Matthias Kowasch
Simon P. J. Batterbury *Editors*

# Geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky

## Environments, Politics and Cultures

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# Acknowledgements

This book is the result of an idea dating back to 2016 to [re]introduce the geographies of New Caledonia's environments, institutions and cultures to an English-speaking audience. Unlike its neighbours in the Anglophone Pacific, most academic work and most scholarly exchange about New Caledonia-Kanaky happens in French, which is a practical, although unfortunate, barrier to wider communication and understanding across the Pacific and beyond. While we acknowledge the difficult colonial legacies of European languages in Oceania, we hope the volume will offer greater exposure for the chapter authors, the majority of whom are francophone, to English speakers.

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# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ADCK | Agence de Développement de la Culture Kanak [Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture] |
| ADEME | Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie (*today* Agence de la Transition Écologique) [Agency for Environment and Energy Management, *today* the Ecological Transition Agency] |
| ADRAF | Agence de développement rural et d'aménagement foncier [Agency for Rural Development and Regional Planning] |
| AEC | Avenir en Confiance [Future with Confidence] |
| AICLF | Association of French Caledonian and Loyaltian Indigenous People |
| ALK | Académie des Langues Kanak [Academy of Kanak Languages] |
| APM | Autorisation Personnelle Minière [Personal Mining Authorisation] |
| CCCE | Comité Consultatif Coutumier Environnemental [Environmental Customary Consultative Committee] |
| CCEM | Committee on Foreign Trade in Mining |
| CCI | Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Nouvelle-Calédonie [New Caledonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry] |
| CCT | Centre Culturel Tjibaou [Tjibaou Cultural Centre] |
| CE | Calédonie Ensemble [Caledonia Together] |
| CEK | Comité Environment Koniambo [Koniambo Environment Committee] |
| CI | Conservation International |
| CICS | Committee for Information, Consultation and Environmental Monitoring |
| CPEL | Comité paritaire d'emploi local [Parity Committee of local employment] |
| CSNP | Coral Sea Natural Park |
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| DDEE-PN | Direction du Développement Economique et de l'Environnement de la Province Nord [Department of Economic Development and Environment of the North Province] |
| EEZ | Economic Exclusive Zone |
| EFCK | Fundamentals elements of Kanak culture |
| EPK | Local Kanak Schools |
| FCCI | Fédération des Comités de Coordination des Indépendantistes [Federation of Independentist Coordination Committees] |
| FCPE | Fonds Commun de Placement d'Entreprise [Company Mutual Fond] |
| FI | Front Indépendantiste [Independence Front] |
| FIDES | Investment Fund for Overseas Economic and Social Development |
| FLNKS | Front de Libération National Kanak et Socialiste [Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front] |
| FNSC | Fédération pour une Nouvelle Société Calédonienne [Federation for a New Caledonian Society] |

| | |
|---|---|
| FPRESC | Fonds de Prévention des Risques Environnementaux et Socioculturels [Environmental and Sociocultural Risk Prevention Fond] |
| GDPL | Groupement de droit particulier local [legal entity with customary civil status] |
| GFKEL | Group of Kanak and Exploited Women in Struggle |
| ICAN | Indigenous Customary Negotiating Body |
| ICMM | International Council for Mining and Metals |
| INSEE | Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques [National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of New Caledonia] |
| IRD | Institut de Recherche pour le Développement [French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development] |
| ISEE | Institut de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques [Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of New Caledonia] |
| KNS | Koniambo Nickel SAS |
| LCK | Kanak languages and culture |
| LCOA | Languages, Oceanian cultures and learning |
| LCR | Les Républicains calédoniens [The Caledonian Republicans] |
| LEG | General Electoral List |
| LEO | L'Éveil océanien [Pacific Awakening] |
| LESC | Special Electoral Consultation List |
| LNC | Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes [The Caledonian News] |
| MCs | Multinational companies |
| MPA | Marine Protected Area |
| MSC | Melanesian Spearhead Group |
| NMC | Nickel Mining Company |
| PALIKA | Parti de Libération Kanak [Kanak Liberation Party] |
| PAMCO | Japanese Pacific Metals Company |
| PENC | New Caledonian education project |
| PIF | Pacific Islands Forum |
| PNG | Papua New Guinea |
| PT | Parti Travailliste [Labour Party] |
| RDO | Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien [Democratic Oceanic Party] |
| RPCR | Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République [Rally for Caledonia in the Republic] |
| R-UMP | Rassemblement-UMP [Rally-Union for a Popular Movement] |
| SEML | Société d'Economie Mixte locale [Local Investment Company] |
| SLN | Société Le Nickel [The Nickel Company] |
| SMT | Société des Mines de la Tontouta [Tontouta Mining Company] |
| SNNC | Société du Nickel de Nouvelle-Calédonie et Corée [New Caledonian and Korean Nickel Company] |
| SOFINOR | Société de Financement et d'Investissement de la Province Nord [Financing and Investment Company of the Province] |
| SMSP | Société Minière du Pacifique Sud [South Pacific Mining Company] |
| SPC | The Pacific Community |
| SPMSC | Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien [Mining Participation Company of the Caledonian South] |
| SPREP | The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme |
| STCPI | Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participations Industrielles [Territorial Caledonian Industrial Participation Company] |
| UC | Union Calédonienne [Caledonian Union] |
| UICALO | Union of Indigenous Caledonians Going for Freedom within Order |
| ULMWP | United Liberation Movement of West Papua |

| | |
|---|---|
| UNC | University of New Caledonia |
| UPM | Union Progressiste en Mélanesie [Progressist Union in Melanesia] |
| USD | US dollars |
| VKP | Voh-Koné-Pouembout |
| WEEE | Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

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# Introduction: Geographical Understanding and "Listening" in New Caledonia-Kanaky

1

Simon P. J. Batterbury and Matthias Kowasch

**Abstract**

This chapter is an introduction to "Geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky", edited by Matthias Kowasch and Simon Batterbury. The archipelago is a "biodiversity hotspot" with high species endemism, ultramafic soils and nickel resources that have been mined extensively for nearly 150 years. It remains a territory of France, and after three referendums on independence, decolonisation is an unfinished and ongoing process that still divides communities in their interpretation of history and their aspirations for the future. The 21 chapters of the book, including this introduction and the conclusion, reflect different themes and offer cultural, political, social and ecological perspectives. New Caledonia-Kanaky (NC-K) is a "window on the world" in terms of decolonisation paths, environmental and social justice, racial inequality, biodiversity and the impacts of mining. The book has seven parts: (1) biodiversity, environmental protection and policies; (2) fisheries and agriculture; (3) extractive industries, mining development and waste management; (4) land reform and urban development; (5) cultural heritage, languages and education; (6) small-scale politics and gender questions; and lastly (7) decolonisation and political independence.

**Keywords**

Biodiversity hotspot · Nickel sector · Decolonisation · Indigenous Kanak scholars · Scalar geographies · Common destiny

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## 1.1 Introduction

This book offers a geographical perspective on one of the most fascinating places on the planet – the Pacific archipelago and territory of New Caledonia-Kanaky (*la Nouvelle-Calédonie* in French). The archipelago is located in the southwest Pacific Ocean about 1200 km east of Australia and about 540 km south of Vanuatu. New Caledonia-Kanaky (NC-K) has a land area of 18,576 km$^2$ and is politically divided into three provinces (North, South and Loyalty Islands).

We have edited this collection for an English-speaking audience, working over several years to solicit, write and sometimes translate the chapters. The islands that make up the territory are still little known to Anglophone scholars and students. Their history of settlement is shared with neighbouring island chains, being part of the migration and diffusion of Melanesian peoples over millennia. The precise origin and itinerary of the first settlers are debated, but archaeological studies pin the arrival of humanity around 3500 mya (Sand 2010). The archipelago was the scene of European trading and sandalwood exploitation by the 1800s and was officially colonised by France in 1853, under Napoleon III. What those settlers found was a large Pacific archipelago, including the New Caledonian main island Grande Terre populated by Kanak clans and the Loyalty Islands chain inhabited by Kanak and Tavu'avua' peoples (see Fig. 1.1).

Geographical research on New Caledonia-Kanaky is dominated by discussion of three phenomena. Firstly, its extraordinary marine and terrestrial biodiversity has a high percentage of endemic species, unique ultramafic soils and extensive fringing reefs surrounded by an extensive marine territory. There were no land mammals remaining in immediate precolonial times other than a flying fox (*Pteropus vetulus*) and bats. While there is an endangered virtually flightless bird, the Cagou (*Rhynochetos jubatus*), larger ones (e.g. *Sylviornis neocaledoniae*) had already been hunted to



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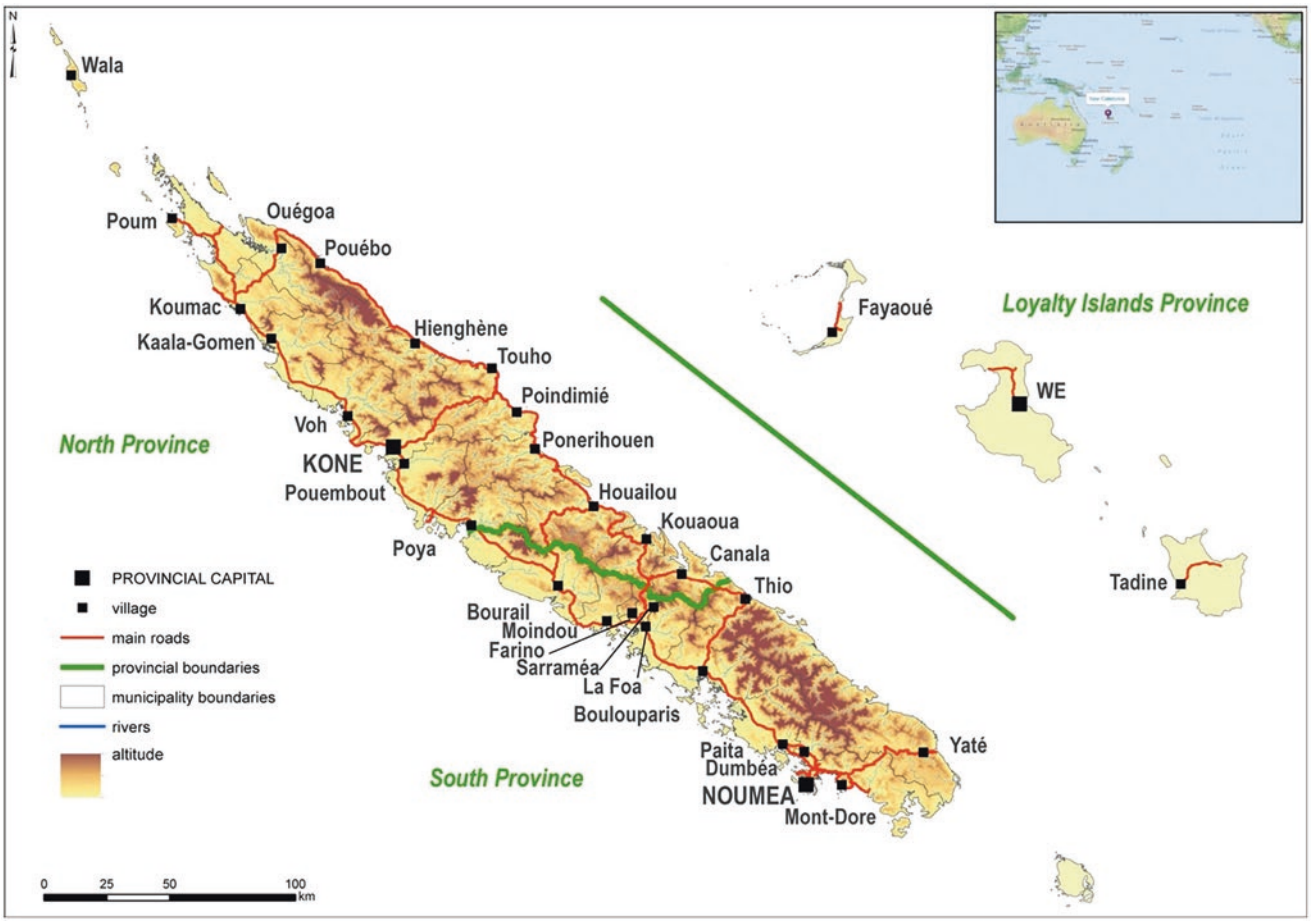


**Fig. 1.1** Provinces and municipalities in New Caledonia-Kanaky. (Source: https://georep.nc/. Cartography: Arroyas 2023)

extinction before European arrival (Kier et al. 2009, p. 9325; Jaffre et al. 1997). In recent years, documentation of this "biodiversity hotspot" with its Gondwanan relicts has turned towards concern over species loss and the effects of marine and terrestrial climatic change. There has also been greater recognition of the deleterious impacts of nickel mining, by far the most important industry and source of income on the islands.

Secondly, the economy is highly dependent on mining, impacting other sectors such as road infrastructure, hospitality and construction. The main island Grande Terre possesses around 25% of worldwide nickel reserves, discovered in the nineteenth century by the French engineer Jules Garnier (Batterbury et al. 2020). While the nickel sector contributes to 10–20% of local GDP (depending on the global demand on nickel), the sector contributes over 90% to the country's export value. The Kanak independence movement wants to use the nickel sector as an instrument for economic emancipation and future political independence. The Koniambo mine and smelter in the Kanak-dominated North Province were developed for this purpose, thanks to a 51/49% shareholding model with a multinational mining company (Falconbridge, which was later acquired by Xstrata, then Glencore) (Pitoiset 2015; Kowasch 2018). While this arrangement ended in 2024, the extractive industries and decolonisation are deeply connected.

Thirdly, decolonisation is an unfinished and ongoing process: contentious and divided in many ways, in terms of people's interpretation of history and aspirations for the future of the territory. New Caledonia-Kanaky is one out of 17 countries on the UN list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, defined by the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24) as "territories whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government" (UN 2021). Since the Matignon Accords in 1988 and the Nouméa Accord in 1998, however, the territory has for the most part embraced an ongoing process of decolonisation, the term used in the Nouméa Accord (Gagné 2015). There have been three referendums on political independence from France since 2018. Critical scholars (see Belhôte and Merle 2022; Kowasch et al. 2022; Trépied 2021) consider the third to have been undemocratic and wasted. A series of events in late 2021, including a fierce outbreak of the COVID virus especially in Kanak communities, led independence leaders to call for

"non-participation" by their supporters, overwhelmingly Kanak. Despite the request for postponement, the French government stubbornly stuck to the initial date on 12 December 2021 for the third and final referendum. In an interview in December 2021, Jean-Francois Merle, the advisor to former Prime Minister Michel Rocard, said that it was never a strength of France to invent new "soft" partnerships and collaboration with former colonies. "I own, or I do not own", is the underlying political principle (Kowasch et al. 2022). Currently, the territory is still "owned", and as a result, the politically charged and unresolved negotiations have continued into 2024 about how, and to what extent, decolonisation will take place. President Macron's visit to New Caledonia-Kanaky in July 2023 was followed by documents confirming France's intention to remain a significant force in the Pacific. Challenging supporters of independence, his government now wishes to replace the Nouméa Accord, allow French citizens that have resided in the archipelago for only 10 years voting rights, and set back the independence cause, potentially for generations.

The events of 2021 left New Caledonia-Kanaky in an unusual and even unique position. The struggles of Indigenous people in the French overseas territories in the Pacific also differ from those of other groups, for example, the Inuit of the Americas or Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In contrast to Aboriginal and Māori leaders, Pacific Islanders from the French territories came late and only irregularly to the UN meetings about Indigenous rights (Gagné 2015). Their struggle is little known and understood in the Anglophone world even though they constitute over 41% of the population of NC-K, along with tens of thousands of other Pacific islanders who also reside there. In this book, several chapters address the complex history of stalled decolonisation of NC-K and how this relates to aspects of everyday life including land tenure, housing, cultural heritage and education.

New Caledonia-Kanaky is located in a region, Oceania, where China is investing heavily and trading with neighbouring countries. This has often been used to justify the continued French presence as a Western, largely non-aggressive buffer to Chinese expansionism (Kowasch et al. 2022). There are of course other geopolitical reasons for France to keep its overseas territories and to rebuff decolonisation requests. Imperialistic aspirations, cultural hegemony and abundant natural resources stand out. Extensive and globally significant nickel reserves on Grande Terre mean it is sometimes called the "nickel island", while biodiversity and high species endemism are also notable. The archipelago has more than a hundred years of nickel extraction remaining. Kanak people were for a long time marginalised in this industry controlled by French corporate interests, particularly by the company SLN (Société Le Nickel). There was limited employment for them in mines and at the Doniambo smelter in Nouméa. Only recently have Kanak begun to develop subcontracting operations, and they have participated in large-scale mining with the Koniambo project since the beginning of the 2000s (Kowasch 2010; Rosner 2018). As of early 2024, the shared ownership agreement of Koniambo was ended by the main investor, Glencore, which decided to sell its stake, leading to a transitional period. In addition to its nickel resources, NC-K has an EEZ (exclusive economic zone) of 1,740,000 km$^2$ including major maritime assets: fish, the biological diversity of reef ecologies, seabed minerals and deep-water oil and gas reserves (Maclellan 2017). The potential resources in the EEZ are desired by French interests, as France competes for power and recognition on the international stage.

For the Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), the term "research" is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. When mentioned in many Indigenous contexts, "it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories" (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, p. 1). In this book, however, we have tried to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the research content, and to engage scholars of different backgrounds, all of whom support cross-cultural exchanges and knowledge-building. Among them are four Indigenous Kanak scholars, knowledge holders and activists (Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane from the island of Maré, Antoine Cano Poady from the community of Baco in the North, Chanel Ouetcho from the community of Touaourou in the South and Jean-Michel Guiart who has Kanak heritage). They have contributed chapters on Indigenous knowledge and education, on cultural heritage and on decolonisation and the principle of "common destiny". These chapters not only deal with scientific knowledge and concepts but also address activist issues and Kanak cultural knowledge, such as music and toponyms.

To value various perspectives on the country (or territory), and to honour the Indigenous lands that contributors deal with in different ways (political, social-economic, ecological, historical, spatial), we use the term "New Caledonia-Kanaky" in the title of the book and in some chapters but according to author preferences. New Caledonia is the official name, dating back to James Cook and his crew who named it in 1774 only because the mountainous scenery of the main island reminded Cook of his native Scotland. But the name has endured right through the colonial period. For most Indigenous Kanak peoples, the country is called "Kanaky". The Nouméa Accord, signed in 1998 and which President Macron of France wishes to extinguish and replace in 2024, provided new symbolic national "markers" comprising a flag, a country name, banknotes, a slogan and an anthem. Similar to what occurred in Papua New Guinea, the future name could be agreed on to be New Caledonia-Kanaky or Kanaky-New Caledonia, as employed by the former French overseas minister Victorin Lurel in 2012 and by some

(French) scholars (e.g. Leblic and Cugola 2018) – but there is no official decision yet on this. In addition, because of its history of settlement, there are still customary and European models of land tenure that have run in parallel for almost 170 years. Sourisseau et al. (2010) call this a unique form of "historic dualism". Kanak communities living on customary land called "tribu" in French ("tribe" in American English) can comprise one or several clans. However, we prefer to use the term "community" in this book, because first, North American tribes are quite different to those in New Caledonia-Kanaky (and we want to avoid misinterpretations), and second, we think that the term "community" better translates – in English – to the structural organisation of several Kanak clans in a social entity. However, it is not used this way in francophone ex-colonies in Africa.

## 1.2 Book Contents

The 21 chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion, reflect the great diversity of the country, from a cultural but also a political, social and ecological perspective. They draw on, and provide examples of, a large variety of concepts such as biodiversity, decolonisation (Batterbury et al. 2020; Mohamed-Gaillard 2020), environmental justice (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020), inclusive development (Raworth 2017), locally driven development on customary land (Scheyvens et al. 2020) and feminism and women's rights activism (e.g. Douglas 2003; Trask 1996). The book has seven parts: (1) biodiversity, environmental protection and policies; (2) fisheries and agriculture; (3) extractive industries, mining development and waste management; (4) land reform and urban development; (5) cultural heritage, languages and education; (6) small-scale politics and gender questions; and lastly, (7) decolonisation and political independence.

Part I of this book includes three chapters, environmental protection and terrestrial and marine biodiversity. As we have outlined, New Caledonia-Kanaky has the world's highest plant endemism richness by several measures (Kier et al. 2009) and is considered to be a biodiversity hotspot (Pouteau and Birnbaum 2016). The archipelago's lagoons were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 because of the great diversity of coral reefs and associated ecosystems that they offer, and because of their sheer scale.

After this introduction, Rodary introduces environmental policies in NC-K and argues that ecological rationality, doing the right thing for ecosystems, the atmosphere and the oceans, cannot be dissociated from political rationality, which means that certain scales of environmental governance are privileged. The treatment of the archipelago's environmental issues is heavily dependent on the political strategies and tactics of various New Caledonian actors at different scales (municipal, provincial, New Caledonian, Oceanian and French). Chapter 3 authored by Isnard and Jaffré explores characteristics of New Caledonian plant biodiversity and draws a picture of the major unique elements of its flora. The authors highlight that to protect plant diversity, more ambitious aims are needed including habitat protection, supporting plant populations (not just rare species) and being mindful of genetic diversity. Pelletier explores ocean biodiversity in the fourth chapter, across NC-K's large marine EEZ that includes outlying atolls and remote reef systems in the Coral Sea. She details the particular features and the iconic species that distinguish this part of the South Pacific and the inevitable anthropogenic pressures on oceanic and coastal habitats. While reef and coastal environments remain in better health than many of their neighbours, the threats posed to them are real.

Part II of the book deals with fisheries and agriculture. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) declared the period 2019–2028 to be the Decade of Family Farming. Georgeou et al. (2022) note that around 80% of all Pacific Islanders still rely on agricultural produce from their own gardens or from other smallholders to support or to supplement their diets. Family and smallholder farming, but also fishing, make an important contribution to food security as many scholars have noted in previous stocktaking exercises and research projects (Connell and Waddell 2006). For example, the interdisciplinary FALAH project (2021–2025), funded by the EU Horizon 2020 RISE programme and led by the University of New Caledonia (UNC), is building a network of research teams operating in the Pacific Islands that have a common interest in family farming and food security and its direct or indirect relationship with the environment, health and nutrition.

In this part, two chapters deal with family farming and fishing practices. First, Sabinot et al. discuss the role of fishing in the livelihood activities of New Caledonians, independently of their social status, and examine the different purposes for which fishing is practised. During their fieldwork, the authors from IRD (Institute of Research for Development) and IAC, both based in New Caledonia-Kanaky, were often told that a good fisher is "responsible" and "respectful". The fisher's social function is essential to societal well-being. There have been some efforts to preserve resources and to assist fishers. The authors thus argue that in the face of worldwide over-exploitation of marine resources, small-scale fisheries have to be given more priority, which means enhancing the knowledge systems on which they are based, and their practices. Second, Bouard et al. examine the main transformations that have marked Kanak family farming and describe the ways in which monetisation and globalisation have influenced Kanak custom. They conclude that Kanak domestic groups continue to undertake agricultural, hunting and fishing activities, although some members leave

to work outside the community. Based on a large quantitative survey of Kanak households, driven by IAC (New Caledonian Institute of Agronomy) in 2010, and other data, the authors show that monetary wages are not systematically reinvested in agriculture and especially not in the purchase of equipment.

The nickel sector plays a key role in the New Caledonian economy. This makes it unique among the Pacific islands and subject to important distortions and influence from global metal markets. Part III of the volume including three chapters dealing with nickel exploitation and processing, which dates back well over a century, environmental policies in the nickel sector, mining nationalism, and waste management.

Nickel mining leads to heavy environmental impacts and creates tonnes of mining waste, so-called mine tailings. Waste management can be a great challenge for small island countries (Manglou et al. 2022). The chapter by Pestaña et al. addresses mining waste but importantly, broader waste management strategies in NC-K, framed in the context of island waste problems. The largely urban population generates metropolitan waste similar to Western cities, and there is a lack of consistency at all governance levels in the way it is handled and treated. The vast majority of waste generated is sent to landfills, and particularly in rural areas, some ends up in open dumping sites. Better recycling is part of the solution, but a general aim should be to minimise the waste stream and establish ethical and innovative management.

Chapter 8 analyses environmental policies and conflicts between companies and local associations/communities. Many scholars have shown that large-scale mining leads to extensive environmental damage, social upheavals and widening economic disparities (Bebbington et al. 2018; Dunlap 2019). Kowasch and Merlin explore how two mining projects in New Caledonia-Kanaky (Goro Nickel in the South and Koniambo in the North) define the links between their environmental impacts, their responsibilities and their political and democratic concerns. Based on the analysis of environmental justice and conflict (Le Billon 2015; Schlosberg 2004), the authors show that the legitimacy of environmental associations and committees negotiating with mining companies is always fluid. Environmental management can be differently addressed and is often intermingled with social and political claims for benefit-sharing and legitimacy, especially in the context of decolonisation and in negotiations with profit-driven entities. In the ninth chapter, Demmer analyses the (unfinished) decolonisation process through the prism of the nickel sector. To promote economic development and emancipation, the Kanak independence party FLNKS have been relatively successful in nickel mining and processing until a recent fall in prices. This chapter provides some insights on the internal arguments and struggles concerning the right strategy to insure benefit from nickel resources.

For the largest population group, the Kanak, land is crucial for their identity. The former Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou highlighted that land is more than material wealth or property: "A clan, which loses its land, loses its personality" (Tjibaou and Missotte 1976 p. 60). Part IV of this book deals with land issues and urban development.

Chapter 10, authored by Batterbury, Kowasch and Arroyas – the latter working at ADRAF, the New Caledonian agency in charge of land reform dating back to the 1970s – describes the history of re-allocating and restituting land to the descendants of its earliest inhabitants. Based on two case studies (Poum and Baco, both located in the North Province), the authors investigate the question of recognising land legitimacy without land allocation, a variety of land conflict issues and the assessment of socio-economic development on customary land. They conclude that an individualised profit-oriented neoliberal paradigm and a collective more "inclusive" economy approach overlap on customary land in NC-K. Next, economic development in the North Province (anchored by the Koniambo mining project) is a core element of the politics of rebalancing, initiated with the Matignin-Oudinot Accords in 1988. Economic and financial power is concentrated in the capital Nouméa and its neighbouring municipalities (Dumbéa, Païta and Mont-Dore) forming the Greater Nouméa agglomeration – where 67% of the total population of NC-K live (and around 65% of jobs are located in the South Province) (see Fig. 1.1). Rebalancing politics aim to promote "development" in the Kanak-dominated North of Grande Terre by creating infrastructures and jobs. The geographer Pantz analyses – from a spatial perspective – the ethnic redistribution that accompanies the urban expansion of the capital Nouméa, which has for a long time been entitled "Nouméa, the white". He argues in Chap. 11 that the persistence of spatial, social and political inequalities and marginalisation raises the question of the true place of Kanak people in Nouméa today.

Part V of this volume addresses cultural heritage, languages and education, in three chapters. The chapter by Indigenous Kanak knowledge holders Poady (community of Baco) and Ouetcho (community of Touaourou), and by Stastny and Kowasch, highlights Kanak cultural heritage including toponyms, social mapping and Kaneka music. The authors demonstrate that in a context of colonial legacies, institutional conservatism and depleting natural resources, the initiatives undertaken by Kanak people at the grassroots level are key to the continuance of Kanak cultural heritage and practices. The cultural work and artistic engagement of clans, associations and individuals create opportunities for Kanak people that are otherwise not, or are inadequately, provided by (public) institutions. The Kaneka band "Humaagué" are valuing Kanak cultures and heritage by addressing a large diversity of topics such as village-level cultural practices, colonial history, Kanak independence struggles and the mining industry. Another important aspect of cultural heritage

are Kanak languages, discussed in the following chapter authored by Leblic. The French anthropologist offers an overview of Kanak languages and shows that they persist, although their speakers have been displaced over long periods. Kanak people have taken an interest in language protection, supported by the Academy of Kanak languages and the Tjibaou Cultural Centre. Chapter 14, authored by the Kanak educational scientist Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane, deals with Kanak knowledge in formal education. Wadrawane asks how fundamental elements of Kanak culture can be integrated into schooling, with opportunities to develop innovation in teaching techniques and teacher training. He argues "Educational institutions in New Caledonia have for too long been an authority preoccupied with preparing and producing its own heirs" and "Schools tend to distance Kanak pupils from their culture and way of life".

Part VI contains two chapters dealing with localised political arenas and the evolution of feminist and gender politics. Kerryn Baker describes the tensions between France's democratic support of equal rights and parity between men and women in political bodies, and the historically patriarchal traditions of Kanak society. Notably, the Kanak writer and politician Déwé Gorodey (1949–2022) fought for women's rights, as well as Kanak identity and independence, but male-dominated Kanak bodies strongly resisted French parity laws until 2004. While close to half the seats in the Congress and the Provincial assemblies are now held by women, this is not the case in the Customary Senate or in the Parliament (Wadrawane et al. 2023). Nayral analyses the hybridisation of political power on Ouvéa island in the Loyalty Islands Province (Fig. 1.1), through the actions of a local council that challenges French political norms while still existing within the French Republic.

Part VII turns to the third major theme we identified above, the "unfinished and ongoing process" of decolonisation. This is the focus of Gagné's chapter on self-determination and the use of Indigenous identity, revealing New Caledonia-Kanaky as unique in the francophone Pacific. So much has been written about the unfolding of the 2018–2021 referendums on independence that it is important to keep an accurate tally of the currents of political debate and actions and the intentions behind them. This is provided by Denise Fisher, former Australian consul in Nouméa. After explaining the referendum processes, she questions the finality of the third referendum, given that such a large percentage of the population consider it illegitimate, as did we (Kowasch et al. 2022). In chapter 19, Jean-Michel Guiart offers a critical perspective on the struggle for independence, questioning not only the motivations of the key actors but also their oft-repeated mantra of seeking a "common destiny". While this term drove several legitimate and long-lasting efforts to set aside the binary divide that has plagued the colonial period, he argues it is "hard to see in material and practical terms". "Common destiny" is a dream without substance, insofar as it does not identify any concrete project or real political will other than the continued benevolence of France. Inequality has a major racial dimension, with Kanak ethno-nationalism on the one hand and French ethno-nationalism on the other. But he argues the racialisation of the New Caledonian political debate sees both sides subjugated, in the name of globalisation, to neo-liberalism. In other words, the historical disadvantage of Kanak people remains largely intact, and the whole territory is no closer to a commonality of intent after decades of struggle and deliberation on matters of governance. He proposes, following Foucault, that the future lies in addressing inequality, leaning towards some form of heterotopia, or "worlds within worlds" in which individual cultures can still thrive, but with social and economic justice. It is not a question of overthrowing the oppressor, he argues, but of escaping domination by destroying the system that alienates. For Scott Robertson in his chapter, the French "citizenship ideal" has not worked in New Caledonia-Kanaky, challenged by the persistent disagreements and inequality that Guiart identifies.

## 1.3 Discussion

This book is the result of collective effort, across cultures and spanning the globe. However, no volume of this type can be a complete geographical account, since geographies are constantly being rewritten by the flux in geopolitical relations affecting the archipelago, the turbulent political debate around independence and changing economic fortunes with overwhelming reliance on a single mineral export that changes in value, affecting labour markets and the natural environment.

We recognise that even with 21 chapters we could not cover every topic. The book does not have a lengthy discussion of climate change, past and present, but this is referenced in several IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) reports and other studies (Dutheil et al. 2021). Dutheil et al. estimate that the islands will see an 18% decrease in annual mean rainfall by 2080–2100, due to changing atmospheric circulation, experienced particularly during the summer hot season. They show that this is because of "strong anti-cyclonic and air subsidence anomalies centred on the north of New Caledonia, which reduces moisture convergence over the archipelago" (Dutheil et al. 2021, p. 87). The effects including more bushfires will fall on water resources and terrestrial ecosystems. In addition, New Caledonia-Kanaky is occasionally in the path of cyclones, which are increasingly felt outside the normal cyclone seasons, affecting perceptions of risk and vulnerability. We have omitted discussion of Pacific development aid programmes, because NC-K is in a rather unique situation given its fiscal

and administrative links to France, from which it receives financial transfers, and it is therefore part of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). By contrast, it receives little support from international NGOs and multilateral agencies. It is not part of the European Union, and funding has diminished for the OCTs (EU Overseas Countries or Territories). Its aid flows are not reported by the World Bank after 2004. Nonetheless, individual programmes do operate, many of them registered as local associations and membership organisations, notably in social support programmes, healthcare and nature conservation.

The classic concept of scalar geographies is very relevant in New Caledonia-Kanaky, given its enmeshment in global assemblages of cultures and trade that are organised hierarchically (Green 2016). It is well understood that "socio-spatial processes change the importance and role of certain geographical scales" (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003, p. 913). The French Pacific dependencies are subject to distant sites of power, to which they are beholden, but to which they also contribute through flows of materials, people, culture and knowledge. Scalar interlinkages are complex.

The local scale was impacted by the socio-spatial nature of pre-colonial clan histories of settlement and movements, as they traced itineraries across the islands. Talking with elders in September 2022 and August 2023, we were struck how memories of these histories are still strong. European settlement, the radiation of settlement from Nouméa, land spoliation and the creation of "tribal reserves" for Kanak people all disturbed the lifeways and social relationships of the first inhabitants, later leading to significant land access problems and land tenure conflicts.

At the regional or "island" scale, the creation of three provinces by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) in the wake of the 1980s civil war was significant, because it gave more administrative and some political autonomy. This is the scale at which biophysical and political connections and disconnections have emerged. New Caledonia-Kanaky exhibits significant urban primacy, and on Grande Terre, there are still significant clashes between the aims of capitalist mining firms and environmental policies and nature conservation efforts. The efforts by the North Province to establish a new urban growth pole anchored by the Koniambo mine are also significant (including shopping malls, rental housing, leisure facilities, filling stations, etc.). Nevertheless, the demographic and economic dominance of the capital Nouméa in the South remains.

The EEZ, but also the establishment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site (in 2008) and of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea (in 2014), extends the island space into marine territory, although so far without adequate resources or political will for management and regulation, as Pelletier's chapter illustrates. However, the marine space represents an opportunity for NC-K and France for economic development on the national and also the international stage. Some improvements in marine protection were approved in 2023.

The Pacific region is increasingly significant in world affairs given its geopolitical importance, particularly for Chinese influence and because of its enduring colonial links (Kowasch et al. 2022; Strating et al. 2022). The relationship with France and other countries is playing out, for example, in a dispute over the EEZ borders with Vanuatu, and France's relatively new Pacific Islands Forum membership. In 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron was promoting an Indo-Pacific vision, but independence supporters in NC-K feel little affinity for it. Other issues, like oceanic plastic waste, have a cross-Pacific dimension (Fuller et al. 2022; Manglou et al. 2022). The colonial relationship, some of the movement of minerals and the geopolitical standoff between the major powers operating across the Pacific have all been formed at the global level, given (in particular) the extreme distances between France and NC-K. NC-K's bargaining position in the United Nations is tricky, since France is a full member, and President Macron and his predecessors have done nothing to advance independence, despite Macron highlighting that colonisation was a crime against humanity, in a speech in Algeria in 2017 (Le Monde 2017). His position has since hardened (NC 1ère 2023). It is worth remembering – and this is not always evident when focussing on the mine sites, huge trucks, and wharfs on Grande Terre – that the market for nickel, the prime export, is global. The recent arrival of Tesla as an important buyer reinforces this, as does the fall in nickel prices of 2023 and 2024.

## 1.4 Conclusion

A scalar political ecology (Green 2016) of Pacific issues is fundamentally geographical in scope and ambition. Space is socially constructed. Scalar relationships interrelate and imbricate over time. We cannot understand social, political, economic and environmental transformations on "connected" islands like these without reference to the "higher-order" processes that led to transformations of land use, settlement and social change (Connell and Waddell 2006).

While this is a fundamental geographical observation, there is also an emerging sociospatial agenda for change here. It is guided by an ethical position expressed in different ways in this book: self-determination and tolerance rather than overdetermination by lucrative extractivist forces and by a geopolitical agenda forged largely in Europe. Addressing inequalities across gender, race and class and recognizing that the unique island endemism and species diversity on land and at sea matter, as do lowering $CO_2$ emissions and managing pollution and waste. The words of Ojeda et al. (2022) provide guidance. They argue for a "common connection to

each other while feeding from our separate roots". This means simultaneously "acknowledging where we come from, while climbing out of our differences into shared listening" (Ojeda et al. 2022, p. 160). For this, "we all need to be on the same side despite our differences and partial knowledges. We do not have time, life, or energy to spend fighting each other anymore. We have to listen" (ibid, p. 162). Over the years, similar sentiments have been expressed in NC-K, for example, by the current president of the New Caledonian government, Louis Mapou (Confavreux 2020).

The comedic movie "The Rob Mission" (dir. Chevrin 2021) introduced a lighter note into a fraught period of political and economic uncertainty. Two astronauts, Kanak and Caldoche,[1] are a few minutes out from preparing to shake hands for the cameras as they circle over the territory on a satellite that will, among other things, produce imagery capable of identifying every last gram of exploitable Caledonian nickel. But arguments about symbolism, flags, the length of traditional greetings and food choices rapidly dissolve their partnership, derailing their mission and placing it in extreme peril. The short film plays on racial international stereotypes – "France will pay", one says, as their bickering breaks the satellite, and things do not end well despite a last-minute effort to bury their differences and save the mission and themselves. A self-serving French politician back on Grande Terre hopes the live broadcast of "friendship" will give a "future together" (common destiny) message on screen, but he just annoys both astronauts. Like the movie, this book exposes some of the reasons that "listening" in NC-K has been so hard since the 1800s but also some of the issues around which it has occurred, or still must happen. New Caledonia-Kanaky is a window on the world. It deserves much more attention. We all need to focus on "conversations and actions across lines of difference to address shared interests in a world where many worlds are possible and where living worlds are recognized, respected, and valued for themselves and for serving as the basis for flourishing human communities" (Ojeda et al. 2022, p. 163).

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# Part I

# Environmental Protection and Biodiversity

# Which Environmental Policies for New Caledonia?

2

Estienne Rodary

**Abstract**

Scientists identified the extraordinary terrestrial and marine biodiversity of New Caledonia over 70 years ago. Campaigns to preserve endemic flora and fauna by international NGOs have existed since the 1960s, but established interests lying behind the extractive economy on Grande Terre helped delay effective environmental regulations and actions until the 2000s. The territory still has some of the highest $CO_2$ emissions per capita in the world. Multi-layered governance is in place, applied through the Convention on Biological Diversity (initiated in 1992), the UNESCO World Heritage listing for reefs and lagoons (2008) and the Natural Park of the Coral Sea (2014). Ecological policies are hampered by the divergence of views on the environment at the provincial and territorial scales and the degree of local participation that is permitted in environmental decision-making. Different resources also fall under different management regimes, and some campaigns target environmental issues alongside social and economic justice issues.

**Keywords**

Environmental policies · New Caledonia · UNESCO World Heritage · Biodiversity hotspot · Protected areas

## 2.1 Introduction

New Caledonia presents a mixed picture when it comes to environment. On the one hand, the territory is characterised by exceptional and unique natural habitats. The prevalence of nickel on the main island Grande Terre gives New Caledonia very specific soils that have profoundly shaped living organisms. The remoteness of the islands increases their biological peculiarity, and as other chapters also show, the territory is classified as a biodiversity hotspot, and has the world's highest plant endemism richness (Kier et al. 2009). On the other hand, the main island is profoundly marked by more than one century of nickel exploitation that has brought its share of environmental damage and pollution, as well as profits to the French state and commercial interests. In this context, environmental protection has long been overlooked or undeveloped, particularly where it challenges the mining sector. The importance of New Caledonian biological diversity was known from the 1950s onwards but only officially emerged as a domain worth of political action in the 1990s. Similarly, local authorities did nothing about air quality for decades, even when the French weather agency (Météo France) offered new air quality detectors to cover all French territories in the early 1990s.[1] The first structure in charge of air quality control (Scal'air) was only set up in 2004 and the first measures were actually implemented in 2007.[2]

The turn of the twenty-first century was indeed a crucial moment in the dawn of New Caledonia's environmental policies. There was no mention of environment issues in the Nouméa Agreement signed in 1998, but the three provinces gazetted their own environmental Code ten years later (2008 for the North Province, 2009 for the South Province and 2016 for the Loyalty Islands Province). The end of the 2000s also saw the first local community unrest over environmental conservation, in particular in opposition to the nickel industry. Those movements were an impulse for wider environmental concerns. The island's lagoons were listed in the UNESCO's World Heritage Site in 2008. The subsequent creation of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea in 2014 that covers the entire Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) promoted

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[1] NGO administrative, personal communication, July 2017.

[2] http://www.scalair.nc/scal-air/presentation/historique-du-projet.


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a new image of a territory at the forefront of environmental policies in the Pacific region (Dégremont 2017).

Whether this image was legitimate, and for whom, is an open question. As the title of this chapter suggests, "environment" refers to a set of diverse and contentious issues that have different relevance for different actors. "Environment" is understood here not only in material terms but as a problem of human-environment relationships, both scientific and political in nature.

It follows that environmental problems, as well as the mechanisms devised to solve them, differ according to who is seeing and assessing them. And this is all the more important in profoundly divided territories such as New Caledonia, where an environmental policy may have different meanings and different impacts to the different communities that make up society. To give only one example, New Caledonia ranks third globally in its emissions of $CO_2$ by person (at 30 t $CO_2$/person in 2019).[3] But the territory's Gini coefficient is 0.43 (Mathieu et al. 2016),[4] showing strong wealth inequalities, with some producing very little $CO_2$. New Caledonian communities consume natural resources at very different rates and are also affected differently by the exploitation of those resources. As a result, some are much more willing and able to engage with environmental public policies than others.

Policy analyses show that a "problem" only becomes one when an issue is perceived as such by some stakeholders (Surel 2000). The potential discrepancy between this cognitive construction of a problem and its policy formulation is generally narrowed where the decision-making actors (in particular, the state) are perceived as legitimate. This is, of course, patchy: an environmental problem will not be seen in the same way depending on the positionality of its observers, spatially and socially; what may be a problem for some actors may not be for others. The consequence is that environmental policies are always confronted with two types of tensions. On the one hand, some stakeholders will not recognise the policies put in place, finding them irrelevant or illegitimate. On the other hand, social fragmentation allows certain pressure groups or vested interests to orient environment policies, issues or targets to suit their own interests, rather than the public interest. This observation can be applied to any kind of social context, but it is particularly relevant to post-colonial societies such as New Caledonia, which is still marked by a strong segregationist heritage and deep socio-economic disparities.

This chapter attempts to take this fragmented situation into account. Rather than presenting a mere list of environmental problems in New Caledonia and the policies put in place to address them, it outlines these issues in conjunction with the different scales at which they are set and dealt with. Scalar politics are indeed crucial in New Caledonia, because of the colonial history and the segregation that resulted from it. At the local level, the colonial system, based on European settlement and the creation of "tribal/community reserves" for the Kanak population, generated strong land tenure conflicts that are still tangible today. At the regional level, the creation of three provinces by the Nouméa Agreement (1998) in the wake of the civil war gave the provinces a large degree of political autonomy that sometimes collides with the "territorial" (i.e. New Caledonian) government. Another scale that profoundly shapes environmental policies is the "island" level, where "islandness" brings different effects – both ecological and political – of connection and disconnection. The Pacific region is a further level that moulds New Caledonian policies, in stark contrast to the exclusive relation that New Caledonia holds with France.

This chapter uses these different scales as a way to present the main environmental policies that have been implemented in New Caledonia and to show the processes of fragmentation that are so specific to New Caledonian environmental policies.

## 2.2 Divided We Feel

The first level where one can see fragmented dynamics in environmental policies is at the local level. Here we will present two examples of such local fragmentation, mining-related environmental policies and nature conservation policies, where, over the last two decades, New Caledonia has seen the emergence of highly differentiated forms of civil society mobilisation (see chapter by Kowasch and Merlin in this book).

The New Caledonian countryside has been transformed by mining activities since the end of the nineteenth century. Nickel mining in particular has had a significant impact on the islands' natural environments, although heavily concentrated on Grande Terre (Richer de Forges and Pascal 2008). In 2008, it was estimated that the total area degraded by soil excavation was about 200 square kilometres, that is, 1.2% of the surface area of the main island Grande Terre. Today, some of these areas are still being exploited, others are abandoned (becoming orphan mines) but their effects on ecosystems persist, particularly because land restoration on ultramafic habitats takes much longer than in less hostile environments. It has been estimated that land restoration on ultramafic rock and soil can take up to 500 years (Losfeld et al. 2015). Opencast mining has very serious environmental

[3] After Qatar, Curaçao, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Kuwait, Brunei, Bahrain, Mongolia, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Data: http://www.globalcarbonatlas.org/en/CO2-emissions. Accessed 20 April 2021.

[4] See also http://www.isee.nc/emploi-revenus/revenus-salaires/inegalites-pauvrete-revenus-sociaux?highlight=WyJnaW5pIl0=. Accessed 14 September 2018.

consequences, with the destruction of the ecosystems at the mine site, erosion, the dissemination of toxic-rich metal dusts and the pollution of rivers and lagoons (Desoutter and Bertaud 2019). Mining activities in New Caledonia have been increased over the last two decades with the creation of two new large mines and processing plants in the North Province (Koniambo, currently suspended) and the South Province (Goro) (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin and Chap. 9 by Demmer in this book). Official figures are not made public, but it is estimated that 150 new hectares have been mined each year since 2009, compared to 50 hectares per year in previous decades. Mining concessions today occupy 300,000 hectares, or 18% of the territory,[5] which also suggests a strong mining growth. This is particular since the establishment of the Goro plant that, thanks to its hydrometallurgy process, can extract nickel from laterites at low levels of concentration.[6]

Despite the importance of the effects of mining activities from the early twentieth century, New Caledonia only adopted strong environmental protection measures with the revision of the 2009 mining code. This code includes a number of regulations, including one that requires the revegetation of mining sites. But those regulations have a limited impact due to the low rate of land restoration and the complexity of recreating ecosystems with species endemism of up to 90%.

It is in the municipalities most affected by extraction activities that antagonism to mining companies has been most prevalent, for example, in Thio, the first mining town (Le Meur 2017), or Mont Dore where the Goro hydrometallurgical plant was built (Merlin 2014). Unrest typically combines identity claims, economic arguments and environmental concerns. In the case of Goro, which has experienced serious and accidental pollution and risk management problems associated with acid ore processing, the mobilisation led to the creation of the Rhéébù Nùù committee in 2002 (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book). The action of this grassroot organisation led to the well-known agreement between the mining company and the village communities on sustainable development in the Great South (Levacher 2017). Mines like this one sit at the heart of identity claims, at specific sites where indigenous issues intersect with wage demands, health concerns and environmental issues – all associated with mines. The social movements around the construction of the Koniambo plant had a less obvious connection to environmental issues and were more related to land tenure claims from local Kanak communities (Kowasch 2012). The North Province administration controlled by a pro-independence party devised the North plant as a way to increase the economic revenues of the province, giving it a different status with local Kanak residents. In both cases nevertheless, because Kanak identities are profoundly embedded within a sense of place and history, environmental and economic transformation from mining cannot be disconnected from a holistic change in social relationships and the territorial belongings of Kanak communities.

In other locations, communities can remain distant from mining pollution issues, either because they are far from mine sites or because specific interests impede this type of issue from emerging. The most emblematic case is certainly the Société le Nickel (SLN) plant located in Doniambo, a smelter bordering downtown Nouméa, where air and marine pollution (linked in particular to the backfill works carried out in the harbour and the discharge of pollutant gases) are minimised by the SLN and public authorities to reduce public concern. In this context, a handful of local NGOs venture to expose and oppose the production of air pollution by powerful actors like SLN. One of the main local NGOs, Ensemble Pour La Planète (EPLP), has invested heavily in mobilising against pollution across the territory and has denounced collusion between industry and government that allows heavily polluting activities to continue. EPLP, as a federation of local NGOs, is currently the most dynamic structure in terms of its ability to bring issues to court or to mobilise the media on environmental concerns.

Nature conservation policies have been shaped in rather different ways, because they have involved a wider range of expatriate experts (researchers, civil servants, community activists) and with an under-representation of local people, whether of European origin or Kanak.

It is in this field of conservation issues that New Caledonia has the greatest number of organisations, either local or international. Since the creation in 1965 of the first environmental association in New Caledonia, the New Caledonian Ornithological Society, naturalist organisations have multiplied, and their fields of intervention have also increased, spreading from ornithology to larger issues such as mangrove conservation, land restoration, etc. International organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Conservation International (CI, present since 1996) and the Pew Charitable Trusts have in recent years set up branches in New Caledonia and today have a leading role in financing biodiversity conservation policies and managing or monitoring protected habitats or species. The intervention of global NGOs at the local level on the islands is not without friction and controversies. CI's role in New Caledonia is maybe one of the most telling of these tensions, which are largely shaped by questions of belonging and legitimacy. It is active on different topics, such as control of invasive species (see Chap. 3 by Isnard and Jaffré in this book) and coastal management. It is also invested in more localised actions, in which alliances

[5]Magali Reinert, "En Nouvelle-Calédonie, la biodiversité sacrifiée sur l'autel du nickel", 12 October 2016.

[6]Fabrice Colin, Senior Researcher, French Research Institute for Sustainable Development, personal communication, June 2017.

with local communities can be decisive for the success of its projects. In some cases, such as in the Mount Panié Reserve (North Province), CI has been able to strengthen its links with a local association, Dayu Biik, which manages the protected area. It partly funds the organisation, which recently decided to prohibit tourists from entering the reserve and to stop its collaboration with scientists who used to conduct research there. In other cases, such as on Ouvéa Island (Loyalty Islands Province), customary authorities revoked the ability of CI to operate, after they discovered that CI was setting up a trilateral agreement between Ouvéa's authorities, CI and a Swiss cosmetics company that would give the latter bioprospecting rights (anonymous, personal communication). Global NGOs' capacity for action and even their presence in New Caledonia is therefore largely affected by legitimacy issues in a context where environmental issues are closely connected to economic and identity politics.

## 2.3 Three Provinces and One Territory

The second level of tension in environmental policies is found between the provincial governments and the New Caledonian territory government. The Nouméa Accord helped to reduce political tensions, in particular through the creation of three provinces with large political autonomy. Two of them (North Province and Loyalty Province) are governed by pro-independence parties, and one (South Province) is controlled by the anti-independence party.

The provinces have autonomy over laws and regulations regarding terrestrial and coastal environments, for which each province has its own environmental code. But in this context of provincialisation, divergent philosophies regarding environmental policy orientations and the logic of integration of local populations are emerging (David 2015). The South Province code is, for instance, almost identical to the French code, which is notoriously poor in measures to enable public participation. Comparatively, the government of the North Province has introduced some more elements of community involvement. And the code of the Loyalty Islands Province has reversed the order of priorities between scientific expertise and local expectations.[7] The creation of protected areas there, for example, is only possible on the basis of community initiative. Similarly, new articles of the code that have been voted in 2023 give certain species (and specifically sharks and sea turtles that have special significance in Kanak societies) the status of legal subjects.

There is, therefore, a real move towards decentralisation at the provincial level, with the aim of accommodating different political orientations in New Caledonia. But at the same time, this decentralisation process is confronted with competing logics that seek to frame environmental policy at the territory level. For instance, the management of emblematic and marine species such as turtles (*Cheloniidae* and *Dermochelyidae*) and dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) has justified the creation of countrywide action plans involving local authorities, NGOs, scientists and the provinces, with the rationale that the population of those species range over provincial boundaries. But this does not necessarily mean that all stakeholders participating in the action plans have the same vision about management options for these species. Should the plan target Kanak people that have historically hunted these animals for customary ceremonies? Or should actions be focused on nonprofessional sailors and fishermen in the greater Nouméa region, who constitute the largest anthropogenic pressure on the marine environment? (see Chap. 5 by Sabinot et al. in this book) On these questions, the North and Loyalty Provinces on the one hand and the South Province (generally backed by NGOs) on the other hand have divergent answers even though they are all engaged in the action plans.

These provincial differences also affect other issues of concern. Among them, one of particular importance is the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) policies developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (signed in 1992 with the ABS policies adopted in 2010 under the Nagoya Protocol of the CBD). These require any entity wishing to collect and/or use biological resources to obtain prior agreement from communities that own, use or possess associated knowledge linked to these resources. The identification of these communities is in itself a complex subject (Robinson and Forsyth 2016), especially when they straddle different jurisdictions, as with the three provinces. The legal framework is complicated in the New Caledonian case because although the provinces have authority over the use of natural resources, the associated knowledge legally falls under the government of New Caledonia, which has not yet introduced any law or regulation on this matter.

Another important topic has been the classification of the New Caledonian lagoon as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (see Fig. 2.1). This also highlighted the tensions between the levels of government.[8] New Caledonia's nomination had identified, on the basis of ecological criteria, six separated protected marine areas spread over the three provinces. But UNESCO required these areas to be managed by a single structure, explaining that one UNESCO site could not be properly run by three different authorities. This led to the creation of the Conservatory of Natural Areas (*Conservatoire d'espaces naturels; CEN*), which has since been in charge of the management of the six areas.

[7] Délibération n° 2016–13/API of 6 April 2016 concerning the adoption of the environmental legislation of the Loyalty Islands Province. *Journal officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 23 June 2016.

[8] NGO administrative and Government officers, personal communication, October 2017.

