senator Lionel Cherrier published in the magazine’s second edition (3/4/80), gave way to uncompromising criticism of attempts to foster a centrist political response later in the year. Just prior to the political realignment which saw the centrist FNSC break its alliance with the RPCR and instead join with the FI, *Corail* opined: ‘For two years now, week after week, *Corail* had denounced, proof at the ready, the criminal actions of the FNSC. For two years now, week after week, *Corail* has denounced the suicidal apathy of the Caledonians who consider the political deals, secret or otherwise, of the FNSC with fraternal and pluri-ethnic Caledonia’s worst enemies - that is to say the racists of the Independence Front - as simple and unimportant ups and downs’ (4/6/82). A year after the realignment of the FNSC with the FI, an article appeared entitled ‘The anniversary of the “grand air” of treason’ which recalled *Corail’s* version of the circumstances of the FNSC-RPCR split (24/6/83). Less than a year later, a series of lengthy and seemingly obsessive articles, entitled ‘The Caledonian sickness’ was published over several weeks describing and discussing these same events, but this time in enormous detail (*Corail*, December 1983 - March 1984).

5 ‘Poor gendarmes, sad alibi of the disorder, abused by a decadent power. From today, justice is no longer in command, it is the brave warriors of socialist and racist Kanaky’ (9/8/85).

6 As an example of highly personalised reporting, *Combat Calédonien* published an article which questioned who a woman was who frequently appeared at the High Commission, using this as an excuse to describe Pisani’s personal history in injurious detail and describe him as ‘Pisani-blue-beard’ (*Combat Calédonien*, 8/3/85).
Similarly, an article entitled, ‘There won’t be any place for Caledonians on the Caillou\(^7\) of independence’ - an unremarkable enough statement in the context of New Caledonian anti-independence politics - concludes somewhat more distinctively, ‘Everyone should know, **thousands of us will be eliminated**’ (Corail, 26/3/82). The use of such strident tropes is a feature of extreme-right discourse, and was one of the characteristics of the interpretive resources employed in Corail and Combat Calédonien which distinguished them from Les Nouvelles.

We are given an insight into other distinguishing features of extreme-right press discourse through Corail’s reference above to ‘History’. Much of Les Nouvelles’ discourses was rhetorically grounded in a notion of ‘rights’, which was exemplified in the stress placed in the paper on the argument that pro-independence demands were racist. For Corail and Combat, on the other hand, the rhetorical grounding of their discourse was in the lessons of history: history became the terrain on which these publications developed their interpretive repertoires and through which they sought to privilege certain readings of local political events.\(^8\)

\(^7\) A local nick-name for New Caledonia is ‘le Caillou’.

\(^8\) The appearance in Corail of historical articles derived in part from Lacourrège’s interest in historical research. Lacourrège published several lengthy historical articles, such as the four part series on the history of the press in New Caledonia and a series of articles on the nineteenth century journalist Henri Rochefort-Lucay, publisher of La Lanterne, the material for which was gathered from the Paris police archives and French period newspapers (see for example, Corail, 16/10/81 & 10/6/83)
Figure 5.1: *Corail*, 18/3/83 (cover)
Figure 5.2: Combat Calédonien, 26/7/85 (cover)
History and grand narrative in Corail and Combat Calédonien

The historical narrative developed in Corail and Combat was seldom presented in any sustained fashion within individual articles although, as we shall see, there were some notable exceptions. Despite its piecemeal introduction, history is nonetheless put to the task of advancing in Corail and Combat a series of discourses on modernity, tradition, capitalism and socialism which favour particular readings of local political events. The most sustained articulations of these discourses appeared in articles written for Corail and Combat by René Blasco, and in contributions to both publications by Gilbert Monchanin who, in an article written ostensibly about Tjibaou, provides perhaps the best illustration of the stunning historical and geographical sweep of the grand narrative developed in these publications.

Monchanin’s article begins by arguing that the media has done much to promote an image of Tjibaou as a charismatic and intelligent leader. However, he reminds his readers that Tjibaou has proclaimed himself not only ‘canaque’, but also ‘socialist’, a reference which precipitates from Monchanin a sweeping historical overview of what he sees as the socialist malaise. He writes:

Let’s leave aside the original socialist doctrine: that which was nationalist, individualist, that demanded respect for hierarchies and natural values. Obviously, this is no longer at issue, having for a century been expelled to History’s oblivion. The Socialism in question is completely different, opposed even. It is internationalist - worldist we’d say. It is egalitarian, ‘massifying’. It is opposed to everything that has for centuries made the greatness of Western civilisations.

This Western civilisation was said to be ‘fashioned by superior beings who climbed well above their like’. For Monchanin, the first of these superior beings was ‘Cromagnon man from whom ‘a universe has been drawn which, rejecting the debilitating, annihilating mass, has projected the genius of individuals enthusiastic to take on progress’.

Socialism becomes, within this schema, the ‘absolute and caricatured antithesis of the Western spirit’:
For risk, enthusiasm, combat, it substitutes aboulic charity - welfare - masked by the deceptive term solidarity...Rather than exalting the individual always in pursuit of an ever bigger dream, it exalts - pitiful choice - burial in this formless, colourless and odourless mass, where all the heads have been planed to the height of the lowest head. The European presence in this country should have been the chance for Canaques, if they had been able, to emulate and overtake, ON THEIR OWN GROUND, those who have created the only planetary civilisation that the world has known (Corail, 20/5/83).

The presentation of a racial hierarchy presided over by European civilisation, and the positioning of ‘Canaques’, along with other indigenous peoples, as demonstrably incapable of emulating this civilisation and, therefore, inferior, provided a stark justification for the maintenance of colonial relations of power in the territory and held the potential to produce significant ideological effects. It also underscored the significance of Combat’s privileging of a ‘loyalist’ identity over other ways of categorising the anti-independence population; for what was important within this narrative - what, in other words, gave continuing justification to the maintenance of colonialism in New Caledonia - was not a claim to be ‘Caledonian’ or to constitute a ‘people’, but to be part of a civilisation. Loyalism expressed this belonging.

The centrality of this presumption of European racial superiority to the discourses developed in Corail and Combat explains another distinguishing feature of these publications. We have seen that much of the struggle over independence in Les Nouvelles was expressed in an acute fluidity of identity. In Corail and Combat, there is an almost total disregard for contesting Melanesian identity. This disregard is reflected in their willing use of the term ‘Canaque’, as in the above quote, and even ‘Kanak’ when referring to anti-independence Melanesians such as Dick Ukeiwé (see, for example, Corail, 5/11/8 & 30/7/82). Such a use of ‘Kanak’ in Les Nouvelles would have been considered highly seditious; its use in Corail was unproblematic because ‘History’ had demonstrated that identity was fixed: indigenous peoples had, within this interpretive schema, demonstrated themselves incapable of attaining the heights of European civilisation, and no change in nomenclature would alter this historically verifiable fact.

This view of racial identity as biologically fixed is evident in the choice of the title Identity for the National Front’s intellectual magazine in France. What this title signifies is not an exploration of the complexities of identity, but rather a will to retain French national identity against the sullying cultural influences of immigrants.
in France (Marcus, 1995: 116-7). In Corail and Combat, it is also evident in the parodying of the pro-independence claim to a ‘Kanak’ identity, spelt with a ‘K’. This was achieved through replacing ‘Cs’ with ‘Ks’ in words used either in reference to the pro-independence struggle, or used by the pro-independence movement. Thus, Corail referred to the ‘Républik de Kanala de Machoro’ (Machoro was from Canala) and to a ‘Konstitution Kanake’ (21/11/81 & 4/2/83), while Combat referred to the ‘Ekoles populaires kanakes’ (8/3/85). One reading of this strategy of substitution is to underscore the fixity of identity, the argument being that no amount of discursive gloss was going to change its basic nature.

**Loyalism, international socialism and Melanesian culture**

This assertion of racial fixity contradicted the effort rendered in Combat to appropriate loyalism to the interpretive repertoires developed in the publication. What is surprising about these repertoires is that they often appeared only tangentially relevant to the issue of independence. Indeed, loyalism seemed to have more to do with an antipathy towards international socialism than a stance on independence.

We are given an insight into the discourse on international socialism by following further Monchanin’s comments on Tjibaou’s advocacy of socialism. Monchanin argued that, in this advocacy, Tjibaou was merely responding ‘to a coherent and evil will that isn’t his own and of which he probably isn’t even conscious ... It is that of those who have doomed the West to destruction’ (20/5/83). This ‘coherent and evil will’ is what Corail and Combat referred to elsewhere as Marxist international subversion (Corail, 8/4/83). It is this subversion, and its expression in demands for indigenous rights, not independence, that emerges as the primary referent of these publications’ critique. As Corail noted, ‘to be “indépendantiste” is a right, but matching this word, which is respectable in itself in spite of its utopian aspect, with the two other adjectives, “kanak” and “socialist”, is to practice both racism and political despotism’ (Corail 10/9/82).

This focus on international socialism rendered political events throughout history and around the world relevant to the New Caledonian situation, but within these publications, and especially in feature articles, there was a relative dearth of
attention to the New Caledonian political situation *per se*. Often the relevance was only referred to in a general introduction to the article while the article itself made no mention of New Caledonia because it had been taken from a French extreme-right publication. For example, one article recalled in considerable detail President De Gaulle’s acts in relinquishing Algeria. *Combat’s* introduction commented that the anniversary of De Gaulle’s return to power on 13 May 1958 was a fitting time to remind younger generations of the acts of this ‘Gaullist impostor’ and reminded readers that Pisani himself had once been a Gaullist (*Combat*, 17/5/85). The relevance of a series of articles published in *Combat* on the experience of political partition in several countries was more obvious, as partition had been mooted as one of Pisani’s possible options in his development of a political strategy for the future of the territory. As the introduction to the series commented: ‘Partition! Ah, the terrible word finally let out. At “Combat Calédonien”, we’ve been thinking about it discreetly for a long time’ (*Combat*, 24/5/85). The series began with the publication over several weeks of extracts from a book written in 1959 by Gaullist Minister Alain Peyrefitte, in which he considered the option of partition for Algeria by examining sympathetically the situation in such countries as Cyprus, French Canada and Switzerland. In one introduction, *Combat* presented partition as a means to both thwart international socialism and save Melanesian society. It was argued that the agents of international socialism - whom the extreme-right describe as the ‘Internationalists’ (the French term is *mondialistes*) - oppose partition because their objective is to impose a ‘planetary unification of the world, the disappearance of countries, nations, cultures, the global uniformity of an international economy under the pretext of free exchange’ (*Combat*, 31/5/85). Partition, therefore, by thwarting international socialism, would enable Melanesian culture to survive. As one FN politician visiting New Caledonia put it: ‘if Melanians were to separate from the French flag, it would be the suppression of their custom and way of living, for there is no custom in the countries of the gulag’ (*Combat Calédonien*, 12/7/85). René Blasco elaborated on this theme in an article on what he termed ‘separate development’ in South Africa which, he argued, was not ‘apartheid’. ‘Separate development’ was more apt in describing the then

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9 The book is called, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie?*

10 *Combat Calédonien’s* introduction to Blasco’s article provided an excellent insight into the breadth of the extreme right’s interpretive ambit: ‘That was expected. It was enough to pronounce the word partition for the cunning echo to respond: apartheid!...When pacifists start serving Muscovite imperialism, when homosexuals say they’re normal, when murderers are no longer sent to the gallows, and the destruction of foetuses is planned in the name of life and liberty; when we talk about progress in the midst of a totalitarian regression which is devouring our societies and we invent a historical
South African situation, he argued, ‘in order to highlight their concern; to ensure that all the peoples and races of Southern Africa have access to a development which fits properly with their culture - their world vision - and those indescribable choices which are forever printed in each according to his or her atavism’ (31/5/85).

This discourse on indigenous culture contrasts starkly with the discourse on ‘pluri-ethnicity’ developed concertedly in Les Nouvelles. Within Combat, indigenous culture is manifestly inferior and therefore fragile. Its inadequacy and fragility is attested to in the readiness with which elements in Melanesian society have capitulated to the doctrine of socialism, rather than emulate European civilisation. The optimal response, within this discourse, is to facilitate the Melanesian cultural slumber by separating Melanesians from European civilisation and the corrupting influences of its socialist ‘has-beens’, geographically if at all possible, and, if not, culturally at least. The notion of cultural borrowing and blending implicit in the discourse of ‘pluri-ethnicity’ is anathema to this discourse on Melanesian culture and its place within the grand narrative developed in these publications.

The struggle for hegemony in anti-independence publications

The almost obsessive will in Corail and Combat to historically and geographically contextualise the political struggle in New Caledonia in order to render it meaningful within the context of the grand narrative which they developed evokes Gramsci’s writings on the strategy through which political groups defend or contest ideological hegemony, the precursor to political hegemony. Gramsci argued that this strategy involved struggles over what he termed ‘common sense’ - the taken-for-granted, but yet inherently fragmented and contradictory, understandings we develop of our world. Hegemony is secured through the articulation of understandings which better reconcile these contradictions.11

We have seen that there were significant dilemmas in Les Nouvelles’ discourses and little attempt at their reconciliation in earlier editions. In a sense, this lack of effort reflected the relatively hegemonic position of the paper’s discourses within the

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anti-independence community. *Les Nouvelles* could appeal to this fragmented common sense, without needing to demonstrate a superior understanding of local political circumstances. *Corail* and *Combat Calédonien*, on the other hand, were attempting to challenge this common sense by presenting alternative interpretations of these circumstances. They were attempting, in other words, to wrest anti-independence hegemony from the more centrist conservative position articulated in *Les Nouvelles*. The advancement of their view of loyalism required the mobilisation of discourses and rhetorical strategies which could render more coherent the fragmented common-sense presented in *Les Nouvelles*, thus precipitating this will to contextualise.

The title of René Blasco’s weekly segment in *Combat*, ‘Taboo’, points to another discursive strategy employed in these publications. Rather than ignore oppositional discourse, *Corail* and *Combat* sought to co-opt it to their own interpretive armoury. Thus, for example, the claim that *Corail* was ‘fascist’ precipitated a response which outlined five alleged characteristics of fascism and then described how these applied to the pro-independence movement (2/10/81). To the accusation that the publication had incited the assassination of Declercq, *Corail* responded with an analysis of the comments made on Declercq in its ten previous editions, finding, not surprisingly, that there were no traces of ‘fascism’ or comments which might be read as inciting violence (ibid). Other terms were also turned back on the movement, such as when Kanak demands for self-determination were described as ‘Kanak apartheid’ (22/1/82). This strategy of appropriating oppositional terms, metaphors and discourses was, of course, aimed at undermining them. It is completely opposed to the strategy of the ‘unspoken’ in the mass audience media which seeks to contain the discursive sphere by avoiding reference to oppositional discourse, viewing such reference, we might presume, as tantamount to its validation. But the will to broach what others may have considered ‘taboo’ was only partial. *Corail* and *Combat* were highly critical of *Les Nouvelles*’ policy of publishing pro-independence communiques. As *Corail* commented:

> And that’s enough from you too Leyraud, Ventrillon, d’Andre, Lepot and all the other tools of the trade, all ‘born in Noumea’, as you often sign, enough of offering, under the facile and hypocritical cover of the ‘right to

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12 This is not to say that the views which they expressed were not held by some of *Les Nouvelles*’ loyalist readership. The white supremacist discourses articulated in *Corail* and *Combat Calédonien* were certainly close to some of the more racist rhetoric in *Les Nouvelles*. 

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information’, your columns - those blessed and impregnable sanctuaries where the patent destabilisers of New Caledonia find refuge as soon as their coups have been realised. Are you so naive as to think for a single moment that on the big evening when the big prizes are being distributed, seats will be kept for you on the stage ‘for services rendered in the past?’ (Corail, 21/1/83).

Corail even went so far as to accuse Les Nouvelles of complicity with the pro-independence movement, arguing that: ‘At Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, the general rule is not to even slightly hurt the indépendantistes’ (Corail, 22/4/83). Critique of other anti-independence media was a means not only to demonstrate Corail and Combat’s superior commitment to independence, but also to advance their own enigmatic narratives on history, as when Corail refuted FR3 radio’s comment that ‘South Africa was the only African country still occupied by whites’, arguing instead that whites were already in South Africa in 1652, before the blacks started to invade the territory.

Anti-independence politics and dilemmatic discourse in extreme-right publications

No matter how seemingly totalising were the narratives developed in Corail and Combat, significant discursive tensions remained. These tensions were the product of differing sentiments within extreme-right political groups and the more general difficulties of mobilising discourses developed in one context - metropolitan France - in the very different socio-historical and political setting of New Caledonia.

In contrast to the inherent unity suggested in the category of ‘loyalist’, the population who came to describe themselves thus were diverse and far from united on key political issues. As we have seen, a sizeable number of Melanesians opposed independence. In addition, the European ‘loyalist’ population comprised several social groups, each with different collective experiences and consequently different readings of the socio-political circumstances surrounding them. Tensions existed between those European Caledonians born in the territory, termed ‘Caldoche’, and those who migrated to the territory in the post-war period. Among

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13 The origins of the term ‘Caldoche’ are uncertain and disputed (see for example, McCallum, 1989:4-5; Barbançon, 1992:17-21), but its popularisation appears largely to have been the result of its use in the foreign media during the period 1984-85 as a classification opposed to that of ‘Kanak’ (Barbançon, 1992:19). Although the term is becoming more popular in the 1990s among Europeans born in the
the earliest immigrants were the estimated 2,000 *Pieds Noirs* from North Africa, primarily Algeria, who had fled after the withdrawal of France from Algeria. As Bobin writes, these *Pieds Noirs* ‘arrived in New Caledonia with the firm intention of not seeing the Algerian misadventure repeated’ (Bobin, 1991). Their members were among the more uncompromising anti-independence militants and they came to occupy important positions in anti-independence political groups. The *Pieds Noirs* were followed by a large number of migrants from France who came to the territory in the 1960s and 1970s, encouraged by the resettlement policies of the French government and the economic boom in the territory during the period 1968-72 (Bobin, 1991; Henningham, 1992:62-3; Barbançon, 1992:33-40).

The tensions between the immigrant and *Caldoche* communities were exacerbated by tensions within both communities. Immigrants from France were frequently contemptuous of a perceived lack of culture and urbanity within the *Caldoche* community. The contempt was reciprocated, the *Caldoches* being resentful and scornful of the ‘*metro*’ presumption of superiority (McCallum, 1989:4-7). In addition, economic differences within the *Caldoche* community were stark and precipitated animosity. The collective habitus of the *Caldoche* politico-economic elite was far removed from that of the poor *broussard* living a near subsistence lifestyle in the bush. Yet these were precisely the polar extremes of the continuum of social groupings within the anti-independence movement. The *Caldoche* alliance with the post-war immigrant communities to oppose independence meant that the political groups which they formed were replete with tensions and divisions which surfaced publicly at various moments during the decade.

This alliance was expressed politically with the formation in 1978 of the RRPCR. Divisions within the anti-independence community precipitated the formation of more extreme right-wing political parties and movements: the Front Calédonien (FC) in 1982 and, as we have seen, the FN(NC) in 1984. Although these smaller parties were formed, in part, in response to the perceived inadequacy of the RRPCR’s response to the escalating push for independence, it is important to note, as McCallum does, that many of the more extremist opponents of independence were members of the RRPCR, not the ostensibly more extreme parties (McCallum, 1992:54).
The relationships between anti-independence political groups were rendered somewhat ambiguous by the shifting allegiances of some of their members. Some politicians shifted parties and movements on several occasions during the decade. For example, Justin Guillemard, initially an RPCR politician, formed the FC in 1982. He left the movement in 1984 and was expelled from the RPCR in 1987 following a series of personal attacks against RPCR politicians (ibid:35). Guillemard then joined the FN(NC) and stood at the head of the party’s ticket in the West Region during the 1988 regional elections (ibid:44). An even more extreme case of political mobility was that of François Néoéré who stood in 1979 as a pro-independence candidate on the Fl’s ticket and was, by 1984, the secretary general of the FN(NC).

The existence of tensions within and between anti-independence groups was acknowledged in Combat, and ADG argued that his publication should reflect ‘ALL opinions on the local Right’ (Combat, 6/9/85). While, arguably, Corail and Combat privileged more extremist opinion, the practice of publishing articles from outside contributors resulted in some of the discursive tensions existing within the more extremist right-wing community emerging in these publications. For example, the experience of colonialism in the territory was described differently. At one point Corail likened new legislation which tightened metropolitan political control in the territory to the ‘worst times of colonialism, it’s Paris, and Paris only, that commands’, evoking the type of populist, anti-French rhetoric which underpinned early pro-autonomy discourse (Corail, 19/7/82). However, only a month later, the ‘fait colonial’ (‘colonial fact’) was defended in Corail by RPCR politician George Faure who argued that:

...there is nothing to condemn the fait colonial; there is every reason to be proud of it. It is the colonial experience that made New Caledonia what it is with its public amenities, and a remarkable and unequalled educational, sanitary and social system. It is the colonial experience that liberated Melanesians from structural tribal dictatorships (Corail, 26/8/83).

Faure’s defence points to another area of divergence within extreme-right discourse. His positing of colonialism as a liberating force for Melanesians sits uneasily with the discourse articulated above on the demonstrable incapacity of Melanesians to take advantage of the benefits of European civilisation. Such slightly derogatory.
tensions in discourses on Melanesians were a major source of discursive dilemma within these extreme-right publications. They attested to the difficulties inherent in the transposition of extreme-right discourse from a metropolitan context to a colonial one.

**Mediations in extreme-right discourse**

The grand narrative developed in articles by Blasco, Monchanin and elsewhere in *Corail* and *Combat*, in its discourse on Melanesians, appeared to make little concession to the particularities of the New Caledonian anti-independence context. There were many respects in which this narrative could be considered unsettling in a New Caledonian anti-independence context. The transposition of the extreme-right's anti-immigration rhetoric to the territorial context in which a large portion of the anti-independence population could themselves be described as 'immigrants' was a difficulty which resulted in minimal emphasis being placed on this aspect of the extreme-right's program in their New Caledonian publications. There were, however, some mobilisations of anti-immigration discourse. Blasco, for example, in defending South Africa’s ‘separate development’, launches a tirade against those who blame the West for the human tragedy throughout Africa and asserts:

*One day, Europe will be sick of its gloomy Punch and Judy shows. One day, Europe and America will have had enough of being invaded by the unkempt crowds that demanded, boastfully, to be their own masters, only to invade us today, fleeing their countries. Countries which we made sparkle. That they destroyed and turned to dust. After 40 years of freedom, Africa stinks and runs for refuge in Europe (Combat, 23/8/85).*

Blasco’s primary referent here is, of course, African immigrants in Europe, but the not too fanciful possibility existed that the text could be turned towards another referent - immigrants to New Caledonia and, in particular, Pieds Noirs who ‘demanded, boastfully, to be their own masters, only to invade us today, fleeing their country’. This type of unsettling parallel existed in other extreme-right discourses. In discussing the National Front’s program in France, Marcus argues that the party ‘insists that a plurality of cultures and peoples must be preserved, but clearly not in France’. Its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, recognises cultural difference but argues that all peoples’ engagement with the world is best ‘adapted to the geographical environment in which they were born, live and die. They are the products of an
historical evolution and, just like individuals, they have a past, they have origins, their own characters and a singular destiny’ (Le Pen cited in Marcus, 1995:106). Le Pen therefore argues that ‘there is an intangible relationship between a living individual and his land. Just as an animal feels sheltered in its biological space and seeks to mark out its territory, so human beings need a homeland’ (ibid). The transposition of this discourse on culture and place into the New Caledonian context renders it distinctly evocative of Kanak claims to land ownership and demands for Kanak independence. As a result, it was unlikely that such a discourse would be publicly mobilised in the territory. But even more seemingly benign utterances, such as Le Pen’s comment in Corail that ‘I have ... the right to demand not to be suspected and persecuted because I am French and Catholic’, risked appropriation by Kanaks who could demand similar rights on the basis of race and belief (Combat, 21/6/85).

The points of appropriation between extreme-right and pro-independence discourse were numerous because of the common grounding of their key interpretive repertoires in notions of cultural difference which both the extreme-right and Kanaks argued granted them special rights - the one to a French ‘homeland’, the other to a Kanak one. This notion of irrevocable cultural difference contrasts significantly with a more mainstream assimilationist discourse on Melanesian culture in the anti-independence movement, reflected in Faure’s comment above on the benefits brought to Melanesians by colonialism, and frequently expressed through notions of ‘pluri-ethnicity’ and ‘fraternity’. Perhaps because of the disturbing parallels between extreme-right and pro-independence discourses on cultural difference, this assimilationist discourse was at times privileged in Corail and Combat. Its mobilisation facilitated the transposition of other aspects of extreme-right discourse between the very different socio-historical and cultural settings of metropolitan France and New Caledonia.

### Negotiating dilemmatic discourse: the case of François Néoéré

I have already pointed to the tendency within publications to section off dilemmatic discourses to particular themes in order to optimise their rhetorical efficacy. This practice was also evident in Corail and Combat. Any attempt at reconciliation, if it occurred, was usually left to the reader. One wonders how a Melanesian opponent
of independence would negotiate through these discourses on socialism, culture and place which, in some of their manifestations, were markedly less than complimentary to Melanesians. The anti-independence movement, including the extreme right, sought after all to court Melanesian support in order to augment its symbolic capital and enhance its electoral fortunes. How would a person such as Néoéré - a Melanesian who had never even visited France prior to 1984 and whose extreme-right discourse could therefore be expected to reflect local permutations - effect such a negotiation?

We gain some insight into how he did this through articles written by him and published in *Corail* and *Combat* following his appointment to the position of FN(NC) Secretary General in 1984. What is striking about Néoéré’s discourse is the selectiveness of the resources which he uses and the enigmatic manner in which these resources are choreographed into interpretive repertoires which tend to militate against the worst of the extreme-right’s anti-egalitarianism. Indeed, in Néoéré’s writing, there is a rhetorical stress on egalitarianism which is presented as congruent with the political program of the FN.

Néoéré’s emphasis on egalitarianism is achieved through the central place afforded a discourse on Christianity, also prevalent in some extreme-right political discourse in France, particularly that of Le Pen (Marcus, 1995; D’Appollonia, 1988). For Néoéré, the struggle was not a fight against independence but rather a fight for Christianity. It was a struggle against Marxist materialism and atheism - a ‘fight for peace in Jesus Christ’ against Marxism, as he described it (*Corail*, 11/5/84). Only Jesus Christ, he argued, could ‘unite in LOVE all Caledonians not matter what their race, in the shadow of a single flag, that of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ (*Corail*, 11/5/84).

We are given some insight as to why Jesus Christ should want to unite Caledonians under the French flag and no other from the discourse on Melanesians which he chooses to mobilise. Instead of a stark discourse on Melanesian cultural ineptitude such as that developed by Monchanin and Blasco, Néoéré chose to stress Melanesian progress, not stasis, under colonialism. However, unlike many Europeans, he felt the need to qualify this progress. He anticipated the Kanak retort to his argument by acknowledging that ‘some errors and injustices [had been]
committed by some French settlers in New Caledonia’ but recognised that these ‘would never equal the wealth and benefits, as much spiritual and cultural as material, distributed profusely during the past 182 years, to the benefit of Melanesians’ (Combat, 22/3/85).

But remaining with France was also, he argued, a duty. Here, his argument became highly enigmatic in his linking of this duty with Christianity and custom. Custom and Christianity were for Néoéré nearly synonymous because: ‘Custom [too] is the love of man, it is the respect of the word of the elders who have given it’ (Combat, 12/7/85).14 The ‘word of the elders’ to which he is referring here is that which supposedly ceded New Caledonia to the French at the beginning of colonisation, a ‘word’ which the pro-independence movement disputes was ever given. For Néoéré then, only through the struggle against independence could Christianity, and therefore custom, be sustained in the territory, and, once sustained, both would bind New Caledonia to France.

There is a curious circularity in this argument on the need to fight for France in order to be bound to France by custom. There are also dilemmas produced through his highly enigmatic discursive negotiations, in particular, in his advocacy of the sustenance of custom while welcoming European cultural influence in Melanesian society. But what is most striking in the interpretive repertoires which he develops is the centrality of egalitarian notions to them. His discourses on Christianity, fraternity and custom are rhetorically grounded in notions of equality, yet, in their combination, they support an outcome, not to mention a political party, which rejects racial and cultural equality.

This apparent disjunction between discourse and its likely outcomes was also noticed by Wetherell and Potter in their analysis of Pakeha New Zealander discussion of Maori culture and society. As they found:

The majority of Pakeha New Zealanders we interviewed used the resources of individual rights, egalitarianism, practical rationality, history as progress and so on to argue for outcomes which we would describe, taking up our own stance within the argumentative battlefield, as actually ‘illiberal’, as designed to maintain unequal power relations and the dominance of a

14 Néoéré’s linking of Christianity with custom was not novel. Tjibaou had himself commented that: ‘The oral tradition of our people is much the same as the Bible’s’ (quoted in Chesneaux, 1988:61).

As they point out, this disjuncture reinforces the view that ideology can be assessed only as an effect. It is the manner in which the interpretive resources are assembled, not so much the resources themselves, which set in train certain ideological effects (ibid:186).

This is not an argument about the intentions behind Néoéré’s discursive constructions. He may well have believed that only the extreme-right was concerned to save Christianity in the territory and therefore ensure the possibility of the type of ‘democratic fraternity’ which he advocated, just as he may well have believed, as he argued, that the National Front was not racist, a view lent credence by his presence at the head of the party during most of 1985. The ultimate irony, however, was Néoéré’s forced resignation towards the end of that year, following the circulation among FN(NC) members of a letter from Le Pen urging his replacement by a European (Connell, 1987:370). His outing was received with incomprehension by the new editorial writer at Combat who had taken over from ADG upon his return to France. This writer commented, somewhat politely, that Le Pen’s act must have reflected his confusion over the New Caledonian situation (Combat, 27/12/85).

Many read Néoéré’s forced resignation as validation of the compulsive racism of the National Front. As one writer to Bwenando commented:

After having eaten all the grist that came to his mill and having adhered to all political parties, Mister ‘chameleon’ NEOERE has not been able to take on the white colour necessary for membership of the National Front; hence his eviction from the fascist sect. He didn’t understand that for the Les Pens, Chiracs and the like, the aim is to keep Caledonia for France, not necessarily with Kanaks (Bwenando, 10/1/86).

There is, of course, much to commend this reading. But Néoéré’s disfavour could also be read as a response to the perceived waywardness of his discourses. In his attempt to articulate a vision which did not relegate Melanesians to a cultural past, but which at the same time did not denigrate this cultural past, Christianity, egalitarianism and fraternity emerged as his unifying themes. Perhaps it was thought by Le Pen, and no doubt others within the FN(NC), that, in the process,
Néoéré had lost the plot. Others clearly held this view, although for different reasons. The writer to Bwenando continued:

So, I suggest that he continue to write a lot of anti-socio-communist and anti-Marxist articles. He has so much talent and we have so little opportunity to laugh at funny stories. Besides, I’m sure it won’t be long, with the divine inspiration he has, before he writes that it was a Marxist mole infiltrator of the weekly Combat Calédonien who obtained from LE PEN the expulsion of NEOERE, the attacker of the ‘red devils’. Really, we are impatient to read you, fake brother NEOERE (ibid).

Others also found his discursive and rhetorical constructions less than convincing. The party formed by Néoéré for the 1986 French national elections, Vérité Fraternité, Vivre Français, did poorly, winning no more than 2.6 per cent of the vote, principally in Noumea and his place of origin, the Isle of Pines (Connell, 1987:370). Néoéré, in seeking to render coherent the dilemmas which others had left unaddressed, had clearly not found a way through which was convincing to many Melanesians or Europeans.

Néoéré’s discourse on Melanesians and his vision of a ‘democratic fraternity’ in Caledonia was also antithetical to the vision of loyalism which was projected through the grand narrative discussed above, and which was clearly much more in keeping with some of the central premises of extreme-right discourse in France. This loyalism was the articulation of an identity which was oriented towards an affinity with a civilisation, not an emphasis on local political outcomes. This is attested to by the steady demise of references to ‘loyalists’ or ‘loyalism’ in the anti-independence media, particularly Les Nouvelles, following the ratification of the Matignon accords. The shift in political emphasis in the territory from issues of grand principle to negotiated political agreements, brought about by this ratification, rendered somewhat anachronistic the claim to a ‘loyalist’ existence, particularly after the passing of the initial hostility among a significant proportion of RPCR voters to Lafleur’s agreement to the accords. The new political exigencies required the emergence of new subjectivities, along with a renewed contestation over the claims to a rightful existence as ‘Caledonian’.
CHAPTER SIX - THE PRO-INDEPENDENCE MEDIA

The prevalence of racist discourses on Melanesians in the anti-independence media, and the persistent denigration in these media of Kanak political demands, provided compelling reasons for the pro-independence movement to investigate the establishment of its own media. Not only could such media provide information and cohesion to the movement, it could also assert a Kanak existence in the face of its persistent denial in more mainstream anti-independence publications. That the will to assert identity was at the forefront of the push to establish pro-independence media is evident in the comment from a prominent pro-independence journalist that Radio Djindo was established to ‘allow the Kanak People to reclaim its Word in its Country so that its Voice could radiate throughout the whole Territory’ (Waia, 1991). This notion that reclaiming the right to speak is implicit in the anti-colonial project has been central to post-colonial theory and writing. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue: ‘The seizing of the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word become crucial features of the process of self-assertion and of the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process’ (1989:82).

