

Recent Challenges to Nation-Building in Kanaky New Caledonia



DAVID CHAPPELL

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Since the Noumea Accord of 1998, New Caledonia has been trying to build a nation in a society long divided by ethnicity (indigenous vs. immigrant) and politics (independence vs. autonomy within France).¹ The Accord granted increasing self-government, official recognition of the indigenous Kanak identity and development assistance, with a possible referendum on independence between 2014 and 2019 if three-fifths of the members of congress support the idea. The Accord also prescribed seeking a 'common destiny,' after more than a generation of polarisation that reached its peak during the Kanak revolt of 1984–88. Today, pro-independence Kanak parties run two out of three provinces and hold 43 per cent of the seats in congress. But organised immigration during a nickel boom in the 1960s and 1970s ensured a loyalist settler majority who prefer autonomy with French guarantees of security, and similar immigration continues today. Moreover, the legacy of a century of colonial segregation after French annexation in 1853 has caused the quest for symbols of a new 'national' identity and ideas about how to 'exit' from the Accord process (via referendum or another negotiated accord) to remain controversial. The results of French elections in 2012, after local government turmoil in 2011, have raised the specter of re-polarisation after two decades of efforts at conciliatory compromise.

The Quest for Symbols to Represent a Common Destiny

Louis-José Barbançon, a local-born historian who is descended from a French convict sent to the colony in the nineteenth century, sees in the Noumea Accord's call for a common destiny a profound challenge:

How can we convert the plural memories of the communities of the New Caledonian islands into a common destiny? How can we juxtapose and then merge [indigenous] Kanak memory, whose time dimension stretches back over almost 3000 years, with the memory 'stemming from colonization' that dates back barely 150 years? The priority must be to recover the memory of the forgotten ones ... and to exalt the *duty to remember* (Barbançon 2007: 1).

Barbançon himself freely admits, 'My country is Kanak land to which we came' (Barbançon 2007: 1). Thirty years ago, he participated in a governing coalition of the *Front Indépendantiste* (Independence Front) and centrist settlers, but increasing polarisation ruined that cohabitation, and the resulting Kanak revolt took the lives of 73 people. More recently, Barbançon and others have helped to create adapted school textbooks and to negotiate symbols of identity for their autonomous country. He describes both processes as quite challenging, but he is one example of the many people who have tried to mediate between opposing political forces and to construct a common destiny by facing up to a shared but contested colonial past.

The Noumea Accord is enshrined in the French national constitution and in more than a hundred organic laws passed in Paris to implement it. In addition to delegating more powers of self-government to New Caledonia and recognising Kanak identity in various ways, it prescribed that long-term inhabitants should work together to choose five identity symbols for their country: a motto, a hymn, images for banknotes, a flag and a country name. Local government Vice-President Déwé Gorodé organised a committee, which



included Barbançon among others, that created a country motto and hymn, as the Accord proposed. But choosing a new country name and flag arouses deep emotions dating back to the violent 1980s and beyond. Indigenous nationalists call their country Kanaky, while most settler loyalists prefer New Caledonia, the name English explorer James Cook gave to the main island in 1774. Some have suggested a combination of the two as a gesture of compromise. As Sylvain Pabouty of PALIKA (*Parti de Libération Kanak*) told me, 'There is a Papua New Guinea, so why not a Kanaky New Caledonia?'²

Settler loyalists, however, tend to prefer the term Calédo-Kanaky, suggesting a different priority. Both Kanak³ (derived from the Hawaiian word *kanaka*, which travelled around the region in shipboard and plantation pidgin in the nineteenth century) and Caledonian (which originally referred to Scots) are modern identity formations that resulted from colonial confrontations. Kanak independence supporters regard their term as inclusive, while settlers often see it as exclusive and prefer Caledonian. Each category contains many components, from nearly thirty indigenous language groups and hundreds of clans to over half a dozen self-identified immigrant communities, and the political divide over independence or autonomy does not always align with ethnicity. The issue came up again recently, after the Socialist Party victory in the French 2012 elections, when the new Minister of Overseas France, Victorin Lurel said simply, 'The members of this government are interested in the future of New Caledonia, of Kanaky'. Some loyalists immediately read that statement as combining the two country terms and called it either a regrettable slip of the tongue or, worse, a metropolitan attempt to impose a collective label, instead of an acknowledgement of both viewpoints (NC 2/8/12).