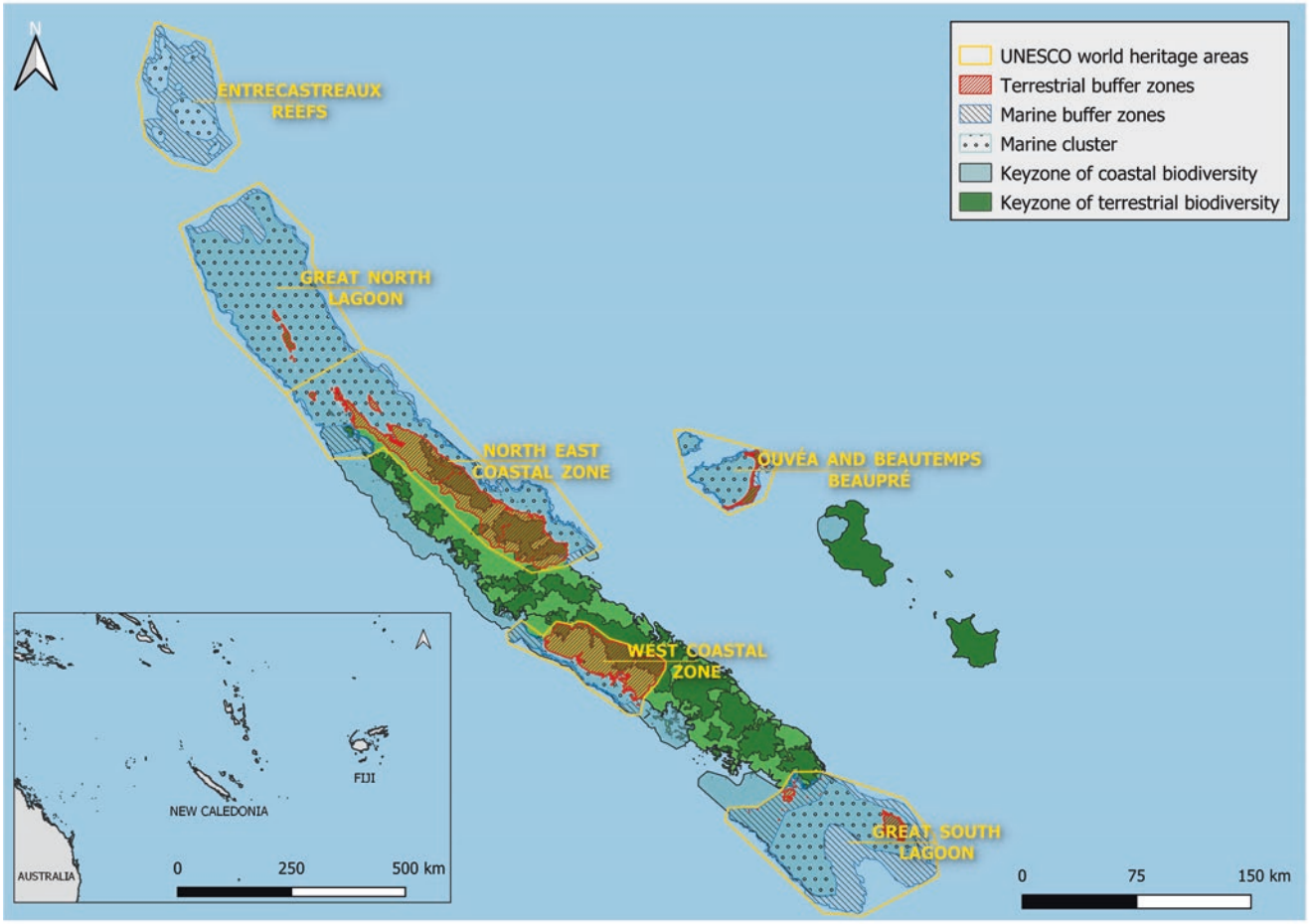


**Fig. 2.1** UNESCO World Heritage Sites in New Caledonia. (Source: https://georep.nc/, cartography: Eibl 2022)

In recent years the CEN has broadened its scope by including other domains of action at the country level, including the conservation of endangered dry forests (*forêts sèches*), the battle against invasive alien species, an action plan for dugong and the coordination of the local committee of IFRECOR (French Coral Reef Initiative). According to some inside observers, the CEN is an organisation whose added value lies in its ability to provide coherence in the policies it implements countrywide, an ability that the provinces do not have. For others, on the contrary, the CEN is merely a structure in charge of issues that the provinces do not want to deal with.

## 2.4 The Island

The third scale concerns the island level, understood as the New Caledonian archipelago in this case. Islands terrestrial habitats are characterised by a strong level of isolation. In this context, the ability to restrict or cordon off remote islands from humans (Dalmas et al. 2016), animals or plants is controlled by a limited number of actors with a disproportionate weight in relation to the entire population. This was illustrated by the cancellation of travel to New Caledonia as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. Here, ecological dynamics intersected with political and economic strategies to create an "isolationist ideology", even though the materiality of the isolation was undermined by existing global flows and networks that structurally include the movement of goods, people, animals, plants and even biogeochemical elements (such as plastic debris on beaches) that prevent the archipelago from being an isolated space, regardless of political viewpoints and projects (Maes and Blanke 2015).

The fight against invasive species is an issue that illustrates this point. It is widely recognised among biodiversity conservation policy specialists that the introduction of alien species poses risks to native species, in particular for oceanic islands (Beauvais et al. 2006). In practice, however, the current global "melting pot of biodiversity", that is, the global mix of species found on any particular place (Kull et al. 2013) makes it particularly difficult to control movements (natural or anthropogenic) and to clean up a local habitat from external elements.

In general, invasive species management policies must combine strictly ecological factors with technical data on the feasibility of these management methods and even more so with the potential economic or social interests that these species represent. In New Caledonia, the Sunda sambar (*Cervus timorensis*) is emblematic of these cross-cutting issues. Introduced on the island in 1870, the population of this deer species is today around several hundred thousand individuals and spreads over the entire main island, which makes its eradication technically impossible.[9] The species causes extensive damage to forests, leading to increased erosion. As such, it is the subject of an old policy of population control through hunting. A jaw bonus system has been in place since 2008. But the paradox is that deer are now subject of appropriation by Caledonians, in which deer hunting stands as a heritage practice. Deer eradication is therefore not only technically impracticable but also socially impossible, especially since deer hunting largely transcends community divisions and constitutes one of the practices shared by all Caledonians.

At the other extreme, one anopheles mosquito species, a malaria vector, was introduced in New Caledonia in 2017, probably through the importation of exotic plants (bamboo) for the local market. The country had never had a population of this mosquito species and was therefore malaria-free, although the disease is found in nearby countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu). Despite the health alert issued early after the mosquito was detected, the measures taken by the authorities have not been able to eradicate the mosquito population. In August 2018, the mosquito was found in different regions of the main island, a situation that makes its eradication extremely difficult. To date the spreading of malaria has been restrained, but there is a risk that New Caledonia will have to introduce health policies to manage malaria in the future, at very high cost, thanks to economic vested interests that broke the isolation policies put in place in New Caledonia (Pol et al. 2018).

## 2.5 Their Sea of Islands

The strategies deployed by New Caledonian actors in marine environmental policies differ from the terrestrial ones. In the marine domain, more than on land where the material dimension of indigeneity is more obvious, the logic of action at the ocean scale seems self-evident. Ecological connectivity processes are particularly pronounced (Olds et al. 2016), and population movements are historically significant (Hau'ofa 1994). This Pacific scale is nevertheless seen by most New Caledonian decision-makers as a complex level in which the territory is both seeking a regional legitimacy and a French exclusivity.

The role New Caledonia has played in the creation of very large marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Pacific Ocean is a case in point. While big MPAs were almost non-existent before 2010 (except in the form of small coastal marine protected areas) the last decade has seen an explosion of MPAs at the global scale but especially in the Pacific region. In 2023, the Pacific Region nests 21 of the largest MPAs (more than 100,000 square kilometres) that together account for 12.5 million square kilometres (of the 27 million protected worldwide). In this context, the creation of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea in 2014 was part of an oceanic dynamic. It served as a strategic instrument for France (which was seeking to catch up to the Aichi objectives set by the CBD, of reaching 10% of marine areas protected) and for New Caledonia (which saw this park as an important lever for regional cooperation).

The park covers the entire EEZ but not the territorial waters (and therefore not the coastline) and as such affects relatively few stakeholders. But the management committee set up as the main governance body of the park is nevertheless inclusive, bringing together administrative authorities, socio-economic actors, environmental associations and customary authorities. The management committee had to formulate a management plan during the first years of the park and it was finally validated in 2018. But this plan remains very broad and without specific goals and means.

Nine years after its creation, the park is still in a development phase. Its administrative staff is limited (and depends on a small team within the Department of Maritime Affairs), its management means on the ground is non-existent (and depends on other agencies: army, provinces and government) and the management plan (2018-2022) does not provide specific budget or action measures. The park has nevertheless implemented some conservation mesasures in the last years. Several reserves were created in 2018, covering 2.3% of the park's surface area, extended to 10% in 2023. These reserves with high level of protection aim at protecting remote coral reefs and seamounts from fishing and tourism.

The park therefore has a double characteristic that distinguishes it from other environmental measures in New Caledonia. On the one hand, it comprises a very broad governance body associated with an area covering almost all New Caledonia's seas. As such, it is a management structure that can have a say in all actions carried out by public authorities, the private sector and individuals in the maritime domain. The park can serve as a platform for stakeholders to organise and manage activities at sea, thus almost being an instrument of marine spatial planning. On the other hand, the governance of the park is, in practice, restricted to the repre-

[9]François Tron, Head of CI New Caledonia, personal communication, December 2017.

sentatives and/or leaders of the various stakeholders and does not have mechanisms for the participation of New Caledonian populations. The public consultation conducted in 2017 through some 50 meetings throughout the country received only 250 opinions.[10] This lack of participation is compounded by a lack of capacity, both in terms of monitoring and control of the MPA and in terms of public awareness. In short, the park encompasses the whole of New Caledonia's maritime region – stakeholders and spaces – but does not have the capacity to develop further, due to shallow participation mechanisms and lack of resources.

In this context of great uncertainties surrounding the park's long-term funding, the government and conservation NGOs are seeking to position the park in the international project-based funding networks that dominate the world of development aid. To this end, the strategy devised in Nouméa is to present the park as a special asset that distinguishes it from other MPAs and, more generally, from other marine environments in the Pacific. The first element of this rhetoric was forged from scientific data showing that New Caledonia's coral reefs were in relatively good condition at the global scale (Cinner et al. 2018), and suggesting that while "pristine" reefs accounted for only 1.5% of all tropical reefs, New Caledonia alone hosted one-third of them.[11] This information, demonstrating New Caledonia's exceptionality, spread quickly through the media and into political domains. The government has since organised its communication strategy around New Caledonia's ecological wealth and the potential it represents in economic terms (marine ecotourism, advanced maritime industries, etc.), promoting it as a "biodiversity research hotspot".[12] The change from ecological narratives to economic ones is unsurprising, but what is more specific to New Caledonia is the shift in places and scales, where terrestrial biodiversity richness (exceptional but strongly impacted, as shown earlier) is now engulfed by marine biodiversity (important but not exceptional compared to the coral environments of Southeast Asia) (Payri 2018). This aim here is to display New Caledonia as distinctive, compared to its geographical or ecological neighbours. A question is whether this assertion of natural biodiversity richness, boosted by the establishment of the MPA, is part of an isolationist ideology that diminishes regional cooperation and the importance of transoceanic movements.

## 2.6 France at the End?

There are close ties between the strong bond New Caledonia has with France and the limited involvement it has across the Pacific region. A narrative about the unique features of the New Caledonian environment illustrates this. The attachment to France has been considered essential by all governments of New Caledonia over the last three decades and during the onset of institutional process of self-determination (Maclellan 2018). The environmental sector is dominated by French advisors, technicians and scientists, despite the transfer of skills that New Caledonia has seen over the past 20 years. In the maritime domain, while the government of New Caledonia has authority over the exploration, exploitation and conservation of natural resources in the EEZ, France retains powers over the exploitation of "strategic resources", and of policing in all domains, including the control of international vessels and, among them, the "blue boats" that fish illegally in New Caledonian waters.

The power of France's presence in all the oceans of the globe and the size of its global EEZ give it particular power, especially in the South Pacific.[13] As long as New Caledonia remains dependent on France, geopolitical strategies developed in Paris cover the assertion of maritime military capacity, MPAs and their control and the potential to exploit seabed mining resources.

Here, as with other scalar politics presented in this chapter, environmental issues, far from being merely ecological subjects, are heavily dependent on the political strategies and tactics of various New Caledonian actors who play on scales – communal, provincial, New Caledonian, Oceanian and French – like fish in a water column.

Ecological rationality cannot be dissociated from political rationality in the privileging of particular scales of environmental governance. Technical management of environmental issues and outcomes is doomed to failure if the multi-layered political nature of the natural environment of New Caledonia and its waters is not recognised. This is particularly true in the specific context of a highly fragmented society embarked on process of independence.

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# What Makes New Caledonia's Flora So Outstanding?

3

Sandrine Isnard and Tanguy Jaffré

**Abstract**

This chapter explores the main characteristics of New Caledonian plant biodiversity, and provides a condensed picture of the major unique elements of its flora. We present the results of recent research conducted in a territory that has much to contribute to science and society. We explore the original and unique representation of some plant lineages and functional groups, as well as the rich and diversified vegetation.

**Keywords**

Biodiversity hotspot · Endemism · Island flora · New Caledonia · Ultramafic vegetation

## 3.1 Introduction

New Caledonia is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating regions for many botanists. The territory harbours a highly diverse and endemic flora with approximately 3400 autochthonous vascular species, of which 75.5% are endemics (i.e. species that occur nowhere else) (Morat et al. 2012; Munzinger et al. 2022). Ultramafic substrates, that is, metal-rich and nutrient-poor soils with chemical and physical properties that constrain plant growth, have strongly influenced the exceptional endemism and richness found in New Caledonia (Isnard et al. 2016). When global endemism is compared to other regional flora, New Caledonia is ranked third after Hawaii (89%) and New Zealand (82–89%). The distinctiveness of New Caledonia rests on the concentration of endemism and richness (Schmid 1982) found in a relatively small surface area (ca. 19,000 km$^2$). The archipelago is also remarkable for harbouring three endemic families (Amborellaceae, Phellinaceae and Oncothecaceae) (Fig. 3.1) and a high number of endemic genera, currently estimated between 62 and 91 (Munzinger et al. 2022; Pillon et al. 2017). New Caledonia is also rich in relict lineages, that is, remnant plant species from a large group where most taxa are now extinct, leading several authors to recognize New Caledonia as a phytogeographic unit ("region" (Guillaumin 1934) or "sub-kingdom" (Takhtajan 1969)). Despite geographic proximity, floristic affinities with Vanuatu are relatively low (Schmid 1990), possibly because of their recent proximity and their edaphic divergence (Mueller-Dombois and Fosberg 1998; Schmid 1990). Analyses of floristic affinities (Morat et al. 1994; Mueller-Dombois and Fosberg 1998), supported by phylogenies (Barrabé et al. 2014; Swenson et al. 2014; Thomas et al. 2014; Turner et al. 2013), have identified Australia and then New Guinea and the geographic area of *Flora Malesiana* as the most likely origin for a substantial proportion of the New Caledonian flora.

New Caledonia is also recognized as a major hotspot of terrestrial biodiversity, because of its high endemism but also because of the threats to habitats, as more than 70% of the original vegetation has been lost (Myers et al. 2000). This recognition of a unique biological heritage should drive greater protection of natural habitats, as highlighted by Ibanez et al. (2019), to reduce the impact of anthropogenic activities on natural resources.

Some of the most threatened formations unique worldwide are maquis (a non-forest vegetation on ultramafic substrates), areas of dry forest and the relics of rainforest on ultramafic substrates (which are also sources of nickel, chromium and cobalt from peridotite and serpentinite rocks) (Bouchet et al. 1995; Ibanez et al. 2019; Jaffré et al. 2010).

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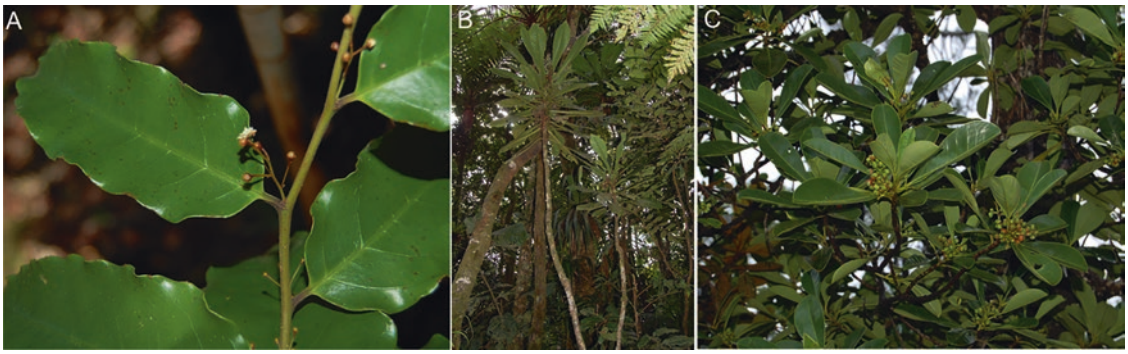


**Fig. 3.1** The three endemic families of New Caledonia. (**a**) *Amborella trichopoda* (Amborellaceae); (**b**) *Phelline macrophylla* (Phellinaceae); (**c**) *Oncotheca humboldtiana* (Oncothecaceae)

Climate change could affect species richness in New Caledonia as indicated by a recent study estimated that 87–96% of species could decline by 2070 and up to 15% could become extinct (Pouteau and Birnbaum 2016).

## 3.2 A Complex Geological and Biota History

The floristic richness and particularly the supposed archaism of the New Caledonian biota have long been interpreted as a Gondwanan heritage (Holloway 1979; Morat 1993; Mueller-Dombois and Fosberg 1998). However, newer geological evidence demonstrates a complete marine submersion of New Caledonia for a long period of time, after the fragmentation and rifting of Zealandia from Gondwana (Maurizot and Campbell 2020; Pelletier 2006). The main island of New Caledonia (Grande Terre) was completely submerged between 75 and 60 Ma. The landmass is older than 25 Ma, as attested by geological evidence. Emergent land areas probably existed in the Southwest Pacific from 60 to 34 Ma, possibly including some locations on Grande Terre, suggesting a plausible scenario of re-colonization from short- and/or long-distance plant dispersal (Maurizot and Campbell 2020). Overthrusting of oceanic mantle (obduction) occurred at 34 Ma and gave rise to the ultramafic bedrock that, after erosion and fragmentation, covers today about one-third of the surface area (including the Belep Islands and the Isle of Pines). This geological scenario is congruent with recent molecular dating of the crown age of several lineages (Barrabé et al. 2014; Grandcolas et al. 2008; Maurizot and Campbell 2020; Murienne et al. 2005; Nattier et al. 2017; Pillon 2012; Swenson et al. 2014). The geological and biotic history of Grande Terre is certainly more complex than previously thought, and future research on past events will hopefully shed light on the remaining grey areas. The Loyalty Islands are much younger and lower islands, composed of recent uplifted carbonate platform deposits, whose first emergence date back to the Pliocene (Maurizot and Campbell 2020). The flora of Loyalty Islands is relatively poor (ca. 400 species) compared to the main island, with a small number of endemic species (25–30 species) (Schmid 1969).

## 3.3 Phylogenetic Originalities of the Flora

### 3.3.1 The Emblematic Conifers

The archipelago hosts 47 conifer species (for a total of ca. 650 worldwide), in 13 genera and 4 families (Munzinger et al. 2022), representing 7% of conifers species worldwide. An astonishingly high proportion of conifer species are, however, threatened with extinction (Farjon and Page 1999; Jaffré et al. 2010). Conifers are clearly among the most emblematic trees of New Caledonia, especially the genus *Agathis* ("kaori") (5 species) and *Araucaria* (14 species out of 20 worldwide) with *Araucaria columnaris* ("Pin colonnaire"), a symbolic tree for the Kanak, producing famous picture-postcard landscapes. The tallest harvested trees reached 60 m on Lifou Island (Schmid 1981). All conifer species are endemics, often narrow endemics (Jaffré 1995) (i.e. occurring in one or widely separated small populations; Drury (1980)). By virtue of their high richness and local abundance in some forests and maquis on ultramafic soils, conifers are emblematic of this substrate in New Caledonia. Most species are indeed distributed on ultramafic rocks (Jaffré et al. 2010). Although they constitute only one-third of the surface of the Grande Terre, these soils are home to 42 conifer species, that is, more than 93% of the species, of which 28 species (62% of the total) are strictly soil endemics.

Among the remarkable examples of conifers found in the island are the unique parasitic species of gymnosperm: *Parasitaxus usta* (Farjon and Page 1999; Feild and Brodribb 2005). The oldest tree so far dated in New Caledonia is an *Agathis ovata* ("mountain kaori") whose age has been estimated at over 1500 years for a 97-cm-diameter tree

(Enright et al. 2003). Some New Caledonian conifers are also notable for their slow growth. Plant height and diameter (at breath height) growth rate for *Araucaria goroensis* (previously confused with *A. muelleri*) are among the slowest recorded for any tree species (Enright et al. 2014). Some Araucariaceae species are long-lived, slow-growing trees and show long-term persistence in environments ranging from maquis to forest, where they emerge above the canopy (Rigg et al. 2010).

The ascription of the "relictual" or "Gondwanian" attribute to the New Caledonia flora is based, at least in part, on the high concentration of conifers (Jaffré 1995), this group being sister to the more recently derived angiosperms. Conifers indeed dominated the world before the emergence of angiosperms in the Cretaceous. Recent studies, however, indicate that some groups, like *Araucaria*, diversified recently in New Caledonia (Gaudeul et al. 2012; Pillon 2012; Setoguchi et al. 1998).

The rapid diversification of Araucariaceae species may be the result of adaptive radiation of forest conifers on ultramafic substrates in open conditions (Enright et al. 2014; Setoguchi et al. 1998). Conifers succeed and dominate in many habitats, not only where their competitors, angiosperms, have low tolerance and reduced competitive ability (Brodribb et al. 2012). In New Caledonia, with the exception of a few shade-tolerant Podocarp species, most of the species belonging to *Araucaria*, *Agathis*, *Podocarpus*, *Dacrydium* and *Callitris* genera grow in conditions exposed to wind and light, often on the steep slopes of the ultramafic massifs (Jaffré 1995). In some forests on ultramafic soils, conifer species (e.g. *Araucaria* and *Agathis*) may form part of the canopy or are present as emergent. Some species also form emergent layers in the maquis, producing an unusual structural association. Because of their growth dynamics in their ability to develop in full sun, *Araucaria* species are good candidates for the recovery of areas that have been destroyed by fires (Rigg et al. 2010).

### 3.3.2 Basal Angiosperm and Relictual Lineages

Relicts, or the so-called left behind, are species or groups of species remaining from larger and/or more widespread group of organisms in which most taxa are now extinct (Grandcolas et al. 2008). A quirky characteristic of the New Caledonian flora is the diversity of relictual lineages and the presence of numerous early branching lineages, due to their phylogenetic positions (hereafter called "basal angiosperms"). Even if they are not primitive per se, the study of basal angiosperms can provide insightful information for understanding the early stages of flowering plant evolution. Together with relictual lineages, they also constitute good models to understand the biogeography and history of the regional flora.

The most famous lineage of basal angiosperms is represented by *Amborella trichopoda* belonging to the endemic and monospecific family of Amborellaceae. Molecular phylogenetic studies indicated that this species is the only extant member of the sister group to all other living flowering plants (APG 2016), and its lineage has been estimated to be at least 160 Ma, in the Early Cretaceous (140–180 My ago) (AmborellaGenomeProject 2013). Considered a "witness of the past" (Poncet et al. 2019), *Amborella* has been the subject of intense studies from a wide range of disciplines (Pillon and Munzinger 2005), since the origin of angiosperms, famously characterized by Charles Darwin as "an abominable mystery", continue to fuel debates.

In New Caledonia, basal angiosperms are represented by 109 species (90% are endemics) distributed in 22 genera and 10 families (Trueba 2016). Relictual lineages can also be found in other parts of the angiosperm phylogeny. The fact that many endemic genera (26–35, Pillon et al. 2017) are monospecific and most of them have few species is suggestive of declining lineages and extinction events inside formerly diverse clades. This relictual diversity is illustrated by several lineages, such as the mono-generic *Strasburgeria* which is thought to have been widely distributed in the Antarctic region in the early Eocene (Contreras et al. 2013). Other potential examples include the endemic monospecific genera *Paracryphia* (Paracryphiaceae), *Nemuaron* (Atherospermataceae), *Platyspermation* (Alseuosmiaceae) and *Phelline* (Phellinaceae).

## 3.4 Major Radiations and Diversification

A conspicuous feature of many islands is the phenomenon of "adaptive radiation" that implies the diversification of ecological roles, and attendant array of morphological and physiological attributes, from a single colonizer (Givnish et al. 2014). New Caledonia has few examples of dramatic adaptive radiation (Pillon et al. 2017). The largest genera of New Caledonia, in terms of species numbers, are *Phyllanthus* with 108 species, *Psychotria* with 83 species and *Syzygium* with 68 species (Morat et al. 2012; Munzinger et al. 2022). The monophyly (a common ancestor) of these genera is however doubtful (Barrabé et al. 2014; Biffin et al. 2006; Kathriarachchi et al. 2006). To our knowledge, very few examples of adaptive radiation have been highlighted in New Caledonia, and these concern the genus *Geissois* (Cunoniaceae) related to diversification of biochemical strategies on different soils (Pillon et al. 2014) and in the genus *Oxera* (Lamiaceae), where niche shift has been associated with pollination, dispersal and life form traits (Barrabé et al. 2018).

The paucity of large adaptive radiation in New Caledonia is attributed to the fact that the flora is essentially woody. In addition, the age of the main island increases the probability of extinction and colonization within the same groups, along with competition with new migrant species.

## 3.5 Functional and Taxonomic Disharmony

Disharmony is a key concept in island biology that describes the biased representation of higher taxa on islands compared to their mainland source regions. Generally, the disharmony results from taxa having differential colonization success (i.e. selective dispersal) and environmental and/or biotic filtering. As in many island systems, the flora of New Caledonia is strongly disharmonic, with some groups being predominant. In New Caledonia, the disharmony of the flora is often attributed to ultramafic soil conditions, which would have favoured the settlement and diversification of some pre-adapted plant groups (Jaffré et al. 1987; Pillon et al. 2010), while dispersal limitation would have played a less important role (Pillon et al. 2010). Adaptation to ultramafic soils is associated with drought stress, nutrient limitation and high levels of potentially phytotoxic metal, all major sources of stress in ultramafic environments (Isnard et al. 2016; Kazakou et al. 2008). The archipelago is recognized as a hotspot for plants growing on metal-rich soils, as more than 70% of the endemic flora and 63% of species occur on these ultramafic soils (Isnard et al. 2016). The chemical and physical adversity of ultramafic soils has driven some plants into spectacular transformations, remarkably illustrated by the evolution of trace element hyperaccumulation (Jaffré et al. 2018; Paul et al. 2020). The word "hyperaccumulator" was introduced in a publication reporting the extraordinary accumulation of nickel in *Pycnandra accuminata* (formerly *Sebertia*), a New Caledonian endemic tree (Jaffré et al. 1976). The famous "blue sap" species accumulates an astonishing 20–25% nickel in its latex, which is coloured blue-green from nickel complexes. The extremely high level of Ni tolerance is posited to derive from the unique properties and large volume of laticifers (Isnard et al. 2020). The over-representation of groups associated with ultramafic soils might also have been accentuated by the evolution of metal accumulation syndrome in many lineages. A recent study, carried out on herbarium specimens (Herbarium of New Caledonia, NOU), confirmed that New Caledonia is a global hotspot for hyperaccumulator plants, as 3–4% of the dicotyledonous flora are Ni hyperaccumulators (Gei et al. 2020). This represents a strong functional disharmony, compared to other regional or worldwide flora.

Ultramafic substrates are not the only driver of the disharmony in the New Caledonian flora, however. The prevalence of several relictual rainforest lineages has been attributed to a preference for this habitat, and their persistence in climatic refugia, protected from recent major climate-driven extinction events, which have otherwise affected Australia and some nearby South Pacific islands more strongly (Byrne et al. 2011; Pouteau et al. 2015). Several regions of the Pacific where relict angiosperms are also abundant are also recognized as having rainforests that persisted during the late Quaternary through glacial refugia such as in Southeast Asia, New Guinea and Queensland (Byrne et al. 2011; Wurster et al. 2010). The rainforest refugia at the last glacial maximum (LGM, around 23,000–18,000 years BP) of relict angiosperms (Pouteau et al. 2015), including *Amborella* (Poncet et al. 2013), coincide with refugia proposed for palms (Pintaud et al. 2001). The last glacial maximum has been shown to shape the population dynamics of *Amborella trichopoda* and to impact their present intra-specific genetic structure. In New Caledonia, the almost exclusive rainforest distribution of basal angiosperms is explained by wood (xylem) vulnerability to drought-induced embolism (Trueba et al. 2017). Another recently discovered example of functional disharmony concerns the unbranched woody plants (i.e. monocaulous plants or "palm-like") (Bruy et al. 2018). This growth habit, which has been previously described by botanists studying the New Caledonian flora (Schmid 1990; Veillon 1976), represents ca. 9% of woody flora, belonging to 41 genera, 30 families thus representing an important phylogenetic diversity and a new case of convergent evolution on islands (Bruy et al., unp.data).

## 3.6 Principal Vegetation Types

The vegetation of New Caledonia has been described by numerous authors (Jaffré 2022a; Jaffré et al. 2012; Morat et al. 1981; Mueller-Dombois and Fosberg 1998; Virot 1956). The following treatment is based on the last synthesis of these works, published in the Atlas of New Caledonia (Jaffré et al. 2012) (Fig. 3.2).

The landscape is a mosaic of secondary vegetation (c. 50%); low- to mid-elevation shrublands or "maquis" found on ultramafic substrates (c. 25%), including ca. 50 km$^2$ of wetland and marshes of the Plaine des Lacs; and another quarter of low- to mid-elevation rainforests growing on various substrates. There is also ca. 1% of montane rainforests and shrublands found above 800 m. This mosaic also includes few relictual patches of dry sclerophyllous forests scattered along the west coast on volcano-sedimentary rocks.

The floristic diversity of New Caledonia is unevenly distributed over less than two-thirds of the archipelago, mainly in forests and maquis on ultramafic rocks. On the basis of their very contrasting floristic compositions, two main types of vegetation can be distinguished. Vegetation is dominated by introduced species with very few endemics, referred to as "modified vegetation" and vegetation termed "autochthonous

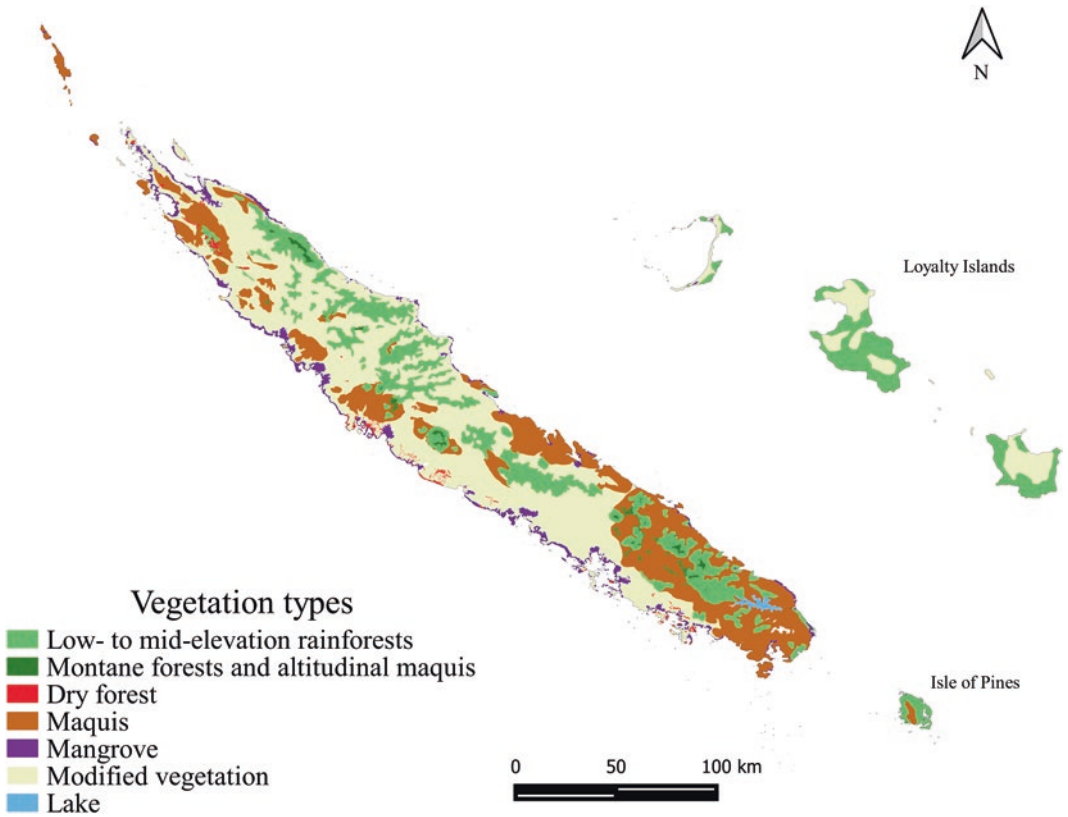


**Fig. 3.2** Simplified vegetation map illustrating the main vegetation types. (Modified from Jaffré et al. 2012)

vegetation", whose flora is mostly composed of native species with a high proportion of endemic species. The frequency and distribution of vegetation result from a dynamic process particularly influenced by human activities (Ibanez et al. 2013; Morat et al. 1981; Stevenson et al. 2001).

### 3.6.1 The Modified Vegetation

The modified vegetation contributes poorly to the diversity and originality of the flora but comprises species traditionally used by local populations for various practices related to traditional medicine as well as domestic purposes (Lormée et al. 2011; Rageau and Schmid 1973). The modified vegetation covers about 7000 km$^2$, more than one-third of the Archipelago, and mostly includes savannas and secondary thickets, with a total of ca. 400 native species of vascular plants and an endemic rate of only 11% (Jaffré et al. 2009). Less than five endemic species are found exclusively in this vegetation type. A significant proportion of the 2000 inventoried introduced species occurs in the modified vegetation (Hequet et al. 2009), including about 360 naturalized species. Some species that frequently dominate the secondary thickets, "Lantana" (*Lantana camara*), "Goyavier" (*Psidium guajava*) and "False mimosa" (*Leucaena leucocephala*), are very prolific and competitive in degraded habitats and described as invasive because of their wide coverage and ecological and/or socio-economic impacts (Meyer et al. 2006).

Widely represented from sea level to 600–700 m, except on ultramafic substrate, savannas are characterized by a continuous grass layer with a discontinuous shrub or tree cover, most often the autochthonous "niaouli" (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*). The expansion of the modified vegetation results from the destruction of an initial vegetation cover, since human arrivals from about 3000 year BP, under the effect of repeated fires as well as clearing for crops and livestock (Ibanez 2012; Schroers and Tron 2013; Virot 1956). The process of expansion and contraction of forests and savannas is principally driven by bush fires, locally depending on climate, humidity, wind strength and direction, and the quantity of combustible plant matter (fuel) (Ibanez et al. 2013). *Pinus caribaea*, introduced in the 1960s in New Caledonia for timber exploitation, has now a distribution that exceeds areas used for forestry. This species frequently invades modified vegetation (savanna and maquis) and is considered as one of the most threatening non-native species (Hequet et al. 2009; Kohler 1984).

### 3.6.2 Natural Vegetation

#### 3.6.2.1 Low- to Mid-Elevation Rainforests on Various Substrates

Rainforests on ultramafic substrates are a unique ecosystem and under severe threat with more than 75% of the original cover already destroyed (Jaffré et al. 1998). Forests survive as scarce remnant fragments scattered in a matrix of maquis (Mc Coy et al. 1999) (Fig. 3.3c). Most forest fragments are under direct threat from mining activity (Ibanez et al. 2017b, 2019). Forests on volcano-sedimentary rocks on the east coast are principally threatened by fire, clearing and introduced species (deer, pig and *Pinus caribaea*) (Schroers and Tron 2013).

Rainforests cover about 3900 km$^2$ in areas with mean annual rainfall between 1300 and 3500 mm (Jaffré et al. 2012). They occur at low altitude in the Loyalty Islands and the Isle of Pines and from 300 m up to 900–1000 m on the main island, where they extend discontinuously along the central mountain range. On isolated massifs, rainforests are usually confined to steep slopes and high valleys. In the southern massif, rainforests occur below 300 m where annual rainfall exceeds 1600 mm, for example, along the rivers. The dense humid forests of New Caledonia are found on acidic rock types (volcano-sedimentary and metamorphic) covering 1800 km$^2$, on ultramafic rocks covering 1200 km$^2$ and on limestone rocks covering 900 km$^2$ principally in the Loyalty Islands and Isle of Pines (Jaffré et al. 1997).

The rainforest is the richest native flora, at all taxonomic levels with ca. 2100 species of vascular plants (endemicity of 83.2%), belonging to 474 genera and 135 families (Morat et al. 2012; Munzinger et al. 2022. [continuously updated]).

Rainforests on volcano-sedimentary and ultramafic substrates, with about 1360 species and endemic rates of, respectively, 76% and 82%, are more diversified than the limestone forest that principally occurs on the Loyalty Islands and Isle of Pines and harbours only 225 species with an endemic rate of 48% (Jaffré et al. 1997). A Permanent Plot Network (NC-PIPPN) was set up in 2005 and currently consists of 220 plots of 0.04 ha) (20 × 20 m) and 21 1-ha plots, located on the main island (Birnbaum et al. 2015; Ibanez et al. 2014). The network is intensively used in ecological studies and provide a comparative framework with other regional or worldwide flora. High species richness and floristic dissimilarity recorded from the plots confirm that New Caledonian mixed rainforest is exceptionally rich (Ibanez et al. 2014; Jaffré 1993). Rainforest species exhibit a strong spatial aggregation, thought to express limited dispersal ability (Birnbaum et al. 2015). The flora on ultramafic versus volcano-sedimentary soils are dissimilar from species to

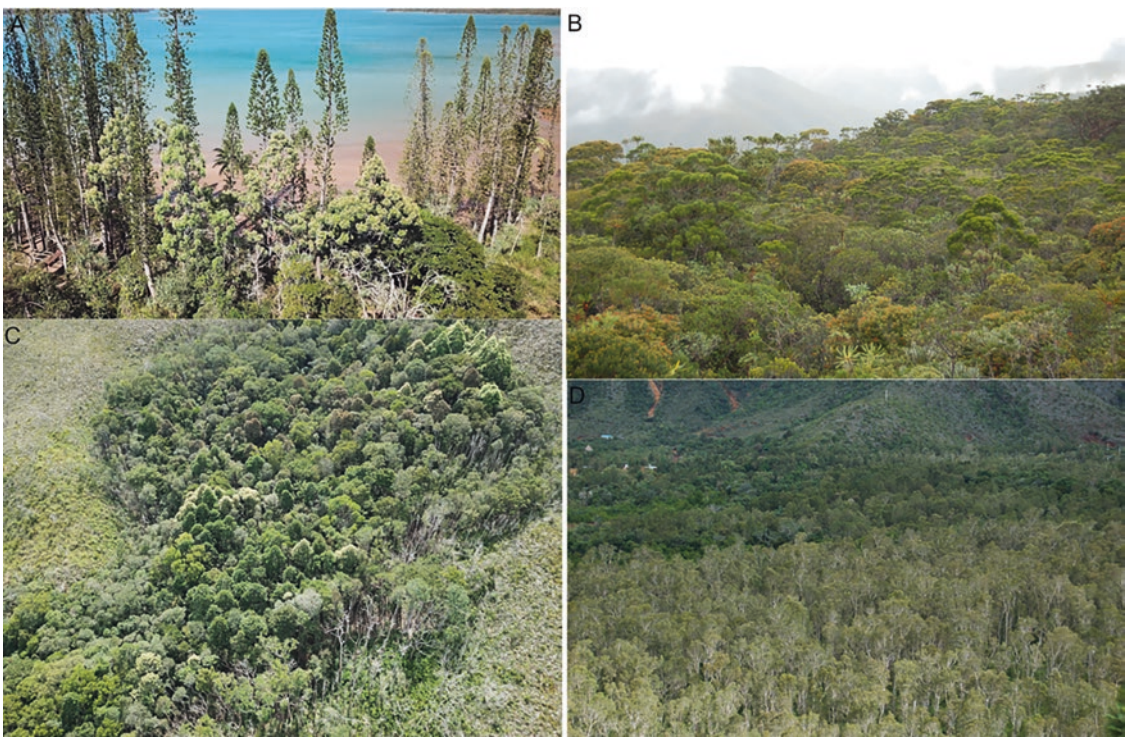


**Fig. 3.3** Illustrations of New Caledonian landscapes. (**a**) *Araucaria columnaris* ("Pin colonnaire") growing at the edge of the sea, Prony, South of Grande-Terre; (**b**) Tall maquis containing abundant *Gymnostoma deplancheanum* trees, col. de Yaté; (**c**) Remnant fragment of rain forest on ultramafic substrate scattered in a matrix of maquis and burned vegetation; (**d**) Rainforest-Savana interface, with savanna composed of *Melaleuca quinquenervia* (in the foreground), South of Grande-Terre (Thio). (Photo credit: A & C, Jean-Michel Boré, IRD)

family level (Ibanez et al. 2014), while the number of species on both substrates (ca. 1300 species) and endemicity (76–82%) is fairly similar (Jaffré et al. 1997). The presence of highly heterogeneous soils combined with altitudinal and rainfall gradients is the main driver of the floristic dissimilarity (Ibanez et al. 2014).

Large-scale disturbances (cyclone and fire) have a strong influence on the composition and structure of the forests. By producing large canopy openings, large-scale disturbances play a crucial role in regeneration dynamics. They favour some monodominant and gregarious species including *Nothofagus* spp. (*Nothofagaceae*), *Arillastrum gummiferum* (*Myrtaceae*), *Cerberiopsis candelabra* (*Apocynaceae*), *Gymnostoma deplancheanum* (*Casuarinaceae*) and *Codia mackeeana* (*Cunoniaceae*) (Demenois et al. 2017; Ibanez and Birnbaum 2014; Mc Coy et al. 1999; Read and Jaffré 2013; Read et al. 2008). These long-lived, shade-intolerant trees are commonly secondary species but appear unable to maintain dominance in the absence of disturbance at low to mid-altitudes. Progression to mixed canopy forest is predicted in the absence of disturbance (Demenois et al. 2017; Mc Coy et al. 1999; Read and Jaffré 2013), for which there is some evidence in the Quaternary pollen record (Hope and Pask 1998).

In comparison with other rainforests in the Southwest Pacific, New Caledonian rainforests exhibit high average density (1253 stems $ha^{-1}$) including abundant palms and tree ferns, with the abundance of the latter being unparalleled outside New Caledonia (Ibanez et al. 2014, 2017a). New Caledonia rainforests are also distinctive for their low mean canopy height (ca. 16 m) (Blanchard et al. 2016). The frequent tropical cyclones affecting New Caledonia explain much about the structure of its rainforest (Blanchard et al. 2016; Ibanez et al. 2017a). In these forests, lianas diversity is low, and they represent only ca. 8% of the woody autochthonous flora (Isnard and Bruy, submitted). Lianas could be disadvantaged in low canopy forests with large-scale disturbances, as their diversity is known to be maintained by small-scale disturbances (canopy gaps) and they grow preferentially in tall and heterogeneous forests.

#### 3.6.2.2 Montane Forests and Altitudinal Maquis

Maximum elevation is rarely above 1600 m, but mountain forests are found above 900–1000 m and sometimes at only 700–800 m on the windward rainy coast, where areas more than 3500–4000 mm of rain can fall per year (Nasi et al. 2002). The mountain flora of New Caledonia is characterized by a very high endemicity and by a specific richness in some original groups. Mountain maquis and low forests often have emergent conifers. Among the 47 conifer species occurring in New Caledonia, 33 extend to mountain ranges (Nasi et al. 2002). The flora, although impoverished in comparison to lower altitudinal forest, host several species of the endemic families Phellinaceae as well as most basal angiosperm lineages (Pouteau et al. 2020). The palms and tree ferns (Cyatheaceae, Dicksoniaceae) are also well represented. Climbing secondary hemi-epiphytes (e.g. *Freycinetia*) are abundant in some forests at high altitude and can replace liana whose abundance decreases with altitude, probably as a result of climate niche differentiation (Bruy et al. 2017). Some cloud forests have additional original vegetation, because of their frequent cloud presence, low light transmission, cool temperatures and reduced vapor pressure deficit (Brunijnzeel et al. 2010). The low canopy forest (6–10 m) ("forêt à mousse") has a low diversity among the angiosperms and gymnosperm flora. It is however rich in lichens, bryophytes and ferns (Hymenophyllaceae).

#### 3.6.2.3 Tropical Dry Forest

Tropical dry forests (TDF or "forêt sèche") around the world consist of various plant associations. They can be loosely defined as forest in frost-free regions with 500–2000 mm of annual rainfall and a pronounced dry season of 4–7 months (Holdridge 1971). In New Caledonia, dry forests extend across areas with average annual rainfall below 1200 mm, very commonly below 1000 mm and episodically less than 800 mm, essentially on the western side and in the northern part of the main island. Dry forest occurs on sedimentary rocks (phtanites, sandstone, various sedimentary rock layers, limestones) or more rarely on basalts (Jaffré et al. 1993). It does not occur on ultramafic rocks where the edaphic conditions exert the major influence over the floristic composition (Jaffré et al. 1993; Morat et al. 1981).

Tropical dry forest in New Caledonia is highly endangered (Gillespie et al. 2014). It has been reduced to <2% of its original extent in New Caledonia due to land clearance, cattle ranching and fire (Bouchet et al. 1995). Dry forest is also threatened by introduced species including *Leucaena leucocephala* ("faux mimosa"), *Acacia farnesiana* ("cassis"), several Poaceae and a few autochthonous species such as *Casuarina collina* ("bois de fer"), *Acacia spirorbis* ("gaïac") or *Trophis scandens* ("liane feu"), which prevent regeneration of native forest species (Bouchet et al. 1995; Jaffré et al. 2008). This critical situation led to studies of these forests, beginning in the late 1980s (Jaffré et al. 1993, 2008) and the inception in 2001 of an action programme dedicated to the preservation of dry forests ("dry forest programme") (Mansourian et al. 2018) today managed by the "Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels".[1]

The dry forests are today restricted to small, more or less degraded, forest fragments totalling about 350 $km^2$. About 350 autochthonous vascular plants have been recorded, comprising 60% of endemic species (Jaffré et al. 2012; Morat et al. 2012). These forests are strongly marked by a physiog-

[1] http://www.cen.nc/foret-seche

nomic and floristic heterogeneity, with species richness ranging between 10 and 70 species and endemicity rates ranging from 20% to 60% according to plant associations (Jaffré et al. 2008). Plant association varies with canopy openings created by the deer introduced in the 1800s, *Rusa timorensis* (De Garine-Wichatitsky et al. 2005), and the degradation or invasion by gregarious species (Gillespie et al. 2014; Jaffré et al. 2008).

Of relatively recent origin, the dry forests share major floristic affinities with Australia (Jaffré et al. 1993). Dry forests do not contain palms or conifers (Jaffré et al. 1993) and very few species belonging to basal angiosperm lineages.

New Caledonia's tropical dry forests contain significantly lower species richness than mainland tropical dry forests in biodiversity hotspots. Among Pacific islands, New Caledonia and Fiji harbour the highest native species richness followed by Hawaii, the Marianas and the Marquesas, while New Caledonia and Hawaii have the highest endemism (Gillespie and Jaffré 2003). Family composition is relatively similar to that of neotropical dry forests; however, there is no consistently dominant family of trees within Pacific dry forests. There is very little overlap at the species level among regions (Gillespie and Jaffré 2003).

#### 3.6.2.4 Maquis

In New Caledonia, the maquis refers to all non-forest vegetation on ultramafic substrates (peridotites and serpentinites). The maquis flora harbours about 1140 species of vascular plants, of which more 90% are endemic to New Caledonia (Morat et al. 2012). At least 840 species are restricted to this vegetation type, whose 96.9% are endemic (Isnard et al. 2016). The richness of the maquis is particularly remarkable considering the relatively small area covered (4300–4400 km$^2$). The soil provides an ecological barrier against most introduced species (with the exception of the Caribbean pine), and invasive introduced species do not grow spontaneously in the maquis because of edaphic constrains. Most maquis species are poor competitors and do not establish in vegetation on more fertile substrates (Jaffré 1980; Jaffré et al. 1987).

The maquis of New Caledonia is strongly heterogeneous – floristically and physiognomically – and ranges from shrubby, evergreen, sclerophyllous to cyperoid vegetation depending on soil properties (Isnard et al. 2016; Jaffré 2022a). These soils are deficient in phosphorus, potassium and calcium and frequently abnormally rich in nickel, manganese, chromium and cobalt, as well as in magnesium for serpentinite soils (Isnard et al. 2016; Jaffré 2022b). The maquis develop in climatic conditions from sea level, in the driest areas of the west coast, to the highest mountain with annual rainfall exceeding 3000 mm. The vast majority of maquis results from the destruction of forest by repeated fires, as fire facilitates the propagation of maquis species. Palynological studies, carried out on the southern plateau of Grande Terre, revealed that natural fires have been widespread on the island over at least 130,000 years, thus before the arrival of humans (Stevenson and Hope 2005). The environmental instability during the Pleistocene played an important role in forest disturbance ecology and caused major vegetation changes in the Austral-Asian region (Hope et al. 2004). In New Caledonia, drier conditions probably increased fuel loads and the vegetation experienced recurrent cycles of destruction by fire favouring the expansion of open maquis followed by forest reconstitution (Stevenson et al. 2001). Some maquis, currently persisting in more or less degraded forms, originally occupied the ridges exposed above 800–1000 m, as well as the drier areas at the base of the massifs, in the form of stunted dry forests (Jaffré 2022a).

Mainly represented in the extreme south of Grande Terre, on about 250 km$^2$, the maquis on hydromorphic soils (flooding temporary to permanent) is relatively poor (ca. 40 species) but contains a very specialized association of species adapted to hydromorphic conditions and frequent periods of submersion (Jaffré 1980). The herbaceous layer is composed of Cyperaceae. The most characteristic species of the shrubby vegetation include several species of the genera *Pancheria* and *Cunonia* (Cunoniaceae), *Cloezia*, *Melaleuca*, *Xanthostemon* (Myrtaceae), *Styphelia* (Ericaceae), *Grevillea* and *Stenocarpus* (Proteaceae). The riverbanks are home to few shrubs, belonging to *Pandanus* (Pandanaceae), *Serianthes* (Fabaceae), *Gymnostoma* (Casuarinaceae) and two very rare conifers, *Retrophyllum minus* and *Dacrydium guillauminii*. Although fairly homogenous, wetland maquis contain several species with restricted distribution, listed on the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species. Their conservation in areas rich in lateritic minerals remains challenging but requires adequate conservatory actions considering the terrestrial plant originality and the specialized fauna and flora of the aquatic zones (L'Huillier et al. 2010).

Several features of New Caledonian maquis (high level of micro-endemism, nutritional specialization) suggest that this vegetation might qualify as an OCBIL (old climatically buffered and infertile landscape) (Pillon et al. 2021), suggesting that analogous conservation models could apply there.

#### 3.6.2.5 Mangroves

The mangroves of New Caledonia occupy more than 35,000 ha, including ca. 9000 ha of salt flats and *Sarcocornia* salt marshes, and another ca. 26,000 ha of tree and shrub stands. Due to the coastal morphology, the great majority (88%) of mangroves are located on the west coast (Virly 2006). The flora of mangrove forests of New Caledonia includes 24 Indo-Pacific taxa, comprising 15 genera from 13 plant families (Duke 2007). Floristic composition and richness differ between the two coasts with highest richness on the east coast. The zonation is typical of semi-arid coastlines:

*Rhizophora* spp. are predominant in 50% of mangrove areas colonizing the seashore and *Avicennia marina* in >15% developing at the edge of salt flats (Virly 2006). Contrary to the rest of New Caledonian flora, the mangrove flora has stronger affinities with Asian mangrove.

Large amount of trace metals (Ni, Cr, Co) can be deposited in mangrove sediments (Marchand et al. 2012) as a result of natural erosion and sedimentation along the coastline that can be strongly amplified by open-cast mining activities (Fernandez et al. 2006). Studies assessing the impact of Ni mining on the downstream ecosystem showed that Ni concentrations are 10 to 100 times higher than in other New Caledonian mangroves. Mangroves might be a buffer between mining on land and the world's largest lagoon (> 20,000 km$^2$) (Marchand et al. 2016).

## 3.7 Conclusion

New Caledonia hosts a terrestrial plant biodiversity of undeniable importance, and this is widely and internationally recognized. The remarkable and idiosyncratic flora of the archipelago results from historical and environmental contingencies occurring on an old, large, isolated and heterogeneous island. Varying environmental conditions and recent climatic fluctuations have shaped the current original phylogenetic composition, after disharmonies resulting from plant colonization, and have promoted the endemism of the flora. In situ radiation and adaptation after colonization, often repeated within the same group, have led to the diversity of plant lineages. The adaptive and evolutionary responses of the flora to future global and local changes remain uncertain.

Recent advances in molecular and functional biology have showed that the originality of the flora is not only because of the large number of species or their endemicity. The idiosyncratic character of New Caledonia also comes from the phylogenetic diversity and originality of the flora and its functional and ecological diversity. These functional features related to plant morphology, anatomy and physiology are sometimes unique to New Caledonia or relatively well represented on the islands compared to flora worldwide.

Throughout its history, which might have begun 37,000,000 years ago, the vegetation of New Caledonia has experienced phases of stability, as well as successive phases of regression and expansion, accompanied by vegetation and floristic changes. The most recent change since the arrival of humankind 3000 years BP is undeniably anthropogenic: alteration of the vegetation cover and biodiversity loss. This decline has grown in pace with the expansion of agriculture, logging and industrial development, mostly from mining, which began in 1873 (see L'Huillier et al. (2010)). Human activity has resulted in land clearing, construction of access roads (to assess or to exploit resources) and an increase in the frequency of fire and the spread of invasive species. The increase in mining activity has certainly led to the irreversible destruction of plant cover and associated flora. Particularly important is the ultramafic substrate ("terrain minier") where nickel ores are found: it covers a third of the surface of Grande Terre but globally only 3–5% of the earth. Fire may destroy more vegetation than mining, but open-cast extraction is not followed by secondary or self-succession. In addition, surface mining or the storage of excavated material can wipe out relics of maquis and forests, currently saved from fires because of their topographical and microclimatic conditions. Mining activity can thus give the *coup de grace* to forest relics or small populations already endangered (Jaffré et al. 2010).

The originality and the complexity of New Caledonia's plant biodiversity require the implementation of specific conservation measures, including the rescue of rare and threatened species evaluated under IUCN criteria (Read List Authority, RLA-Flore NC, http://endemia.nc) and the protection of sites with micro-endemics (Narrow Endemic Species Hotspot, see Wulff et al. (2013)).

The risks of loss of terrestrial biodiversity cannot be evaluated based on species extinction risk alone. It is important, as advocated in other regions of the world and in a recent article by Ibanez et al. (2019), to set more ambitious objectives including the protection of habitats representative of the different environmental, soil and climate conditions and supporting populations (not just rare species) with genetic diversity. It is also important to identify and protect potential future refuge areas that would be less likely to be impacted by climate change. A better consideration of the preservation of the phylogenetic diversity should also be implemented with priority given to lineages that are only or preferentially represented in New Caledonia. In addition, the potential of innovative technologies and useful resources for societies remains understudied. Recent discoveries are encouraging, including in metal chemistry ("ecological catalysts" for chemistry) (Grison and Lock Toy Ki 2021; Losfeld et al. 2012), for new sources of natural dyes (Toussirot et al. 2012) or the medical value of plants (Coulerie et al. 2013; Hnawia et al. 2008; Lormée et al. 2011). New Caledonia has much to contribute to the understanding of plant evolution and island biogeography, but also for society, and should be at the centre of conservation concerns.

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# Marine Biodiversity in New Caledonia and Contemporary Conservation Challenges

4

Dominique Pelletier

**Abstract**

New Caledonia is internationally renowned for its exceptional marine biodiversity, which has resulted in 80% of the lagoons and reef areas being placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. This chapter presents the main features of this outstanding marine biodiversity and its ecological significance, highlighting the threats posed by anthropogenic pressures and global drivers, and associated conservation challenges. Oceanic and coastal dynamics determine distinct marine ecosystems. The oceanic ecosystem of the Coral Sea will be described first, and this chapter will focus on the lagoon and reef areas, which are in close relation to human populations.