Adam and Tiffin’s definition of post-colonialism highlights the relevance of this area of enquiry to an analysis of the pro-independence media in New Caledonia. Post-colonialism can be defined, they argue, as discursive practices involving ‘resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies’ (cited in Barker et al., 1994:5). From this definition it is clear that many of the central concerns within post-colonialism are highly relevant to a consideration of the New Caledonian pro-independence media. For example, the emphasis within post-colonialism on the interplay between colonial and anti-colonial discourse is particularly apt in the New Caledonian context. In its style and content, the pro-independence media repeatedly bears the mark of its inevitable engagement with colonial discourses. This engagement is inevitable because, as Terdiman argues: ‘no discourse is ever a monologue; nor could it ever be analysed intrinsically ... everything that constitutes it always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies’ (cited in Parry, 1993:172).
The tension between this engagement and the anti-colonial quest for disengagement raises the question of the extent to which oppositional movements can break out of the constraints imposed upon them by those whose dominance they are trying to arrest. Disengagement from colonial dominance requires active opposition to the colonial power, through discursive and extra-discursive engagement in the political struggle. But, as some have argued, fighting against a system is, in a sense, validating that system in its position of dominance. Goldie (1995) uses the analogy of a chess game to illustrate this point. For Goldie: ‘The indigène is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker ... the individual signmaker, the individual player, the individual writer, can move these pawns only within certain prescribed areas’ (ibid:232). Moreover, it is possible, he argues, to see ‘the play between white and indigène as a replica of the black and white squares, with clearly limited oppositional moves’ (ibid:232-3). Goldie concludes that in engaging in these moves the players validate the rules of the game which is itself that of the coloniser. This constraint on oppositional moves has been described by Said as ‘the partial tragedy of resistance that it must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire’ (1994:253).

This constraining of oppositional moves within a system of rules introduced by the coloniser can be seen in the pro-independence movement’s use of the French language in its media. Language privileges certain conceptual categorisations, subject positions, discourses, and systems of reasoning. Recognition of such constraints has led some opposition movements to use vernacular languages as an ultimate strategy of abrogation.¹ This option is more feasible in some socio-political contexts where a vernacular language is broadly shared and the political obstacles to its deployment are not too great. In New Caledonia, the large number of vernacular languages², the imposition of French as lingua franca and the absence, until recent times, of the teaching of vernacular languages in schools, have resulted in French becoming the most widely used medium of political, and indeed social, exchange between Kanaks.³ In addition, a 1922 law declaring illegal the publication

¹ Ashcroft et al. describe abrogation as ‘a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or “correct” usage, and its assumption of a traditional fixed meaning “inscribed” in words (1989:38). Fabian (1986), in his discussion of the use of Swahili in the Belgian Congo, demonstrates how vernacular languages can also be appropriated.
² There are currently around 28 vernacular languages spoken in New Caledonia (Connell, 1987:14).
³ The Ecoles Populaires Kanak was an attempt to rekindle the use of vernacular by teaching in vernacular languages. Although few EPKs remain, the existence did constitute a form of pressure on
of vernacular texts without an accompanying French translation militated against the production of vernacular publications, although the pro-independence media did defy this law on occasion.\textsuperscript{4} The pro-independence movement’s use of French raises the question of how far it jeopardised its ability to develop a resistance culture which was expressive of its claims to difference.

While there are those who would argue that the promotion of difference is impossible in such a context (see, for example, Spivak, 1988), a great deal of post-colonial writing has been concerned to emphasise the ways in which difference still emerges, despite the imposition of culturally alien linguistic and discursive forms. The emphasis here is on the manner in which oppositional movements selectively appropriate aspects of the dominant culture and incorporate these with aspects of traditional culture to create hybridised cultural forms. For Ashcroft \textit{et al.}, post-colonial writing ‘emphasises how hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen to be the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth’ (1995:183). Mary-Louise Pratt describes as ‘autoethnographic’ those hybridised texts which colonised people construct about themselves in response to colonial texts. They involve, she argues:

\begin{quote}
...a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to \textit{intervene} in metropolitan modes of understanding (1994:28).
\end{quote}

This intervention is not possible through the use of vernacular languages. Although French tied the pro-independence movement into Western categorisations and privileged the importation of Western modes of reasoning, it made possible tactics in the political struggle which would not otherwise have been possible, such as attempts to broaden electoral support outside of the Kanak community and to win international support. Chaterjee argues that Indian nationalist discourse was different even though it was heavily influenced by Western thought (1986:42).

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{La Tribune du Pacifique} published a couple of articles in vernacular languages without translations, signalling that it was doing so in defiance of the law (see, for example, the editions of July and October 1980).
influence was not, she writes, ‘a simple relation of correspondence, even of derivation’, because:

First of all, nationalist thought is selective about what it takes from Western rational thought...nationalist texts will question the veracity of colonialist knowledge, dispute its arguments, point out contradictions, reject its moral claims. Even when it adopts...the modes of thought characteristic of rational knowledge in the post-enlightenment age, it cannot adopt them in their entirety, for then it would not constitute itself as a nationalist discourse' (ibid:41).

Others criticise the emphasis within post-colonialism on hybridity on the basis that it emphasises mediation over struggle. Benita Parry (1993) has argued that the emphasis tends to obscure the force of the continuing struggle between protagonists, and the manner in which this force continues to be exercised through colonial institutions. It either erases ‘the voice of the native’ or limits ‘native resistance to the devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority’, resulting in ‘a downgrading of the anti-imperialist texts written by national liberation movements; while the notion of epistemic violence and the occluding of reverse discourses have obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of an-other knowledge and producer of alternative traditions’ (cited in Loomba, 1994:307). Ania Loomba (ibid) also makes a plea for a depiction of post-colonialism which views hybridity as only one of its characteristic forms, recognising that it co-exists with forceful opposition as well as the maintenance of aspects of traditional culture.

No matter what the mix of derivative, traditional or hybrid forms incorporated in pro-independence discourses in New Caledonia, the concerted opposition from anti-independence activists to the pro-independence media suggested that their existence, and the discourses which they produced, were highly unsettling for the anti-independence movement. As Bwenando commented: ‘If our enemies have tried to physically eliminate us, it is because they have understood our importance in the struggle' (31/11/85). Whether their discourses constituted an optimal blend of forms is not the major concern of this and the following chapter. Indeed, such a concern sits uneasily with some of the central premises of this thesis. At times, the obvious borrowings within the pro-independence media of Western cultural forms and discourses may have militated against the oppositional efficacy of these media. But this was not always the case. As I sought to demonstrate in chapter 4, anti-
independence groups found it difficult to appropriate the pro-independence discourse of ‘the people’, ultimately abandoning the quest despite this discourse’s origins in French political thought. This abandoning highlighted the efficacy of this discourse for the pro-independence movement and reinforced Said’s apt observation that only a ‘confused and limiting notion of priority allows that only the original proponents of an idea can understand and use it’ (1994:261). Moreover, traditional discourses also continued to be used within the pro-independence movement but not always with the same apparent degree of efficacy, judging by the openings which they created for counter-discourses. Once again, the point here is that the efficacy of any discourse emerges largely from its strategic, situated usage in practice, and not from an isolated consideration of its inherent form.

Consideration of the strategic use of pro-independence media discourse therefore forms a central theme of this chapter, preceded by a discussion of the institutional constraints on the production of these discourses. In the process I draw on concepts and debates developed and discussed within post-colonialism, but not with a view to assessing the efficacy of pro-independence media discourses outside of the context of their located use.

**Attitudes to media**

The pro-independence movement’s determination in the early 1980s to achieve its political aims through a mix of legal and extra-constitutional means precipitated an increasingly hostile response from the existing media and threw into sharp relief the media’s power in influencing, in what pro-independence groups considered a particularly pernicious way, the discursive terrain. However, this view of the media’s capacity for damage was accompanied by a growing awareness of the benefits which the media could bring in advancing the pro-independence struggle. Increasingly, the movement looked to foreign media to bring to the attention of an international audience their demands and claims of injustice and oppression. As the UC publication *L’Avenir* commented:

In 1878 we had no newspapers and no international support. Today, the struggle can be brought to an international level by the media. It’s important...because the mass media has the power to create opinion. It’s a necessity (13/4/85).
Even when the FLNKS was boycotting the local media, it continued to maintain relations with the overseas and metropolitan press, prompting *Les Nouvelles* to complain, in late 1984, that it had to learn that the FLNKS had lifted its blockades from an AFP release (*Les Nouvelles*, 23/11/84 & 7/12/84). This emphasis on encouraging international support led the FLNKS to establish, in 1987, an overseas news service, the Agence Kanak Presse, which carried news on the pro-independence movement to international media and organisations.

These divergent perspectives on the media as enemy and ally were sharply illustrated in an event which occurred in late 1987. An illegal sit-in by FLNKS members in the central Place des Cocotiers in Noumea was broken up by police using batons. International television crews filmed the violent dispersal but state-owned RFO television was not present. The UC publication, *L’Avenir Calédonien*, commented that the result was that Australian TV viewers got 10 minutes on the dispersal while Caldoche viewers got 30 seconds (presumably of read commentary). Of the three minutes shown on French television, *L’Avenir* added:

> Three minutes of television summed up, before millions of viewers in France and the world, the reality of Colonialism in New Caledonia. The three minutes of television on the events of Saturday 22 August in the Place des Cocotiers was but a CONCENTRATE OF ALL THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT’S ERRORS. Without the cameramen, on this day, the entire world would be immersed in the PONS-LIE (*L’Avenir*, 28/8/87 & 9/9/87).

By this stage, the FLNKS had already responded to pressure from within the movement to establish its own media. *Bwenando* and Radio Djiido began operating in 1985 and, in 1986, the FLNKS-controlled regions produced the weekly magazine *Construire*. In addition, two regional radio stations, Lifou’s Radio Kenu and Hienghène’s Radio Maxa Hiehene, were established in 1987.

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5 An FLNKS communiqué was, however, broadcast on RFO (*Les Nouvelles*, 7/12/84).

6 Ukeiwé suggested that the sit-in was staged for the media. He commented that the FLNKS ‘wanted to increase public awareness through the media and, more particularly, foreign media, like the Australian-New Zealand journalists and also a few metropolitan journalists’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 28/8/87). *Les Nouvelles* followed with a similar line commenting that the FLNKS ‘was running a veritable media campaign essentially oriented towards the Pacific Anglo-Saxon media’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 31/8/87).

7 Radio Kenu began operation in May 1987 (*L’Avenir*, 15/5/87). Radio Maxa Hiehene opened at the end of August 1987. ‘Maxa’ means ‘raise one’s head’ (*L’Avenir*, 9/9/87). In September Maxa’s cable was cut, resulting in claims of sabotage from the FLNKS. Tjibaou denounced the ‘systematic interferences with the freedom of expression of the Kanak people’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 10/9/87).
The financial difficulties faced by all these media resulted in their demise, with the exception of Radio Djindo. I discuss later in this chapter the argument that this demise reflected a lack of willingness within the FLNKS to sustain media which some in the FLNKS felt could not be adequately controlled. Here, I wish to consider another argument advanced by what appears at first a curious cross-section of the New Caledonian political community on why the FLNKS press, in particular, did not survive. This argument suggests that the lack of support for the Kanak press attests to a more general cultural malaise. In its most sympathetic form, the argument is that: ‘The press, well, it’s not a Kanak thing’, suggesting that a traditionally oral culture evinces great difficulty in surmounting its cultural legacy and in embarking on new modes of communication. The articulation of this discourse by supporters and opponents of independence is one of its more intriguing aspects.

The media and Kanak culture

In the introduction to his book, *La terre est le sang des morts* (1985), anthropologist Jean Guiart recounts a story he heard of the appearance of the first Kanak publications. Guiart writes that a small group of Europeans calling themselves anarchists offered the use of their roneotype machine to Nidoish Naisseline, a young Kanak from Maré in the Loyalty Islands, heir to the Grand Chieftaincy of Gawahma, and a founding member of the Foulards Rouges, a movement of young Melanesians demanding Melanesian cultural and political rights. Naisseline used the roneotype machine to produce tracts written in the three languages of Maré. The tracts were immediately confiscated by the police and Naisseline was imprisoned for having published material which the authorities claimed incited murder. Naisseline’s arrest precipitated a large demonstration and what Guiart terms, the ‘first riot of modern times in Noumea’. Guiart claims that the tracts had been badly translated (he implies maliciously), and that the offending phrase, ‘*la terre est le sang des morts*’, had been translated into ‘the blood of Whites has to be spilt on the land’ rather than what he argues is the correct meaning ‘that the blood of the sum of all previous generations was the process through which the soil in which the yams were planted was symbolically constituted’ (ibid:9-10).

In reading Guiart’s story, I am reminded of Foucault’s mischievous remark about a story he once encountered: that it is so beautiful he fears it might be true
Certainly, the general outlines of this story are a matter of historical record in New Caledonia (Association pour la Fondation d’un Institut Kanak d’Histoire Moderne:78). This record holds that a tract was produced and Naisseline arrested, precipitating a large demonstration and riot. But what is fascinating for the purpose of this discussion in Guiart’s story are some of the embellishments and, in particular, the description of European anarchists approaching Naisseline with the offer of their machine. Here, it seems to me, we potentially have a very classic colonial tale. What the story enables is a reading of the events of ‘modern times’ - the period which Guiart seems to consider commenced with the emergence of Kanak political demands - as made possible by Europeans. It was through European instrumentality - in this case through the lending of the roneotype machine - that the public articulation of Kanak political demands became possible. I am not arguing that this thesis of European instrumentality is Guiart’s intended reading. But, as a story, it makes for multiple readings, and many opponents of independence in New Caledonia, upon reading Guiart’s story, would rue the day that those ‘anarchists’ first approached Naisseline to bestow upon him the fruits of Western modernity.

This discourse on European instrumentality in the Kanak accession to media (and indeed to most other ‘modern’ things) is one with which the pro-independence movement has had to contend, and which many Kanaks find deeply offensive. The most common articulation of this discourse by those opposed to independence held that the pro-independence media, while ostensibly Kanak, was written by Europeans. In early 1987, Pons declared that ‘an important mass audience media outlet is directed by a member of the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire - Communist Revolutionary League)’. Bwenando retorted that there has only ever been one resident member of the LCR in the territory, Jean-Louis Dion, adding that he ‘collaborated at Bwenando at the technical level only with no editorial responsibility, and that he left the territory a year ago’ (Bwenando, 17/2/87). Two months later, RPCR Counsellor Pierre Maresca made a similar declaration in the Congress, arguing that a reading of Bwenando indicated that the articles were written by Europeans, not Kanaks. FLNKS Territorial Counsellor Yéiwéné Yéiwéné replied, according to Bwenando, ‘that it wasn’t the fault of Maresca and his like if Kanaks had learnt to read and write, and therefore to produce a newspaper’ (Bwenando, 7/4/87).
There are significant parallels between these discourses on Kanak media and earlier discourses which portrayed Melanesians as voiceless. Conservative Caledonian historian Bernard Brou’s description of Jeanson’s leftist newspaper *Le Calédonien* is a classical statement in this regard. According to Brou, Jeanson:

“called for the ‘honourable’ repatriation of migrant workers (Vietnamese and Indonesian) and, with the support of three indigenous grand chiefs, Vincent Bouquet from Bourail, Henri Naisseline from Maré, and Pascal Sihaze from Lifou, attempted a Melanesian defence that the indigenous people don’t express (Brou:14).”

This broader discourse on European instrumentality in the emergence of Melanesian consciousness and political demands is brought to bear in the more specific discourse on European instrumentality in the Kanak media.

One of the more intriguing aspects of this discourse is its broad political currency. I encountered it in my discussions with several European pro-independence supporters, some of whom had worked with Kanaks in pro-independence publications, and even in discussions with some Kanaks. Marc Coulon, who has lengthy experience working in pro-independence publications, was one of its exponents. According to Coulon:

“The Kanaks agreed to produce *L’Evenement*, but didn’t yet have the will themselves to produce a newspaper. That’s certain...because I think that they didn’t have the idea, or didn’t feel that they had the means, or it didn’t seem a priority...I have to say that it also corresponded with the fact that the notion of ‘mediatising’ an idea or words was completely new, in so far as, up until now and even still a bit today...the two camps in this country - the two politico-ethnic blocks - had their own systems of communication. There were the Whites - the RPCR - with *Les Nouvelles* and the TV, and then the Kanaks with their system of oral communication through meetings - by transmitting messages - and that a Kanak newspaper or a pro-Kanak newspaper, was a kind of totally unthinkable thing (interview, 18/4/94).

Certainly, European involvement in oppositional publications which sought to advance indigenous political rights had been longstanding. Catholic and Protestant missionaries had been involved in producing bilingual publications in indigenous

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8 Perhaps not surprisingly, the *Histoire du Pays Kanak* draws on Brou’s comments in its entry on *Le Calédonien*, but omits reference to Brou’s comment that the indigenous people were not voicing political demands at that time (Association pour la Fondation d’un Institut Kanak d’Histoire Moderne:66).
languages and French for over 50 years prior to WWII. After the war, the various political news sheets which appeared were largely the work of European political activists. For example, *L’Avenir’s* publication director was UC party leader and New Caledonian deputy, Maurice Lenormand. Lenormand was the major contributor to the publication, using it as a vehicle for the propagation of his leftist populism through denouncing the economic and political power vested in what he termed the ‘trusts’ and calling for greater political autonomy. From the early 1980s the principal contributor to *L’Avenir* was François Burck, a Caldoche UC activist who was to assume the position of secretary general following the killing of Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1989. Similarly, Jean-Paul Caillard had been prominently involved in several publications.

*La Tribune du Pacifique* seemed to signal a break with the pattern of European control of oppositional publications by designating a young Kanak, Henri Bailly, as its publication director. Bailly was a prominent PALIKA member who joined Naisseline’s new political grouping, Liberation Kanak Socialist (LKS), when it broke away from PALIKA in February 1981 (Association pour la Fondation d’un Institut Kanak D’Histoire Moderne:100). However, the vagueness of *La Tribune*’s opening editorial which commented on the composition of its workers - its statement, for example, that the paper was the initiative of ‘a certain number of people, indépendantistes and others’, and that ‘most of the journalists at this paper wouldn’t be able to write even one line in Lifou, Paici or Wallisian’ - suggests that most of the team were Europeans (*La Tribune*, July 1980).

However, the record on European involvement in oppositional media is not as clear as some suggest. In PALIKA’s *Le Kanak* we have at least one example of a longstanding publication produced by Kanaks. Since the party’s inception in 1976,

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9 The first bilingual publication was the Catholic *Le Messager des Loyalty*, written in French and Lifou (O’Reilly,1955:311). In 1910 the Protestant mission in Ro, Maré began publishing *Nata me roi (Celui qui raconte bien)* in the Maré language. Leenhardt was the first director followed by E. Benignus. O’Reilly says that the printing press and characters were reported to have been sent to Houailou in late 1914 (ibid:316). Between 1912 and 1916, the Protestant mission at Houailou published the monthly, *Virseri (ka e)*. Leenhardt then published *Virherhi* which printed articles in diverse local languages including Hienghène, Koné Nemi and Ponerihouen and continued until 1936 (ibid:316). Between 1930 and 1939, the Protestant mission on Maré published *La Voix des Isles* in the Maré, Lifou and Houailou languages (Brou, 1975:53). The title *Le Messager* was again used as the banner for a bilingual publication of the Association des Indigènes Calédoniens et Loyaltiens (AICLF), which began in October 1947 and contained articles on issues deemed relevant to the indigenous population including education, political rights and alcoholism, and which, importantly, also gave some attention to international issues (O’Reilly, 1955:318; Bordier, 1989b:63).

10 Coulon argues that *La Tribune* was largely a European publication.
the need was felt to produce a publication which would set out the party's principles and political program as they related not only to political issues at the time, but also to less immediately topical issues such as religion, custom, the economy and schooling (PALIKA member, Sylvain Pabouty, interview, 18/4/94).

The argument that Kanaks were tardy in their involvement in the press because of their lack of cultural affinity with this mode of communication is also challenged by the extent of readers' contributions to Bwenando in the form of articles and letters. Bwenando presented itself as the voice of the Kanak people and was confirmed as such in many readers' comments on the publication. As one reader stated: ‘I congratulate the newspaper, and especially its team who participate in the often disquieting publication of our only, unique means of expression’ (6/12/85). Another reader concurred, in more fulsome prose: ‘every time I finish combing the pages of the newspaper, I feel that I have discovered a reality that has often been hidden by the imperialist press. Without a doubt, Bwenando truly remains the newspaper which serves the Kanak people’ (12/11/85). In this affirmation, we are not left with the impression that Bwenando was particularly culturally aberrant. The increasing volume of articles and letters from readers printed in Bwenando also seems to belie the view that writing was ‘not a Kanak thing’. In late 1985, Bwenando claimed that an average of 13 pages of each 16-page edition was written by readers (12/11/85). Letters conveyed news on such topics as FLNKS activities in local areas, local military activities, tensions among pro-independence groups in the tribes, alleged harassment from anti-independence groups, progress on land claims and options for independence. By 1987, letters from FLNKS prisoners imprisoned in Camp Est near Noumea were also printed regularly.

The purpose of this discussion is not to confirm or refute the veracity of the claims that the pro-independence media was largely a European construct, or that FLNKS equivocation over its media resulted from culturally-based difficulties with this form of communication. Nor is it to delve behind the intentions of one or more of the bearers of these discourses. As Fabian argues: ‘In interpreting this sort of talk as discourse one is less interested in the truth value of specific statements, in the question for instance, whether a certain author really expressed his convictions, gave an accurate report of facts, and so on. Instead, one seeks to appreciate the documentary value of a ‘style’ by discerning key notions, rules of combining these
and theoretical devices used to build arguments. In short, one concentrates on elements which determined the shape and content of colonial thought irrespective of individual intention (1986:79).

In a similar vein, I seek to highlight this dominant theme in the discussion of the Kanak media and treat it as discourse; that is, as a version grounded in a particular interpretive repertoire enabled by the experiences of colonialism in New Caledonia. The discourse on European instrumentality in the Kanak media is grounded in antecedent discourses on Kanak quiescence and voicelessness, which were themselves enabled by the disruptive impact of colonialism on the indigenous peoples. As a pervasive colonial discourse, it formed the discursive backdrop to Kanak efforts to establish their own media. As I argue below, a great deal of the style and content of the Kanak media derives from an engagement with this discourse.

**Bwenando as an FLNKS emblem**

Hnalaïne Uregei was *Bwenando’s* first editor. Uregei says that he had been told by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, at the FLNKS congress where the decision was taken to produce a newspaper (Hienghène, 25-6 May 1985), that he would be in charge of its production. Uregei was one of the very few Kanaks who had any experience in the print media, having worked briefly on a trade union publication. According to Uregei, the decision to attempt to produce a mass circulation newspaper was ‘emblematic’ for the FLNKS. It would show, he argued, that Kanaks were capable of producing a ‘real newspaper’ (interview, 10/5/94). Uregei’s stress on this notion of a ‘real newspaper’ illustrates the influence of the discourse of European instrumentality on the pro-independence movement. It suggests that *Bwenando*, at its inception at least, was meant to speak as much to others as it was to the movement. For these others it was to demonstrate Kanak intellectual competence and organisational abilities. Above all, it would demonstrate that Kanaks not only existed but also had charge of this existence. In other words, there was a great deal riding on the success of *Bwenando* as an exemplar of the Kanak political struggle.
This reference to a ‘real newspaper’ by a politically committed Kanak is, however, curious. After all, ‘real newspapers’ in the New Caledonian context were most frequently conservative and commercial publications. Could the quest to emulate certain aspects of such publications be reconciled with the will to use a publication to assert the uniqueness of Kanak identity? How did Uregei, and others involved in the publication, negotiate this apparent dilemma?

Bwenando’s pursuit of the status of a ‘real newspaper’ was most apparent in certain organisational and stylistic features. It was also apparent in its journalists’ engagement with certain professional discourses. However, these points of rapprochement coexisted with stylistic and discursive features which departed significantly from more conventional publications. The differences became more prevalent as the publication proceeded, and as the will to demonstrate Kanak capabilities to others faded in the face of an escalation in anti-independence militancy encouraged by the election of a conservative French government in 1986.

The objective of publishing a ‘real newspaper’ had certain organisational consequences, such as the legal requirement that a non-profit organisation be established from which a management committee would be constituted. The Political Bureau of the FLNKS decided to use an already existing structure, Les Editions Populaires (EDIPOP), to act as the managing organisation of Bwenando and later Djiido. EDIPOP had been established in the early 1980s by Marc Coulon and two other non-Kanak UC members, Jean-Pierre Deteix, who had come to New Caledonia from France in the late 1960s to work in Catholic education, and Ismet Kurtovich, a Caledonian of European descent. Its initial purpose was to sell leftist books by correspondence, but later it was used as a vehicle to publish several monographs on politics in the territory (Deteix interview, 12/5/94). The Political Bureau designated Deteix as the paper’s administrator, but Uregei was given free reign over its concept and editorial content. Deteix says that, at the time, he argued that the paper should be modest, with a priority that it be completely autonomous, meaning that it should be photocopied, not printed. Uregei’s view was different; he sought a printed publication. According to Deteix: ‘in the Kanak mind they thought that they had to at least have one publication which has as good as the others. It’s a thing of the past to want to only use stencils’ (12/5/94).
The production of *Bwenando* was financially constrained from the outset. Deteix was responsible for raising capital for the publication and managed to assemble a small amount, primarily from overseas non-government organisations and the German Greens, which enabled the purchase of a computer and the hiring of a secretary. Despite these financial constraints, Uregei believed it was imperative that the publication appear regularly on a weekly basis. Indeed, frequency and regularity appear to have been key features of *Bwenando*’s attempts to emulate ‘real newspapers’. These features distinguished *Bwenando* from other pro-independence publications in that most pro-independence political news sheets appeared irregularly. During periods of intense political crisis, the efforts of activists responsible for these publications were often directed elsewhere. Most were unapologetic about these lapses, as *Le Kanak*’s comment regarding a four-month lapse in publication during the turbulent period following the 18 November territorial elections indicated:

*Le Kanak* is an activist publication and therefore entirely realised by activists. During the months following 18 November, we certainly privileged the realisation of the FLNKS structures with a stronger mobilisation than before...This issue appears because the circumstances permit. If this is the case in the weeks that follow, we will try to continue our work of informing (*Le Kanak*, 9/3/85).

*Bwenando* first appeared as a 16-page weekly publication on 11 July 1985 and maintained this rhythm, apart from a couple of single-week lapses, about which it was highly apologetic, until the end of 1987. This was quite an impressive record, as working conditions were ‘prehistoric’, according to Uregei, with the small team being required to work lengthy hours to ensure regular publication on a very minimal salary. The *Bwenando* office did not even have a telephone after November 1985 (*Bwenando*, 5/9/86). *Bwenando* moved to fortnightly publication at the beginning of 1987 and continued regular publication until April 1988, after which only five editions appeared at irregular intervals.

Apart from regular publication, *Bwenando* incorporated other newspaper conventions (Figure 6.1). Its pictographic front page emulated, modestly, the style of most of the major metropolitan French and local weekly publications available in the territory, particularly *Combat*, which was similarly printed in black and white. In addition, *Bwenando* incorporated regular sections such as page 3 editorials and
letters to the editor, usually printed on page 2, although the clear political engagement of most of its discourse rendered the page 3 editorials barely distinguishable from other articles. *Bwenando* did not seek to emulate other publications’ coverage, for example, of entertainment or *faits divers*, suggesting that the publication of a ‘real newspaper’ did not signify the will to engage with a readership beyond that of the pro-independence movement and overseas sympathisers. It noted, however, that the paper was read by some in the
Figure 6.1: *Bwenando*, March-April 1987 (cover)
anti-independence community. In its creation and certain stylistic features, *Bwenando*’s purpose was to demonstrate Kanak existence and competence to these readers; in its discourses, however, the movement spoke, through *Bwenando*, resolutely to itself.

*Bwenando* sought to expose the political activities, clandestine machinations, and allegedly corrupt activities of the right in Noumea and throughout the interior. It reported on the activities of the regions and the struggle committees, the activities, decisions and proposals of the Political Bureau of the FLNKS, and the decisions of congresses. It also analysed FLNKS campaigns and set out to rally militants to improve their organisational structures and sharpen their militancy. From the outset, therefore, *Bwenando* conveyed a militancy of tone in keeping with its apparent quest to foster the abilities and preparedness of FLNKS militants to engage in extra-constitutional action. It also kept alive the notion of unity of black peoples in the anti-imperialist struggle by devoting two or more pages in most editions to news of other anti-imperialist struggles elsewhere in the world - frequently South Africa, Chad, the Caribbean and Central America, and East Timor. *Bwenando* was therefore a major conduit for the importation of an internationalist discourse of black and Third World struggle and resistance.

**Professional discourses**

In parallel with the will of the *Bwenando* team to produce a ‘real newspaper’ was the will to be recognised as ‘real journalists’. The establishment of an FLNKS newspaper resulted in the creation of a new type of activist within the movement - the journalist. There were prior instances where Kanaks had written regularly for pro-independence publications, but the decision to publish a regular FLNKS newspaper necessitated the full-time dedication of some activists to the task. These activists readily assumed the professional appellation of ‘journalist’ and sought official recognition for this status through requests to the High Commission to be issued with press cards which enabled journalists’ entry into official functions and judicial proceedings. *Bwenando* decried the non-response from the High Commission to its requests. It argued that one implication of what it took to be a refusal was that *Bwenando* journalists could not report on judicial proceedings involving Kanaks, unless they managed to get a place in the public gallery, which
was frequently difficult, particularly after the bombing of the Noumea court house in 1986 and the consequent relocation of trials, either to a court annex or to the theatre of the Fédération Ouvrier Laïque (FOL). Noting that journalists working for anti-independence publications had press cards, *Bwenando* railed: ‘In New Caledonia, only foreigners, faschos and schemers can hold a press card. Therefore, at the TRIAL OF THE KANAK PEOPLE, THE KANAK PEOPLE’S NEWSPAPER IS BARRED’ (26/6/86).\(^{11}\)

The desire to be recognised as journalists resulted in an engagement with some professional discourses, but this engagement was always tempered by other discursive pressures. The most notable engagement was with a discourse on truth, expressed in comments on the truthfulness of the reporting in *Bwenando* compared with that of other publications, and also in the volume of empirical material used in articles to sustain the arguments which they advanced. This claim to ‘the true’, bolstered by the incorporation into articles of extensive supporting evidence, is prevalent in the style of journalism that has come to be known as ‘investigative journalism’. This style is particularly apparent in the numerous articles on ‘RPCR terrorism’ in the early editions of *Bwenando*, which appear to have as their primary objective the desire to prove that it was the RPCR, not the FLNKS, that was terrorist. This thesis was widely concurred with within the FLNKS. One therefore wonders why it was seen to be necessary to include this volume of supporting material. Perhaps it was intended to inform the movement and overseas readers of details of which they were unaware and make known to the RPCR that the movement was watching its activities. However, it might also have been included because of the *Bwenando* journalists’ engagement with received ideas of journalistic style and professional practice. That a discourse on truth was at the forefront of this engagement in *Bwenando* probably attests to its compatibility with political engagement. *Bwenando* argued that it sought to expose the truth, but it gave to this quest a highly political justification in arguing that ‘only the truth is revolutionary’ (18/4/86). The revolutionary power of truth would, it argued, liberate the territory:

\(^{11}\)By September 1987, *Bwenando* appears to have received official recognition. A journalist from *Bwenando* appears to have participated in a Pons ‘meet the press’ televised by RFO (*Bwenando*, 11/9/87). This was just after Alain Le Garrec took over as director at RFO. See chapter 8, p. 278.
New Caledonia, comfortably stuck in a bog of lies since March 1986 in particular, will only survive by letting the truth set it free. The current regime survives only on lies. Its press, radio, television, inject a daily dose of lies into the Caledonians, thereby applying the precepts of Dr GOEBBELS by which it is sufficient to tirelessly repeat lies, preferably the most outrageous and cynical possible, in order to make an official truth. Volumes could indeed be written to enumerate what Caledonians, supposedly ‘informed’ by official television and the main press under the orders of LAFLEUR and the local extreme right, haven’t known and will never know. Let’s just ask this one question: Where and when have the main press and official broadcasters ever explained honestly the ideas of supporters of Canaque independence? Inexhaustible when it comes to exposing as ‘terrorists’ those who refuse to sacrifice themselves to the cult of LAFLEUR and who don’t give in in the face of oppression and colonial violence, always ready to make a big noise about uncontrollable and tendentious rumours and to pass on cheap police gossip, the Territory’s main media have never respected Caledonian opinion to the point of really letting the ideas of the independence movement be known (7/5/87).

There are inflections in Bwenando’s engagement with truth. Liberating truth is compared with ‘official truth’, which is manufactured by powerful media institutions involved in the repetition of lies. Despite this ‘official truth’ being lies, Bwenando repeatedly acknowledges its force and coherence in its references to the existence of ‘two logics’, the one belonging to the coloniser and the other to the colonised (26/6/86). This notion of ‘two logics’ is brought to bear particularly in Bwenando’s analysis of the differential treatment afforded Kanaks and Europeans by the judicial system. Bwenando considered this to be exemplified in the acquittal of the perpetrators of the Hienghène massacre which was followed shortly after by the conviction of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the imprisonment of Yéiwéné Yéiwéné on the grounds of inciting violence after they declared that the acquittal meant that Kanaks should now arm themselves in self-defence (8/1/88). The movement within Bwenando between the notion of truth as absolute and the more contingent notion of the existence of competing realms of truth allowed for the strategic mobilisation of inflections in the discourse of truth according to the requirements of different discursive contexts.
Financial and political difficulties at *Bwenando*

The ambitious scope of the project - that is, the desire to produce a weekly newspaper with a relatively broad coverage of issues in a context of extremely limited financial and material resources - resulted in the paper experiencing severe financial difficulties almost from the outset. Although the paper sold well (3,000 copies were initially printed and this number increased progressively to 5,000 by 1987), the proceeds from sales did not always find their way back to *Bwenando*. Distribution was effected through an ‘activist network’ with bundles being picked up by activists from the *Bwenando* office and delivered to other activists in Noumea and the interior for further distribution. *Bwenando*’s exasperation with this situation was expressed in a May 1986 editorial:

> A lot of right-wing people buy and read *Bwenando*. They at least, it seems, are more serious and pay more regularly than some...FLN activists who haven’t sent anything for months, despite the decisions of the AG [General Assembly] at Houailou and the motion of the congress at OUNDJO (29/5/86).