If the country name is a challenge, how about the flag? In a sense, the indigenous ethnic identity is more coherent than that of immigrants or their descendants; by now, France has officially recognised the former in various negotiations, while the latter has at least one foot in Europe, Asia

or Polynesia. As Nic Maclellan has discussed in a previous discussion paper in this series (Maclellan 2010), many loyalists say they can identify only with the French tricolour, because it is their French citizenship that legitimises their presence in the country. In the 1980s, the provisional government of Kanaky created its own revolutionary flag, but some settlers regard that flag as a 'terrorist' symbol. Pabouty has suggested that Kanak have put up with the colonial tricolour for 150 years, so settlers should have to accept the Kanaky flag for 150 years. But the loyalist Caledonia Together (*Calédonie Ensemble*) party supports the Noumea Accord's recommendation to seek a common flag, so they tried to merge the two flags. Pierre Frogier, leader of the conservative anti-independence party Rally-UMP (*Rassemblement-UMP*) (RUMP), which is allied to the French metropolitan Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*)(UMP) led by former president Nicolas Sarkozy, then surprised everyone by suggesting that both flags should be raised together for the Pacific Games of 2011 in Noumea. The Sarkozy government agreed, for the time being, and raised both flags over public buildings a year ahead of time. Frogier called his compromise an act of reconciliation. He also speculated that once raised, the Kanaky flag would never come down, and neither would the tricolour (NC 1/7/10). In effect, the two flags flying together legitimised both local loyalists and independence supporters.

That compromise did not quiet supporters of a common flag, however, and the French high commissioner had to ban opposing street protests to avoid violence. A few communes would not raise the Kanaky flag, so the pro-independence Caledonian Union (*Union Calédonienne*) threatened to bring down the cabinet by resigning from it. Local government president Philippe Gomès of Caledonia Together warned that his group would counter that move by resigning from the cabinet themselves. In early 2011, the cabinet changed four times in two months due to opposing resignations.⁴ Critics worried that New Caledonia had caught the 'Tahitian syndrome', because French Polynesia had rotated its presidency ten times in seven years

among three leaders. The French parliament soon changed the rules in New Caledonia to allow for a grace period of 18 months for elected cabinets. The real surprise was that the flag controversy produced a new governing coalition between two former enemies, Frogier's RUMP and the mostly Kanak Caledonian Union. Both Caledonia Together and other independence supporters (e.g. PALIKA) called it an alliance 'against nature'.

Frogier accused Caledonia Together of almost crossing the 'yellow line' into chaos. He praised co-operation with the largest pro-independence party which, in the 1950s, had supported autonomy under the motto 'two colors, one people' before the regime of president Charles de Gaulle took away self-governing powers in the 1960s in order to control nickel mining profits, thereby radicalising Kanak politics in the 1970s (Chappell 2004). According to Frogier, the 'historical signatories' of the Noumea Accord could now negotiate a consensual conclusion to the process of building a self-governing country (NC 20/2/11). His new Kanak allies then proposed that the Kanaky flag be made the country flag right away, since local settlers lacked a flag of their own, but Frogier would not support that move. Instead, he backed the election of Rock Wamytan of the Caledonian Union as speaker of the congress, the first pro-independence leader to hold that post since Wamytan's grandfather more than 30 years earlier. Wamytan remained pro-independence but said, 'we're making the necessary effort to mine the depth of what constitutes our Caledonian soul in its diverse origins [to] permit a better future for our children' (MNP 3/4/11). In another reconciliation gesture, at the annual Accord signatories' meeting in Paris, non-signatories, such as Caledonia Together, were officially allowed to participate. The committee also agreed to let the two flags represent the country for now, while they focused on more technical details such as development aid contracts and the continuing transfer of self-governing powers to the country, for example in secondary education and civil and commercial law.