**Keywords**

Marine biodiversity · Coral sea · Fishes · Benthic habitats · Iconic species · Conservation · Marine protected areas

## 4.1 The Marine Components of the New Caledonian Archipelago

Located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean and relatively far from neighbouring islands, New Caledonia includes a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of ~1,300,000 km$^2$ (Fig. 4.1). The EEZ is bounded in the West by the Australian continental shelf, by the Solomon Islands and by Vanuatu in the North and by New Zealand and Australia (due to the presence of Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs) in the South. New Caledonia's EEZ is part of the Coral Sea, which is among the 4% of the global ocean that remain relatively unaffected by human impacts (Halpern et al. 2008). The EEZ forms the Coral Sea Natural Park (CSNP) declared in April 2014 by the government of New Caledonia.[1]

In addition to this extended oceanic area, New Caledonia's main island (Grande Terre) is almost entirely surrounded by a large lagoon delineated by the longest continuous barrier reef area in the world (approximately 1500 km). This reef encloses a lagoon of 24,000 square km. Exchanges between the open sea and the lagoon occur through a number of reef passes described in Breckwoldt et al. (2022), among others. The Loyalty Islands located northeast of Grande Terre comprise two islands without lagoons (Lifou and Maré) and Ouvéa which displays a semi-closed lagoon area. In 2008, six areas in the barrier reef and the enclosed lagoon were declared as a World Heritage serial site owing to their exceptional natural beauty, the diversity of their habitats and their coral and fish species.[2] In addition, they have large populations of iconic and threatened species such as turtles, whales and dugongs.

### 4.1.1 The Oceanic Ecosystems in the Coral Sea

The attributes of the Coral Sea ecosystems were reviewed by Ceccarelli et al. (2013). They point out that these oceanic ecosystems are generally low in nutrients (oligotrophic), resulting in the dominance of small plankton (picoplankton) and pelagic invertebrates (jellyfish and squid), with mesopelagic fishes such as myctophids. This trophic web supports seasonal and/or ephemeral aggregations of top predators and in particular large pelagic species (mainly tuna, marlin and swordfish). These sustain important commercial fisheries

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[1] https://mer-de-corail.gouv.nc/en.

[2] https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1115 (see map in Chap. 2 by Rodary in this book).


M. Kowasch, S. P. J. Batterbury (eds.), *Geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky*,
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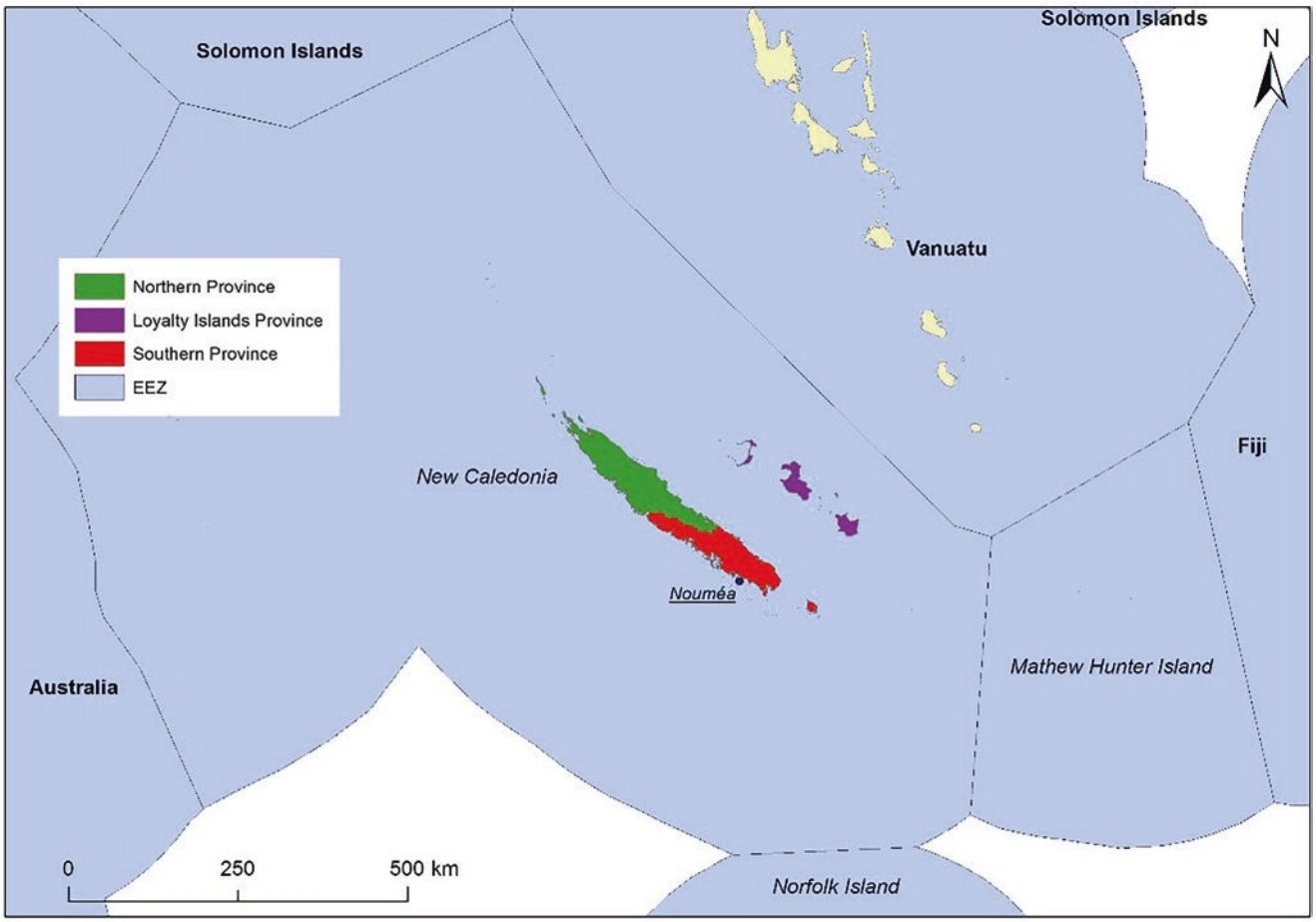


**Fig. 4.1** Delineation of provinces and the exclusive economic zone of New Caledonia, located in the Southwest Pacific (17–24° latitude south, 158–172° longitude west). (Source: www.georep.nc, cartography: Kowasch 2021)

and some recreational fishing. Ceccarelli et al. (2013) also identified that we know too little about the underlying productivity (the zooplankton and micronekton that sustain larger species) and associated trophodynamics.

Seamounts are "undersea mountains" (Yesson et al. 2011). Based on bathymetry data, Yesson et al. predicted the presence of more than 500 seamounts in the Coral Sea. They provide habitats for many fish species and invertebrates and can host significant populations of fishes, as a seamount is an attractive biotope for underwater fauna, in the same way as an oasis in the middle of the oligotrophic ocean. They may thus be particularly productive, in particular when they culminate in mid-water (less than 1500 m). A number of ongoing research projects aim at improving the understanding of seamount-associated communities (e.g. led by French and Japanese institutes).

The continental shelf and bathyal (abyssal) habitats were rarely investigated in the past and are relatively poorly known in comparison to other habitats. Between 2016 and 2021, the French Museum of Natural History, Ifremer (National Institute for Ocean Science) and IRD (French Institute of Research for Development) conducted a series of four surveys to explore the deep habitats in the Coral Sea and revise biodiversity inventories.[3] Samples are not yet fully analysed. Observation technologies such as acoustics and imaging should provide additional data in the future.

Marine biodiversity, at least its most conspicuous components, is mainly observed in coastal and reef areas despite the large surface area of the Coral Sea and the EEZ. These areas also correspond to the meeting point between the land and the sea and between human populations and marine ecosystems. They will thus be the focus for the rest of the chapter. Firstly, I summarise the components of marine biodiversity and then the benthic habitats which are home to it. I then focus on components that are the most conspicuous and related to human populations, which are fish and iconic species. Lastly, I examine the

[3] https://www.mnhn.fr/fr/la-planete-revisitee-en-nouvelle-caledonie.

anthropogenic pressures affecting marine biodiversity and the instruments implemented to manage and preserve it.

## 4.2 What Comprises Marine Biodiversity in New Caledonia?

New Caledonia's reputation as a "hotspot of biodiversity" is justified for terrestrial and marine environments. This section builds on a compendium of marine species established in 2006 (Payri and Richer de Forges 2007) that largely concerns species observed in the 0–100 m range, although some deep species were also listed. Overall, 9300 species were identified, belonging to 1107 taxonomic families (Table 4.1). For many groups, the number of species identified is a gross underestimate, for example, for molluscs where this number could in fact be as high as 8000–10,000 species (Héros et al. 2007). In general, many small species have yet to be fully described, included in collections already sampled but not entirely processed, for example, for molluscs and Foraminifera. Due to varying research efforts, some groups are much more studied than others, like fishes, whereas worms are less researched. In addition, some biotopes were historically less inventoried, like the external slopes of barrier reefs, intermediate lagoon reefs and mangroves. Remote oceanic reef areas were also inadequately sampled in the past but were the focus of several surveys more recently[4] and in particular in the AMBIO project who provided an extensive video-based survey of fishes and habitats in all the remote reefs in the CSNP (see references below).

**Table 4.1** Number of species observed in New Caledonia per main taxa group

| Taxa | Common names | Number of species |
|---|---|---|
| Plants | | 45 |
| Mangrove flora | Mangrove species | 34 |
| Marine angiosperms | Seagrasses | 11 |
| Algae | Algae | 443 |
| Foraminifera | A group of single-celled organisms | 585 |
| Porifera | Sponges | 149 |
| Cnidarians | | 784 |
| Scleratinarians | Stony corals | 310 |
| Alcyonaria | Soft corals etc… | 173 |
| Gorgonacea | Gorgonians | 93 |
| Other groups | Jellyfishes, sea anemones, etc. | 208 |
| Lophophorates | | 415 |
| Molluscs | Bivalves, cephalopods and gastropods | 2151 |
| Worms | | 416 |
| Arthropods | Crustaceans and sea spiders | 2043 |
| Echinodermata | Sea urchins, sea cucumbers, starfishes, crinoids (sea lilies and feather stars) and brittle stars | 257 |
| Tunicata | Ascidians | 290 |
| Vertebrata | | 1794 |
| Fish | | 1695 |
| Sea snakes | | 15 |
| Sea turtles | | 4 |
| Sea birds | | 55 |
| Marine mammals | | 25 |
| **Total** | | **9372** |

Only fully identified species were listed. Cyanobacteria were not listed. Figures taken from Payri and Richer de Forges (2007)

In Payri and Richer de Forges (2007), a large proportion of species are microfauna and meiofauna, meaning they are smaller than a few millimetres. For instance, there are 585 species (6% of species) of Foraminifera, which are mostly calcareous species found in shallow lagoonal waters (Debenay and Cabioch 2007). Arthropods also form a vast group (22% of species) with many small taxa, for example, copepods which are tiny crustaceans either planktonic or benthic organisms, sometimes associated with fish or corals.

A second feature of New Caledonian biodiversity is endemicity, that is, the fact that many species are only found there. For several groups, the rate of endemicity is quite high, for example, 40% of sponge species. It is lower for other non-sessile groups, for example, around 50 species for molluscs. The notion of endemicity is closely related to conservation efforts, because if an endemic species disappears from its habitat, it disappears from the planet.

High biodiversity is largely explained by the diversity of ecological niches and habitats found in New Caledonia. The next section describes the main features of these habitats in lagoon and shallow (0–100 m) reef areas.

## 4.3 Benthic Habitats

Lagoon and reef areas encompass a mosaic of benthic habitats. Habitats are characterised by their geomorphological structure, a simple typology distinguishing the barrier reef with its external and internal slopes, the intermediate reefs located in lagoon areas, the lagoon areas themselves and the fringing reefs. Reef passes are specific areas with strong hydrodynamics entailing a remarkable abundance of fish and the frequent presence of large species such as sharks and rays. Andréfouët and Torres-Pullizza (2004) mapped the geomorphological distribution of reefs and lagoons in New Caledonia and showed the diversity, complexity and intertwining of reef-associated structures. This configuration has

[4] https://mer-de-corail.gouv.nc/fr/missions-du-parc-comprendre/campagnes-scientifiques.

been shaped by strong ancient geological and climatic events.

Overlaying this geomorphological structure, habitat is in addition described by substrate types with varying granularity and organisation. Furthermore, this abiotic substrate is covered with fixed fauna and flora of different sizes, shapes and colours. Hence, the notion of habitat involves a range of spatial scales, from the very fine (a few centimetres) to the large (across a few kilometres) and with a diversity of features. A diversity of shelters in a habitat determines its capacity to host a rich and diverse biodiversity. This diversity of so-called niches and the favourable weather conditions throughout the year likely explain why New Caledonian lagoon and reef habitats exhibit such diverse marine life.

The most common benthic habitats observed in the lagoon and reefs are living coral, sandy bottoms, debris habitats, seagrass beds, macroalgae fields and mangrove areas (Figs. 4.2 and 4.3) (Pelletier et al. 2020).

Mangroves are located at the land-sea interface, in lagoons and estuaries, and are particularly vulnerable to anthropogenic pressures. In New Caledonia, the larger areas are found on the western coast of the Grande Terre, notably from Pouembout to Koné, but they are distributed all around the island. This unique habitat provides four important ecosystem services to human populations: carbon sequestration, water purification, coastal protection and fish biomass production (Trégarot et al. 2021). Because of their intricate root network, mangrove areas are particularly good shelters for animals to avoid predation, for instance, crabs or young fish. Trégarot et al. found that New Caledonian mangroves had a relatively lower vulnerability than in some other French oversea territories.

Seagrass habitats are most frequently found on fringing reefs and on the western coast of New Caledonia (Fig. 4.2, top left), for example, in the Bourail area. By contrast, they are infrequently found in remote reefs across the CSNP. Like mangroves, seagrass habitats limit the erosion of the sea bottom by stabilising the fine-grained substrate. They help trap fine sediments and particles that are suspended in the water column, which increases water clarity. Seagrass also provides food, shelter and essential nursery areas for fish species, including exploited ones, and for invertebrates. Some fish families are more often observed in seagrass habitats than in hard bottom habitats, for example, emperors (Lethrinidae). The green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) feed directly on seagrass, while the decomposition of seagrass plants releases nutrients in water and food for small invertebrates. Finally, seagrasses provide a safe environment for juvenile and small adult fish and invertebrates to escape from larger predators.

Like mangrove and seagrasses, macroalgae habitats are also found on soft bottoms (Fig. 4.2, top right). Pelletier et al. (2020) found a distribution concentrated in the western

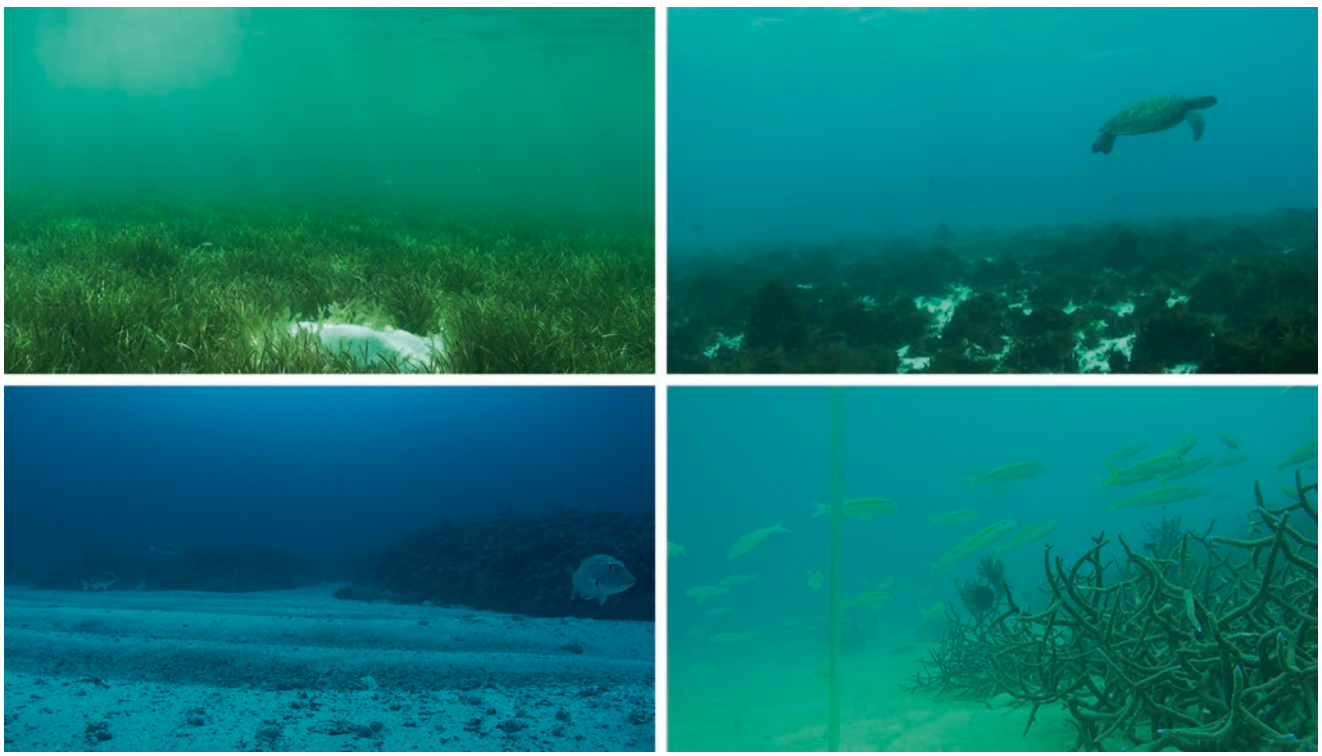

**Fig. 4.2** Seagrass habitat in Abore barrier reef (top left), macroalgae habitat in Merlet integral reserve (top right), sandy habitat in Bellona remote reef (bottom left) and sandy habitat with isolated coral patch in Merlet integral reserve (bottom right). (Source: Pelletier 2020)

**Fig. 4.3** Live coral habitat (top left), debris habitat on exposed reef flat at Astrolabe remote reef (top right), debris habitat associated with damage from recreative uses and mooring at Mbe Kouen unprotected reef (bottom left) and debris habitat dominated by boulders at the volcanic island Hunter (bottom right). (Source: Pelletier 2020)

coast of the Grande Terre and particularly in the Nouméa area. Macroalgae are primary producers that form the basis of many marine food chains and provide habitat and refuge for a range of organisms. Yet, they appear to support less diversity of animals than seagrasses.

Sandy bottoms (Fig. 4.2, bottom) are habitats where biotic cover is low or absent. A number of mobile fish species can be observed, for example, rays, sharks, jacks and flatfishes and passing sea turtles (Pelletier et al. 2020). Sea cucumbers (a type of echinoderm, like starfish) are commonly observed. In these relatively desert areas, many small species aggregate around isolated coral reef patches that appear as oases (Fig. 4.2, bottom right).

Other types of soft bottom habitats are also present in New Caledonian coastal waters and around shallow reefs. Bays and semi-enclosed zones represent 35% of sediment bottom habitats (Laboute et al. 1991). Sediments and mud are mostly transported by creeks and rivers that wash out from the landmass and accumulate on the lagoon floor. Examples include Prony Bay in the south or Port-Bouquet Bay on the southeast of Grande Terre. In such areas, marine life is mostly endogenous, hidden in the sediment, although some corals, invertebrates and fish species have adapted to this environment.

Hard bottom habitats are the other types encountered in New Caledonian coastal areas. Living coral habitat is the richest and most diversified habitat in terms of marine species, invertebrates and vertebrates. Bioconstructed coral structures yield a diversity of ecological niches and complex habitat morphologies which provide multiple refuges for numerous species. In New Caledonia and in other regions, the macrofauna of this habitat has been researched more thoroughly than others, and corals and fish species have often been used as surrogates in biodiversity assessments (Bellwood and Hughes 2001) because they are comparatively easy to enumerate and are well known taxonomically. According to Pelletier et al. (2020), who established the distribution of benthic habitats at the scale of New Caledonian lagoon and reef areas, the live coral habitat is the most remarkable where reefs are protected from trade winds, for example, on the external slopes of the barrier reef, in the South Lagoon and at several remote reefs of the CSNP (Astrolabe, Chesterfield, Bellona, Entrecasteaux) (Fig. 4.3, top left). Live coral cover is also abundant on some fringing reefs on the eastern coast of Grande Terre, for example, in Pouebo and Borendy.

The debris habitat displays a lower cover of live coral, ranging from 0% to approximately 20%, with diverse facies, either small debris, dead coral, rocks, boulders or slabs. In these habitats, the diversity of fish species is lower than in the live coral habitat. Yet, some species are still quite common here, like triggerfish (Balistidae), surgeonfish

(Acanthuridae) and parrotfish (Scaridae) (Pelletier et al. 2020). This habitat is found in areas where the live coral has been damaged either from natural or anthropogenic forces and in zones exposed to waves (e.g. in reef flats) (Fig. 4.3, top right) or with strong hydrodynamics, for example, reef passes in and out of the lagoon. Where nutrients are abundant or corals have died from bleaching, macroalgae may develop on the substrate or on dead coral, particularly if grazing species (herbivorous species feeding on these macroalgae) are not abundant. The debris habitat is commonly observed in the larger Nouméa area, on the internal slope of the barrier reef and around islands and reefs where frequentation by boat is high (Fig. 4.3, bottom left). It is also found in exposed shallow areas in the remote reefs of Petrie and Astrolabe and in Hienghène and Pouébo on Grande Terre's northeast coast.

Particular hard bottom habitats can be observed in specific areas, for example, around the remote volcanic islands of Matthew and Hunter, northeast of Grande Terre (Fig. 4.3, bottom right). Surprisingly, a substantial cover of live coral was observed on their fringing reefs (Roman and Pelletier 2015).

To summarise, these six main habitats display very distinct features and therefore host distinct species compositions and macrofauna abundances. They may serve as a nursery for some species and a feeding ground for others. Likewise, a given species may spend part of its life cycle in a given habitat and others in different habitats. Therefore, the biodiversity of coral reef ecosystems strongly depends on the coexistence and connectivity of these complementary habitats.

## 4.4 Fishes and Other Exploited Species

Fish have been well described and illustrated in New Caledonia: the checklist of Fricke et al. (2011) comprises 2320 marine species in 246 families. Laboute and Grandperrin (2016) reported and illustrated 1200 species. The majority of New Caledonian marine species (1860) belong to the Grande Terre group, 1029 to the Loyalty Ridge (including the Loyalty Islands) and 193 to the New Caledonian basin at large (Fricke et al. 2011). These authors list 107 endemic species, that is, 4.6% of the total native species, which is a high rate of endemism (and mainly comprises small species). It is likely that the number of fish species is underestimated because the observation techniques commonly used (underwater visual censuses) cannot reliably capture species that are cryptic, camouflaged, averse to divers or too small (Kulbicki et al. 2010).

The distribution of fish species and their abundance strongly depends on benthic habitat (see above) and on fishing pressures. In many reef passes, in addition to greater abundances, several species form large aggregations, either for spawning or for feeding on spawning species. This is, for instance, the case of the false pass of Bourail, very close to the coast, and the Kouare pass in the South Lagoon, located more offshore from Grande Terre (Fig. 4.4, bottom right). Protecting reef passes from excessive fishing is key to safeguarding the spawning potential of fish populations. The AMBIO (Advanced Nanostructured Surfaces for the Control of Biofouling) project showed that fish abundance and fish diversity were highest in the remote reefs of the CSNP (Fig. 4.4, top left and right) and particularly at Astrolabe reefs (Schohn et al. 2017a) and at d'Entrecasteaux reefs (Schohn et al. 2017b), mainly because of their remoteness and the outstanding health status of these remote coral reefs. The AMBIO project also documented the effectiveness of the marine protected areas (MPAs) implemented on Grande Terre to protect the abundance and diversity of fish assemblages and of exploited fish species; see, for example, the Abore reef marine reserve (Fig. 4.4, bottom right).

## 4.5 Iconic Species

Iconic species are those with an outstanding social value to humanity; this notion of course being culturally dependent. Iconic species are used to promote New Caledonia and its biodiversity.[5]

A number of fish species are considered as iconic (Fig. 4.5). Most rays (20 species) belong in this category, including the manta ray (*Mobula birostris*), the giant guitarfish (*Rhynchobatus djiddensis*), the round ribbontail ray (*Taeniurops meyeni*) and the whitespotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus ocellatus*). Shark species are included as well (more than 20 species observed) and the humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*). Most ray species and the humphead wrasse are endangered. The conservation status of requiem sharks (genus *Carcharhinus*), the great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*), the whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) and the tawny nurse shark (*Nebrius ferrugineus*) range from vulnerable to endangered. Although some of these species are relatively rare, diverless video-based surveys conducted in the AMBIO project evidenced very high frequencies of some shark species (over 40%, that is, they were seen on more than 40% of underwater video stations at a given site) and humphead wrasse (20%) on some remote reefs in the CSNP. Rays were most often observed in lagoon areas, with a frequency up to 10%.

[5] See, for example, dugong and whales featured in advertising material for cruises at https://escales.ponant.com/nouvelle-caledonie-grand-lagon-sud/.

**Fig. 4.4** Examples of fish species observed in New Caledonia: Live coral seascape in Chesterfield remote reef (top left), large abundance of fish with jacks and a shark above a coral patch in Astrolabe remote reef (top right), sweetlips in Nouméa barrier reef MPA (bottom left) and aggregation of fish in Kouare reef pass (bottom right). (Source: STAVIRO images from AMBIO project, Ifremer)

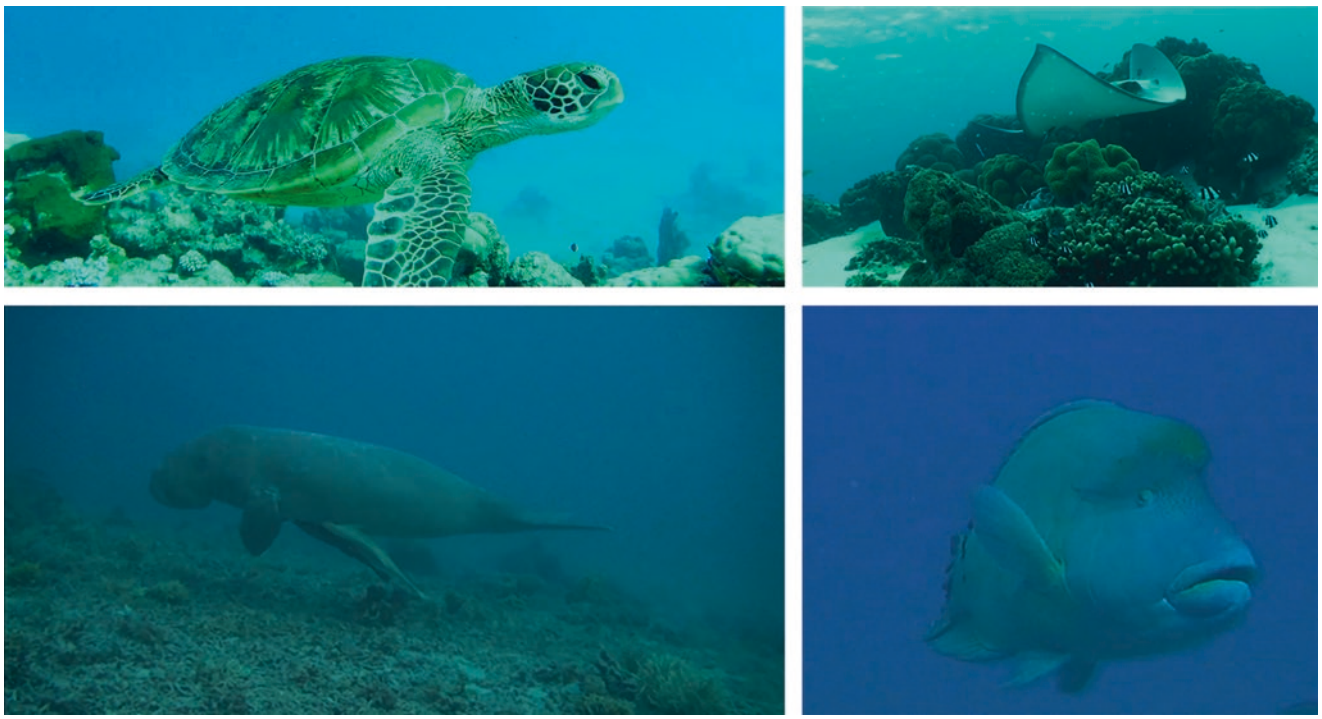

**Fig. 4.5** Examples of iconic species observed in the New Caledonian lagoon: green turtle (Kouare pass) (top left), cow tail stingray (*Pastinachus sephen*) (Nouméa barrier reef) (top right), dugong (Signal Islet, Nouméa Lagoon) (bottom left) and giant wrasse (Kouare pass) (bottom right). (Source: STAVIRO, AMBIO project, Ifremer)

Four species of sea turtles (out of seven in the world) are present in New Caledonia. The green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is the most abundant (Fig. 4.5). It comes onshore only to breed, and important nesting sites are located at the d'Entrecasteaux reefs and atolls, while a few other sites are distributed on the western and eastern coasts of Grande Terre and across the Loyalty Islands. The loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) has a main nesting site in the Bourail area and minor sites in the Isle of Pines and Loyalty Islands. The hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) can be observed in several places on the northeastern coast, on the Loyalty Islands and across some southern locations on Grande Terre and the Isle of Pines. The leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is only sporadically observed transiting in New Caledonia (d'Auzon 2007).

Some 59 species of sea birds have been observed in New Caledonia, out of which 28 breed in the territory (Spaggiari et al. 2007). Four breeding species display subspecies that are endemic to New Caledonia: two petrel species (*Pterodroma leucoptera caledonica* and *Pseudobulweria rostrata trouessarti*), the silver gull (*Larus novoehollandiae forsteri*) and the fairy tern (*Sternula nereis exsul*). Petrel species that breed in New Caledonia are classified as vulnerable (*Pterodroma leucoptera*) or endangered (*Nesofregetta fuliginosa*), while two others are considered as near-threatened: *Pseudobulweria rostrata trouessarti* and *Esacus magnirostris*. There is evidence that at least three species were extirpated from regions of New Caledonia where they used to breed: the boobies (*Sula dactylatra* and *S. leucogaster*), the fairy tern and the silver gull.

There are 25 species of marine mammals in New Caledonia. None of them are endemic, as they are widely distributed across the Pacific (Garrigue 2007). The territory hosts the largest population of dugong (*Dugong dugon*) in Oceania. Some 23 species of Cetaceans have been sighted but many only once. The most abundant species is the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), which breeds in the South Lagoon. The minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) is regularly observed too, as is the Indian Ocean bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*).

Sea snakes are abundant in the lagoons of New Caledonia compared to other islands in Oceania, with 14 species inventoried. They are encountered in the reefs and shallow bays fringing the shores of coasts and islets (Ineich and Laboute 2002; Borsa 2008), where they move ashore and also prey on fish on coral reefs. Snakes are also present in remote reefs in the Coral Sea (Goiran et al. 2022). Two species are endemic to the territory: *Laticauda saintgironsi* and *Hydrophis laboutei*.

## 4.6 Conservation Challenges and Current Management Measures

Marine biodiversity in New Caledonia is subject to several types of anthropogenic pressures (Table 4.2). Most if not all of these are correlated with economic activity and the presence of humans. After several decades of growing populations, the number of human inhabitants of New Caledonia had stabilised by 2019, related to other trends noted in this book.[6]

Urbanisation coupled with rapid demographic increase until 2019 has entailed an extension and densification of the Nouméa agglomeration and the growing urban population anchored by Kone, with consequences in terms of run-off to the lagoon. A different type of run-off occurs due to mining

**Table 4.2** Anthropogenic pressures and their impacts on marine biodiversity in New Caledonia

| Pressure | Impacts |
|---|---|
| Fishing | Reduction of fish populations, particularly long-lived and large species (sustainability not evaluated in New Caledonia)<br>Disposal of fish guts and waste in some areas<br>NB: very few habitat-impacting or destructive fishing techniques are used in New Caledonia |
| Recreational uses (other than fishing) at sea | Disturbance of marine life (birds, mammals) and degradation of benthic habitats (corals, seagrasses, algae) and sessile fauna |
| Frequentation of islets by visitors | Disturbance of marine birds, some of them are nesting on the islets<br>Habitats and sessile flora and fauna, as well as islet vegetation, are eroded and degraded through repeated trampling, wood collection and light pollution |
| River run-off including from water treatment plants | Inputs of organic nutrients, pollutants like molecules not treated by water plants, heavy metals from industrial areas and phytosanitary products used by agriculture |
| Mining activities | Run-off from soil erosion on land, inputs of pollutants<br>Sediment deposit in the lagoon (siltation)<br>Degradation of habitats due to channelisation and other works carried out in the maritime zones |
| Mooring of boats and cruise ships | Destruction of benthic habitats (corals, seagrasses, algae) and associated sessile fauna through mooring and landings of hundreds of passengers in small areas |
| Creating artificial shorelines, for example, tourist development | Degradation or destruction of benthic habitats (corals, seagrasses, algae) and associated sessile fauna |

[6] https://www.isee.nc/population.

activity, resulting in heavy soil erosion (due to extraction and access roads). For instance, in the Thio area, sediments cover most of the fringing reefs and impair underwater visibility close to the shore (Roman et al. 2015).

Marine recreational activity includes boating, fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling, jet-skiing, sailing small non-motorised craft like kayaks, kitesurfing and surfing. These uses have been growing and diversifying in all coastal areas of New Caledonia over the last three decades, in parallel with demographic increase. Gonson et al. (2016) showed that the number of boat trips in the Nouméa area has more than doubled over a 9-year period (2005–2014), with most operated by local residents. These authors also showed a sharp increase in the number of visitors to the many nearshore islets, aided by a growing traffic to the most popular ones by taxi-boats transporting tourists and residents. In 2013, approximately 157,000 visitors landed on five main islets facing Nouméa (AMBIO project, Gonson et al. 2017). Islets where landing is permitted suffer from substantial degradation due to these landings and leisure activities. Elsewhere, the development of cruise ship tourism over the last 20 years has meant several very large ships anchor off formerly untouched bays on the islands of Lifou, Ouvéa and the Isle of Pines (Île des Pins), as well as in Nouméa harbour. Lifou had 4 landings per year in 1995, increasing to 30 between 2005 and 2008, and 120 in 2016. Pelletier et al. (2016) found a severely damaged reef habitat in Lifou in 2014. That study proved that living coral cover was reduced to zero in a 200 m radius around the mooring point and was badly damaged up to a 400 m distance away from it (Fig. 4.6), often due to the anchor and its chain. Accordingly, the abundance of fish species decreased to a very low level around the mooring sites.

Fishing of course constitutes a major pressure on biodiversity. Fishing is mostly for food but also for stocking aquaria (see Chap. 5 by Sabinot et al. in this book). It is a traditional activity and source of food for Melanesian populations who live by the sea, who have regulated it over thousands of years through customary rules involving territorial fishing rights and closed areas. There are some commercial vessels operating from urban areas, but mostly informal fishing takes place elsewhere, with a mix of subsistence and recreational fishing and with a parallel commercial market (Jollit et al. 2010). Non-commercial fishing pressure is concentrated near the urban centres of Nouméa in the South Province and near the urban agglomeration of Voh, Koné and Pouembout in the North (Gonson et al. 2018). In 2005, the catch in the southwest lagoon was estimated at more than 1100 tons/year from recreational fishing alone (Jollit 2010; Jollit et al. 2010).

The non-commercial catch across the archipelago is substantial. Fishing in the lagoon typically targets grouper (Serranids), surgeonfish (Acanthurids), snapper (Lutjanids), emperor fish (Lethrinids), parrotfish (Scarids), mullet (Mugilids), rabbitfish (Siganids), jack (Carangids) and grunt (Haemulids). Several crustaceans are also prized: the giant mud crab (*Scylla serrata*) caught in mangroves, the coconut crab (*Birgus latro*), spiny lobsters (*Panulirus* sp.) and slipper lobsters (*Scyllarides* sp. and *Parribacus* sp.) Some other invertebrates are targeted too: troca (*Trochus niloticus*), amusium (*Amusium japonica*) and giant clam (*Tridacna derasa* and *Hippopus hippopus*). Unfortunately, the most spectacular seashells may sometimes be sampled for collection. A large number of fish and marine invertebrates (crustaceans and molluscs) are taken. In a survey of recreational fishers conducted in the Nouméa area during the PAMPA project (Pelletier 2011), almost 80 fish species were observed in catches and 15 invertebrate species; among them are spider conch (*Lambis* sp.), giant clam (*Tridacna* sp.), slipper lobster, octopus (*Octopus octopus*) and cuttlefish (*Sepia latimanus*). Note that there is to date no well-established and comprehensive monitoring programme for non-commercial fisheries, and this is not a current political priority. Commercial fisheries (aside from offshore pelagic fisheries) are also not evaluated.

**Fig. 4.6** Snapshots of coral reef habitat in the mooring area, Lifou. Impacted zone (left) and comparable non-impacted zone (right). (Source: AMBIO project, Ifremer)

New Caledonia has, however, been quite a pioneer in France regarding environmental protection, particularly by establishing a number of reasonably sized marine protected areas (MPAs). The first marine reserve, still an integral reserve today, dates back to 1970 (covering 172 km$^2$), but most of the reserves were declared between 1981 and 1995, in the South Province. Many are located in the lagoon facing Nouméa (174 km$^2$). In these MPAs, fishing is banned, but there are many recreational vessels and visitors (see above). The largest no-take reserve is formed by the Abore barrier reef offshore from Nouméa city, which was definitively closed to fishing in 1995, after a short reopening between 1993 and 1995. The high catch levels after reopening demonstrated the protection afforded by the MPA (Ferraris et al. 2005).

Other marine reserves were established by the South Province in Bourail on the west coast (in 1993), Ouano (west, in 2004), close to Thio in the east (in 2010) and by the North Province in Hienghene (east coast, in 2007), Pouebo (northeast, in 2009) and a site close to Voh in the west (Kan-Gunu in 2013). The next step in protecting marine biodiversity was placing 80% of the New Caledonian reef and lagoon areas, that is, 15,743 km$^2$, on the World Heritage list in 2008.[7] The gazetting of these reserves has reinforced the awareness of protective measures within the perimeter of the World Heritage listing and is subject to compulsory periodic monitoring for their "exceptional universal value" (EUV). In this case, EUV is bound up in maintaining marine biodiversity, aided by participatory management of marine areas with local people. The creation by the government of the Coral Sea Natural Park in 2014 has extended protection to the entire EEZ of New Caledonia, outside of the lagoons. It includes several remarkable shallow reefs and atolls: Entrecasteaux, Chesterfield and Bellona, Petrie and Astrolabe, Walpole, Matthew and Hunter. These remote areas are home to quasi-pristine biodiversity, exemplified by abundant fish populations and high coverage of living coral in sheltered reefs (Schohn et al. 2017a). Their remoteness is the first factor of protection, as is also the case for the South Lagoon area (Bockel et al. 2017). In 2023, significant additional protection was agreed bringing the coverage of strictly protected marine areas up to 10% of the EEZ, a plan developed in cooperation with fishers and Indigenous and other government authorities (Oceanographic 2023). The gazetting of these strongly areas within the CSNP perimeter complies with the target 14.5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life below water".

Another component of management for the marine environment lies in the adoption of Environmental Codes by the North, South and Loyalty Islands Provinces in 2008, 2009 and 2016, respectively. These documents provide frameworks for regulating commercial and non-commercial fisheries. The regulations include constraints on the type and numbers of fishing gear and officially ban several fishing practices such as night fishing and other destructive practices.

[7] https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1115.

## 4.7 Conclusion

New Caledonia and its extensive marine territory have been gifted with an exceptional marine biodiversity. The territorial government and the provinces have, over time, implemented several important management instruments to preserve this biodiversity, offering some protection from large foreign fishing vessels operating across the Pacific. In this respect, the territory appears as quite exemplary. It also benefits from a low human population density compared to other tropical islands, and substantial local of marine habitats and species that stretches back thousands of years.

Yet, this is a fragile situation. Environmental policies and controls on commercial exploitation of the ocean and lagoon environments must be sustained over the long term by the different governing bodies, not least because the marine environment is extensive. While the extension of conservation efforts in 2023 are encouraging, they require implementation and funding. This is particularly important as the territory also must face the consequences of climate change which is becoming a major driver and a threat to lagoon and reef socio-ecosystems. Sound management of anthropogenic pressures will contribute to increasing their resilience with respect to local and global change.

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# Part II

# Fisheries and Agriculture

# Small-Scale Fisheries in New Caledonia: Towards a Fishers' Perspective

5

Catherine Sabinot, Séverine Bouard, Camille Fossier, Julie Mallet, and Gilbert David

**Abstract**

Devoting a full chapter to the fishers of New Caledonia serves a dual purpose: firstly, to report on a practice driven by multiple rationales that are, for the most part, unknown or insufficiently understood in and outside the territory, and secondly, to show that the place that fishers occupy in the relationship between fish, ecosystems, fishing effort and consumption is much more complex than in other small-scale fisheries and management regimes. Drawing on anthropological and geographical research conducted since 2010, this chapter sketches a general picture of the main types of fishing practised in New Caledonia, focusing on presenting the fishers who undertake them. We discuss the place of fishing in the livelihood activities of Caledonians, irrespective of their social status, and examine the different purposes for which fishing is practised and that fishers assign to their practices. The conclusion focuses on ongoing efforts at the territorial and provincial levels to better incorporate the fishers' diversity and functions in fisheries management policies.

**Keywords**

Small-scale fisheries · New Caledonia · Livelihood · Subsistence fishing · Customary fishing · Recreational fishing · Consumption

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## 5.1 Introduction

### 5.1.1 Fishing and Fishers

The main ambition of this chapter is to describe the diversity and the complexity of small-scale fishers' behaviours and practices in New Caledonia and to examine in particular the fishers' motivations for undertaking professional and non-professional fishing. Devoting a full chapter in this book to the small-scale fishers of New Caledonia serves a dual purpose: firstly, to report on a range of livelihood practices including commercial and subsistence fishing, marketing and distribution and regulation that are driven by multiple rationales, and secondly, to show that fishers occupy a complex position in the marine ecosystem that extends much more widely than their operations in New Caledonia's territorial waters to include on- and offshore labour relations and commodity chains involving buyers and consumers.

We hypothesise that fisheries management is much more than the management of fishing effort, that is, all the means deployed to extract living marine resources. Fishers and their activities cannot be reduced to catch, number of boats, fishing gear, duration of trips and spatial location. Seeing fishers as the top predator in a fishing ecosystem is also rather limiting, ignoring their other activities and social networks.

Therefore, we need to go beyond the ecosystem service approach, which considers fisheries as an ecosystem supply service. It was applied recently in New Caledonia through the IFRECOR (French Initiative for Coral Reefs) and RESCCUE projects on monetary value services provided by the lagoons (Pascal 2010). A relationship is established


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between the ecosystem that produces the fish resource and the consumers who are beneficiaries of the service.

This approach tends to completely eclipse fishers, who appear to lose their place in the fish/consumer relationship. Yet they are the main actors in this dynamic. Fishing is not only a question of fish mortality management (Brêthes 2000; David 2008). To put fishers at the forefront means to explore the non-biological drivers of fishing effort, including cultural and social drivers and their own views of their role and functions in society.

### 5.1.2 Fisheries Studies in New Caledonia and Their Fields of Application

As other chapters explain, New Caledonia is a French overseas territory in the Pacific, a *sui generis* territory still engaged in a process of negotiated decolonisation. Its population is diverse, as previous chapters have outlined. Throughout its sometimes violent and painful history, Europeans, Oceanians and Asians have settled in New Caledonia and today live alongside the indigenous Kanak people, who now make up 41.2% of the population according to the last census (ISEE 2020). For both Kanak and non-Kanak people who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, fishing is an important activity in rural areas alongside horticulture, market gardening, agriculture (Guyard et al. 2014; Bouard et al. 2018) and waged employment, which is mainly in mining services. Fishing is widely distributed and uses a range of fishing gears.

The study of fisheries in New Caledonia falls into two main categories (Fig. 5.1). The first are ethnographies of fishing practices as part of research on a local group or community (Teulières-Preston 1992; Sarasin 2009) or as targeted anthropological studies on fishers (Leblic and Teulières-Preston 1987; Leblic 1989; Leblic 2008; Sabinot and Lacombe 2015). Recent research has focused on firstly changes in recent years in subsistence fishing; secondly its contribution to fishers' livelihood needs, especially in Kanak communities; and thirdly the link to conservation agendas and mining development (Cornier and Leblic 2016; Sabinot and Lacombe 2015; Sabinot and Bernard 2016; Sabinot and Herrenschmidt 2019).

The second group of studies is more oriented towards the economic and geographical extent of fisheries, particularly using survey data (Fig. 5.1). The main focus in the South Province is recreational fishing, including on the UNESCO World Heritage reefs of the Great Southern Lagoon (Jollit 2010; Jollit et al. 2010; see Chap. 2 by Rodary in this book). Two questions are addressed. How can frequenting of fishing grounds be used as a proxy for fishing effort? Also, how can the impacts of recreational fishing be assessed in marine protected areas, by observing catch and carrying out statistical monitoring? Earlier studies dealt with household consumption as a proxy for fish catch in Kanak communities of the North and Loyalty Islands Provinces (Guillemot et al 2009; Léopold et al. 2004; Labrosse et al. 2006).

These two research areas are carried out alongside the monitoring of commercial fish production, which is currently done by the three provinces and the government of New Caledonia.

### 5.1.3 Empirical Bases

Our main rationale in this chapter is that the diversity and complexity of fishers' behaviours and practices are a major constraint to properly managing artisanal and small-scale fisheries. This assumption comes from our own research between 2013 and 2019 across the three provinces.

We rely on field observations done in New Caledonia, as well as on interviews conducted with actors from the fishing and conservation worlds and with provincial officers. Three of the authors are residents of the territory and make observations on a daily basis, with relatively regular close and immersive contacts with fisher groups ranging from a few days to a few weeks. It is difficult to estimate the number of interviews conducted over the last 5 years on fishing practices and fisheries management, but we can assert that at least 500 different people across the country have been interviewed, in particular in Yaté, Poum, Koumac, Belep, Ouégoa, Pouébo, Thio, Ouvéa, Lifou and Maré (Fig. 5.2). In all research programmes, we examined the transformations that occur in fishing practices, knowledge and norms. During a recent project funded by the North Province (Sabinot et al. 2019), the 78 professional fishers who benefited from North Province subventions between 2010 and 2016 were interviewed in order to provide qualitative and quantitative data on their catch, the organisation of fishing and distribution and their institutional relationships. Moreover, we use data from the general census conducted by ISEE in New Caledonia in 2014 that included questions about secondary activities in fishing and boat ownership and from a study of New Caledonian household consumption conducted between 2014 and 2017 (Quidnovi, ERPA, ASS-NC, DAVAR 2017).

This chapter begins by describing *who* the fishers in New Caledonia are and where and how they fish. We illustrate the main types of fishing practised in New Caledonia's extensive lagoons and in fresh and brackish waters and the implication of these for management. We then examine the *why*: why do people go fishing and what are their motivations to become fishers? We explore the different aspects of

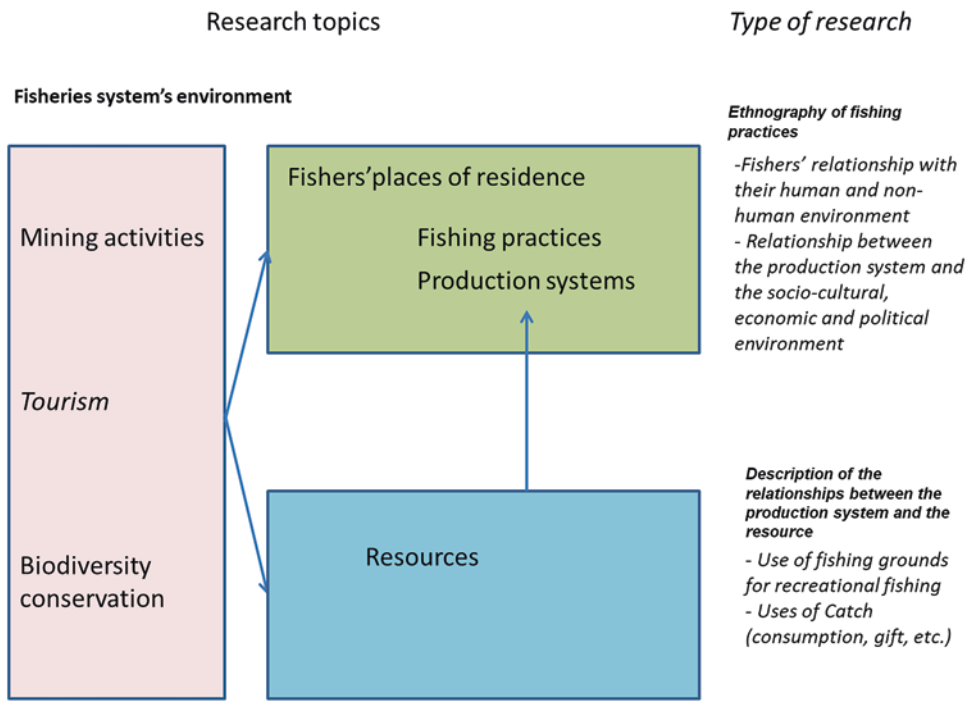


**Fig. 5.1** Typology of human and social science studies of fishing in New Caledonia. (Source: Authors 2022)

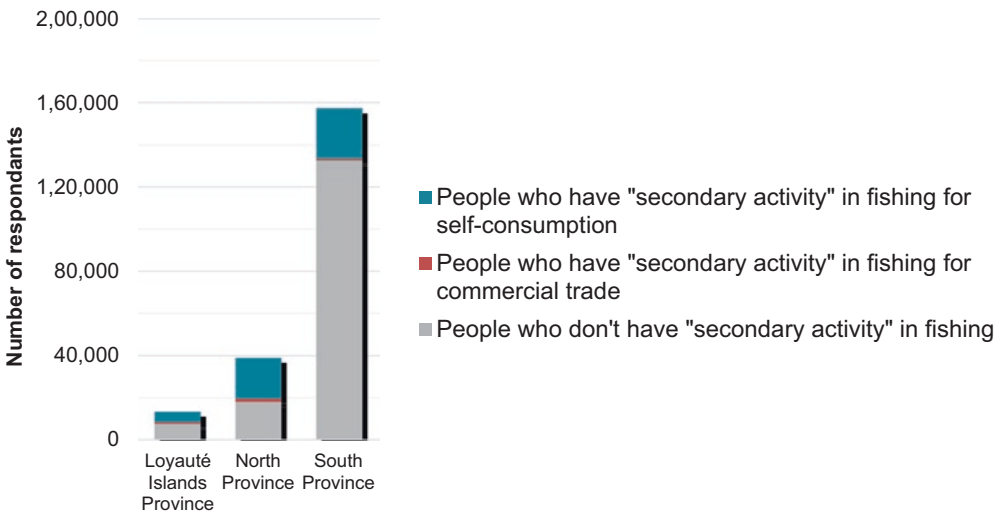


**Fig. 5.2** Province-wise summary of the number of inhabitants declaring that they practise a fishing activity for personal consumption or for sale. (Source: ISEE 2014)

fishing practices including sharing during fishing trips, exchange and the consumption and the sale of the catch. After presenting the institutional and legal categories of each of New Caledonia's provinces (under which the fishers can be classified), we discuss the place and role of fishing in the territory. In the conclusion, we explore ongoing efforts at the country and provincial levels to better capture the diversity of fishing practices and understand fishers' multiple dimensions in the management of the sector and in various fisheries policies.

## 5.2 The Fishers' Dilemma: To Fish and How to Fish, That Is the Question

"Are you a fisher? – No …. – Do you fish? – No… [long silence] Oh yesterday I went fishing with my uncle… – And when was the last fishing trip before? – On Wednesday [2 days before] with my brothers and the children…" This conversation is very frequent in New Caledonia. Many people fish every two or three days but they do not perceive themselves as fishers. They have no fishing license from the

provincial institution. And for Kanak people, if they are not member of a fishing clan whose duty and legitimacy is to provide fish products to customary events, they do not recognise themselves as fishers.

### 5.2.1 Who Are the Fishers?

Estimating the number of active fishers in New Caledonia is complex because of the informal character of subsistence, customary and recreational fishing, none of which are monitored. The general ISEE Census of 2014 provides some information: There were 280 professional reef lagoon fishers reported across New Caledonia. The Census introduced the notion of "pluriactive" fishers engaged in more than one remunerative activity. Respondents had to indicate whether they were engaged in an ancillary fishing activity, either for their personal consumption or for sale (ISEE 2014). These fishers, men and women, total 1 person in the Loyalty Islands Province, 203 in the North Province and 76 in the South Province (these numbers have increased since 2014). Figure 5.2 presents a summary of responses on ancillary activities. In the case of non-professional fishing, it is possible to estimate the differences between fish sold and consumed in the household.

A very small percentage of respondents said that they fish to sell. In the Loyalty Islands and North Provinces, out of a total of 24,468 individuals, 37% (5019 respondents) and 50% (19,449 respondents), respectively, said that they fish for their own or their household's consumption, with the household being defined as a group of individuals who take their meals together. In the South Province, the situation is different because the population is unevenly distributed spatially, with a strong concentration in the metropole of Greater Noumea (which includes the municipalities of Noumea, Païta, Dumbea and Mont-Dore), where income-generating strategies are much more oriented towards salaried employment. This has fundamentally changed the way of life in the local territories and their relationship with nature over time (Sabinot et al. 2019). These differences could explain why only 15% of the 159,890 inhabitants of the South Province (23,983 individuals) said that they fish for self-consumption. To summarise, subsistence fishing in New Caledonia is broader in terms of stakeholders than commercial fishing alone. The number of boats owned by households is also mentioned in the census. While fishing can be done without a boat, most boat owners use them to fish. Of the 85,063 New Caledonian households reported in 2014, 8258 owned one and 646 two or more (ISEE 2014). They use boats mainly for transportation and fishing and usually lend them to friends and extended family.

Various surveys have also shown that informal and non-professional fishing is very common in New Caledonia, especially in Kanak communities (Guyard et al. 2014; Sabinot and Lacombe 2015; Mallet et al. 2018). A comprehensive survey by the New Caledonian Agronomic Institute (IAC) of a representative number of tribal inhabitants showed that 62% of the domestic groups reported having fished in the coastal lagoons in 2010 (Guyard et al. 2014). However, the intensity of this practice remains highly variable. Figure 5.3 shows that close to three quarters of the population in Kanak communities catch an average of 154 kg of lagoon fish, crabs and shellfishes per year, 16% of people have a production nearly five times higher (690 kg per year) and 13% close to 11 times higher (or 1.7 t per year). This difference can be explained by the heterogeneity of fishers in terms of the time devoted to fishing activity and their gear. Only 13% of households recorded as fishers account for 50% of the fish production. The rest (87% of all households) are very much part-time fishers. Some of them spend just a few dozen hours fishing per year (mainly for special events or holidays) when others spend more than 1000 h, which means a fishing trip perhaps once, twice or three times a week. All part-time fishers are also involved in several subsistence, customary or remunerative activities: agriculture, hunting and work (wage or non-wage). For these households in Kanak communities, even though fishing reduces the time available for other activities, farming is never completely abandoned. For all the working-age members of these domestic groups specialised in "fishing", farming always represents more than 32.2% of their time spent working over the year (Guyard et al. 2014).