*Bwenando* is referring here to the decision taken at the FLNKS’s congress in Oundjo that the newspaper proceed, despite EDIPOP’s argument that the paper was in financial trouble and would need to close (Deteix interview, 12/5/94). EDIPOP’s recommendation precipitated vigorous and acrimonious debate at the congress over *Bwenando*’s future. The resolution, which supported not only *Bwenando* but also Radio Djiido and the Popular Kanak Schools, revealed little of the acrimony which had preceded its passing:

> The fourth FLNKS Congress affirms that the newspaper BWENANDO, radio DJIIDO and the E.P.K. (Kanak Popular Schools), are indispensable structures in the Kanak People’s struggle for liberation. The Congress therefore decides that all the structures, all FLNKS organisations, should mobilise in order to strengthen their finances and operations (*FLNKS: La Charte du FLNKS. Les Motions de Tous les Congrès. Les Decisions du Gouvernement Provisoire de Kanaky, EDIPOP*).

Although financial pressures clearly brought into question the continuing viability of *Bwenando*, political dissent over the editorial orientation of the paper was perhaps of equal, if not greater, weight in EDIPOP’s recommendation. The dominant UC leadership in the FLNKS had agreed to the activist initiative to establish *Bwenando*, but from the outset had been uneasy about the concept of an FLNKS publication.
Deteix says that the UC leadership had long before decided against establishing a newspaper on the grounds that it would be too costly and too difficult to distribute, favouring instead the establishment of a radio station (interview, 12/5/94).

Following the Oundjo congress, management was transferred from the UC-dominated EDIPOP to a new association, Bwenando, comprising the workers from the paper and a member of each constituent FLNKS group designated by the FLNKS Political Bureau. Deteix says that the UC sought to withdraw from its close association with the publication but agreed to have a representative on the new association which, he argues, never met (ibid). Instead, a system of collective self-management appears to have resulted from the new organisational structure. This meant that editorial control remained with the editorial team, moderated only marginally, if at all, by the political representatives of the constituent FLNKS groups. Jacques Violette, the leader of the Parti Socialiste Kanak (PSK) and a European, took over as the head of this team (Uregei had left in late 1985 to become the FLNKS’s representative in France). The suggestion that the editorial content of Bwenando was collectively determined was lent weight by the publishing in 1986 of an article which Violette attributed to himself because, he said, he had not submitted the text to the editorial committee for its agreement (31/7/86). Uregei argues that the new management structure, along with changes in the editorial team, did not significantly alter the editorial orientation of the newspaper. Bwenando, he argues, ‘never reflected the dominant, hegemonic, consensual stream - the right-wing stream - within the FLNKS’ (interview, 10/5/94).

It was the prospect that an FLNKS newspaper might act as a conduit for the expression of more marginalised discourses within the FLNKS that had led the UC and other more conservative groups in the Front to be concerned about the initial structures of editorial control within the paper. And it appears to have been the prevalence of such discourses that precipitated the UC’s unsuccessful move to seek the paper’s closure less than a year into its publication. The prospect that Bwenando would chart a more radical, leftist course was signalled in its first edition. Uregei referred to the ‘coming revolutionary effervescence’, adding that: ‘the war, if

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12 From this period until 1988, Bwenando designated its publications director as Susanne Ounei and its chief editor as Luc Tutugoro. However, the absence of Ounei from the territory during much of this period brings into question the extent to which she contributed in an ongoing fashion to the paper. Uregei argues that the team of Bwenando was like a Kanak music group: the group remains but the membership changes completely on a regular basis (interview, 10/5/94).
there is going to be war, is yet to come - as if to imagine that it is still possible to contain the violent blast, born on 18 November, within institutional constraints' (11/7/85). A tendency in Bwenando to lapse into Marxist revolutionary discourse must have been unsettling for more conservative members of the movement. In one article, Marxism is touted as the legitimate political philosophy for the FLNKS - a view which many in the FLNKS did not share:

...in 10 years time a referendum will result in independence and the independence project will have become much more radical. Racist or Marxist, not both, for Marxism and racism are fundamentally contradictory, contrary to what is claimed by illiterate ‘political scientists’ who haven’t read Marx (20/12/85).

The will of more conservative elements to control the publication was pitted against the aspirations of Uregei and others for a ‘real newspaper’ which, they argued, required that the publication have a significant degree of editorial independence from the FLNKS and its constituent groups. The editorial position of the paper was partially clarified following the Oundjo congress. In an editorial referring to criticism within the FLNKS of Bwenando’s publishing of an article critical of the FLNKS move to distance itself in its relations with Libya, Bwenando referred to the decision taken by the FLNKS Political Bureau after the Oundjo congress that:

Bwenando would be the FLNKS newspaper but would remain independent, provided that it doesn’t depart from the framework of the Charter and motions of the congress. Obviously, the BP [Political Bureau] will maintain supervision in order to ensure that the content complies with the defined orientations.

Bwenando continued with an interpretation of this mandate:

To begin with, BWENANDO has a vocation to OBJECTIVELY INFORM and maintain debate within the FLNKS. Our newspaper is that of the FLNKS, therefore the newspaper of the people, the rank-and-file. And the rank-and-file should be informed in order that it can engage in the debates. It is therefore reprehensible to lie to the rank-and-file, even by omission, by hiding the truth. Don’t forget that ‘only the truth is revolutionary’. Bwenando also has a mission to generally support the diverse FLNKS structures and the actions of the Political Bureau in particular (18/4/86).

This interpretation treads, of course, a fine line between pluralistic notions of objectivity, revolutionary notions of truth, and service to the FLNKS. It might be a
succinct statement of position, but it did little to mask the inherent tensions between Bwenando’s commitment to be both editorially independent and politically aligned. This tension was rendered particularly acute in the volatile political context in the territory, which rendered every discursive intervention highly significant. The concerns expressed by conservative (and some less conservative) groups in the FLNKS over what they saw as Bwenando’s destabilisation of the movement demonstrated that Bwenando’s interpretation of its mandate was not shared by all.

Bwenando’s assertion of its independence from particular positions within the FLNKS came early in its publication. In its first month, an article criticised a UC communique which expressed concern at the ‘risk of anarchy’ from the activities of FLNKS activists in the east coast town of Thio (8/8/85). A month later, Bwenando acknowledged that it had been criticised for ‘demolishing its partners’, choosing to interpret this criticism as referring to its persistent opposition to what it argued were the collaborationist policies of the more moderate pro-independence group, the LKS (19/9/85). This was a curious interpretation given that the LKS was not a constituent member of the FLNKS.

Bwenando’s retort to these criticisms was that others had accused the publication of being too consensus-oriented. There is much in the publication to support the view that Bwenando was an important advocate for many FLNKS decisions. Much of Bwenando was devoted to rallying readers around decisions taken at congresses and at meetings of the Political Bureau. For example, Bwenando waged strenuous campaigns to effect adherence to the electoral boycott of 1986 and the referendum boycott of 1987. It even campaigned for the boycott of the 1988 presidential elections, despite having previously argued that the FLNKS should participate in the poll. However, Bwenando’s episodic divergences from certain decisions, along with its discussion of issues of considerable sensitivity within the FLNKS, resulted in a continuation of criticisms that the newspaper was excessively divisive. These came not only from more conservative elements within the Front. The FLNKS’s constituent union, the leftist USTKE (Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanaks et des Exploités -United Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers), had strongly supported the continuation of Bwenando and had provided financial support.

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13 Although UC representatives dominated in senior FLNKS positions, all the constituent groups within the FLNKS had equal representation on the Political Bureau which, as a result, sometimes adopted a more militant stance than that advocated by the more conservative UC leadership.
assistance to ensure this. However, at one stage, even the USTKE, through comments published in *Bwenando*, was moved to: ‘deplore that our newspaper, supported by the union, plays at this game, and (to) demand that it doesn’t contribute to our divisions but rather to our unification’ (18/4/86). *Bwenando*’s retorts to such criticism were always less than contrite. In response to the USTKE, *Bwenando* argued that ‘No-one fights more for the unity of the FLNKS and the reconciliation of its tendencies than *Bwenando*’ (ibid). Elsewhere, *Bwenando* provided a more sustained response:

As in the past, certain naively reproach *Bwenando* for having echoed so-called ‘internal divisions’, for displaying ‘intestinal quarrels’ to the advantage of our adversaries. We accept the risk, which is only fictitious. In reality, there are only advantages to prove to those who accuse us of totalitarianism, that the debating of ideas and freedom of opinion are in fact the rule within the FLNKS. Since the creation of the FI in 1979, it is in-depth debate which has been at the root of our mobilisation. This debate is at the origin of the creation of the FLNKS and the actions taken, which made us progress on the difficult road of liberty (7/5/87).

Violette’s management of *Bwenando* from late 1985 to the paper’s demise in 1989 might be considered by some to muddy the paper’s claim to Kanak authenticity, and was probably behind Maresca’s comments cited above that *Bwenando* was written by Europeans. But under Violette *Bwenando* sought to give new meaning to its claim to be the voice of the Kanak people by incorporating an even larger volume of articles, letters and poems written, it claimed, mostly by Kanaks. The diversity of views expressed in these contributions generated further concern among FLNKS conservatives (12/11/85). Deteix’s assessment that this practice of encouraging contributions precipitated Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s subsequent assassination illustrates the level of hostility felt by some in the movement towards *Bwenando*’s editorial policies under Violette. Deteix argues that, under the editorial direction of Hnalaine Uregei:

*Bwenando* had a certain editorial quality while being open to events and to popular sensitivities. I think that Hnalaine knew how to maintain, in spite of everything, an editorial standard at the paper...[The new editorial orientation] made a bad newspaper because everyone can’t say intelligently just anything. Statistics even show that, by constantly saying just anything, people become uninterested, or people think that it is the official word of the FLNKS. And when just anything is expressed, it can’t be the official word of the FLNKS because this development culminated in the assassination of Jean-Marie. That is to say, this conception that just anyone, because he is
Kanak, can say officially and publicly just anything, culminates in just anything. And it is this manner of thinking about [the paper’s] operation that contributed to the assassination of Jean-Marie. This happened from the moment that the FLNKS didn’t dare confront things and say, 'No, you can’t say that. Those things can’t be done, can’t be said, you haven’t the right to say that (interview, 12/5/94).

Although *Bwenando*’s demise in was ultimately precipitated by financial crisis, animosity towards *Bwenando* meant that there was little will within the FLNKS leadership to assist the newspaper to continue. The last edition to be published was a memorial edition for Jean-Marie Tjibaou in July 1989. A memorial edition for Yéiwéné Yéiwéné was foreshadowed but never appeared. With the demise of *Bwenando*, the FLNKS no longer had a publication and none has subsequently emerged. For Uregei, the closure of *Bwenando* underscored the notion that the newspaper was emblematic for the FLNKS:

> When I say that *Bwenando* reflected perfectly the evolution of the Front in its different phases, that is to say that, at the beginning, there was enthusiasm - a united, revolutionary enthusiasm. Everyone bought it - no, they didn’t buy it - everyone read it. *Bwenando* was well distributed. Very quickly, the FLNKS fell back in its divisions - structural divisions. That had repercussions on *Bwenando*. Very quickly, a part of the FLNKS leadership no longer recognised *Bwenando* or did everything to stop *Bwenando* from operating. As early as 1986, *Bwenando* had already fallen into a type of ghetto, there you are! (interview, 10/5/94).

The experience of *Bwenando* attests to the centrality of the struggle to control discourse to political struggle at all levels, not only between officially recognised adversaries but also among ostensible political allies.

**Radio Djiido**

Radio Djiido’s continuing existence suggests that the station was better able to negotiate the difficult financial and political constraints under which it, like *Bwenands*, operated. That Djiido endures where *Bwenando* demised suggests not only that its finances were better managed but also that its management structures and editorial policies were better suited to the exigencies of political power within the FLNKS. In particular, the strength of UC influence within the station’s management appears to have ensured that Djiido pursued a more conservative
editorial line and therefore maintained support from more moderate elements within the FLNKS and, in particular, its UC-dominated leadership.

Deteix argues that the FI had discussed the establishment of a radio station following the legalisation in 1981 of ‘free radio’ services in France. However, it was, he argues, primarily UC members who ‘turned to action’ and committed financial resources to ensure the station’s establishment and initial operation. A prominent UC member who was subsequently appointed as station manager, Octave Togna, travelled to France to purchase equipment, with finance from the German Greens, some foreign non-government organisations and EDIPOP (Togna interview, 23/11/89). The UC formed an association, Unica, to take out a loan to purchase a house as premises. Its location a few hundred metres from the anti-independence radio station RRB, in the upper middle-class Noumean suburb of Magenta, was illustrative of the major purposes which the UC envisaged for the station. According to Deteix, Djiido was established to ‘affirm a presence, to get whites used to the fact that they weren’t the only ones to speak’ (Deteix interview, 12/5/94). As Togna put it, the choice of location was very political: ‘The voice of the Kanak people should make itself heard even where people don’t like it’ (Kanaky, no. 9, September 1987).

This objective immediately distinguished the aims of Djiido from those of Bwenando. Although Bwenando was created in part to articulate a Kanak voice to those who denied its existence, its voice primarily addressed Kanaks. Distribution was a problem for the publication because the aim was that Bwenando reach Kanaks throughout the territory. Djiido’s signal covering a 50-kilometre radius meant that the station could be heard only in greater Noumea, whose population was primarily non-Kanak. Djiido did seek authorisation to extend its signal into the interior early in its operation. Its lack of success in this regard did not, however, jeopardise what appears to have been its major objective - to constitute a Kanak presence in ‘Nouméa la blanche’. The centrality of this objective is reflected in Togna’s comparison of the efficacy of Djiido and Bwenando:

14 Deteix says that Radio Djiido resulted from the initiative of such people as himself, Eloi Machoro, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Yéiwéné Yéiwéné, Octave Togna and Léopold Jorédié.

15 Djiido began being broadcast to 80 per cent of the territory in 1991 through a network put in place by the state-run broadcasting transmission company, TDF (Waia interview, 10/5/94). Prior to this, Djiido had made unsuccessful requests to TDF for the extension of its network (Deteix interview, 12/5/94). The extension of Djiido and RRB was a commitment made in the Matignon Accords.
Psychologically, local whites think that it is impossible that local Kanaks could use radio. It is unthinkable. It’s unthinkable that Kanaks could speak for themselves and that we could rape whites in their own homes - by that I mean penetrate their homes without entering physically. Bwenando doesn’t enter into the homes of Europeans; Djiido does, but they hide to listen to us. We are stronger than Bwenando in so far as radio is more able to influence European opinion than a newspaper (interview, 23/11/89).

The station was opened on 24 September 1985, the 132nd anniversary of the annexation of the territory by France, by New Caledonian Deputy Roch Pidjot and Jean-Marie Tjibaou, with an opening Tamla Motown jingle which signalled its intended musical orientation towards the black musical genres of reggae, soul, funk and disco. Djiido was the territory’s first 24-hour radio service, a programming decision taken as much for security reasons, to ensure a continual presence at the site, as a demonstration of the capabilities of its team. Only 24 hours into its operation, a bomb was thrown at the premises but it caused little damage. The staff and premises continued to be subjected to considerable harassment from right-wing agitators, resulting in the staff being required to sleep on the premises during periods of acute political tension. Djiido’s news broadcasts were frequently jammed. Bwenando believed that the jamming was emanating from RRB, describing it as ‘a violation of OUR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION in Kanak country’ (Bwenando, 16/10/85; see also, Bwenando, 10/1/86 and L’Avenir, 25/11/86).16

The objective of using Djiido to demonstrate Kanak abilities to the European population of Noumea placed a high premium on the broadcasting of programs which complied with dominant notions of media professionalism and program structure. Early efforts were made to secure training courses for those designated to work as journalists at the station. From the beginning of 1986, journalists were sent overseas for six-month training programs, primarily to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. One of the first journalists to undergo training in Australia was Nicole Waia, who became Djiido’s co-director in 1989. She argues that, while these courses were helpful, Djiido’s journalists learnt most from emulating the modes of operating of other journalists working in the territory. This was hardly a mind-set which demonstrated a critical engagement with notions of media professionalism.

16 Djiido was also subject to defamation proceedings. Les Nouvelles Hebdo reported that Djiido was found guilty of defamation in December 1987 for having broadcast an interview with Pierre Juquin which defamed Serge Vanhale and Bernard Deck (25/2/88).
Togna also resolved to emulate much of the programming structure of the other radio stations in the territory. Djiido primarily broadcast music, its political programming being mostly restricted to its three daily news bulletins and a couple of additional information programs. Initially, the news bulletins, which then lasted only five to seven minutes, were compiled by Deteix and UC politician Léopold Jorédié. Bulletins were compiled from news broadcast on RFO, RRB, Radio Australia and the Voice of America, and from pro-independence sources who provided information by phone (Togna interview, 23/11/89; Deteix interview, 12/5/94). By 1986, the news bulletins lasted at least 15 minutes and more local news was incorporated into the bulletins as a result of information relayed to Djiido from local FLNKS struggle committees. Djiido would frequently be informed of activities of the police and the military in the interior, and this information would be incorporated into news bulletins. The incorporation of this news was, according to Nicole Waia, a new and troublesome development for their opponents:

Our political adversaries began to understand the extent to which we were dangerous for their propaganda. From then on, they could no longer say anything they liked. Radio Djiido annoyed them, hence their will to sabotage it at any cost (Waia, 1991).

In part, the restriction of political information primarily to the news was an organisational imperative: the small news team was already stretched in putting together three main daily news bulletins. However, it was also seen as a legislative and political imperative. Legislatively, Djiido and RRB were required to comply with certain standards of objectivity and balance, and the requirement that political programming be clearly identifiable from the remainder of the programming. Djiido appears to have followed these dictates more closely than RRB, but both stations flouted this legislative requirement at times. Nicole Waia commented, for example, that Djiido publicised the FLNKS call to boycott the French national elections of 1986 and the 1987 referendum on independence by broadcasting advertisements explaining the FLNKS position, ignoring a directive from the High Commissioner that the station give air-time to its opponents (Waia interview, 10/5/94). Djiido did, however, give some exposure to anti-independence political discourses. It did so, Waia argued, in order to counter the anti-independence discourse which described the Kanak struggle as ‘a racist fight, even a fight for expulsion’ (Waia, 1991). As she commented:
We want Djiido to be the image of a future national radio station or national structure when the country is independent. That is to say that people have to be able to express themselves...It is the only way to convince people that our struggle isn’t a racist struggle (interview, 10/5/94).

Even during the Ouvéa crisis, Djiido maintained its policy of keeping political discourse to the news bulletins, this time for security reasons in order to guard against the station being attacked by those Waia described as ‘fascists’. As she commented: ‘Above all else, we mustn’t excite people here in Noumea because we aren’t in a position of strength here. People have already come here to throw grenades and all’ (Waia interview, 10/5/94).

The limiting of political discourses primarily to news bulletins engendered criticism from within the FLNKS. As one writer to Bwenando commented:

I am waiting for Radio Djiido to become a political radio service for the FLNKS on which the political situation in Kanaky would be analysed; where one could hear of the history of the Kanak people’s demands- all in all, a political education for the Kanak people and those who are colonised and exploited in order to reinforce the work of the struggle committees and Bwenando, rather than waste time broadcasting music (Bwenando, 27/3/86).

Bwenando responded by defending Djiido, telling such critics that they should rather ask themselves what they have done for Djiido (ibid). Bwenando’s response pointed to resource constraints as the major factor behind Djiido’s programming orientation. While these constraints were indeed formidable, they were exacerbated by the choice taken by the management at Djiido to comply with conventional notions of professionalism and program structure. Alternatives were possible, but not if the objective of the station was to demonstrate Kanak existence and competence to ‘Nouméa la blanche’.

**Djiido and FLNKS politics**

As with Bwenando, Djiido was a structure of the FLNKS but was also guaranteed a degree of editorial independence from the FLNKS. This independence was considered crucial if Djiido was to succeed in projecting a professionally credible image. Waia’s interpretation of this relationship is evocative of Bwenando’s,
although it is probably less forceful in the manner in which it asserts Djiido's editorial independence. Waia argues that:

> Certainly we can't say anything against the FLNKS...but that doesn't stop us from doing analyses which run counter to them a bit. When one doesn't agree with the orientation taken by the FLNKS, one doesn't denounce it but rather does an analysis and makes sure that people in the FLNKS listen to it. Then that allows a debate to take place. But at no time does the FLNKS have a direct hold (Waia, 10/5/94).

Journalists at Djiido were clearly faced with tensions similar to those at Bwenando. The different fate of these two FLNKS media suggests, however, that the tensions were negotiated differently between the organisations. A major factor in this difference appears to have been the continuing influence of the UC in the management of Djiido. Until his appointment as head of the Agence de Développement Culturelle Kanak (ADCK) in late 1989, Togna maintained relatively tight editorial control over Djiido’s news and current affairs programming. Although he was not located on the premises during the day (he held a position at the SLN), journalists would seek his advice on whether potentially contentious information should be broadcast and he would be present most evenings when the nightly news bulletin went to air. Although EDIPOP remained in place as the official management structure of the station, its remained so in legal terms only, and was not called on to provide management or editorial advice. In interview, Togna stressed his central editorial role: ‘There are times when you have to say things. I make the choice. I base the choice on a proper analysis of the political situation. It is never dictated from outside, never, never, never’ (23/1/89).

A hint of Togna’s forceful personality is conveyed in this quote. It, along with the prominence of his position in the UC and the FLNKS in general, probably assisted significantly in shielding journalists at Djiido from acute political pressure. Togna says that it was initially very difficult to guard the station’s independence (ibid). However, his ‘proper analyses’ of the political situation, which dictated his editorial decisions, were no doubt significantly influenced by his closeness to the UC. His response at interview to a question on the relevance of the notion of socialism to the operation and programming of the station provided what I believe to be a good illustration of how his views reflect more conservative positions within the movement. After an extended period of laughter, Togna was seriously adamant:
‘Me, I’m not a socialist; I am only a Kanak! The station is Kanak because Kanaks work in it ... I don’t want to be colonised a second time’ (ibid). His rejection of the relevance of socialism to the operations of the station and to the movement more generally suggested an alignment with more conservative elements within the FLNKS on this important and divisive issue. His response contrasted sharply with that, for example, of a PALIKA territorial counsellor who asserted unwaveringly that he was a ‘Marxist-Leninist’, and with the general adherence to certain socialist principles within the more leftist groups within the FLNKS, in particular the PALIKA and the USTKE.

Togna’s editorial control within Djiido was therefore highly significant in the station being able to negotiate the difficulties of an arm’s-length relationship with the FLNKS. In addition, as Waia argues, the superior financial management of Djiido also ensured that the station could continue while Bwenando was forced to close.

A Kanak radio

Djiido’s claim to constitute a Kanak presence in ‘Nouméa la blanche’ and to be the voice of the Kanak people implied that the station would be the conduit for the assertion of Kanak identity. Within much pro-independence discourse, Kanak identity was expressed, as I argue in the next chapter, through the assertion of difference. Djiido, on the other hand, through its concerted engagement with notions of professionalism, appeared at times more concerned to emulate the broadcasting style of its competitors than to chart a more culturally distinct course. Togna’s assertion that Djiido is Kanak because only Kanaks work at the station does not resolve the issue of the extent to which this Kanak presence was expressed through Djiido’s programming. Within the broadcast media in particular, we might assume that the exigencies of complying with professional practices would limit the scope for difference. For example, in the presentation of news, such factors as the punctuality of news bulletins, the scope of coverage of issues, the structure of the news bulletins, and their mode of verbal delivery are governed by professional codes which journalists at Djiido mostly appeared adept at emulating. Were there expressions of difference in Djiido’s news and information programming?
The primary difference was, of course, the incorporation of news on pro-independence movement demands and activities, which was far from insignificant in a context where pro-independence discourses were largely excluded from the mass audience media. However, in addition, some more general differences were apparent. Djiido placed greater emphasis on regional news, which was congruent with the pro-independence argument that New Caledonia should be seen as part of the Pacific, not France.\footnote{In 1991, Djiido had agreements with Pacnews, Radio Australia, Radio Vanuatu and Radio Tefana in Tahiti for the exchange of information and programs (Waia, 1991). By 1994, a French regional news broadcast from Radio Australia was being transmitted each lunch-time (Waia interview, 10/5/94).} In addition, Djiido’s news stories tended to be longer than those broadcast on other media. For example, lengthy extracts of interviews sometimes featured prominently in news bulletins, and Djiido developed a reputation for reading extensively from AFP wire service stories.\footnote{In 1991, Djiido had agreements with Pacnews, Radio Australia, Radio Vanuatu and Radio Tefana in Tahiti for the exchange of information and programs (Waia, 1991). By 1994, a French regional news broadcast from Radio Australia was being transmitted each lunch-time (Waia interview, 10/5/94).} In part, these differences resulted from resource constraints. Journalists frequently did not have time to edit interviews and the choice of a 15 to 20-minute news bulletin, three times daily, often necessitated heavy reliance on AFP news. While some listeners viewed the lengthy reading of AFP news stories as an unfortunate lapse in professionalism, others considered it a significant contribution to broadening out the informational sphere. For Barbançon, the filtering of information by the other radio services in the territory, particularly RRB, meant that:

...you have to listen to the indépendantiste radio to know a bit more. This is the only radio station to take account of AFP stories, in an almost exhaustive manner. It is one of the few areas of liberty that still exists’ (1992:56-7).

These practices, while influenced by organisational imperatives, may also reflect a different appreciation of the role which radio can play in advancing independence. The broadcasting of lengthy interviews with Kanaks might be seen to valorise the contribution of people who were not particularly adept at the ‘30-second grab’. As Tjibaou once commented: ‘As a result of speaking through the media one’s language becomes more sophisticated and one even loses contact with one’s own rank and file (Canberra Kanaky, September-December 1985). Giving voice to this Kanak ‘rank and file’, or speaking in its voice, could reduce the risk of alienation among Kanak listeners and valorise their voice. It might therefore constitute not only a cultural expression but also an astute tactic in the political struggle. In addition, the more lengthy coverage of individual stories reflects a more pedagogic view of the medium and a presumption that a fuller understanding of local and
international events would enhance Kanak self-awareness and the political struggle for independence. These differences might be seen to be expressive of cultural difference but, as we have seen, this was not the primary objective of Djiido.

The image of Kanak identity articulated through Djiido’s programming de-emphasised difference, promoting instead a vision of Kanaks as assimilable and, indeed, assimilated into an area of endeavour which could be seen to exemplify modernity - the media. This articulation of Kanak identity contrasted significantly with other notions of Kanakness which saw this identity as best expressed through culturally authentic practices and institutions. Djiido’s choice reflected, as I have argued, the more politically moderate influence of the UC leadership through Togna and Deteix, resulting in the station facing less opposition from the FLNKS leadership, even if some more radical FLNKS members believed that more political programming was warranted. However, this relative lack of opposition seldom translated into enthusiastic support for Djiido from the FLNKS leadership, with the result that the station received little financial assistance from the Front. According to Deteix, the FLNKS wanted a radio station but has rarely helped out. He argues that FLNKS politicians are anti-media: they are opposed to the idea that issues pertinent to the pro-independence movement should be discussed on radio resulting

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18 Djiido began taking the AFP wire service at the beginning of 1987.

19 My short period of time working in the news room at Djiido also gave me the opportunity to observe some organisational differences which distinguished Djiido’s mode of operation from that of public radio stations in Australia where I have also worked. Public radio provides the closest point of comparison in the sense that a significant amount of the programming is overtly politically oriented and stations frequently operate under severe financial constraints. Indeed, public radio in Australia mostly uses volunteer labour. As in public radio in Australia, working conditions at Djiido were very poor. Workers were often required to work a 16-hour day, six days per week, and received for it only a small amount of pocket money. Working for Djiido entailed virtually living for Djiido. Workers ate together throughout the day in a small shed at the side of the house. Some, in 1989, still slept on the premises. The station’s only car belonged to Nicole Waia; it was not working very well when I was there and required to be push started. When journalists went out to cover stories they would leave together in the car and be dropped off at various places by the driver (most frequently Nicole), which often meant they arrived at their destinations late. Back in the cramped news room, journalists sat around a very large table (made from several tables pushed together) and each engaged in their various listening, editing or writing tasks. Nicole, who clearly presided in the news room, was busy with her own tasks, but occasionally an issue would be raised through, for example, a journalist asking a question about an AFP wire story, and Nicole would begin to extemporise on the issue, getting deeper and deeper into commenting in a most eloquent fashion on its origins and implications. She commented to me that she saw her role in relation to the other, at that time young, journalists as pedagogic. For me, Nicole was the grand matriarch of the news room, commanding authority but bestowing her political analysis and benevolence on her team. Togna’s authority in the station was palpable. His arrival in the evening generated a degree of apprehension among the workers. He would give directives, tell people off about their work and shout out of his room to tell people to shut up if they were making too much noise. But he also seemed to have a great deal of affection for his workers, most evident after the evening news bulletin when most journalists would get in his van to be driven home. This mixture of authority and benevolence struck me as very distinct and certainly very different to the more individualistic environments in which I had worked in Australia.
in there being between these politicians and Djido ‘a permanent brawl’ (interview, 12/5/94).

There is clearly a paradox here between the FLNKS’s public pronouncements on the media and its more private practices. The public condemnation of the control of discourse within those media institutions which the FLNKS described as ‘colonial’ did not translate into strategies of greater discursive openness in its own media. It appears, as Barbançon has argued, that the ‘unspoken’ could emerge in Kanak society as readily as it could in European.

**Issues and discursive emphases in the pro-independence press**

The politically affiliated pro-independence press provided the forum for the propagation of party information and analyses of political events. *L’Avenir* published speeches and articles written by UC leaders, as well as precis of UC congresses and meetings of its central committee. Prior to the 1980s, Lenormand was the major contributor to the publication, but other party members were required to ensure publication during the lengthy periods when Lenormand was in Paris for parliamentary sittings. In 1980 and 1981, *L’Avenir* published speeches delivered in the French parliament and the Territorial Assembly by UC Deputy Roch Pidjot, in the face of FR 3’s policy of not giving exposure to Kanak politicians (see for example, *L’Avenir*, 15/6/80; 31/12/80; 4/8/81). Throughout the decade, most senior party members - Pierre Declercq, Eloi Machoro, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yéiwéné Yéiwéné (all of whom were dead by the end of the decade) - wrote for *L’Avenir* or had speeches which they had delivered in the Territorial Assembly or elsewhere published. François Burck took over as *L’Avenir*’s editor in the early 1980s, and most with whom I spoke considered that he was the primary catalyst for the publication’s appearance during the decade, assisted by Régis Lethezer, an administrator within the UC. *Bwenando* also contained considerable party news. The FLNKS published a regular section ‘News from the Front’, contributed by its Political Bureau, as well as letters and articles from representatives of its constituent groups, precis of FLNKS, UC, UPM and FULK (Front Uni de Libération Kanake - United Kanak Liberation Front) congresses and decisions of their
leadership committees. In addition, articles on PALIKA congresses and decisions were published in *Le Kanak*.  

However, the ambit of issues discussed in the pro-independence press went well beyond party politics. The publications addressed broader social and economic issues, such as health, nutrition, education, the development of economic resources, and Kanak culture. The emphasis which each publication placed on these issues differed. For example, Kanak culture was addressed more frequently in *L’Avenir*, particularly in the early 1980s, than in *Bwenando*. This difference reflects in part the evolution of the pro-independence struggle. In the early 1980s a great deal of organisational work went into the establishment of regional and local struggle committees. The issue of the role of customary authorities in these committees was at the forefront during this period and was discussed in several articles in *L’Avenir* (see, for example, 15/5/80). Later in the decade, the intensity of the political struggle resulted in articles in *Bwenando* being more focused on articulating central pro-independence discourses than on discussing the detail of political organisation. The differences between the publications also pointed to tensions within the FLNKS over key policy issues which at a later time could emerge as significant areas of dissent. However, there was also considerable discursive commonality and continuity across the publications, which strengthened during periods of heightened insurrectionary activity when the objective of unity against political opponents was foremost.

**The pro-independence media as counter-discourse**

We have seen that the interpretive repertoires developed by anti-independence politicians and their client media privileged hostile readings of the Kanak struggle. The pro-independence media sought to counter these readings by developing an alternative discursive terrain from which readings which affirmed the Kanak struggle would emerge. This alternative terrain was developed through engagement with anti-independence discourse. Indeed, the dialogue between these media was

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20 Precis of congresses did not contain summaries of the debates. They merely pointed to the topics which had been discussed and the resulting motion.