Raising the two flags together was originally a temporary measure for the Pacific Games in 2011. France and New Caledonia spent a lot of time and money organising the event as a way to expand the country's role in Oceania, much like hosting the Pacific Arts Festival a decade ago and becoming an associate member of the Pacific Islands Forum. New Caledonia won 120 gold medals at the Games, and French Polynesia was second with 59. A related event called into question the colonial borders of the country. In July, the flame of the Pacific Games was brought ashore on the outer island of Ouvéa by a Sāmoan named Niko Palamo. He carried the flame to the chief of a local clan who had welcomed his Sāmoan ancestors in pre-colonial times. Polynesians from Sāmoa, Tonga, and Wallis and Futuna had once voyaged to the outer islands of New Caledonia and intermarried with the Melanesian inhabitants, leaving behind a Polynesian-derived language and the names of several clans. Roger Wamou, president of the local cultural area, said:

The transmission of the flame by a Sāmoan here on Ouvéa is an important event that we welcome with joy, considering our history. The population still has the feeling of living in confinement since the [1980s violence], but this flame shines on us [and] makes us respect ourselves We're showing that our island remains a land of welcome [because] the path of the flame begins here for all of New Caledonia; it's another history being written, starting here (NC 18/7/11).

Yet earlier, France had prevented neighbouring Vanuatu from taking over the uninhabited Matthew and Hunter Islands, which are regarded as customary resources by people in southern Vanuatu. The Kanak Customary Senate had said those two islands should belong to Vanuatu, but France wants to control the Exclusive Economic Zone around them (Willie 2010). Perhaps the Sāmoan visit to Ouvéa was allowed, because in local settler discourse, Kanak are often said to be just one migrant group among others?

Another issue that challenges the construction of a common destiny is returning indigenous artefacts from European museums. In fact, the head

of rebel chief Ataï, who led the 1878 Kanak revolt and was killed and beheaded by indigenous allies of the French, was sent to France as a specimen. Ataï became a symbolic martyr to modern Kanak nationalists in the 1960s. In the 1980s, Caledonian Union leader Eloi Machoro led an armed struggle across the centre of the main island, in part to atone for the role of his own ancestors, the Canalas, who had killed Ataï. Machoro himself was shot to death by a police sharpshooter. Rumours had long claimed that the head of Ataï was in the Museum of Man in Paris, so, in 2011, Chief Bergé Kawa, a descendant of Ataï, began to push for its return. A professor at the museum now says that his predecessor 'did not want to waste his time and [therefore] said the museum did not know where the head was'. The professor added, 'Human remains are national property', but if the family or the territory wanted the head back, all they had to do is ask. Kawa has organised a support committee and demonstrations outside the museum. Apparently, all that remains of Ataï's head is the skull and a mortuary cast of the face, but Kawa says the issue goes beyond his family: 'It is very important for the Kanak people, for their struggle. Today people speak a lot about a future together, but how can we make a future together with the people who cut off the head of someone who gave his life for the Kanak people? Returning the head is a sign of peace-making and permits reconciliation' (NC 7/7/11). The French government is now seeking a consensual solution among all the stakeholders.

Killings in the 1980s, such as that of Machoro, remain a painful memory for families on both sides of the local political divide. For example, 2011 was the thirtieth anniversary of the unpunished murder of Caledonian Union secretary general Pierre Declercq, who was shot to death in his own home. Along with Machoro's widow, Wamytan is trying to organise a truth and reconciliation commission, like the one Desmond Tutu created in South Africa. 'Speaking out is liberating,' Wamytan says.

We should know how Machoro, Declercq or [Jean-Marie] Tjibaou were killed. In politics, we cannot look in each other's eyes and build

a future if we cannot admit to each other how the Events⁵ [of the 1980s] unfolded and how they influence our way of running the country' (NC 29/10/12).

A general amnesty in 1988 left many questions unanswered. However, Wamytan was critical of a new commercial film on the Ouvea crisis of 1988, because it is based mainly on a book written by a French police officer and reportedly portrays some Kanak leaders unfavourably. Wamytan was not alone in having that sentiment, but charges of bias came from both political sides (Maclellan 2011).