Since there is uncertainty about the informal sector's production, an assessment of the total fishery production of New Caledonia is difficult. Two studies in 1994 and 2001 (Dalzell and Adams 1994; Virly 2001) showed that subsistence and recreational fishers account for over half of the total (Fig. 5.4). The data is relatively old, but the permanence of community fishing activities demonstrated above, and the rate of recreational boating in the general population, suggests that subsistence and recreational fishing are still significant.

According to monitoring of commercial fisher's logbooks at the province level, the fishing production in New Caledonia accounts for 3570 t in 2015, including 538 t of lagoon and reef fish, 2840 t of tuna and associated fish and 192 t of sea cucumbers and trochus shells. In 2010, the production was recorded as 3769 t. The lagoon/reef fish and sea cucumbers/trochus shells production were, respectively, 1.3 and 1.2 times higher (656 t and 253 t). The pelagic fish production was very similar (2860 t). In terms of value, the fishing activity was a bit less profitable in 2015 (15 million USD dollars of catch) compared to 2010 (16.9 million USD). The value of seafood products caught exclusively in the lagoons was five million USD in 2010 and 4.1 million USD in 2015 when the value of tuna longliner production decreased from 11.9 million USD in 2010 to 10.9 million USD in 2015.

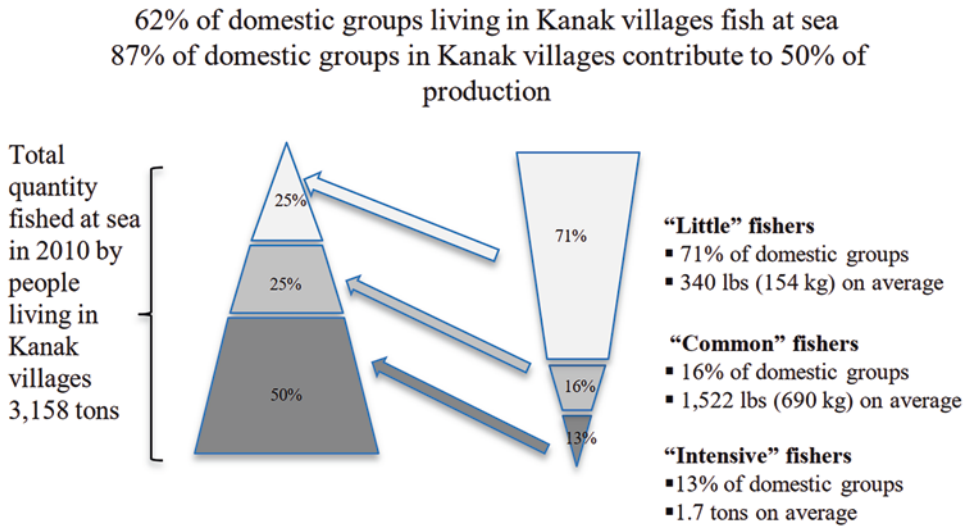


**Fig. 5.3** Distribution of fish volume caught by groups. (Source: Agriculture survey in Kanak communities, Guyard et al. 2014)

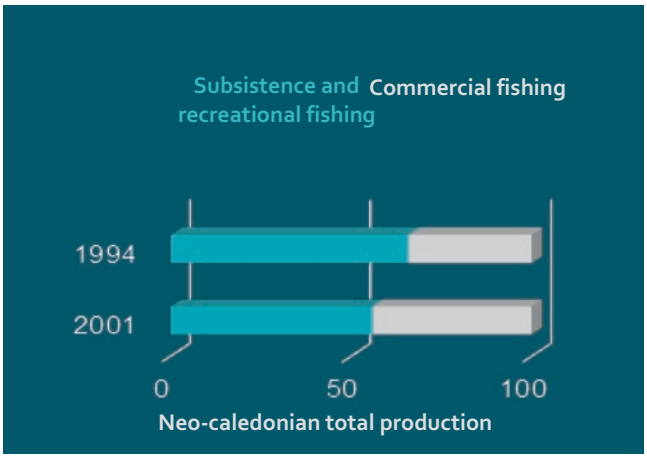


**Fig. 5.4** Share of subsistence and recreational fishing in total New Caledonian production. (Sources: Dalzell and Adams 1994; Virly 2001)

According to Guyard et al. (2014), Kanak communities consumed 60% of what they caught themselves, and gifted 19%, with only 21% sold. Community populations therefore earned 644 million Pacific Francs – 5.9 million USD of income from sea fishing. Due to the distribution of the Caledonian population and the unbalanced development of tourism in the archipelago, Kanak households located in the far North, the West and Southeast (Yaté, Thio and Isle of Pines) tend to market their fish more readily than inhabitants of other communities in the rest of the country.

### 5.2.2 Where and What Do They Fish?

Irrespective of whether fishers practise their activity occasionally, or do so systematically in order to earn an income, they all demonstrate their technical and practical knowledge of the underwater shallow habitats and the inland water bodies that they fish. They select their fishing gear according to the species they target and adapted to the fishing environment, strongly constrained by the weather and tidal changes.

Fishers learn by accompanying their parents or grandparents on fishing trips and in turn pass on knowledge of the fishing grounds to the next generation. Outside Noumea, when Kanak people paddle outrigger canoes, their fishing grounds are in the vicinity of the community. The fishing territory of those who can venture further out to sea includes areas around more distant channels and islets, often associated with coastal clans or communities. In Noumea, fishers are also well adapted to local conditions. They use motorboats or sailboats to fish around the islets and channels of the Great South Lagoon. The professionals also fish outside the lagoon, seeking the deep-water demersal fish on the reef slope at 100–500 m depth, mainly snapper (*Genus Etelis* and *Pristipomoides* of Lutjanidae family), sea perch (*Serranidae* family) and grouper (genus *Epinephelus*). In rural areas, rivers are also fished, mainly for subsistence consumption. Fishers target "crawfish" (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*), eel and mullet (*Mugilidae*). In Yaté lake, recreational fishers target blackbass (*Micropterus salmoides*), an introduced North American species.

Some practices, such as gleaning, are carried out on reef flats and involve the gathering of shellfish, octopus and crabs (especially in mangroves, using crab traps). Mangroves and mudflats are commonly gleaned by women and young people. Hook and line fishing are also practised on the soft bottoms of the lagoon, at the edge of a rising tide reef flat or around isolated reefs in order to catch seabed or near-seabed species such as members of the Lethrinidae family (emperors, emperor breams and pigface breams). Hook and line fishing are practised by both men and women. In areas where standing in water is impossible, this method is also practised from boats, with or without a rod, with a bait or with a trolling lure to catch carnivorous fish such as the narrow-barred

Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) or the dolphinfish, locally known as mahi-mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*) which can grow to 15 kg in weight and a metre in length.

The speargun is very popular in New Caledonia. It is used in a wide variety of environments to catch the most common reef fish (parrot fish, groupers, etc.), firstly all over the lagoons, from the shoreline to the barrier reef, secondly in the channels between the lagoon and the ocean and thirdly on the outer reef slope. It is also used to fish in rivers, in "water holes", which can exceed 10 m in depth. Lobsters and sea cicadas are also caught by dive fishing, and spearguns are used for the larger cray fish. Lobster traps are also used, although less so today. Bare-hand fishing while snorkelling is also practised to collect giant clams (genus *Tridacna*) and mother of pearl shellfish such as trochus (*Trochus niloticus*), as well as sea cucumbers. This last species is not consumed locally. They are exported to the Asian market, mainly China and Singapore, as they have been since the 1800s. They are used in the pharmacopoeia and also eaten (Conand 1986). In Poum, in the North Province, trochus and sea cucumber fishing is an activity that has been part of the territory and the genealogy for a very long time. Some fishers of trocas and sea cucumbers of this commune are direct descendants of the fishers who settled there, originally from the Shetland Islands (Batterbury, pers. com. 2021). Trade in these two shellfish was so important in the second part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Bichlamar, the language used for international trade in Southern Melanesia and now the national language of Vanuatu (Crowley 1990; Tryon and Charpentier 2004), was commonly spoken among the coastal communities of Northern New Caledonia until the Second World War. In 2017, several Arama seniors confirmed to Sabinot and David that their grandparents still used it when they were young in the 1960s–1970s.

Gill nets and cast nets are used in the lagoons to catch fish with gregarious behaviour that move in shallow water (usually one to seven metres deep) such as dawas (*Naso unicornis*), barbs (*Siganidae*), mullet (*Mugilidae*) or even milk fish (mïkwaa, *Chanos chanos*). Gill nets can also be used to block streams and capture schools of fish as they move upstream or downstream. The encircling net is used to catch pelagic fish, mainly *Selar* spp., but also mullet and mïkwaa. Around the Isle of Pines, this last fish is the target of collective fishing carried out during customary ceremonies. Young people sometimes learn this technique from their elders. The rest of the time, they fish with the speargun, troll baits or hook and line. Children very often start and learn by fishing with a hook and line, walking on the reef flat and only then from a boat moving away from the reef flats to isolated coral "potatoes" and remote islets.

Each type of fishing gear is thus associated with a type of habitat or "resource space", and allows the fishing of the desired species by adjusting to its seasons and anatomical or ecological characteristics (Table 5.1). Irrespective of the purpose of fishing – recreational, subsistence or professional – it is common for many different types of fishing gear to be on board the boats in the lagoon in order to adapt to the species of fish and their behaviour. "Resource spaces" can therefore be associated with particular types of fishing, and catches are measures of productivity, depending both on the resource itself and on the associated technique. However, for fishers with professional status, that is, licensed by one of the provinces, it is usually forbidden to carry a speargun on board during a professional fishing trip.

The resource areas that fishers are normally frequent form an interesting criterion for differentiating them, since each resource space corresponds to specific target species and cor-

**Table 5.1** Fishing in resource spaces

| Resource spaces | Productivity* | Main types of fishing | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mangroves | High | Fishing on foot and gill net | Crabs, shellfish and fish |
| River mouths | Very high | Hook and line and gill net | Fish |
| Sea grass beds | High | Hook and line, gill net and cast net | Demersal fish, small pelagic fish and sea cucumbers |
| Pinnacle reef | High | Hook and line and gun | Demersal fish |
| Pelagic areas of the lagoon | Low | Dragnet | Pelagic fish |
| Channels | High | Hook and line and gun | Demersal fish |
| Inner reef flat | Medium | Hook and line, gun and net | Demersal fish and shellfish |
| Outer reef flat | Medium | Hook and line, gun and net | Demersal fish and shellfish |
| Reef crest | High | Hook and line and gun | Demersal fish, shellfish and crustaceans |
| Inner reef drop-off | Medium | Hook and line and gun | Demersal fish, shellfish and crustaceans |
| Outer drop-off with depth of 20–100 m | Medium | Hand line | Demersal fish |
| Drop-off <100 m depth | Low | Hand line | Deep-water demersal fish |
| Pelagic area outside the lagoon | Low | Trolling line | Surface pelagic fish |
| Pelagic area around FADs | Medium | Trolling line and hand line | Surface and sub-surface pelagic fish (50–200 m) |

*By productivity we mean the mass of organic matter developed at a given level of the food chain. It decreases with depth.

responding fishing strategies and techniques. However, few fishers specialise in fishing in a particular area and the species it contains. Apart from those catching deep demersal fish using special techniques (hand line and hand reel), and those using fish aggregation devices (FAD) to fish offshore, most fishers operate across several environments, and their respective fishing practices are just one facet of their fishing "profile". The idea of such profiles was defined in a previous study spanning the whole of Melanesia (David 1997) and is composed of four variables that are still relevant today. These are the "resource space", types of fishing gear used, how the fishing boat is powered and proximity to a household that consumes fish products. It can be applied to three categories of fishers: small-scale commercial fishers, recreational fishers and subsistence fishers. The latter are defined as all non-recreational fishers who fish because of the desire/need for consumption and whose sales only concern the surplus left over after this personal consumption, with these surpluses being always less than half their catches, in number and weight of the catch (David 1997).

Although the concept of the fishing profile is useful to some extent in classifying fishers, it does not cover the diversity of situations, especially the pluriactivity of most Melanesian fishers, and the diversity of combinations of "fisher status/use of production". Thus, a subsistence fisher, who can also be described as a self-consumption fisher because most of his/her production is consumed by this person and their immediate household (he or she only sells surplus production from time to time), will be categorised as an informal fisher if he/she has no professional status. But another subsistence fisher may have the status of a professional fisher, that is, with fishing and commercial licences accorded by the provinces and the government, but with very limited commercial activity because of individual preferences or constraints within the family or social group. Throughout the world, the informal fishing sector, still insufficiently understood to even consider being subject to management, actually spans several definitions that vary depending on the chosen reference system. As we have shown, in New Caledonia, there are two easily identifiable categories of fishers from a legal point of view, the professional and the non-professional: either the fisher has a fishing permit or they do not. We arrive at the same dichotomy if we consider that the "formal" is what is included in public statistics and the informal that which is not. In New Caledonia, at present, only the professional fishery is monitored, through the administrative registration of the fishers themselves and the information concerning their catches in the logbooks submitted to provincial officials. Defining clearly what a fisher is might be a task in its own right, and necessary for any robust accounting of the numbers of fishers and any understanding of the practice in its various dimensions.

## 5.3 What Are the Underlying Reasons for Fishing?

### 5.3.1 Why Do People Go Fishing?

The amount of fish caught in New Caledonia is substantial but there are few fishmongers in the territory, most in Noumea. Thus, most fishers do not fish to sell their catch through official market channels. Professional fishers do so, although not all of them, especially in the islands and the North Province. Fishing is both a recreational activity and one that provides protein and generates income. It is also a practice that allows one to survive, to maintain social relations and to assume a function or a role in the Kanak customary system. Understanding why people fish, and how they distribute their catch, involves these social dimensions.

Fishing for their own and family consumption is a major reason fishing forms part of local livelihoods. A follow-up study of New Caledonian households conducted between 2014 and 2017 (Fig. 5.5) showed that families consume most of their catch (from 41% to 46%). This rises to 58–72% in the North and the Loyalty Islands Provinces. According to the study, professional fishing using official channels accounts for less than 38% for all New Caledonian households and less than 22% for of those living outside of the South Province.

Aside from selling to the scarce fishmongers and other retail outlets, fish products are frequently exchanged or sold, legally or illegally, through channels as diverse as markets, via hawkers, personally from individual to individual, or in meeting places like the *nakamal* where, at the end of the day, many Caledonians consume kava, a tranquilising drink made from the roots of the plant *Piper methysticum* (Chanteraud 2001).

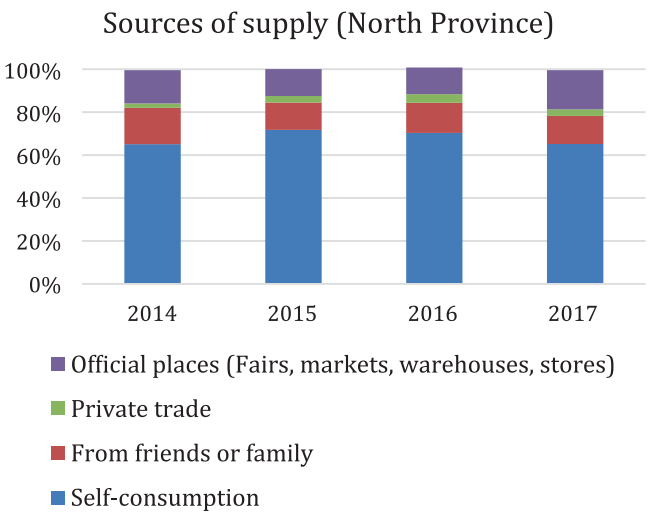


**Fig. 5.5** Sources of supply of fishery products consumed by New Caledonian households. (Source: Quidnovi, ERPA, ASS-NC, DAVAR 2017)

### 5.3.2 What Do the Distribution Patterns of Fish Catch Reveal?

A study of 78 fishers conducted from 2017 to 2018 in the North Province offers a more "socially embedded" view of the economic dimensions and distribution of fishing products and deepens understanding of fisher motivations. It showed that fishers use a wide variety of channels to distribute their fish (Sabinot et al. 2019). All fishers who received support from the Province between 2005 and 2010 were asked about their distribution channels. On average, a fisher from the North Province uses over four different distribution channels and those from the Oceanian Coast use more than six. Figure 5.6 shows to whom fishers generally sell their catch. The two main channels used, regardless of fish product volume, are the local markets (23%) and fulfilling the individual's orders (18%). Because of the difficulties with conserving fresh fish, fishers do fulfil pre-orders where a sale is guaranteed.

It should be noted that in terms of frequency, sales for customary purposes account for 10% of total sales made by professional fishers, almost as much as sales to hawkers (12%) and more than to hotels and restaurants. Some professional fishers mentioned that sales for customary purposes are becoming significant. In addition, a large number of fish are gifted during customary events, and also given to family, friends, children studying in the city, etc.

Fish are also sold at fairs or festivals, where trade has strong social value (Bouard and Sourisseau 2010). Even though there are not many such events, the fact that they account for 11% of the total (in number of channels used, regardless of volume) shows their significance. In addition, fishers from the Belep Islands reported having brought two tonnes of fish to the annual fairs held in Poum and Koumac, two remote northern townships (Sabinot et al. 2019). Some fishers even want to turn professional just so that they can participate in fairs. Bringing fish to a place where people gather, whether to give it away or to sell it, makes it possible for a fisher to assert their "identity".

Whether for commercial or non-commercial purposes, fishers from isolated areas and with limited transport still send fish across the country – mainly through their family network, for communal, religious, tourist, tribal or customary events and for family celebrations – or to send to children or relatives residing elsewhere. To do so, they use the bus, send parcels and transport fish by car in an ice box or in buses laid on for special events. Figure 5.7a, b show the spatial movement of seafood products caught in 2017 by 31 fishers from the Belep islands, Poum and Koumac. Each arrow illustrates a seafood export to another municipality in New Caledonia. The colours reflect the type of event or person receiving the seafood.

Outside official commercial channels, fish transfer in New Caledonia is mainly social and can occur well beyond the fishers' residential area, as Fig. 5.7b illustrates.

### 5.3.3 What Are the Motivations to Become a Fisher?

As we have noted, an individual becomes a fisher primarily because of their family context, and they acquire social skills and know-how through daily or regular experience while young. Those who fish do so because they have learned from their family and have the desire to continue the tradition in the lagoons or rivers. Despite changing lifestyles, fishing maintains links with the local environment as the communities' "pantry", particularly the lagoon's reef spaces and streams, to provide healthy food for family and relatives. Today, fishing is also a means to finance the purchase of school supplies, telephones, household appliances and other one-off expenses. A few days or weeks can be devoted to fishing so that a particular expense can be met and then the fishers before returning to other activities.

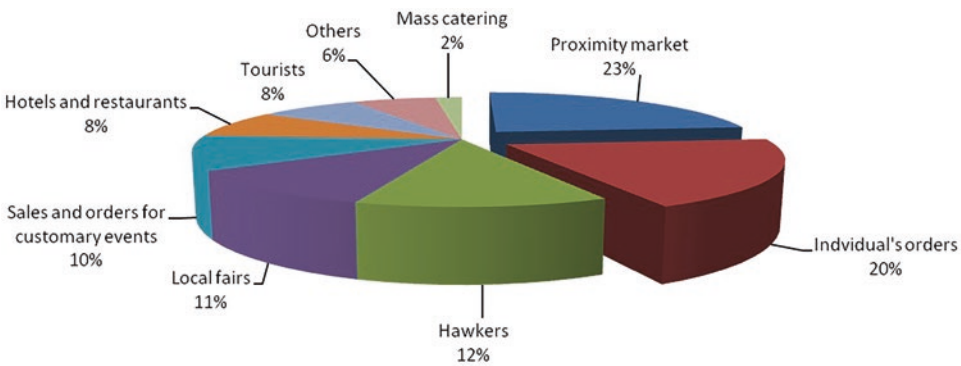


**Fig. 5.6** Distribution of responses regarding fish mongers and buyers. Answer to the question "Who do you normally sell to?" (interviews with 78 professional fishers who received funds and subventions from the government of the North Province)

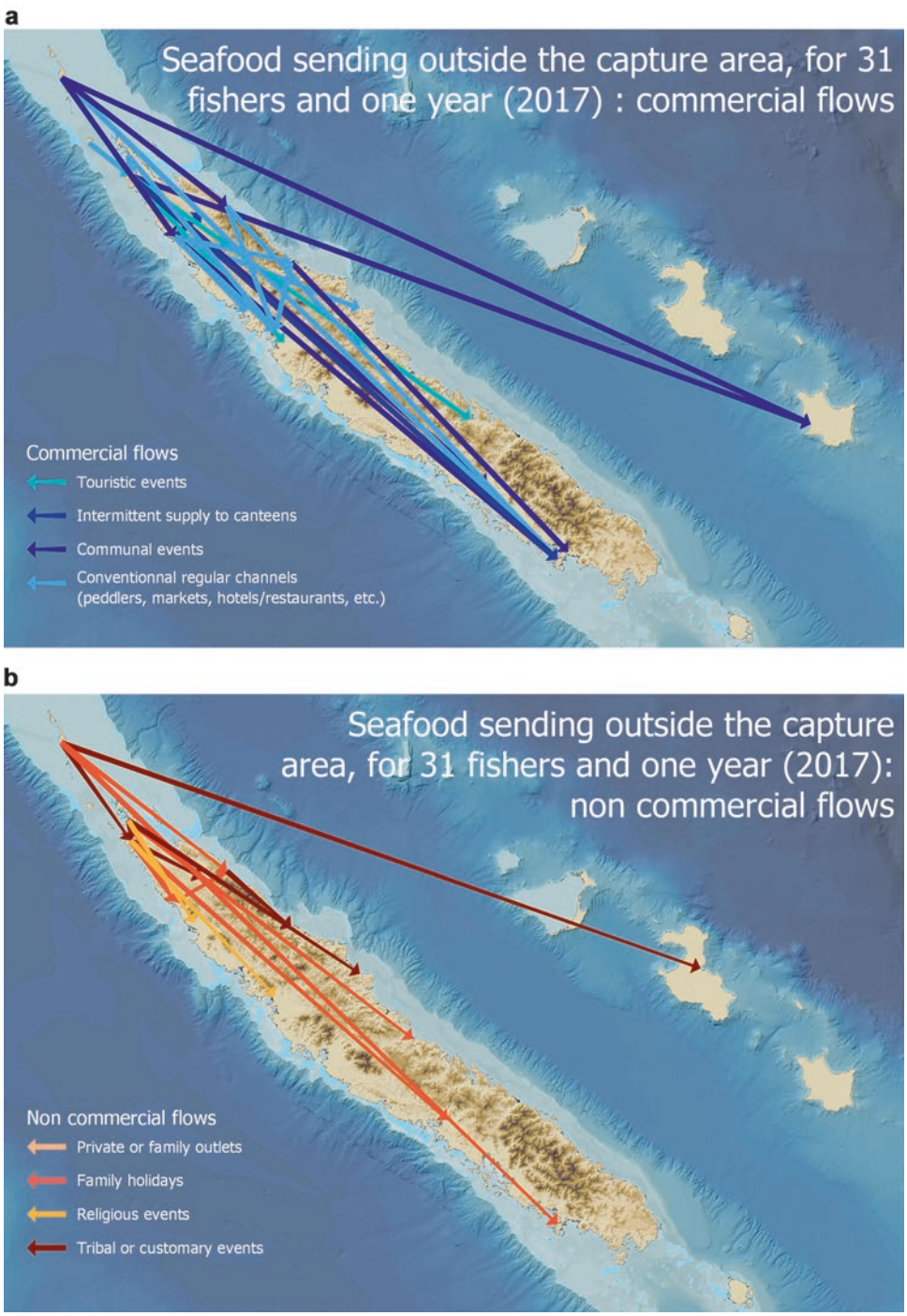


**Fig. 5.7** (**a**, **b**) Transport of fish caught in three North Province villages according to the type of destination. (Source: Authors)

The reasons for opting into commercial fishing can include securing financial support to buy a boat or motor and needing money within the family or making contributions to celebrations and events. Fish are also an "exchange currency" that can be used to barter for agricultural or other products. We observe this practice in Greater Noumea with speargun fishers who trade fish for work on their boat, homemade jams and many other types of products and services.

In Kanak communities in particular, several fishers asserted that there is a "necessity" that leads a person to adopt fishing as a primary activity, especially for professional fishing. The testimony of a man from Lifou Island highlighted the various motivations and constraints that force the fisher to professionalise their activities – mainly relating to leadership and the means to cope with the customary duties inherent with the status:

> If I'm a clan leader, I have more responsibilities than my brother. I have obligations and therefore I will not always have time. My brother will have much more time. He will be able to develop an activity that I will not be able to. But somewhere, I still want to undertake this activity. As I said we are pluriactive, we are customary, we are heads of families, we have responsibilities to the parish, we are fishers, farmers ... and one's well-being in the community is based on that balance. By "well-being" I mean that you are accepted by everyone, your clan recognizes you, you are someone in the community. You belong to yours. When there is an imbalance, you feel that there is discomfort. Likewise, those who focus too much on customary activities, who devote all their energy to them, are forced to "parasitize" the other members of the clan in order to be able to support themselves, buy sugar or buy this or that. This is frowned upon. You have to be self-sufficient, while having enough comfort and being well integrated. This balance is needed. (Interview excerpt 2018)

It is clear that pluriactivity is important for Caledonians, regardless of their background or location. Finding the balance between different activities, especially in a context of increasing monetary needs, is an issue that increasingly preoccupies fishers. Tribal members in particular must find a balance between sufficiently remunerative commercial activity and significant involvement in customary life. The latter requires the contribution of not only marine and agricultural products but also personal time.

The specialisations of individuals and their clan are part of their identity and are originally based on the territory they occupy (Leblic 2008; Sabinot and Herrenschmidt 2019). Fisher clans and sea clans have identities based in part on their use of territory, giving them roles that are important for their relationships with their chieftaincy and other clans; for example, their catch may be shared during customary ceremonies or offered to the chieftaincy. Fishing also occupies an important role in non-Kanak societies but in different ways. When receiving guests, it is satisfying to greet them with lobsters or other seafood. For religious events, some fishers are expected to bring the fruits of their catch.

Even when undertaken professionally, fishing remains a family activity. When an individual owns a boat, others also take advantage of it. The boat is used not only for professional fishing with a family crew but also for customary fishing and for transport. A 2017 survey of 78 professional fishers in the North Province found that 92% of the crew members on professional fishing trips were members of the captain's family (Sabinot et al. 2019). The fisher contributes to many different aspects of society through fishing practice and through the type of equipment they own. The economic, customary, religious and family-focused relations around fishing need more detailed study. Fishing contributes not only to the production of intangible wealth but also to stability and opportunities via social relations, in a context where public services are poorly developed, especially in terms of transport.

## 5.4 Institutional Considerations and Integration of the Multiple Dimensions of Fishing

In New Caledonia, the recognition of fishers by formal institutions and their rights are topics that have been much debated in recent years at provincial and governmental levels. As in other countries, the social relations of fishing were given little considerations until recently.

Teulières-Preston (2000) underlined the juxtaposition of the two institutional systems. Kanak people generally see lagoon areas as part of their territory, with rules and ascribed values that predate colonisation. Land was first appropriated by the colonial power in the 1850s and the arrival of General Du Bouzet in 1855 (Merle 2011). French law divided the "public maritime domain" in reef and lagoon areas according to categories of boats in use, with governmental legislation setting limits on their activities. Customary rules are still respected in areas surrounding clan territories where subsistence and customary fishing activity is practised. The Noumea Accord (1998) reconfigured the marine public domain by giving control over it to the provinces. Different modes of social regulation are thus intertwined, namely, "(i) legislative, (ii) hybrid and (iii) constitutional" (Dana et al. 2016).

New Caledonians come under the purview of government departments and provincial departments. Each of the three provinces has departments and directorates dedicated to fisheries and environmental management, with activities that have a varying degree of transversality. The agencies are the SMRA (Department for the Management of Aquatic Environments and Aquatic Resources) in the North Province, DEI (Department of Integrated Economy) in the Loyalty Islands Province and DENV (Department of Environment) and DDR (Department of Rural Development) in the South Province. These organisations have promulgated environmental codes specifying fishing quotas and species protection status according to the seasons and the level of danger to the species, but they also heed economic development policies where these support fishers and their professionalisation. Provincial rules promote a sustainable fishing and the development of the professional and commercial fishing sector and allow better catch monitoring. While the rules differ from one province to the other, professional fishers wanting to benefit from assistance must all fill out and submit logbooks listing the species and quantities caught and sold.

Despite some subsidies, the legal status of the professional fisher at territorial level is only just beginning to get underway. Steps are in discussion by the Fishers Confederation of New Caledonia to professionalise the sector further, by providing tax exemption schemes to buy materials, and a pension scheme.

Subsistence fishing in rivers and in the lagoon is permitted in all three provinces and does not require permits. There are rules concerning target species and catch quotas. Neither subsistence or recreational fishers can sell their catch. That said, there are many different channels for the exchange and sale of fish and for other fishing products, as we have noted. The public services find integrating these different dimensions of fishing to be challenging.

In the North Province, fishers can obtain subsidies to develop a "traditional economic activities project", and those with other salaried or licensed activities can become professional and then claim provincial subsidies. An additional policy is now being formulated to institutionalise and formalise the status of "*pêcheurs à pied*" (fishers on foot, along shorelines) in the North Province and of subsistence fishers in the South Province. This is partly a surveillance exercise: total catches are unknown, and fisheries and environment departments of all three provinces are trying to better estimate and improve production.

The ability to monitor both professional and informal fishing varies between the provinces and is shown schematically in Fig. 5.8. According to provincial representatives, the logbooks in the South Province report approximatively 90% of production realised by professional fishers recorded in the provincial register, in the North about 50% and in the Loyalty Islands less than 10%. The fisheries departments of the provinces are working to improve the visibility of the harvest, as well as gradually integrating social and informal dimensions.

Given the widespread practice of pluriactivity in the territory, the North Province has made it easier for fishers to receive professional status. They can obtain a fishing licence free of charge if they do not engage in any other income-generating activity that pays more than the minimum wage. In the South Province, the policy is still being formulated, but at present, the fisher must not engage in any salaried activity and must not practise a licensed activity other than one that exclusively concerns the use of the boat for which a professional marine fishing permit is being sought. In the Loyalty Islands Province, the licence is free of charge and fishers are authorised to have incomes from other activities. There is a fish conditioning unit, including an ice plant, financed by the province that offers contracts and guarantees sales for professional fishers. They can also obtain a fuel

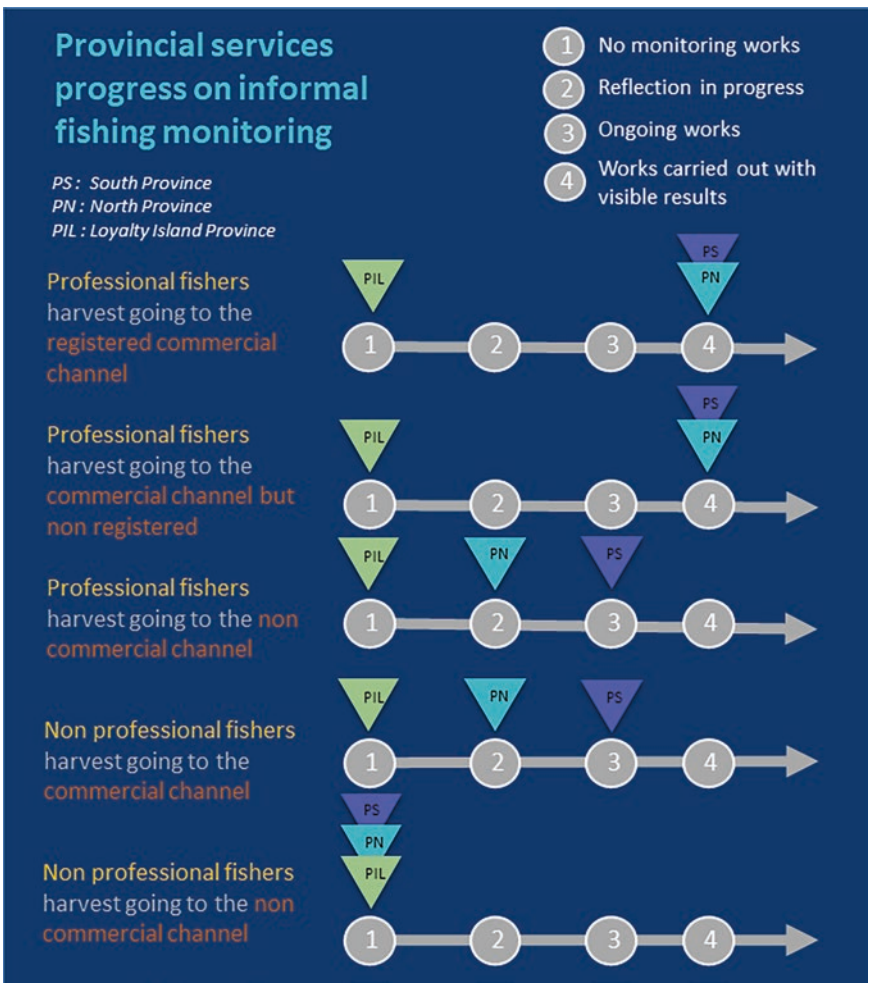


**Fig. 5.8** The provinces' ability to monitor catches of professional and non-professional fishers. (Source: Authors)

subsidy, but this is less popular. Generally, all fishers are expected to file fishing catch volume reports.

The residential unit is the most appropriate unit to understand fishers' strategies, since it accounts for pluriactivity and local-level decision-making at the residence level (living unit) or household level (consumption unit). Decisions are often taken by one individual; however, if all members of the domestic group, including men, women and children, practise fishing, then "social capital" is strong. Especially in Kanak communities, the collective dimension goes further than the core family, and different collective levels interact around fishing activity. Moreover, local cultural or even religious associations can be important.

A major problem for public authorities remains the lack of data on fishing. They need to know how fishing decisions are made and how individual and collective decisions are articulated (or not) within local realities and constraints, to better monitor catch rates and inform policy and management decisions. Governance requires management of the frequency of trips, as well as the type of operations and fishing gear mobilised. Managing stocks focuses on target species and size classes; fishing grounds are regulated by permission/prohibition to access specific fishing areas.

Work is still in progress, and the understanding of the multiple dimensions of fishers and of the evolution of the resource continues to be a major challenge. Formalisation by provincial authorities, the professionalisation of the sector and according status to the different categories of fishers will assist knowledge acquisition, monitoring of fishing activities and management.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In New Caledonia, fishing is the most common human use of coral reefs. This was a country of fishers as well as farmers – but now also one of employment in mining, tourism and other services. Governmental and provincial institutions have put rules in place for the professionalisation of their fishers, intended for those who sell their catch. While they are struggling to do this, and as we have shown, and cannot monitor catches comprehensively, it is important to note that official support for the development of fishing in New Caledonia has largely contributed to the acquisition of boats by fishers. Although a fisher who owns a boat no doubt uses it to fish, permission may be given for others to use it, depending not only on their need for food or income but also as an act of customary respect or to earn prestige and legitimacy. During our investigations, we were often told that a good fisher is a "responsible" and "respectful" fisher. The fisher's social function is essential to the well-being of New Caledonian society as a whole. Recognising these multiple dimensions within small-scale fisheries management policies is difficult, but it has already begun in New Caledonia, and the study of these issues can shed light on evolving practices elsewhere, too.

We have demonstrated the multifunctionality of fishing and in particular the diversity of functions that fishers fulfil and the various roles they play. Research interest has increased in small-scale fishing over the last decade, with renewed interest from international institutions, in particular because of its importance for the food security of coastal populations. The global "Too Big to Ignore" (TBTI) project, led by the University of Newfoundland, which "focuses on addressing viability and sustainability of small-scale fisheries"[1] is a perfect example of the manifestation of this interest.

In our globalising world where urban life tends to supplant rural ways of living, the risk to balanced management of marine fish stocks comes from accelerating concentration in the fishing sector, through large industrial-scale fishing fleets operating in the global ocean. Widespread overexploitation is therefore the dark future that threatens fisheries. In 2016, about 35% of global fish production entered international trade in various forms for human consumption or non-edible purposes. The 60 million tonnes (live weight equivalent) of total fish and fish products exported in 2016 represent a 245% increase over 1976 (FAO 2018). With a population that could exceed 10.3 billion by the end of the twenty-first century (medium variant; the high variant even predicts 14.8 billion; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022), humanity cannot survive without seafood and without protecting local fishing grounds against poaching and global overexploitation. New Caledonia has seen some efforts to preserve resources and to assist fishers, and future developments will need to be monitored.

The only alternative to avoid the looming disaster of widespread over-exploitation is to bring small-scale fisheries back to the forefront, which means enhancing and acknowledging the importance of small-scale fishers and their knowledge and practices within society so that they can be considered the rightful custodians of a coastal fisheries heritage (Cillaurren and David 2003). To this end, coral reefs and lagoons, for the most part inaccessible to large fishing vessels, can play a key role. New Caledonia, whose reef ecosystem is still in good condition (or even in very good condition in the case of some areas further away from Noumea), could serve as a model for other countries. Giving fishers a real chance to take their place in society, by feeding the population; managing the resources, transmitting their knowledge, values and know-how; bringing money into the home; and fulfilling their customary role when they have to, are future challenges.

[1] http://toobigtoignore.net/.

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# "Fortunately, I Have My Field": Changes and Permanencies in Kanak Family Farming

6

Séverine Bouard, Leïla Apithy, Stéphane Guyard, and Jean-Michel Sourisseau

**Abstract**

In this chapter, we examine the main transformations that have marked Kanak family farming and describe in particular the ways that monetarisation and globalisation have influenced Kanak custom. First, we briefly recall the historical foundations of Kanak family farming. We then describe the transformations that have swept through it: changes in the functions associated with Kanak family farming, the magnitude, the technical evolutions and the methods of deriving value from products obtained from agricultural activities, hunting and fishing, embedded in wider relationships of exchange and territorial anchoring. We go on to explore the sustainability of the non-commercial dimension of these activities. We conclude with lessons we can learn from the practice of family farming in order to think about its place and its contribution to the rural New Caledonian world and more broadly in future economic models.

**Keywords**

Family farming · Domestic economy · Social change · Pluriactivity · Households · Livelihoods

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## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we track the trajectory of Kanak family farming by taking into account the cultural foundations of clan (or tribal/community) organisation – largely hybridised today with settler, mainly European culture and language, but still playing a structuring role. Among these foundations are the marginalisation and relative confinement of Kanak people in reserves during the early days of colonisation, the still-present influence of those spatial logics and the way actors perceive and interact with labour and product markets while maintaining a continuity between the productive and domestic spheres.

Firstly, we briefly recall the historical foundations of Kanak family farming. We then examine the transformations that have swept through it: changes in the role of farming, the magnitude, the technical evolutions and the methods of deriving value from products obtained from agricultural activities, hunting and fishing and how these are embedded in wider relationships of exchange and territorial anchoring. We go on to explore the sustainability of the non-commercial dimension of these activities.

These themes exist in the literature. Several studies on Kanak society have noted not only the permanence and the resilience of customary values but also their transformations and their hybridisation with a market economy that was established and expanded with European settlement from the 1850s (Guiart 1998; Leblic 1993; Bensa and Leblic 2000; Demmer and Salaün 2006; Faugère 1998; Faugère and Merle 2010; Kowasch 2010). Other studies highlight the risks of a non-economic interpretation of Kanak social dynamics, while pointing out the Kanak specificities in New Caledonian society. These emphasise the Kanak world's relationship to work and the detailed rationales behind accumulation by rural households (Mercoiret et al. 1999; Gorohouna 2011; Gaillard and Sourisseau 2009).

The available literature has little to say on the dynamics of microeconomic and social change, beyond the unresolved


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debate between those who fear the disintegration of Kanak society and its subsumption by the market economy and those seeing hope of innovation among New Caledonia's indigenous population that will allow the maintenance of their societal foundations and preservation of clan relationships and their link to the natural environment. Bensa and Freyss (1994) concluded that "For the time being, money is more soluble in Kanak society than Kanak society in money ...." But they did not explore in any detailed way the possibility of maintaining agricultural activities, hunting and fishing or even continued residence in Kanak villages, on customary lands while in – or adjacent to – "western" society. They focused more on the capacity of tradition to control the consumption of consumer goods and to separate economic and political power. They noted the durability of this separation, as well as the maintenance of high levels of food self-sufficiency, which implied the maintenance of agricultural production and hunting, fishing and gathering activities. One of their original observations was to say that maintenance of tradition has an economic logic, as well as important social value. In the rationale of New Caledonia's "assisted" economy (with substantial subsidies from France and overseas imports), it is difficult for products from Kanak family farming to find their place in a very narrow market dominated by large importers or European farmers. New Caledonia also has a high cost of living and wages that limit the interest in, and the profitability of, agricultural work. These activities therefore remain weakly monetarised. In the end, for Kanak households, money can only be earned through waged labour, mainly from public employment and more recently from mining opportunities. This situation does not favour the rise of agrarian capitalist entrepreneurs.

## 6.2 Recent History of Kanak Family Farming

### 6.2.1 From Segregation by Confiscation of Land and Confinement…

The structuring of Kanak society and its associated production systems were deeply modified by colonisation. The transformation started with the demographic and health shocks brought with the first contacts in the 1840s (mainly with Marist missionaries in the north of Grande Terre). Then, after the French takeover in 1854 and the prevarications between the various colonial projects (penal servitude, free colonisation from France and mining), the Feillet plan (1893–1905) marked the beginning of colonisation through settling European farmers, which displaced Kanak communities. In parallel with the expropriation of land for these free settlers, the French colonial administration organised and enforced the confinement of the Kanak, subjected to the *Code de l'Indigénat* (Indigenous Code; Merle and Muckle 2019). Thus, the reduction in available land due to confinement, and the need to find time to work at remunerative activities in order to be able to pay the colonial capitation tax, compelled the Kanak to radically simplify their agricultural production systems. Their bundles of land rights were either made irrelevant or overridden. The extensive pre-colonial agricultural techniques (terraces, ridges) declined, along with their mastery of tuber cultivation over thousands of years (Haudricourt 1964). The number of crop combinations, rotations and fallow periods all decreased. While horticultural know-how remained the foundation of the Kanak agricultural model, its refinements faded away (Barrau 1956), and fields requiring less attention and care made their appearance. The garden, still organised around the cultivation of taro and yam, continued to exist but at lower densities. Other plants, more rustic and requiring less husbandry (taro from New Hebrides, legumes), were incorporated into cropping systems (Barrau 1956; Saussol 1979). While cattle husbandry remained rare, pigs became part of livestock systems, especially in the Loyalty Islands. Hunting, ancestrally limited to the fruit bat, expanded to other species following the ill-controlled multiplication of pigs and wild deer, initially introduced for domestication.

The Kanak responded to the scarcity of land and the need to work with a simplification of crop management sequences and the rapid adoption of alternative solutions, but adaptation to the new circumstances also necessitated livelihood diversification. Households began combining agriculture, fishing and hunting with wage labour. The "mining boom" period in the late 1960s resulted in a diversification of activity systems towards employment in the mines. Subsequently, the French government decided to help manage the economic depression that followed the boom, with more provision of administrative or government jobs (Freyss 1995).

Despite the abolition of the *Code de l'Indigénat*, expansion of reserves and a mishmash of development efforts, Kanak agriculture was largely ignored by the public authorities until the 1970s. The *Opération Café*, to encourage the Kanak to cultivate coffee, is emblematic of the effort to improve the living conditions of community populations in response to rising demands for their independence in the late 1970s. This significant operation had mixed success despite the significant financial and human resources that were committed to it. In any case, agricultural and social policies did not reverse the feeling of marginalisation among Kanak people (Kohler and Pillon 1986).

Today, New Caledonia enjoys a specific political status, a result of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) and the Nouméa Accord (1998), signed in response to the violent expression of claims for Kanak independence in the 1980s.

In addition to a programmed transition to independence, still in negotiation in 2023, this status created three provinces endowed with significant powers. After decades of marginalisation linked to the settlement of colonisers of European origin, these recent political changes have considerably improved the integration of the Kanak in the market economy.

### 6.2.2 … to Current Kanak Family Farming

Even though Kanak agriculture has been marginalised historically, confined to unfavourable soils by colonial land seizures and displacement of Kanak communities, it continues to play a key role in household food security, non-commercial exchanges and the local economy. Nowadays, family farming in communities still exists, but surveys and agricultural statistics show difficulties in measuring its non-commercial elements (self-consumption and exchanges) and the "informal" dimensions of agricultural production. For example, the general agricultural censuses (ISEE/DAVAR 2004, 2013; ITSEE 1993) propose snapshots of the agricultural sector and interesting diachronic syntheses, but the majority of Kanak households involved in agricultural production are invisible in them. This is because the information is largely based on the measurement of production for which accounting records are maintained. Also, a threshold is applied corresponding to a level of production and/or minimum surface area cultivated. The agricultural population is therefore only partially described, and the volume of its production is underestimated. A survey conducted in 2011 of 1786 Kanak households representing 12.5% of the population residing in communities (Guyard et al. 2013a) showed that almost all families have at least one field but that production varies considerably.

Harvested agricultural volumes (from fields and home gardens) reflect the importance of community agriculture. They amounted to 31,000 tonnes in 2010, with tubers and bananas accounting for more than half (respectively, 10,000 tonnes of tubers and 6000 tonnes of bananas, that is to say an average of 940 kg tubers/household and 550 kg bananas/household). The provinces do not all contribute equally to production: the North Province generates half of the community crop production, the Loyalty Islands Province one-third and the South Province only 13% where Kanak people living on customary land represented only 6% of the population (Guyard et al. 2014) and 9% of customary land (DITTT, ADRAF 2019). Specifically, the North Province produces half of the tubers (mainly on the Northern East Coast) and 80% of the bananas (mainly in the North). The Loyalty Islands produce half of the coconut crop (mainly on Ouvéa and Lifou) and 42% of fruit (excepting bananas) and field vegetables. Maré is conspicuous for its production of tubers. While almost every domestic group owns at least one field, the quantities harvested vary: 25% of domestic groups generate 60% of the total volume, each of them harvesting an average of 6.5 tonnes per year (with a minimum of 3.3 tonnes). On the other hand, 50% of the domestic groups contribute only 12% to the total agricultural production of Kanak people on customary lands (860 kg on average) (Guyard et al. 2014).

Most of all, this research confirmed the economic importance of farming and hunting/fishing activities for community populations: product sales make nearly 16.7 million € from a total of 276 million € of monetary income, which is just 6%. For each domestic group, the mean is 120 € from a mean total income of 2045 € per month. At first glance, this monthly income may seem high compared to the average disposable income in metropolitan France (36,740 € in 2017 or 3061/month), but the average cost of living is 33% higher than in France. Some items are considerably more expensive than in France (64% for communications and 73% for food) but only 2% more for transport. Furthermore, the average size of domestic groups is 4.9 people, compared to 2.2 in France in 2017. Agricultural monetary income is higher in the Loyalty Islands Province (166 €/month) than in the North Province (106 €) or in the South Province (91 €) (Guyard et al. 2014).

However, by including home consumption, gifts and customary transfers, the value of these agricultural activities rises to 65 million €. This figure is not insignificant when compared to the market agricultural production captured by official statistics: 87 million € (DAVAR, ISEE 2011). For domestic groups, their total income from agricultural and hunting/fishing activities thus amounts to 755 € on average from a total of 2677 € per month. It amounts to 825 € for the domestic groups of the Loyalty Islands Province, 816 € for those of the North Province and 500 € for those of the South Province. With this method of calculation, the ranking of provinces with the highest average income (agricultural and non-agricultural) varies. In terms of monetary income, it is in the South Province where the average monthly income is the highest, at 2305 € per month against 2103 € for the Loyalty Islands Province and 1902 € for the North Province. However, taking into account the non-market value of agricultural and hunting/fishing products, the Islands Province (2757 €) overtakes the South Province (2707 €) and the North Province (2606 €) (Guyard et al. 2013b).

Even though we cannot incorporate the value of social and cultural practices by putting a price on products given away, exchanged or consumed within the family, this calculation shows that the wealth generated by agricultural and hunting/fishing activities cannot be reduced to their commercial dimension. The amount of time devoted to these activities, the volumes produced and exchanged and their contribution to incomes, food and social capital leave no doubt: agriculture, hunting and fishing continue to occupy a central place in the economy (in its broader meaning) of the

Kanak clans and communities in all parts of the territory, including of those in close proximity to urban centres and development hubs (Guyard et al. 2013a). Even though Kanak family farming has historically been marginalised and confined to unfavourable land, it continues to play a key role in household food security, non-commercial exchanges, the local economy and the maintenance of customary, family and social ties.

This study also revealed the prominent place of income from waged labour for households living in communities, which reflects a gradual transformation of activity systems over time. Wages and other incomes from "self-employment and odd jobs" now represent, on average, 60% of the monetary income of domestic units. We will now discuss the combination of family farming with hunting and fishing activities and other work activities (wage labour, entrepreneurship, etc.).

## 6.3 Rural Activities in Kanak Communities: A Way to Understand Recent Economic and Social Recompositions?

Throughout the archipelago's precolonial and colonial history, agricultural, hunting and fishing activities constituted the economic core of Kanak organisation, to provide food for the households as well as to build power relationships and alliances within and between clans. These activities therefore have a social dimension and their implementation has adapted to the major historical periods. Today, the Kanak farming systems are very diverse, especially in technical terms and in the way in which production generates value. Nevertheless, Kanak family farming continues to rely on:

- The production of tubers (yam, taro and, more recently, cassava) as also other food plants (with a particular role for the banana), grown on small plots, mainly with manual labour. There is very limited access to inputs and hired labour.
- A sophisticated management of genetic material, based on the maintenance of diversity and the dissemination of knowledge and techniques and the exchange of clones and varieties.
- Geographical specialisations in the combination of agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering, which more or less structure long-distance exchange systems.
- Very limited pig and poultry farming activities.
- Very often a distant and restricted relationship with markets: we observe the recent and limited appearance of one or two commercial farms per municipality by some Kanak agricultural entrepreneurs, most often on land allocated to groups subject to special local rules (*groupement de droit particulier local*, GDPL) or on rented land, but always separated from food and customary plots.

An element of durability is the involvement not only of domestic groups but also of the individuals who compose them. In 2010, 93% of Kanak domestic groups residing in communities owned at least one field, and 90% of all working-age people (85% of 39,000 workers over 16 years of age) reported farming, hunting, fishing or gathering activities, and for 56% of them, these were their only activities in the year. The survey also showed that 72% of individuals between the ages of 14 and 15 also took part in these activities and that, occasionally, even younger children did so. The changes therefore concern the intensity of involvement in community activities, more than this involvement itself (Guyard et al. 2014).

Figures specific to Kanak agriculture are hard to come by, but Françoise Brune (1993) studied the "food" fields of four communities located along the Koné-Tiwaka transversal route during the 1991–1992 agricultural season. She built on Jacques Barrau's survey in 1952 (Barrau 1956), and the work is invaluable for tracking historical transformations. Both surveys were conducted prior to the inauguration of the current road (in 2000), which we can assume has greatly increased the mobility of these communities and therefore modified their activity systems. These four communities were chosen to be typical of a coastal environment on the leeward coast (Oundjo in the West), two contrasting inland settings (Atéou and Bopope) and a coastal environment on the windward coast (Kokengone in the East).

Representative results at the community level cannot be derived from the IAC survey realised in 2011 (Guyard et al. 2014), and therefore a strict comparison is not possible. However, case studies on the Koné-Tiwaka communities add to the data collected by the later statistical study. The communities in question straddle two areas of the North Province for which the IAC survey is representative: the area known as the Western Spaces (communes of Poya, Pouembout, Koné and Voh) and the area called the Ocean Coast (communes of Hienghène, Touho, Poindimié and Ponérihouen). These areas are much larger and add up to a population of 14,000, while the four communities of Tiwaka had a total of only 650 inhabitants in 1991 (Brune 1993). In both cases, the surface areas were calculated from the footprint of one plant of the crop concerned, using the same conversion scales. The number of plants is probably slightly underestimated by the IAC survey. Indeed, the method uses estimations, and some plots may have been overlooked, while Brune and Barrau were accurate and exhaustive in their assessments.

Between 1952 and 1991, per capita acreage of tubers plummeted from 461 to 136 $m^2$/inhabitant. This drastic decline concerned all types of tubers, but taro was the most affected (from 170 to 25 $m^2$/inhabitant, with a quasi-

disappearance of irrigated taro). The yam, which has the most symbolic value, was the least affected, with the areas under cultivation appearing to bottom out at a low threshold of production necessary to meet household needs for food and customary donations; the quantity of the latter has been revised downward, notably because money and other foodstuffs could be used. For banana, the acreages decreased by half (from 128 to 57 $m^2$/inhabitant), which is commensurate with the less demanding character of the plant and less rigorous management, although with more crop losses. Between 1991 and 2010, the area under cultivation continued to fall, but the pace had slowed down, and more importantly, the decline was mainly for cassava. Yam acreages per capita seemed to be stable, around 40 $m^2$ per inhabitant, especially if one considers the conditions of the comparison. We note that the surface areas were very similar, in aggregate, over the whole of the North Province and the two zones of the Western Spaces and the Ocean Coast. For bananas, on the other hand, the estimated areas increased significantly. At first glance, the decrease in cassava, which is not very demanding in terms of labour, means we can assume that the time devoted to tuber cultivation has not changed significantly over the last 20 years. The increase in banana acreages can be explained by the fact that this crop has low labour requirements and is valued for its culinary qualities. Bananas have also been used to "mark" or lay claim to land, in a context of competing land tenure claims and tensions. This may explain land use trends after the decline in cultivation observed between 1952 and 1991. Moreover, while other crops, especially fruit trees and open-field vegetables and fruits, occupied only 10% of the surface areas along the Koné-Tiwaka route in 1991, they represented nearly 25% in the North Province in 2010. Even though these other crops are less widespread, they nonetheless form part of the agriculture practised in Kanak villages.

With respect to Jean Freyss's thoughts on diversification of household incomes resulting from New Caledonia's "assisted economy" (1995), we find it difficult to judge the processes of attraction/repulsion to the labour market in the nickel sector or to paid work in public administration. We lack points of comparison or benchmark data on fishing and hunting for the 1990s. And yet, community agricultural activity seems to have endured despite an increase in off-farm options and was estimated in 2010 to be close to its 1991 level. This is despite the period being much more favourable economically, with high nickel prices and a level of foreign direct investment that boosted the economy (Geronimi and Blaise 2016) and also a much lower unemployment rate and considerable social progress (CEROM 2008).

The case of the communities around Voh, Koné, Pouembout (VKP) and Poya in the North Province is interesting. With the recent growth of VKP as a Kanak-dominated urban hub anchored by the Koniambo mine (see Chaps. 8 and 9 by Kowasch and Merlin, and Demmer in this book), with associated local economic development and subcontracting work, a decline in local activities in the communities located nearby would be expected. Indeed, the firm Émergence estimated that almost all of the households and domestic groups of the Koné and Pouembout communities had at least one of their members employed in 2008 (Emergence 2008). However, the IAC survey shows that domestic groups residing in this area maintain an above-average non-monetary income from agricultural, fishing, hunting and gathering activities (680 € against the average of 635 €). The region's development does not seem to have had an impact on the time spent on these (Guyard et al. 2013a). Figure 6.1 shows that the time invested in agricultural and hunting/fishing work in the *Espace de l'Ouest* (Voh, Koné, Pouembout and Poya) is close to the time spent in agricultural activities by individuals in Kanak villages on the East Coast (*Côte Océanienne*), more distant from the mining and urban hub. Formal employment opportunities are much rarer on the East Coast. But the average hours spent on other activities are almost as great as for individuals in the South Province, while the average hours spent on other work activities is close to those of individuals in the South Province and Greater Nouméa.