21 Most articles appearing in *L’Avenir* were published without attribution, although articles appearing in the early 1980s were attributed to Pidjot and Lenormand and the authors of published speeches were identified. Similarly, most *Bwenando* articles appeared without attribution, although there were some exceptions. In 1985, Hnalaine Uregei published an editorial which argued for the significance of the gains made by the FLNKS since 18 November 1984 (26/9/85).
unrelenting for, as L’Avenir argued, it was the anti-independence ‘press that defines colonial “legality” and which justifies the illegality of the indépendantistes that have to be destroyed’ (L’Avenir, 30/9/81). The pro-independence media responded not only to anti-independence taunts and accusations, but also to their silences, for these silences sometimes pointed to the perceived strength of pro-independence interpretive resources. For example, Bwenando sought to respond forcefully to the accusation that FLNKS members were terrorists, resolving ‘issue after issue to lead with RPCR terrorism’ (Bwenando, 12/11/85). But Bwenando also responded actively to the near silence in the anti-independence media over the FLNKS’s strategy to seek reinscription on the UN list of countries to be decolonised, making repeated references to the UN Charter and the rights it conferred on indigenous peoples (see, for example, 14/7/86). The influence of anti-independence discourse on the discourses developed in the pro-independence media is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in Bwenando’s discussion of the existence of two theses around which the independence struggle was being waged. In response to the RPCR’s thesis of ‘terrorism, petty crime, corruption, hatred, intolerance, dishonour, stupidity, obscurantism, subservience’, Bwenando posited the ‘confidence, Honour, mutual Respect, dignity, sincerity, Justice, liberty, intelligence’ of the FLNKS (Bwenando, 16/10/85, capitalisation in the original). This autoethnographic depiction leaves little doubt over the influence of dominant modes of representation in the anti-independence press on pro-independence discourse.\(^\text{22}\)

A mark of the pro-independence media’s engagement with the anti-independence media is the prevalence of media criticism in the pro-independence press. In reading Bwenando, L’Avenir and Le Kanak we are left with the distinct impression that those who contributed to these publications were persistent consumers of most local media, despite an FLNKS directive that the anti-independence media be boycotted by activists. Bwenando illustrated on several occasions that it was attentive to the output of its competitors. Responding to Lafleur’s denial that he had made certain comments at a press conference, Bwenando retorted:

> You said those things during a press conference and they were broadcast on RRB which is listened to by thousands of people including FLNKS comrades. And we managed even to listen and RECORD your remarks without

\(^{22}\) Jara and Magana argue that bipolar functionalism is central to colonial discourse. This example suggests that it might also be central to anti-colonial discourse (Jara & Magana, 1982:117).
vomiting...We prefer to leave the embellishments and lies to candidate Lafleur and his media: Affreux Jojo, RRB and \textit{Combat Calédonien} (12/3/86).

\textit{Bwenando}’s disgust with \textit{Les Nouvelles}’ coverage precipitated a call to FLNKS activists to adhere to the boycott directive:

\textit{Les Nouvelles}, fascist disinformation rag, uniquely designed to intoxicate and manipulate opinion. \textit{Les Nouvelles} 'handles' the news without any objectivity or honesty. It deforms or hides the facts and really takes its readers for idiots, which they end up being through their daily reading of this dirty and demoralising paper. Right now, there are no more excuses to not apply strictly the FLNKS directive to boycott \textit{Les Nouvelles}, a directive that has never been lifted (12/2/86).

The frequency of \textit{Bwenando}’s subsequent reference to and criticism of \textit{Les Nouvelles} brings into question the extent to which its journalists were prepared to relinquish their daily reference to what was, after all, their main press opponent.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Colonialism as meta-discourse}

Central to the many discourses and their permutations which were developed across the pro-independence media was a discourse on colonialism. This discourse not only informed but rendered coherent all others, and might therefore be considered a type of meta-discourse: it enabled the subsuming of almost all aspects of public existence into an expression or product of it. Thus, the introduction of violence into the territory, the European-influenced diet of Kanaks, syphilis, and AIDS were presented as colonial products and agents of colonial repression (see for example, \textit{L’Avenir}, 16/7/87; \textit{Bwenando}, 5/6/86 & 12/8/87; \textit{Le Kanak}, January & March 1990). Drawing on the psycho-political theories of Fanon and Nemmi, the pro-independence press argued that colonialism structured the mind and imprinted itself on the bodies of the colonised. It also formed the interpretive schema, described on one occasion by \textit{L’Avenir} as ‘the colonial logic’ (\textit{L’Avenir}, 9/9/87), within which political events could be understood. The large 1982 demonstration organised after the FI-FNSC’s formation of government by the Committee for the Defence of the Institutions was described in \textit{L’Avenir} as an ‘outbreak of colonialism and racism’ (29/6/82). The situation of the Koindé tribe was

\textsuperscript{23} The pro-independence media’s interest in the anti-independence media appears to have been reciprocated. \textit{Bwenando} noted on a couple of occasions that the local media used information
described as ‘typical of colonialism: tribes dismissed but also exploited and diminished in their dignity’ (L’Avenir, 28/5/86), while Tjibaou argued that the violence on Ouvéa in 1988 ‘is in keeping with the context of 130 years of colonisation ... Those who want to walk on the head of Kanaks are acting like their colonial grandfathers’ (Les Nouvelles, 23/4/88). In the face of anti-independence claims that colonialism had long since demised in New Caledonia, the pro-independence movement continued to assert that colonialism remained the defining feature of society responsible for the full range of inequities and injustices which it claimed. The influence of Marxist discourse meant that the pro-independence movement linked this discourse on colonialism with a discourse on capitalism as a system of inherent inequity, although this link was strongest in the early 1980s and argued for more strongly in Le Kanak than in Bwenando or L’Avenir.24

broadcast on Radio Djiido, and argued that the number of defamation charges brought against it demonstrated that ‘our adversaries read us’ (8/1/88).

24 For example, the strong Marxist influence in PALI KA privileges a class analysis of political events which often subsumes the Kanak political struggle into a broader discourse on class struggle. This privileging of a class analysis is well illustrated in an article responding to the loyalist accusation that the Kanak independence struggle was racist. The title of the article, ‘Racial conflict or class conflict’ is suggestive of its conclusion. Following a systematic Marxist analysis of the class structure of the territory, Le Kanak concludes that ‘it is class interests, which have become explosive, which are clashing today, not, like some believe or like to make believe, a racial clash’ (Le Kanak, 9/3/85). This penchant for analysing political events as congruent with the grand Marxist narrative on class society is a distinguishing feature of Le Kanak, although the publication also engaged in less theoretically grounded analysis and discussion. L’Avenir, particularly under the influence of Lenormand, similarly engaged with discourses which linked the Kanak political struggle with the struggle to undermine economic exploitation, but did so in a more populist manner in keeping with the UC’s more reformist agenda. In articles in 1980 and 1981, Lenormand argued that multinational capital was behind the propaganda campaign to make the Caldoches believe that they would be thrown out of the country after Kanak independence. The aim of these multinationals was, according to Lenormand, to ensure that the ‘petit blanc’ in the territory resist Kanak and Socialist independence, thereby securing the multinational grip on the territory’s economy (L’Avenir, 15/7/80; January 1981). Lenormand’s leftist political economy informed much of L’Avenir’s analysis up until the early 1980s. Its influence waned, however, as Lenormand progressively withdrew from involvement in L’Avenir and as political views polarised. After the 1981 presidential elections, it appeared increasingly futile to call on worker solidarity with Kanak political claims. In the lead-up to the 1981 presidential election, UC Deputy Roch Pidjot had urged the ‘exploited’ to vote for Mitterrand, arguing that, under Giscard: ‘The despoilings, unemployment, pollution, increasingly degrading working conditions, high cost of living’ had worsened. These conditions were symptomatic, he argued, of the ‘colonial situation in which the territory finds itself’, a situation which ‘will only come to an end through the combat engaged in by the Kanak people for Kanak and Socialist Independence with the will and necessity to join with the mass of all exploited workers’ (L’Avenir, 15/4/81). The size of the ‘worker’ vote for Giscard indicated that this discourse on worker solidarity with Kanak political demands had not convinced. L’Avenir expressed its disappointment in this workers’ vote, describing it as ‘anti-Kanak’. From this time onwards, the emphasis in L’Avenir shifted from political-economic analyses to an emphasis on Kanak political demands (L’Avenir, 30/4/81). This emphasis on Kanak political demands was also favoured in Bwenando. Although the leftist politics of those working for the publication were evident in its engagement with Marxist tropes and its open trumpeting, at times, of Marxism, the immediacy of the paper’s involvement in the acute political struggles occurring until mid-1988 resulted in a greater emphasis on rhetorical strategies grounded in the dominant discourses articulated within the FLNKS at that time, in particular, the internationalist discourses on the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples. Perhaps the ultimate example of the mobilisation of Marxist tropes in the analysis of economic, political and social life in New Caledonia was the booklet, published in 1982 by EDIPOP, Capitalism and Colonialism in New Caledonia, which sought to ‘explain capitalism and colonialism in
This refutation of the demise of colonialism also took other forms. For example, Pidjot described the Dijoud plan for land redistribution as substituting ‘new colonisation for the old’. He continued:

We don’t accept that our land be stolen once again...the canaque people, the victim of massacres before being reduced to slavery, won’t accept being mishandled one more time (Les Nouvelles, 22/12/80).

This depiction of colonial relations in the 1980s as constituting a ‘new colonialism’ or ‘neo-colonialism’ was prevalent across the pro-independence media. L’Avenir described the Lemoine statute as ‘neo-colonial’; Bwenando used the same term to describe the Fabius statute (L’Avenir, 11/5/84; Bwenando, 17/2/87). But the precise difference between the old and this ‘new colonialism’ was the source of competing articulations in the pro-independence press. For Pidjot, ‘between yesterday’s colonisation and today’s, nothing has changed’ (L’Avenir, 31/12/80). Nor, he argued, had the Kanak response: ‘My people survived a different colonial policy, it will once again resist the new colonisation’ (L’Avenir, 31/12/80). Lenormand, on the other hand, articulated a notion of neo-colonialism as expressed through the imposition of new forms of economic domination - what he described as a ‘super-capitalist system’. This articulation implied that neo-colonialism was not directly linked to the question of independence, as New Caledonia could not be an independent territory unless the ‘super-capitalist system’ was destroyed (L’Avenir, 15/7/80 & 26/12/85). A third articulation of ‘neo-colonialism’ related it to the imposition of a new form of political domination presided over by Melanesians. As one activist writing to Bwenando commented: ‘Neo-colonialism means putting a black mask of domination in the place of White domination. It changes the cards but not the rules of the game’ (Bwenando, 19/9/85). This articulation referred to a situation in which New Caledonia became ‘independent’ but was governed by conservative Melanesian politicians such as Ukeiwé and RPCR Deputy Maurice Nénou. The suggestion was that only the FLNKS would change the ‘rules of the game’.

This articulation, like that of Lenormand, in divorcing the notion of neo-colonialism from that of independence, left open the possibility that the taunt of ‘neo-colonialism’ general and ‘analyse the situation in New Caledonia’ by linking economic exploitation with Kanak demands for self-determination.
could be directed at the more conservative elements within the FLNKS: those who would acquire political power without moving to reconstitute New Caledonian society on a more equitable political or economic basis. Indeed, by 1989 this articulation had emerged. PALIKA argued in *Bwenando* that: ‘The neo-colonial tendency proves itself very present in the liberation movement’ (*Bwenando*, 27/4/89).

These articulations of ‘neo-colonialism’ coexisted with a broader discourse on colonialism which was far more homogeneous and totalising, and it was this latter discourse that constituted the greatest point of unification for the movement. It was always there to be mobilised when unity and mobilisation were the objectives. But the moment the discussion extended beyond the ‘fait colonial’, even, as we have seen, to a discussion of contemporary colonialism, competing articulations emerged, many of which were dilemmatic. These dilemmas reflected divergences in political orientation within the FLNKS and, consequently, different appreciations of what constituted optimal discursive strategies. In addition, the simultaneous mobilisation of these dilemmatic discourses within publications (such as Pidjot’s and Lenormand’s articulations of neo-colonialism described above) pointed to differences within parties over understandings of key notions. These different understandings suggest the complexity of political relationships within the FLNKS. But they also provided a rich armoury of interpretive resources which could be mobilised strategically in the discursive struggle.

**Kanak independence**

In the early 1980s, *L’Avenir* argued that the ‘time of colonisation’ could be erased only through recognition of ‘the right of the Kanak people to accede to independence’ (*L’Avenir*, 27/10/81). The claim here went beyond seeking the proclamation of New Caledonia as an independent country. What the ‘Kanak people’ demanded was a ‘Kanak independence’ in which ‘only the kanak people determines its future in its country, in KANAKY’:

That is to say, in actual fact, that only the kanak people, with their status as colonised people, should be called upon to vote in a self-determination ballot (*Bwenando*, 26/9/85).
This articulation of ‘Kanak independence’ drew its justification from the internationalist discourse on the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, articulated formally in the UN Charter. That this internationalist discourse should resonate so strongly among Kanaks in New Caledonia attests to the centrality of the struggle over identity in the territory. ‘Kanak independence’ suggested a type of independence through which Kanak identity would be expressed. While such an articulation of ‘Kanak independence’ was prominent in the early 1980s, the discourse subsequently permutated as anti-independence groups mobilised increasingly forcefully against it. Their primary retort was that ‘Kanak independence’ was racist in privileging the rights of one ethnic community in the territory over those of another. The competition between discourses on ‘Kanak independence’ in the pro-independence movement rendered difficult the mobilisation of a sustained counter-response.

The anti-independence argument that Kanak independence was racist had precipitated a counter-response by the late 1970s. In its 1979 platform, the FI had addressed the issue of the place of non-Kanaks in a future independent country, arguing that ‘The legitimation of non-Kanaks begins with the effective recognition of Kanaks as first occupants of the Territory, and the fight for Independence will allow them to be recognised in independence’ (L’Avenir, 15/5/80). Recognition of Kanaks as ‘first occupants’ would therefore result in non-Kanaks being recognised in a future Kanak nation. Within this interpretive repertoire, recognition of Kanaks as ‘first occupants’ implied a recognition of their ‘ownership’ of the land. As the platform argued: ‘Colonisation stole the Kanak land; the FI demands that all the land stolen from Kanaks be returned unconditionally’ (L’Avenir, 15/5/80).

This restoration of Kanak land ownership would, it was argued, allow Kanaks to exercise their traditional ‘right of welcome’ to the land.25 This notion of the ‘right of welcome’ was incorporated from traditional discourse into pro-independence discourse and therefore constituted an important instance of discursive hybridity. What could be understood as the ‘right of welcome’ and its relevance to the place of non-Kanaks in a future independent nation was explained in L’Avenir. According to one Kanak leader: ‘we want to find ourselves at home and rediscover our power of

25 For a detailed discussion of Kanak land claims see L’Avenir, 15/5/80.
organisation - our power of welcome - like the Kanaks from the Loyalty Islands who were able to welcome the clans of the Grand Terre' (L'Avenir, 30/6/81). This articulation suggested that the ‘right of welcome’ was the power to be able to welcome others; a power which could be possessed by Kanaks only if they had their land and re-established forms of Kanak organisation.

The statement in the minimal platform suggested, however, that this ‘right of welcome’ would be extended only to those who had participated in the ‘struggle for independence’, a position which appeared to lend credence to the view that those non-Kanaks who had not supported independence would be ostracised. However, by 1981, the FI appears to have shifted significantly from this position. In an important statement on Indépendance Kanak et Socialiste (Kanak Socialist Independence - IKS), three Kanak politicians articulated a far more inclusive discourse on ‘Kanak independence’, rejecting the proposition that the FI had suggested that other ethnic groups ‘pack their bags’:

No party program or Independence Front leader ever talked about making other ethnic groups ‘pack their bags’. That’s an expression used to create a psychosis of fear and electoral leverage...We can’t see the need for artisans or workers, from any ethnic group, to pack an ‘empty bag’ while they have a place in the businesses, the work sites etc…of this country (L’Avenir, 27/10/81).

In the statement it was argued that the restoration of Kanak mastery over the land was a necessary precursor to the opening of negotiations over the future shape of the nation: ‘The clans, having been recognised as the real masters of the land, will have recovered the right “of welcome” indispensable for negotiations’ (L’Avenir, 27/10/81). The restoration of the ‘right of welcome’ in this statement has shifted from a right to welcome those who have participated in the struggle to a necessary precursor to the opening of negotiations over the future of the nation as ‘partners’: ‘recognition of the right to Kanaque Independence opens the possibility of negotiations between partners’ (L’Avenir, 27/10/81). Within this more inclusive conceptualisation, ‘Kanak independence’ becomes not so much a polity determined by Kanaks as a negotiated settlement between Kanak and non-Kanak ‘partners’.

This more inclusive discourse on ‘Kanak independence’ engendered a further discursive permutation. ‘Kanak independence’ shifts from being a Kanak political
claim to a descriptive term for the independent nation. This articulation is expressed in Tjibaou’s 1987 retort to accusations that ‘Kanak independence’ was a racist concept:

We said Kanak independence! Yes! Why say that it is racist? It’s not racist to speak of French independence! Why is it racist to demand Kanak independence - Kanak nationality - and not racist to speak of French independence? (Bwenando, 29/9/87).

The equating of ‘French independence’ with Kanak independence attests to the significance of the shift which had occurred in articulations of ‘Kanak independence’ by the latter part of 1987, the year in which the discourses of the territory’s mainstream media, Les Nouvelles and RFO, were at their most vituperative. ‘French independence’ is not in itself a call for the supremacy of a particular ethnic group, although the overwhelming dominance of ethnic French in that nation’s political institutions means that the claim of ‘French independence’ will disproportionately favour this socio-ethnic grouping. Presumably, ‘French independence’ has something to do with sustaining the sovereignty of French political institutions. If so, it is an institutional claim, which has as its referent the encroachment of other nations on that sovereignty, not a primafacie a racial one.26 ‘Kanak independence’ thereby becomes a claim for political sovereignty against encroachments from outside. The Other in this discourse has shifted from within - that is, non-Kanaks - to without; that is, the encroachment on Kanak sovereignty from other nations, presumably the most significant being France.

This shift from an exclusive discourse on ‘Kanak independence’ to an inclusive one was not total; parallel discourses remained. The choice as to which discourse to mobilise was at times strongly influenced by the particular political context. Thus, the FLNKS Charter, ratified at the FLNKS constitutive congress in 1984, called for the Kanak people to ‘be recognised as the only legitimate people in the pays Kanak and to have its patrie there’ (check translation), an exclusionist statement par excellence, but one which left a counter-discursive opening in speaking of ‘pays kanak’ (literally translated as ‘kanak country’) rather than referring to ‘Kanak independence’ (Bwenando, 26/9/85). One reading of ‘pays kanak’ referred to not

26 This reading of ‘French independence’ would probably not be concurred with by the extreme-right in France who saw the encroachment upon the French national as emerging from immigrants within France.
the total territory of New Caledonia but rather to those areas in the territory where Kanaks predominate; in particular, the north of the main island and the Loyalty Islands. The reading tended to suggest that a policy of regionalisation, which gave Kanaks considerable political autonomy over the ‘pays kanak’ would go a considerable way towards satisfying FLNKS demands.

Like the FLNKS charter, Bwenando also contained articulations of ‘Kanak independence’ which could be read as exclusionist. Anticipating that the Chirac government would call a general referendum on the question of independence sometime during 1987, Bwenando argued:

> It is absurd to ask the French whether they want to be independent; they are already independent. Nor do we want to ask the French if they want to become Kanak. Anyway, we don’t want some of them to become KANAK, to accede to Kanak citizenship. The question is elsewhere. The real question to ask of every Kanak and uniquely of Kanaks is: do you want to become French or independent? And this is the only manner of proceeding in keeping with the logic of UN texts and even the constitutional logic if we want to interpret the texts honestly (Bwenando, 14/1/87).

This position was not tantamount to arguing that some ‘French’ in New Caledonia would have to ‘pack their bags’ after independence, for the FLNKS had argued that non-Kanaks could maintain their French nationality in the independent nation and would not therefore need to become Kanak citizens. But, within its immediate contextual reading, those unaware of this not too frequently publicised aspect of FLNKS policy could read this statement as exclusionary.

In the face of such a reading, L’Avenir was keen to assert that the demand for independence is the demand for a right and not some sort of revenge, a demand for justice, dignity and democracy’ (L’Avenir, 26/3/87). L’Avenir’s resort to the term ‘democracy’ was probably aimed at refuting the argument that ‘Kanak independence’ would be racist because only Kanaks would be allowed to decide it through a referendum in which only Kanaks could vote. Indeed, within anti-independence discourse, the terms ‘Kanak independence’ and ‘democracy’ were considered antonyms. Perhaps what was meant by democracy here was the establishment of a political system after independence in which each member would have equal voting rights, an argument advanced in the pro-independence press (see, for example, L’Avenir, 27/10/81). But within pro-independence media
discourse there were dissenting articulations even over the issue of the future of democracy in ‘Kanak independence’. As L’Avenir commented:

Democracy, with its system of one man=one vote, comes to us from the West. If 99 imbeciles are unanimous against a single sage, they are right and they decide. It is the least worst of all the systems, and that’s all! In our Kanaky, this system came with the immigrants, who were brought in by the French Government to drown the ‘Kanak Problem’. After having pursued a policy of immigration and fabricated a democracy manipulated by the system in place, it is easy to play the democrat and deny the fundamental Kanak problem in our country (L’Avenir, 27/5/88).

The fate of democracy in a ‘Kanak independence’ is ambiguous in this discourse. It suggests that competing articulations on structures of governance within a ‘Kanak independence’ existed within the movement, a point attested to in the discussion of ‘Kanak independence’ and socialism below.

The more inclusionary discourse on ‘Kanak independence’ also sat uneasily with the meta-discourse on colonialism. Of all the discourses articulated within the pro-independence media, the discourse on colonialism was, as I have argued, the most immutable. The ‘fait colonial’ was the central precept conferring authority on pro-independence demands; it straddled all other discourses but was not necessarily congruent with them.27 As a discourse on structured inequality, colonialism, with its bi-polar taxonomy of ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’, lent itself to exclusionary discourses on ‘Kanak independence’ in its stress on the rights of the ‘colonised’ over those of the ‘coloniser’. The notions of greater rights and historical redress seemed more appropriate to a meta-discourse on colonialism than references to democracy (particularly in a context where Kanaks were an electoral minority) and inclusionary articulations of ‘Kanak independence’.

The central place afforded the ‘right of welcome’ in the discourse on ‘Kanak independence’ also appeared to contradict the more inclusionary discourse. The

27 Certain shifts did occur within this discourse, largely related to the issue of who did or did not constitute the ‘colonised’ in the territory. In the early 1980s, L’Avenir argued that ‘a referendum on the Caledonian Statute can be based only on the consultation of the kanak people, the only people concerned because the only people finding itself in the situation of being a colonised people in its own country’ (L’Avenir, 18/8/82). A major concession from the UC representatives to the discussions held at Nainville-les-Roches in 1983 was to broaden this notion of the ‘colonised’ to include those ‘victims of history’, Europeans of Caledonian descent, with at least one parent born in the territory. Henceforth, the pro-independence movement conceded that these people could participate in a vote on self-determination. The broader discourse on colonialism, however, remained fixed, even in the face of repeated denials of the ‘fait colonial’ by many of those who opposed independence.
difficulty in Western thought of reconciling seeming inequity with equity - the notion in other words that Kanaks have superior claims which, once recognised, can precipitate negotiations among 'partners' - was probably at the root of the anti-independence conviction that ‘Kanak independence’ was racist. However, the importing of this traditional notion of mediation in Kanak society appears to have been less problematic for Kanaks. As Machoro argued in the Territorial Assembly in 1984: ‘The idea that sustains this political will is that of a PEOPLE who wants the restitution of its Patrie in order to live in peace, free and master of its destiny, a Patrie in which it will have every opportunity to exercise freely its capacity for welcome and hospitality which everyone recognises’ (L’Avenir, 2/2/84). The conviction with which anti-independence groups argued that ‘Kanak independence’ was racist indicated that they were unwilling to attempt to come to terms with this Kanak ‘logic’. Instead, this hybrid discourse provided the anti-independence movement with a major discursive opening which was exploited relentlessly in the anti-independence media and which precipitated in pro-independence discourse a range of reactive permutations. In other instances, the pro-independence reaction to dilemmas in their own discourses was manifest in silences, as the development of discourses on ‘socialism’ illustrates.

Kanak independence and socialism

The dilemmatic aspects of discourses on ‘Kanak independence’ were accentuated by competing discourses on ‘socialism’. In 1980, L’Avenir proclaimed that ‘independence, it’s an inescapable fact, it’s tomorrow’s reality’, but cautioned that two types of independence were possible, ‘native independence or neo-colonial independence’, by which was meant ‘that of a capitalist imperialism granted by a neo-colonial metropole which has decided to change its tactic’ (15/7/80). The independence of the ‘natives’ was therefore seen as linked to an alternative economic future for the country. As L’Avenir stated two years later: ‘If we speak of kanak and socialist Independence, it is because this Independence cannot be realised by maintaining the capitalist system in place’ (L’Avenir, 11/7/83). What would replace the ‘capitalist system’ and what therefore ‘socialism’ denoted was, as we have seen, a contentious issue within the movement and gave rise to divergent responses.
One response was a conception of ‘Kanak independence’ as structured around ‘kanak institutions’ - the clans, the land and the ‘regional reality’ - and not constructed out of institutions ‘put in place by the colonial system’ (L’Avenir, 10/3/81). This response was linked in L’Avenir to an articulation of socialism as expressive of ‘kanak institutions’, and particularly traditional land ownership. As L’Avenir commented: ‘Through clan ownership, a purely Kanak socialism can begin; that is to say, modelled on the reality of the country - at least that which concerns ownership’ (L’Avenir, 15/5/80). L’Avenir pointed out, however, that its engagement in the ‘construction of socialism in New Caledonia’ did not imply that it was ‘wedded to Marxism’s ideological foundations’ (15/5/80). In a television address prior to the second round of voting in the presidential elections of 1981, Pidjot declared that: ‘For we Kanaks, socialism is the case. Every clan has its place, its function. Everyone finds themselves there’, while his colleague Gabrielle Paita added: ‘At the return of our land, we could build Socialism there’ (L’Avenir, 30/6/81). The use of ‘case’ as metaphor points to the integrality of this understanding of socialism to Kanak culture, the ‘case’ being the location of communal exchange and therefore a metaphor for Kanak culture.

This fusing of ‘Kanak institutions’ with ‘socialism’ found expression in the term ‘Kanak socialism’ which featured prominently in the precis of the 1981 UC Congress in Noumea. L’Avenir reported that:

What we want is a Kanak socialism
We are against a socialism which denies custom and religion
We are against bureaucratic socialism
We are for a self-managing, decentralised socialism which would allow the exploitation of the patrimoine for the profit of the people (L’Avenir, 14/10/81).

Here we can see the extent to which the UC’s discourse on socialism is structured by competing discourse on socialism emanating from both outside and within the movement. The concern to articulate its support for custom and religion and its opposition to bureaucratic socialism was a response to the anti-independence argument that the movement was being manipulated by the Soviet Union. But it was also a message to those in the movement whose advocacy of Marxism resulted in a more ambivalent attitude towards the place of custom and religion in the future independent nation. As I have argued, the relative paucity of discussion of issues of custom in Bwenando, compared with L’Avenir, illustrates this difference.
The difficulty of achieving some fixity in the discourse on socialism, particularly in the face of an intensifying anti-independence counter-discourse which held that the movement was being inspired by ‘Marxist extremists’, appears to have resulted in an avoidance of more detailed discussions on socialism in the pro-independence press, reflected in Bwenando’s deflective comments in 1986:

The goal is announced: to attain IKS (Kanak Socialist Independence). But the debate to define what is meant by SOCIALISM IN PAYS KANAK is still taking place. One thing is clear: to attain IKS, we have to liberate ourselves, to free ourselves from the colonial state, by fighting on every front: political, economic, cultural (Bwenando, 31/7/86).

After this period, the tensions in the discourses on socialism could be measured by their silences. These silences were enabled by a renewal of intense political contestation and conflict under the Pons ministry, which privileged more assertive rather than reflective discourses, and by the subsequent shift in political strategy under the Matignon accords which gave rise to an ascendance within the FLNKS of notions of managerial competence and economic development over discourses on Kanak independence and socialism.

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28 Tjibaou’s comment at the UC Comité Directeur meeting at Waho similarly suggests that little progress had been made on developing a more consensual understanding on socialism: ‘Independence hasn’t got feet; it’s a marching head. But we’re starting to put feet on it’ (L’Avenir, 18/7/85).
CHAPTER SEVEN - IDENTITY IN THE PRO-INDEPENDENCE MEDIA

In 1972, French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer wrote in a letter to his Secretary of State responsible for France’s overseas departments and territories that the government should implement a policy of massive migration to New Caledonia to secure France’s presence in the territory and, more broadly, in the Pacific. Messmer argued that the only threat to this presence, aside from world war, was the emergence of nationalist demands from the ‘autochthones’. Massive immigration of French citizens would work, he continued, only if it brought about a situation where ‘the demographic mass of the non-Oceanian population is in the majority’. In quoting from Messmer’s letter, L’Avenir noted that it was written around the same time as the declaration from the then conservative Mayor of Noumea Roger Laroque that: ‘Il faut faire du blanc pour noyer le kanak’ (literally translated: ‘more white has to be made to drown the kanak’ (L’Avenir, 8/6/84). The repeated references to Messmer’s letter and Laroque’s declaration in the pro-independence press during the 1980s suggested that these statements were considered particularly significant.1

The context of these references indicated that, for Kanaks, these statements were interpreted not so much as astute statements of policy aimed at shifting the electoral balance but as visceral assaults on Kanak existence. The ‘drowning’ to which Laroque referred was seen not as an electoral dousing but rather a submerging of ‘the Kanak people’ to the point of their disappearance. The pro-independence movement’s preoccupation with this notion of disappearance is expressed in the first clause of the FLNKS Charter. The French government, it declared, ‘is directly threatening the disappearance of the Kanak people by definitively rendering it a minority in its country’ (Bwenando, 26/9/85). Successive French government policies were seen as confirmation that the strategy of ensuring the disappearance of the ‘Kanak people’ was under way. The Lemoine statute ensured ‘the DISAPPEARANCE of the kanak People as a PEOPLE’ (L’Avenir, 14/9/84) and necessitated active opposition, ‘or else the DROWNING of the kanak people will become more accentuated’ (L’Avenir, 2/8/84), while the Pons statute was viewed as an act of ‘ethnocide’ in its abrogation of legislation which ensured certain customary rights (le statute particulier) (Bwenando, 12/4/88). According to

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1 See for example, L’Avenir, 25/5/84 & 8/6/84; Le Kanak, 24/8/85; L’Avenir of 29/6/82 describes Laroque as ‘LAROQUE (...faut faire du blanc)’. 

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L’Avenir, under Pons ‘you could ascertain that the French government proposed, as the alternative to the kanak people’s demand for independence, “the kanak people’s extermination” (L’Avenir, 5/8/88).

This emphasis on a discourse of disappearance can be read as a response to discourses on Kanak identity developed in the anti-independence media. As I argued earlier, Kanak identity was articulated as a type of non-existence; Kanaks were neither Caledonian nor Melanesian and certainly could never constitute a People. The clearest articulation of this view - Pons’ 1987 declaration that the ‘Kanak people don’t exist’ (L’Avenir, 9/9/87) - was a product of this lengthy discursive lineage. Perhaps the most extreme consequence of this discourse of non-existence was to enable a metaphysical constitution of Kanaks as animals (see JanMohamed, 1995:21). The written and pictorial depiction in Les Nouvelles of Tjibaou as a monkey (the Hienghène macaque) (22/11/86) was perhaps the ultimate expression of this consequence. It was a depiction of Kanaks which L’Avenir and Bwenando readily parodied:

A good Kanak is a docile kanak, perfectly trained to bark and be quiet when necessary and at the order of its master? Nice little monkey that is made to ‘dance and sing’ to amuse the gallery but, above all, to not go further than that, and especially not to think that his kanak dignity occurs through the valuing of his own culture. No, his dignity as a kanak Man doesn’t exist, and moreover has never existed. It is an illusion invented by Red Anthropologists to disturb the good conscience of the ‘Master’. It is an attempt at the destabilisation of the Christian West (L’Avenir, 25/3/88 & reprinted in Bwenando, 12/4/88).

JanMohamed (1995) has written of the process of collapsing the Other into a metaphysical alterity, describing it as the ‘economy of the Manichean allegory’. The economy is achieved, he argues, by descriptions of the native which ignore ‘issues such as intention, causality, extenuating circumstances, and so forth’ and tend instead to ‘fetishise a nondialectical, fixed opposition between the self and the native’ (ibid:19). JanMohamed argues that an ideological function of the Manichean allegory is ‘to dehistoricise and desocialise the conquered world, to present it as a metaphysical “fact of life”, before which those who have fashioned the colonial world are themselves reduced to the role of passive spectators in a mystery not of their making’ (ibid:22).
This denial of history and the social also enabled the brutality of some acts of violence towards Kanaks, such as occurred in the Hienghène massacre. *L'Avenir* was not reticent in affirming the existence of such articulations of Kanak identity. In early 1981, *L'Avenir* republished an article from the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* which ostensibly illustrated the attitudes of some Caldoches towards Kanaks. After meeting with a Caldoche called Dolbeau, the journalist wrote:

> Must I type the monstrous remarks? Yes. Because ten other *broussards*, who don’t know each other, spoke them to me almost word for word...’I always taught my kids never to retreat before a charging cow. The *indigène* is like cattle. You have to tame them in a ring. Could you see those savages manage the territory?’ (January 1981).

This articulation of Kanaks as animals was, of course, among the more extreme anti-independence expressions of Kanak identity. But this extreme expression was among the range of articulations of Kanak identity with which the pro-independence movement had to contend. In the face of the denial of human existence, the response in New Caledonia, as elsewhere, was for the colonised to foreground the assertion of their existence in their political struggle. The objective was to assert an identity and reclaim a history. It was also to claim a place in the face of the physical displacement which many Melanesians on the main island experienced as a result of colonisation. Thus, the assertion of Kanak identity and history, and a nation named ‘Kanaky’, became central to the pro-independence struggle. The quest for identity led Kanaks to the internationalist discourse of ‘the people’, which gave them not only a human identity but a privileged one. The discourse of the ‘disappearance of the Kanak People’ therefore connoted not necessarily a physical disappearance but a disappearance of this identity.