The film, called *Rebellion* in English and *L'Ordre et la Morale* in French, portrays the conflict between Kanak independence supporters and French police and army forces on Ouvea in 1988. Kanak nationalists killed four police and took 27 hostages, hoping to force negotiations. The crisis took place during French presidential elections, so the two leading candidates, incumbent Socialist François Mitterrand and UMP prime minister Jacques Chirac, were under pressure to show that they could handle terrorists. Police captain Philippe Legorjus tried to negotiate with Kanak leader Alphonse Dianou, but before the second round of voting, the military undertook an armed hostage rescue, at the cost of 19 Kanak deaths and those of two French soldiers. Chirac lost the presidential election, partly due to the Ouvea violence. Thirty Kanak captives were taken to prison in France, one of whom was Djubelly Wea. Angry at French treatment of his family and community, he would later assassinate Kanak leaders Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene for signing the 1988 Matignon–Oudinot Accords, a peace agreement that recognised the 'double legitimacy' of indigenous and immigrant inhabitants in building the country and postponed the possibility of independence for ten years in return for development aid.

Rebellion was not allowed to be filmed in New Caledonia due to local opposition, so it had to be filmed on Ana'a in the Tuamotu atolls of French Polynesia. UMP politicians and the French army condemned the film as polemical and inaccurate, and Frogier of New Caledonia even urged French Polynesia not to allow the filming on its soil.

Frogier said the movie came 'too soon' because the country was going through a transition to a common destiny. His new ally Wamytan agreed. Some members of the family of Dianou, who died during the final French assault, also opposed making the film, and pressure from various opponents caused the first cinema chain that had agreed to show the film in New Caledonia to cancel its opening. But Philippe Gomès and his Caledonia Together centrists called that censorship, as did PALIKA and the local chapter of the League of the Rights of Man. Gomès visited the filming on Ana'a to show his support for the project. Many New Caledonians regarded showing the Ouvea film as an act of public education.

After heated public exchanges between its French star and creator, Mathieu Kassovitz, and some of his critics, the advertising poster for the film was changed from one that looked confrontational to one that emphasises the lead character's struggle with his own frustration that military force had superseded attempts to negotiate a peaceful solution. Already in 1995, Kassovitz had written and directed an award-winning film entitled *La Haine* (*Hate*), which portrayed an angry young immigrant in a Paris ghetto who tries to avenge police brutality against a friend. The controversy surrounding the Ouvea film guaranteed that audiences were eager to see it and to enquire further about what had happened in 1988. After a different cinema company acquired the screening rights, 16,000 people watched the film in the first two weeks, and requests for more showings overwhelmed the producers. The Ouvea tragedy, more than any other event, brought about the Matignon–Oudinot Accords which, in turn, prepared the way for the 1998 Noumea Accord. Kassovitz first visited Ouvea in 2001, making contact with the local Kanak community through a friend. He then read Legorjus's memoir and, in 2006, he spent another four months in New Caledonia interviewing people before writing the script (NC 23/8/11), which was nominated for a César award.

Kanak actors in the film include Maki Wea, who plays the role of his brother Djubelly, who was killed after assassinating Tjibaou in 1989.

Yabe Lapacas plays the role of his uncle, Alphonse Dianou, who led the hostage takers. A London film reviewer argues that Kassovitz's film, while focusing on a hostage crisis on a small Pacific island, takes a global perspective, because it criticises not only French colonialism but also the West in general. He praises it as a successful action thriller and polemic, compares it to *Apocalypse Now*, and says it was the best film at the 2011 London Film Festival (Will575 2011). A French blogger with opposite politics, however, calls the movie scandalously 'caricaturish', 'intellectually dishonest' and 'mediocre' in quality (Creux 2011). Kassovitz argues that there would be no controversy about it if not for the 'politicians'. Former prime minister and Matignon Accords negotiator Michel Rocard says the film is painful but fits the reality of the events. Legorjus agrees, admitting that some Kanak were shot or allowed to die after they had surrendered (NC 3/6/11). Kanak nationalists regard the battle and its aftermath as a massacre. A 2008 documentary film on the Ouvea crisis had already appeared on French television, and a Kanak theatre play has also portrayed it.