## 6.4 Kanak Farming Systems: Still Complex and Responsive to Innovation

Historically, as we have outlined, the sale of crops produced on household gardens has been limited. The choice of crops, at least as far as tubers are concerned, has remained stable. Aside from rare exceptions, in 2010 the estimate by the IAC community survey of the proportion of products sold commercially is not high (13% of the products, see Fig. 6.2).

The development of more intensive and specialised orchards, fruit and vegetable production using the cultivation techniques disseminated by agricultural services has only occurred among a small number of domestic groups (Fabert 2013; Guyard et al. 2014). This has been a hesitant change in farm configurations, marginally affecting the agricultural practices of the "core" of the food system, which consists of the tuber-banana combination, more specifically the yam-banana association. The banana, as already noted, retains a special place in Kanak agriculture and contributes to the permanence of agricultural activity. Growing bananas does not restrict pursuing other livelihood activities, so it is highly compatible with pluriactivity.

In the end, even if some diversification of cropping systems is underway, the surface areas devoted to the heart of the Kanak agricultural food system do not seem to be diminishing and nor is the proportion of yams in crop rotations.

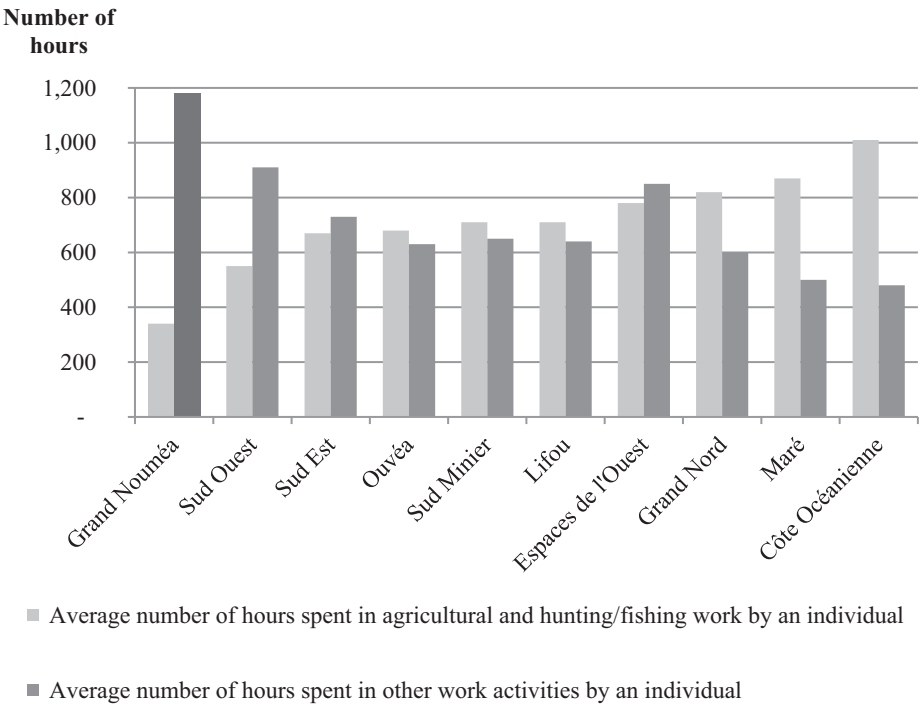


**Fig. 6.1** Time spent in agricultural work and in other activities by an individual. (Source: Guyard et al. 2013a)

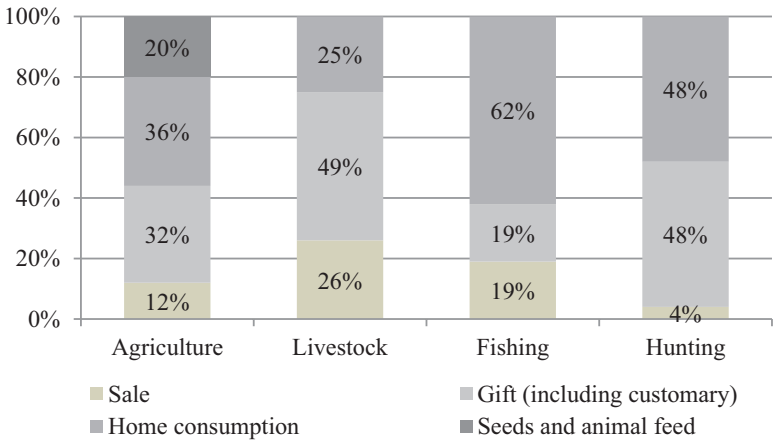


**Fig. 6.2** Destination of food system products in 2010, the prevalence of the non-market. (Source: Guyard et al. 2013a)

The strong economic development of the past two decades has not been accompanied by a decline in food cultivation. One hypothesis is that in a logic of social reproduction, it is strategically important to maintain a minimal productive base even as household income shifts to wages. There is a "threshold" – the lowest amount of activity necessary to activate social links via exchanges and an active relationship. Since the 1980s, the surface areas farmed and the labour mobilised have stabilised.

To understand the richness, diversity and complexity of technical systems and cropping practices, it is necessary to observe them directly, along with the composition of agricultural plots. Insights into this complexity are provided by a study by Gaillard (2007) on the different cropping practices of yam-based gardens, an extremely rich PhD and book by Godin (2009, 2015) on the yam cultivation calendar of the Tendo community (Hienghène) and an analysis of Kanak traditional gardens by Fabert (2013). As far as yams are concerned, the typology established by Gaillard (2007) defines five cropping systems which are part of three production systems (differentiated according to the degree of market integration of products), which are themselves included in three activity systems (differentiated by social anchoring to the producer's clan and community) (Table 6.1).

The first two cropping systems ("all manual" and "not very intensive"), emblematic of the "traditional" subsistence system, retain many of the attributes from those observed by Brune in 1991 or even by Barrau in 1952. They concern more than a third of all Kanak gardens (in all configurations, Fabert 2013) and almost three-quarters of plots dedicated to yams.

**Table 6.1** Typology of yam-based cropping systems

| | Number of yam varieties | Crop support | Equipment, tillage and soil preparation | Staking | Degree of market integration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All manual | >10 | Furrow | Manual | Poles | No integration at all, to low integration |
| Not very intensive | >10 | Furrow | Tiller | Poles | |
| Intensifying | 5 < X < 10 | Narrow ridge | Service delivery tractor | Wires | Ongoing market integration |
| Intensive with little soil preparation | <5 | Narrow ridge | Service delivery tractor | Simplified | Strong market integration |
| Intensive with little soil preparation | <5 | Narrow ridge | Personal tractor | Wires | |

Source: Gaillard (2007)

In the traditional cropping systems studied, two yam species – *Dioscorea esculenta* and, in particular, *Dioscorea alata* – dominate very widely. There is an average of more than ten varieties on each plot, a statistic confirmed by Fabert (2013). As noted by Barrau in the 1950s, these varieties are mainly hardy ones and require shallow planting and limited soil preparation. The focus on these varieties has led to the loss of the more delicate and demanding varieties present before colonisation, such as the old "batane", which could reach three metres in length. Diversity has therefore altered, mainly through abandonment but also through the introduction of varieties from other archipelagos in the region, especially those originating from agronomic research institutes. But some diversity does exist and continues to follow the same rationales and objectives as in the past. Firstly, early first-crop varieties as well as varieties harvested later (second crop) are planted to spread consumption over the season and optimise conservation operations. Since the 1950s, third-crop varieties have become rarer, but despite proven increased hardiness, the staggering of crops still seems to work well with the genetic material available. Secondly, diversity makes it possible to distribute production according to the various functions assigned to it. A clear differentiation exists between yams for day-to-day consumption, yams for sale, yams for seeds and yams for customary purposes exists, as do differentiated cropping practices.

Today, the revival of new yam ceremonies, with an increase in attendance and the quantities that are exchanged, and the existence of seed fields dedicated to the conservation of clones and varieties at by clans or communities demonstrate the sustainability of practices that maintain a minimum level of cultivated biodiversity (Gaillard 2007).

The same logic is observed for the banana. For this crop, diversity is managed more at the territorial level ¬and less at the plot level. This is to adapt to the different conditions of the archipelago but also for strategic reasons (Fabert 2013). Furthermore, the distinction between the "real" old bananas with customary value and the "dessert" bananas introduced more recently shows the durability of the cultural aspects of Kanak agriculture and proves that Kanak farmers possess the fine knowledge required to cultivate the different varieties (Kagy and Carreel 2004).

The traditional yam cropping systems observed involve regular periods of agricultural work over the year. Pre-planting operations are especially important, with special attention paid to the making of ridges, and then digging holes, with extended tillage to loosen the soil. The richness of the various techniques of staking deserves mention: choice of poles and ties, the geometry, choice of knots according to the varieties, etc. They are all indicative of the special care that farmers take. In the same way, manual harvesting always follows strict rules concerning not only who is authorised to "pull out" the yam but also the techniques to use so that the tubers are not damaged and can be preserved. For the entirety of the technical itinerary of yam production, the erosion of knowledge and the loss of the genetic quality of the plants observed in 1991 by Brune does not seem to have worsened (Fabert 2013). Recent studies (Fabert 2013; Bouard et al. 2020) indicate instead a continuity in the care accorded to symbolic plants – the yams first and foremost among them – in conjunction with a diversification of production systems with an acceptance of other plants and other techniques, as long as they do not adversely affect the heart of the food system.

The practices also reflect changes and adaptations made over time, indicative of the ability of producers to innovate despite the codification imposed by customary requirements. For example, production systems now include different types of gardens, since crop diversification leads to the reallocation of cultivated spaces and new ways of managing fallows. Indeed, even if the latter have shortened in duration, the practice of fallowing is still widespread, especially because the use of fertilisers is still very marginal. Fabert (2013) distinguishes seven types of gardens, four specialised (tubers and banana) and three diversified. More than 90% of the domestic groups in the IAC survey cultivate a combination from these two categories of gardens. Depending on the type of gardens, producers draw on the availability of land in mountain areas or on riverbanks and manage five blocks of crops in an overall logic, as shown in the following figure.

Farming systems are increasingly incorporating small-scale motorisation, appreciated because it reduces drudgery and greatly decreases time spent on cultivation activities. Small tillers, tractors and pumps are important innovations because they facilitate pluriactivity and the combination of agricultural and wage labour. Even for the workers who do not earn income outside the community, the time saved can be devoted to collective work and other customary tasks. There is some commercialisation of cropping systems through leasing and contract services. We are even witnessing the emergence of a category of Kanak entrepreneurs who diversify the use of their machines, initially meant for soil levelling or for obtaining public road-maintenance contracts and now being offered for clearing and tilling fields (Bassuel 2013). Other innovations are also being adopted to save time, including a change in the method of yam staking/trellising (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4). The pressure of wild deer and pigs consuming crops is also leading changing plot location, with a tendency to group them together and move them closer to homes or at least to roads, where they are easier to monitor. It also encourages the proliferation of fences and traps, innovations that have specific support programmes from the provincial technical services. Fabert (2013) notes that "the evolution of Kanak gardens and their organisation shows the dynamic side of their traditional aspect through the use of modern tools and practices, ensuring that they are always up-to-date and always compatible with the new socio-economic constraints of today" [p. 1]. Similar conclusions can be reached for fishing and hunting activities, whose techniques have evolved through adaptation to time constraints. There have been technical innovations, like improvements to the quality and reliability of boats, new ways of managing fishing zones and understanding marine spaces and access rights to them (Léopold et al. 2009).

An impression of diminishing community agriculture persists largely because of the inability of statistical techniques to adequately capture the underlying trends. Our observations put "the strong tendency towards regression" or a perceived reduction in time devoted to agriculture in context. While the surface area devoted to tubers has decreased and is not possible to estimate accurately the changes over time in Kanak gardening, we know that the time devoted to community activities has not reduced. It is not possible to capture the regulatory function in terms of employment attributed to community agriculture (as also in fishing and hunting), which provides workers during good economic times and reabsorbs them during less favourable ones. The sustainability of activities and the food system is evident from available data, and adaptive strategies are being implemented that incorporate anchoring to the land and maintaining its economic and social implications, while also participating in the wage labour market.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Recent transformations like the increase of monetary wages for Kanak households have rarely translated into the total abandonment of farming and hunting/fishing activities. The data collected for the year 2010 by IAC shows that a monetary wage is not systematically reinvested in agriculture and especially not in the purchase of equipment (Guyard et al. 2014). The unwillingness to do so confirms the importance that these families accord to the traditional identity and cultural dimension of family farming. From the perspective of cultural identity, agricultural activities have to be maintained, even if the time spent "in the community" is more and more reduced and fragmented. The following few quotes collected

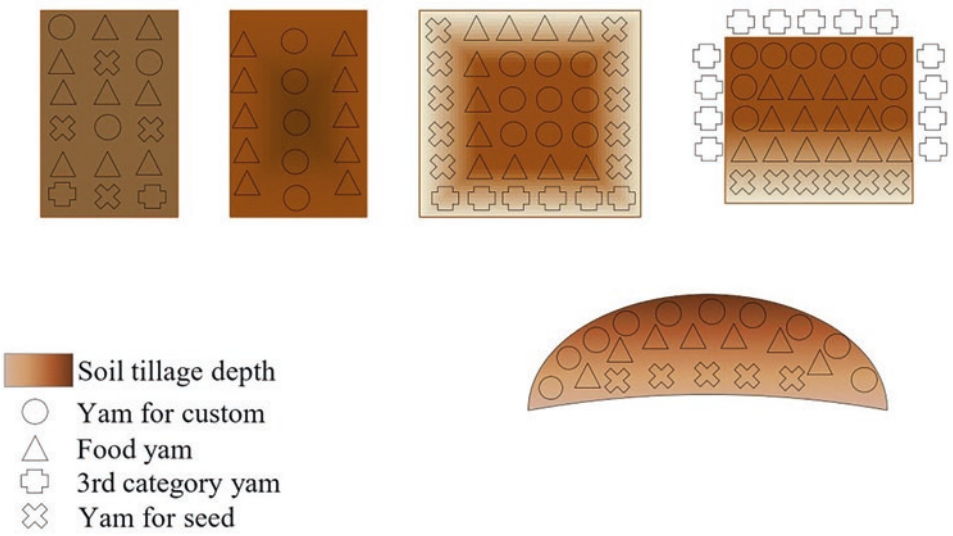


**Fig. 6.3** Different organisations of yams on a ridge. Source: authors

**Fig. 6.4** Yam on narrow ridges with simplified staking. (Credit: Fabert 2013)

during the large statistical survey in 2010 illustrate the social and identity value accorded to agriculture: "Community agriculture is very important for our lives in order to perpetuate our culture and our traditions" (Galilée, Poindimié, 11/08/2011). "A Kanak must have his field of yam, taro, and banana" (Gohapin, Poya, 04/07/2011). In addition, as far as the destination of their products is concerned, domestic groups rarely "benefit" from a favourable local market. The market is often far from the house and the community, and 49% of households do not have a car. Moreover, in the context of the high prices that characterise the New Caledonian economy (Dalmas et al. 2016), self-consumption of cultivated, bred, hunted or fished products is of fundamental importance and perceived as such: "Fortunately, I have my field! There are bananas, yams... There is balance, no question of a great deal of shopping" (Baco, Koné 12/07/2011). [Given the] high cost of living: the field is indispensable for us!' (Mou, Lifou, 27/09/2011). The following statement perfectly embodies this dual function attributed to Kanak agriculture: "Agriculture is sacred, it is something that comes to us from our ancestors, we must not forget to respect the earth that nourishes us ... the high cost of living will bring young people back to the field" (Unia, Yaté, 13/10/2011).

To conclude, these outcomes highlight that Kanak domestic groups continue to undertake agricultural and hunting/fishing activities, even though some members leave to work outside the community. The growth of development hubs, around mine sites like the large one around Vavouto, the increase in the level of education and the improvements in material conditions of life are not systematically synonymous with a decline in agricultural activities or with continuing to fish and hunt. The persistence of these activities is explained not only by their non-commercial dimension and relative independence from the commercial food system but also, perhaps, by the recentness of economic development. Furthermore, a strategy for conserving natural capital and for maintaining a high level of social capital through gifts of agricultural products could be relevant in the context of a fluctuating economy based on mining income. Previous generations still have not forgotten having to "return to the soil" during the nickel crash of the 1970s. Kanak family farming thus retains its roles, even in a context of major economic change, marked by the industrialisation of the local economy.

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# Part III

# Extractive Industries, Mining Development and Waste Management

# Waste Level Rise? Scales, Spaces and Policies of Waste in New Caledonia

7

Gilles Pestaña, Romain Garcier, Laurence Rocher, and Nathalie Ortar

**Abstract**

New Caledonia is known as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. However, it began developing its environmental policies and improving operational measures with an eye towards prevention and protection only two decades ago. So far, waste management responsibilities have been shared among the various levels of government (municipalities, provinces and territories) by default, based on other explicitly defined responsibilities, including public hygiene, health, mining, environment and energy. This chapter analyses waste management in New Caledonia in terms of territories and levels of government. Its central hypothesis is that there is tension between increasing waste generation and territorial waste management practices. The first section discusses the qualitative and quantitative evolution of waste during the last two decades. The second section examines the subject of political and territorial responsibility for waste and how the multi-layered web of these responsibilities is constructed. The third and concluding section of this chapter builds on the case of New Caledonia to address future concerns about the Pacific's cultural politics on waste.

**Keywords**

Waste management · Waste legacies · Waste governance · Scales of waste · New Caledonia · Consumption

## 7.1 Introduction

Although waste has long been neglected in geography and the environmental social sciences, the development of material studies has spurred renewed interest in the subject. In her overview of waste as an object of inquiry, Sarah Moore defines waste as an "object of management" or "a matter to be managed and governed at different scales" (Moore 2012, p. 786). Indeed, waste management is not merely a local issue concerned with maintaining hygienic conditions or limiting pollution; it involves complex and evolving forms of public and private intervention at various levels. Previous literature has contributed to the analysis of waste management by characterising modes of governance as moving away from the disposal mode over the last two decades (Bulkeley et al. 2005, 2007), by conducting comparative waste governance analysis (Davies 2008), by drawing attention to rescaling in waste management planning (Davoudi 2009) and by demonstrating how waste regulation makes possible the governance of the citizenry (Hird et al. 2014).

For several reasons, these questions take on an acute significance in New Caledonia. The first is concerned with the system of governance that has been in effect since the late 1990s. Building on the Nouméa Accord of 1998, the organic law (n° 99-209 of 19 March 1999) and the ordinary law (n° 99-210 of 19 March 1999) define the jurisdiction of the territory. However, nowhere do these laws address the issue of or even mention the term "waste"? Who is then responsible for waste management? This question has been met with an ad hoc response: waste management responsibilities have been shared among the various levels of government (municipalities, provinces and territories) by default, based on other explicitly defined responsibilities, including public hygiene, health, mining, environment and energy. This explains the hesitation that has characterised the organisation of waste management. For example, the waste management responsibilities in the North Province remained undefined. It was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that it

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eventually was assigned to the Department of Economic Development and Environment of the North Province (DDEE-PN).

Another reason lies in the way in which waste stands among other environmental issues. New Caledonia is known as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. However, it began developing its environmental policies and improving operational measures with an eye towards prevention and protection only two decades ago. Despite its mining activity on the main island Grande Terre, the archipelago strives to distinguish itself through its outstanding environmental policies. Among its agenda-setting successes are the 2008 UNESCO classification of the New Caledonian lagoons and the 2014 creation of the Natural Park of the Coral Sea, which spans nearly 1.3 million square km (see Chap. 2 by Rodary and Chap. 4 by Pelletier in this book). Waste is a crucial topic in this "green" public policy context. It alone has the potential to jeopardise the balance of New Caledonia's natural heritage spaces, impact the island's unique biodiversity and threaten the health situation in various spaces, whether island, lagoon, urban or rural. The government's interest to protect the environment from waste is evident from its political agenda items, such as the adoption of the *Loi du pays n°2019-2"* law on plastics (Congrès de la Nouvelle Calédonie 2019), which aims to restrict the use and spread of disposable plastic materials in terrestrial, aquatic and coastal areas throughout New Caledonia.

Comparatively, the third reason is more complex. As the more deprived provinces in New Caledonia have "caught up" in social and territorial terms through the *rééquilibrage* (rebalancing) policy, the consumption patterns in New Caledonia have changed. The inhabitants increasingly generate more varied types of waste. This waste results from consumption practices, which, like its modes of governance, are inseparable from the country's long political and cultural history. However, New Caledonia is subject to contradictory influences with respect to consumption and management norms. Though it remains closely linked to France and Europe (which share both their experts and norms with the territory), it is also charting its own path, one that considers its millennia-old history and its location in the Pacific. Here, waste functions as an indicator of fundamental cultural, economic and geographic transformations. New Caledonia represents an opportunity to examine waste in all its sociocultural dimensions.

This chapter analyses waste management in New Caledonia in terms of territories and levels of government. Its central hypothesis is that there is tension in New Caledonia between increasing waste generation and territorial waste management practices. The first section discusses the qualitative and quantitative evolution of waste during the last two decades. The second section examines the subject of political and territorial responsibility for waste and how the multilayered web of these responsibilities is constructed. The third and concluding section of this chapter builds on the case of New Caledonia to address future concerns about the Pacific's cultural politics on waste.

## 7.2 The Rising Tide of Waste in New Caledonia

New Caledonia's population is distributed unevenly over three provinces. Two-thirds of the population, or 182,000 out of 271,000 in 2019, lives in Greater Nouméa which includes the municipalities of Nouméa, Mont-Dore, Dumbéa and Païta (ISEE 2020) (see Chap. 11 by Pantz in this book). Outside the Greater Nouméa metropolitan area, population density is very low (on average, 15 inhabitants per square kilometre). Therefore, waste generation is very scattered, especially considering that some of the 340 communities are far from towns and suburbs on Grande Terre.

### 7.2.1 Development, Consumption and Waste

Beyond its distinctive demographic traits, New Caledonia is economically unique in Melanesia. A high level of waste generation characterises the country. Since the 1960s, its economy has developed based on a model of economic extraversion. First and foremost, the economy relies on services, public administration and financial flows tied to the residential and tourist economy (70% of GDP in 2017) (Bouard et al. 2016). Second, the economy depends on nickel exports (7% of GDP in 2017) (Bouard et al. 2016). Regionally, New Caledonia has prospered, and imports of capital and consumer goods are high. Depending on the year, they account for 40–50% of GDP, including both manufactured goods and foodstuffs (not including seafood, meat and certain agricultural products).

Although detailed results from studies of consumption that began in 2019 are not yet available, results from previous studies (Decruyenaere and Sauze 2012), provisional data and a qualitative assessment of the situation allow for a cautious two-pronged hypothesis. First, Caledonian consumption of fungible goods is high for the South Pacific zone and is not declining (New Caledonia's per-capita GDP is third in the region, after Australia and New Zealand). Second, the socio-spatial structure of consumption is changing. As a more significant percentage of the population joins the wage economy, and fewer people engage in traditional forms of subsistence economy, consumption of imported goods in the North and Loyalty Islands provinces has increased. Consumption habits have shifted since the appearance of supermarkets in the 1980s and subsequent development beginning in the first decade of the twenty-first century, including the spread of stores to service stations across the territory, notably in the least economically developed areas.

It has led to an increase in the use of precooked and pre-prepared products and the accompanying packaging. Certain parts of the territory, such as the "Voh-Koné-Pouembout zone", have undergone significant lifestyle changes due to the availability of more products. In addition, wage economy participation rates increased dramatically following the construction and opening of the Koniambo nickel smelter in 2013 (see Batterbury et al. (2020) and Kowasch (2018); see Chap. 9 by Demmer and Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book). Although wage labour impacted the volume of flows, consumption habits have shifted across society, changing the nature and quantity of household waste in the process.

New Caledonia generates trash at a rate comparable to metropolitan France (354–536 kg per person per year, contingent on the year). Although reliable data are not available, the provincial government of North Province estimates that the average resident creates approximately 180 kg of household garbage per year (Province Nord 2013). As a result, the North Province generates between 8000 and 9000 tonnes of household waste each year, consisting of bulky waste, green waste, waste from economic activity and end-of-life vehicles, as well as approximately 850 tonnes of hazardous waste. In 2013, the Province's 50,000 inhabitants generated a little under 18,000 tonnes of waste or nearly 400 kg annually. These figures vary significantly depending on whether the statistical inhabitant lives in a Kanak community (less than 300 kg per year) or an urban area (more than 450 kg per year) (Province Nord 2013).

These considerations are valid for the other provinces as well. The South Province, which accounts for three-quarters of the Caledonian population, generates over 80,000 tonnes of household waste annually or 428 kg per person. Household waste generation is notably high in Nouméa, which counts over one-third of New Caledonia's population. The city's affluence, the diversity of its economic structure and its urban lifestyle contribute to high waste generation rates, although they tend to level off (Province Sud 2018). The Loyalty Islands Province, which is sparsely inhabited and contains virtually no industry, generates slightly less household waste per capita, at approximately 280 kg per year (Institut d'Émission d'Outre-Mer 2019).

This data is informative but not particularly evocative. The following image (Fig. 7.1) provides a more graphic depiction of waste in New Caledonia.

The vast majority of waste generated in New Caledonia is sent to landfills, but only part of it is sent to regulated landfills. Some waste, particularly in rural areas, ends up in open dumping sites, brought there by local inhabitants or waste collection services. Household waste, animal carcasses and vegetable matter and previously sorted waste (plastic bags and boxes in the foreground of the photo) are piled up without fencing or other protection. In the best-case scenario, the sorted material is recovered, but most of it is incinerated (as in the background of Fig. 7.1).

**Fig. 7.1** Open dumping site in New Caledonia. (Credit: Garcier, October 2018)

### 7.2.2 Waste Legacies

Official documents often focus on issues of household waste, which hides the fact that this type of waste accounts for only a tiny proportion of the total waste generated or present in the territory. Most waste produced in New Caledonia is associated with nickel extraction and processing, including construction and public works. Furthermore, along with mining debris, scoria from nickel processing accounts for more than three million tonnes of waste in the South Province each year or 15 times the amount of total household waste (Province Sud 2018). Add 800,000 tonnes of building and public works waste and between 30,000 and 50,000 tonnes of ash from the Prony power plant, which provides power for the nickel smelter in the South of the main island Grande Terre.

Adding sterile mining waste (mine tailings) to these quantities increases them by orders of magnitude. Between 1904 and 2017, estimates of the total tonnage of mining tailings produced in New Caledonia approached one billion tonnes (Richard et al. 2018). This is growing (Fig. 7.2) because the mined ores are increasingly poor in mineral content: today, nearly 40 million tonnes of mine tailings are produced annually.

Therefore, the waste issue in New Caledonia is inextricably linked to the local government's economic growth decisions or those imposed on it throughout history. Nickel extraction and processing, in particular, have generated significant amounts of mining and industrial waste to manage. When analysing how specific waste management models are promoted or proposed, it is critical to bear this history in mind because models tend to conceal politically sensitive waste selectively. As a result, mining waste receives less attention than household waste and is treated like a natural problem (particularly when it comes to sediment deposits in rivers). In addition, mining waste is more difficult to investigate than household waste because the nickel industry is a highly contentious political and economic issue in New Caledonia.

### 7.2.3 The Troublesome Governance of Waste

The juxtaposition of such diverse issues within a limited territory raises the complex question of waste governance.

Generally speaking, discard studies have shown that waste governance rests on a set of norms that seek to limit waste collection and treatment to equipment constructed and managed by public or private agents and controlled by the government. At the global level, these norms have spread since the 1990s, as waste management has become increasingly focused on recycling. Local and national fiscal measures have been implemented to finance collection services and pollution absorption and to discourage certain practices such as uncontrolled dumping and car wreckage in public space. Waste regulation and management responsibilities are distributed across various levels of government, as is planning, which is often the domain of intermediary levels charged with rationalising policy at the municipal level. Additionally, consumers are now more involved in waste management and are being encouraged to adapt their daily practices to ensure that residual materials are disposed of "in the right spot".

Growing normalisation, specific fiscal measures, responsibilities shared across different levels and the moral

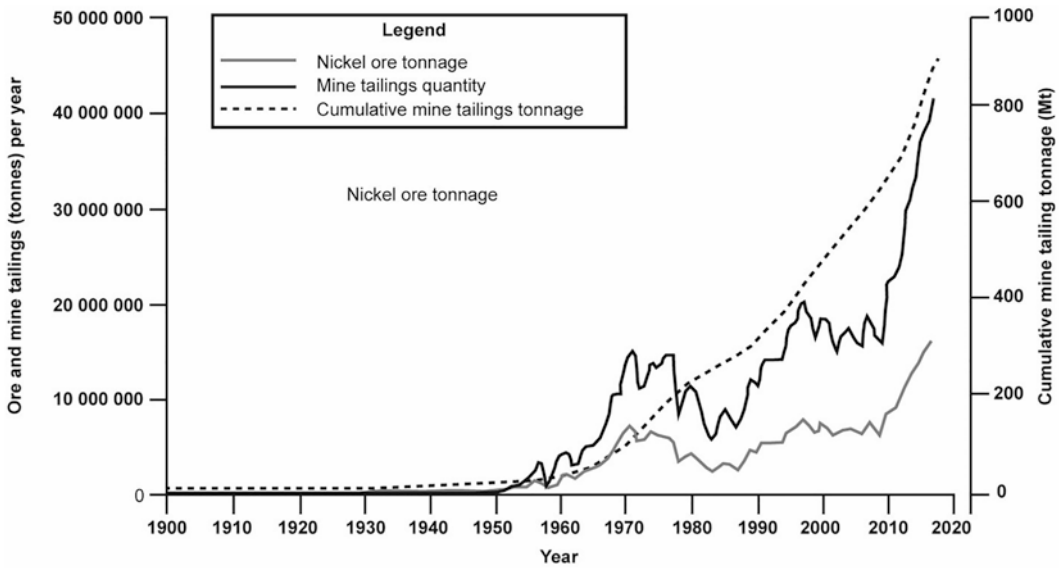


**Fig. 7.2** Annual and cumulative mine tailings produced from 1904 to 2017 throughout New Caledonia (in tonnes, DIMENC/SMC data). (Source: Richard et al. 2018)

implication of individual citizens are all aspects of waste management in New Caledonia, with the added particularity of its organisational structure being relatively new. Most Western countries developed waste policies in the 1970s. These were reformed in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s to incorporate reuse and recycling objectives before pivoting more recently towards the circular economy (Bulkeley et al. 2007; Davies 2008). In New Caledonia, such waste policies were not instituted until the early twenty-first century. This explains why in New Caledonia open dumping sites where waste is burnt in the open air exist side-by-side with an advanced regulatory system aimed at, in particular, banning single-use plastics. Attaining sanitary and environmental objectives and changing people's perspectives on the waste that ought to be prevented rather than eliminated are goals that require persuasion (Rocher et al. 2021). Therefore, our analysis focuses on the superposition of objectives and their multi-scalar distribution rather than on the modifications or impacts of reforms.

## 7.3 A Central Question: Who Is in Charge of Waste?

Two levels of an organisation are primarily responsible for waste management: municipalities (*communes*) or groups of municipalities (*intercommunalités*) are responsible for waste collection and treatment, while the provinces are in charge of regulation and planning. The New Caledonian level is vital for its relationship to metropolitan France and the rest of the Pacific region.

Despite this formal organisational structure, waste management is subject to numerous tensions. Resource-sharing is not easy to establish, and specific treatment schemes have been left without support. Consequently, increasing waste generation puts pressure on the collection without necessarily allowing for better recycling practices. In addressing these themes, we focus on the fiscal dimensions of these problems.

### 7.3.1 Domestic Waste Management: Municipalities in Charge

New Caledonia's municipal code does not explicitly make municipalities responsible for waste management. Article L131-2 of the code mentions "public health" as a matter for local police enforcement. It states that it includes, among other things, "cleaning" and "removal of bulky waste" services for which municipalities or their associations "can implement a fee-for-service program" (Article L233-3). According to this article, municipalities are engaged in waste collection and treatment while adhering to each province's environmental regulations. That said, these responsibilities are challenging for the municipalities to meet for three interconnected reasons.

The first reason relates to the financial burden of these responsibilities on local budgets. The revenue generated from waste collection and management fees does not cover the costs of these services, which must be subsidised by local budgets (most municipalities receive under 50% direct financing, according to the *Calédonie Bureau d'Études* (Caledonia Consulting 2019)). Of New Caledonia's 33 municipalities, the burden falls most heavily on the rural ones, which are vast and sparsely populated. Waste management services in these areas tend to be provided directly by municipal teams, which are often poorly equipped. Urban municipalities are also seeing a gap between limited resources and growing needs. The waste collection tends to be outsourced to private service providers (in Nouméa and Dumbéa, for example, to the local business, *Caléco Environnement*). However, the responsibility for collecting fee payments still falls to local governments. Local budgets are burdened by increasing volumes of waste, population growth, stricter waste collection and management norms and the construction of new facilities. Inspections of old stock (such as open-air dumping grounds and end-of-life vehicles) would require further raising fees. Many municipalities, therefore, do not have the funds to pay for waste sorting, transfer or treatment facilities on their own. They are forced to count on provincial aid, ad hoc packages (ADEME or government) or loans (French Development Agency or private banks). Twelve of New Caledonia's thirty-three municipalities have partially or entirely outsourced waste management to one of the four inter-municipal associations: service-sharing saves on costs.

The second problem is related to the spatial structure of waste services in New Caledonia. In 2014, the average volume of waste collected per week in the North Province was 72 l per community person and 146 l per townsperson (Institut d'Émission d'Outre Mer 2017), making the need for collection more urgent than ever. However, users in rural municipalities tend to be widely dispersed. In contrast to towns, where inhabitants are grouped, door-to-door household waste collection in rural areas entails long travel times: each additional household served comes at a cost. The population density in the Grande Terre municipalities (not including Greater Nouméa) is less than five people/km$^2$, which is exceptionally low even by rural standards. Outside of towns, dispersion is the rule, either in the form of agricultural properties or communities. For example, in the Hienghène municipality (population 2454 in 2019), the Ouayaguette community resides over an hour's drive from town. Weekly waste collection by municipal teams is thus a logistical and economic challenge destined to result in deficits. For island municipalities that are entirely tribal, some waste can only be

disposed of via maritime transport to Nouméa. Such municipalities include Île des Pins (South Province), the Belep municipalities (North Province) and the three municipalities of the Loyalty Islands Province: Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa. Certain small islands around Grande Terre (such as Île Ouen or Tiga, which depends on Lifou) depend on municipal waste disposal methods. These are not merely anecdotal cases, given that several islands have limited freshwater supplies, and poor waste management seriously threatens the sanitary quality of water tables and freshwater lenses.

Lastly, municipalities have to work within the context of waste practices challenged by waste collection. Until recently, the custom was to bring waste to private or public dumping grounds; while vegetable waste was gathered into piles or containers and burnt before enriching the soil, ferrous material was reused. Waste collection requires changing these practices, which is not always straightforward. As one mayor interviewed in 2018 states, "Forcing people to throw things away in rubbish bins wasn't a social norm. Open-air dumping grounds were too deeply engrained and it took time. With the recycling centres, too, some people would go when it was closed and just dump everything out in front, at first" (Interview, 2018).

The sociocultural context in communities appears particularly distinctive and imposes specific modes of social transactions on waste management (Blanc 2009). A technician interviewed in 2019 explains how the use of new services and infrastructures was made acceptable: "We find a contact person in the community […]. We put it in place, and then we leave it for three weeks, and I stop by once a week […]. Maybe you have to go four or five times to discuss things before the operation […]. Often, when people work with a community, they do not understand that they do not live in the same timeframe, that information is not absorbed and processed the same way. After providing them with the information, it is their responsibility to share it across the community. Even if they were present, they must discuss it in the village. This is the process by which information is absorbed. […] That's the way the system is set up" (Interview, 2019). Multiple actors interviewed stated that paying fees for waste management is not yet entirely accepted by community people, considering their modes of consumption and discard practices of composting, recycling, burning or piling up locally without assistance from the local authorities.

Municipal waste management is currently a kind of complex mosaic. Certain inter-municipalities only have rubbish dumps, such as Voh-Koné-Pouembout (VKP), while others have established civic amenity sites (mainly in the North Province). The organisation of waste management is rapidly evolving. Using Greater Nouméa as an example, the Greater Nouméa inter-municipal service (*Syndicat intercommunal du Grand Nouméa*) for household waste treatment was established in 2005; in 2010, its competencies increased and became a generalist service. In 2007, waste management, sorting, transportation and reuse were reformed entirely. Greater Nouméa's municipal and open-air dumps were closed for good in 2008. The civic amenity site in the Ducos peninsula (municipality of Nouméa) was renovated and replaced with three modern recycling centres managed by *Calédonienne de Services Publics* (CSP Fidelio). That said, selective waste collection and sorting for recycling is not optimal because of problems related to the economic equilibrium of recycling programmes (see below) and inter-municipal organisations. Such problems include under-utilised equipment, such as in Mont-Dore's sorting centre.

### 7.3.2 Legal Leadership and Planning Responsibility in the Provinces

Environmental law gives New Caledonia's provinces a pivotal role when it comes to waste. Under Article 20 of the organic law (n°99-209), any authority not explicitly delegated to other levels of government (municipal, New Caledonian, French state) is the domain of the provinces. Since waste is not discussed in the organic law, it comes under the purview of the provinces. Furthermore, since the provinces are responsible for environmental protection, they also supervise waste treatment equipment. Provinces thus play a role in regulation and financing; they can help finance new infrastructures and work with municipalities to establish streams, but they play no part in day-to-day management costs. This shared authority is primarily a modus operandi resulting from legislative silence on this issue.

Here, too, things began to change more quickly after 2000. Before then, action on the part of the provinces was irregular (subsidies, agreements and so on). The South Province institution, which was established earlier, was able to act sooner in the waste sector. It also benefited from the actions of Greater Nouméa urban municipalities, unlike the North Province, which is more rural. The North and South Provinces' environmental codes, which were adopted in 2008 and 2009, respectively, constitute the first major public policy initiatives concerned with waste management. These codes establish durable frameworks for action. Variations in the roles attributed to particular provinces in relation to waste can be explained by an appreciation for competency and territorial context disparities. For example, the Loyalty Islands Province is in a unique situation: its environmental code was established only recently, in 2016, and its territory is not only rural but also characterised by "superinsularity" (*surinsularité*), also known as "double" or "triple insularity": the concept refers to the increased remoteness, isolation and dependence of small islands attached to a larger island. The Loyalty Islands Province is thus responsible both for its civic amenity sites and for transporting waste to Grande Terre.

One main objective of the North and South Provinces was, and remains, to eliminate municipal and open-air dumping sites (or landfills) and replace them with engineered landfills and recycling centres.

This civic amenity site serves as a "voluntary drop-off centre" for local residents can bring waste that corresponds to regulated streams. This waste is then transported to Nouméa for treatment. The South Province has established a network of such centres on a municipal or multi-municipal basis. The Yaté centre (80% financed by the South Province and ADEME) is the most recent (2016, Fig. 7.3); it was established after the modernisation of the municipal dump was completed in 2013. This gives some idea of the level of equipment that can be built in a very rural area: at 1 resident/km$^2$. Yaté is the municipality with the lowest population density in New Caledonia (1667 inhabitants in 2019).

For the North Province, the waste issue did not emerge until 2009–2010, with the 2008 classification of a part of the lagoon as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the enactment of the Environmental Code, the establishment of the DDEE-PN and the renewal of the mandate of the province's political majority. The goal of phasing out dumping sites comes with the related goal of establishing a waste storage centre in each subdivision of the North Province (known as Homogenous Territorial Entities or HTEs) in order to create a base geographic network over the province's vast rural areas. This project is still in progress and has come up against several challenges. First, there are significant pre-existing differences in the level of waste service, as well as the degree of mutualisation among municipalities. Second, waste is not at the top of every municipality's political priority list; drinking water conveyance, municipal roads and schools typically take precedence. Lastly, certain projects have encountered land tenure or real estate problems.

The provinces also play a strategic role in waste in terms of planning. The South Province did not establish a public policy programme for waste until 2012, with the *Schéma provincial de gestion des déchets 2013–2017* (Provincial Plan for Waste Management 2013–2017). This plan assessed the current state of affairs and laid out four operational plans for waste prevention, non-hazardous waste management, hazardous waste management and building and public works waste management. Following a "cooperative effort", the plan was updated with the *Schéma provincial de prévention et de gestion des déchets 2018–2022* (Provincial Plan for Waste Prevention and Management 2018–2022). Its objectives include reducing waste production and impacts on the environment, generating structural responses to universal hazardous waste management, improving collective service coverage and increasing efforts towards reuse and the circular economy. These objectives are defined as quantitative targets, for example, reducing the amount of household waste generated and processed by 10% relative to 2016. A provincial waste management plan was drawn up for the 2013–2018 period for the North Province, but it has not been updated. Lastly, for the Loyalty Islands Province, the enactment of the environmental code has been coupled with efforts to better coordinate waste management. The province aims to establish one civic amenity site per island to put the same set of regulated waste streams as in the North and South Provinces.

**Fig. 7.3** Inauguration of the Yaté civic amenity site, in 2016. (Credit: South Province 2016)

### 7.3.3 At the National Level: An Ambiguous Scale of Action

At the territorial level, the New Caledonian government is responsible for certain hazardous substances. These include infectious clinical waste, unused drugs, asbestos waste, batteries and industrial and household solvents. None of these is treated locally – most are sent to New Zealand, Australia and South Korea. New Caledonia is subject to the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. The convention lays out specific rules for exportation, which requires explicit approval from host countries.

The New Caledonian Board of Mines and Energy is essential for the surveillance and regulation of these wastes, posing serious pollution risks. It is responsible for keeping inventories, particularly of materials destined for export, including collecting and redistributing tax revenues. The tax on polluting activities, established in 2003, is collected upon importing eight types of products, including lubricating oils, batteries, lead batteries and tyres. Revenues from this tax are used to combat pollution and to process these problematic materials. For example, the funds are to eliminate old stocks of end-of-life vehicles, finance infrastructure (such as new equipment or dump restoration) and organise the disposal of certain objects, such as electronic waste (Calédonie Bureau d'Études 2019).

Therefore, waste management responsibility is divided in a scalar fashion according to the nature of materials and the sanitation and environmental risks they present. Beyond the specific aforementioned wastes and the provisions for implementing international laws such as the Basel Convention, the New Caledonian government does not have organisational authority regarding waste. On the other hand, quasi-public and private organisations (called *Éco-organismes* in French) have significant structuring effects at this level. Such is the case for regulated waste streams. Even if the provinces are responsible for the regulatory oversight of these streams, their actual organisation involves coordination on a national scale and the heavy involvement of *Éco-organismes*, as we shall see shortly.

Since 2005, the South Province has established regulated waste streams for dangerous waste (oils, batteries, tyres, WEEE, vehicles) and packaging waste (paper/cardboard, plastics, aluminium cans, glass). In addition to capturing recent waste flows, the purpose of these streams is also to absorb stocks of waste that have accumulated over time. The working principle is that of "extended producer responsibility" based on the French model. In this model, authorised "Eco-organisations" handle collecting various materials at "voluntary waste drop-off centres". The consumer pays these organisations a fee called an "Eco-contribution" (Verrax and Garcier 2017). Regulation of these streams occurs at the provincial level, but their economic organisation is an issue of national scale. The Eco-organisation TRECODEC, for example, was created in 2008, following a joint effort on the part of importers, producers and manufacturers. Soon after being authorised by the South Province, it began operating in the North Province and the Loyalty Islands Province in 2013 (Lifou and then Maré and Ouvéa), agreeing to collect and process used batteries. Thus, while each province is theoretically autonomous with respect to waste regulation, the South Province's action (Province Sud 2018) influenced not only the actions of other municipalities but also terms of the debate by "naturalising" a regulatory choice and policy that were imported from the French metropolitan model. As long as the collected waste materials are destined to be treated (particularly hazardous waste) or recycled, this de facto coordination has an economic justification. However, from this point of view, it seems that the appropriate scale has not yet been determined, because there are insufficient materials collected to be treated or reused locally; instead this waste is exported.

The structuring effect at the national level is not limited to recyclable materials: it concerns the entire waste sector. In this respect, the similarities to metropolitan French norms and modes of action are striking, given that New Caledonia's status gives it a great degree of autonomy in this domain. Advisory and oversight bodies, first and foremost the local branch of the ADEME, play a significant role in transposing French metropolitan frameworks to New Caledonia and working with local government at various levels. This is why frames of reference, the choice of instruments, the jargon employed in the domain, the distribution of responsibilities and, more broadly, the logic of public action are influenced largely by the French model. Other quasi-public institutions, such as consular chambers, help address waste management issues at the national level. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), for example, produces assessments of industrial waste generation and exportation, thereby helping to quantify the metabolic fluxes generated by the sum of the archipelago's economic activities.

These forms of government intervention – assisting public and private actors with financing and information-sharing – structure the waste management system in decisive ways. They reveal an effort to guide and frame the system by assisting in the smooth and uniform operation of the regulatory production process at the provincial level. Lastly, they attest to the existence of a de facto national policy programme.

## 7.4 Devising an Autonomous Pathway for the Future of Waste Governance

We have shown how the modes and levels of waste governance have rapidly evolved in New Caledonia and how European models have influenced them. Nonetheless, the question remains whether these methods, especially if only marginally adapted to the local reality, can contribute to New Caledonia's waste management improvement. We believe that these management models tend to neglect specific issues unique to New Caledonia, which we will discuss. These factors should also be taken into account when issuing a call for future research.

### 7.4.1 Better Understanding Social Practices and Waste Practices

The social norms regarding waste and waste materials in New Caledonia, briefly mentioned above, remain poorly documented. Research in discard studies has established that waste is a relational reality: one person's waste is another's resource. This does not translate into New Caledonia's regulations and technical practices, which tend to ignore the complex social practices surrounding waste for the local population. As a consequence, they suggest a uniformly gloomy waste situation in Kanak communities and in the rural and island municipalities that tend to have the highest percentages of Kanak populations (Belep, Île des Pins, Ouvéa, Lifou, Houaïlou, Poya and so on).

New Caledonia is characterised by a culture of scarcity. This is partly due to it being an archipelago and partly to the impoverishment of a segment of its population, the effects of which are visible right across the territory. In reality, this culture governs the possibility of implementing sensible waste policies. There are seemingly endless examples of this, and we will consider but a few. The fact that New Caledonia is an island territory distant from part of the international exchange of goods means that spare parts for the repair and maintenance of technical objects are often lacking. One way to deal with this is to conserve anything that could potentially serve as a spare part. This applies to all kinds of manufactured products, especially more expensive ones, such as vehicles. The result of this double shortage is that the landscape is peppered with scrap vehicles. It can also lead to conflict when technicians attempt to remove these objects, which they consider to be sources of chemical pollution as well as health challenges (they serve as mosquito nests) and visual hazards. Such conflicts exemplify conflicting conceptions of waste. On the one hand, there are practices that reflect a socioeconomic reality in which all objects are potentially useful; on the other hand, there is an environmental technical logic according to which every object must be in its rightful place.

Implicitly, these are items absent from both waste collection and household spaces because they are reused despite the risks associated with them. Even though plastic packaging is ubiquitous in consumer goods, it is absent from waste collection in tribal regions. However, a part of this packaging gets reused. Plastic bottles are used as ice packs in freezers, which the materially poor use to conserve food from hunting, fishing and gardening. Other types of packaging are used to start and maintain domestic and agricultural fires: for example, tyres are used in crop burning on wild yam [*bambounias*] plantations. Plastic in all forms is highly appreciated in the rainy season, but it is flammable in all conditions. Although technicians generally encourage reuse practices, they condemn burning because of the health and environmental impacts. The technicians' response is partly aimed at spreading awareness of the dangers of such practices for oneself and one's family. However, because this response is not a long-term solution to resource shortages, provinces and municipalities are looking for other options. The North Province is currently considering making impounds open to the public so that people can salvage items that have been adequately treated against pollution and will not serve as a breeding ground for mosquitos.

These examples demonstrate a purely technical approach to waste, which does not account for the variety of long-standing local practices and is destined to present entirely logical practices as irrational or retrograde behaviours.

### 7.4.2 Re-politicising Waste Governance

These questions are significant because contemporary waste governance in New Caledonia is marked by a technical, modernising rationality that is presented as apolitical. It informs the normalisation process occurring in waste management, visible in the relationship between New Caledonia and metropolitan France. France imposes a management model on New Caledonia through technical and organisation engineering. Infrastructural solutions (such as landfills and civic amenity sites) and institutional and financial ones (like inter-municipality associations and recycling chains) are very similar to the French model, including the words used to qualify the various infrastructures and services. This kind of normalisation process occurs within New Caledonia as well: the policies of the South Province not only generate momentum with respect to the other provinces but also provide a normative framework for them. Although these normalisation practices are not inherently problematic, they perpetuate forms of domination – such as through technical expertise. They also naturalise waste management practices. At the same time, certain assumed norms are not questioned. In the following, we discuss two examples.

First, actors in waste management systematically distinguish between consumption and waste, as though they were not fundamentally connected. Is all consumption of food, electronic goods, etc. legitimate in New Caledonia? Is all its waste ethically justifiable? These questions are not posed, even though the import economy makes it possible for the territory to be very selective regarding the products it chooses to import. This has resulted in a preference for generic instruments that have framing effects on the management and social existence of wastes. These instruments are always "end-of-pipe" solutions, which do not address the issue of prevention. In these solutions, waste is presented as a certainty to be addressed using technical fixes.

As for the second example, the focus on household waste overlooks the enormous amount of residual waste generated by nickel mining and processing, which is relatively absent from the public debate. It is widely known that nickel scoria has been and continues to be used in levelling and landscaping work. Nouméa is largely built on these vast expanses of waste, which have been used to extend land into the ocean and to fill in mangroves. Nevertheless, this fact rarely features in public debate, just like any discussion of mining waste itself. This is not to mention that these materials are hazardous but merely to express surprise at the lack of a debate about them.

This surprise is probably timely. There is reason to believe that the politics of waste are changing in the context of the broader debate over New Caledonia's future. For example, in 2019, the Congress of New Caledonia passed a law intended to prohibit various plastic products from being brought to market. Among those prohibited from being produced or imported are plastic bags, disposable tableware, cotton swabs and takeout food trays. This law points to the tension between consumption and environmental protection. Images of turtles wounded by plastic straws, or fish that have suffocated after mistaking plastic bags for jellyfish, have done much, even at the margins, to focus political discussions on waste, both in New Caledonia and the South Pacific more broadly.

### 7.4.3 Waste Beyond the Borders of New Caledonia

The consideration given to plastics at the regional level demonstrates, for the first time, an agreement on the issue of waste. Above all, it repositions the issue beyond the borders of New Caledonia and, more broadly, in the Pacific.

Regional cooperation in the South Pacific has generated reflection on the issue of waste, which is a common point of concern among the islands of Oceania. Since the quantity of residuals (mainly plastic) first rang alarm bells washing up on their coastlines and by the problems resulting from cruise tourism, island territories have grown increasingly concerned about the issue of waste (Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility 2018). All of these territories face the conundrum of coping with residual materials produced from modern modes of consumption and having difficulty reclaiming and recycling secondary materials because the small amounts produced pose a barrier to their integration in recycling chains. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the main intergovernmental organisation for environmental cooperation in the Pacific Islands region, has begun to include – in addition to the issues of biodiversity, climate change and pollution – the issue of waste on its agenda. SPREP's Clean Pacific Roundtable, held in Suva in 2016 and Fiji in 2018, is set to take place in New Caledonia in 2020. The organisation of this roundtable indicates that waste is being recognised as a subject of regional interest that calls for new forms of cooperation and intervention. SPREP works to finance action plans on hazardous waste – the PacWaste Project (Pacific Hazardous Waste Management Programme) and PacWastePlus – and to adopt strategic management frameworks, such as Cleaner Pacific 2025. In addition, SPREP pushes countries in the Pacific Islands region to ratify the Basel and Waigani Conventions, thereby taking on a governance role and working with countries to solidify a regional waste regulatory framework.

New Caledonia occupies a somewhat paradoxical position in this context. We have discussed the fact that the territory is not able to manage its waste locally. Hazardous waste is shipped to Australia and New Zealand, and there are challenges to integrating reusables in the globalised recycling economy. Secure waste management and recycling thus play out in part beyond New Caledonia's borders. The circular economy cannot be entirely conceptualised at the territory scale as restricted as that of New Caledonia. Instead, it must consider itself within the context of a globalised waste system structured by the large Asian (Chinese and Japanese) and Oceanian economies.

In comparison with the region's other countries (not including New Zealand and Australia), New Caledonia's waste management is considered technically sophisticated and marked by French expertise and technical and institutional engineering. At the same time, however, its attachment to France (with a particular legal status and governance, language barriers and a higher level of wealth) distances the country from regional organisations. For example, as a French territory, New Caledonia is not eligible for ACP (Organisation of African, Caribbean and the Pacific States) financing from the European Union nor can it participate in the Cleaner Pacific 2025 programme. Thus, New Caledonia is confronted with broader issues related to the problems posed by its political status for its ability to develop strong regional agreements.

## 7.5 Conclusion

Our analysis of waste governance in New Caledonia is not exhaustive, but specific points have been clearly established. Waste management is a multi-tiered process that involves multiple levels of power. It is essentially the provinces and municipalities and their affiliated groups that bear primary responsibility for waste management. The importance of the territorial level cannot be overstated in two ways. It organises environmental and pollution policy, resulting in the creation of a de facto national environmental policy.

In New Caledonia, waste management is still characterised by a lack of consistency at all levels of government. Is the time suitable for developing the "right" degree of governance to handle waste or making recommendations to improve waste management, planning and coordination of regulation? Analysing governance responsibilities reveals that waste concerns are frequently addressed and defined by default in the context of health, pollution or international law, particularly when it comes to hazardous waste. To solve this, perhaps the objective should be better to understand waste's social presence in New Caledonia, define it openly and establish ethical and innovative management methods. To do so, we must first have a deeper understanding of the forces at work in what is said or kept unsaid regarding garbage in New Caledonia, and then utilise that understanding to uncover the social, political and economic mechanisms that would otherwise remain concealed.

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# 8 Conflicts and Legitimacy of Environmental Organisations Facing Mining Projects in New Caledonia-Kanaky

Matthias Kowasch and Julien Merlin

**Abstract**

This chapter deals with conflicts and the legitimacy of environmental associations in conflict with, or holding to account, recent nickel projects in New Caledonia-Kanaky – Goro Nickel in the South and Koniambo in the North. Based on the concepts of environmental justice and resource conflicts, and on environmental management provisions, we discuss how environmental associations dealing with mining impacts raise their voice, gain legitimacy and intervene in environmental monitoring. The organisations CEK/Environord, ŒIL, CCCE and Rhéébù Nùù pursue different approaches and strategies. CEK was internal to the mining company KNS (Koniambo Nickel SAS) before becoming more "independent" under the label "Environord" (despite continuing financing from KNS). Rhéébù Nùù aimed to fight against the Goro Nickel project in the South before signing a pact with the Brazilian group Vale, with royalties and community benefits. ŒIL is advised by an independent scientific committee which gives it broader legitimacy. Its environmental monitoring allows it some participation in the project, but decision-making remains with the mining operators. Despite the important actions of these NGOs, the pro-independence party FLNKS and the upheavals in 2020 around the selling of the Goro Nickel smelter show that political authorities in New Caledonia-Kanaky are trying to obtain greater control over nickel extraction, processing and exportation themselves.