**Kanakitude?**

The foregrounding of identity began in the early 1970s with the return to New Caledonia of Melanesians who had been involved in tertiary studies in France around the time of the May 1968 protests. Naisseline’s political group, the Foulards Rouges, was particularly concerned with reasserting indigenous cultural values and defiantly appropriated the then term of denigration ‘Kanak’ to affirm Melanesian identity (Chesneaux, 1988:61-4; Henningham, 1992:47-8). While in France, these students became familiar with the writing of Fanon and, through Fanon, Aimé
Césaire, who along with fellow poets Léopold Senghor and Léon Damas were key contributors to the Négritude movement which became influential in France in the 1930s. In appropriating a term of denigration, the indigenous movement followed the strategy pursued by African liberation movements in their reclaiming of the term ‘nègre’. Césaire's description of the rationale behind the reclaiming of the term ‘nègre’ gives an insight into the strategy pursued by these young Kanak students:

We adopted the word nègre as a term of defiance...We found a violent affirmation in the words nègre and nègritude...it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness...We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex...I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And...if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are - that is of the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we were black and have a history...[that] there have been beautiful and important black civilisations...that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world (Césaire, quoted in Parry, 1994:184).

Senghor sought to identify the nature of these ‘values that could still make an important contribution’, citing a black emotivity as a central defining characteristic. Senghor, and the Négritude movement more generally, has been criticised for this quest to discover and advocate essentialist features of Otherness on the grounds that it perpetuates the very process by which the Other came into being as a product of colonial discourse. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write:

Imperial narratives such as that of anthropology in their project of naming and thus knowing indigenous groups have imported a notion of aboriginality, of cultural authenticity which proves difficult to displace. The result is the positioning of the indigenous people as the ultimately marginalised, a concept which reinscribes the binarism of centre/margin and prevents their engagement with the subtle process of imperialism by locking them into a locally strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism...As post-colonial discourse demonstrates, the appeal to ‘authenticity’ is not merely an ontological contradiction, but a political trap (Ashcroft et al., 1995:214).

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3 Ashcroft et al. make similar claims in their summation of Sartre’s critique of négritude:
‘Sartre...classified this colonial movement as springing from the intellectual conditioning of the mother culture. He rightly assumed that any movement founded on an antithesis which responded to the Cartesian ‘I think, therefore I am’ with ‘I feel, therefore I am’ must be subject to a dialectical determinism which made all those who ‘are’ obedient to laws formulated on the European historical experience. How was he to know, if the proponents of the universal vision of Négritude did not, that the African world did not and need not share the history of civilisations trapped in political Manicheanisms’ (1989:135-6).
Against this critique of essentialism, there are those who argue that the resort to some form of nativist essentialism is indispensable as a political strategy. To the criticism that nativism is merely an attempt to ‘revive pristine pre-colonial cultures’ which have themselves been constructed through colonial discourse, Parry argues that the task is rather ‘to address the empowering effects of constructing a coherent identity or of cherishing and defending against calumniation altered and mutable indigenous forms’ (Parry, 1994:179). In a similar vein, Griffiths writes of the Australian Aboriginal author Narogin Nyoongah that ‘he asserts in both his critical writing and practice as a novelist the importance of asserting his identity in essentialist difference as a political strategy’. To do otherwise is, according to Hutcheon, ‘in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses (Hutcheon cited in Mishra & Hodge, 1994:277).

The Kanak intellectuals’ engagement with Fanon and other black liberation writers, such as Albert Memmi, provided one avenue for their involvement in debates surrounding négritude. Fanon’s work is sometimes read as making a transition from an initial act of embracing an essentialised notion of négritude to a subsequent rejection of it in favour of a transnational project of solidarity among the oppressed who, in the process of struggle, construct their collective identity. Parry disputes this reading, arguing instead that Fanon’s work is characterised by ‘instabilities’ in its sometimes embrace and sometimes rejection of nativist notions of black culture and consciousness (Parry, 1994:186). Parry reads Fanon’s seminal work, Black Skins/White Masks, as a text where ‘both an intellectual apprehension of blackness as a construct ... and a visceral attachment to the powerful fiction of black identity are always evident’ (ibid:187), and argues that: ‘To the end there are signs of Fanon’s links with the Négritude movement’ (ibid:192).

These tensions are also evident in the discourses on Kanak identity in the pro-independence media. These discourses range from those which construct Kanak identity as located in essentialist notions of culture to those which articulate a Kanak identity which is indeed transcultural and in the process of construction. While in some instances there is a relationship between the bearers of these discourses and

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4 Said appears also to acknowledge this empowerment in his claim that: ‘To become aware of one’s self as belonging to a subject people is the founding insight of anti-imperialist nationalism...We must
the political grouping to which they belong, in others the discourses appear to shift without such markers, suggesting, as Parry does of Fanon’s work, an inherent instability in their articulations.

**Kanak identity**

In the pro-independence media, articulations of Kanak identity occur across a range of discourses. Central to these is the discourse of the ‘Kanak people’. However, in addition, notions of Kanakness were articulated through the imaginative geographies of the ‘Kanak nation’ and ‘Kanaky’. The dispersed nature of these articulations reflects both the ambitious claims of Kanak identity and its permutations. Certain articulations appear more frequently in certain discourses. Those which ground ‘Kanak’ identity in a past cultural authenticity tend to appear most frequently in discourses on the ‘Kanak people’ and the ‘Kanak nation’, while other discourses, particularly that of ‘Kanaky’ and to a lesser extent ‘Kanak’, lend themselves more readily to articulations which posit identity as an active endeavour, in the process of creation through human agency.

In the early 1980s, the FI sought to establish district and regional political structures which would act as the organisational locus for political action and, in particular, land claims. The promotion of regional and district structures was considered congruent with the structure of Melanesian society prior to colonisation, the regions being divided linguistically and the districts along clan lines. The ultimate aim was for each clan to identify the land over which it could claim traditional ‘mastery’. The FI argued that the claiming of this ‘terre d’origine’ (‘land of origin’) was a ‘duty’ (*L’Avenir*, 15/5/80). This strategy constituted what the FI described as a ‘retour aux sources’ (‘back to nature’) (ibid). It was a political strategy which was grounded in an idea of a ‘Kanak’ past which the movement sought to rediscover, evident in the UC’s demands that the regions ‘rediscover the structure of kanak society at the district level’ (*L’Avenir*, 10/3/81). Two years later, *L’Avenir* was still describing the ‘Kanak region’ as ‘a reality to discover’, pointing, of course, to the difficulty of a ‘retour aux source’ after the geographical and cultural dislocation of more than 130 years of colonisation (*L’Avenir*, 21/4/83).

*not minimise the shattering importance of that initial insight - peoples being conscious of themselves*
The basing of political strategy on an attempted rediscovery of pre-colonial structures drew its legitimation from the internationalist discourse of ‘the people’ which articulated this entity as geographically constituted, even if it was subsequently dislocated through the experiences of colonialism or other forms of domination. The notion of land was therefore integral to this discourse of ‘the people’, which is one reason why it resonated so strongly within Melanesian society. The significance of land in Melanesian tradition rendered very pertinent the concept of a land of origin within the internationalist discourse of ‘the people’.

The quest to rediscover pre-colonial structures was inspired by an understanding that these were expressive of an essentialist notion of ‘Kanak’ culture, which was considered the source of Kanak strength in the political struggle. As Bwenando asserted, ‘if the Kanak people knows how to organise itself and fight for its survival, it is thanks to its original culture, alive and strong’ (Bwenando, 18/3/88). This original culture was presented as the essence of the ‘Kanak people’ and their unity, which derived from the unity of the ‘Kanak people’ in their pre-colonial state.

L’Avenir’s response to Pons’ denial of the existence of the ‘Kanak people’ illustrates the linkages which are made between essentialist notions of culture and ‘the Kanak people’, past and present:

There is a reality, the cultural reality that can’t be abandoned. Over and above the political differences resulting from the geographical configuration of the country, there is a way of being kanak which is identical in all the Territory of Kanaky. It is at this level that the unity of the ‘kanak People’ must be situated. In addition, for 150 years, the struggle to resist colonial exploitation, which has taken every form, has soldered this cultural unity (L’Avenir, 25/7/86).

Pons’ claim that métissage had effectively destroyed the possibility of the constitution of a ‘Kanak people’ elicited a response from Bwenando which further highlighted the centrality of this notion of cultural unity to Kanak identity:

In fact, it is not the form of hair and skin colour that distinguishes a people from another, for there are many peoples throughout the world with black skin and curly hair - but there is only one Kanak people. And the genetic characteristics are effectively modified by métissage. But what makes a

as prisoners in their own land’ (Said, 1994:258).

This quote concludes with a more inclusive statement on ‘Kanak’ culture - ‘But its untameable nationalism, born of this culture, doesn’t stop it from remaining open to exterior cultural contributions’ - illustrating the ‘instabilities’ in this discourse (Bwenando, 18/3/88).
people is all those of the same culture. It is not about hereditary characteristics, but characteristics which are acquired, lived in common, and transmitted, by education, language, artistic expression, social organisation - that is to say, custom, etc... (Bwenando, 12/4/88).

What these ‘acquired characteristics’ are is not developed in any sustained fashion in L’Avenir or Bwenando, although some features are occasionally referred to, such as in the following claim in Bwenando:

Ancient and recent history proves it, the Kanak people is pacifist, its culture makes it repulsed by violence. Kanaks use dialogue, discussions in which wisdom and reason dominate - concessions - in order to regulate problems or conflicts and to arrive at consensual compromises (Bwenando, 18/3/88).

The juxtaposition of this depiction with that of pro-independence Kanaks in the anti-independence media as violent, irrational and totalitarian suggests that this articulation of the ‘Kanak’ essence, far from being a pristine remembering of ‘Kanak’ culture in pre-colonial times, is instead a selective appropriation of various cultural memories and practices, gathered together as counter-discourse. The danger of this resort to essentialising is evident in the readiness with which such depictions could be countered by anti-independence groups. To the claim that Kanaks were ‘pacifists’, anti-independence groups could cite a plethora of instances which ostensibly refuted this claim. In the project of essentialising, colonial discourse could demonstrate again and again its superior abilities, born of its lengthy experience and its domination of the means of discursive production in colonial societies.

One implication of this notion of Kanak identity as grounded in a pre-colonial culture was the identification of all people born within this culture as ‘Kanak’, no matter what their stance on independence. Thus, the pro-independence movement categorised pro- but also anti-independence Melanesians as ‘Kanaks’, probably to the abhorrence of many anti-independence Melanesians who viewed the term ‘Kanak’ as a political term to describe those Melanesians who supported independence. This use of ‘Kanak’ to refer to anti-independence as well as pro-independence Melanesians led to the following type of somewhat confusing statements. Referring to the 1984 territorial elections boycotted by the FLNKS, L’Avenir commented: ‘The French government knows that KANAKS are ready to go to the Territorial elections. But THOSE KANAKS, are they fighting for the
independence of the kanak People or rather looking to SAVE THEIR BACON?’ (L’Avenir, 5/7/84).

The pro-independence movement’s unwillingness to equate the term with a position on the question of independence was a logical outcome of its articulation of ‘Kanak’ identity as culturally located. The pro-independence media occasionally distinguished between pro- and anti-independence ‘Kanaks’ by describing the latter as ‘Kanak de service’ (‘token Kanak’), but nonetheless incorporated this group into the ‘Kanak people’, as the following quote on the 1987 referendum results illustrates:

83 % of the Kanak People boycotted these elections whether the UKEIWES, WAMOS, NENOUS etc. like it or not...The Kanak People demands precisely its independence. Their discourses are too stereotyped and colonialist to convince. The representativeness of such individuals among our people is obvious (Le Kanak, 12/10/87).

This inclusive definition of the ‘Kanak people’ enabled the categorisation of anti-independence politicians, such as Ukeiwé, as ‘traitors’ because of their violation of the majority will of the ‘Kanak people’ for independence. But there were fault lines along this inclusiveness which became most noticeable following Ukeiwé’s participation in the French UN delegation which opposed New Caledonia’s reinscription on the list of countries to be decolonised. Bwenando denounced Ukeiwé’s participation and then announced his disaffiliation from the ‘Kanak’ identity, declaring that his participation proved that he was no more than ‘a Frenchman of Melanesian origin, that is to say a harki’ (13/12/86). L’Avenir was more copious in its condemnation of Ukeiwé, similarly signalling this incident as rupturing his identification as a ‘Kanak’:

Dicky (Ukeiwé), you are not a kanak because you didn’t see - you couldn’t realise -...! that at the UN it was ATAI’s rebellion that the Nations were legitimating and not the colonial repression that we condemn with all the UN countries...Poor Dicky, you the Westerner born in exile, you will never understand the kanak people’s struggle...It is incomprehensible for a Westerner. If you don’t understand it, it is useless to explain it to Jacquot or Chirac (L’Avenir, 18/12/86).²

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² UC politician, Léopold Jorédié defined a ‘Kanak de service’ as ‘Kanaks used to enact a policy and then rejected’ (Bwenando, 27/4/89).
Ukeiwé’s disaffiliation from identification as a ‘Kanak’ implies that the notion of the ‘Kanak people’ developed here has taken on a political connotation in relation to the question of independence. Being ‘Kanak’ here is a way of viewing and understanding the world; a way which is as much politically inspired as it is culturally grounded.

This fault line in the holism of the ‘Kanak people’ enabled, perhaps paradoxically, the articulation of a new notion of the ‘Kanak people’ which was more inclusive than that which held that the ‘Kanak people’ encompassed all Melanesians. This alternative articulation, although implied in the comments about Ukeiwé following his UN visit in 1985, had in effect existed previously in parallel and in tension with essentialist notions of the ‘Kanak people’. As early as 1980, L’Avenir was advancing a notion of the ‘Kanak people’ as a transcultural entity. An article entitled ‘Culture, Nation and the Kanak People’ first suggested this alternative articulation:

The unity of the pays kanak demands of us the constitution of a people, of a single people...the unity of our people is constructed from the indigenous people of this country - the fundamental principle for the building of the Kanak people...Our cultural unity, and of course our specificity, can come only from the fait kanak...It is in this sense that we affirm that the unity of our people is constructed from the ‘indigenous people’ of this country. This recognition remains fundamental for the constitution of a ‘new kanak’ people because, although the exterior contingencies require union, the principles of unity of a people are always secreted from within. Again, it is in this sense that we say that the roots of our cultural unity can grow only in pays kanak, by taking account of the fait kanak inscribed in the country. The grafts don’t happen at the roots but at the branches and buds (L’Avenir, 15/7/80).

This is a complex passage which interweaves notions of the ‘Kanak people’, the ‘new Kanak people’ and the ‘indigenous people’ with those of ‘pays kanak’ and the ‘fait kanak’. It seems, from my reading, to advance the need for the creation of a transcultural unity described as ‘the people’ or the ‘new Kanak people’. This ‘new Kanak people’ is distinguishable from the ‘indigenous people’ but yet takes its legitimation from these people. The passage suggests that it is only through recognition of the existence of these ‘indigenous people’ and their claims over the ‘pays kanak’ that a new cultural unity can be forged. The ‘pays kanak’ comprises not only a territorial expanse but also a cultural and institutional space. The articulation of the ‘new Kanak people’ is not therefore devoid of reference to Kanak people...the unity of our people is constructed from the indigenous people of this country - the fundamental principle for the building of the Kanak people...Our cultural unity, and of course our specificity, can come only from the fait kanak...It is in this sense that we affirm that the unity of our people is constructed from the ‘indigenous people’ of this country. This recognition remains fundamental for the constitution of a ‘new kanak’ people because, although the exterior contingencies require union, the principles of unity of a people are always secreted from within. Again, it is in this sense that we say that the roots of our cultural unity can grow only in pays kanak, by taking account of the fait kanak inscribed in the country. The grafts don’t happen at the roots but at the branches and buds (L’Avenir, 15/7/80).

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Following the UN vote, Bwenando described Melanesian RPCR politicians as ‘French of Melanesian
culture, but in it traditional culture is displaced from being the essence of the ‘Kanak identity’ to being that which has to be recognised for a new ‘Kanak’ identity to emerge which would be shared by people of all ethnic and racial origins in the territory. The strength of this ‘new Kanak people’ would reside precisely in its diversity. It would be ‘proud to be of different origins, to be part of the Pacific Peoples, and to contribute to the enrichment of the peoples of the Pacific, deeply rooted in Oceania’ (ibid). All those residing in a future ‘Kanak nation’ who would choose to take ‘Kanak’ citizenship would constitute this ‘new Kanak people’.

In many respects, this is a hybridised notion of the ‘Kanak people’, not only in its transculturality but also in the manner in which it dilutes references to an essentialising discourse, encoded in the metaphors of the ‘fait kanak’ and the ‘pays kanak’, with a transcultural articulation. Its development in L’Avenir is probably not surprising, for UC politicians appear to have been most concerned to stress publicly an inclusive notion of ‘Kanak independence’. The fact that this more inclusive discourse on ‘Kanak’ identity should appear in such a hybridised form should also be of little surprise, for it reflected the tensions within the pro-independence movement around the issue of what constituted Kanakness between the ‘visceral attachment’ which Parry identifies in Fanon’s work towards the notion of an essentialised identity and a reticence in broaching the issue based on the questionable political wisdom of providing the anti-independence movement with the opening to argue that ‘Kanak independence’ was racist. The maintenance of some notion of an essentialised identity in this more transcultural articulation is also tactically comprehensible as a counter-discourse to the discourses of absence in the anti-independence media. A discourse which posited ‘Kanak’ identity as in the process of creation risked affirming this discourse of non-existence in the present. It is therefore not surprising that the articulation of a transcultural notion of Kanak identity tended to occur away from the thick of the political struggle in the territory. Tjibaou’s comments on Kanak identity, for example, which were in keeping with the critique of essentialism in the Négritude movement - ‘We can’t return to our tradition, that’s just a myth. No people have ever actually done that. For me, the search for one’s identity, one’s model, that’s ahead of me, never behind’ - were not

origin’ (29/9/87).

8 It evokes the discourse on the ‘right of welcome’ but seems to transcend this in its egalitarian connotations; for the ‘right of welcome’ implies that those who are welcomed remain guests subject to the beneficence of their hosts, whereas the notion of the ‘new Kanak people’ is more ambiguous.

The straddling of identity as a past essentialism and a future creation in the pro-independence discourse of place was facilitated by the mobilisation of more than one category. While the ‘pays kanak’ was very much conceived of as a concrete historical given, firmly rooted, as the quotation on page 243 suggests, in the ground, ‘Kanaky’ lent itself more readily to the metaphor of the ‘branches’, growing and changing in response to political exigencies, although articulations of ‘Kanaky’ which were close to those of the ‘pays kanak’ also existed. In an interview on Radio Djido, partly published in *L’Avenir*, in which Tjibaou attempted to explain why he was going to Paris for negotiations after the Ouvéa crisis, this articulation of ‘Kanaky’ came to the fore:

> Either you continue and we ruin the country, to the detriment of everyone, with significant handicaps for the construction of Kanaky, or we try to discuss it to see how far the actual government is capable, in concrete terms, of decolonising and therefore safeguarding Kanaky’s interests - of getting the construction of Kanaky going in a concrete fashion with Kanaks, to see to it that non-kanaks accept the prospect of living in an independent country while being French, unless they accept kanak nationality (*L’Avenir*, 24/6/88).

This is a curious passage in that it suggests a certain admonition of the insurgency which had, after all, been sanctioned by the FLNKS if not personally by Tjibaou. In it, ‘Kanaky’ is both a future and a legacy, expressed through ‘Kanaky’s interests’ which are no longer those exclusively associated with Kanak culture but which now are capable of including, the passage suggests, other resources. This ‘Kanaky’ is the future decolonised nation. It contrasts markedly with a more politically engaged construction of ‘Kanaky’ expressed in Bwenando’s proclamation that:

> it’s Kanaky, Kanaky fighting, Kanaky marching for its liberation. It’s the earthquake, it’s the thunder that rumbles, it’s the water that floods, it’s the fire that purifies, it’s - the *parole* (word) that leaves the *case* (hut) (*Bwenando*, 5/9/89).

Here, ‘Kanaky’ is the embodiment of the political struggle itself, expressed in the potentially calamitous physical occurrences of earthquake, thunder, flood and fire, and also the exemplification of Kanak culture, expressed in the metaphors of the

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‘parole’ and the ‘case’. This ‘Kanaky’ is a very hybridised articulation, blending traditional metaphors and the traditional concept of the inseparability of the physical and human environment with liberation discourse and its attendant metaphors (Kanaky fighting, Kanaky marching for its liberation). This articulation pointed to another which presented ‘Kanaky’ as the product of successful political struggle as in L’Avenir’s comment on Eloi Machoro’s campaign in late 1984 and early 1985: ‘It was a big event. Eloi played Caledonia. He passed and Kanaky became law. He failed and repression would resume the ground that was won’ (L’Avenir, 10/1/86). Tjibaou’s choice of a more politically neutral and inclusionary articulation of ‘Kanaky’ was tactically comprehensible in the context of a broadcast in which he was aiming to gain consent for a shift in tactics from insurrection to negotiation. It signalled the ascendancy of a new post-Matignon, reformist construction of ‘Kanaky’, in considerable tension with ‘Kanaky’ as the personification of Kanak political engagement. While the latter grounded ‘Kanak’ identity in a geographical and therefore cultural imagining, the reformist construction afforded no geographical or cultural privilege to those who had engaged in the political struggle, reserving ‘Kanaky’ instead for all political and ethnic groups.

Kanak history

The quest to reassert a ‘Kanak’ identity was expressed not only in the articulation of discourses of identity and place but also in a discourse of history. For the pro-independence media and the movement more generally, history was ‘colonial history’: a narrative from which Kanaks were excluded or in which they were misrepresented. The assertion of Kanak identity implied, at the very least, the challenging of this history. A major objective of the pro-independence press was to challenge anti-independence interpretations of current events and rememberings: Tjibaou said that he spoke for those who demanded ‘more truth about our present and our past’ (L’Avenir, January 1983). But, beyond this objective, the pro-independence media also advanced the outline of an alternative history - ‘a ‘Kanak history’ - comprising Kanak rememberings of past government policies, Kanak insurrectionary activities, and key dates in Kanak political mobilisation.

The pro-independence movement’s concern with history is evident in the frequency with which articles discussing current events are contextualised in a historical
chronology which refers back to the period of annexation. In a 1980 speech to the Senate on the Pompidou government’s land reform policies, Roch Pidjot refuted the claim that the *statut coutumier* (customary statute) was an obstacle to economic development, proceeding with a chronological outline of the ‘history of colonisation’ declaring that it was a ‘truth that you refuse to recognise ... It is a historical truth’.

Pidjot’s chronology began: ‘+ 24 September 1853: taking of possession by France’. It ended with an entry for 28 November 1897 which read:

> the FEUILLET decree declares: ‘the chiefs, representatives of their tribes, had a right of sovereignty over lands that they did not occupy. This right of sovereignty passed to France when it took possession’ (*L’Avenir*, 31/12/80).

Its ending here suggests that Pidjot viewed that aspect of ‘history’ relevant to the land issue to have been determined by the close of the 19th century. But other topics required more extended chronologies. In an article in *Bwenando* which sought to explain the reasons for the Ouvéa insurrection, the author provided a more updated chronology which covered ‘contemporary Kanak history’:

> In order to explain the mechanisms that were to inevitably lead to the 1988 insurrection, we won’t go back over the course of history to the taking of possession in 1853 (1862 for the Loyalties) nor even to the liberation wars waged by chief ATAI in 1878 and chief NOEL in 1917. We will recall some facts which stand out in contemporary Kanak history. From 1968, we saw the emergence of diverse nationalist movements, ‘Foulard Rouges’, ‘mouvement 1878’, then Union Multiraciale, FULK, etc., that bore witness to the social and cultural demands which quickly led to the demand for sovereignty. In 1975...

The resume incorporated events up to 1988, chosen for their imputed relevance to progress towards what the article described as Kanak ‘emancipation’ (*Bwenando*, 30/8/88).

**Kanak history and form**

The will of the oppressed to reclaim a history has been a topic of some consideration within post-colonialism. This will is viewed as integral to the assertion of identity, for ‘what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have
a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates ‘us’ and not others (Ashcroft et al., 1995:355).\textsuperscript{10} Ashcroft et al. continue:

The post-colonial task, therefore, is not simply to contest the message of history, which has so often relegated individual post-colonial societies to footnotes to the march of progress, but also to engage the medium of narrativity itself, to reinscribe the ‘rhetoric’, the heterogeneity of historical representation as [Hayden] White describes it (ibid:356).

As discussed earlier, Hayden White (1987) has written of the different modes of historical representation - the annal, the chronology and narrative - and discussed their differing effects. Within ‘Kanak history’, chronology, or a mix of chronology and narrative, are the most frequently adopted forms. Perhaps this propensity to use chronology is practically expedient when the writer is attempting to span over one hundred years of colonisation. But there may have been other motivations. Narrative stresses cohesion, unity and continuity (ibid:10). Chronology, on the other hand, is a rendering of history which stresses disassociation and dislocation (ibid).

That Kanaks viewed ‘colonial history’ as a relentless experience of subjugation is expressed in the references to the ‘course of colonial history’ (see, for example, \textit{L'\'Avenir}, 25/7/84). ‘Colonial history’ viewed as a ‘course’ suggests that it has an internal logic of domination which propels it onwards in an almost unstoppable fashion. The narrative form lends authority to this notion of history as a ‘course’. The Kanak response in chronology attests to the continuing depth of Kanak experiences of dislocation which render difficult the presentation of history as a counter-narrative. Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant’s comments on African-Caribbeans’ experiences of history point to the difficulty of developing such a counter-narrative in a context of acute dislocation and disassociation:

\begin{quote}
For history is not only an absence for us. It is vertigo. The time that was never ours we must now possess. We do not see it stretched into our past and calmly take us into tomorrow, but it explodes in us as a compact mass pushing through a dimension of emptiness where we must with difficulty and pain put it all back together (Glissant, quoted in Parry, 1994:161-2).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} In a similar vein, Said has argued that, ‘while identity is crucial, just to assert a different identity is never enough. The main thing is to be able to see that Caliban has a history capable of development as part of the process of work, growth, and maturity to which only Europeans had seemed entitled’ (Said, 1994:257).
Perhaps ironically, the history which the pro-independence media assisted in putting back together remained ‘colonial’ in that the period that it covered was the period of colonisation. In my reading of the pro-independence press, I found no evidence of attempts to reconstruct a pre-colonial past of the type engaged in by, say, the Rastafarian movement. In this sense, there was no attempt to present ‘Kanak history’ as any more than a colonial construct; as a substance needed to fill an absence created by colonialism. It was therefore a strategic intervention, of Western creation certainly but nonetheless not without political efficacy in giving substance to ‘Kanak’ identity and, consequently, the Kanak political struggle.

Narrative and Kanak eyes

While the dislocation of the Kanak experiences of colonialism was expressed in the prevalence of chronology, the assertion of Kanak identity found expression in narrative. Hayden White has discussed the functioning of narrative in the fashioning of subjectivity. He draws on Barthes’ discussion of narrativity and subjectivity to argue that narrative creates the ‘illusion of a centred consciousness capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes, and representing them to itself as having all the formal coherence of narrativity itself’ (1987:10).

White’s argument provides an insight into the prevalence of narrative in the pro-independence press. This press, like Les Nouvelles, frequently used a relatively strict narrative form in its descriptions of events involving violent clashes between pro- and anti-independence groups. Narrative was also prevalent in the publication of ‘testimonies’ from Kanaks engaged in or associated with violent incidents, such as those of the survivors of the Hienghène massacre and their families, and those of

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11 Chakrabarty might well argue, as he does for Indian nationalist history, that the mimetic quality of ‘Kanak history’ renders it ‘a sad figure of lack and failure’ and always ‘grievously incomplete’ (Chakrabarty, 1995:384).

12 The anti-independence movement would argue that this lack of a pre-colonial history testified to the absence of a ‘Kanak people’ prior to colonisation. Chesneaux’s comments on a ‘pan-Kanak national consciousness’ are instructive here: ‘Under French rule, and indeed prior to colonisation, the twenty-eight Melanesian linguistic groups of New Caledonia had no political term to describe their common identity...It would nevertheless be historically inaccurate to describe Kanak national consciousness as a belated or fragile development, if not actually reversible. Kanak common identity may have found its proper terminological expression only recently, but it has existed for a long time. Throughout the long century of French colonial control, the linguistically divided Melanesian groups of New Caledonia were fully aware of their common fate, namely French rule. They knew what they had in common, which included custom, tribal ties, consensus, and that these were radically distinct from the French culture of dominance’ (Chesneaux in Spencer et al., 1988:64).
Kanaks from Ouvéa speaking on their involvement in the incidents surrounding the Ouvéa crisis (*Bwenando*, 14/10/87, 30/8/88 & 18/10/88).

In my discussion of narrative in *Les Nouvelles*, I argued that the use of an impersonal narrative form had the effect of structuring the reader into the text as its ‘author’, thereby enhancing the identification of the reader with the politico-social order authorised in the text. One reading of narrative in the pro-independence media sustains this thesis. The use of narrative structures the reader into the text in a position of empathy with its Kanak subjects, as this account in *L’Avenir* of the Koindé incident illustrates:

...the population, warned in a panic, wants to stop the passage of the vehicles and the equipment. It is at this moment that a war atmosphere is created: deafening helicopter noises right above the sunken tribe, grenade fire carried out by several groups, the tribe is invaded by smoke, the women and children scream and run to the river to calm the stinging in their eyes...In this panic, two shots are fired in the direction of the *Gardes-Mobiles* who continue shooting while retreating (*L’Avenir*, 28/5/86).

The structuring of the reader into the text is enhanced through the deployment of the present tense which situates the reader in the events as they unfold and consequently strengthens the reader’s identification with the motivation behind the counter-fire which killed the gendarmes. But there is a certain tension in this text between the coherence afforded it by its narrative form and its apparent theme of panic. In a sense, this tension is negotiated through the punctuation of the text, with the series of events listed after a colon connoting an uncontrollable conflux of events and therefore reinforcing the notion of panic. Interestingly, reporting in *L’Avenir* on the Koindé events immediately after they occurred mixed chronology and narrative, thereby reinforcing the thesis of panic:

- At 4.30 am, arrival of the helicopter
- The chief of OUI POIN tries to contact La Foa and KOINDE by telephone. He notes that telephone communications with the exterior are cut.
- The deployment of troops allowing BARBOU to cross the tribe without mishap. Removal of the padlocked gate that was barring the way. Return of the BARBOU convoy to the saw mill protected by the *Gardes Mobiles*... (*L’Avenir*, 14/1/83).

A major thesis of the pro-independence movement was that Kanaks were being subjected to a bombardment of oppressive acts over which they had little control
and that the psychological legacy of these acts precipitated the engagement of Kanaks in violent reprisals. Although the narrative form tended to militate against this reading of events, its deployment in other texts was highly effective in asserting a Kanak presence. Within these texts, the master eye which authorises narrative was, in effect, a collective Kanak eye which observed and recorded even the most private actions of its opponents. This effect of narrative is particularly evident, as we would suspect, in articles which discuss the purported crimes or misdemeanours of anti-independence activists, as the following passage from an article in *Bwenando* on the shooting of a young Kanak girl by a Caldoche loyalist, Yann Devilliers, illustrates:

**MOU - PONERIHOUEN, 4 September 85.** Late afternoon. Yann Devilliers, returning home to Ponerihouen, passes in front of the Mou tribe. People from the village are in the process of collecting coconuts and cry out at his passage. Yann Devilliers continues on his way towards Ponerihouen and then goes to the police station to alert them that he had had ‘stones thrown at him’ and that he was going to ‘flatten someone from Mou out of revenge’. The gendarmes record the information and let him leave without reacting further. Devilliers goes home, takes a machine gun (of a yet indeterminate calibre), gets back into his car, and returns to Mou. He passes again in front of the tribe (4 km from Ponerihouen) and stops at the south exit where he finds the people collecting coconuts. He leaves his motor running, takes out his shooter, and proceeds to fire into the crowd (*Bwenando*, 5/9/85).

As with the *Les Nouvelles* account of the events at Koindé, *Bwenando*’s account of this incident is temporally and spatially ambitious. Devilliers’ actions are described across and between several locations (at Mou, at the police station, at his home, in front of the tribe and at Mou’s southern exit). While we can infer from the narrative the source of some of the information it contains (for example, that the comments in quotation marks were comments made to the gendarmes, and the description of the shooting derived from one or more of those being shot at), other aspects of the narrative are unaccounted for (such as the collecting of the gun and Devilliers’ journey between his home and the southern part of the village). As in the case of the *Les Nouvelles* account of the Koindé shooting, the absence of voices in this account creates a space into which the reader is drawn, and from which the politicosocial order of the text is authorised.

However, it is my contention that the absence of a direct voice in the text can engender a different reading; one in which the reader fills the discursive space
created by the absence of a narrator not necessarily with his/her own persona but rather with Kanak eyes, whose silent presence throughout the territory enables the scrutiny of the events surrounding them. As a further illustration, take, for example, the following passage from an article in *Bwenando* entitled ‘Loyalist Rubbish’:

> The press, the radio and TV stated that ‘loyalists’ from TOUHO, unhappy over the strike of municipal workers over the *non-lieu* of the Hienghène assassins, went to tip their rubbish on the steps of the town hall. The media hadn’t specified that the loyalists had used KOTEX and other tampons to stain the town hall walls. When RFO and other media affirmed that TOUHO loyalists were the authors of this act of vandalism, they didn’t specify the number. In reality, there were 10 of them... These 10 ‘artists’ did their works in two parts - part of it was done on Friday afternoon and the other part on Friday evening. ‘These artists’ are the following people:
> - **Mme Edmonde GUILLERMET**, called NOUNOU, wife of the postmaster,
> - **Nicole GUILLERMET**, daughter of the above,
> - **Henri TOUMAINE**, de facto of the above. This ‘monsieur’, with the help of a trailer attached to his car, had gone to collect the rubbish of other TOUHO inhabitants that he then tipped on the town hall...
> - **Jean-Francois GUILLERMET**, son of NOUNOU and brother of Nicole, emptied his rubbish bins on the steps of the town hall around 21h. The vocation of garbageman is truly in the family... (*Bwenando*, 30/10/86).