Maurice Tillewa, Mayor of Ouvea, said, 'the film by Mathieu Kassovitz is part of reconciliation What will we tell our children in 20 years if we have nothing, if we have no support?' (NC 17/4/11). Macki Wea described the first showing of the movie on the island of Ouvea as very intense emotionally. Local people arrived and left in tears:

But when leaving, people were liberated, at peace. Others have opposed the film saying it would reopen old wounds. It's untrue, it hurts everyone at times, but it lances the abscess. The people most concerned, like those of Ouvea, left feeling liberated from a weight on their shoulders since 23 years It's not only Ouvean history, it's not only Kanak history, it's also that of all New Caledonians and even of the French state. Thus it's our common history, part of our common destiny (NC 16/11/11).

At the opening in Paris, Wea said:

I realised that we needed this film so that all of France would take interest in the Kanak people, and beyond that, in New Caledonia

The most powerful moment was the meeting that we had, we the sons or brothers of the hostage takers and of those who were killed, along with the families of police killed or captured. There were victims and orphans on each side. I can tell you that many people wept' (NC 16/11/11).

Kanak even invited the families of the police killed on Ouvéa to the island, along with Legorjus, who hopes that the 'younger generations will find the path to a real reconciliation' (NC 23/8/11).

Yabe Lapacas, who is a law student and portrayed his uncle Dianou, said:

The film has freed speech [because] mothers and fathers of families ... could now talk about the Events with their children and accompany them [to the show] Many people asked us, 'Did it really happen like that?' Yes, it's the testimony of our elders. They said thank you. The camera of Mathieu Kassovitz was there, where there had not been a camera in 1988 (NC 31/12/11).

He encouraged people who watched it to discuss it afterwards:

We learned our history, which we do not learn in primary or secondary school, where it is taboo This film enables us to see our past and to move forward (NC 31/12/11).

Young people have told reporters that the film makes people talk, ask questions, and is thus a step toward understanding the country's past. At a public discussion, a young woman invoked the duty to remember:

Common destiny is a great slogan. But the young generation who does not know its history cannot advance. If it does not take possession of its history, it loses its identity' (NC 16/12/11).

Local historian Frédéric Angleviel says that what is missing in the diatribes about the Ouvéa tragedy is the voice of the Kanak hostage takers, most of whom are dead. There are dozens of monuments, either in the country or in France, that are dedicated to the four police killed during the

kidnapping, but only one, on Ouvéa, is dedicated to the Kanak hostage takers. Local historian Olivier Houdan is leading a commission in Bourail to create a single monument to all the people who died violently in the 1980s and to use the term 'civil war' to describe those so-called Events. Houdan feels that the period needs addressing in collective memory as much as the Algerian War does. The 1980s Kanak revolt has been taught in local schools only since 2008, in one hour of one course in the last year of secondary school, and only reluctantly (NC 29/10/11). Meanwhile, in 2012, a generation after the French presidential election that sparked bloodshed on Ouvéa, another Socialist defeated a UMP candidate and fuelled another shift in local politics.

Political Positioning to Achieve a Common Destiny, or Not?

The cohabitation of Kanak independence supporters and moderate loyalists seeking constructive solutions in 1982–84 was unable to stop the mounting political violence, including a settler riot that invaded the local Territorial Assembly hall. At the Nainville-les-Roches Round Table of 1983, France recognised the innate right of the Kanak people to independence, and Kanak leaders accepted settler descendants as fellow 'victims of history', but loyalist negotiators refused to sign the final document. In 2004, moderate loyalists who had a more social democratic agenda than the dominant *Rassemblement-UMP* pulled off an electoral revolution, parallel to the victory of pro-independence President Oscar Temaru of French Polynesia the same year. The Future Together party and its offshoot Caledonia Together were at first able to dialogue with independence supporters, especially PALIKA, on socioeconomic and other reforms. Then in 2011, the RUMP–Caledonian Union alliance at first marginalised the Caledonia Together party by pushing Philippe Gomès out of New Caledonia's presidency, as a result of repeated party resignations over the flag issue that year. The new RUMP–Caledonian coalition proposed hopeful co-operation between two important political parties who had once been staunch opponents, while New Caledonia

sought a negotiated 'exit' from the Noumea Accord process. Unfortunately, pushing anyone out of the conversation has its costs. The small Future Together party's association with the metropolitan UMP enabled Harold Martin to replace Gomès as president, but both PALIKA and Caledonia Together felt displaced.