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Environmental monitoring · Environmental impacts · Nickel production · Conflict · Indigenous rights · Legitimacy

## 8.1 Introduction

Large-scale mining projects have been shown to lead to extensive environmental damage, social upheavals and widening economic disparities (Bebbington et al. 2018; Dunlap 2019; Kowasch 2018). Landscape modifications introduced by mining include pits, waste piles, built structures (e.g. motorways, bridges) and geomorphological phenomena (e.g. debris fans and turbid rivers) (Bridge 2004).

Major environmental impacts include metal-mining wastes, and UNESCAP (1992) divides these into physical and chemical forms. Physical pollution results from the egress of particulates into the atmosphere, into water or onto land. However, chemical pollutants (such as chrome, mercury or cyanide) are the primary focus of objections to mining activities. According to Horowitz et al. (2018, p. 4), "the environmental legacies of decades of un-regulated mining and the need for long-term monitoring of post-mining landscapes have only recently come into focus". Widespread environmental impacts often disproportionately affect the land-based livelihoods of nearby communities (Downing et al. 2002; Horowitz et al. 2018). Indigenous communities rarely benefit from large-scale mining operations, and the social arena of the projects can be described as inherently unequal. Mostly layered on centuries of exploitation, mining companies usually fail to invest benefits locally (Bebbington et al. 2008, 2018; Yeh and Bryan 2015). Therefore, local peoples living close to mine sites are often victims of major environmental and social impacts (Freudenburg and Wilson 2002; Sachs and Warner 1995). Generally, an analysis reveals the historical reasons for this process of becoming vulnera-


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ble or why people become "victims" of environmental damage (Füssel 2006; Porto 2012). Vulnerability refers to uneven power relations of actors involved in resource extraction, sometimes leading to what Harvey (2003) called "accumulation by dispossession". By expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, land is released "into a privatized mainstream of capital accumulation" by (private) companies (*ibid*, p. 149).

Transnational mining companies have identified achieving a "(social) license to operate", that is, gaining social acceptance, as a major risk to their businesses (EY 2018). The industry is under tremendous pressure to improve its social and environmental performance (IIED 2019) and "social and environmental corporate responsibility", but the definition of responsibility is itself controversial (Dahlsrud 2008). The mining sector considers local economic stability and environmental protection as requirements for making non-renewable resource extraction more sustainable (Bridge 2004; Esteves 2012). But as Bebbington et al. (2018, p. 1) highlight, definitions "…differ based on the degree to which analysts emphasise goals of poverty and income inequality, environmental justice, gender equity, or human and citizenship rights".

Companies have, of course, invested in new technologies aiming to improve ecological and economic efficiency, but dialogue and the development of "partnerships" with civil society groups have no straightforward templates or a guarantee of success (Zhouri 2015; Zhouri and Laschefski 2010). The International Council for Mining and Metals (ICMM) was founded by the mining sector in 2001. The council brings together 25 of the world's leading miners and metal processors, comprising Glencore, Vale and other multinationals. It is a sort of "club" of self-styled responsible mining companies (Bebbington et al. 2008; Kowasch 2018) that requires a commitment to ten principles that include the integration of sustainable development in corporate strategy (principle 2) and the improvement in environmental performance issues (principle 6). The principles of ICMM give the extractive industry sector a coat of green paint, so that much of the discussion regarding how to manage mining more effectively and with less environmentally destructive techniques has emphasised the importance of institutions and better governance (Karl 2007; Humphreys et al. 2007; Bebbington et al. 2018). The ICMM can be seen as a step to promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the resource sector. However, there is no external independent control of the measures and rules established by the council. Critical scholars such as Schwartz (2011) and Brock and Dunlap (2018) argue that CSR has to be contextualised within a neoliberal toolbox designed to increase profits so long as the activities stay within the rules of the game. By taking the example of the Hambach coal mine in operated by the German energy company RWE, Brock and Dunlap (2018, p. 36) say the company tries to "maintain legitimacy and 'pacify' opposition" around the mine.

Many authors have shown that science and expertise are also political issues (e.g. Callon et al. 2009). Controversial techno-scientific practices, and their development, raise questions about democracy. In this chapter, we focus on mining companies that take on the role of experts to measure the effects of their own activities. They deploy a set of studies and measurement devices and report on their environmental impacts and their local dialogue with state administrations and local populations. Hence, we want to ask – in the light of the abundant negative characteristics of mining operations and the profit orientation of multinational companies (MCs) – can environmental organisations be locally legitimate when they are funded by the company they are monitoring? Our broader objective is to discuss how mining companies deal with controversial issues such as deforestation or toxic leakages and how they are involved in environmental politics together with or against local associations.

As other chapters in this book show (see Chap. 9 by Demmer and Chap. 2 by Rodary for example), New Caledonia-Kanaky possesses around a quarter of worldwide nickel reserves, and two major nickel processing plants were built in the last 20 years: Goro Nickel and Koniambo. We will explore how the two mining projects define the links between their environmental impacts, their responsibilities and political and democratic issues. The mining sector is at the core of the decolonisation process and of claims by the Kanak independence movement so that political questions have to be raised within this chapter. Political issues are also linked to environmental aspects of governance. We start with a discussion of environmental justice approaches and a presentation of our methods used, before giving a short history of the Goro Nickel and Koniambo projects and their environmental monitoring. The chapter finishes with a discussion of critical voices, scientific engagement in environmental monitoring and the impacts of the decolonisation process on mining politics.

## 8.2 Resource Governance and Conflicts

In their book on *Governing Extractive Industries*, Bebbington et al. (2018) analyse the contemporary politics of resource governance in Peru, Bolivia, Ghana and Zambia. They caution against seeing too much convergence across their case studies but conclude that some key elements of transnational couplings hinge around: "colonialism and post-colonialism; global commodity prices and domestic political and economic dynamics; state capitalism and neoliberalism; and corporate strategy and new investors" (Bebbington et al.

2018, p. 200). The authors highlight that in all four countries, resource extraction is still associated with the exercise of colonial power and conflicts, which was also the case in New Caledonia-Kanaky until the construction of the Koniambo smelter in the North.

A number of concepts link resources and conflicts, such as "resource wars" and the "resource curse" (Bridge 2004; Le Billon 2012, 2015; Watts 2004). Cooper (2006) argues that resource war narratives fade out the sociopolitical history and context of conflicts, which is shaped and overlaid by religious, environmental, political and/or social tensions. However, mining can be a catalyst and a driver for conflicts shaped by (capital) accumulation by dispossession and uneven benefit distribution. We suggest that resource conflicts can enhance, revive, intermingle with and/or shape (existing) tensions over land, customary issues, identity and religion. Conflicts are often driven by issues of social and environmental (in)justice, by marginalisation, and different perceptions of nature. According to Escobar (2006, p. 9), "many communities in the world signify their natural environment, and then use it, in ways that markedly contrast with the more commonly accepted way of seeing nature as a resource external to humans and which humans can appropriate in any way they see fit" (cited in Le Billon 2015). An appropriation of nature includes forms of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2003) through "land grabs" by globalised corporations for resource extraction, extensive cattle farming or conservation. There are parallels between contemporary reports on "accumulation by dispossession" and historical enclosures under earlier phases of capitalism (Glassman 2006). Capitalism, just like neoliberalism, is inherently an environmental project. The hybrid "socio-natural" character of resources themselves reveals the complexity of conflicts.

A complex (post)colonial context in New Caledonia-Kanaky influenced mining development in the North of the country. Le Billon (2015, p. 182) defines "the idea that people in general will 'naturally' fight over resources rather than find cooperative solutions" as a "pathologization of social conduct in relation to resource control". Major struggles emerge over resources because the transformation of uneven power relations is at stake (Bryant and Bailey 1997). In New Caledonia-Kanaky, we will show that "resistance" to mining and smelting, sometimes violent, has helped negotiation and rethinking of some aspects of projects. Resistance and violent opposition often emerge when local people are not respected, or the way in which the negotiations are conducted is unsatisfactory for local communities. The Goro Nickel example shows how (violent) opposition can turn into negotiation and cooperation, which does not mean that conflicts are avoided or that uneven power relations no longer remain.

Many Indigenous people in the world claim their rights to the land of ancestors impacted by mining and other economic projects. The Goro Nickel project is also an example where Indigenous Kanak people used the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples from 2007 as a bargaining tool, since in Article 28.1:

> (…) indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent. (UN 2008, p. 10)

## 8.3 Environmental Justice and Management

Historical processes of environmental degradation and resource dispossessions are a component of environmental injustice (Le Billon and Duffy 2018; Pellow et al. 2001). New Caledonia-Kanaky was mined from the 1860s onwards (Bencivengo 2014), and for decades, "Société Le Nickel" (SLN) – a French company founded in 1880 (Filer and Le Meur 2017) and today a subsidiary of the multinational group Eramet – had a monopoly on nickel processing. Its smelter, Doniambo, was inaugurated in 1910 as the only processing plant until the construction of Goro Nickel and Koniambo around a hundred years later. The Indigenous Kanak were excluded from working in the nickel sector for many decades. Only after World War II did they get jobs, for example, as truckdrivers. In addition, subcontracting arrangements for Kanak enterprises have grown since the 1990s, with the development of more mines in the North Province (Le Meur et al. 2012).

Environmental justice (EJ) goes to back to Robert D. Bullard who campaigned against environmental racism in the USA. Bullard et al. (1997, p. 65) highlighted that the EJ framework rests "on an ethical analysis of strategies to eliminate unfair, unjust, and unequitable conditions, and decisions". An unequal distribution of burdens and benefits often applies to the extractive industries. While private and state mining companies seek highly profitable growth, Indigenous and other local peoples have been especially susceptible to marginalisation and the destruction of livelihoods (O'Faircheallaigh 2013). Indigenous communities, who often lack political influence because of their small numbers combined with discrimination and social disadvantage, rely heavily on land and natural resources affected by mining activities. Moreover, they are vulnerable to the settlement of immigrant populations.

Distributive justice has not favoured Kanak communities (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020). According to Schlosberg (2004), distributive justice is one of three core elements of radical environmental justice (EJ) – together with recognition-

based and procedural justice (see also Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020). There are (unequal) distribution of burdens and (financial) benefits related to environmental interventions, including extractive operations. Distributive justice includes principles such as vulnerability, need and responsibility. Originators of environmental destruction should take responsibility for their actions and fix the problem and/or compensate those who have endured the burdens (Walker 2012).

In general, the balancing of costs and burdens of mining development against opportunities (jobs, subcontracting, royalties, etc.) has rarely been balanced. Indigenous people often lack capacity to influence and set the terms under which mining operations occur on their lands. O'Faircheallaigh (2018) has developed criteria for evaluating agreements that have emerged from negotiations between Aboriginal peoples and mining companies in Australia. The criteria, which can be applied elsewhere, include the dimensions of environmental management, cultural heritage protection, rights and interests in land, financial payments, employment and training and business development. The dimension of environmental management is particularly interesting for this chapter. For assessing environmental management provisions, O'Faircheallaigh (2018) sets up eight criteria from −1 to +6. The worst case are provisions that limit existing rights of Indigenous and local people. In the best case, Indigenous people have the capacity to act unilaterally to deal with environmental issues associated with the mining project (Table 8.1).

According to Wang (2015), criteria 4, 5 and 6 may represent an opportunity for Indigenous communities to redress long-standing grievances and to gain customary legitimacy among their members. Local (traditional) knowledge and experience should form part of sustainable environmental management, in which case Indigenous people can become active environmental agents, "contributing to surveillance of protected areas and their own communities through self-disciplining" (Wang 2015, p. 326). Empowerment and inclusion can amount to a reaffirmation of the otherness of Indigenous peoples (Wilder 1997). It can also play a critical role in reducing vulnerability of local communities that are "victims" of environmental impacts. From the perspective of multinational companies, environmental monitoring can be entrusted, in part, to local Indigenous communities to benefit from their knowledge but also to pacify tensions and conflicts. Companies can also strengthen customary and land legitimacy of Indigenous clans. But Indigenous communities often have no option to disengage. They do not have the option to move elsewhere since land is imbued with cultural identity and emotional significance (Horowitz et al. 2018). Thus, they may face the choice between resisting or negotiating some (financial and economic) benefits, perhaps with cooperation in environmental monitoring.

In the following section, we will see how claims and negotiations on environmental justice and monitoring, decolonisation and equal benefit sharing articulate in New Caledonia-Kanaky in the two large-scale nickel projects over the last 20 years.

**Table 8.1** Criteria for assessing environmental management provisions according to O'Faircheallaigh (2018) *(modified)*

| | |
|---|---|
| −1 | Provisions that limit existing rights |
| 0 | No provisions |
| 1 | Mining company commits to indigenous communities to comply with environmental legislation |
| 2 | Company undertakes to consult with affected indigenous people |
| 3 | Indigenous communities have a right to access, and independently evaluate, information on environmental management systems and issues |
| 4 | Indigenous communities may suggest ways of enhancing environmental management systems, and mining operator must address their suggestions |
| 5 | Joint decision-making on some or all environmental management issues |
| 6 | Indigenous communities have the capacity to act unilaterally to deal with environmental concerns or problems associated with the project |

## 8.4 Methods and Engagement

We carried out interviews between 2008 and 2022 with representatives of the environmental organisations ŒIL (*Observatoire de l'environnement Nouvelle Calédonie*), CCCE (*Comité Consultatif Coutumier Environnemental*) and CEK *(Comité Environment Koniambo)*/Environord, with members of the customary committee "Rhéébù Nùù" and with representatives of the mining companies Vale and KNS (Koniambo Nickel SAS, a joint-venture between the Indigenous Kanak-driven company SMSP and Glencore). The number of interviewees was balanced between the different actors involved with a slight bias towards customary and NGO representatives (Environord, Rhéébù Nùù) and to Kanak people working in the mining sector. We posed questions on environmental impacts and monitoring, conflicts and benefit sharing. Most of the interviews were not recorded, because of their sensitivity. In addition to interviews, we conducted participatory observations at meetings and conferences including at the mines, with NGOs (such as Environord) and with politicians and customary representatives.

We both conducted our PhD research on mining governance in New Caledonia, including several months of fieldwork. In addition, one of the authors worked as a postdoc at the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) in Nouméa and as a lecturer at University

of New Caledonia. He also lived for 2 years in the community of Baco in the neighbourhood of the Koniambo project, welcomed by a Kanak family. Over time, social relations have become real friendships, with many repeated visits (Kowasch 2014). This position raises challenges: it contributes to critical engagement (Fisher 2008) and a state of "between-ness" (Nast 1994), but care is needed when conducting ethnographic fieldwork and or consultancy (Kirsch 2018).

One author did do a consultancy study for KNS (see Rosner et al. 2016). He did not experience any restrictions in expressing his opinion in the final report and used the information for other research projects and publications without KNS's prior approval. KNS is keen to use the Koniambo project for economic and political emancipation and to engage with scientists. Having access to mining companies can provide a better understanding of their socio-environmental and political impacts. Some information is included in this chapter, and following Batterbury (2019) and Baird (2014), we both agree that engaged academic research can be useful.

## 8.5 Contextualisation of Two Major Nickel Projects: Goro Nickel and Koniambo

The nickel sector is the engine of the New Caledonian economy. Although it contributed only 4.1% to the New Caledonian GDP in 2017 (it has fluctuated between 3% and 9% over the last 10 years), the sector represented 91.4% of export values, rising to 93.9% in 2019 (ISEE 2020). An ISEE study on the impacts of nickel (2020) estimated that a quarter of private sector employees depend directly or indirectly on nickel exploitation in New Caledonia-Kanaky. The overall wealth generated by the nickel sector amounts to 1.15 billion euros, that is, 20% of the market wealth created in 2019. This includes activities directly or indirectly linked to the sector, including household consumption.

The extraction of nickel ores (saprolites) began to increase significantly in the 1950s, as Fig. 8.1 clearly shows, and is now at a historic high. However, laterite ores, present to the south of Noumea and fuelling the Goro Nickel project, were only exploited from the 1990s.

Figure 8.2 shows the ten largest producers of nickel ores worldwide and their production in the time span between 2017 and 2021. In 2017, New Caledonia-Kanaky was the fourth largest producer of nickel ores; in 2021, the Pacific archipelago is still at the fourth place, behind Indonesia (whose production is rapidly increasing), the Philippines and Russia. In 2022, New Caledonia-Kanaky produced 190,000 tons of nickel ores, compared to 186,284 in 2021 (Garside 2022; Reichl and Schatz 2023).

Ferronickel, which contains approximately 35% nickel and 65% iron, is the most important refined nickel product from the territory. New Caledonia-Kanaky is the second largest producer of ferronickel worldwide, with a production share of 9.31%, but far behind Indonesia (53.3%). In 2019, 75% of metals exported were ferronickel, 16% NiO (nickel oxide), 7% NHC (nickel hydroxide cake) and 2% $CoCO_3$ (cobalt carbonate) (ISEE 2022). While the Koniambo smelter produces ferronickel (as does the old Doniambo processing plant in Nouméa), Goro Nickel's final products are NiO, NHC and $CoCO_3$.

### 8.5.1 Goro Nickel

In 2003, the Canadian mining company Inco (later to become Vale, which is the largest company worldwide based on 2017 production totals) started to build a processing plant in the South of New Caledonia on the Goro plateau, with a future annual production output of 60,000 t of nickel and 4500 t of cobalt (Fig. 8.4). The mine, with an area of approximately 21 ha, had a life expectance of 29 years. It is open cast, and laterite ores are dug to a depth of 50–60 m (Mining Technology 2019). Nickel (oxide and hydroxide cake) and cobalt are delivered by a conveyor to the Prony Port, from where 4500 containers can be exported annually. After substantial delays during the construction, the processing plant and the mine opened in 2010. The shareholding was Vale (95%), and SPMSC (*Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien*), a public mining holding company supported by the three provinces of New Caledonia-Kanaky, had 5% (Fig. 8.3).

The hydrometallurgical process of the Goro Nickel project means a discharge of wastewaters (36,000 $m^3$ per day) including manganese and chrome into the New Caledonian fringing lagoon via a 24-km-long pipeline lying on the sea floor at a depth of 35 m. The wastewaters were a major reason why the project attracted violent protests by local Kanak clans and environmental organisations during its construction phase. To reduce environmental impacts, Vale Nouvelle-Calédonie declared that the group has invested about € 850 million for environmental monitoring and repairs or 21% of the total investment of the company (Vale 2016). But the most dangerous impact has been almost entirely ignored. According to Horowitz (2019), mercury used in the coal-fired power plant will contaminate seafood, upon which local communities depend for subsistence.

Several environmental incidents occurred and even led to suspending metal production for 6 months in 2012 following spills. Other environmental impacts include the damage of an oak forest located near the smelter in 2011 (particularly gum oaks, an endemic species) and the leak of an acid process solution in May 2014 in the creek of the North Bay, because of a human error: thousands of fish and shellfish died. In February 2019, the Nouméa Court ordered Vale to pay around

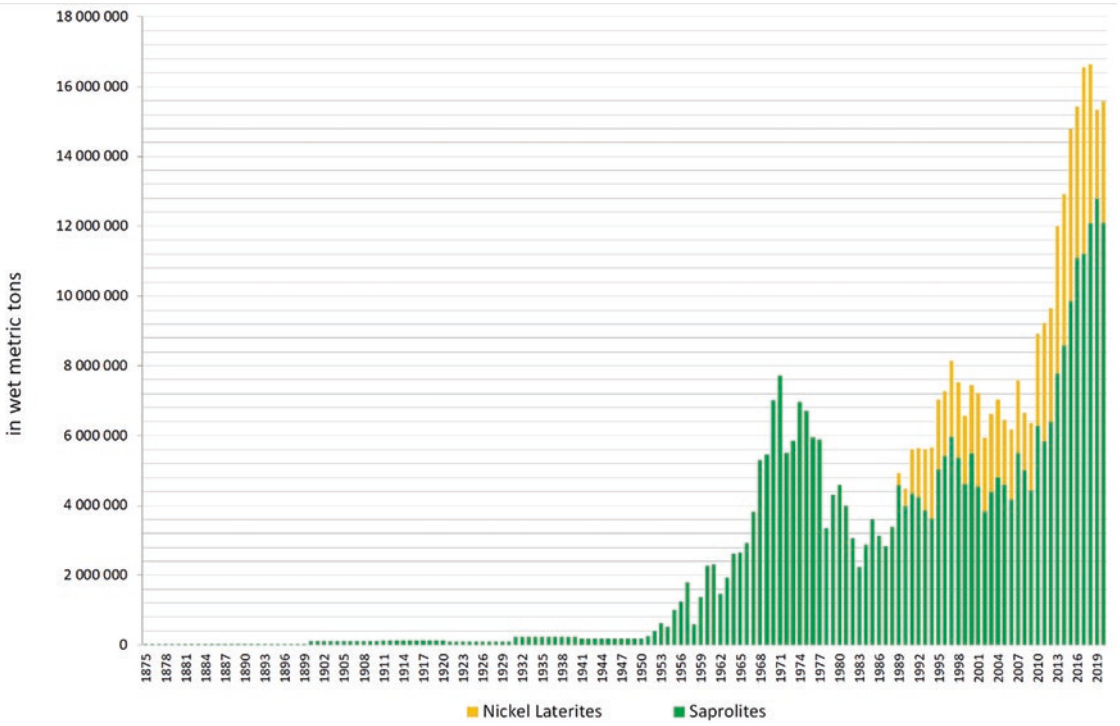


**Fig. 8.1** Extraction of nickel ores from 1875 to 2020 in wet tons. (Sources: ISEE and DIMENC, adapted by Bouard (cited in Bencivengo and Bouard 2021))

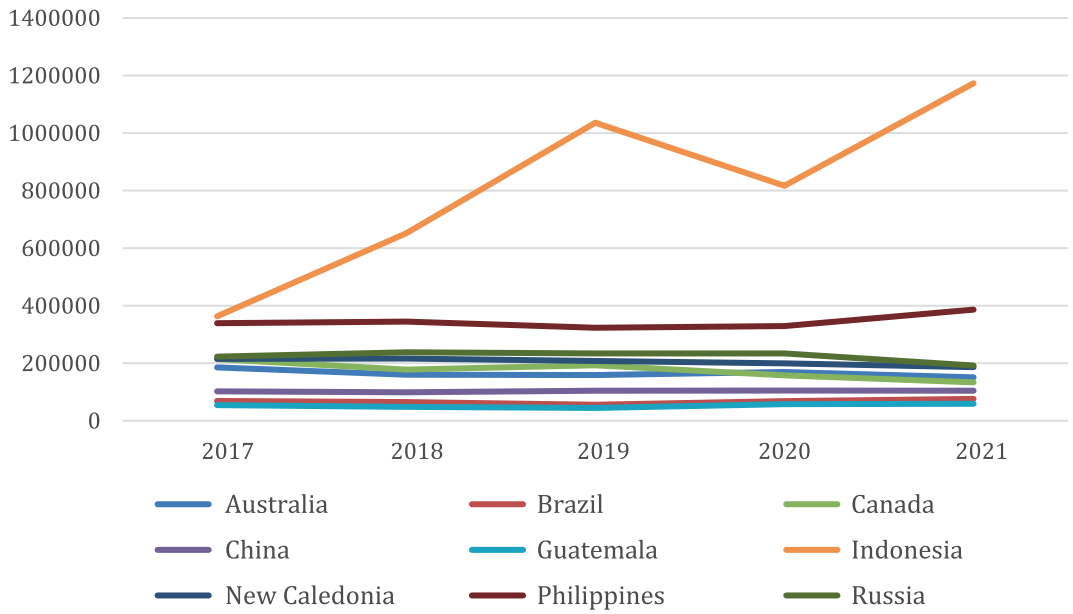


**Fig. 8.2** Major countries in worldwide nickel ores production in metric tons from 2017 to 2022. (Source: Reichl and Schatz 2023)

€ 92,000 to an environmental association for the moral and ecological damage suffered in two separate episodes (NC la 1ère 2019). This legal conviction was not the first one for Vale related to environmental damage. In practice, Vale never fully mastered the high-pressure-acid-lead (HPAL) technology used to convert ore to nickel oxides (Reuters 2018).

Despite the troubled history of the Goro Nickel project, the processing plant (Fig. 8.4) produced 2780 t of cobalt and 40,300 t of nickel in 2017, its sixth year of operation (Vale 2018; Reuters 2018). According to Eduardo Bartolomeo, the head of the company's base metals division, Vale commissioned a "very detailed study to know exactly why we can't

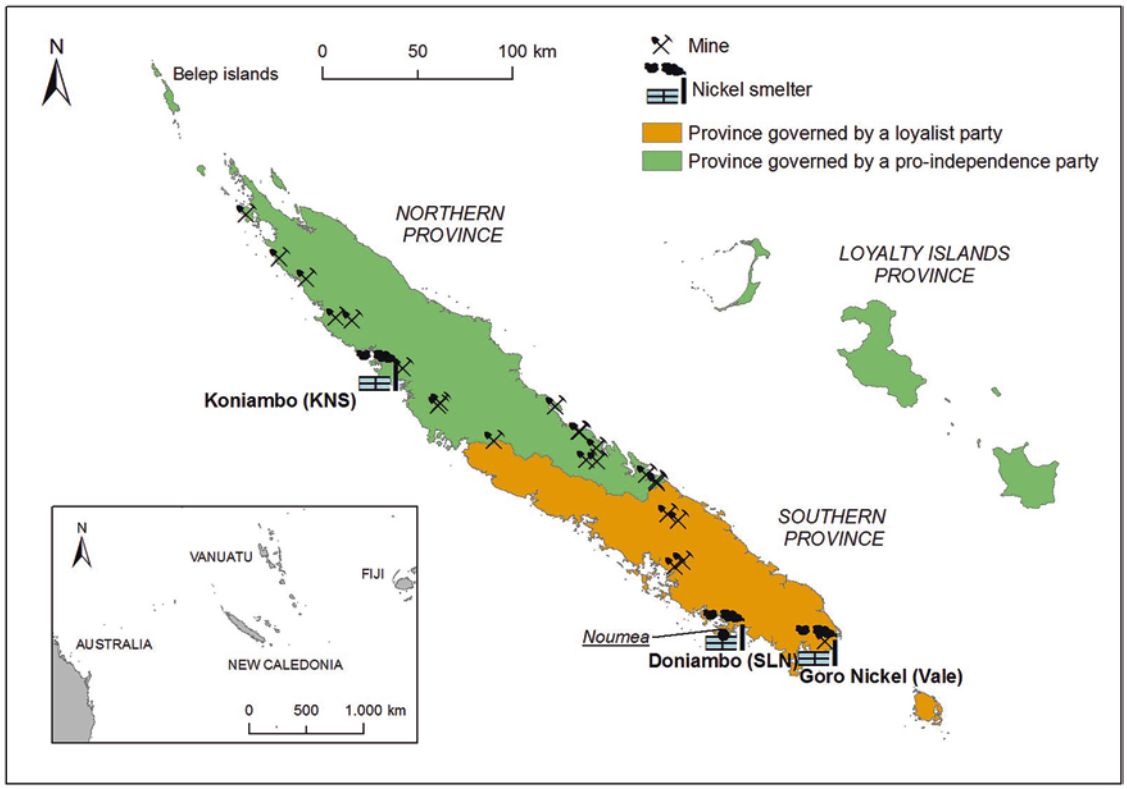


**Fig. 8.3** Nickel mines and smelters in New Caledonia-Kanaky in 2020. (Source: https://georep.nc/, cartography: Kowasch 2020)

**Fig. 8.4** Goro Nickel smelter. (Credit: Kowasch 2009)

achieve our nameplate capacity" (Reuters 2018). The goal became to invest $500 million for the period 2019–2022 to get the plant operating at 50,000 t per year of nickel products (*ibid.* 2018; Horowitz 2019). The real incentive was the coming "electric vehicle revolution" (EVR), to turn its nickel division around. Indeed, nickel is vital to lithium batteries, in part at the expense of cobalt on price and supply stability grounds. Five years ago, however, this seemed to lie in the future, because batteries only accounted for approximately 5% of total nickel demand (*ibid.* 2018). Vale found big investment in the EVR to be risky at the time, although more recent events after they sold the mine proved them wrong.

In November 2019, between the first two referendums on political independence (in 2018 and 2020) (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book), Vale announced it would close the nickel refinery due to technical and financial problems. "We are unable to produce sufficient nickel. It is therefore better to limit the damage and close the processing plant with approximately 90 jobs than the entire operation in New Caledonia and leave 1,300 people on the street", said Pierre Tuiteala, the manager of the Soenc-Nickel (employees and workers union in New Caledonia). Vale planned to maintain cobalt production, increase the amount of NHC (low-grade nickel) and export crude ores. Representatives of the Brazilian company presented their strategy to the New Caledonian parliament and explained that the planned exports of raw ores should be around two million tons per year. However, exporting raw ore is a complex political issue, with several interests wishing to see it processed before export. The approval process was difficult and needed an amendment to the mining law (Outremers 360° 2019).

In April 2020, SOFINOR, a public investment company of the North Province, expressed interest in acquiring the Goro plant, in partnership with Korea Zinc, a leading global metal producer. Under the bid, the three provinces would jointly get a majority stake in the new company and control of the smelter. But conservative politicians in Nouméa opposed SOFINOR's influence in the South Province, because it is governed by an anti-independence party. Negotiations between Vale and the Australian company New Century Resources were also suspended in September 2020 after local opposition. At the end of October, Antonin Beurrier, the CEO of Vale Nouvelle-Calédonie, surprisingly announced the creation of a new company "Prony Resources Nouvelle-Calédonie". Over half of the shares in the future Goro Nickel project would be held by New Caledonian interests, while the Swiss commodities trader Trafigura would hold another quarter. The independence movement disagreed that Trafigura should be given preference over the SOFINOR/Korea Zinc offer. They said Trafigura was only interested in buying the smelter and mining titles to sell on when the market for nickel was more active, in order to maximise profits. Violent protests against Trafigura disrupted the New Caledonian economy, but Korea Zinc formally withdrew its bid on 7th December. A day later, Vale accepted the offer of Prony Resources and Trafigura.

The deal was signed in March 2021 and provided a 30% shareholding by the SPMSC. Another 21% went to the company's employees and the local population, bringing New Caledonia's share in Goro Nickel to 51%. The newly founded finance company Prony Resources (founded by Antonin Beurrier) will get 30% of the shares, and only 19% go to Trafigura. The participation of Trafigura was contested throughout by two local initiatives, the "Usine du Sud = Usine Pays" (Plant of the South = Plant of the Country) and "Instance Coutumière Autochtone de Négociation" (ICAN) (Indigenous Customary Negotiating Body), composed of eight senior chiefs of the Djubea-Kapumë customary area, the Drubéa-Kapumë customary council and the Rhéébù Nùù committee. They finally accepted that the 51% shareholding belonging to local interests was sufficient. The contract also included clauses about environmental protection. But end of 2023, Goro Nickel is in financial difficulties again, and the smelter is placed under conciliation proceedings.

Most of the workers at Goro Nickel live in Nouméa and commute to the plant, approximately 70–80 km away. The Kanak communities in the vicinity of the mine (Goro, Touaourou, Waho and Unia) and the smelter have not experienced strong in-migration and economic development from the mining project. The capital city profits economically, and the South Province government has always supported the project, against local (environmental and customary) opposition.

Vale has engaged in various participatory and environmental monitoring initiatives. Those initiatives are internal or externally led, but continuing environmental and customary conflicts have given rise to new political identities composed of Indigenous groups presenting themselves as environmental activists, which we will analyse in the next section.

### 8.5.2 Koniambo

The Koniambo project (Figs. 8.3 and 8.5) has a powerful symbolic importance for the Kanak independence movement that governs the North Province of New Caledonia-Kanaky (Fisher 2013; Pitoiset and Wéry 2008; Kowasch 2010, 2018; Kowasch et al. 2015). In the 1990s, political leaders of the North Province and the small mining company SMSP (owned by the North Province) began a search for an industrial partner to build a nickel processing plant in the province. This was part of the "rebalancing" goals established by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988. Since then, three-quarters of the finance released in French development contracts has gone to the North Province and the Province of Loyalty Islands and only one-quarter to the South Province (based on the budget of 1988) (Kowasch 2012a), where 74.4% of the total population

**Fig. 8.5** Koniambo smelter. (Credit: Kowasch 2009)

live (Census 2014; ISEE 2016). The North Province, where 70% of the population are Kanak (ISEE 2016), lags significantly behind the South in economic terms (Kowasch 2018). Overall, three out of four jobs are located in Greater Nouméa (David et al. 1999; ISEE 2016; Kowasch 2012a, 2018), and a large majority of enterprises are located in the South Province (74.9%), where 33% of the population is European and "only" 26% are Kanak (ISEE 2016).

The political authorities of the North Province long argued for localising the nickel industry in the North, using it to drive an urban growth pole close to a processing plant. The Bercy agreement in 1998 fixed an exchange of mining titles between the Poum massif (in the ownership of SMSP) and the Koniambo massif (in the ownership of SLN) (see Chap. 9 by Demmer in this book). This allowed the Koniambo project to proceed with an industrial partner, which was initially Falconbridge (49% of the shares) and the local SMSP (51%). While Falconbridge brought financial means and technical know-how into the new joint venture, SMSP yielded the mining titles and had the support of the local population. After the signature of the Bercy agreement, the construction of a nickel smelter started in 2006. Some months later, in August 2006, the Swiss group Xstrata took over Falconbridge and became the new partner of the Kanak-driven SMSP. In 2014, the Koniambo nickel smelter was finally inaugurated, in the presence of the French president François Hollande.

Typical for the fast-changing mining sector, in 2013, ownership changed again, when the British-Swiss commodity trading and mining company Glencore completed the takeover of Xstrata and acquired the 49% shareholding. The composition of the project did not change, but other Glencore operations were exposed for violating human rights, having working conditions resembling slavery, corruption and poor environmental performance. These claims apply variously to the Kolwezi cobalt mines in DR Congo, the McArthur River Mine in Australia and the Tintaya and Antapaccay mines in Peru. In addition, between 2017 and 2019, the company spent "millions bankrolling a secret, globally coordinated campaign to prop up coal demand by undermining environmental activists, influencing politicians and spreading sophisticated pro-coal messaging on social media" (The Guardian 2019). Due to weak nickel market conditions and to unprofitable operations, Glencore decided on 12 February 2024 to sell its 49% stake in Koniambo, leading to a six-month period in which the smelter's furnaces will remain hot to maintain the viability of the site (Reuters 2024; pers. information, 2024). Both companies, SMSP and Glencore, assure they will look for a new industrial partner for KNS.

The Koniambo project in northern New Caledonia includes the Koniambo mountaintop mine, a large processing plant using a pyrometallurgical process, a deep-water port and a coal-fired power plant on Vavouto peninsula (Fig. 8.5). The urban growth pole project has advanced over the last 15 years, and the population has risen to about 11,000 people in the three nearby municipalities Voh, Koné and Pouembout (VKP). The Indigenous communities living in the vicinity of the smelter mostly support the project (Kowasch 2010; Rosner et al. 2016), but it is conflictual for many people to dig up the rugged mountains that constitute ancestral land, while developing Western-style shopping and hotels, modern housing and new public facilities like a swimming pool, a movie theatre and bike tracks (Batterbury et al. 2020).

## 8.6 Environmental Monitoring at Goro Nickel and Koniambo

We now return to the crucial issue of the environmental performance of these two projects and how they should be monitored. Local communities in New Caledonia have long-term experience with environmental impacts resulting from mining activities since nickel deposits were discovered in 1876. Environmental impacts are a major concern for both projects. The following section thus discusses how environmental conflicts and monitoring were negotiated.

### 8.6.1 Goro Nickel

In 2002, Indigenous communities in Yaté, the most southerly municipality of New Caledonia, formed "Rhéébù Nùù" (which means "eye of the country"), a customary association, in order to start discussions about the Goro Nickel project and to monitor its (future) environmental impacts. Rhéébù Nùù was initially strongly opposed to the scale and to the location of the project and organised blockades of the construction site, engaged in acts of vandalism and initiated legal action against the mining company. The customary association accused Inco of ignoring international environmental norms and disrupting sacred and taboo places. Moreover, Rhéébù Nùù worried that the pollution might have implications for human health. Horowitz describes the most violent acts by members of the association that occurred in October 2006: "Destroying equipment and infrastructure, they [the activists] dug trenches and set up barriers made of cars and burning tires, blocking access to the site". The next day, they "were joined by 100 more activists as well as 200 gendarmes who released teargas on the activists and fired on a pick-up truck that was charging at them" (2009, p. 248). She pointed out that Rhéébù Nùù members not only "destroy company equipment; they also targeted fellow community members" (2009, p. 256), who did not agree with the violent acts against the mining project.

To resolve the conflict, the provincial government created a Committee for Information, Consultation and Environmental Monitoring (CICS) in 2004 (Horowitz 2011). This committee was intended to bring the mining company, Caledonian politicians, public services, local communities and (scientific) experts to the table. One major role was to answer the questions raised about manganese discharge into the lagoon. With support of environmental associations, Rhéébù Nùù showed that no viable studies could determine the impact of the wastewater. CICS discussed the choice of experts and what measures should be taken to control environmental impacts of the mining operations. At the first CICS meetings, Rhéébù Nùù was then considered as a misinformed actor, and their concerns about environmental impacts were minimised. Their demands did not seem legitimate to the others involved. But at the following meetings, the customary association assumed a role as "non-specialist counter-expert" (Interview, 2014). They were able to discuss technical, political or ethical uncertainties about the scientific studies of wastewater and were recognised as a legitimate actor in environmental monitoring (Merlin 2014). The last meeting of CICS aimed to concretise an agreement with Vale, the "Pact for Sustainable Development of the Big South", and to create a new environmental monitoring association, called "ŒIL". Despite the violent opposition to the project in its early years, Rhéébù Nùù signed the pact in September 2008 – after winning the council election in Yaté. Through this IBA, the mining company committed the following:

(a) To an extensive reforestation programme
(b) To create a Consultative Customary Environmental Committee (CCCE)
(c) To create a Corporate Foundation to finance local development initiatives (educational, economic and sociocultural) (Vale et al. 2008)

The support from Vale was for three programmes with € 14 million (CCCE), € 45.56 million (foundation) and € 20.1 million (reforestation programme) over a period of 30 years (Vale 2013). In exchange for Vale's commitment, Rhéébù Nùù renounced violent or illegal actions (Vale et al. 2008). Thus, all protests were extinguished. By their about-face on the project, Rhéébù Nùù members sought to gain (back) legitimacy and power, because the association became a principal representative of local Indigenous communities. The declaration of Rhéébù Nùù to transform into a political party and to compete in council elections in the municipality of Yaté – and win the elections – was a key part of their campaign. However, the committee still continued fighting for environmental justice, but benefit sharing and gaining (customary) legitimacy were officially recognised, although they had existed already.

Financed by Vale, the CCCE recruited and trained seven "environmental technicians" and an engineer, integrated into Vale's environment department. The aim was to ensure the participation of customary authorities in environmental monitoring and the consideration of traditional Kanak knowledge. It has published a monthly environmental monitoring newsletter. The December 2018 issue, the most recent on the homepage as of December 2022, indicates that the effluent into the lagoon was 100% in accordance with norms (CCCE 2019a). Two minor incidents were detected related to the environmental performance of the smelter and the mine. The CCCE also (co)finances and publishes reports and studies realised by scientists of IRD based in Nouméa or other research institutions and engineering companies. In 2017 and 2018 for example, CCCE published four reports, two of them together with

ŒIL (CCCE 2019b): (a) a study of maritime traffic in the South Grand Lagoon in order to assess the risk of collision and disturbance for the humpback whale population of New Caledonia (Bourgogne et al. 2018); (b) a synthesis of studies on humpback whale distribution dynamics in southern New Caledonia (Derville and Garrigue 2017); (c) data acquisition from a network of reference stations in freshwater environments: physical chemistry and benthic macro-invertebrates (Mary 2017); and (d) participatory monitoring of the reefs of the Great South (Job 2017). In addition, the committee has published annual reports of its activities. There has, however, been no output since the end of 2018.

Vale (co)financed this research through the intermediary of the CCCE. The committee is partly involved in environmental monitoring, even if this work does not always directly concern the mining project (e.g. the studies of humpback whales).

One year after the signature of the "Pact for Sustainable Development of the Big South", in 2009, the South Province decided to establish ŒIL. Unlike the CCCE, the association appears to be independent vis-à-vis the mining company, even if the latter participates in its financing. ŒIL, which is composed of members, voluntary experts and a secretariat whose employees earn wages, is a "hybrid forum" (Callon et al. 2001). Public and private participation mingles and members include six different groups: (public) institutions, municipalities (Yaté and Mont-Dore), representatives of locale communities, environmental associations, the private sector (the mining company) and a consortium of economic actors. The objective of ŒIL, which is still functioning, is to produce environmental indicators to monitor the impact of Goro Nickel. Since 2013, for example, it has coordinated the Acropora project, part of the New Caledonia Coral Reef Observation Network (RORC, initiated in 1997). In 2019, six out of nine coral reefs close to the plant were in good health, two were satisfactory and one mediocre. Over time, reef health has been maintained for eight of the nine. The indicators include coral cover, invertebrate and fish density, coral breakage and necrosis and presence of rubbish and fishing gear (ŒIL 2020).

ŒIL continued its work after the smelter and mine were sold in 2021. The CCCE was affected when members of the committee participated in sometimes violent demonstrations about mine ownership in 2020 ("*Usine du Sud = Usine Pays*"). In December, there was property damage at the smelter, and the French High Commission in Nouméa ordered protests be broken up, echoing the law-and-order rhetoric of the South Province leadership (Maclellan 2020). In response, French anti-independence proponents armed with hunting rifles mounted roadblocks, at least until the transport of weapons was banned. "*Usine du Sud = Usine* Pays" and ICAN argued Vale was selling the project while leaving behind a big environmental mess. The various movements, including those involved in environmental monitoring, wanted New Caledonian control of the business, rather than another multinational player. This was finally obtained, even if the Swiss trader Trafigura remains a partner in the new consortium.

There is a very different pattern of participation and environmental monitoring around the Koniambo project. Local communities are more invested in it economically, and the question of environmental impacts is raised differently.

### 8.6.2 Koniambo

On 14 February 2007, the North Province and the mining company KNS signed a voluntary environmental charter concerning the minimisation of environmental harms from Koniambo. An environmental committee was created to assess the various mining impacts across the region, including environmental quality and subsistence activities like agriculture, hunting and fishing. The "Comité Environnemental Koniambo" (CEK) also had watershed protection as an aim and monitors the effects of mountaintop mining on plants and animals. The environmental charter mandated the gradual restoration of mine sites with endemic species during the operation phase. The aims of CEK can be summarised as follows (CEK 2010a; Kowasch 2010):

- To implement the environmental charter
- To contribute to the consultation and information process based on the results of the environmental monitoring programme of KNS
- To provide stakeholders in the North Province with information about environmental policies and measures
- To deal with any environmental issues related to the Koniambo project
- To bring elements of analysis and reflection to the mining company
- To communicate on the techniques and studies concerning environmental protection

The CEK, whose chair was Jacques Loquet, a former mine worker, had 18 members and could set up working groups. It included representatives from the mining company, the French state, the provincial government, public institutions (mostly Kanak in this region), the municipalities, customary representatives (one became the president) and environmental associations. Meetings required the presence of at least three-quarters of the members. The work of the members was voluntary, but compensation was provided for their function or mandate. KNS helped with secretarial support.

While the structure of CEK looked to be representative, they were forced to reflect on their structure and ability to communicate. An information hub was not developed, due to a lack of financial resources. While environmental associa-

tions regularly attended the meetings, customary authorities did not, lacking transport or having overlapping commitments (with customary affairs in particular). They also felt that environmental measures in the field were insufficient, lacking enough communication, consultation and investigation. According to the committee, the environmental monitoring method was not effective, and the tasks were performed anarchically, without developing any significant indicators of project performance. Loquet proposed four solutions (Kowasch 2010):

(a) The CEK leaves the mining company KNS to carry out its actions and work independently.
(b) The CEK remains within KNS but is given the means to carry out its mission properly.
(c) The CEK accepts a solution recommended by KNS: the creation of a legal entity.
(d) The CEK develops a different internal/external strategy.

The choice to leave the company required (a) creating a new (independent) environmental association or joining an existing one. As Rhéébù Nùù's experience in the South demonstrated, the environmental struggle is best fought external to company control. New members could be recruited, although probably hostile to the Koniambo project. The disadvantage would be the lack of access to mining operator documents, and the committee wanted to retain an element of neutrality in the face of public scrutiny of its actions.

Choice b included the risk of being an organisation denounced as too closely aligned with KNS, without a legal framework or its own budget. KNS would have to provide the means for its operation. Nonetheless, it would have access to data and internal information.

The creation of a legal entity (choice c), an association with its own operating resources and budget, had advantages for the mining company, because it would not have to deal with the budget and the activities of the committee. The question of who would appoint the president and how customary representatives could be integrated into the CEK remained.

As for a dual internal/external strategy (choice d), questions would be raised about regulating disagreements and separating environmental analysis from implementation. A dual strategy would make it possible to put pressure on the ground but only if the committee has the means and power. Independent scientists could be funded to carry out impact studies, which would increase credibility in the eyes of the local population.

Events came to a head when CEK organised a visit to the future smelter for "opponents" from the proximate Kanak community of Oundjo, thus leading to accusations from other more supportive clans that the committee had lost credibility. At the end of September 2008, KNS proposed that CEK worked from outside [option a or c]. For Loquet, this was telling, suggesting KNS wanted: "to get rid of a baby who is becoming too cumbersome and too greedy because he/she wants to grow up" (CEK 2008). Loquet complained that the work of the committee was little understood by the local population. At a meeting in the Kanak village of Temala, an Oundjo fisherman confirmed: "We know you exist but we don't know what you are doing" (CEK 2010b, p. 2). The CEK's room for manoeuvre remained narrow. The committee was not integrated into the environmental monitoring meetings of the project and therefore did not participate in KNS's environmental decisions. They continued for a few years, but an external evaluation of the CEK in 2016 revealed that the committee was again regarded as an organisation under control of the mining company.

In 2017, CEK finally left KNS to form an independent environmental association, called "Environord" (Interview Loquet, 16/8/2019). KNS supplied financing of the new association for its first years. Environord now organises monthly meetings that are attended by KNS representatives (from the company environment department and/or its small community relations team; interview, October 2022), environmental and citizen associations and customary representatives. But the association has only two employees, one is permanent and the other one fixed-term. Environord now has responsibility for air quality monitoring, which shows a degree of confidence of KNS towards the association. Nevertheless, it remains a challenge to find qualified local people to undertake such studies (Interview Loquet, 16/8/2019). Environord seeks to collaborate with other actors in environmental research projects but still lacks financial means.

## 8.7 Discussion: Positioning and Legitimacy

### 8.7.1 Colonialism and Postcolonialism

As other chapters show (e.g. by Batterbury et al.), the independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou (murdered in 1988) transformed Kanak senses of self and identity, when he asked "Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?" (Tjibaou 2005, cited in Fisher 2014, p. 1–2). Since then, Kanak political leaders have "increasingly talked about 'recognition of identity', 'decolonisation' and 'full accession to sovereignty' rather more than independence" (*ibid*. 2014, p. 10). Their involvement in the nickel sector is a crucial element for most Kanak political leaders to accede to economic and political sovereignty. In 1995, the economist Jean Freyss noted that "the battle for development becomes the instrument of Kanak combat" (1995, p. 59; see also Demmer 2002; Mokaddem 2010; Kowasch 2012b). The strategy of the independence party FLNKS is to build economic and political independence, using nickel processing to create added value (Demmer 2007). The real purpose is not profit-

making but a political goal, differing somewhat from Rhéébù Nùù's discourse which was about Indigenous rights nested within their environmental protest against Goro Nickel. Their claim was that Indigenous peoples are closer to nature, work with less advanced and polluting technologies and defend biodiversity as knowledgeable users of natural resources. But the broader independence movement, led by its signature Koniambo project in the North, has taken a different view and pursued an industrial strategy to support rights and recognition.

FLNKS independence leaders have very rarely been defenders of a fetishised tradition and identity politics that seeks recognition in law (Demmer and Salomon 2013). The FLNKS wants to use the mining sector as an instrument for economic and political emancipation, and this explained the great support that neighbouring Indigenous communities gave to the Koniambo project. They still perceive Koniambo to be "their project" in order to generate employment and services and "development" (Kowasch 2018). To a certain extent, this has muted criticism against the project among Indigenous communities close by, and can make Environord's role somewhat delicate. Environmental justice is an integral part of Kanak culture, but environmental impacts of mining projects are often described as the "price to pay" for new jobs and political emancipation (*ibid*. 2018).

The discourse of Rhéébù Nùù also changed in recent times, approaching or even agreeing to the FLNKS strategy. Many members of the committee integrated the newly founded initiatives ICAN (Indigenous Customary Negotiating Body) and "*Usine du Sud – Usine Pays*", which both supported a majority shareholding of SOFINOR/Korea Zinc in the Goro Nickel project (applying the 51/49% model known from Koniambo). But anti-independence politicians were opposed to an expansion of SOFINOR to the South. Sonia Backès, the leader of the anti-independence coalition "*Avenir en Confiance*" and president of the South Province, argued that "those who are proposing this want to economically colonise the Southern Province" (Maclellan 2020). Backès, who supported Emmanuel Macron for the French presidential elections in 2022, is strongly opposed to an independent New Caledonia-Kanaky. Known for her reactions to critical journalists, she told the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation that in New Caledonia, there are no longer any colonised peoples (NC 1ère 2021). After difficult negotiations, the final compromise for control of the Goro Nickel project was a 51% shareholding for the "country" including SPMSC (30%), company employees and local communities (21%). Although not a shareholder, the American electric car giant Tesla has joined as a technical advisor to improve the industrial process, since it needs the "ethical nickel". The mining titles of the Goro deposit will be held by the South Province (via PromoSud) and will give rise to royalties. Backès says the agreement is a new model based on control, development of wealth and environmental protection. But it is still a huge and quite destructive nickel mine. Mining companies such as KNS acknowledge that (opencast) mining must reduce its (massive) environmental damage. In the next section, we discuss in more general terms the role of local organisations in this huge challenge.

### 8.7.2 Legitimacy and Critical Voices

Local communities in New Caledonia-Kanaky wonder if CCCE, ŒIL, Rhéébù Nùù and Environord can monitor mining companies effectively and importantly, actually hold them to account. If they can, it is a source of hope for other local battles with mining companies worldwide. But how can organisations and association have legitimacy and acceptance when they are funded by the company they are monitoring?

In the South, the Pact has negated the "ability to protest" (Horowitz 2014, p. 98). Some of the Rhéébù Nùù members expressed regret about signing it and wondered whether they had "signed too quickly" (*ibid*. 2014, p. 98). In the North, the former CEK president of Environord regretted the lack of finance and operational support, constraining its freedom. Both mining companies, Vale and KNS, benefit from New Caledonia's neoliberalised regulatory and fiscal policy environments (Horowitz et al. 2018). Switches of tactics have been evident. In the South, Vale faced informal regulatory challenges from Rhéébù Nùù (*ibid*. 2018). Activists based their legitimacy on ties to customary authority. However, when protests became more violent, customary authorities felt uncomfortable supporting the committee and Vale and then switched tactics and brought customary authorities to the negotiating table in order to destabilize Rhéébù Nùù's claims and legitimacy (Horowitz et al. 2018). The committee needed to ensure customary legitimacy so it accepted the Pact that its lawyer, and Vale's lawyers, had negotiated. This seems an odd about-face; Rhéébù Nùù was defending Indigenous legitimacy, which was unfortunately controlled by Vale by that stage. The mining company wanted the "social license to operate" (Fisher et al. 1985), which was also the purpose of the "Pact". Nonetheless, Rhéébù Nùù did not have support from all families and clans in the communities, and some customary authorities and villagers taunted the committee as being corrupted by the mining operator. The committee had accepted a degree of effluent flowing into the Caledonian lagoon, while getting financial compensation and support for onshore development projects. Therefore, customary legitimacy dropped away with the signature of the Pact with Vale. Rhéébù Nùù members – and the CCCE as well – were not perceived as legitimate representatives of all Kanak communities in the South. On the other side, the Pact shows that Rhéébù Nùù prioritised recognition (as partner

for negotiation with Vale) over their environmental and economic concerns (Horowitz 2014). While ŒIL follows a scientific appoach, the representational strategy of Rhéébù Nùù is symbolic-historical-political in nature, too quickly coopted, and thus it ceased to be accepted by local communities as a legitimate representative.

The recently founded initiatives "*Usine du Sud – Usine Pays*" and ICAN do not want to be "neutral". They defend a political position that meets the claims of the independence movement FLNKS: the control of natural resources by the territory. Environmental monitoring is one of their issues, largely organised and supported by Kanak independence activists. Nonetheless, it is embedded in their social-political claims for resource sovereignty, expressed as territorial majority shareholding in the project and greater benefit-sharing.

The Kanak band Humaa-gué is based in the Touaourou community, close to the Goro Nickel plant, and they have denounced environmental destruction in the neighbourhood of the Goro Nickel project (fieldwork, 2022). They are mostly in favour of the FLNKS approach to economic participation and political emancipation. Their Kaneka[1] song "Terre du sud" (Land of the South) addresses the issue. Here are the original and translated lyrics:

| *Terre du sud (2012)* | Land of the south (2012) |
|---|---|
| *Oh toi, l'industriel actif à deux pas de chez moi*<br>*Regarde tout près de toi en contrebas dans ces vallées*<br>*Tous ces gens-là qui vivent de cette eau venant de la terre*<br>*Imagine un instant que tes enfants sont là parmi eux* | Oh you, the mining company operating just a stone's throw from my house<br>Look very close to you, below in the valleys<br>All these people who live from this water that comes from the earth<br>Imagine for a moment that your children are there among them |
| *Si cette terre du sud est l'avenir,*<br>*Elle n'est pas le cobay de l'avenir industriel*<br>*Si cette terre du sud est l'avenir,*<br>*Elle n'est pas le cobay de l'avenir industriel*<br>*Unissons-nous main dans la main*<br>*Et travaillons pour un avenir meilleur* | If this southern land is the future,<br>It is not the testing ground of the mining operator<br>If this southern land is the future,<br>It is not the testing ground of the mining operator<br>Let us unite hand in hand<br>And let's work for a better future |
| *Si de nos jours encore, l'avenir dépend de cette cause*<br>*Alors, dis-moi pourquoi cette science nous est encore occulte*<br>*Si de nos jours encore, l'avenir dépend de cette cause*<br>*Alors pourquoi occultes-tu le droit à nos valeurs* | If even today, the future depends on this cause<br>So, tell me why this science is still hidden to us<br>If even today, the future depends on this cause<br>Then why do you hide the right to our values |

[1]Kaneka music fuses traditional styles with pop, world music and most notably reggae.

| *Terre du sud (2012)* | Land of the south (2012) |
|---|---|
| *Si cette terre du sud est l'avenir,*<br>*Elle n'est pas le cobay de l'avenir industriel*<br>*Si cette terre du sud est l'avenir,*<br>*Elle n'est pas le cobay de l'avenir industriel*<br>*Unissons-nous main dans la main*<br>*Et travaillons pour un avenir meilleur* | If this southern land is the future,<br>It is not the testing ground of the mining operator<br>If this southern land is the future,<br>It is not the testing ground of the mining operator<br>Let us unite hand in hand<br>And let's work for a better future |

In the North, Environord is still an ally of KNS. As highlighted, the purpose of the former CEK was to communicate the techniques and studies of KNS concerning environmental protection. Since the creation of Environord, the association has gained in self-awareness and "legitimacy" and acceptance, even though it still depends on KNS financially. Based on the model of ŒIL (which is also co-financed by a mining company), the association aims to conduct scientific studies or to award them to look for partners. In contrast to Rhéébù Nùù or ICAN, different actors of society are members, including public institutions, the local (provincial) government, the mining company and all local communities of the (VKP) region represented by customary representatives. KNS participates in (nearly) all meetings of the committee – in contrast to public institutions and the local government.