The story continues with an account of the removal of the sewage and rubbish, interspersed with commentary on the various participants, alleging the involvement of some in arms trafficking and the secreting away of arms after the Hienghène massacre. The article raises the question of how its author was able to gather together the information which it contains. In this text, the deviations from a strict chronological narrative render it difficult for the reader to assume the position of narrator. Instead, the story seems to connote the presence of Kanak witnesses, not only to the range of events which it describes but also to the ‘private’ lives of those whom it identifies as the ‘10 “artists”’. The ideological effect of this reading is potentially quite potent. In the context of the interior of the territory where Europeans were in the minority, it asserts the power of the Kanak presence in a colonial context where Europeans claimed domination. In demonstrating this presence, the pro-independence media was not only asserting Kanak identity; it was also challenging the identity of those who opposed them, for the identity of their opponents was premised on the non-existence of Kanaks.
The pro-independence media demonstrated that Kanaks were not only there but were also observing, noting and narrating anti-indépendantiste lives. As L'Avenir commented somewhat menacingly, those engaging in clandestine activity may have believed that their actions were going unnoted, ‘But the kanak eye was there to observe the gesture of the coloniser’ (L'Avenir, 9/9/87).

**Kanak othering**

The notion that selfhood is impelled by those characteristics and attributes projected onto others implies that the types of identifications forged in the pro-independence press of these others tells us something of the pro-independence media's construction of Kanak identity. We might expect that the pro-independence press would reserve its most acute ‘othering’ to those who opposed ‘Kanak independence’ and did so most actively. Certainly, these people were the object of considerable denigration in pro-independence publications where they were described variously as fascists, nazis, terrorists, extremists and almost any combination of these and other related terms. Within these categorisations a distinction was sometimes made between extremists from metropolitan France and its former colonies and ‘Caldoche’ extremists, as when L'Avenir commented on the belligerence of ‘the Caldoche extreme-right and the PATHOLOGICAL cases of the Vietnam and Algeria veterans who pursue the fight for the CHRISTIAN WEST against COMMUNISM’ (L'Avenir, 31/1/86).

Here, anti-independence extremism is presented as a type of psychological disorder, but it is also presented at times as the emotional state of those who fear the loss of privilege, as in L'Avenir’s reference to ‘the reactionary right holding on to its colonial privileges’ (L'Avenir, 14/10/81). The presentation of anti-independence extremists as suffering from an emotional impairment certainly rendered them different from, and we might presume inferior to, those doing the categorising.

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13 The increasing resort to the genre of the ‘testimony’ was a more overt expression of the presence of Kanak witnesses whose narratives frequently contradicted those ‘official’ versions released by the military or the administration. One testimony from Martial Laouniou following the Ouvéa crisis recounted the executions, after their capture, of Samuel Wamo, Vinceslas Lavellois and Alphonse Dianou by the military (Bwenando, 18/10/88).

14 For example, L’Avenir referred to ‘The fascists, the nazis, all the New Caledonian extreme-right’ (L’Avenir, 30/9/81). Bwenando described fascism as ‘this vile beast, omnipresent in Kanaky’ (11/7/85) and L’Avenir, remembering the public jubilation in the streets of Noumea following Machoro’s assassination, referred to the ‘Sinister spectacle when the Marseillaise resonates with fascist accents!’ (L’Avenir, 10/1/86).
However, it is difficult to see how this difference might truly constitute an ‘otherness’ if the Other is meant to signify an entity which is fundamentally distinct from those who classify it (Thomas, 1994:71). Rather, anti-independence extremists were presented, as Nicholas Thomas writes of representations of pagans in pre-modern European discourses, as ‘incomplete or imperfect forms, rather than ... “peoples” of a comprehensively distinct kind’ (Thomas, 1994:71).

While the pro-independence press referred to its political opponents by mobilising categorisations which might be broadly held to connote negative images (e.g. ‘fascists’), the condemnation of these people was usually implicit in the condemnation of the actions in which they had been involved. There was very little extended analysis of their character, of the type engaged in in more dedicated projects of ‘othering’. This was not always the case. Although the passages in which the Caldoche character was discussed were few and not very expansive, there was nonetheless some fleshing out of their character. These passages suggest that the Caldoches were far more the object of the pro-independence media’s ‘othering’ than the most extremist of its non-Caldoche opponents.¹⁵

Within the pro-independence media, a differentiation was sometimes made between the wealthy Caldoches, such as Lafleur and Laroque, and the poorer Caldoches, referred to variously as ‘Caldoche de base’ (eg. Bwenando, 3/10/85), ‘petit blanc’ (L’Avenir, 21/5/83), ‘colon’, or, simply, the ‘poor people’ which, as the following passage suggests, signified more than a comparative state of financial deprivation:¹⁶

The Caldoche big wigs (literally, big heads: *grosses têtes*) have already exported their billions, invested abroad, and don’t give a damn about what they leave behind. Once departed for other financial blue skies, the poor people will be forced to come to terms with the Kanak people or to instead settle abroad. It’s for them to decide! (Bwenando, 31/10/85).

¹⁵ Some of the Caldoches were, of course, among the most extremist in their actions against Kanaks and European pro-independence supporters. Bwenando writes that a young Kanak shot in the violent confrontation between Kanaks and Europeans which took place on 8 May 1985 was killed by a ‘bloody stupid fascist Caldoche who still hasn’t understood that, on that day, he dug the tomb of French Caledonia a little deeper. Go on then and talk to young Kanaks about “Fraternity” and ‘Peace”. On that day a lot of them were made acquainted with...hatred. The hatred of fascism, of the racist arrogance of the “Whites”. Pure hatred. A build-up of hatred’ (Bwenando, 11/7/85).

¹⁶ Bwenando here refers to the ‘Caldoche de base’ fed on the prose of the “SINISTER JOBARD” (L’Affreux Jojo) (Bwenando, 31/10/85).
In an article commenting on the assault of Australian journalist Helen Fraser by anti-independence demonstrators, *Bwenando* identified, in a photo of the alleged assailants published in *Les Nouvelles*, a Mr Arrighi, whom *Bwenando* considered typified this class of *petit blanc de Calédonie*:

Mr Arrighi isn’t a ‘strong arm’. He is a ‘monsieur like everyone else’, a well and truly ordinary citizen such as exist in their thousands. He wasn’t ‘heated’, he wasn’t ‘provoked’, he is afraid, and he exercises his fear like others spit their venom, he eases his mind...(He) is a Caledonian *petit blanc*, typical of the numerous primary school teachers, young and frequently from good families, who, after the failure of their metropolitan studies, fall back on the territorial public service (*L’Avenir*, 21/5/83).

The characterisation of the *petit blanc* as fearful and intellectually inept coheres with another characterisation of Caldoches as children. *L’Avenir* argued that the Caldoches ‘have always acted like children in care, relying on the Metropole and allowing it the task of managing their interests and administering their local public affairs’. It concluded by calling into question the ability of the Caldoches to critically reflect on issues in order to find a way out of the political dilemmas in the territory (*L’Avenir*, 15/7/80). Instead of seizing control of their destiny, they were ‘eternal sheep’ following Lafleur to the abattoirs (*L’Avenir*, 18/8/87). Indeed, after their massive vote against independence in the 1987 referendum, *L’Avenir* considered that the Caldoches had effected their own elimination. According to *L’Avenir*:

‘Through this 98% vote, the “victims of History” have disappeared and the Caldoches have declared the end of their existence as such’ (*L’Avenir*, 30/11/87).

There is a certain disjuncture between this notion of the disappearance of the Caldoche identity and the previous characterisation of the Caldoches as infantile and sub-intelligent. This characterisation had as its primary referent French identity: the Caldoches were presented as inferior forms of a French national identity which the pro-independence movement generally left unchallenged. In contrast, the notion of the self-inflicted disappearance of the Caldoche identity suggests that this identity was in some respects distinctive and was not just a subordinate form of French identity. Such a view of Caldoche identity was seldom articulated in the pro-independence press. But its mobilisation here tells us something of how the pro-independence press conceived of this distinctive Caldoche identity when it wished

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17 Here ‘Caldoche’ is used generically, presumably to denote both the ‘groses têtes’ and the *petit blanc*. 
to concede its existence. In this instance, Caldoche identity is validated through Caldoche support for Kanak independence. Through this support, the Caldoches demonstrate their acceptance of the Kanak presence and its cultural and political claims. This acceptance confers on the Caldoches a distinctiveness. They are no longer merely European immigrants but rather have come to an accommodation with the distinctiveness of their circumstances - a distinctiveness conferred by the Kanak presence - and therefore have effected their own distinctiveness. Without this distinctiveness afforded the Caldoches by virtue of their recognition of the ‘fait kanak’, they remain ‘sub-Europeans’. In a comment on the implications for Kanaks of the Pons statute, Bwenando described this lack of acceptance of the ‘fait kanak’ as a Caldoche ‘uprootedness’. According to Bwenando, through the Pons statute the French government had:

...chosen to eliminate, in the medium term, the Kanak ethnic group by depriving it of its culture, therefore practising Kanak ETHNOCIDE. And it will happen very quickly, in one or two generations, Kanaks will have become black ‘sub-Europeans’, the uprooted in their own country - a type of Caldoche (Bwenando, 12/4/88).

Such passages suggest that the pro-independence press reserved its most concerted othering for the Caldoches: those with whom it would inevitably have to contend. This depiction of the Caldoches as ‘sub-European’ implicitly valorised European identity. The pro-independence press may have presented Europeans as politically malevolent, but their claim to identity, and therefore legitimacy, was never in dispute. In contrast, the Caldoches were the object of denigration, their physical and cultural uprootedness being presented as the core of their abjectness. One effect of this discourse on Caldoche identity was to delegitimate Caldoche claims to rightful participation in determining the future of the territory, reflected in the FLNKS’s repeated claim that it would only negotiate with the French government and not local anti-independence politicians. Another likely effect was the escalation of Caldoche militancy which, in a sense, mirrored the escalation of Kanak militancy in the face of the denial of legitimate Kanak existence.

However, the Kanak discourse on Caldoche identity was hardly a discourse of the non-existence of the Caldoche in the way that the anti-independence discourse was of the non-existence of Kanaks. The pro-independence media appeared unable or unwilling to construct an Other as a fundamentally distinct and unrelentingly
negative imagining. The absence of such an imagining may reflect the extent to which the Kanak Other remained prisoner to negative imaginings conferred on it. It could also be seen as a disavowal of the argument that counter-discourse always falls into the traps of colonial discourse. Although the Caldoche were the primary target of Kanak derision, they remained derivative of an identity which the pro-independence movement never seriously contested. As such, their discursive exclusion from rightful participation in determining political outcomes in the territory was never fully effected in the pro-independence press.
CHAPTER EIGHT - STATE BROADCASTING AND POLITICS

State broadcasting in the territory attracted particular scrutiny in the pro- and anti-independence press in the period from the early 1980s to the signing of the Matignon and Oudinot accords. This scrutiny far outweighed that directed towards any other national or local government agency, in part because state broadcasting was one of the more visible agents of state power in political circumstances which rendered pre-eminent the struggle over representation. The centrality afforded criticism of state broadcasting suggests that it was considered almost emblematic of the French state. As such, the press’s critique of state broadcasting drew on certain discourses on state power, and in particular both pluralist and instrumentalist discourse. Most criticism of state broadcasting programs was delivered by the mobilisation of instrumentalist discourse which advanced the position that programs were vehicles for propaganda from the state and its agents, evident, for example, in Combat Calédonien’s description of an RFO news bulletin as: ‘A real publicity program doubled with a blinding socialist aspect’ (Combat, 5/7/85). This critique drew its force, however, from the prevalence of an alternative pluralist discourse on state power which had as its broadcasting corollary the notion that the state broadcaster should represent the views of all interest groups within the community in an impartial manner. RFO programs were frequently criticised for the extent to which they fell short of this objective.

While both pro- and anti-independence groups condemned state broadcasting, they were nonetheless highly interested in it. For example, Combat Calédonien published a regular column criticising RFO programming but accompanied this with a two-page program guide. A similarly ambivalent relationship was evident in the comments on state broadcasting of one Kanak, published in the pro-independence publication La Tribune. While the Kanak mobilised an instrumentalist critique of FR3’s programming, he avowed that he nonetheless watched FR3 because ‘we always hope that they will give us good news about Caledonia - that they will talk about it like we want them to - but they always say it their way’ (La Tribune, May 1981). In the Kanak’s comments we see a pluralist imagining of what television might be like and an instrumentalist critique of what television was like. These discourses provided both a framework for critique and a benchmark for improvement in state broadcasting. Either could be mobilised in different contexts...
to pursue desired rhetorical ends. Implicit in the criticism of RFO for instrumentalist ‘censorship’, bias’ or ‘disinformation’ was the presumption that pluralist ‘access’, ‘balance’ and ‘truth’ were the alternative even if they were considered undesirable or ultimately unattainable by those initiating the criticism. But these alternatives were themselves highly contested terms which were closely related to the contestation over identity. The question of who should have access to the media and which voices constituted ‘balance’ was ultimately linked to the question of who could rightfully participate in the political process - and this was a question over which the media had, as we have seen, significant influence. The delegitimation of the Kanak identity in the anti-independence press gave force to the argument that Kanaks had no right of representation on state broadcasting. The weight of this argument was evident in RFO’s cancellation of an interview with Tjibaou following criticism from anti-independence groups that RFO should not broadcast a ‘terrorist’ (Les Nouvelles, 29/5/86).

This relationship between identity and professional discourses on objectivity and balance is also evident in Combat’s praise for an obituary for Roger Laroque, broadcast on RFO and written and presented by journalist Michel Quemener. Combat’s comment on Quemener’s work - ‘Nothing more could be asked of a public service journalist than that he be the witness and echo of the men of his time’ - could be read, out of context, as an indication that the obituary gave voice to a range of views on Laroque and his work in politics. In context however, Combat’s praise for Quemener, a journalist renowned for his strident right-wing views, suggests that his was a highly sympathetic remembering and that those referred to in the statement as the ‘people of his time’ were a politically select group. This claiming of relevance for one group was, of course, an expression of the irrelevance of another. Irrelevance implied no rightful claim to inclusion on the spectrum of discourses from which ‘balance’ is constituted. Access was therefore integrally linked to the question of legitimacy and identity.

This relationship might appear self-evident to many New Caledonians who remember the long period up until the late 1970s when local politicians were denied access to broadcasting time on state radio and television on the grounds that they were not members of French national political parties. Such overt discrimination was expressive of state broadcasting’s imperial mandate. The territory’s monopoly
radio and television services were to act as ‘the voice of France in the Pacific’\(^1\) which signified a national French voice, not a territorial one. During the 1970s, however, state broadcasting was required to become more responsive to local exigencies as a result of political pressures in both France and New Caledonia, which I discuss below. State broadcasters now had to engage with professional discourses on objectivity and balance in a hitherto unprecedented fashion. Despite this new imperative, state broadcasting in New Caledonia remained highly partisan well into the 1980s. It appeared that journalists at FR3 and RFO were able to negotiate their engagement with these professional discourses in a manner which enabled a continuing political alignment.

The historical legacy of conservatism in broadcasting in New Caledonia goes a significant way towards explaining this political alignment. The political culture in the organisation privileged particular readings of these professional discourses which enabled the continuing exclusion of pro-independence voices, particularly during the period of conservative government in France from 1986 to 1988. To the extent that journalists concurred with the identification of Kanaks as ‘terrorists’, the exclusion of Kanaks from the realm of legitimate debate could be seen as the exemplification of professionalism, not a serious lapse in it.

**Political shifts in reporting on RFO**

Criticism of the political reporting of state broadcasters in certain pro- and anti-independence media gives some insight into the shifts in editorial orientation during the 1980s. One indicator of the direction of these shifts was the changing vociferousness of their criticism. Prior to Mitterrand’s election as president in 1981, *Corail* was uncritical of FR3’s political reporting while *L’Avenir* persistently criticised what it described as the censoring or under-reporting of interventions in the National Assembly by the Kanak Deputy, Roch Pidjot (15/6/80; 5/11/80; 11/12/80). In the period between Mitterrand’s election and Chirac’s victory in 1986, *Corail* and *Combat* criticised state broadcasting relentlessly, with *Corail* reserving for RFO its most acerbic description as a ‘Marxist station’ (*Corail*, 18/3/83). *Combat* included two weekly columns on RFO, ‘RF Faux’ (RF Wrong) and ADG’s ‘In My Opinion’.

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\(^1\) This is how those involved in the first radio service in the colony described their radio station.
The criticism of state broadcasting in the pro-independence press was less prone to the vicissitudes of changing political influence in France, although there were some shifts. Criticism in L’Avenir of the lack of access afforded to pro-independence politicians on state broadcasting ceased shortly after the Socialist electoral victory in 1981. However, the pro-independence press never relinquished its instrumentalist critique. Following the killing of a young Kanak in May 1983, L’Avenir advised its readers that an activist had been sent to the scene to gather together the facts because the local press, aided by the gendarmerie, usually gave only a ‘a version which justified the colonial Regime’, which, L’Avenir argued, ‘we didn’t have to wait long for, for as early as Thursday, RFO, through its announcer Claude TISSANDIER, gave the gendarmerie and the colonial government’s official version (announcer chosen on these occasions)’ (L’Avenir, 21/5/83). During this period, Bwenando also criticised the reporting and radio and television commentary of some state broadcasters, most notably Michel Quemener who, ‘while he did sports commentary was still drinkable, but who, now that he does the TV news, antagonises us as much by his latent racism as by his infantile jokes’, but also Hubert Chavelet who succeeded ADG as editor of Combat (Bwenando, 6/12/85). However, Bwenando’s criticism of RFO escalated substantially after the formation of conservative government in 1986. A few months after the election, Bwenando declared that RFO’s reporting ‘has never been so low’, likening it to ‘something like Radio-Paris under German occupation’ (Bwenando, 30/10/86). L’Avenir began describing RFO as ‘Radio-Fascist-Overseas’ (29/11/86) and advanced the somewhat surprising view that: ‘The present journalists’ commentaries are so sickening, because of their lack of objectivity, that even people in the RPCR no longer hide the fact that they only listen to Radio Djiido news’ (L’Avenir, 18/8/87).

The shifts in editorial orientation during the 1980s, although criticised by different media in the territory, nonetheless had the effect of demonstrating that programming changes were possible. Moreover, the transparency of political intervention in state broadcasting in France had been sufficiently commonplace to engender the expectation that political influence could have an effect. Criticism of state broadcasting in New Caledonia was therefore not merely a negative reflex, but was also aimed at influencing changes in editorial orientation, evident in the frequency with which pluralist discourse was mobilised alongside instrumentalist critique.
However, this view of the political malleability of state broadcasting in the territory probably over-stated the extent to which change was possible within the broadcasting organisation. Although the structure of the organisation was finely tuned towards political influence, the bureaucracy which sustained FR3, and later RFO, was nonetheless one with its own culture and institutional imperatives which could not change as readily as political will. It was a state employer and as such engendered certain expectations of job security and career advancement which rendered difficult, for example, the replacement of staff with political views antithetical to new political currents. It was required to negotiate with unions and to produce programming within budget constraints, and its staff - particularly its journalists - were required to negotiate through pressures which were at once political, professional and personal. For example, journalists who were stridently opposed to independence (as it appears many were during the 1980s) were nonetheless required to respond in some manner to the new political exigencies of the Socialist government while at the same time paying some service to the notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’. Moreover, their engagement with these professional discourses also had to contend with competing notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ articulated in the pro- and anti-independence media. For example, I found no reference in Corail to the notion of ‘balance’ prior to Mitterrand’s victory. But, Corail repeatedly decried its alleged absence afterwards, arguing that pro-independence sentiment was over-represented on the state broadcasting service.² Of FR3’s move to include pro-independence voices after Mitterrand’s victory, Corail merely commented: ‘well, it happened today. Messrs Tjibaou and Pidjot spoke to us about their racist project of Canaque independence’, indicating its intolerance for the

² We could imagine that this labyrinth of pressures and constraints would render management of the state broadcasting service difficult, particularly in the post-Matignon context when management was required to provide better access for the pro-independence movement immediately after the period in which anti-independence virulence in the station had been at its peak. The volatility created by balancing these pressures in the post-Matignon period had a bearing on my fieldwork. In 1994 I was requested by management not to attempt to speak to journalists working at RFO lest I rekindle old passions and animosities which had been contained through various management strategies - provisionally contained, one must assume, judging by the restraint requested on my part. As a result, I was unable to speak to journalists about certain issues, the exploration of which would have assisted me to understand how media discourses emerged through the range of practical and professional constraints discussed in relation to media discourses surrounding independence in Les Nouvelles. In addition, my access to television archival material was relatively scant, which meant that my analysis of RFO discourses surrounding independence is limited to Michel Quemener’s television commentary on the trial of those accused of the Hienghène massacre, discussed in the following chapter (I am very grateful to the management of RFO and the RFO archivist for my access to this material). Most of my knowledge of RFO is therefore based on secondary sources, primarily, of course, those critiques of the station engaged in by the loyalist and pro-independence media. The manager of RFO in 1989, Alain Le Garrec, and the manager in 1994, Maxime Briand, did, however, allow me to interview them,
interpretation of ‘balance’ which emerged under Socialist government influence (Corail, 5/11/81). That such concepts as ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ became significant in the struggle over media representation in New Caledonia attests to the pressures which the emergence of pro-independence political demands placed on hitherto colonial bastions, such as FR3 Noumea. It also attests to the extent to which the pro-independence movement was influenced in its demands for media reform by discourses developed and mobilised in political struggles over media access and control in France.

Politics and state broadcasting in France

The extensive political influence in state broadcasting in France meant that state media organisations were readily implicated in political struggles such as that of May 1968 when journalists at the monopoly state broadcasting organisation L’Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision de France (ORTF) initiated a series of strikes over political interference in broadcasting (Smith, 1973). Out of this industrial action and the more general political pressures resulting from the May protests, the new government of Georges Pompidou, under Prime Minister Chaban-Delmas, initiated a range of broadcasting reforms which Kuhn argues were intended to wrest editorial control of broadcasting away from the Ministry of Information, which was abolished (Kuhn, 1985:52). Following Chaban-Delmas’s dismissal in 1972, the Ministry of Information was reconstituted and ORTF reorganised, a restructuring which Sorbet and Palmer argue resulted in ORTF’s editorial control of its programming being ‘more theoretical than real’ (Sorbet & Palmer, 1986:91-2). Giscard d’Estaing came to power in 1974 with the promise to end political interference in broadcasting and initiated a break-up of ORTF into seven separate companies, each involved in providing different aspects of the broadcasting service and each organisationally independent (Kuhn, 1985:54). FR3 was established as the provider of radio and television services to regional France and an overseas section was established within FR3 to provide radio and television services to France’s overseas departments and territories. D’Estaing abolished the Ministry of Information; however, Kuhn argues that political involvement continued under a new structural guise: ‘The Gaullist emphasis on direct control of political output via the Ministry of Information was replaced by a system of control through presidential appointments’

and I had discussed RFO with journalists and others prior to 1994. Some of this material is reflected
(Kuhn, 1985:56). Opposition politicians were now able to get access to broadcasting time, but editorial content and commentaries ‘remained predominantly one-sided’ (ibid). As Kuhn argues:

> While the crude, external interventionism of the de Gaulle presidency had given way to a slightly subtler internal manipulation during Giscard’s septate, by the time of Giscard’s electoral defeat in 1981, the government-controlled state monopoly was in its essential aspects still alive and well (ibid).

The Paris crowds celebrating Mitterrand’s victory reportedly chanted the names of broadcasting journalists targeted for their prior political complicity. The expectation among the crowd was that their days in state radio and television were numbered. In Noumea, the mood among the sizeable majority who opposed Mitterrand was, of course, subdued, but there was cautious optimism among those mostly pro-independence voters who had supported Mitterrand, and demands for change in state broadcasting were, as for the crowds in Paris, among the earliest demands made by the pro-independence movement.

**The politics of imperialism and broadcasting in New Caledonia**

Following Mitterrand’s election, *La Tribune* commented that the pro-independence movement could now ‘expect much greater access to the media (radio, television and newspapers)’ (*La Tribune*, June 1981). The priority given to media reform was reflected in its inclusion in a three-point list of claims which *La Tribune* published shortly after the election. The publication argued that the new government should take the following measures quickly:

1. immediate withdrawal of the *gardes mobiles*, the pre-eminent colonial forces
2. replacement of the High Commissioner
3. replacement of the director of FR3 and greater access to radio information broadcast by local political forces (*La Tribune*, June 1981)

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Dissatisfaction with state broadcasting was not the sole preserve of the pro-independence movement. Conservative political groups had long decried the absence of Caledonian voices on radio and television. This absence was read as affirmation that state broadcasting’s mandate in the territory was clearly imperial.

The relationship between French imperialism and New Caledonian broadcasting began with the introduction of radio in the colony. Brou writes that radio was first heard in New Caledonia in 1931 during the opening of the colonial exposition at Vincennes in France. The transmitter built at Pontoise for the occasion was intended for broadcasting to the colonies and Brou writes that the signal was clearly received in Noumea (Brou, 1975:54). This was not the case for subsequent broadcasts despite the construction in 1938 of a short-wave transmitter at Essarts-le-Roi (Brou, 1976:65). The disappointing reception was one factor in encouraging the development of a local radio service. Radio Noumea was originally established as a private concern by local entrepreneur M. Gaveau, and began broadcasting on 28 May 1937 (Brou, 1976:58). Although emanating from Noumea, Radio Noumea’s designs were unwaveringly imperial. Only months after the service began, Mr Gaveau doubled his transmitter strength so that his programs could be better heard in America, Australia, New Zealand and throughout the Pacific, dubbing his station ‘The voice of France in the Pacific’ (Bulletin du Commerce, 8/2/38; Brou, 1975:66). During the war, control of the station was transferred to the local administration’s information service which retained significant control into the post-war period.

By the 1950s there was considerable dissatisfaction over official control of Radio Noumea, relating primarily to the refusal of the administration to allow local politicians access to radio broadcasts on the grounds that they were not members of metropolitan French national parties (PIM, April 1970:103). This dissatisfaction precipitated an incident in 1958, described by Brou as the ‘radio coup’, in which a group of eight to ten men, including four or five local senior politicians, who were frustrated over official media control, seized control of the station in order to make an on-air declaration (Brou:86-7). Thompson and Adloff write that in the absence of local political voices, news broadcasts consisted mostly of official communiques.

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3 Thompson and Adloff write that the administration assumed full control of the station in 1958 (Thompson & Adloff, 1971:505). I was unable to find any reference to the ‘radio coup’ in La France
and information. They added that the station’s ‘failure to report fully the general council debates annoyed the conservative members of that body, and its alleged slanting of local political news to the detriment of the UC angered Lenormand (Thompson & Adloff, 1971:505). Dissatisfaction over the national government’s broadcasting policy in the territory was therefore expressed across the political spectrum.

Television, which began on a regular basis in 1967, was similarly under tight government control. Some of the flavour of radio and television programming from this period can be gleaned from the columns in PIM of Australian journalist Helen Rousseau, who was married to a Caledonian pro-autonomy politician and resided in the territory. Rousseau described state-controlled radio and television in this period as ‘very powerful tools in moulding local public opinion, drawing closer identification with metropolitan France’. The programs consisted, she wrote, largely of ‘news, interviews and films, prepared in France and covering events in Europe’, providing little ‘to suggest that New Caledonia forms part of the Pacific region or that it could have its own Pacific identity’ (PIM, April 1973:7). In advancing this view, Rousseau was echoing the sentiments of Caledonian autonomists who viewed self-government as, amongst other things, a means to nurture a local identity. The use of radio and television to propagate discourses highly favourable to the French government and local administration was therefore viewed with particular distain. Rousseau writes, for example, that radio and TV carried radio-telephone speeches urging a ‘yes’ vote in Pompidou’s 1972 referendum on the enlargement of the European Common Market, assuming mistakenly that the autonomists would vote ‘no’ (PIM, May 1972).

Some changes in state broadcasting in the territory began to occur from the early 1970s, precipitated by the structural changes in state broadcasting taking place in France and the emergence of new political pressures in New Caledonia linked to nascent Kanak demands for self-determination. These reforms appeared aimed at staving off the push for autonomy by attempting to demonstrate that the French government was attuned to local needs. It was only in February 1970 that the first Caledonian politician, Roch Pidjot, who had held his position as deputy to the French parliament for over five years, was allowed to speak on television. This was
more a concession than a policy shift and occurred because Pidjot appeared on television with a delegation of three visiting French parliamentarians (PIM, April 1970). In 1973 Rousseau was still writing that Caledonian politicians ‘are never allowed on local radio or TV to discuss political questions’ (PIM, March 1973). In addition, there was a new focus on local politics. Two months prior to the territorial elections of September 1972, Radio Noumea extended its broadcast time to 16 hours per day and began including more local news. Journalists were flown in from Paris to assist with the additional broadcasts and some people were recruited locally to work as journalists. Rousseau writes that from this time onwards local news featured prominently, although the issue of autonomy was still taboo:

While Caledonians were kept up to the minute almost on murder trials and soccer matches some 20,000 kilometres away, local speculation over the Administration or private persons often hit high tension relays on radio cocotier (coconut radio). Now all this has changed (at least within certain officially acceptable limits)...a whole battery of metropolitan French public servants and scientists are being coaxed out of their bureaux to assure the Caledonians that they are there to ‘serve the public’ and to actually give their telephone numbers and invite further inquiries (PIM, September 1972).

Local politicians were allowed on radio and television as a matter of general policy for the first time during the 1977 territorial election campaign, but the UC was the only pro-independence group allowed representation (La France Australe, 27/8/77). FR3’s then manager, Roger Le Leizour, made much of the decision to allow local political groups broadcast time, acknowledging that:

For a long time, politicians from Overseas Departments and Territories have demanded greater media access in order to get their ideas and programs known, as much on radio as on television. And, it is in response to this demand that the administrative council of FR3 has decided to have, not a real electoral campaign, but to do interviews with the different candidates during the campaign (La France Australe, 30/8/77).

The denial of access to other pro-independence groups elicited threats of judicial action from those excluded and the following condemnation from the UC:

The Union Calédonien protests against FR3’s refusal to allow democratic access to radio and television for the principal political formations during the electoral campaign. Brief interviews apportioned in a manner which

subsequent to, or may have precipitated, the ‘radio coup’.
privileges the parties supported by the administration constitutes an abuse which brings into question FR3’s objectivity (La France Australe, 27/8/77).

From this time onwards, conservative Caledonian politicians began to appear on radio and television but the pro-independence movement argued that coverage was generally not afforded their representatives. In an article entitled ‘The TV news scandal’ published in La Tribune just prior to Mitterrand’s election, the author acknowledged that FR3 news now included local stories but deplored the scantness of this local coverage when compared with the time allocated to news from France and overseas:

...instead of repeating every week the number of unemployed in France, let’s begin by giving the number of Caledonian unemployed. It is like that for every event. It is talked about but succinctly, in a hurry, almost apologising when announcing the local segment. Local, that’s FR3’s name for Caledonia. It is spoken about, but through the complacent recital of official communiques. It is spoken about, but always by inviting anti-independence personalities. Have you already seen Pidjot on the TV? Have you already heard interviews with elected indépendantistes? Have you already seen impromptu or otherwise interviews with opposition personalities? (La Tribune, May 1981)

One FR3 journalist working in Noumea during the early 1980s commented that this skewing of coverage was not only the consequence of the political preferences of some individual journalists but was also station policy. Journalists were told that they were not to speak to indépendantistes, a constraint which appears to have been readily accepted by most staff. This censorship fuelled the instrumentalist critique. As one Kanak commented in La Tribune:

TV: it is the arm of the current government. They accuse us of being against democracy, but it is us who haven’t the right to newspapers, TV, radio - that’s their democracy!! (La Tribune, May 1981).

Shortly after Mitterrand’s 1981 election victory, the new Minister for Overseas Territories, Henri Emmanuelli, visited the territory and severely rebuked FR3 for its censorship of oppositional political groups in a speech to the Territorial Assembly. Emmanuelli stated that all political opinions had right of expression on FR3, noting

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Le Leizour argued that access had been determined on the basis of past election results, but some new political groups had been granted access on the grounds that they had been formed by elected politicians (PIM, November 1977:37).
that this had not always been the case (L’Avenir, 31/8/81). This position was reaffirmed by the head of FR3 Paris, Guy Thomas, in a visit to the territory two months later. A new manager, Fred Jouhaud, and a new chief editor, André Blondet, took up their positions in early 1982, and staffing changes took place. Corail commented that all journalists had been told to ‘pack their bags’, but this appears to have been an exaggeration, as several journalists remained (Corail, 16/10/81).

The demands for media reform from the pro-independence movement went beyond greater access for its politicians. In a speech to the Territorial Assembly during a debate on a report on broadcasting in the territory, Roch Pidjot argued that the new government should find the means to ensure that all the territory’s inhabitants were able to receive TV and radio. He also demanded that programs be broadcast in vernacular languages and that local technicians be trained. L’Avenir commented of the broadcasting report that it ‘only gave one opinion, because everyone knows that Paris has the power and, no matter what one says, Paris always decides’ (L’Avenir, 25/5/82). The Parti Socialiste - Nouvelle-Calédonie (PS-NC) argued that the only way to circumvent the use of local broadcasting for governmental ends was to ‘RETURN ... to the country its competence over audio-visual communication’ in order to allow the creation of “A CALEDONIAN OFFICE” for radio-television which will be the instrument of a Caledonian communication policy’ (Corail, 26/2/82), a suggestion which Corail described as ‘crazy’ (ibid).