In September 2011, voters cast their ballots for candidates to the French senate in Paris, where New Caledonia now has two seats. Frogier and Mayor Hilarion Vendegou of the Isle of Pines, whose ancestor was the first Kanak chief to sign the treaty of French annexation in 1853, each defeated a Caledonia Together candidate. The RUMP seemed to have perpetuated its long-time monopoly of legislative representation in Paris. Frogier argued that raising the two flags had won over the pro-independence Caledonian Union, which did not ally with PALIKA in the senate election. The loyalist Caledonia Together leader, Gomès, blamed the voting system, which empowers a small group of urban 'great electors' to choose senators. His party boycotted a speech by President Martin, who predicted the end of political instability and a consensual outcome of the Noumea Accord. Gomes rallied small loyalist parties around his 'common flag' cause, claiming 25,000 voters. But Wamytan of the Caledonian Union was now congress speaker, and cabinet Vice-President Gilbert Tyuienon of the same party told the UN:

New Caledonia, leaving aside majority-minority logic, has decided to go beyond ideological oppositions by installing a new method of governance based on a sharing of power in the country's institutions (NC 29/11/11).

Such optimism received yet another surprise when metropolitan politics swung to the left against Sarkozy in 2012. Dogged by austerity measures in the European economic crisis, the UMP leader lost the French presidency in May to Socialist François Hollande, causing some local loyalists to recall bitterly the Mitterrand era in the 1980s. Kanak pro-independence leaders actually welcomed the return of their old allies the Socialists to power in Paris,

and in the national assembly elections in June, they united and nearly won a deputy seat in the interior district of Grand Terre, where Jean-Pierre Djaiwé of PALIKA led after the first round of voting. But the customary Kanak abstention rate in French legislative elections remained high, and in the second round, loyalists suddenly rallied around Gomès against independence. In Noumea, Sonia Lagarde of Caledonia Together won, giving that party both New Caledonian deputy seats in Paris and thus displacing the Rassemblement-RUMP from the National Assembly. Touting this shocking comeback, Gomès reiterated his opposition to Frogier's position on the two flags issue. He hoped to build 'a little nation within the big one [France]' by uniting Caledonians under a common flag, not under two that represented opposing forces (NC 14/6/12). In the year since Gomès' ouster from the country presidency, his protest campaign against the temporary two flags policy had attracted other dissident loyalists besides those who originally supported his party platform of social democratic nation-building. Some belonged to local branch of the right-wing National Front, which had lost its Congress seats in 2009, partly due to the restriction of the electorate in provincial elections and independence referenda to long-term residents.

Attracting such allies seemed to have hardened Gomès' anti-independence rhetoric and created a disturbing sense of re-polarisation, just when consensual negotiations were needed. As for the Socialist victory in the French presidential election, Gomès said that economic stress in Europe had pushed a third of metropolitan French to vote 'against the system', a nod to the National Front in France and also to his new local allies. In the election for deputies to Paris (in which the vote is not restricted to long-term residents), the local National Front did twice as well as in the restricted 2009 provincial elections. Its leaders called that improvement 'a sanction against the manipulations that have happened here with the [two] flags affair' (NC 24/4/12). In addition, fewer New Caledonians cast their ballots in the second round of the legislative elections unless they were angry. The local paper observed ruefully, 'the loyalist electorate does not want anyone to discuss with