We argue that "participation" in an environmental association (here Environord, CCCE or ŒIL) is in fact another means of social control and discipline exercised by a mining operator, as Saldi et al. (2014) show for a case in Argentina. As this book shows, the question of local input into environmental monitoring is part of "a dispute between (individual) parties each with their own specific interests" (Zhouri 2015, p. 454), which is based on the existence and persistence of dissent (Mouffe 1999). ŒIL, CCCE and Environord play their part, but they are not totally distanced from the organisation they are monitoring. In the same way, land claims and conflicts between different Kanak clans in New Caledonia also instrumentalize economic projects such as mining to gain (customary) legitimacy and influence (Kowasch 2012b).

Referring back to O'Faircheallaigh's (2018) criteria for assessing environmental management provisions (Table 8.1), using the capacity to act unilaterally to deal with environmental concerns or problems associated with the project is not really happening, because of the company support through funding. In contrast to the CCCE, ŒIL appears to be more independent from the mining company, although it does have some corporate financing. As a "hybrid forum" (Callon et al. 2001), ŒIL has an independent scientific committee and can conduct environmental studies without company consultation. However, the association cannot force the company to take certain measures or decisions. Since Environord is no longer an integrative component of KNS, the committee can independently evaluate environmental

management systems and issues. It may also suggest ways of enhancing environmental management systems, but KNS is not obliged to address their suggestions. Moreover, Environord is too small to have all of its own finance. It is a tool to federate different actors from civil society to communicate about environmental protection measures. But negotiation with customary authorities has to occur directly, in the communities and at conferences with clan representatives and customary authorities.

KNS has a double perspective. Glencore (which currently withdraws from New Caldonia-Kanaky) has a profit motive and sees Environord as an instrument for environmental monitoring and communication. But in their 2020 sustainability report, reflecting the changing language of the times, the company wants to be an active and valued participant "in all the communities that host us" (Glencore 2020, p. 59). They also highlight that they pay "all relevant taxes, royalties and levies required by local and national regulation in our host countries" (*ibid*, p. 65). These are, however, quite favourable in New Caledonia-Kanaky.

## 8.8 Conclusion

According to O'Faircheallaigh (2018), environmental management provisions intermingle with social and political claims for benefit sharing and legitimacy, especially in a context of decolonisation. Questions of environmental and social justice (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020) thus play a key role in negotiations between local communities, environmental organisations and mining companies. The crucial challenges for mining companies, outside their responsibilities to shareholders, include reducing their environmental impacts, integrating local communities and demonstrating legitimacy in their environmental monitoring.

We have shown that Goro Nickel and Koniambo have different social-political contexts, dating back to the administrative division into three provinces in 1988 – one governed by an anti-independence party and two supporting independence. The Koniambo project in the North therefore had a completely different political independence strategy behind it, explaining its greater acceptance by the local Kanak people. Resistance against the mining project was muted and restrained. Rhéébù Nùù, by contrast, used environmental claims to raise customary legitimacy concerns in the South, initially with outright protest. ICAN, including Rhéébù Nùù members, later aligned their claims for the control of mining resources, similar to the FLNKS strategy in the North and also highlighted environmental damage.

By studying these environmental associations and committees, we have shown that "legitimacy" is always negotiated. The Koniambo project involves local businesspeople, urban planners and Kanak communities. It is an economic project with political intentions, which is very visible when traversing the growing urban agglomeration that has grown up alongside it. Since the beginning, the participation and inclusion of Kanak communities have been considered vital. Therefore, CEK and later Environord – despite its financial funding by KNS – benefit from broad legitimacy, whereas Rhéébù Nùù and ICAN in the South lack this.

In the efforts to hold both projects to account for any environmental damage, independent scientific studies seem to be better accepted. Greater legitimacy is given to studies that are financed by public services than by private companies, and Environord wants more public institutions such as the provincial government to co-finance its staff and scientific work. Environord has sought greater impartiality, based on the model of ŒIL in the South, but needs this to be financed. ICAN and Rhéébù Nùù took another path. From the viewpoint of its detractors, the latter sold its soul by signing an agreement with Vale after fighting against Goro Nickel, according to local opponents to the committee (various interviews between 2008 and 2014). CCCE is still not recognised by all Indigenous communities in the South. The acceptance of the latest deal in 2021 giving 51% of the Vale project to local actors will need strong evaluation after some years of operation, on social and environmental grounds.

Associations and committees can be instrumentalised by mining companies. We know that the involvement of Indigenous people is sometimes used by mining operators as a marketing façade. Even when they are trusted, the communication of scientific results remains problematic, especially when feeding back to local communities. New Caledonia-Kanaky has good levels of formal education, but scientific papers – if written in French – are often not distributed in villages and communities, and presentations mostly occur in the cities. Customary representatives sometimes do not attend meetings and participation, always recommended for any form on impact assessment, is a challenge for mining companies. Discussions have to take place on an equal footing. Of course, where the oral tradition is still present as in New Caledonia-Kanaky, the word will always reach the rest of the local community. But to change power relations between mining companies and local communities, a "swap" of (or at least participation in) decision-making concerning environmental monitoring and mining operations in general will be necessary.

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# The Decolonisation Process Without Independence in the Light of Changes in the Nickel Sector in New Caledonia

9

Christine Demmer

**Abstract**

From the Matignon-Oudinot Accords of 1988 onwards, the pro-independence parties agreed to play the economic development game proposed by the State in order to reduce the glaring inequalities between Indigenous Kanaks and non-Kanaks. The FLNKS (*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste*) took up the challenge in two of the three provinces, where Kanak people were in the majority, and the pro-independence coalition tried to establish a form of economic sovereignty by claiming partial public control of the "country's" main resource, nickel. The story of the stages of this mining nationalism, which enabled the pro-independence movement to gain a foothold in a reconfigured nickel sector (despite encountering opposition both in the economic and the local political arena), aims to measure the road still to be travelled by FLNKS to achieve decolonisation. This could be in harmony with the foundation of a new national community of citizens, one that would be more autonomous vis-à-vis metropolitan France and in which the Kanaks would be fully included.

**Keywords**

Decolonisation · Economic struggle · Nickel sector · Nationalisation · Mining policy · Ethnic equality · National economic community

## 9.1 Introduction

Nickel is the main mineral resource of New Caledonia. Depending on the year, it represents up to 90% of the territory's exports and 10% of its GDP (Morvannou 2015). This chapter focuses on the strategy deployed by pro-independence parties gathered in the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS) to control nickel in order to build a sovereign country. The study of Kanak economic nationalism and its vagaries is in fact a pretext for measuring the extent and forms of decolonisation in New Caledonia. If it is a question of grasping the progress of the archipelago's economic sovereignty, it is also a question of reflecting on the extent of the construction of a "common destiny" between different ethnic groups in this former settler colony. It may seem surprising to try to measure the sharing of socio-economic citizenship – which can be defined by free access to employment, education or health – that would complement the sharing of the same citizenship marked by common political rights and duties. However, we shall see that the entry of Kanak independentists into the nickel industry at the end of the 1980s was perceived as much by the State as by FLNKS itself as an opportunity to participate in the reduction of inequalities that mainly affect Indigenous Kanak people. From this period onwards, the issue of social justice – well as of Kanak cultural recognition – became a permanent part of the definition of decolonisation in New Caledonia.[1] More precisely, nickel was invited into politics as a lever to reduce the strong territorial inequalities between the North of the main island Grande Terre, mainly populated by Kanaks, and the South where wealth is concentrated and where most of non-Kanaks live. This multiculturalist perspective was an imperfect response to the pro-independence movement's desire to create a nation (in the sense of a

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[1] See Frazer (2011) on the link between recognition and redistribution and Trepied (2021) on decolonisation from the post-war period to the 1970s.


M. Kowasch, S. P. J. Batterbury (eds.), *Geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky*,
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national community of citizens), moving beyond being recognised as a national minority.

In order to trace the history of Kanak mining nationalism and to provide food for thought on the two main aspects of the economic decolonisation of New Caledonia (strengthening the productive fabric and reducing inter-ethnic inequalities), I begin by recalling how nickel became central to the Kanak discourse on emancipation, before evoking the Kanak strategy for attempting to control it for the benefit of the "country". In a second step, I expose the obstacles encountered in this process of nationalisation, which will be an opportunity to reflect on the limits of the decolonisation process still underway (see Chaps. 17 and 18 by Gagné and Fisher in this book).[2]

## 9.2 Economic Nationalism as a Response to State Developmentalism

In addition to the establishment of a penal colony and the spoliation of Kanak land for the benefit of cattle-breeding colonists, the colonial history of the archipelago is marked by nickel mining. For more than a century, the French company *Société le Nickel* (SLN), managed between 1888 and 1974 by the Rothschild family, ruled over the mining sector with no real competition from the smaller mining companies mainly run by New Caledonian families (Bencivengo 2014). From the end of the nineteenth century, these companies called on forced labour, from the New Hebrides (today the independent state of Vanuatu), from French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies (today the independent states of Vietnam and Indonesia), but also hired labour (particularly Japanese workers), because the Indigenous Kanak were requisitioned for other works in the French colony (Muckle 2015).

Although the Defferre's Framework Law of 1956 offered some political autonomy to the archipelago, the State's desire to control nickel resources, the so-called green gold, put an end to this in the 1960s. Placing the French Overseas Territories under the Ministry of Overseas France encouraged new immigration from metropolitan France. Due to the boom of the nickel sector between 1967 and 1972, immigration to New Caledonia increased so that the Kanaks became a minority in their own country. Encouraged by a group of Kanak students defending anti-colonial theories, who returned to New Caledonia after studying in metropolitan France, some Kanaks then began to challenge the French presence. From 1981 onwards, several pro-independence parties merged in the *Front Indépendantiste* (FI) before founding FLNKS in 1984 (Chappell 2013/2017). The creation of FLNKS, asserting itself in a break with political institutions, also marked the reinforcement of a struggle with the State to achieve independence. At least 80% of Kanaks (representing over 41% of the total population today) want independence. At the beginning of the fight, activists highlighted the fate of Kanak people during the "dark years" of the exceptional legal regime of the *Code l'indigénat* (between 1887 and 1946), which opposed citizens and Indigenous people because of their cultural difference (Merle and Muckle 2019). The pro-independence movement stressed the reality that Kanak people were pushed into reserves, based on legal segregation, deprived from freedom of movement and compelled into forced labour. They observed that the equality of political rights, acquired at the time of the French Union, after the abolition of the *indigénat* regime and after World War II, was slow to be established. The movement also denounced the inequality of treatment that remained, with Kanaks occupying poorly paid and precarious jobs. The first decade of the independence movement thus saw demands for the restitution of their land.

After violent and deadly confrontations between descendants of (European) settlers and Kanak people, the agreements negotiated with the French Government and the anti-independence camp to restore peace in the mid-1980s opened a political dialogue centred on development of Kanak livelihoods, territories and recognition of identity. With the Matignon-Oudinot Accords, signed in 1988, the French State tried to favour the economic development of the Kanak-majority regions in the hope of weakening the independence claim. This decolonisation path, without independence, was named "within the French Republic", by the former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard (Mohamed-Gaillard 2020). To this end, three provinces (North, South and Loyalty Islands) were created, considering the ethnic distribution of the population, which allowed the independentists to manage two of them.[3] Moreover, the Accords provided a referendum on self-determination after a ten year period. With this power conferred, the independentists had to demonstrate their capacity to eventually govern a country. With the establishment of this multicultural perspective, the French Government took care to favour the North and the Islands in the distribu-

[2] A first referendum on self-determination took place on 4 November, 2018; 56.4% of eligible voters were against independence. The second referendum on 4 October, 2020, saw an increase in the proportion of pro-independence votes to 46.7% (53.3% against). The third vote was due to take place on 12 December, 2021. The independentists demanded the postponement of the third referendum to respect the mourning of the Kanak people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They were not successful. With less than 10,000 votes separating them from a "yes" vote in 2020, the call to stay at home allowed the "no" to win hands down.

[3] In 1989, 78.7% of the total population in the North Province was Kanaks against 15.7% of Europeans and 5.6% of other ethnic groups; the Loyalty Islands were home to 98.1% Kanaks and 1.3% Europeans at that time. As for the South Province, where the capital Nouméa is located, Europeans were in the majority with 44.3% of the total population against 25.8% of Kanaks (Gilbert et al. 1999).

tion of budgets and investments, although the South Province was by far the most populated. With the help of state-province contracts that promised to train 400 Kanak managers, the Accords aimed at a growth policy in these areas and a more equitable redistribution of benefits across the territory. However, in line with the new orientations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), local elected representatives were asked to take responsibility for the development of the archipelago (Blanchet 1999). New negotiations in 1998 led to the Nouméa Accord, which pursued the objective of rebalancing between ethnic groups while seeking to strengthen the autonomy of the archipelago – in particular with the transfer of political competences, except sovereign powers (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book). It also tried to bring the different ethnic groups together around a New Caledonian citizenship based on the creation of a restricted electorate for local (provincial) elections (see Chap. 20 by Roberston in this book). This mandate has also used for a local employment preference policy. Within this new political framework, "New Caledonia-Kanaky" became an "overseas territory" (*pays d'outre-mer*).

From 1988 onwards FLNKS, which was now in charge of two of the three provinces, deployed an economic nationalism strategy aiming, through the reappropriation of the territory's main mineral resource, to get New Caledonia out of a situation of dependence (Freyss 1995). Shortly before this, the independence leaders promoted entrepreneurship in Kanak rural areas to shift the economy from domestic agricultural activities still practised on Kanak lands. After the rejection of a political solution proposed by the French State and the execution by the elite group of the national gendarmerie of Eloi Machoro, the leader of a Kanak revolt, the State proposed, in 1985, a first development plan by regions, inviting FLNKS to be involved. Due to the lack of resources to wage an armed struggle against the coloniser, and aware of their numerical inferiority, the independentists returned to economic nationalism. FLNKS seized upon the regions it was able to run before provincialisation, in the hope of "building Kanaky" (Demmer 2016). Leaders particularly encouraged a form of nationalisation of the economy "from below", in order to enter the market for goods and services and also, to a lesser extent, the labour market, from which the Kanak had largely been excluded. The Matignon-Oudinot Accords, through their concern for "economic rebalancing" between Kanak and non-Kanak populations and the creation of decentralised governance through elected representatives, allowed the independence movement to enter the nickel industry (Pitoiset 2015). Under pressure from Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the president of FLNKS, who wanted the Kanaks to have access to the main economic levers of the territory, and with financial assistance from the French State, the local mining company *Société Minière du Pacifique Sud* (SMSP), subcontrator of SLN, was purchased by the *Société de Financement et d'Investissement de la Province Nord* (SOFINOR), the investment company of the North Province. It is governed by the independence movement. The unprofitable company was bought from the loyalist politician Jacques Lafleur, former owner of SMSP. That is why it remains a symbol of the ethnic rebalancing process, even though Lafleur's supporters (predominantly white) voted massively against the Accords.

Through public control of resources, and by being the main shareholder of SMSP, FLNKS also promoted nationalisation of the economy "from above" despite also soliciting the private sector and seeking alliances with multinationals. FLNKS was (and still is) aiming to create wealth and an economic basis for future independence. The SMSP became a leading mining company in New Caledonia in a short timeframe. From the FLNKS point of view, other nationalisations of nickel enterprises should follow. To strengthen the added value of the mining sector, FLNKS argued in 1992 at its national conventions in favour of the progressive cessation of raw ore exports, which provide less profit than the sale of processed ore. The pro-independence leaders then promoted the creation of a nickel smelter in the North, in addition to the SLN smelter in the suburbs of Nouméa. After numerous blockades of mine sites, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin agreed to the pro-independence leaders' wish to build a nickel smelter which was backed by the supply of ore from the Koniambo massif. The Bercy Protocol (named after the location of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance in Paris), which was signed on 1 February 1998, formalised the agreement and was a prerequisite for discussions on a new political status for the archipelago. These negotiations resulted in the Nouméa Accord, signed on 5 May, of the same year, extending the decolonisation process by 20 years.

It is now time to explain in more detail the stages of this nickel independence conquest and its obstacles.

## 9.3 The Stages of Mining Nationalism, Focused on Companies in the Nickel Sector

With the "Regions status" back in 1985/86, the preparation for independence involved cooperatives and "economic interest groups" imbued with an utopian idea of liberation by action. In the following phases, this utopian or millenarian dimension evaporated. What remained from the Kanak national liberation struggle was the more pragmatic idea of an investment in the market economy, as described above. Now in possession of the mining company SMSP, the question of rural Kanak entrepreneurship (often of a collective form) has arisen again, but the pro-independence leaders are also promoting subcontracting companies, located in the

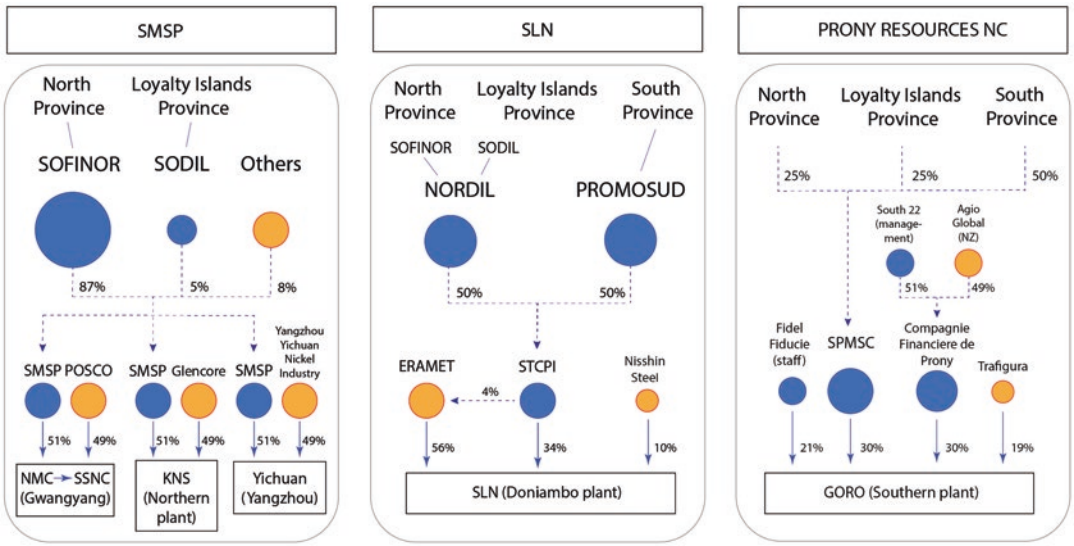


**Fig. 9.1** Shareholding of the mining companies SMSP, SLN and Prony Resources. (Source: Burton and Levacher 2021)

neighbourhood of the mines and, later, of new smelters in the North and also in the South (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book), based on the model of so-called people's shareholding enterprises (see Fig. 9.1). These shareholding companies involve Kanak clans or communities ("tribes" or *tribu* in French) on former reserves that have become customary land (see Chap. 10 by Batterbury et al. in this book). Other small non-Kanak mining contractors have also been encouraged to participate in local economic development. In 2001, people's shareholdings included approximately 15% of the adult population of the North Province, of which 49% were selected to represent clans (Pitoiset 2002). For example, in the neighbourhood of the Koniambo project, local enterprises are gathered in a "simplified shareholding company" (*SAS Vavouto Koniambo*) whose shareholders were four civil participation companies,[4] three of them representing customary actors and one of them individual Kanak and non-Kanak shareholders (Kowasch 2010; Le Meur et al. 2012). Advocating the development of entrepreneurship – again without excluding the presence of small non-Kanak operators – was perceived as a condition for clan members to retake control of an economy that was dominated by colonial settlers and largely dependent on transfers from the French State. Raphaël Pidjot, the first general manager of SMSP and later its CEO, has particularly encouraged this model of nationalisation from below, which means ownership of the resource by the citizens (Mauss 2018).

The recognition of a form of local sovereignty over the resource does not obscure the national dimension of mining heritage. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, FLNKS leader and signatory of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords, along with other leaders, considered the takeover of SMSP as a step in the Kanak reconquest of the nickel sector, and more broadly of the territorial economy, from above. He perceived it as an opportunity to allow local people to really benefit from the spin-offs of resource exploitation. The State, for its part, encouraged the assumption of responsibility for development by the provinces created in 1988. Each province was to have an investment company (half private and half public) for this purpose. In the South, 68% of PROMOSUD (the local Development and Investment Corporation) was financed by the provincial budget. The investment company in the Loyalty Islands Province, which does not possess nickel resources, was financed to a level of 79.5% by public funds. In the North, 75% (now 85%) of SOFINOR was financed from the provincial budget.[5] SOFINOR became the majority shareholder of SMSP, with 87% of the shares, while the *Société de Développement et d'Investissement des Iles* (SODIL) has 5% and 8% are held by other shareholders (see Fig. 9.1). Therefore, pro-independence representatives, who have a majority in the North Province assembly, were integrated into the SMSP board of directors.

Control of a mining company through financial investment by the North Province was seen as a major economic development tool (see also Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book). It was innovative, using local semi-public companies, so-called *Sociétés d'Economie Mixte locales* (SEML), to invest in the mining sector and to develop socio-economic

[4]These companies are made up of at least two partners who show a desire to join together to undertake a business, thus contributing to losses and sharing profits together.

[5]The remaining 25% of SOFINOR's capital belonged to the *Institut Calédonien de Participation* (Caledonian Participation Institute), split between the *Agence Française de Développement* (the French overseas aid agency), holding 52% of the shares, and the three provinces, each holding 16%.

activities. Traditionally, public authorities do not invest public funds in industry. Here, they use this economic tool to serve the general interest for the development of facilities or the creation of social housing. According to the independentists, the takeover of SMSP, symbol of a Kanak reconquest of the economy, was also a means of better integrating the Kanak into the labour market, both as workers and entrepreneurs. Given the problem of exclusion experienced by Kanak people, the demand for participation in the nickel industry was to paraphrase the politician Léon Bourgeois, a claim to build a "society of equals", a nation that (re-)integrates marginalised and excluded people (Castel 2008). However, while being an act of partial reconquest of Kanak sovereignty over the nickel resource, the control of SMSP was tantamount to reappropriation of all of the society called upon to make a nation – Kanaks and non-Kanaks alike. The semi-public set-up of the company (the "semi-nationalisation") in fact signalled a desire to ensure that a territory, and not just a single ethnic group, benefited from the spin-offs of the nickel sector. Nickel was presented as a "national heritage" that should no longer benefit only a few industrialists but be for "all the people of this country" (Pidjot 1993).

SMSP, owner of mining titles, quickly became a major player in the nickel sector, the largest exporter of nickel ores in New Caledonia and the second largest producer of oxidised ores in the world. But that was not enough for the independence leaders. In accordance with the wishes of former FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, investment in metallurgy became the main way to add value to the nickel sector, following the example of other producer nations. In 1995, SMSP succeeded in convincing the Canadian company Falconbridge to engage in a metallurgical project with an unprecedented set-up: SMSP took a 51% stake in the capital of the future smelter, leaving 49% for the Canadian group. In return, SMSP would provide the mineral resource. To accomplish this, the independentists needed a new nickel deposit. They proposed an exchange of mining titles with the oldest of the mining companies in New Caledonia, SLN. They wanted to swap the Poum massif, less rich in nickel, for that of Thiébaghi, a richer deposit both located in the North (Fig. 9.2). SLN, supported by loyalists, refused. Long-term discussions began: SMSP, supported by FLNKS, negotiated with SLN and the French State, which held shares in Eramet, the French parent (then owning 70%) of SLN through a public investment group, ERAP.[6] In the end, through the Bercy agreement, it was not Thiébaghi that was involved in the swap but the Koniambo massif, located closely to Koné, the capital of the North Province. The condition was that SMSP and its partner Falconbridge had to begin investing before 1 January 2006 (David and Sourisseau 2016; Kowasch 2010). KNS, the joint venture between SMSP and Falconbridge, was then founded to mine the deposit and run the future smelter. After changing partners twice (Falconbridge was acquired by the Swiss group Xstrata, which was then acquired by Glencore), the Koniambo smelter began producing ferronickel, with a fairly high nickel content, in 2013 (see also Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book).

The development of the metal processing strategy, on a global capitalist market, has continued (see Fig. 9.1). SMSP joined forces with another industrial corporation, the South Korean steel group POSCO, on the same unprecedented 51/49% shareholding model. Together, they created a company called *Société du Nickel de Nouvelle-Calédonie et Corée* (SNNC), which since 2008 has been processing Caledonian ores, with a lower grade compared to Koniambo, in Gwangyang (South Korea). This alliance marked a new turning point in the history of SMSP as the company has become primarily a nickel refiner. Except for Koniambo, SMSP mines have been spun off to become the property of the Nickel Mining Company (NMC), a new POSCO (Pohang Iron and Steel Company)-SMSP joint venture. Since then, the Korean group has benefited from a regular supply of New Caledonian nickel ores while the Kanak part of the venture ensured the sale of its ores. After a period of trial and error, in March 2018, SMSP signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Chinese industrial group Yangzhou Yichuan Nickel Industry, again on the 51/49% shareholding model, for a future processing plant in China. According to the strategic plan of the independentists, the joint venture refineries, in each of which SMSP has a majority stake, are intended to get better value from nickel by selling it in refined form. In October 2015, the SNNC smelter in South Korea, for example, was estimated to have returned ten times more than what would have been received by selling unprocessed ore (SMSP 2015). The North Province, which benefits from these spin-offs through SOFINOR, seeks to reinvest them in financing economic projects.[7]

But local development objectives are not the only element in the Kanak nickel project. FLNKS is also looking to extend the provincial strategy to New Caledonia as a whole. According to a second version of the Bercy Agreement in 1999, they obtained the transfer of a parcel of SLN shares to a New Caledonian public structure co-managed by the three provinces: the *Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participations Industrielles* (STCPI). From 2007, STCPI has had a minority interest of 34% with special voting rights. Eramet (with a quarter of shares held by the French State), restructured into three groups (nickel, manganese and alloys), holds 56% of SLN shares, while the Japanese com-

[6] In 1985, via ERAP (and Elf Aquitaine), Eramet was 85% owned by the French State. But EU competition laws made the State divest its holdings and it began floating off its shares in 1994.

[7] For its part, KNS does not pay dividends. It is still repaying its debt, 97% of which is held by Glencore.

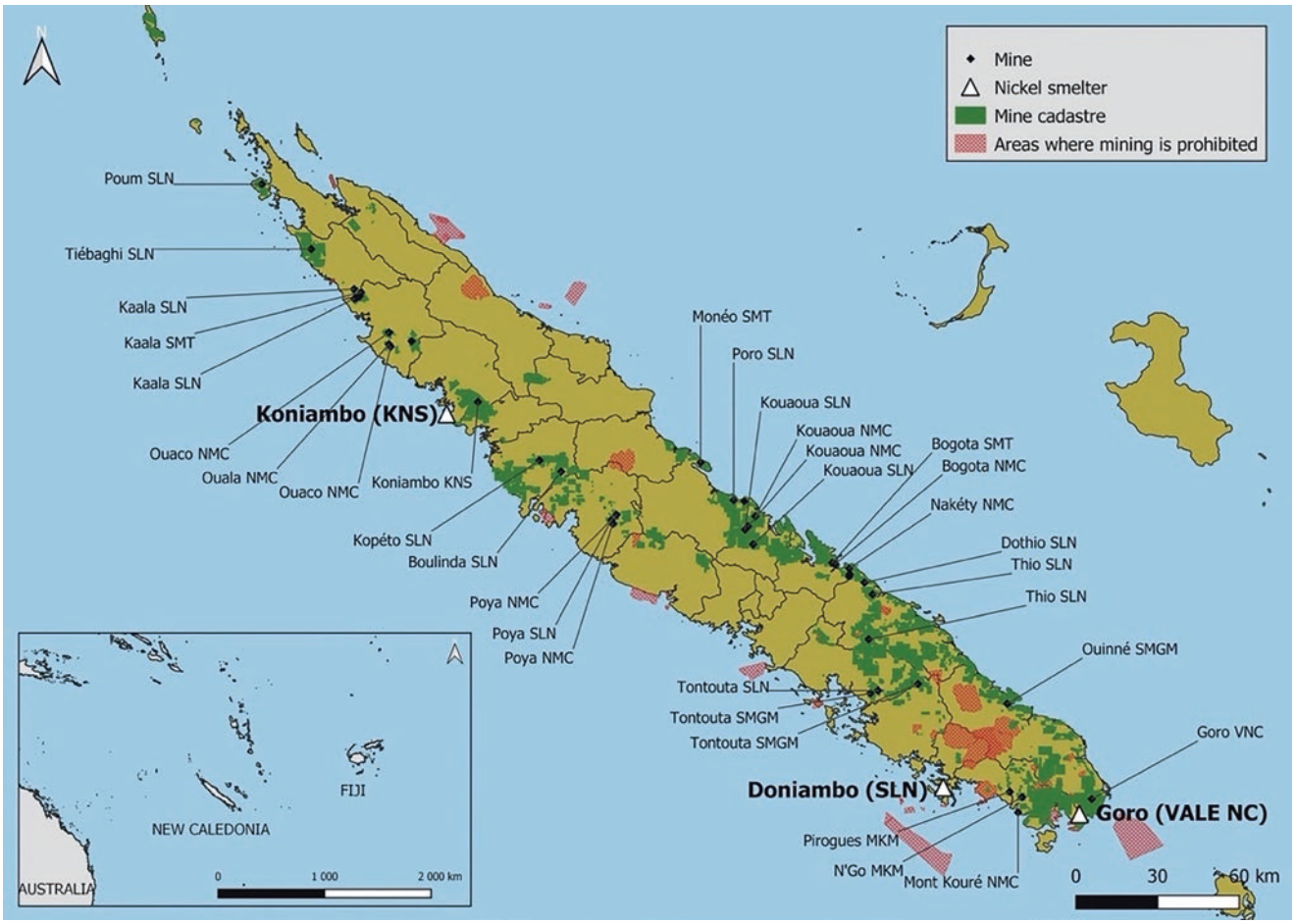


**Fig. 9.2** Nickel smelters and mines in New Caledonia. (Source: https://georep.nc/, cartography: Eibl 2022)

pany Nisshin Steel holds the remaining 10% (see Fig. 9.1). Between 2000 and 2010, SLN paid more than 335 million € in dividends to New Caledonia. The objective (shared by the predominantly white, conservative and autonomist but anti-independence party *Calédonie Ensemble*) is to eventually achieve a 51% majority public share in SLN. This strategy is in line with a broader political vision that focuses on the nationalisation of nickel resources (both raw and processed) by ensuring that the dividends earned by companies benefit New Caledonia rather than the French State or private shareholders. This "nationalisation" of SLN's capital was an important step in a Kanak logic of control over mineral resources. It is significant because SLN still owns three quarters of New Caledonian nickel reserves and retains more than 50% of the mining titles. The changes to the major shareholders have obliged SLN to refocus its assets towards New Caledonia. The challenge is to "caledonise" local nickel smelters through public-private partnerships and encourage "small" local mining companies to sell the ores they extract to the New Caledonian smelters (including those "offshore" in South Korea or China in the future). The aim is to create more added value and streamline mining activities.

## 9.4 A Changing Nickel Sector

The demands of the Kanak independence leaders – first the acquisition of SMSP and then the construction of a smelter in the North – has changed the New Caledonian mining sector. The SMSP is not only the originator of a local metallurgical project but also of several offshore partnerships, all aimed at making better use of nickel incomes. In addition, Kanak demands have led to a "caledonisation" of processed nickel from the oldest local smelter in New Caledonia, Doniambo, changing the relationship between mining operators in the "country". In colonial times, from the 1870s to the 1930s, SLN had a hegemonic position, controlled by the French branch of the Rothschild Bank. It ruled over small subcontractor mining companies, run by migrants from France who had established local roots or settlers from other Pacific islands, with a fluctuating number depending on nickel prices, who were only able to export by themselves between the two World Wars. These "small miners" were almost wiped out during World War II, but they rebounded after the war. By the end of the 1960s, thanks to a boom in nickel prices, 15 independent companies were exporting raw

nickel and 6 others were subcontracting for SLN. Today, the "small miners" (now four in number) are no longer linked to SLN (Bouard et al. 2018).

The involvement of the independence movement in the nickel sector (through SMSP) also had an impact on the construction of a third nickel processing plant in the archipelago. When the loyalist leaders of the South Province and the New Caledonian Government realised that the Kanak independentists would succeed in setting up the joint venture between SMSP and Falconbridge, they contacted the Canadian group Inco to initiate another project to exploit low-grade nickel laterites found in the southern region. Launched in 2002, Goro Nickel was acquired by the Brazilian company Vale in 2006. Despite employing a number of Kanak people and engaging with local subcontractors also gathered in an SAS, the mine and processing plant has had a troubled history (Levacher 2016). Initially, the project moved away from a "national vision"; it was essentially privately owned – with only 5% participation by the provinces. Unable to benefit, along with the rest of the inhabitants of the South Province, from the dividends of the plant, the local Kanak communities, in the spirit of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, negotiated a new agreement in 2008, the *Pacte pour un Développement Durable du Grand Sud* ("Pact for Sustainable Development of the Big South"), which allows them to benefit from funds to encourage local sociocultural development (Levacher 2016; Demmer 2007; Horowitz 2015; see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book).

In 2020, in the middle of the second referendum on political independence, the departure of Vale has been a game changer. At the end of a major mobilisation on the part of FLNKS, customary authorities and local associations, Goro has also been the subject of public investment (see Fig. 9.1). Prony Resources, a newly created mining company, brings together, in *Compagnie Financière de Prony*, Goro Nickel managers and industrial investors and customers; they have 30% of the shares in the project. The Swiss trading company Trafigura acquired 19%. Moreover, the New Caledonian shareholding company *Société Publique Calédonienne de Participation Minière* (SPMSC), including the three provinces, has 30% of the shares (compared to 5% previously in Vale). The other novelty is that employees of Prony Resources have a 12% stake in the project through the *Fonds Commun de Placement d'Entreprise* (FCPE) and local communities, represented by their customary authorities, and have a 9% stake through the *Fonds de Prévention des Risques Environnementaux et Socioculturels* (FPRESC). Both together therefore have 21% of the shares in the project (represented by *Fidel Fiducie*; see Fig. 9.1).

The board of directors of the mining company Prony Resources has eight seats: two for SPMSC and two for FCPE and FPRESC, which allows local communities and staff to play a role in decision-making. In this shareholding scheme, "New Caledonia" exercises a certain control over the project through the provinces (SPMSC) and Kanak groups (clans and chieftancies) represented in the FPRESC. The latter thus got involved in the nickel sector that is far away from the more inclusive vision proposed by FLNKS.

Therefore, with the rise of SMSP under the control of the independentists, it is not so much the company, having become one of the world leaders in nickel exports, that has imposed itself on the New Caledonian industrial landscape but rather the demands of FLNKS for a form of nationalisation of metallurgical companies which does not exclude the recognition of Kanak's localised rights nested within national rights. The three models of shareholding now established on the archipelago all respond to the desire to constitute a public nickel rent. This does not prevent SLN from retaining 53% of the area covered by mining concessions in New Caledonia. By comparison, the mining branch of SMSP (NMC) now owns 13% of this area (acquired in a short time span), while the Koniambo mine has 4%, and *Société des Mines de la Tontouta* (SMT, see Fig. 9.2), owned by "Ballande", a historic "small miner", has 16%, making it the second most important owner of mining titles after SLN (Morvannou 2015). Despite being called "small", such companies have revenues that vary between 8 million and 42 million € (Syndicat des producteurs-exportateurs et exportateurs de minerai 2016).

## 9.5 Searching for a "National" Mining Policy

Through its emancipation struggle focused on (semi-)nationalisation of metallurgical enterprises, FLNKS initiated a refocusing of the mining sector on territorial development aims. In addition to the prospect of nationalisation, Kanak mining nationalism is expressed at the political level by the aim to develop a sustainable mining strategy. This project has accompanied the political dynamics of the Nouméa Accord, which favour greater autonomy for New Caledonia. In its weak sense (for the loyalists), this autonomy should not go beyond the transfer of sovereign powers to New Caledonia; in its strong sense (for most Kanaks but also a portion of non-Kanaks), it should lead to independence in partnership with France. Within the strong politicisation of mining questions, a *Schéma de Mise en Valeur des Richesses Minières* ("Plan for the Development of Mineral Resources") was established in 2009, accompanied by a new mining code regulating mining activities in New Caledonia. The *Schéma* includes prospects for exploiting mineral deposits in a more environmentally friendly way, gives guidelines for management of non-renewable resources and contains principles for

the export of mining products.[8] Article 39 of the mining code states that any individual decision taken within the framework of mining regulations must be compatible with the principles and orientations of the *Schéma*. Thus, the struggle led by FLNKS also allowed for stricter regulations on mining to optimise the nickel rent and plan for the ineluctable exit after the next 50 years of this industry based on an unsustainable resource. On the environmental aspect of the *Schéma*, the nationalist leaders have learnt from activists for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples who, in Goro and elsewhere, willingly combine in their discourse the preservation of living areas of local populations with criticism against extractivism (Demmer 2021).

Acting within the *Schéma* does not, however, amount to a well-defined political strategy for nickel. Between October 2010 and February 2012, such orientations were discussed within an Industrial Strategic Committee composed of the signatories to the Nouméa Accord and representatives of local political authorities. The committee of signatories of the Nouméa Accord (which annually brings the political representatives of New Caledonia together in metropolitan France) and the Working Group of Presidents (of New Caledonian provinces) and Signatories, which was created in 2013, have had further discussions. With two expert reports to support them, written by Anne Duthilleul (2012) and by Michel Colin (2016), politicians were able to examine the issues of management and development of mineral resources, the export policy for raw ores, the shareholding structure of metallurgical companies and the contribution of nickel to present and future territorial wealth. After 2016, these questions were deliberately left aside so as not to weigh on the first referendum on political independence which occurred on 4 November 2018. A concerted political strategy on the competences of the Caledonian government therefore remains to be defined (Demmer et al. 2018). As we shall see below, the loyalists reopened the debate in 2020, in a framework that appears to bypass both the previously invited actors and the nationalist approaches.

On the Kanak side, there is a well-defined strategy, called the *doctrine nickel* ("nickel doctrine"). Officially adopted in January 2015 by FLNKS in Kaala-Gomen, it echoes the strategy that started with the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988. In addition to demanding the control of mining titles, it reminds us of the need to process nickel ores in smelters that are more than 50% owned by New Caledonia in order to maximise profit. In doing so, FLNKS defends the multiplication of processing plants to ensure the processing of ores of different grades, therefore taking into account the progressive depletion of New Caledonian deposits of nickel, the "green gold". In fact, the doctrine confirmed the historical orientations of the pro-independence movement, which intends to nationalise both the raw resource and its transformation to benefit the "country" rather than private companies. This implies suspending exports of raw ore from the "small miners" with a view to processing them locally and, in the future, processing nickel from elsewhere (especially Indonesia or the Philippines) in New Caledonian smelters. By wanting to create added value by transforming raw ores, FLNKS not only defends the territory's current development but also hopes that this strategy will make it possible to finance economic diversification and therefore to think about the post-nickel era. More broadly, the nickel doctrine poses the need for the "country" to control the granting of mining titles and extraction permits. The pro-independence movement aspires to transfer mining titles to a New Caledonian public institution capable of deciding when and where to grant mining concessions to extractive companies – a power that currently belongs to provincial administrations.

While the question of authorising the export of unprocessed ores has been particularly debated by the elected representatives, as we shall see below, the prospect of holding three referendums on self-determination between 2018 and 2021 has left other questions relating to the construction of a New Caledonian nickel policy unresolved. These include the question of mining taxation or the creation of a sovereign wealth fund to be financed in whole or in part by nickel, either to implement economic diversification or to build up intergenerational savings. All these issues related to a nickel strategy, although regularly debated, have not yet been decided.

## 9.6 The Difficulty of Imposing a Kanak Nationalist Strategy

Political and economic critics of the doctrine claim that the FLNKS "offshore model" is not equivalent in terms of benefits to a local processing model. It could even lead to the rapid depletion of nickel ores due to the need to honour delivery contracts with multinational smelter partners. These same critics believe that the repayment of debts contracted with private and public partners and the nickel price crisis on the world market between 2015 and 2021, and again in 2023, has not yet enabled the economic take-off expected from the dividends earned. In terms of tax benefits, the situation is not good either, since the current smelters in New Caledonia benefit from exemptions that apply until they become profitable (a decision voted in 2001 and 2002 to

[8] In detail, the *Schéma* concerns (1) an assessment of the mineral reserves of New Caledonia, (2) prospects for the exploitation of deposits, (3) guiding principles in terms of environmental protection for the exploitation of deposits, (4) identification of geographical areas subject to special policies, (5) orientations in terms of industrial development necessary for mineral resource exploitation with regard to sustainable development and (6) policy principles for the export of mining products.

attract foreign investors). Finally, the exporters of raw ores believe that by demanding the processing of raw ores in local plants, FLNKS is seeking to favour SMSP, of which it is the majority shareholder via SOFINOR, rather than allowing New Caledonia to benefit from nickel revenues. Finally, they invoke freedom of trade principles to counter the nickel doctrine. The scheme established in 2009 guarantees exporters a certain independence from local processors, as it only encourages them to maintain connections with so-called traditional customers.

In this regard, in 2015, a request to export raw ores to China, a non-traditional client of New Caledonia, led to lively debates that illustrated the reluctance of mining operators but also of most political authorities to adopt a raw ore export strategy in line with the nickel doctrine. This debate spilled over into the political sphere, with a large part of the loyalist camp defending a liberal option against the FLNKS strategy, especially against the parliamentary coalition *Union Nationale pour l'Indépendance* composed of *Parti de Libération Kanak* (PALIKA) and *Union Progressiste en Mélanesie* (UPM) parties. However, the pro-independence party *Union Calédonienne* (UC), also a member of the umbrella party FLNKS, was divided on this issue (Demmer 2017). The dispute that took place between 5 and 28 August 2015, seemed to oppose *ContraKmine*, the union of the subcontractors transporting nickel from the mines, and the New Caledonian Government. With fears for their jobs, the union (representing truck owners, subcontractors of the operators, mostly Kanaks) demonstrated against the prohibition on mining companies selling low-grade ores to China. In this conflict, called in the media *conflit des rouleurs* (haulage conflict), the government wanted to respect the decisions of the Strategic Committee at the time. Therefore, the Committee on Foreign Trade in Mining (CCEM), composed of the president of the New Caledonian Government, the provincial presidents and representatives of miners and metallurgists, initially referred the "small mining companies" back to one of their authorised historical Australian clients, even though the latter was in great difficulty and had decided to freeze the price of its purchases for 5 years. After 2.5 weeks of blockades by subcontractors and truck owners paralysing the main roads in Nouméa, a first protocol of agreement was proposed to the leaders of *ContraKmine* and the *Syndicat des Producteurs et Exportateurs de Minerai de Nickel* (SEM), a union representing producers and exporters of nickel ores. The president of the New Caledonian Government committed to reconsider export requests to China and to consult CCEM for possible exports to the Japanese Pacific Metals Company (PAMCO). *ContraKmine* and the miners only obtained the possibility of a re-examination of their request and support for the harmonisation of contracts with the Australian customer, Queensland Nickel. Judging the guarantees to be insufficient, the movement continued demonstrating. A fatal crash of a driver at a roadblock and the mediation of the UC president finally brought the dispute to an end, on the basis of a slightly different memorandum of understanding.

The story did not end there. The conflict has led to a softening of the previous view of the mining scheme. Modalities for processing raw ores with less than 1.65% nickel were then examined by the New Caledonian parliament. On 14 October 2015, parliament representatives concluded by 27 votes to 25, with two abstentions, that the *Schéma* does not prohibit exports to non-traditional customers such as China, in line with the regulation in force before the initial refusal. The result was that "small mining companies" and SLN were allowed to sell less rich nickel ores to Chinese smelters for a limited period, despite the opposition of a "nickel doctrine support committee". The latter argued that low-grade nickel ores should not be extracted now but preserved for future exploitation. The aim was that such low-grade nickel ores should later be sold to a smelter that will be built in China and that will be run by a Chinese-New Caledonian consortium including SMSP. One interpretation is that the nickel crisis, for pragmatic reasons, has overridden the Kanak nationalists' desire to control exports. However, the conflict can be considered as an ideological battle between a liberal vision of the sector's management and a more Keynesian conception compatible with an economic (and political) emancipation sought by FLNKS. In a third interpretation, the conflict can be seen as a mobilisation aiming to destabilise SMSP – and nationalists – and their integrated economic model. To defend the nationalist position, the *Union Nationale pour l'Indépendance* (UNI) organised conferences throughout 2016 devoted to the SMSP's strategy, explaining the drawbacks of exporting raw ores in the context of a nickel low price crisis and the inadequacy of sustainable management of the nickel sector. Its supporters even launched a legal action in the administrative court to annul a licence granted by the Caledonian government in 2015 (after the conflict) to the Ballande company, to export ores to the (Japanese) Sumitomo smelter (Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes 2016). But nothing changed. Since the conflict, other contracts with Chinese clients have been validated.

By opening up a new export channel, the *ContraKmine* struggle has thwarted the nickel doctrine. It also modified the philosophy of the *Schéma minier*, aiming to restrict the authorised export channels. In the appendices to the *Schéma*, point 15 of paragraph 4 (dealing with the industrial development guidelines for mineral exploitation from a sustainable development perspective) states that mining operators should not be dependent on local smelters. However, point 17 highlights that the conditions for authorising exports depend on future market evolution and other criteria, including those of the preservation of interests and benefits for the miner and also for public authorities. Divergent interpretations have

thus arisen, allowing different responses to this nickel export crisis. While the prevailing interpretation gave the advantage to the mining operators, another interpretation focussed on New Caledonia. In any case, the crisis has shown that the nickel doctrine, with its desire to control nickel ore exports, did not prevail.

In July 2020, Thierry Santa, president of the conservative *Le Rassemblement* party and president of the New Caledonian Government at that time, validated the principle of a new work cycle dedicated to nickel, called "a new nickel for a new world", which bypassed the historical players. FLNKS personalities such as the president of the North Province, Paul Néaoutyine, have criticised this principle. They argued that a working group with local politicians and the French State on nickel has existed for a long time (15 years) without ever having been able to develop a common strategy (Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes 2020). Santa's initiative led to bills submitted to the parliament (*Congrès*) on 4 August 2020 (Projet de loi de pays. Rapport n°46 et projet de délibération n° 48), and 5 November 2021 (Congrès Proposition de loi de pays n°71). The first bills proposed amending the mining code to allow (for a limited period) the export of raw ores from SLN's Tiébaghi mine and from the Goro mine (Vale NC's deposit at the time) (see Fig. 9.2), which are normally due to be processed in an ad hoc smelter. The latest bill on 5 November 2021, explicitly states that it is a response to claims based on the Kanak connection to land, with the aim of developing mineral wealth – through local implication. The bill concerns the authorisation of mining exploitation under a sublease (amodiation), a contract allowing the exploitation and sale of ores in return for a royalty payable to the primary lease holder. The ores could therefore be exploited by a company with a majority shareholding of a person under of public law (*personne de droit public*). A mining concession can be assigned to such a company without the need for a "personal mining authorisation" (APM, *Autorisation Personnelle Minière*). This law proposal, extending some discussions related to the Vale conflict (selling of the smelter and mine in March 2021), opens up the possibility for public players, particularly from the South Province, to become involved for the first time, in a different way than in the North Province, in the exploitation of nickel. Indeed, this sublease in exchange for a royalty, which allows the sale of nickel ores, was discussed in detail during the relaunch of the Goro Nickel project with the new consortium. The proposal seems also to be in line with a demand made in middle of 2010 by a group of Kanak subcontractors affiliated to UC, called the Federation of Small Kanak Miners (Demmer 2019). This grouping wanted to see Kanak people, in municipalities near mine sites, to become mining operators recognised in the name of "the connection to land" (with the help of companies made up of shareholders grouped into clans and chieftainships). The Federation defended the idea that nickel, although a national resource, is first of all a local heritage of specific clans. In the light of this recent mobilisation, the objective of the proposed law becomes clearer. In addition to reinforcing the direct benefits from the nickel sector in the South Province, the bill also encourages the recognition of clan or community societies as mining operators although they have a legal status of customary civil law (in opposition to public law)[9] – through the Fonds de Prévention des Risques Environnementaux et Sociocul-turels (FPRESC), which can get subleases. This is a new opportunity for companies run by clans or communities (with "people's shareholding"), as they are generally not able to obtain an APM because they lack the required financial and technical capacity. In any case, it can be seen that the range of Kanak claims to sovereignty over nickel resources are taking increasingly varied forms, more or less supported by a democratic conception of the Kanaky nation.

## 9.7 Unfinished Decolonisation

All of the above casts light on the process of decolonisation. The "caledonisation" of metallurgical companies and the mining *schéma* of 2009 is an achievement of the Kanak struggle for "national" control over mineral resources, but other struggles continue. The independence leaders are not the only actors in the management of New Caledonian mineral resources, either in the nickel sector or in the political arena. They have to deal in particular with "small miners" who defend their own interests. They also must deal with loyalist politicians, generally non-Kanaks, with whom they have agreed to form one people (Demmer 2018). In July 2021, the presidency of the collegial New Caledonian government was for the first time won by a pro-independence leader, Louis Mapou of PALIKA ("Kanak Liberation Party"), after more than 30 years of political agreements. Out of the 54 members of the parliament, 32 seats are allocated to elected representatives from the South Province (mainly loyalists), 15 to those from the North Province and 7 to those from the Loyalty Islands (mainly pro-independence representatives). But for those advocating for *Kanaky-Nouvelle-Calédonie*, the challenge remains to convince non-Kanak citizens to build an independent country with them. FLNKS must continue to assert common interests to

[9]Communities (*tribus*) created by the colonial administration with the *cantonment* policy, represented by a chief, are part of customary *districts* corresponding to larger chiefdoms founded on the territory of municipalities. These Kanak communities are legal persons but are not currently recognised in public law; they instead fall under customary civil law.

one day achieve its goals, such as defending mineral resources as national heritage.

The position of the autonomist party *Calédonie Ensemble* in the *conflit des rouleurs* shows that a kind of convergence of perspective is possible. Indeed, while not supporting political independence, *Calédonie Ensemble* joined with FLNKS on the question of economic benefits for the "country" and thinking about some form of common destiny. Since the referendum period, both conservative parties *Le Rassemblement* and *Les Républicains Calédoniens* support in contrast a "hyper-provincialisation", a kind of autonomy of the provinces that could permit or maintain separate ethnic groups and conserve the benefits acquired since the colonial period by a territory which is now the South Province. The multiculturalist policy developed at the end of the 1980s, based on the promotion of Kanak identity and the reduction of interethnic inequalities, which implied that the richest province had to make more of an effort, is deeply contested. In contrast, some parties composed of non-Kanaks, like *Calédonie Ensemble*, seem less afraid to share economic or political power without going so far as to support the foundation of a new common nation.

For its part, the French government worked for a long time in support of a *rapprochement* between supporters of independence and loyalists, in the hope of establishing a durable peace. It even tried to encourage the emergence of a national sentiment, either to prepare for independence or to strengthen autonomy within the French Republic. It defended the economic empowerment of the "country" by supporting the mining *schéma* annexed to the Nouméa Accord. By supporting the involvement of independentists into the nickel sector, it sought to ensure peace by promoting a sharing of the "nickel cake" while hoping that Kanaks would participate in boosting the territory's GDP and contribute to lightening the State's financial burden in New Caledonia. Thereafter, it tried to accommodate each of the opposing parties. Therefore, the 14th meeting of the Committee of Signatories of the Nouméa Accord in February 2016, which devised an economic plan for the mining and metallurgy sectors, enabled both SLN (through financial aid from the State) and the "small miners" to be strengthened by allowing both of them to benefit from the plan. It also helped the latter, by allowing a review of ore exports to China, and SMSP, by inviting other mining operators to support it in supplying the Gwangyang smelter in South Korea so that it can honour its commitments to the Korean manufacturer. However, during the fight led by the independentists for the takeover of Goro Nickel in 2020, Emmanuel Macron's France was initially much less conciliatory with FLNKS and has since (particularly in 2023) shown clear signs of *rapprochement* with the loyalists (Trépied 2021).

## 9.8 Conclusion

In the complex history of the struggle to reclaim mining resources, FLNKS won a battle with the takeover of SMSP by the North Province. Through SMSP and SOFINOR, FLNKS has taken a place in a sector previously reserved for non-Kanaks, which it has largely helped to transform and revitalise with the aim of building independence. FLNKS is not the master of the New Caledonian nickel game, but it did not seek to be. In wanting to prove itself economically in the circle of miners and industrialists, locally or even globally, the challenge for the coalition was to make the most of it for the "country" and its inhabitants. This is the meaning given to the prospect of nationalisation, which does not necessarily mean, for all members of FLNKS, defending a socialist vision of the economy.

In the absence of independence and ownership of nickel resources, the nationalisation strategy took the form of a (semi-public) appropriation of one mining company. This struggle has borne fruit. After 1998 and more recently in 2020, the idea of provincial participation in the three New Caledonian smelters was accepted. After years of struggle, semi-public ownership of nickel resources – or rather of the companies that exploit and process it – has been strengthened. Yet, if the "mining scheme" was a step forward in control of nickel sector by the New Caledonian political class, according to increased autonomy of New Caledonia in the Nouméa Accord, where the failure seems more bitter, it is in the implementation of a common nickel policy. Already battered since the 2015 *conflit des rouleurs*, it seems to be moving further away after the pro-independence failure in the referendums. A large part of the anti-independence political class does not accept the idea of a centralised control of resources. The freedom of enterprise is presented as sacred, as is the idea that each province in possession of the "green gold" should be able to benefit as much as possible from nickel extraction.

In the past agreements, provincialisation, supporting an ethnically based territorial economic rebalancing, was a difficulty in creating a common destiny for all Caledonians, based on something more than just equity between ethnic groups. Thinking about the reinforcement of a *communauté des citoyens* (community of citizens) (Schnapper 1994), a new Caledonian community based on egality between citizens as FLNKS would prefer is not on the political agenda, except perhaps for some parties which defend an autonomist and non-independent perspective. The policy of equitable development, initiated by Michel Rocard in 1988, now sounds to some (*Le Rassemblement* or *Les Républicains*) like a failure that should lead to a reduction in the weight of the government and a strengthening of the power of the provinces. Such conception enshrines a desire to break off dialogue between pro- and

anti-independence parties and even to fragment the "country". This means that the enactment of social justice between citizens, which involves sharing the same country together, is not the preference of loyalists, especially anxious to challenge the presence in the South of Kanaks from the North and the Islands, who are perceived as parasites on local social assistance. In 2021, even *La Chambre Territoriale des Comptes* ("The Territorial Audit Chamber") has questioned the legality of the presence of the North and Islands' provinces in the SPMSC on the grounds that the smelter is not located on their territories, and these two provinces should be required to respect the geographical perimeters in which they exercise their powers (CTC Nouvelle-Calédonie 2021).