Shortly after pro-independence politicians gained access to FR3’s programs, Corail erupted with claims that ‘the majority are “fed up” with being assaulted each evening over the airwaves or on the screen’ (Corail, 5/11/81). Corail accused the head of FR3 Paris, Guy Thomas, of partiality in favouring coverage of pro-independence events, citing the air-time given to a pro-independence demonstration. FR3 was prepared, according to Corail, to ‘send out a group of cameramen-sound technicians and journalists for 50 demonstrators in the Place des Cocotiers, but to totally ignore the pro-French reactions of the majority, expressed by the Melanesian population itself’ (Corail, 5/11/81). The argument advanced by Corail that FR3’s coverage of pro-independence events was disproportionately advantageous appears to have resonated strongly among anti-independence activists. At a large anti-independence rally in June 1982, members of the crowd were reported to have
shouted out to the FR3 team covering the demonstration to film the grand chief Poadja who was being presented to the crowd by one of the organisers. Les Nouvelles reported that people in the crowd shouted: ‘FR3, film the Melanesian who is in front of you! You film enough of the Palika boys, so film him’, after which ‘the crowd spontaneously chanted: Film - Film’ (Les Nouvelles, 28/6/82).^5

Combat gave significant coverage to a report on state broadcasting in New Caledonia written by the French RPR Senator Charles Pasqua following a visit to the territory. According to Combat, the report proved that:

RFO New Caledonia privileges the REBEL FLNKS TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE LEGAL GOVERNMENT OF Dick Ukeiwé...RFO disinforms, in Noumea like in Paris. Only tough thugs, drug addicts, slobberers, mates and anti-French racists count on RFFaux (Combat, 12/4/85)

Pasqua’s report went beyond criticism of RFO political coverage to argue that coverage of the New Caledonian crisis across all TV stations in France favoured the FLNKS. He cited television coverage in the volatile period from 11 November 1984 to 10 February 1985 and found that Ukeiwé appeared for 21 minutes in this period compared with 53 minutes for the FLNKS (Combat, 12/4/85). The report went on to say that in New Caledonia, on the day prior to the November territorial elections, the ‘indépendantistes granted themselves 1 minute 22 seconds whereas the RPCR had a bare allowance of 49 seconds’. The report also mocked the manner in which air-time was divided between the differing political groups in the territory according to the rule of partition employed by metropolitan broadcasters known as the ‘three thirds’ rule. This rule specified that news time should be divided in three: one third to government institutions, one third to the political majority, and one third to the opposition. As the report pointed out, this schema became complicated when applied to the New Caledonian context, for the first third comprised governing institutions in France and New Caledonia and the third, the metropolitan and local oppositions. This resulted in political antagonists being classified as belonging to the same group. Thus, Pisani and Ukeiwé were together in the ‘governing

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^5 Les Nouvelles appears to have agreed that FR3 reporting did not do justice to the demonstration, commenting that FR3 had not mentioned that one demonstrator had been hit by a tear gas canister even though two Australian radio stations had mentioned it. Les Nouvelles continued: ‘During this same television news, the High Commissioner’s tasty communique was read out, but at no point were the four points of the motion handed to the High Commissioner cited, and these were, after all, the principal objectives of this mass demonstration. As for the news bulletins broadcast Sunday lunchtime
institutions’ group and Chirac and the FLNKS in the ‘oppositions’ group. The report also criticised RFO’s employment policies, and in particular its alleged side-lining of ‘undesirables’, presumably designated as such for their political views, and the resort instead to contract employment which Combat argued promoted self-censorship in that journalists wishing to have their contract renewed would see the necessity of conforming to predetermined political positions. Combat accompanied its article with a list of RFO staff considered the most politically compromised.6

The Pasqua report illustrated how fraught with difficulty was the notion of balance in a volatile political context. The resort to an analysis of ‘balance’ based on the time allocated to different political groupings is a common way of attempting to determine equity, but does little to address the different representations of political groups in the media. For example, a short, sympathetic news story is likely to produce a far more positive outcome than a lengthy story which imputes negative connotations. Moreover, in pointing to the difficulties of group delineation and categorisation, the Pasqua report also highlighted a further problem associated with this type of simple content analysis; that is, its necessary reliance on notions of groups as relatively fixed entities. Both media representation and group affiliation were, as we have seen, highly contested in the New Caledonian context rendering any comparison of the time allocated to different groups itself highly contestable.

The pro-independence media did not contest these figures suggesting that the movement believed that access during the period covered in Pasqua’s report and, more generally, during the period of Socialist government was adequate. But the pro-independence press nonetheless remained critical, as we have seen, of aspects of RFO’s programming, decrying, for example, journalists’ presentation of information from the military or administration as fact and the prevalence of conservative political commentary on radio. By late 1985 Bwenando commented that RFO’s ‘extreme-right orientations are more transparent than ever’, referring to commentary from the ‘trio that doesn’t make us laugh, ZAJAC - CHAVELET - QUEMENER’ (Bwenando, 6/12/85 & 20/12/85). The decision to allow commentary on Radio Noumea, the demonstration and march of the day before weren’t even mentioned” (Les Nouvelles, 28/6/82).

6 Combat pointed in the photo to Dominique Gonod, chief television editor Jean-Francois Luciani, Fred Jouhaud, and assistant television editor Armand Petit, and added the names of Dupart and Murraciole whom Combat argued had worked in Corsican television where he had supported the independence movement (Combat, 12/4/85).
from journalists who were renowned for their political conservatism may have been an attempt to win support within the anti-independence community in the lead-up to a national election in which it was expected that the Socialists would fare poorly. RFO could demonstrate that the Socialist government was concerned to give voice to antithetical political views. But there were probably other reasons why RFO’s programming under Socialist government influence was less than editorially homogeneous, which relate more to the legacy of conservatism within the state broadcasting organisation and the types of work practices employed in the news room which rendered difficult centralised control of all news product.

**Journalism and news production at RFO**

Until the broadcasting changes brought about by the Socialist government in late 1981 and early 1982, broadcasting in New Caledonia had been carried out by a deeply conservative institution structured around an ethos of imperial servitude and a contemptuous disregard for local experience. While significant changes occurred after 1981, a legacy of conservative influence remained. Certainly, some journalists left, but others stayed for an array of personal and professional reasons. The support staff, however, most of whom were hired from within the local European community, did not change significantly, and their contribution to the creation of a conservative political culture in ORTF/FR3/RFO-NC should not be underestimated. After 1981 there remained journalists and others who held conservative political convictions alongside newly recruited and, according to *Corail* and *Combat*, socialist management and journalists. A further change which took place was the hiring of two Melanesians, Joseph Cahié and Wallès Kotra, to work as journalists. Kotra in particular was known within the anti-independence community for his pro-independence views, which earned him the description in *Combat* as a ‘precious collaborator’ (*Combat*, 31/10/85) and in *Corail* as a ‘token indépendantiste agent’ (*Corail*, 18/1/83).

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7 We might assume that locally hired staff would be less mobile than staff transferred from RFO Paris. Claude Tissandier was one locally hired journalist who remained after 1981. Others, although not locally born, refused offers of relocation. This appears to have been the case with Michel Quemener. One management strategy in situations where journalists did not take up offers elsewhere was to give these journalists new tasks within the station. Thus, following the re-election of a Socialist government in France in 1988, Quemener was shifted away from political news reporting back to sports reporting whence he had come in the early 1980s. *Corail* commented that another strategy was to send old journalists back to France for training (*Corail*, 30/4/82).
This heady political mix of journalists and other workers at RFO probably gave rise to significant management difficulties. In May 1982 Les Nouvelles reported that all was not well at FR3 and workers went on strike in late 1983 complaining about ‘the jobs for the boys’ in relation to hiring and ‘the creation of non-budgeted positions’ (Les Nouvelles, 6/5/82 & 29/12/83), suggesting that new staff may have been hired to circumvent the staffing rigidities resulting from some staff choosing not to take up offers of employment elsewhere. Another consequence of this journalistic mix was a difficulty in controlling the media product. Journalists who readily accepted the idea that pro-independence groups should be excluded from media access were likely to have difficulty making the transition to the new editorial exigencies. The legacy of their personal convictions was no doubt at times evident in their media product. In addition, journalistic work practices produced openings for the articulation of political preference.

A convention within French broadcasting is that journalists in radio and television not only produce radio and television news stories but also present the news bulletins. Within RFO, different journalists were assigned presentation on certain days. These journalists had considerable influence over the content and structure of the news bulletins. Not only did they produce some stories themselves, but they also wrote linking passages between stories. The level of intervention of the chief editor probably varied. Individual stories may have been vetted, but this may not have always occurred given the severe time pressures associated with the compilation of bulletins. Constant vetting may also have been deleterious to staff morale. Its undermining of professional autonomy may have increased tensions among journalists, resulting in pressures on chief editors to intervene less frequently in the interests of staff morale. These tensions allowed for some variation in tone and emphasis and the emergence of comments considered by some commentators to be decidedly aberrant. L’Affreux Jojo, for example, was scandalised at Kotra’s introduction to a press release - ‘And now, a communique from the government of Kanaky’ - and another journalist’s comment, during Mitterrand’s visit to the territory, that there were now ‘Three presidents in Kanaky’, referring to Mitterrand, the

Corail was severely critical of the reporting of these two Melanesian journalists. In typical fashion, their names were both misspelt in Corail (as ‘Chayet’ and ‘Cotra’) (Corail, 12/3/82). Elsewhere, Corail spelt Kotra’s name ‘Kodja’ (Corail, 10/6/84).
President of the Territorial Assembly, and the President of the government of Kanaky, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (Les Nouvelles, 15/1/85 & 18/1/85).  

RFO and the return of conservative government

The re-emergence of conservative partisanship within RFO after the conservative victory in the French national elections in 1986 was greatly facilitated by both the continuing presence of journalists who had worked at the station prior to 1981, and an institutional ethos which had been shaken but not shifted during the five years of Socialist government. Staffing changes once again took place and a new manager was appointed. By late 1986 Bwenando was questioning where all the talented journalists had gone, lamenting that in their absence: ‘We lapse into the QUEMENER, GIROLD defectives and, to finish it off, Mémé BEAUCHAMPS…’ (Bwenando, 30/10/86). Bwenando’s description of Beauchamps was both cutting and revealing of the patriarchal views of its author and, we might suspect, those of many men within the pro-independence movement:10

You had to see this grimacing bag in ecstasy, jiggling in her seat while ‘covering’ CHIRAC’s arrival. She had half-a-dozen orgasms during the 48-hour passage of her dear prime minister. In France, she was put out to retirement, but for Noumea she is still good (Bwenando, 30/10/86).

L’Avenir suggested that Beauchamps and other new staff were National Front members (L’Avenir, 18/8/87) and questioned the fate of Joseph Caihé who, they claimed, was heard on radio but no longer seen on television. Was he too tanned, they queried (L’Avenir, 18/8/87).11

The pro-independence press accused RFO once again of censoring oppositional views, claiming that the station ‘has given instructions to boycott everything that is indépendantiste’ (L’Avenir, 26/3/87) and was ‘filtering’ information to the point that, 

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9 The trade-off between external political pressures and organisational imperatives was rendered increasingly problematic in a context of acute political turmoil, such as existed in early 1985. RFO was at this time reportedly under pressure from Pisani to minimise perceptions of the extent of the FLNKS insurrection by not reporting on certain events, and L’Affreux Jojo described RFO as ‘remarkably obedient’ to the Socialists, alleging that the station refused to broadcast a communique from an RPCR politician on the grounds that it was a personal attack on Pisani (Les Nouvelles, 21/1/85).

10 Parry writes of the use of patriarchal positions in anti-colonial discourses, commenting that their retention ‘points up the inadvisability of using the sources to write an optimistic narrative of liberation struggles as “ideologically correct”’ (Parry, 1993:179).

11 L’Avenir named Simonin and Desplage as National Front members (L’Avenir, 18/8/87).
’at some time, the Caldoches themselves will know less about Caledonia than the French’ (L’Avenir, 10/4/87). Bwenando’s claim that RFO ‘has never been so low’ was supported in the pro-independence press by figures which ostensibly demonstrated that the RPCR received four times the amount of air-time given to all pro-independence groups, and that the RPCR and the government received more than 90 per cent of broadcasting time (L’Avenir, 15/5/87). This assessment of broadcasting time formed the basis of a formal complaint to the national regulatory body, the National Commission of Communications and Liberties, established by the Chirac government to oversee issues of media concentration and broadcasting access. In its submission, the FLNKS took issue with RFO’s figures for the period 1 April - 31 July 1987, arguing that certain interventions were counted as part of the opposition when they should have been included with the local majority and concluding that the RFO figures were ‘a curious way to establish a balance!’ (Yéiwéné Yéiwéné submission, 21/8/87).

It was also argued that three documentaries on the independent south Pacific states of Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu, commissioned by RFO and written and presented by Tierry Desjardins, should be included in the time allocated to the majority. L’Avenir described the themes of Desjardins’ documentaries as:

NEW GUINEA: a barbaric and wild anthropophagie people
FIJI - xenophobic and racist people
VANUATU - independent, but at the pay of Cuba and the Soviets (L’Avenir, 18/8/87).

12 Bwenando claimed that on RFO news of 29/11/86, during which violent events at Thio were reported on, Pons, Lafleur and Lèques received 9 minutes 12 seconds broadcast time while Tjibaou received 35 seconds: ‘Only the local right’s thesis was presented, because the facts broadcast by the FLNKS were never mentioned (procession of armed RPCR, the first and numerous shots fired by RPCR fascists against kanaks and the Mouledons family)’ (L’Avenir, 29/11/86).

13 The pro-independence movement’s resort to an analysis of content based on the time allocated to different political groups was clearly a strategic response which sought to tap into the dominant modes of assessing balance within broadcasting organisations and the broadcasting regulatory authority. However, at an epistemological level it was somewhat incongruent. The notion of a quantitative assessment of merit had been the source of considerable critique within the movement. The claim to a ‘Kanak independence’, for example, was based on the claim of the superior rights of the indigenous people even though they constituted a numerical minority in the territory. Similarly, the frequent resort to numerical comparisons of numbers of pro- and anti-independence demonstrators was criticised by Tjibaou on the basis that there was no equation between numerical strength and moral rights.

14 Barbançon describes Desjardins as the ‘master thinker’ of the pieds-noirs in New Caledonia and writes that he was ‘a metropolitan Le Figaro journalist...one of whose first claims to fame was the publication in this daily of an article entitled “Kanak culture doesn’t exist”’. This article was followed by a book where sentences like this can be read: ‘What is distinctive about Kanak culture is its anthropophage tradition’, or ‘Kanaks use languages made up of a series of onomatopoeias and animal cries’. This bit of anthology earned him a television series on the independent South Pacific states, in which the mostly Melanesian citizens are presented like sub-men’ (Barbançon, 1992:60).
Desjardins' documentaries formed part of what Barbançon called a ‘televised bludgeoning’ during the six months leading up to the September 1987 referendum on independence (Barbançon, 1992:61). Bwenando commented that this included saturation publicity urging participation under the slogan ‘votez dur, votez mou, mais votez dans le trou’ (vote hard, vote soft, but vote in the hole) which was authorised by what Bwenando described as an obscure Centre for Civic Information (Bwenando, 11/9/87). Bwenando pointed to RFO’s coverage of the referendum results, and in particular the results for the small island of Belep, as an illustration of the extremes of farcical sycophantism reached by RFO in the post-referendum loyalist euphoria. Bwenando reported that one journalist had announced that: ‘At Belep, the largest electoral victory...100% of voters said ‘yes to France’”. This resounding victory had not, Bwenando argued, been difficult to attain as only two people on the island had voted (albeit ‘for France’), the remaining 98 voters having abstained (Bwenando, 29/9/87).

RFO and the Matignon accords

Prior to the referendum a new manager, Alain Le Garrec, was appointed to RFO-NC. The period of Le Garrec’s appointment is somewhat perplexing from a strictly instrumentalist view of the political functioning of RFO. Prior to Le Garrec, periods of appointment as manager had corresponded with the tenure of national political parties. New directors had been appointed in 1981 and 1986 corresponding with the change in government which occurred at each of these times. Le Garrec, however, was appointed during a period of conservative government, yet continued throughout the period of Socialist government until his transfer to RFO Tahiti in 1991, which meant that he presided over the station prior to and following the Matignon accords. This was a period in which RFO’s editorial policies shifted significantly away from the anti-independence triumphalism of the pre-referendum period towards a new engagement with notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ in keeping with what came to be described as the ‘spirit of the Matignon accords’. One reading of Le Garrec’s appointment in August 1987 was that RFO management in Paris itself believed that the editorial orientation pursued within RFO-NC had become excessively transparent and that, in the longer term interests of maintaining

15 L’Avenir argued that a similar interpretive strategy had been used by RFO following the legislative elections. RFO had announced that 100 per cent of the community of Pouebo had voted for the
some vestige of credibility regarding state broadcasting’s ability to represent divergent views, changes needed to be made. Such reasoning is in keeping with a more structuralist view of the state which conceives of the state’s service to political and economic interests as premised on the maintenance of some popular belief in the state’s neutrality and its will to serve a plurality of interests (Mosco, 1982).

Editorial extremism on RFO did nothing to advance the thesis that the French state, through its agencies, acted in the long-term interests of all in New Caledonia or to refute the instrumentalist thesis advanced by Yann Céléné Uregei at the United Nations in May 1987, that RFO was one of the pillars of French colonialism.

In interview, Le Garrec spoke of the difficulties he experienced in his attempts to broaden access on radio and television from late 1987. According to Le Garrec:¹⁶

> We had to fight, to suffer pressures and even things which could appear as threats, with attempts to intervene through ministers or superior powers in order to get rid of this or that person in charge deemed a little too independent...The battle was difficult, but I have to say, it also benefited from the Matignon accords since, from that moment, political relations in the territory changed so much that, finally, what RFO had been doing for several months before the Matignon accords, provoking more and less nervous reactions, finished by being accepted (Le Garrec interview, 22/11/89).

Changes to broadcasting in the territory were foreshadowed in the Matignon accords. The general issues of principle outlined in the accord documents were heavily grounded in pluralist discourse. The government committed its regulator, the CNCL (Commission Nationale de la Communication et des Libertés), to ensure that ‘the means of public communication respect pluralism in news and program diversity with regard to the different communities of the Territory’ (De la mission du dialogue aux accords de Matignon, 1988:7). In a speech at Hienghène, Prime Minister Rocard added that ‘objective and quality news is a political and cultural necessity for New Caledonia’ and foreshadowed the hiring and expeditious training of Melanesians as journalists and technicians ‘so that news is the reflection of all communities’ (Du temps du pardon au temps du partage, 1988:23). In addition,

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¹⁶ At this time, he argued, the RPCR had an expressed desire to control the station and the FLNKS was refusing RFO access to their press conferences on the grounds that they felt boycotted by the station. Le Garrec said that it took several months for the FLNKS to observe that RFO’s mentality had evolved, ‘that changes in their interest had occurred and that there was no longer reason to boycott RFO’.
Rocard declared that all programs ‘should be adapted to take into account the
cultural and social realities of the territory, which isn’t the case at present’ (ibid).

While Rocard’s comments may have seemed reassuring to many who felt politically
and culturally marginalised by their lack of representation on RFO programs, they
masked, of course, a range of complex contestations. While pluralist discourse had
been one of the primary resources drawn on by most political groups in their critique
of state broadcasting, there was, as we have seen, no consensual position on what
pluralism meant. Even Rocard’s notion of New Caledonia as a multi-community
entity which RFO was required to ‘reflect’ was a highly political utterance in its
categorisation of the ‘Kanak people’ as a ‘community’, a categorisation which
Kanaks had long rejected on the basis that it did not recognise their status as ‘first
occupants’. Moreover, Rocard’s suggestion that these ‘communities’ were self-
evident apparitions which could be mirrored off the camera’s neutral gaze, rather
than discursively constructed and contested entities - not the least through the
media itself - seemed to constitute a wilful disregard for the centrality of the struggle
over identity in the broader political struggle which had been taking place.

But Rocard’s comments fell short of a classic pluralist discourse on media diversity
and objectivity in suggesting that the hiring of Melanesians would allow RFO to
better reflect all communities, by which we might assume he meant the ‘Melanesian’
community. This was an important shift by virtue of its conceding that journalists
were not neutral arbiters and that ‘Melanesians’ might therefore be better able to
reflect the ‘Melanesian’ community. But in a ‘community’ which was politically
divided, the essentialist presumption that a Melanesian, no matter what her/his
political views, could better represent this community because of, perhaps, some
shared cultural essence showed a naivety which was not lost on the pro-
independence movement. The question of who would be hired for training by RFO
was watched closely by the FLNKS. While the choice of Melanesians was
ultimately not contested because it included FLNKS activists, the inclusion among
those hired of non-Melanesians generated considerable opposition. The statement
on the need to hire more ‘Melanesians’ in the official Matignon documents had been
translated into a directive to RFO that it hire 10 ‘Caledonians’. According to Le
Garrec, specifying employment for Melanesians was racist and therefore anti-
constitutional. Of the 10, RFO hired what Le Garrec described as ‘7 Melanesians

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and 1 métis’, suggesting that the remaining two were European. The FLNKS expressed its anger at what it argued was a wilful subversion of understandings reached in the accord negotiations that those hired would be ‘Melanesian’.

This example once again highlights the significance of the struggle over identity to media practice. The media were not only affected by the manner in which group identity was constructed; they were also major sites of its construction. This interrelationship suggests one mechanism through which journalists at RFO may have been able to reconcile their engagement with notions of professional practice and their exclusion of Kanak and other voices in the pro-independence movement. The discursive marginalisation of these others enabled their exclusion from the realm of legitimate discourse and therefore from professional media practice. One could be professional and not speak to Kanaks if one viewed Kanaks as illegitimate participants in the territory’s political processes.
CHAPTER NINE - THE POLITICS OF METISSAGE

Colonialism might be conceived of as a bipolar society of coloniser and colonised, but the experiences of colonialism produced a far more complex set of relationships of power which rendered problematic the definitive placement of some individuals or groups in such a bipolar schema. In New Caledonia, as elsewhere, the settler population personified much of this complexity. While there existed settlers whose wealth and political influence exhibited many characteristics of a comprador class engaged in facilitating the maintenance of colonial relations and, in the process, benefiting personally from such engagement, the majority of settlers could claim no such political or economic position. Many were people of very modest means while others might be said to constitute an urban or rural underclass. Many in the interior lived a near subsistence lifestyle and their physical proximity to Melanesian communities and the similar, although far from identical, experiences of material deprivation resulted in the adoption of aspects of Melanesian agricultural and cultural practice.

This hybridity was facilitated by the relatively frequent practice of métissage (interracial union) between settlers and Melanesian women. The identity of the children of such unions was particularly ambiguous. The father bestowed upon these children the identity of ‘European’ when they were brought up in the settler’s household, despite the frequently dark tones of their skin and the very significant cultural influence of their mother. But this claim to being ‘European’ was open to contestation by those who considered themselves less touched by such genetic or cultural influence. In informal discussions during my 1989 fieldwork in Noumea with business and tradespeople who had migrated to New Caledonia from France, I was particularly struck by the derogatory manner in which the Caldoches were described, exemplified in the description of the Caldoches as ‘white Kanaks’.

1 I recorded in my notebook the following comments made by a metropolitan French couple who owned a laundry in Noumea and who had been resident in the territory for about 10 years. Their discourse echoed that which I had heard with some frequency prior to my discussion with them. I tried to record their main statements: ‘I am not a Caldoche’; ‘the Caldoches are stupid’; ‘they are white Kanaks’; ‘the Caldoches are worse than Kanaks’; ‘Caledonia would be nothing without France’; ‘the wealth of the country comes from France’; ‘Kanaks can’t be exploited because they don’t work; they have an idyllic life but they still keep complaining’; ‘show me a people in the world which is more free than the Kanaks’; ‘the money circulating in the Provinces is all because of the benevolence of France’; ‘there are many métis in Caledonia and they don’t know if they are one thing or another’; ‘Kanaks will put all the whites out of the country and the situation will be fucked like it is in Vanuatu’ and ‘we are not racists’.

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Such a description suggested that the assertion of ‘Europeanness’ by settlers, particularly those of interracial unions, was a claim rather than a statement which was necessarily broadly concurred with by the French immigrant population. It was, in effect, a strategic intervention in a symbolic field in which the identity of these settlers was constantly being contested; in other words, a political assertion which proclaimed the lingering superiority of this domestic unit over its Melanesian counterpart. But this assertion could never elide the very complex identifications of such settlers, who claimed to be ‘European’ but whose material and cultural circumstances linked them experientially to the surrounding Melanesian communities.

At one level, the notion of hybridity might well be apt in explaining the cultural blending which resulted from métissage, particularly when discussing the types of domestic practices which resulted from the different cultural influences. But it seems to me that the notion of hybridity is not fruitful when discussing the type of complex identity constructions produced by settler métissage in New Caledonia; for hybridity suggests a certain accommodation between different cultural influences which, over a process of time, become reconciled in a new type of blended, yet discrete, identity. Certainly, more stable identity formations can occur in more hegemonic political contexts, but the political volatility in New Caledonia during the 1980s allowed for no such reconciliation. Indeed, this context rendered the fragmented nature of the settler métis identification more transparent and politically contentious as the territory divided between the primarily European population who opposed independence and the primarily Kanak population who supported it.

**Métissage in New Caledonia**

Ann Stoler has described métissage as the ‘fault line’ of colonial authority in its linking of ‘domestic arrangements to the public order, family to the state, sex to subversion, and national essence to racial type’, arguing that métissage ‘might be read as a metonymy for the biopolitics of empire at large’ (Stoler, 1995:13). Stoler’s discussion of colonial policy on métissage in French Indochina and the Netherlands Indies in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century points to the manner in which colonial authority attempted to contain this ‘fault line’ through an
inclusionary rhetoric which nonetheless masked a range of exclusionary practices.²
In the Netherlands Indies, the inclusionary rhetoric came to link nationality with
cultural competence, not genetic racial characteristics, thereby opening up
nationality to new sections of the métis population. In New Caledonia, a similar link
was forged. ‘European’ identity was linked with culture as opposed to racial
characteristics, but, rather than a requirement of cultural competence, a
demonstration of cultural allegiance was what was required to secure the status of
‘European’. This less proscriptive attitude to the cultural attributes of the métis
population may have emerged from the difficulties faced by the settler population in
acquiring extensive cultural competency in situations of geographic isolation and
material deprivation.

Officially, métis, as a hybrid identity in New Caledonia, did not, and does not, exist. Métis
either had chosen for them, by virtue of the choice of their parents or parent)
or themselves chose to be either ‘Melanesian’ or ‘European’, depending on their
cultural circumstance or allegiance. We could imagine that this lack of official
recognition of métissage would serve to heighten the fragmentation of the settler
métis’ identity. One had to be either ‘Melanesian’ or ‘European’, officially one could
not be a bit of both, meaning that there was no official validation for the complexity
of colonial life which the settler métis experienced. This official discourse
contrasted, as we have seen, with more exclusionary categorisations, such as that
of ‘white Kanak’, which differentiated between ‘Europeans’ on the basis of degrees
of perceived cultural and racial purity.

The fragmented identity of the settler métis allowed for considerable rhetorical
flexibility. The settler métis claim to be ‘European’ was a claim to cultural
superiority and to the economic and political benefits which being ‘European’ gave
rise to in colonial society. But, equally, claiming ‘Melanesian’ affiliation could also
be rhetorically effective in allowing settler métis to augment their symbolic capital by
presenting themselves as privileged commentators on Melanesian society and
politics and, as will be seen, privileged claimants of the land. This flexibility was

² Faced with the prevalence of métissage, particularly in the Netherlands Indies, Stoler analyses how
the imperial state responded to this ‘métis problem’ by determining a range of cultural markers which
could distinguish those métis who could rightfully claim citizenship from those who could not. While
this opened up the possibility of citizenship to many métis, there existed nonetheless a range of
‘exclusionary practices that restricted access and use of that knowledge by gender, race and class’
(Stoler, 1995:144).
also apparent in anti-independence media discourse. The anti-independence media generally mobilised an inclusionary discourse of settler métis as ‘European’, avoiding reference to the cultural complexity of their circumstances. But the anti-independence media could also switch to a discourse on the settler as métis when such an identification was deemed ideologically propitious. Polysemous identity was therefore as rhetorically advantageous as it was ontologically inevitable.

The involvement in late 1984 of a group of at least seven settler métis in the massacre of ten Kanaks near Hienghène foregrounded the issue of polysemous identity and its relationship to the political struggle around independence during the 1980s in what I believe to be an unprecedented manner. In the pro- and anti-independence media reporting on the massacre and the subsequent trial, those who defended and those who indicted the settlers sought an understanding and explanation of their gruesome act in the complexities of their identity. The anti-independence media gave considerable prominence to the defence’s argument that the affinity of the perpetrators with Melanesian culture, and indeed their Melanesian ‘blood’, absolved them of any intention of killing the Kanaks, thereby invalidating the charge of premeditated murder. The pro-independence media, on the other hand, gave prominence to the defence’s argument that the massacre was, in effect, a desperate effort by the settler métis to proclaim their ‘Europeanness’ in the face of their demonstrable Melanesian affiliations. Perhaps the strongest statement of this thesis came from French anthropologist, Alban Bensa, who, in an article in the French pro-independence publication Kanaky, reprinted in Bwenando, argued that the massacre had been plotted by a group of ‘pro-French’ ultras in Noumea who:

...operated a simple psycho-political mechanism: land-owning petits colons, métis, of limited outlook, decultured and in search of identity, were invited to show themselves more European than ever by spilling Kanak blood. Incited to ‘whiten’ themselves by perpetrating the murderous exclusion of blacks, the métis could also, after the event, be pushed back into the Kanak camp in order that the white roots of the plot disappear. Elementary deception. With their backs against the wall, the ‘loyalists’ hoist the colours! (Bwenando, 8/1/88).

Although both the pro- and anti-independence media emphasised the identity of these settlers as métis, there was considerable difference in how their métissage was conceived of and described. In the process of conceiving and describing, the media was, of course, constructing, and in their constructions of the settlers’ identity
we see the currency of particular discourses on identity and can speculate on their possible ideological effects.

The Hienghène massacre

On the evening of 5 December 1984, a group of 17 Kanaks, most of whom were returning from an FLNKS meeting in the town of Hienghène to their tribe at Tiendanite, were ambushed and gunned down by a group of settlers. Most of them were shot as most attempted to flee the two trucks in which they were travelling, which had been forced to stop by a tree trunk placed across the route. Ten Kanaks were killed and four wounded. The massacre occurred outside the house of a settler, Maurice Mitride, who became a suspect along with a group which Les Nouvelles described as a ‘clan of métis’ (Les Nouvelles, 10/12/84). Mitride was arrested on 10 December, charged with premeditated murder and imprisoned. Contact was made with the remaining six settlers, who had fled Hienghène, by judge François Semur who was flown to an agreed meeting place near the west coast town of Voh. The six - Raoul Lapetite and four of his sons, Jess, José, Jacques and Jean-Claude, along with adopted Melanesian son Robert Sineimène - surrendered to the judge and were flown to Noumea where they too were charged with premeditated murder and imprisoned.

On 29 September 1986, Semur, as the examining magistrate, dismissed the charges against all seven on the grounds of self-defence and they were released from prison. Semur’s ruling was appealed by the prosecution, and on 20 November 1986 the court of appeal reversed Semur’s finding and determined that the seven would go to trial. In justifying this decision, the court of appeal argued that the self-defence provision of the penal code was relevant in situations where a response was being made to a real and concrete aggression, and noted that in this case the evidence suggested that the Kanaks had engaged in no such aggression towards the settlers. Despite the overturning of the dismissal, the seven accused were not re-imprisoned. The case went to trial on 19 October 1987 and the proceedings lasted for 10 days. At the close of the trial, the jury deliberated for only a couple of hours (including the time to have a meal) and returned with a finding of not guilty on the grounds of self-defence.
Media reporting on the massacre

This outline of some of the major events associated with the massacre and the trial masks, of course, the existence of many interpretations of these events. The interpretive repertoires which were to be developed by the defence, and which ultimately secured the release of the seven accused, began to be articulated in Les Nouvelles and on RFO almost immediately following the massacre. The development of the pro-independence movement’s interpretive repertoires was more tardy: Bwenando and Djiido did not then exist and the movement’s active political engagement had resulted in L’Avenir and Le Kanak not appearing for a significant period. It was only following the dismissal of charges in late 1986 that a special edition of Bwenando on the Hienghène massacre and the dismissal was published (November 1986). This was followed by a second special edition published just prior to the trial (14 October 1987). In addition, editions of L’Avenir and Bwenando were published following the verdict and these contained a significant volume of analysis of the trial outcome (L’Avenir, 6/11/87; Bwenando, 17/11/87). The anti-independence media therefore had a considerable head-start in developing and propagating its interpretive repertoires.

What is striking about these repertoires is the congruence between the interpretations advanced by Les Nouvelles shortly after the massacre and the argument subsequently followed by the defence during the trial. This congruence was marred by only one article in Les Nouvelles, published the day after news of the massacre became public in Noumea. This was a highly uncharacteristic piece of journalism in its pointing to the existence of different interpretations of the massacre. The article began:

The circumstances of this clash remain hazy for the moment because the accounts diverge depending on the political tendency of the witnesses. It is still possible, by bringing together the versions, to try to reconstruct the facts as follows (Les Nouvelles, 7/12/84).

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2 Les Nouvelles cites article 329, 2 of the penal code as the article relevant to their dismissal (Les Nouvelles, 20/10/87).