the independence supporters except in a crisis [and] wishes a return to the logic of [opposing] blocs' (NC 18/6/12). Frogier denounced Gomès's 'radicalisation' of local politics which, he said, ran a 'violent campaign that has awakened old demons' (RNZI 2012). Frogier lamented, 'we have gone twenty-five years backwards', and Wamytan, whose Congress leadership was now in danger, expressed concern that the concessions made by the RUMP might not endure. President Martin even blamed rising juvenile delinquency on the bad example set by street protests against the two flags (NC 18/7/12). After the new Socialist overseas minister mentioned Kanaky in the same sentence as New Caledonia, defeated RUMP deputy Gaël Yanno condemned 'taking sides' with a pro-independence 'minority', which risked crossing the 'yellow line' into chaos: 'The Socialists, once in power, have not waited long to put into practice their electoral slogan "change is now" [but] we will fight any unilateral proposal that goes against keeping New Caledonia in France ... it's no to Kanaky! And it will always be no' (NC 12/8/12). The annual signatories committee meeting in 2010 had actually decided to raise both flags, but some loyalist politicians now accused Paris of 'imposing' it.

Paul Neaoutyine of PALIKA, who is President of the Kanak-run Northern Province, had been skeptical of the RUMP–Caledonian Union alliance. He said that tactical move against both Gomès and his own party had enabled a few pro-independence politicians like Wamytan and Tyuienon to acquire symbolic posts, but the loyalist backlash that brought down that fragile entente had reminded the independence parties of their own goals. PALIKA would 'continue as before', by negotiating with French parliamentary groups and the new regime in Paris to lobby for the fulfillment of the Noumea Accord, which promised emancipation (though the exact form of that is still open to debate). The annual signatories committee meeting, already enlarged to include Future Together, Caledonia Together and the union-affiliated Labour Party (*Parti Travailleiste*), was the agency 'who will decide if we stop or not'. PALIKA, more leftist than the chief and church-based Caledonian Union, was often able to work

with social democratic loyalists, and the Socialists controlled Paris. Neaoutyine warned:

... the right wing as well as independence supporters who join the game started by the right, not to pretend that there will be a radicalisation, a return backwards of 25 years. They should not play on fear that we lost something. No, we are here to build. People must distinguish between deceptive rhetoric ... and real political work (KOL 1/7/12).

At the Bastille Day celebrations on 14 July, 2012, two different marches took place in Noumea. The first featured the French military parade in front of the Museum of New Caledonia to cheers from a mostly loyalist audience. The second was organised by the USTKE (*Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Kanak et des Exploités*) (Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers), the second largest labour federation in the country, which backs the pro-independence Labour Party, in the name of 'Kanak 2014'.⁶ Marchers went from working-class Vallée du Tir to the Mwâ Kâ, a totem pole sculpted by Kanak artists to symbolise the nation (Maclellan 2005). A loudspeaker mounted on a truck called out, 'We're not terrorists, we're not dangerous, come join our ranks!'. A young Kanak with a raised fist told a reporter, 'We don't care about the common destiny, that's an idea invented by France. We are determined, we will use every means to keep our [Kanak] flag raised.' Many participants mocked Gomès, and Wamytan said, 'Philippe Gomès aroused the fear of independence and thus of Kanak. This march today lets all those who expressed their voices in the legislative elections to send a clear message' (NC 16/7/12). Another speaker urged Kanak to register to vote, especially in the Southern Province, before the provincial elections of 2014 and the independence referendum (MNP 22/7/12).

In August, Wamytan lost his post as speaker of congress to Gerard Poadja of Caledonia Together, whom loyalists rallied around on the third ballot to challenge the brief RUMP–Caledonian Union alliance (NC 30/8/12). Nevertheless, in late 2012, Daniel Goa, the new UC leader, advocated putting aside divisive identity symbols for now 'to build a country' (NC 29/11/12), and despite new divisions

within the RUMP, Frogier suggested, 'To run the Rassemblement, you must have a vision for Caledonia and must be able to speak with independence supporters' (NC 28/11/12). At the meeting of the signatories of the Noumea Accord, each party stated its views but also worked for consensus on issues such as efforts to reduce the high cost of living and the pursuit of educational and socioeconomic reforms to reduce inequalities, both with continuing French aid (NC 8/12/12).

Conclusion

After significant decolonisation in the 1950s, New Caledonia's destiny was reversed in the 1960s for reasons of French national prestige and strategic nickel resources. The lesson of the 1980s is that regression was a mistake. Today, everyone in the restricted New Caledonian citizenship of long-term residents has accepted self-government; they differ over the *degree* of separation from France, that is, the specific details of sovereignty. The exact legal boundary between enlarged autonomy and full sovereignty, especially in a globalising world that compromises even French independence (for example, the European Union, or multinational corporations), has yet to be determined. In March 2011, at a colloquium in Noumea that presented comparative perspectives on decolonisation, legal scholars suggested that so-called 'reserved' powers — which loyalists want France to keep — such as defense and public order, are not carved in stone in French law. Instead, they constitute bundles of administrative responsibilities, some of which are already shared, so the exact category of the country's future status may be less important than the principles that local leaders bring to the negotiating table and find consensual ways to implement. Lam Dang, of the Federated States of Micronesia, said that the dialogue should start with what people want, and if an acceptable international law term fits or not, so be it (NC 13/3/11). New Caledonia is already a *sui generis* country that defies classification. Complete independence is dear to most Kanak and even a few settlers, but a referendum between 2014 and 2019 is unlikely to gain a majority in favor, given the demographic situation in which Kanak are

now a slight minority. Compromises will have to be made.

Hollande, like Sarkozy and Chirac before him, has promised that France will accompany New Caledonia in its process of emancipation as far as local citizens desire. But concerns among settlers over juvenile delinquency among urban Kanak and supposed foreign threats (for example, China or 'Anglo-Saxon' neighbours or terrorists) continue to make independence unappealing to many of them. Other key issues include continuing economic development and educational training subsidised by France and by nickel exports, and reducing the cost of living and the large income and employment gap between settler-dominated greater Noumea and the mostly Kanak rural interior and islands (NC 9/5/12). The visit by a Sāmoan flame-bearer to his distant Kanak relatives on Ouvea, the attempted Kanak customary granting of two islands to Vanuatu, and the ongoing concerns of the Pacific Islands Forum and Melanesian Spearhead Group show that self-determination may also need to transcend colonially defined identities. Pro-independence activists and labour unions will likely keep up the pressure to move ever closer toward sovereignty, which might become a habit over time if the two sides learn to trust each other better. As they work together on a daily basis to balance indigenous dignity with settler security, and collective identity with individual rights, they may ultimately build a new nation. In the 1960s, Kanak priest Apollinaire Anova-Ataba regarded rebel chief Ataï as an apostle of liberty for all New Caledonians from colonial rule. If leading political parties can agree to raise two flags together because each accepts the identity of the other, political actors may yet come to accept alternative visions of a contested past and shared future. And in the future, perhaps, a Kanaky New Caledonia?

Author notes

David Chappell has been teaching Pacific Islands History at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa for 20 years. After his first book, *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships* (1997), he specialised in the 20th and 21st centuries, publishing numerous articles on decolonisation,

migration and nation-building. His second book, *The Kanak Awakening: The Rise of Nationalism in New Caledonia*, is forthcoming from University of Hawai'i Press and examines the genesis of the modern anti-colonial movement in the 1960s and 1970s in a historical and global context.

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Endnotes

- 1 These two highly politicised dichotomies are of course more complex and overlapping in reality
- 2 Sylvain Pabouty, personal communication, Noumea, June 1998.
- 3 The spelling of Kanak is invariable, whether singular or plural, masculine or feminine, as used in the official spelling in the Noumea Accord. In that manner, it also better fits indigenous linguistic usage.
- 4 The Noumea Accord specifies that if a party in the proportional cabinet resigns, a new cabinet must be elected by the congress. The situation had arisen several times since 1998, but not repeatedly as in 2011.
- 5 *événements*, a term also used by French media to describe the May 1968 student-worker uprising in France.
- 6 This refers to the possibility of holding a referendum on independence in 2014, as stipulated in the Noumea Accord.

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State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
School of International, Political & Strategic Studies
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200

Telephone: +61 2 6125 8394
Fax: +61 2 6125 9604
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