4 L’Avenir pointed to evidence during the trial from Noumea Mayor Jean Lèques that he had been informed by telephone of the massacre at 8 pm on 5 December (i.e., only half an hour after it finished) as evidence that the massacre had been organised in Noumea (L’Avenir, 6/11/87).
The synthesis which followed was certainly far from beyond contention, but the author did proceed to note that the argument advanced by the ‘anti-independence side’ that the house of a settler, Henri Garnier, had been set alight by the Kanaks as they passed in their trucks had been denied by the doctor who had travelled to the scene in an ambulance shortly after the massacre and who had seen Garnier’s house intact (ibid). The uncharacteristic openings in this article may attest to the general revulsion which even many who opposed independence felt at the news of the scale of the massacre. Considerable discursive effort subsequently went into closing these openings in Les Nouvelles.

There is some evidence to suggest that RFO’s initial coverage similarly foreshadowed the argument developed more fully by the defence during the trial. The pro-independence movement accused RFO of supporting the thesis that the shooting had resulted from immediate provocation from the Kanaks. According to the wife of one of the victims:

Before knowing the facts, RFO had already taken a position, pretending that Kanaks kill whites at Hienghène and that, if there were dead and wounded, it was as a result of confrontation - of pitched battle. When RFO was subsequently aware of the facts, it kept the same attitude - the same thesis - against all probability - against all evidence (Bwenando, 14/10/87).

The journalist chosen to travel to Hienghène the morning after the massacre was Michel Quemener. Quemener was also the journalist chosen to cover the trial, and he gave nightly television reports of the day’s proceedings. These reports were highly partisan in the manner in which they sought to close readings of the proceedings around interpretations which concurred with those advanced by the defence. Quemener stressed the heightened insurrectionary activities of the FLNKS as justification for the settlers’ resort to violence, arguing that the defence’s rhetorical question to the jury - ‘Do you remember what they had lived through?’ - ‘summarised the trial well’. He attempted to explain away inconsistencies in the evidence of the accused by arguing that:

...if it appeared almost natural for them to express themselves in paramilitary terms at the time when, and the expression crops up often, Caledonia was in
Quemener made no such attempt to explain away the contradictions in the evidence of the survivors. Their evidence, and that of other prosecution witnesses, was passed over very briefly. The scant summary of Tjibaou’s evidence, for example, made no reference to most of his major points. In his summary of the prosecution’s final submission to the jury, Quemener sought to parody the prosecution’s argument with comments such as: ‘He (one of the prosecution lawyers) criticised the French presence, that of the gendarmes, of the press, of the preliminary investigation, of the public prosecutor and, undoubtedly, others that I’ve forgotten’, suggesting that the prosecution’s argument was merely a litany of accusations not worthy of retention. These asides gave a highly partisan reading to Quemener’s nightly commentary which is well remembered by many within the pro-independence movement. But, perhaps because his brief was to summarise the day’s proceedings, only small sections of his commentary are devoted to developing a discourse on the identity of the accused, and his reports are therefore referred to only occasionally in this chapter.

The congruence between the seemingly spontaneous arguments developed in Les Nouvelles and RFO and those of the defence point to the efficacy of prior discursive work by the anti-independence media and other institutions in allowing for relatively consensual readings of events within the anti-independence community. The arguments mounted by the media and the defence - that the accused were acting in self-defence and were themselves victims of the laxity of the French Socialist government which had not protected settlers - may appear laboured to some, but to many within the anti-independence community these were commonsense readings

5 I was allowed to record a sound tape from Quemener’s commentaries and subsequently transcribed the material. The commentaries were undated. Quotes from them are therefore included without any date reference.

6 No reference was made, for example, to his comments on the massacre forming part of the ‘logic’ of colonialism and his criticism of ‘colonial justice’ in the territory.

7 There were some inconsistencies between Quemener’s report and the report in Les Nouvelles on evidence given by Colonel Marchasson, commander of the gendarmes in New Caledonia during 1984. Les Nouvelles’ report indicated that Marchasson’s evidence had contradicted that given by other gendarmes stationed at Hienghène during the trial who had argued that they had been ordered to remain in their barracks and not to use force. Les Nouvelles’ heading read, ‘Colonel Marchasson didn’t convince...’ (Les Nouvelles, 26/10/87). Quemener, on the other hand, commented: ‘Colonel Marchasson only confirmed what his men said. On the ground, the gendarmes, whose competence, fidelity and humour are not at all in doubt, lived an untenable situation’. Marchasson was one of the ‘star’ witnesses and this divergence in reporting is therefore very interesting, and may attest to the
of the massacre and enabled, as we shall see, the ultimate portrayal of the accused as heroic identities - the ultimate personification of *la Calédonie profonde* - and the massacre as an act of civic duty. The weight of this common sense gave little chance that the alternative interpretation advanced by the FLNKS media and the prosecution during the trial would be found persuasive by the nine jurors, none of whom was Melanesian. While arguing that the massacre was the result of a premeditated and calculated plot to murder Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who was expected to be returning to Tiendanite with the other Kanaks after addressing the FLNKS meeting in Hienghène, the prosecution also engaged in what was described as ‘the trial of the trial’ by highlighting irregularities in the gathering of evidence and the refusal to charge other loyalist settlers named by the survivors as having participated in the massacre (*Les Nouvelles*, 29/10/87). The prosecution argued that these irregularities assisted in justifying the initial dismissal and the ultimate acquittal (*Bwenando*, 17/11/87).

In his address to the court, Jean-Marie Tjibaou foreshadowed the acquittal, arguing that it was a logical outcome of the functioning of ‘colonial justice’ in New Caledonia, just as the murder of the Kanaks was a logical outcome of colonialism. As he commented: ‘It is logical that you kill us and we await our turn’ (*Bwenando*, 8/1/88). Tjibaou’s references to the gruesome ‘logic’ of colonialism were seized upon by *Les Nouvelles* as vindication of the massacre and the acquittal. *Les Nouvelles* decontextualised Tjibaou’s comments, referring only to his ‘unexpected assertions’ such as ‘It is logical that you kill us’ (*Les Nouvelles*, 28/10/87), while Henri Perron in his weekly editorial published following the acquittal wrote:

> This acquittal verdict is, without a doubt, a victory for French Caledonia. But, as a matter of fact - and this is the question that everyone was asking

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8 *Bwenando* pointed to the deficiencies in the gathering of evidence which included: the gendarmes arrived at the scene of the massacre over 12 hours after it had occurred; the instructing magistrate, Semur, refused the seizure of certain pieces of evidence at the houses of the accused; Semur refused to charge Henri Garnier and his wife despite considerable evidence pointing to their having participated in the massacre; he also refused to charge other settlers who survivors claim participated in the massacre; during the autopsies, not all bodies were X-rayed and there was therefore no record of the number of bullet wounds in all but two of the corpses (one of which had 26 bullets); there was still considerable mystery over the arms used; the judge refused a reconstruction of the event at its location (*Bwenando*, 17/11/87).

9 He continued: ‘If you want to go that far, we have no place in this session. We are sadly not on the side of the law. We are already condemned. Because the verdict that will be given will follow a long series of verdicts which have always been situated logically against what we represent’ (*Bwenando*, 8/1/88).
Thursday night - was it necessary to bring the accused in front of the judges? Was it necessary to revive the wounds; necessary to hand to France’s adversaries such a political platform? In other words, couldn’t we have saved a trial? That is what, in substance, Jean-Marie Tjibaou - for whom the first verdict was logical in relation to French justice - didn’t cease repeating (Les Nouvelles, 31/10/87).

These interpretations of Tjibaou’s comments seem highly disingenuous. While it is tempting to assume that they derive from considerable malice and point to the extent of the political engagement of Les Nouvelles, the possibility also existed that such interpretations were widely held by many in the audience listening to Tjibaou’s comments - people whose ‘logic’ was the common sense which resulted from years of discursive effort aimed at legitimating colonial relations in the territory and which was supported by colonial institutions such as the territory’s legal system. The reporting in Les Nouvelles was expressive of this ‘logic’ which the paper had itself played such a large part in propagating.

The pro-independence press reporting on the massacre drew on the interpretive resources which had formed the inventory of pro-independence analysis and argument. Bwenando’s two special editions on the massacre included chronologies of ‘the tragedy of the past in the valley of Hienghène’ dating back, in one instance, to the ‘taking of possession’ in 1853 and in the other to the exile for seven years of the grand chief of the Hienghène valley, Bouarate, in 1857, thereby demonstrating that ‘barbaric massacres are a long tradition of the French people’ (Bwenando, November 1986 & 14/10/87). Tjibaou is reported to have read from one of these chronologies during his address to the court (Les Nouvelles, 28/10/87). Most of the two special editions was devoted to ‘testimonies’ from the survivors and their families to ‘let the Kanak victims speak, as French justice and the right-wing media let only the assassins speak’ (Bwenando, November 1986). Moreover, Bwenando sought to ‘situate the affair in its historical and political context ... leaving a large place to the resolutions of the UN, to modern international law which takes precedence over national law, in order to show that it is the Kanak people that has been in a state of self-defence for more than 130 years’ (November 1986).

10 Les Nouvelles reported that Jean-Marie Tjibaou was asked during the trial about comments he is reported to have made that the killing of two gendarmes by Kanaks had been ‘logical’. The paper wrote: ‘Reminding him that he has recently used this frightful word ‘its logical’ when evoking the death of two gendarmes, Maître Lergenmuller asked him if, according to him, the shooting in front of Mitride’s place was also logical. And J. M. Tjibaou had this astounding reply: “Since we are in a state of rebellion since 1853, it is logical that you kill us. I hope that this trial will be the last, but it won’t be. There will be others” (Les Nouvelles, 28/10/87).
The confrontation between these two ‘logics’ during the trial took place within a legal setting which, judging by the acquittal, seemed to afford no credence to the interpretive schema of the pro-independence movement. Pro-independence discourse, however, was given considerable credence, not only by the prosecution and the pro-independence media, but also by the defence and the anti-independence media. The presentation of the settlers as métis enabled the defence to appropriate key aspects of pro-independence discourse. In doing so, the rhetorical efficacy of the prosecution’s mobilisation of these discourses appears to have been significantly undermined.

The ‘clan of metis’ and la Calédonie profonde

Two days after the magistrate’s dismissal of charges against the seven settlers, Les Nouvelles published a front-page photo of the seven posing in a line with the caption ‘FREE .... but it isn’t finished’. The placing of the seven in the photo, most with arm around arm, suggested the type of solidarity and bonhomie of a football team, not a group who had admitted to participating in a massacre and who purportedly regretted their actions (Figure 9.1). Another photo of the ‘line-up’, this time less posed, appeared alongside a full-page story on page three along with
Figure 9.1: *Les Nouvelles*, 2/10/86
Figure 9.2: *Les Nouvelles*, 2/10/86
two smaller photos, one of Maurice Mitride and Raoul Lapetite, and the second of Lapetite and one of his sons holding their dog ‘Mustang’ (Figure 9.2). The page three report was headed, ‘With freedom, the Midtide-Lapetites have rediscovered nature. Raoul, the patriarch, will continue writing his memoirs’ (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). The group photos reinforced this heading, set as they were in a garden setting with the group standing on a section of cropped grass flanked by forest. Until this point, there had been little discussion in the anti-independence media of the accused, except in the brief references to them as ‘métis’. Most articles had concentrated on placing the blame for the massacre on the French Socialist government and its representatives in New Caledonia at the time, in particular High Commissioner Jacques Roynette. These photos and the page three article therefore largely introduced the settlers to the readership of Les Nouvelles, and the paper’s characterisation of the settlers was carried forward into the defence’s depiction of them during the trial.

The settlers, and ‘patriarch’ Raoul Lapetite in particular, were presented in Les Nouvelles as men of ‘nature’ enamoured with the beauty of the forest and a lifestyle living in harmony with their natural surroundings. Thus, Les Nouvelles commented that the proximity of the forest, evident in the photos, 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, 2/10/86). According to Lapetite, his first act as a free man was to ‘look at the trees. And then the flowers and the nature. But most of all the trees; the same kind that we have at our place, in the mountains...’ (ibid).

The contrast between the depiction of the serenity of these men and the violence of the massacre in which they acknowledged that they participated is striking. Presumably, this contrast is instructive in seeking to demonstrate the out-of-character nature of their violent act and therefore to validate the thesis advanced by the defence that the settlers engaged in the massacre only because they were pushed beyond the limit of their (the image suggests) considerable tolerance by the insurrectionary activity being waged by Kanaks. The defence’s question to the jury in its final address - ‘In their place, what would you have done?’ - suggested that nothing distinguished these men from those in the jury who themselves were supposed to be the personification of reasonable citizenry. However, the presentation of the settlers was not merely that of common people but rather of
exemplars of a particular vision of Caledonia, *la Calédonie profonde*, for which Caledonian defence lawyer and former conservative politician Georges Chatenay said that he spoke during the trial.¹¹

The harmony, peacefulness and affinity with nature expressed in the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde* is clearly evident in the discourse on the identity of these settlers. Indeed, the similarities between the photos and their accompanying texts referred to above and the photo and text of *la Calédonie profonde* discussed in chapter four are striking. The settlers were posing on a domesticated space with a luxuriant natural backdrop, just as the farmer was glimpsed by the camera on a stretch of domestic space with a majestic backdrop of mountains in the distance. Both are colonial scenes 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).

This harmony was possible only in a world in which Kanaks were themselves domesticated and rendered tame and in the process denied human will and agency - a world, in other words, which was effectively gutted of Kanaks as human agents. This vision was well expressed in *Les Nouvelles*’ description of the area in which Mitride and the Lapetites lived as ‘the gentle Hienghène valley’ (2/10/86). This imaginative geography was possible only through a denial of the human existence of Kanaks whose articulations of their own history and struggle bespoke a far more brutal engagement with settlers.

The challenge to this utopian vision, brought about by the increased militancy among the valley’s Kanak population, was, in effect, a challenge to the identification of these self-proclaimed ‘European’ settlers as the presiders over this colonial order. In the anti-independence media’s reporting on the trial, much was made of the ‘climate of fraternity’ which existed between the settlers and the surrounding Kanak

¹¹ Chatenay: ‘I am here to talk about my country, this *Calédonie profonde* that I know well’ (*Les
communities, particularly Tiendanite (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). During his television report on the first day of the trial, Quemener commented that the major question which needed to be answered was: ‘How people, all of whom are more or less métissé and who had lived up until then on good terms with the tribes of the region, could have come to such an extreme?’ (RFO). Mitride told Les Nouvelles that the victims had been ‘our best friends’ while Raoul Lapetite had described them as ‘brothers’ (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). The seeming inexplicability of their act in massacring these ‘brothers’ could be understood, according to the defence, only by appreciating the transformation which had occurred within the Kanak communities, transforming former friends into ‘enemies’. The situation in the valley was, according to one of the defence lawyers, Lergenmüller, worse than war:

...because, in war, the enemy is known, while in the situation at the time, no-one acted in broad daylight. The worst was that one didn’t know if friends, worked on by propaganda, were still friends or if, at night, they transformed into enemies (Les Nouvelles, 30/10/87).\textsuperscript{12}

This depiction of the Kanaks as duplicitous characters capable of evil metamorphosis ultimately underscored a thesis of the monstrousness of those Kanaks who engaged in the political struggle around independence and thereby served to validate the treatment afforded them. The psychiatric report on Maurice Mitride, commissioned by the defence, reinforced this Manichean juxtaposition between good and evil presented in this depiction. The psychiatrists described Mitride as:

...good son, good father, good husband, good worker, good citizen, good friend, attached to traditional values, to the land, to honour. 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, 20/10/87).

This description equates the massacre with ‘the Good’, and the repeated references to Mitride as ‘this citizen’ serve to present the massacre as an act of civic duty by ridding ‘the gentle Hienghène valley’ of the evil wreaked upon it by the unexpected political metamorphosis of the Kanak.
For the pro-independence press and the prosecution, the seeming incongruence of the transformation effected among the settlers who turned upon their ‘brothers’ could rather be explained by reference to the psychic disruption which resulted from the upsurge of Kanak militancy among the settlers. As the prosecution argued: ‘The first reaction of Europeans - the people who chose to be European - was amazement. They weren’t expecting a revolt. Those who chose this camp forgot history. The others, they haven’t forgotten’ (Les Nouvelles, 29/10/87). A similar thesis was advanced by Bwenando:

As long as the Tiendanite Kanaks allowed themselves to be had, everything went well between them and the colons. Jean-Marie TJIBAOU said to us that his brother LOULOU, the chief of the tribe, had decided that that has to stop, because the time of the colons was finished. It is what the MITRIDE-LAPETITES and others never swallowed, never forgave (Bwenando, 14/10/87).

Within this thesis, ‘fraternity’ existed within a structured relationship of dominance between ‘Europeans’ and ‘Kanaks’. This ‘fraternity’ was itself an expression of the paternalistic benevolence of la Calédonie profonde exemplified in Raoul Lapetite’s comment that he had stayed in the UC for 23 years to help Melanesians (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). Such ‘fraternity’ could not, of course, withstand the challenge to the relationship of dominance heralded by Kanak militancy.

*Métissage and la Calédonie profonde*

When Chatenay evoked la Calédonie profonde during the trial he linked this imagining directly to the phenomenon of métissage. It was easy, he argued, to ‘present Caledonia as two communities in confrontation’. Turning to the accused, he continued: ‘Look at these white colonialists and you will understand the amplitude of the problem’ (Les Nouvelles, 30/10/87). His fellow defence lawyer, Garaud, reinforced this argument, exhorting the court room to: ‘Look at these white settlers! We haven’t seen them on the front page of the Parisian intelligensia’s weeklies. Sineimène is almost blacker than Jean-Marie Tjibaou’ (Les Nouvelles, 30/10/87). The defence’s references to the physical characteristics of the accused as métis was presumably intended to sustain the argument which underpinned

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12 José Lapetite was reported to have said: ‘All the Tiendanite lads, even those dead, were my friends. Since 18 November, they had changed one hundred per cent. Before, we went hunting together and I slept at their place. It’s strange how they had changed’ (Les Nouvelles, 22/10/87).
much anti-independence discourse that the confrontation over independence was not racially based. Garaud’s reference to the Parisian weeklies related to the anti-independence argument that the overseas press was seeking to present European settlers as racists by depicting the struggle as racially based. For the defence, the prevalence of métissage within the European community belied this argument. Within this view, métissage attested to the intimacy of relationships forged between races, and the acceptance of métis as European demonstrated the depth of racial tolerance in the territory. The defence’s comment about the accused that, ‘You know, they are rich, white colonialists, white, rich and oppressors’, parodied the view which the defence considered was advanced by most overseas media by invoking the modest material circumstances of these settlers and their manifest métissage (cited in Quemener, RFO).

Chatenay’s evoking of métissage when referring to la Calédonie profonde gave sociological substance to a geographical imaginary grounded in notions of harmony and order. La Calédonie profonde was as much a place of interracial harmony as it was natural harmony, personified in the settler métis and expressed in their bonds of ‘fraternity’ with Melanesian communities. The emphasis placed in the anti-independence media and by the defence on the identity of the accused as métis attests to the believed efficacy of the argument that métissage proved that there was no racism in the territory and therefore no legitimate grounds for Kanak protest and militancy. While the anti-independence media had long denied the argument that its opposition to independence was racist, mostly by articulating a discourse on ‘Kanak independence’ as racist, the privileging of the issue of métissage as exemplifying this argument was a new rhetorical twist. During the 1970s and 1980s, at least in the period up until the initial dismissal and trial, the phenomenon of métissage had been relatively absent in public discourse. The emergence of a public discourse on métissage at this time proved, as I argue below, particularly efficacious in enabling the anti-independence movement to appropriate key aspects of pro-independence discourse as its own, thereby challenging the very basis on which the pro-independence movement grounded its claims to legitimacy and difference.

Appropriating discourse
Raoul Lapetite said of his ancestors that: ‘You know, they weren’t racist because my father took an indigenous wife, daughter of a grand chief, and me, I’m a métis’ (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). Lapetite’s self-identification here as métis contrasted with his more frequent claim at other times to be European. In discussing Lapetite’s ancestry, Les Nouvelles noted that the children of Raoul Lapetite’s father and Melanesian mother were métissé, but added the qualification: ‘However, Raoul doesn’t consider himself a métis today. He is European. For him, only the father counts - descent is only paternal and excludes wives’ (Les Nouvelles, 20/10/87).

Despite Lapetite’s assertion of ‘European’ identity, little was made of his ‘Europeanness’ in Les Nouvelles, while considerable effort was vested in constructing his identity as métis. Indeed, much of this construction occurred through purported quotes from Lapetite himself, who sought to emphasise his Melanesian heritage as proof that the massacre had not been a racist act but was rather driven by Kanak political extremism. Indeed, over the period of media reporting on the initial dismissal of charges and the subsequent trial, he increasingly de-emphasised his claim to be ‘European’, asserting instead his identity as a métis. Following the trial he even appeared to recede from his claim to be ‘European’, presenting his ‘Europeanness’ as more a matter of circumstance than will, ‘because, with the French, you are acknowledged by your father because of the registry office, but there wasn’t any Canaque registry office at the time’ (Les Nouvelles, 31/10/87).

Lapetite’s claims to a Melanesian heritage were sweeping. He claimed that he and his five brothers were the only legitimate customary owners of the land of the Windjick tribe in the Hienghène valley and that he was therefore the only legitimate owner of this land, not the ‘Tiendanite’ who he described as ‘newcomers’. He spoke fluently the ‘language of Hienghène’ and knew ‘the legends better than certain Melanesians’ (Les Nouvelles, 21/10/86). These claims to a demonstrable ‘Melanesianness’ were reinforced by the discourse mobilised by Lapetite in his discussion of his affiliation with the land which he claimed as his own. What he wanted, he argued, was his land because: ‘It’s sacred. We are part of the land’ (Les Nouvelles, 2/10/86). This mobilisation of a discourse on the land which had become associated with demands for Kanak independence was, in effect, an appropriation of this discourse for a very different imagining.
Through the phenomenon of métissage, ‘Europeans’ were able to claim pre-colonial rights to the land, thereby usurping the legitimacy of Kanak claims to prior ownership. By extending ‘European’ ancestry to pre-colonial times, métissage dissolved any disjuncture between the pre-colonial and the colonial, thereby enabling the type of harmonious continuum implicit in the notion of *la Calédonie profonde*. Métissage enabled, in other words, much of pro-independence discourse to be appropriated to this imagining. This appropriation was particularly evident in the privileging, as we have seen, of the trope of nature in discussions of the character of the Lapetites.

Writing of nineteenth century landscape painting, Bernard Smith has commented that: ‘European control of the world required a landscape practice that could first survey and describe, then evoke in new settlers an emotional engagement with the land that they had alienated from its aboriginal inhabitants’ (cited in Thomas, 1994:148). Through the appropriation of Kanak discourse, a type of discursive alienation was effected. This was a means, yet again, of articulating the non-existence of Kanaks as human. Within *la Calédonie profonde*, Kanaks occupied a subordinate place in a domesticated space presided over by ‘Europeans’. Harmony resulted from acceptance of this order, which was the natural response as there existed no legitimate basis for contestation. To contest this order would presuppose the existence of racial inequity which, the argument went, was disproved by métissage. It would also presuppose that Kanaks had special rights which derived from some inherent difference. But métissage colonised these rights, as indeed it colonised Kanak history, by enabling these rights to be appropriated by the ‘European’ population which, through métissage, could claim Melanesian ancestry and traditional rights to the land. If the basis of claims to ‘Kanak’ identity was the notion of difference, then the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde*, by appropriating these differences, denied this identity.

**The Other in the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde***

The massacre demonstrated how abjectly Kanaks were considered by those who actively opposed ‘Kanak independence’. Having no recognition as rightfully human, the Kanaks returning in their trucks to their community could be ambushed and mowed down with bullets. The descriptions of the survivors of the brutality and
relentlessness of the massacre is chilling and illustrated, as Bwenando argued, ‘the horror of the events and their unfolding’ (Bwenando, 14/10/87). The pro-independence movement argued that the acquittal demonstrated that the ‘Kanak hunt was now open’. As Bwenando argued:

> France is putting into place the legal tool which 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).

Here, Bwenando was referring to evidence from survivors, which was denied by the accused, that the settlers used lamps to light up the fleeing Kanaks (ibid).

In the pro-independence press there is repeated reference to this notion that the acquittal demonstrated that Kanaks were thought of not as animals but just as some form of animal sub-species. Bwenando referred to the recollection of one survivor that during the massacre ‘no head of cattle was wounded in the shooting’, concluding that this demonstrated that ‘the life of a Kanak is worth less than that of a cow’ (Bwenando, 17/11/87). Following the acquittal, one of the prosecution lawyers commented on the dignity of the families of the victims during the trial, particularly in the face of highly racist taunts from some Europeans in the gallery, and referred to the comment from Celine Tjibaou during her evidence that: ‘Mister President, you didn’t see the bodies. Even when a deer is killed, it isn’t massacred like that’ (Bwenando, 17/11/87). A commentator writing in L’Avenir, who described himself as ‘a convict descendant’, drew a similar parallel between Kanaks and hunted animals:

> If poachers had organised a fraudulent night hunt on someone else’s property and had killed 10 head of cattle, they would have been condemned. For 10 Kanaks, they are acquitted. It has to be stated: in New Caledonia, shortly after the referendum, a head of cattle is worth more than a Kanak skin (L’Avenir, 6/11/87).

The racist taunts from some in the public gallery reinforced the perception among Kanaks that anti-independence extremists characterised them as a lower form of animal life. 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’ (Bwenando, 17/11/87). Under the heading,
'The fascist ambience', *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’ (*L'Avenir*, 6/11/87).

This mobilisation of the trope of the monkey underscores the notion of Kanaks as a failed form of humanity. This species coexisted through colonialism with Europeans and other races which had succeeded in making the evolutionary leap into full humanhood. Within this view, Kanaks were failed humans, and it was this failure which rendered them inferior to other animals, such as cattle, who were never in contention for an identification as human. In this regard, *Les Nouvelles*’ photo of Raoul Lapetite and one of his sons posing with their dog Mustang is telling. The signs of affection displayed in this photo towards this loyal, domesticated creature, which, we are informed, left Hienghène with the settlers after the massacre, evoke a strong contrast with the depth of antagonism which must have engendered the massacre of Kanaks. Perhaps the loyal Melanesian who embraced the colonial imagining which found expression in *la Calédonie profonde* might have evoked similar affection. But Kanaks who wilfully sullied this imagining had reserved for them, at the hands of these settler métis, a level of brutality which shocked even many who opposed independence for the territory. As the prosecution argued: ‘The motive of the crime wasn’t fear but hatred towards the Kanak people who dared revolt’ (*Bwenando*, 17/11/87).

**Polysemous identity and ideological effect**

Bensa’s argument that the extreme nature of the settler métis’ barbaric act might be explained by the heightened fragility of their identity is persuasive. This argument is lent force by theoretical insights into identity as polysemous and discursively constructed. In media reporting on the massacre we have evidence of the engagement of Raoul Lapetite with Melanesian and European discourses as well as a discourse on métissage. Although strategic considerations appear to have been primary in his mobilisation of Melanesian and métis discourse, his facility with these discourses suggested an experiential engagement with them. Raoul Lapetite was, indeed, European, métis and Melanesian. The heightened contradiction between
these fragmented selfhoods may well have engendered the brutality of the violence. As the prosecution argued, in trying to ‘kill the Kanak in them’ the settlers pledged allegiance to the European world ‘by giving it these gruesome guarantees’ (*Bwenando*, 17/11/87).

The massacre demonstrated the potential ideological effect of the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde*. By denying the human existence of Kanaks, this discourse acted as a powerful prop for the maintenance of colonial relations of power. The massacre was, of course, an extreme response to the types of political engagement enabled and indeed authorised by this discourse. But even in less violent responses, as indeed in everyday practices and imaginings, a play of domination was authorised by the identification of Kanaks as less than human.

I have concentrated on the discourse of *la Calédonie profonde* because of its prominence in the territory’s anti-independence media during the 1980s. I do not wish to suggest that this was the sole discourse enabling relations between Europeans and Kanaks, remembering that there were Europeans who supported ‘Kanak independence’. Even among those less wedded to this objective, there were discursive permutations. However, the anti-independence media gave almost no expression to these alternative discourses on Kanak identity, an omission which attests to the degree of their political engagement and therefore their complicity in encouraging political violence in the territory during the 1980s.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate the central role which the discursive struggle played in the political struggle around independence. In an important sense, the media debate was only minimally grounded in a discussion of political issues which might normally be considered central to the question of independence. Instead, discourses on identity became the battleground on which the discursive struggle primarily took place. For example, in my discussion of the discourse of la Calédonie profonde I argued that it was integrally linked to notions of identity; in particular, the non-existence of Kanaks and the emergence of a discourse on métissage. This discourse which elided Kanak identity had many discursive precedents in New Caledonian colonial discourse. In response to the denial of their existence, pro-independence Melanesians articulated notions of Kanak identity which privileged their identity in relation to other identities in the territory. Central to this articulation of identity was the emergence of an internationalist discourse of ‘the Kanak People’ - a discourse which conferred on Kanaks not only a privileged identity but also special rights. I have argued that these discourses on identity were not merely superstructural phenomena, devoid of relevance to the actual political struggle, but were rather discourses which had concrete consequences to the extent that they authorised particular forms and strategies of political engagement.

Pointing to the relationship between discourse and engagement is, of course, an argument on the material effects of discourse. But this thesis has also sought to elucidate the materiality of discourse in another respect. In my analysis of pro- and anti-independence media institutions - primarily Les Nouvelles, Bwenando and Radio Djildo - I sought to consider the institutional mechanisms through which media discourses were produced, stressing the discursive pressures which operated in these institutions which had a significant bearing on the types of discourses which they produced. My aim was to view these mechanisms as pressures, in the spirit of Giddens’ ‘theorem of knowledgability’\(^1\) which views us as intelligent and purposive agents whose strategic actions nonetheless take place within important political, economic and discursive constraints.

\(^{1}\) See chapter 2, page 67 of this thesis for the initial reference to Giddens’ theorem.
In analysing these media institutions it was clear to me that the most significant - and indeed determining - constraint was that of the experiences of colonialism in New Caledonia, which continued to structure the political, economic and discursive spheres and which had brought into existence notions of identity which were centrally contested in the political struggle. The differing fates of the main anti- and pro-independence publications - the enduring Les Nouvelles and the defunct Bwenando - pointed to the differential opportunities available to those media organisations which seek to perpetuate colonial relationships compared with those which seek to bring about their demise. The respective fates of these publications illustrate the colonial interrelationships between the economic, political and discursive spheres - interrelationships which ensured the relentless propagation of colonial discourses and which seriously hampered the propagation of anti-colonial discourses in many practical ways.

But, as an overarching concern, I have attempted in the thesis to work through and apply different theoretical approaches relevant to the analysis of media reporting in situations of heightened political contestation. Essentially, I sought to negotiate between two approaches. The first approach, informed by neo-Marxist perspectives, claimed a lingering, if somewhat residual, relevance for the notion of ideology and viewed the power of ideological discourse as deriving from the power of those groups and interests involved in its propagation. The second approach was more concertedly post-structuralist in its view that discourse has an efficacy of its own which transcends its origins. At the outset of the thesis I outlined what I saw to be the major limitations of both perspectives, particularly in the context of their relevance to the material I was working on.

The major problem with the first approach was its view of ideology as the discourse of dominant groups in society and its near silence on the status of oppositional discourse. Attempting to circumvent this absence in response to post-structuralist critiques led to a tendency to conflate the notions of ideology and discourse, rendering the notion of ideology, some theorists argued, useless for analytical purposes. A prevalent response to this critique was to shift ideology so that it was understood not as a form of discourse but rather as an effect. However, as I have argued, the residual role left for it as an effect meant that it was difficult to apply in a work of media textual analysis because it presupposed detailed audience analysis.
in order to determine the effects of discourse - a task well beyond the scope of this thesis.

I found that the major limitation of the second, post-structuralist approach was its lack of attention to the different effects of power of different discourses. In my analysis I found that some discourses appeared particularly efficacious, judging by the responses they elicited, while others failed to resonate so strongly with their audience. In a sense, my desire to be able to differentiate between the power of different discourses suggested that some notion akin to that of ideological effect would be analytically useful.

I believe that my focus on discourses of identity provided a means through which these two approaches could be negotiated. In analysing the creation of identities it was possible to assess the effects of these discourses by relating them to the tangible forms of political engagement that they authorised. This enabled me to employ the notion of ideological effect while remaining cognisant of the post-structuralist view that discourse has an efficacy of its own which need not be traced back to those groups and interests from which it derives. While acknowledging the post-structuralist critique of the neo-Marxist insistence that the power of discourse derives from the power of those enunciating it, at the conclusion of my thesis I have formed the view that the differential effects of power between different discourses do relate in many instances to differences in the extra-discursive power of particular groups. In the context of New Caledonia, this is tantamount to saying that material and other inequities brought about by the experiences of colonialism resulted in the discourse of the powerful being more frequently more effective than that of subordinate groups. For example, the force of *la Calédonie profonde* was premised on decades of discursive effort aimed at legitimating the marginalisation of Kanaks. This discursive effort was made possible through the imposition in the colony of structures of political and economic governance - amongst them the media - which subordinated the indigenous peoples. However, the efficacy of certain pro-independence discourses, despite the subordination of the Kanak people and the pro-independence media's lack of resources and its organisational problems, demonstrates that the relative power of those originating the discourse is not the only determinant of its effects.
I have found, therefore, that there is indeed merit in viewing discourse, as Stuart Hall\textsuperscript{2} does, as both constituted and constituting - the product of groups and interests but also constituting those groups and interests. However, in producing effects of power, the discourse of the ‘powerful’ is always significantly advantaged by virtue of their control, to quote Marx, over the ‘means of mental production’\textsuperscript{3}, achieved through their economic and political dominance - a relationship which the pro-independence movement was always at pains to point out.

\textsuperscript{2} See introduction, page 28 for the initial reference to Hall’s view of discourse.

\textsuperscript{3} Cited in Barrett, 1991:9.
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