Although SOFINOR promoted the development of entrepreneurship in the different municipalities of the North Province, and FLNKS saw it as a way to reduce economic inequalities within the province, the provincial logic of nickel re-appropriation is detrimental to the advancement of inter-ethnic social justice in New Caledonia. More broadly, the process of nickel nationalisation is conducive to the enrichment of the territory but cannot be considered as an effective tool for reducing inequalities. A new community of citizens with equal rights is constructed with the help of other political dynamics. In this respect, the decolonisation of New Caledonia (within the Republic or not) has not yet been achieved. Moreover, it is the persistence of social inequalities that leads to a competition between two different visions for New Caledonia-Kanaky: a nationalist vision and a demand for Indigenous recognition based on ethnic difference (Graff 2012; Demmer and Salomon 2017). The legal proposal to assign a mining concession to a company without the need for a "personal mining authorisation" (APM) that is granted if there is "connection to land" signals this kind of tension between different conceptions of Kanak sovereignty and at least conceptions that envisage nested levels of sovereignty. But, to date, the establishment of distinct community rights (claimed only by a minority of Kanaks and which suits the anti-independence movement because it does not require independence) is still not considered as a satisfactory resolution of the colonial problem by FLNKS. The latter remains attached to a unitary conception of the nation. It promotes a cultural pluralism under private law, attached to a particular personal status called "customary".

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# Part IV

# Land Reform and Urban Development

# Land Reform, Conflict and Local Development on "Grande Terre"

10

Simon P. J. Batterbury, Matthias Kowasch, and Aurélie Arroyas

**Abstract**

New Caledonia-Kanaky has operated customary and European models of land tenure in parallel for almost 170 years, since the early days of colonisation when francophone governance was imposed to enable settlement, and Kanak populations on prime agricultural were forcibly displaced onto "reserves". This "historic dualism" has been at the heart of lengthy political discussion and the demands of the Kanak independence movement to reclaim its land and sovereignty. While debates about the development of customary land continue in times of political uncertainty, since the late 1970s re-allocation of land to Kanak clans by the state, latterly through the *Agence de développement rural et d'aménagement foncier* (ADRAF), has been substantial. We assess this process, offering two examples from the Northern Province where land conflicts remain and where "modern" development has taken place on customary land now controlled by clans, under their stewardship. This partial integration into the market economy has addressed many, but not all, of the problems of "historic dualism".

**Keywords**

Land tenure · ADRAF · Customary land · Territory · Kanak · New Caledonia-Kanaky

## 10.1 Introduction

Land is crucial for Indigenous identities. It has deep spiritual, social, material and cultural importance across all of the Pacific's Indigenous cultures. The Indigenous Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, murdered in 1989, highlighted that for his people, land is more than material wealth or property: "A clan, which loses its land, loses its personality" (Tjibaou and Missotte 1976, p. 60). While it is difficult to make sweeping assumptions, he therefore identified a big difference with Western views of private property where "ownership" means land belongs to someone, others may be excluded from it (Cohen 1954) and it may also function as a commodity or an investment opportunity. While there may still be an intimate personal or familial attachment to privately held land or territory, Western norms place less emphasis on whole communities or the commons. Land as personality and land as property, in the modern history of New Caledonia-Kanaky, are two approaches that have rarely been reconciled and have caused untold conflict.

In the South Pacific, one estimate is that 83–97% of land remains under customary forms of tenure (Boydell 2010). Customary lands have been "a source of considerable debate for decades, and a philosophical and political struggle has ensued around the value of its development and the opportunities and constraints involved" (Scheyvens et al. 2020, p. 52). New Caledonia-Kanaky has been central to these differing perspectives because of its history of settlement, and it has operated customary and European models of land tenure in parallel for almost 170 years. Sourisseau et al. (2010) call this a unique form of "historic dualism". While this duality has existed since the early days of colonisation, early efforts

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to establish European settlement and economic activities voided a large percentage of customary tenure. Part of the Indigenous population was forcibly displaced onto less "valuable" land. This was a key source of anguish for Kanak clans, and it became a major origin of their later uprisings against France. In recent times, land has been at the heart of political discussions and the demands of the Kanak independence movement to reclaim its sovereignty. In the period since the 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords, the balance has swung towards land restitution to Kanak peoples, across the three provinces, as we describe below. But debates about the development of customary land continue to this day and are highly topical given the strong spatial disparities that remain across the territory and uncertainties about the political future of the archipelago.

In this chapter, we focus on contemporary land reform (*réforme foncière*) – the process of re-allocating and restituting land – from its early origins in the 1970s. To illustrate these trends, we present two cases of reform in the North Province, around Baco and Poum, to illustrate the complexities of customary issues and conflicts over land allocation in societies that combine some modernist development aspirations and projects, including mining, with customary claims to land. We discuss three key questions: How to recognise the legitimacy of claims to land where re-allocation is complex? Secondly, how may socio-economic development and other projects emerging on customary land challenge the "historic dualism" still prevalent across the territory? And, has the contemporary land reform process led to the appeasement, or to the emergence, of more conflicts? We conclude with a discussion of land reform challenges and the role that customary land can play in "inclusive development".

## 10.2 The History of Land Reform

The need for land reform in New Caledonia goes back to the declarations of Governor Du Bouzet in 1855, who applied imperial French law to assert government control over all land not occupied by the Indigenous population, deemed *tribus sauvages*, with an assumption that this land was "vacant" or unoccupied (Otis 2021; Ward 1982). This land would then constitute the domain of the state, referred to hereafter as state land or domain land. Land that was not actually vacant but used for hunting and as part of bush fallow cycles was also deemed vacant, and its allocation to settlers caused immediate conflict. Du Bouzet's actions have sometimes been seen as affording at least some land to the original inhabitants of the islands, but in reality, subsequent events meant there was little difference from British colonial edicts elsewhere in the Pacific, which usually seized "all" land for the state. Britain and France's colonial and trading operations both displaced and alienated Indigenous populations. In New Caledonia in 1868, reserves were given legal authority by Governor Guillain in a process of "*cantonnement*" – these reserves were a place for Kanak clans displaced by land takeovers to reside without threats to their land ownership. But this was not always their original land, and French authorities misunderstood customary tenure, which is adjudicated and managed through "first occupant" inhabitants and clan heads, who command respect. Guillain instead allocated land to tribes, a mostly fictional, larger entity that was an approximation of a European concept of an administrative entity (Ward 1982). As "land thereby became a property owned collectively by the tribe", led by "political" chiefs, rather than the customarily important clan, problems were bound to occur. The rebellion led by Chief Ataï in 1878 against France had much to do with the inequalities of land seizures and displacement (Wadrawane and Gravelat 2021). By that time, reserve boundaries could be modified by the state at any time.

The distinctive French governance system, consisting of hierarchical levels of authority linked to defined territories (i.e. reserves or communities/*tribus*), was fully instituted from 1898, with district chiefs appointed over village chiefs, again counter to customary norms on the main island Grande Terre although Wadrawane and Gravelat (2021, p. 168) argue that such arrangements were present in the Loyalty Islands. The district *Grands Chefs* were political appointments with officially assigned administrative duties. This coincided with the imposition of Governor Feillet's strong, pro-settler politics from 1895, pushed forward with *cantonnement* and diminishing Indigenous rights. From 1887, the *Code de l'indigénat* was imposed on Indigenous people, which concretised restrictions on free movement, promoted head taxes to force Kanak into labour to pay them, and it allowed for imprisonment of Kanak without trial (Merle and Muckle 2019). By 1902, the reserves on Grande Terre made up less than one-tenth of the island, and clans were forced together on them (Ward 1982). The official *cantonnement* process finished in 1903, but reserves extended in size until the Second World War as mining and urban expansion continued (Batterbury et al. 2020). The *Code de l'indigénat* was not repealed until after the war, when Kanak later gradually obtained full citizenship and voting rights. After the war, reserves became less constraining and were considered by many Kanak as a bastion of their culture. But with rising populations and a shortage of land for traditional farming, demand grew for reserve expansion and also restitution of clan territories (Saussol 1979).

## 10.3 Enter Land Reform

Some 124 years after Bouzet's declarations, in 1979, the Territorial Assembly adopted a proposal by Paul Dijoud, French Secretary of State for the Overseas Departments and

Territories, to set up a long-term economic and social development plan for New Caledonia (Fisher 2013). By this time, the "settler economy" was dominant, centered on Nouméa and across several other urban and rural areas, in numerous mining concessions and mineral processing and export facilities, and on the best agricultural land on the west coast of Grande Terre, where pastoralism had come to be more profitable than crop production. Dijoud's plan was elaborated in a difficult political and economic context, with the re-emergence of the Kanak independence movement, the polarisation of the political landscape and the end of the nickel boom leading to widespread unemployment (Tutugoro 2021). The plan was to encourage economic recovery, in particular to kickstart agricultural production (see Chap. 6 by Bouard et al. in this book). Another intention of the French government was to satisfy some of the identity claims of Kanak people, with the hope that the "land problem" could be eased by respecting the historical rights of Kanak communities that had been denied in previous decades.

The land reform programme therefore had the dual objective of first rebalancing spatial disparities created by colonisation, through the redistribution of land parcels bought back by the state from (mainly) European settlers to Kanak clans. Second, it imposed a normative goal: to support agricultural development on Kanak customary land. At the commencement of the reform in 1978, Kanak customary land on Grande Terre consisted of 176,000 ha of Indigenous Kanak reserves, increased from 126,614 ha in 1946. The area of land in private property had grown to 435,000 ha, and state domain land (including mines, mountainous terrain and reserves) had diminished but still extended over 1,020,000 ha (Fig. 10.1).

The land reform programme was launched, but no one could foresee the scale it would later achieve. Following the failure of various agricultural policies and poor market performance, the redistribution began on largely abandoned private settler agricultural land and to Kanak communities (*tribus* and *réserves*). Some administrators had mistakenly assumed that many clans had died out, thus limiting the number of claimants: this was not the case. On 22 December 1980, the French newspaper *Le Monde* (1980) noted that land reform was planned to last 10 years, with annual re-allocations of 10,000 hectares. But the reality was different: it became a long-term initiative, redirected or accelerated by political events, resulting in profound territorial changes.

During the first period of the reform, from 1978 to 1988, land allocations were made mainly on the basis of economic criteria, combined with customary criteria such as the legitimacy of the applicant's land claim. This was the period of specific arrangements for the development of economic sectors such as the "coffee project" (see Chap. 6 by Bouard et al. in this book). As this did not meet with great success and after the Nouméa Accord was signed, a second period, from 1989 onwards, saw customary claims gradually dominating the programme, and land redistribution became relatively disconnected from economic and agricultural development possibilities (Demmer 2010).

Generally, the reform process aims to allow farmers of all ethnic origins to settle on acquired land, and it gives Kanak communities the choice of the legal regime for the land allocated, by opting for either the common law or customary law regime. The choice of customary regime entails, depending on the local context, a transfer to the benefit of a community (known as a reserve expansion) or to one or more clans. The common law regime involves either a free or paid transfer, or a lease, to an individual or to a group dedicated usually to agricultural activity. In order to encourage the maintenance of farmland, the redistributed land was inalienable for 20 years.

To facilitate land allocations, the French National Assembly passed a law on 7 January 1981, on land development and rural settlement in New Caledonia-Kanaky. The territorial government was then given the rights of pre-emption or reclamation, against fair payment for

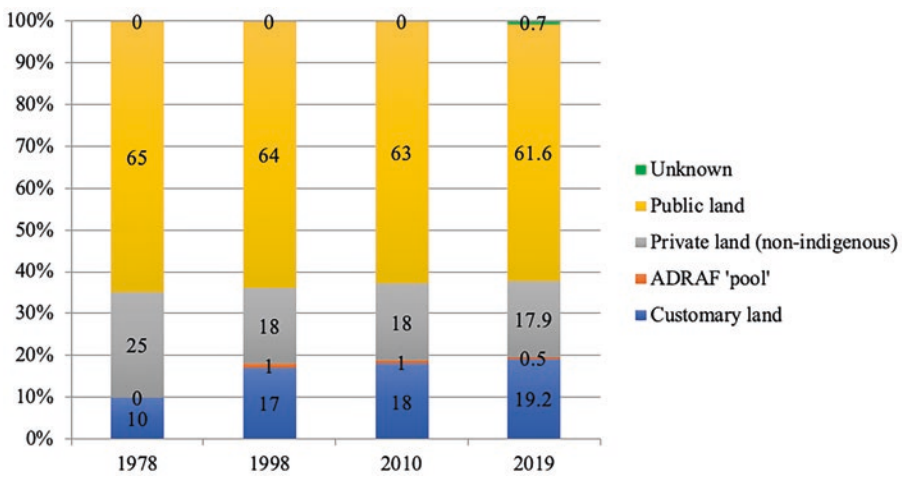


**Fig. 10.1** Land distribution over time on Grande Terre. (Source: ADRAF 2019)

uncultivated or insufficiently developed private lands, basically sanctioning expropriation. The scheme was financed by New Caledonian credits from the land redemption fund, supplemented to a large extent by the State through FIDES (Investment Fund for Overseas Economic and Social Development).

Between 1978 and 1986, 40,000 hectares of land, divided into 150 properties, were purchased by the New Caledonian government and the "Land Office", the New Caledonian agency charged to implement the land reform. During the same period, more than 35,000 ha were redistributed to clans and communities under customary law, with 40 allocations for the direct benefit of clans and 111 for the expansion of reserves, involving 63 reserves out of 139 on Grande Terre. These allocations concerned 24 municipalities of Grande Terre; 15 of them, the majority, were located in the current North Province. Among those with the most numerous and extensive allocations were the municipalities of Hienghène (6700 ha), Canala (4100 ha), Koné (3800 ha), Voh (2700 ha), Houaïlou and Poindimié (more than 2000 ha each) (see Fig. 10.2). In these municipalities, there were numerous private landowners dating from the colonial period. Beginning in the early 1980s, they were confronted with land claims (or even occupation of their lands) organised by land committees created by the pro-independence political parties.

From 1982 to 1986, the Land Office took over from the New Caledonian government to continue these reforms. Management was directly carried out by the French state. Nearly 50,000 ha more properties, mostly located on the east coast, were acquired. But over the same period, only 2080 ha were allocated, mostly to clans. In a period when tensions between Kanak communities and European settlers had again become extreme and violent, the Land Office aimed to ensure the coexistence of a European land tenure system and a traditional customary system. Within locally defined boundaries, recognition of customary land rights can take several forms. One form, after the purchase of land by the Land Office, is a transfer of ownership to a *Groupement de droit particulier local* (GDPL), a legal entity with customary civil status. These were created in 1981, bringing together one or several clans or a community (see Kowasch et al. 2015). Second, there is the collection of a fee paid by the Land Office to the holders of customary land rights, when acquisition of the property for redistribution is not possible.

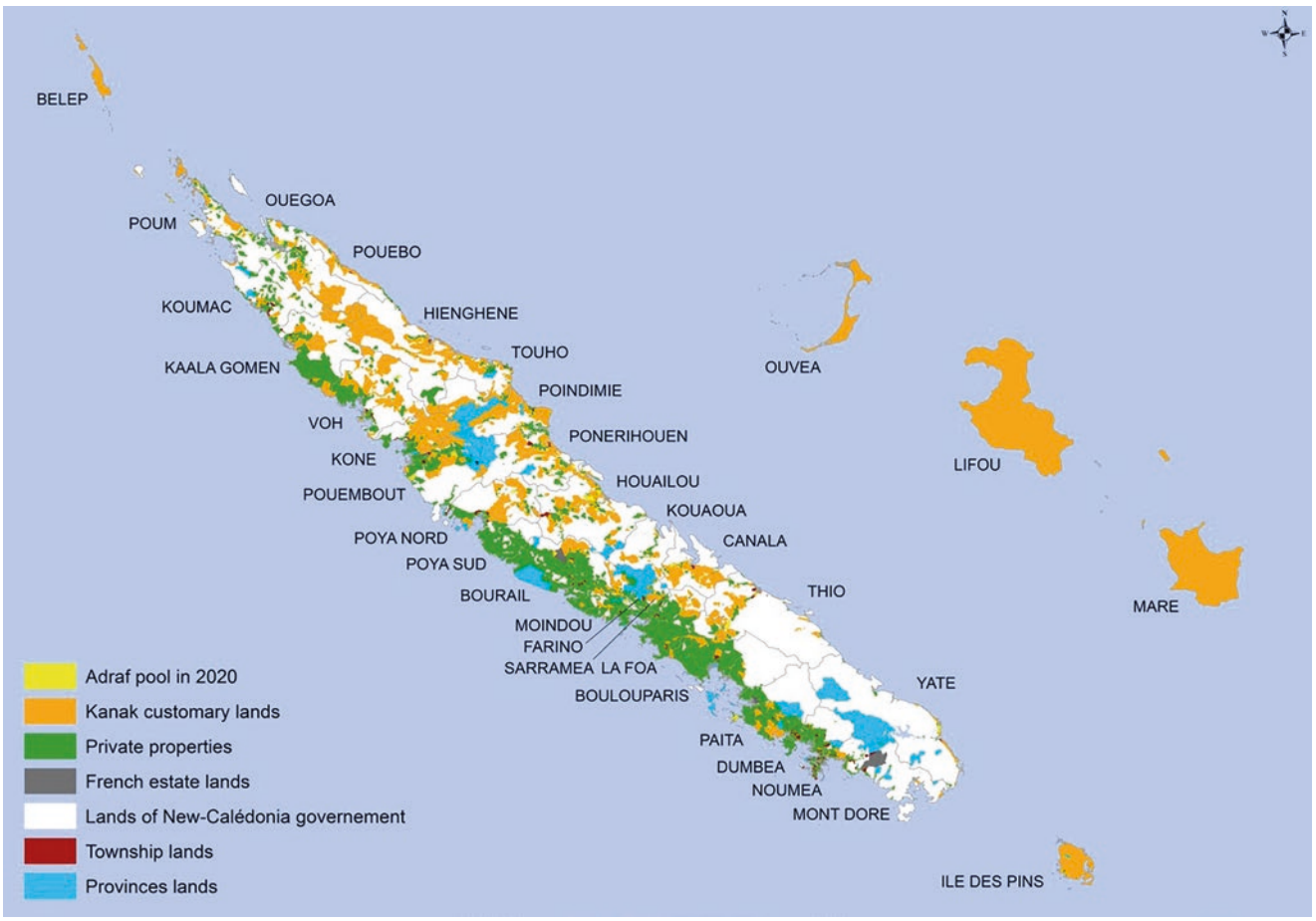


**Fig. 10.2** Land distribution on Grande Terre in 2020. (Source: ADRAF 2011, 2021)

In 1986, the Land Office was replaced by the *Agence de développement rural et d'aménagement foncier* (Agency for Rural Development and Regional Planning) (ADRAF), aiming to continue the redistribution of lands and to promote the development of rural areas. The responsibility shifted from the French State to New Caledonia's territorial government, and a development discourse was asserted, again encouraging agricultural activities (cattle and deer breeding, rice and coffee growing, arboriculture, etc.). ADRAF agents were in charge of supporting programmes for agricultural development on lands allocated to Kanak clans and communities. As a result, the reform was no longer land-based but agrarian, in a political context that was still fragile and tense. Between 1986 and 1988, a certain number of properties, mainly located in Bourail, Moindou and Pouembout on the west coast (Fig. 10.2), were also allocated on a lease basis to non-Kanak individuals or enterprises, under the condition that they may be used and developed. These lands were legally not considered as customary but as belonging to common law land status ("classic" private property).

In 1988, the legal status of ADRAF was changed again and its missions were adapted to the changed political circumstances. The French State regained control of land reform. Economic development was now entrusted to the New Caledonian provinces, newly created by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords signed in 1988. ADRAF, for its part, focused on new land allocations, especially to clans and communities. The GDPL was chosen to become the main legal structure to receive land allocations, on the assumption that it seemed possible to combine customary life and economic development in such an arrangement. The GDPL composition allows it to traverse the "historical dualism" that has plagued the islands' political history: it must respect customary relationships between clans, even when some clan members reside elsewhere, as is common in New Caledonia. As a legal entity, listed in the commercial register, the GDPL is also adapted to economic activity and able to conduct tourism projects, agricultural development, industrial operations and other activities. GDPLs moved from operating a private property regime managed customarily to a fully customary ownership regime that is well established in Kanak communities. That important shift occurred in 1999, when the organic law resulting from the Nouméa Accord created the category of customary land, alongside private and public land.

The pressure of (peri-)urban development around the major urban centres on Grande Terre, and the fear that land could be sold to private investors has driven the more concrete status afforded to GDPLs. Land allocation to clans has been de-linked from demonstrable economic development outcomes, and ADRAF no longer allocates land according to economic criteria. The political motivation eventually became to recognise the close relationships of Kanak clans to land, recognising customary land legitimacies. As described by Paul Néaoutyine (1993, p. 140), leader of the independence party PALIKA and president of the North Province: "(…) there is a relationship to the land and it is nuanced according to the historical context and the gestures that have been made". This has been a long journey, however. Ward (1982) argued that France eventually did better at land reform than Anglophone Oceanic dependencies, but only because "they had at their disposal the category of domaine [state] land, ruthlessly acquired by their predecessors" (Ward 1982, p. 13).

Between 1988 and 2019, the work of reallocation continued. ADRAF made nearly 950 allocations, covering an area of more than 130,000 ha, of which 99,000 ha went to GDPLs. Statistically, the distribution of land on Grande Terre is currently around 19% customary land, 18% private property under common law and 63% state land (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2). Some balance has been achieved, although there are still disputes and unresolved claims. ADRAF still has a bank of around hundred properties to allocate, with a total area of about 7400 ha. Some of these date back to the early 1980s, when a lack of local consensus stymied reallocation. These plots often hold memories of disputes, and sometimes even violent conflicts, which must be managed and resolved in the long term.

Despite the historical forced displacements and the current voluntary mobility of the Kanak population, the main challenge of land reform remains to facilitate access to land for those who lack it. For some, land reform is now advanced or even complete, but not all agree. The division here is predictable: conservative politicians consider that the land reform ended with achieving a balance between customary and private land, but pro-independence leaders say more claims need consideration.

Certainly, a clarification of legitimate claims to ownership and control between clans, families and individuals on customary lands is incomplete. Land rights and legitimacies may never be "resolved" on land with complex histories, but there are examples where agreements have led to, for example, a GDPL allocating communal land for housing or commercial development, for the benefit of all in the community, as we describe below, and as certain Native American tribes have done in the United States. With the rapid arrival of more serious climate change, and the commitments being made by the territorial and French governments, environmental questions will join economic ones. Land is central to the development of renewable energy, currently underdeveloped, and there are possibilities for carbon sequestration and credit schemes as well as better biodiversity preservation. The continued efforts to address island food self-sufficiency could

involve some land restituted by ADRAF. These will be issues that all New Caledonians have to address over coming decades.

## 10.4 Case Study: Claims, Conflicts and Land Allocation in the Municipality of Poum

We now illustrate some of the practical complexities surrounding land allocation in and around Poum, an isolated municipality in the extreme north of Grande Terre. In 2019, Poum had 1435 inhabitants of whom 85% are Kanak, with a density of only three inhabitants/km$^2$ (ISEE 2019). The Kanak communities are part of two customary districts, Arama and Nénémas, which form – together with 11 other districts – the Hoot Ma Whaap customary area. Poum has a unique colonial history, and complex relations exist between small inhabited islands (Baaba, Yande, Taanlô and Yenghébane, all now with less than 20 inhabitants over the year, and Tie) (see Fig. 10.3). The capital Nouméa is more than 400 km to the south and connected by the national highway. There is a small administrative centre established in the colonial period, which houses a school, a post office, a police station, a church, a clinic, a new petrol station and store and the municipal offices. Economic activity is limited, although a nickel mine has increased production in recent years and there is limited fishing and tourism (Kowasch et al. 2015). The Boaouva clan in Titch have been affected by dirty runoff from nickel mine holding ponds, creating freshwater scarcity and conflict with the mine.

In Poum, a particular feature of land reform was that Guillain's historical misunderstanding of social relations was avoided (Rocheteau 1968). The pro-independence party *Union Calédonienne* (UC) is dominant in the region, and it advocated since its creation under the slogan *Deux couleurs, un people* (two colours, one people) the return of customary land directly to the clans and not to the more numerous communities (or *tribu*, the colonial legal construction). This was unlike other municipalities where clan and community claims were juxtaposed. The region formerly had several reserves located on the mainland and the islands. Under land reform, customary land in the municipality increased from 4,250 ha in 1978 to 8,040 ha in 2019 – 17% of the total land in Poum compared to 14% for private property. The rest is (New Caledonian) state land. In 2019, ADRAF's stock amounted to 680 hectares. These lands, most of which were acquired in the 1980s, are the subject of tensions between clans, each defending their legitimacy as "first occupants" or land owners. The itinerary of settlement history, disrupted during the colonial period, is very important in Kanak culture. Legitimacy conflicts often hide political, economic and even religious differences that disrupt discussions and negotiations. In this case, conflicts still exist in terms of governance and management of land.

Figure 10.3 reveals that the largest customary land is located in the south of the Arama customary district. There was also a large ADRAF stock. Since the re-establishment of the great chieftaincy of Arama, customary leaders have clarified the place of their clans in the region, resulting in sizeable allocations of land being agreed over the last few years. By 2021, some 70% of the 680 ha in stock was allocated to GDPLs designated by the customary leaders. The appeasement of economic conflicts has encouraged the solution of customary land questions. Out of three conflicts areas in the region (Fig. 10.3), there is one that is appeased (Titch – Mouac). The two other ones still continue: while one opposes two clans (conflict area Dahote – Dahma), the other concerns economic activities in the Boatpass area.

## 10.5 Case Study: Economic Development on Customary Lands of the Baco Community

The Baco community is located about four kilometres from the town of Koné, the capital of the North Province. Located on the west coast, the three neighbouring municipalities of Voh, Koné and Pouembout (VKP) include a growing urban area fuelled by mining and the administrative and service functions of the small conurbation. The proximity to Koné gives Baco a peri-urban character (Kowasch 2012a). Baco has approximately 600 inhabitants, belonging to 22 clans (Poady 2021; Kowasch 2010). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the 22 clans have grouped themselves into 4 larger ones (Wabealo, Baco, Poawidapthia and Poaxu) to restructure the customary organisation in the former reserve and to help create an amalgamated community that did not exist before the colonial era (see also Naepels (1998)). This grouping into four bigger clans also helps to cope better with administrative requirements, facilitating various development projects situated on customary land (Kowasch 2010).

The land situation of the community is particularly interesting. Customary land covers a total area of 4739 ha, of which 230 ha represents the former reserve. Reserve extensions during the land reform were made in 1980 (5 ha) and in 1984, 1990 and 2014 (560 ha). In addition, there are 1980 ha for the four clan-based GDPLs, 1510 ha for the community GDPL of Tiaoué-Pouembout and 480 ha for the community GDPL Vai-Koohnê (Fig. 10.4). There are four clan-based GDPLs: the Wabealo GDPL for the Wabealo clan, the Babo GDPL for the Baco clan, the Poavidapthia GDPL for the Poavidapthia clan and the Poadjane GDPL for the Poaxu clan. Because of its relatively abundant landholding and its

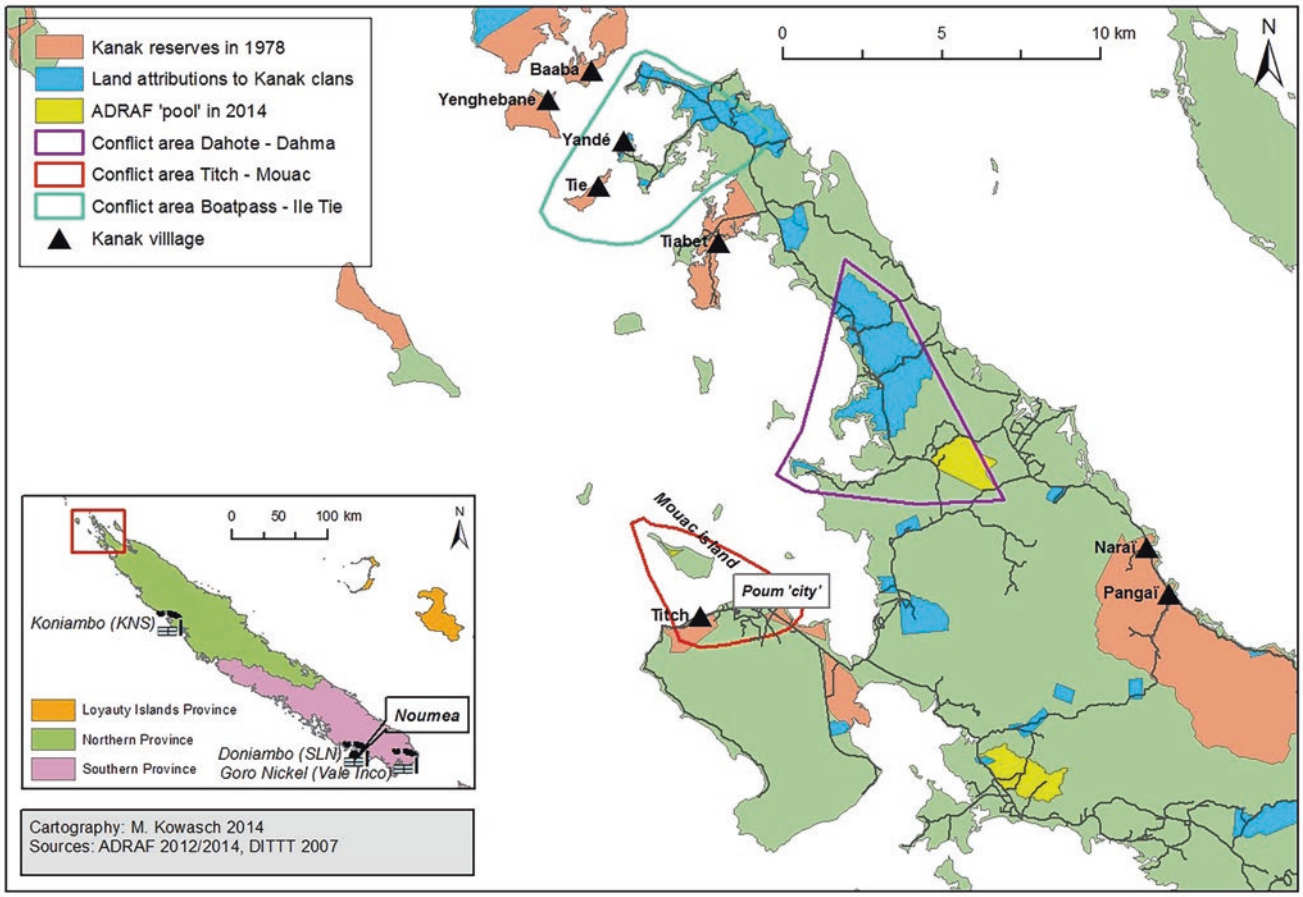


**Fig. 10.3** Land distribution and conflicts in Poum municipality. (Sources: ADRAF 2012/2014, DITTT 2007, in: Kowasch et al. 2015)

location close to the provincial capital, the Baco community enjoys good conditions for the integration of customary lands into the socio-economic development of the area.

The Baco community has engaged, as the architects of the first Dijoud land reforms in the 1970s had hoped Kanak communities would, in several urban and economic development projects. One is on the lands of the GDPL Baco clan, where a development plan exists for a 48 ha section of the GDPL area comprising three zones: housing, other facilities and socio-economic activities. According to Patricia Goa, a member of the North Province Assembly and member of the GDPL Baco clan, "the cultural notion is as important as the economic notion" (Communication at a meeting on 26 September 2008), which means that the cultural heritage and current cultural elements should be represented in the design of the development plan. By the end of 2020, a three-screen cinema, a school of arts, a branch of the University of New Caledonia, a petrol station, a bank, a shopping centre and several restaurants and cafés had already been opened, in addition to rental housing (see Fig. 10.5a, b). For each of the facilities, a lease has been signed between the developer and the real estate civil company, including the GDPL members and the president of the clan council of Baco. The land is leased for a fixed period of time, except for the school of arts and a future Lapita museum. As these are projects representing Kanak culture, the Baco clan ceded the land free of charge for these two projects. In return, the clan demanded that the GDPL should be consulted concerning the maintenance of the buildings. In addition, the clan asked for local craftsmen to be prioritised for construction.

Economic development on customary land such as this is supported by the North Province government. At the beginning, a public body, the SAEML Grand Projet VKP, was mandated to oversee management and to support the GDPL in creating real estate entities. The projects themselves are part of the "rebalancing" policy determined by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988 and renewed by the Nouméa Accord in 1998, as other Chaps. 14, 18, 20 in this book describe (Wadrawane; Fisher; Robertson). The political authorities of the North Province believe it is important to involve Kanak communities in the broader urban development of the VKP area, seeing this as lying between clan and national priorities in terms of scale, as well as being of mutual benefit (Kowasch 2012b). Back in 1995, Winslow explained that Kanak leaders were "opposed to the idea of individual profit" (Winslow 1995, p. 9). Social-economic

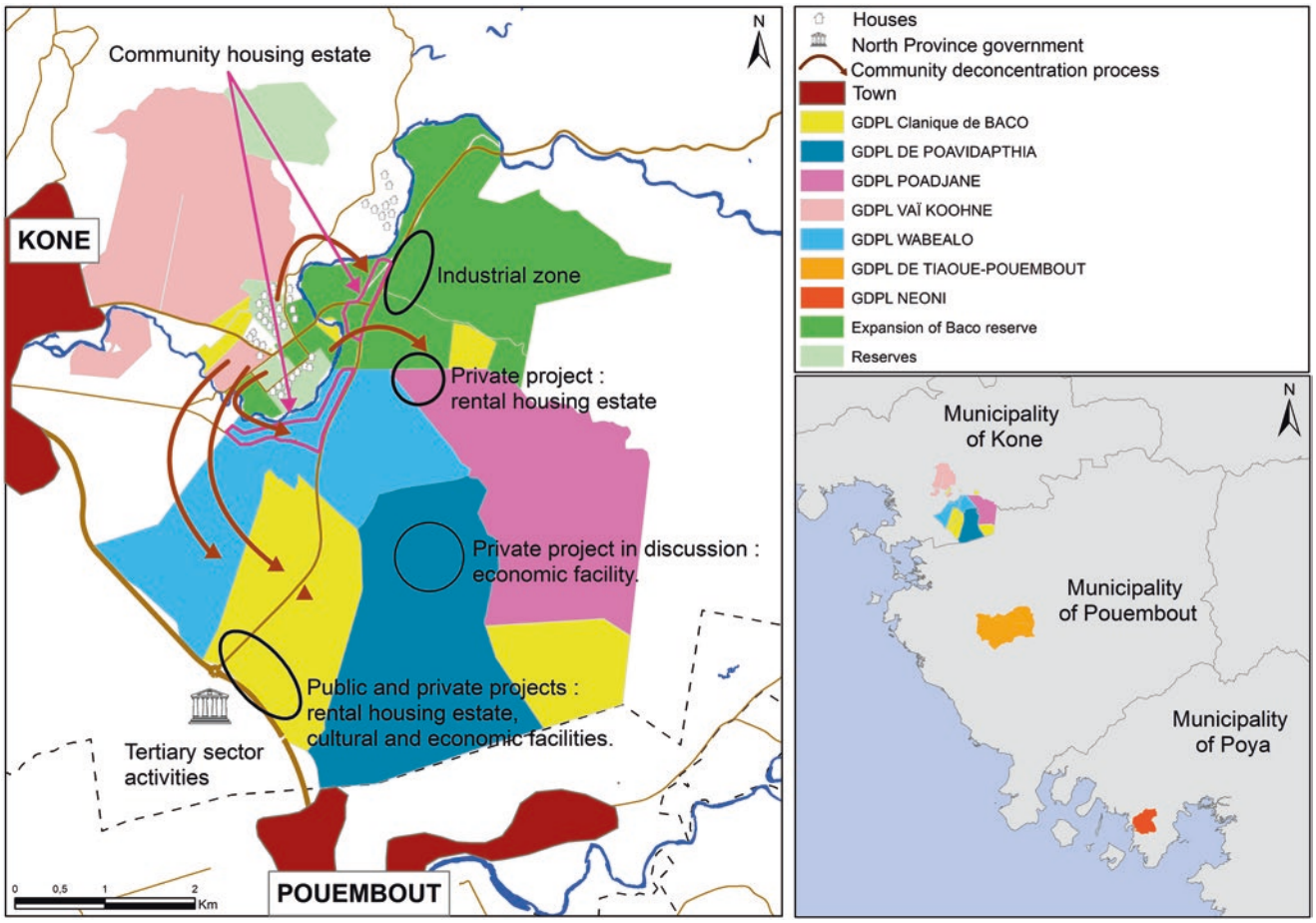


**Fig. 10.4** Map of customary lands of Baco community (Sources: ADRAF 2021, https://georep.nc/. Cartography: Kowasch & Arroyas 2022. See also Kowasch 2012b)

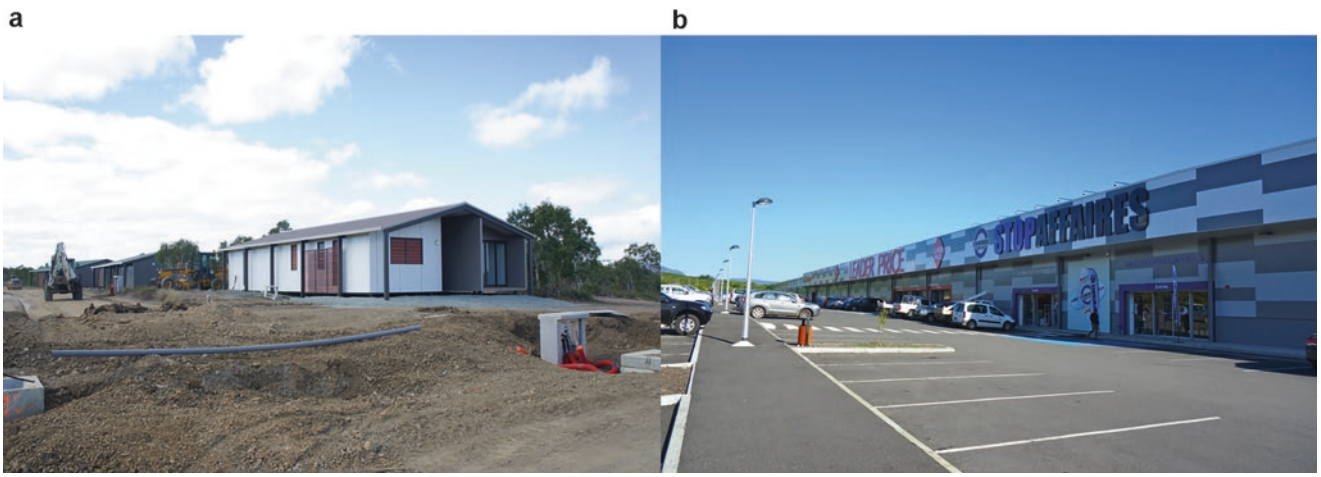


**Fig. 10.5** (**a**, **b**) Economic projects on customary land in Baco: rental housing and shopping centre. (Credit: Kowasch 2011, 2017)

projects on customary land in Baco straddle the line between collective and individual profit, as business managers benefit individually while paying rent to the GDPL, a collective clan entity. The sheer scale of the multiple projects on customary lands in Baco have made it a "flagship" project for New Caledonian political authorities, as communicated in the media (Kowasch 2010, 2012b).

In sum, clear clan structures of the community, and its situation next to a growing urban area, have facilitated these modern development activities, very much in accord with the economic designs of the North Province, which wants to increase economic activity in the VKP area to provide local jobs and services for Kanak even if full independence is never achieved from France. Governance structures have been put in place to manage the appearance of "historic dualism" at the local scale.

## 10.6 Discussion: What Future for the Land Reform?

### 10.6.1 Recognising Land Legitimacy without Land Allocation?

Today, as an overall balance has been achieved between customary land and private property, the land reform process seems to be winding down viewed against its objectives as set over 40 years ago. Political actors, especially anti-independence leaders, are less and less inclined to pursue land reform in its current form. However, the land claims that emerged in the 1960s and that were the origin of the reform process could not be concluded abruptly. New responses are now being sought, involving cases of economic development on customary land and the extensive involvement of Kanak clans in the mining industry (through subcontracting, employment, shareholding, etc.).

To return to our first question, has the establishment of economic projects managed or co-managed by Kanak clans or communities now recognised and validated their legitimacy? As the case of Baco shows, this can happen.

More broadly, however, the question of legitimacy refers to the clans' historical itinerary. The social identity and legitimacy of clans are established through an itinerary, as a series of places through which they have passed (Naepels 1998, 2006). This history is often disputed, and "official" land restitution though ADRAF has found addressing the complexities of historical claims and counter-claims to be difficult (ADRAF 2000). The identity of a clan is constantly constructed through social change, as on Mouac Island in the case above. The histories of occupation are transmitted orally to younger generations and at customary ceremonies (speeches and dances at marriages, funerals, etc.). Land can also be given or exchanged with another clan for cultivation or housing, creating mutual customary relations – the host clan and the clan that is welcomed. Traditionally, social ascent takes place in a consensual way through the recognition of a clan in a certain place and the consequent modification of territorial boundaries (Herrenschmidt 2003). In this way, land claims are part of a game of influence: power relations that aim to change the territory for the benefit of one's own group (Kowasch 2012a). Amin (2004) identifies this process as a "politics of place".

A recognition of the clan and a reshaping of the territory can thus take place without (legalised) allocation but through customary agreements. An active participation in, or a joint decision on, the implementation of a cultural or social-economic project on a plot of customary land can also represent, for the clan concerned, a certain recognition of its land legitimacy.

It is also important to remember that an allocation of land and property rights does not necessarily mean that people have the capacity to derive any material benefit from them. The quality of (customary) land impacts the ability to valorise or benefit from it, and varies across the different municipalities. Here, Lund and Sikor (2009) distinguish between "property" and "access". "Property" is about land claims considered to be legitimate, according to the Western definition linked to ownership, while access is about the ability to benefit from land and property. For the Boaouva clan access to land, clean water and the economic benefits from a mine situated above the Titch community next to the Poum administrative centre are still pressing issues, despite their rights to the land (Kowasch et al. 2015).

### 10.6.2 Conflict Appeasement or the Emergence of Conflicts?

Before land reform began, tensions were localised at the interface between the customary and the European or Western world. Such tensions were rendered more visible through land claims, which had to be publicly adjudicated. Today, many of the remaining conflicts have reverted to the customary sphere, requiring the redefinition of clan rights and legitimacies over newly allocated spaces.

The beginning of GDPL allocations resulted in the creation of new customary authorities in parallel to the existing community authorities (the clan council and chieftaincy arrangements). Decision-making power in these cases was transferred from the clan council of Kanak communities to the representatives of the clans constituting a GDPL. By allocating land to clans and families, some GDPLs have deviated from their community chieftaincy roles. A more

developmental vision of land, particularly in the VKP area and illustrated by Baco, has emerged. Socio-economic development actions have temporarily supplanted customary social organisational activities, although there are checks and balances to legitimate these decisions locally.

Several cases in New Caledonia-Kanaky have shown that starting a project with economic gain on customary land can lead to different kinds of conflict: financial, customary or land based, as seen in Poum. The majority of socio-economic projects are not individual ones but with the clan, or tribal. A financial conflict can easily emerge in the distribution of project benefits to the members of the GDPL or the village. The GDPL's proxy is often the only person with access to the bank account. This can lead to tensions between GDPL members. Different ideas and visions regarding the implementation of the project and the distribution of benefits can in some cases reawaken old customary conflicts between families or clans, as occurred in the distribution of benefits from tourism on Mouac island. These conflicts, which we should stress are not unique to Melanesian societies, are then juxtaposed with the sharing of financial benefits. Finally, the land conflict reveals tensions around land legitimacies, with remnants of "reserves" now existing alongside newly founded territories with different legal status.

### 10.6.3 Assessment of Socio-economic Development on Customary Land

In 1993, the influential Kanak independence leader Paul Néaoutyne stated that the land may change its function over time, to support activities that guarantee a fulfilling life for those who live on it (Néaoutyne 1993). According to ADRAF (2014), the future of development projects on customary land will rely on using the rights acquired by Kanak clans and communities to secure external investment: an economic consideration.

Development projects on customary land are certainly an opportunity for the integration of Kanak clans into the market economy, should they wish it. Baco's "flagship" status has shown that socio-economic development on customary lands is possible, including decision-making by clan members and financial benefits that are accruing for future generations. Cultural functions and ceremonies are still practised in the community despite the leasing of land and several "modern" development projects.

Another "dualist" transition concerns the opening up of the country to renewable energy as part of the NC Energy Transition Scheme,[1] established by the territorial government in 2016. The Energy Transition Scheme offers development prospects on customary land through the establishment of solar energy.[2] Kanak clans contribute to the capital of the operating companies by providing land for the installations. They are integrated as shareholders. These economic associations were widely supported by the provincial administration as the regional capital of the North, Koné, has expanded linked to the construction of the Koniambo smelter and mine.

Our assessment is that despite 40 years of land reform, the establishment of a specific legal structure, the GDPL and positive examples such as the projects realised in Baco, the integration of customary land into economic development remains marginal. There are several aspects to this. First, the former reserves, in which the Kanak clans were displaced and grouped at the end of the nineteenth century, were naturally the locations not deemed useful to Europeans: often mountainous, far from urban centres and often with less fertile soils. Bouard et al. (2020, p. 8) note that before 1988, "European cattle farming on large farms occupied over 90% of the UAA (Useful Agricultural Area), leaving the Kanaks with a food production agriculture that was, at best 'improved'".

This situation has barely changed. Figure 10.6 shows the agronomic quality of customary land in the South Province in 2015 (the most recent data) and reveals that only Yaté in the south has good quality soils on customary land. Except for Yaté, Païta and Boulouparis (good or moderate quality), the agronomic quality of soils is mostly poor in the 12 municipalities of the province examined. In the North Province (Fig. 10.7), the situation is slightly better, even if only three municipalities have a majority of good soil quality on customary land. In 8 out of 17 municipalities, moderate or good agronomic quality is predominant or characterises at least the half of customary lands in 2012. However, a general census of agriculture in 2012 showed that 62% of farms in New Caledonia-Kanaky are located on customary land, and they concern barely 18% of the useful agricultural area (Bouard et al. 2020).

Land reform has improved the overall situation of customary land, except in the south of the west coast where large agricultural plains have been excluded from redistribution, because of high land costs. But, apart from some local shops and farming projects supported by communities, few individual initiatives have developed on customary land. The lack of security of land tenure (in terms of land claims and conflicts) and the impossibility of securing finance (loans, mortgages, etc.) are issues, justifying the poor representation

[1] https://gouv.nc/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2016.06.23_schema_tranition_energetique_stenc.pdf

[2] https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/nouvellecaledonie/province-sud/paita/ferme-solaire-kotabore-ete-inauguree-746353.html

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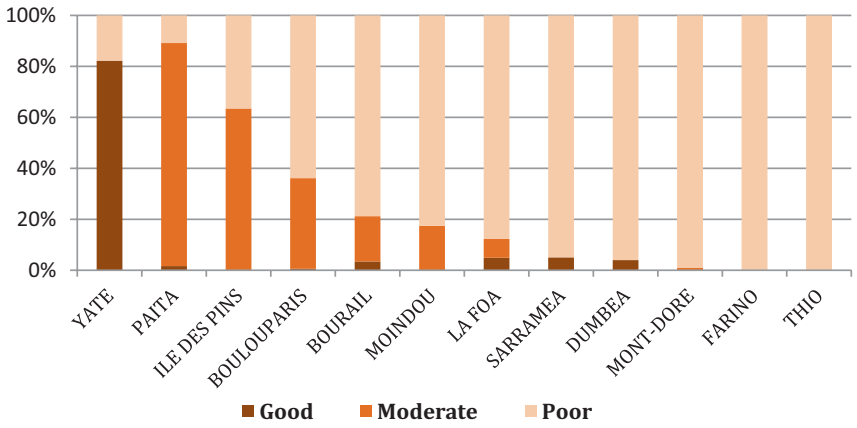


**Fig. 10.6** Agronomic quality of customary land in the South Province. (Source: ADRAF 2015)

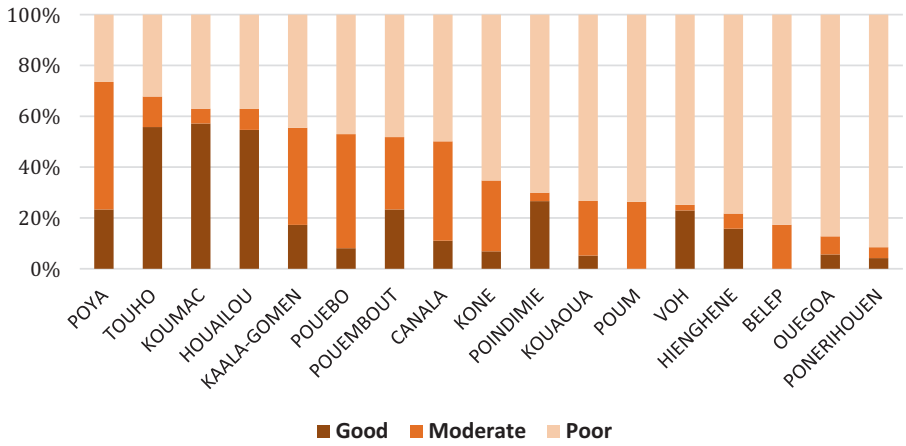


**Fig. 10.7** Agronomic quality of customary land in the North Province. (Source: ADRAF 2012)

of activities on customary land to market-oriented economic development. In Baco, this problem was solved by long-term leases and by creating a real estate company managed by clan members supported by the provincial government that co-financed (up to 70%) the establishment of business parks (an industrial zone, rental housing, a shopping mall, a small university branch campus, etc.). In general, customary lands are inalienable, unseizable, incommutable and non-transferable.

Second, beneficiaries can be hard to identify, given the complex history of land seizures, displacements and upheavals associated with colonisation. Customary authorities empowered to enunciate land rights and legitimacy are sometimes lacking or inefficient, and their members come and go. There are also legal ambiguities between customary and common rights.

Lastly, customary authorities that manage land rights sometimes show limited efficiency, according to ADRAF (2014). These are not problems unique to New Caledonia-Kanaky. Family or clan obligations can cut across the reinvestment of profits (Purcell and Scheyvens 2015). This means that customary practices appear as a constraint to economic development based on property ownership. Duncan (2018, p. 1) using the example of Papua New Guinea notes: "Around 95% of land in PNG is held by clans under customary ownership [meaning] that individuals from within the clan or outside entities could not gain secure title to portions of clan land. Thus, there was no scope for individuals to express their innovative abilities and entrepreneurship through having complete control over the use of the land... Hence, customary land, which provides a livelihood for around 85% of the PNG population of approximately eight million, has been much less productive than it could be".

Of course, this is a Western interpretation of the requirements for entrepreneurship: individualised development is considered "modern" viewed against customary norms (Jayaraman 1999, p. 9). The contemporary efforts of ADRAF, and provincial governments, try to step around pure neoliberal paradigms of economic growth and capital accumulation, recognising the chequered environmental and labour history of mining, in particular. Ecosystems and reef quality fared badly in the mining boom, before more controls were put in place. Epeli Hau'ofa (1993, p. 16) claims that the peoples of the South Pacific must "overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically. It is time to create things for ourselves, to create established standards of excellence that match those of our ancestors". This argument is in line with more distributive economies, partly based on the efficient use of common

goods and natural and social resources that people manage themselves. Local communities take care that natural resources and ecosystems are not degraded, in a form of "inclusive development", rather than leaving these to be controlled by governments or market forces (Raworth 2017, p. 82).

Scheyvens et al. (2020) demonstrated, using examples from PNG, Fiji and Samoa, that projects on customary land can be more viable and environmentally friendly and contribute to development adapted to the needs of populations: "Customary land ownership is not necessarily a barrier to economic development but, rather, an asset that can support culture, the environment and socio-economic needs of Indigenous people". Local development could indeed better meet the needs of Kanak families and clans than neoliberal economic projects set up by foreign investors who exist within an economic growth dynamic.

Fishing or agricultural projects, for example, have the advantage that they can combine commercial and non-commercial (subsistence) dimensions (Bouard et al. 2020; see also Chap. 6 by Bouard et al. in this book). Producers thus have the possibility of selling part of their harvest on local markets or in Nouméa but can also keep part for their own consumption or for cultural and customary ceremonies. A large survey of 1786 Kanak households representing 12.5% of the population living in Kanak communities conducted in 2011 (Bouard et al. 2020; Guyard et al. 2013) revealed that almost all families have at least one field and that 12% of the products are being sold. In this way, more "traditional" tubers and vegetables are planted, which supports greater biodiversity threatened by industrial agriculture and monocultures. The embeddedness of economic activities into the social life of the clan and the community seems to be an important aspect for the success of a project. Participatory communication and distribution of benefits, if agreed, can help to meet expectations and obligations towards the clan and the community.

Socio-economic development on customary land in Baco involves projects that are often seen as a means of generating financial income through rents by combining collective (clan) management and individualised investment (e.g. the petrol station operated by the Dutch company Shell). However, the economic zone is generally perceived as a "business corner" (Interview, 4 December 2008), even if it has transformed the habits and behaviours of the community. The result is an overlapping and amalgamation of different approaches and perspectives to "economic development". Most of the community's inhabitants do not want major changes to land use on customary areas. The "business corner" is perceived as "elsewhere", on GDPL land. The message here is that culture of sharing, and harmony with, and preservation of, the natural world, can come into conflict with increasing accumulation and production. Decisions have to be made after wide debate and agreement. Not all projects on customary land in Baco are commercial, but these shared perceptions of human-environment relations could partly explain why economic projects such as petrol stations, banks, etc. are always located outside the community living space.

## 10.7 Conclusion

Land reform was one of the main claims made by political independence leaders at the beginning of the decolonisation process in New Caledonia-Kanaky. The reform that was undertaken was extensive, and the attribution of land back to Kanak clans supports many elements of the "material" decolonisation agenda famously called for by Tuck and Yang (2012) involving the actual return of stolen land, as well as mental and symbolic decolonisation (Batterbury et al. 2020). In New Caledonia-Kanaky, priorities have gradually changed over time from a simple restitution of land to following development priorities, with partial economic integration of some customary land into an economy that still remains "dualist" in many ways. We have identified some of the challenges that remain, particularly around the extent to which customary arrangements can allow property to form a basis for investment, and a guarantee of that investment.

New Caledonia has many unique features given its undecolonised status, but we know that alternative economic models are already applied elsewhere in the South Pacific where economic projects on customary land are integrated into the social environment of the clan and the community (Scheyvens et al. 2020). Alternative approaches distribute benefits, for example, from fishing or agricultural sales across the community, sometimes through sports clubs or religious institutions. This can be done where commercial profit is not the (main) objective but rather community well-being.

Land reallocation has played a major role in economic change in the archipelago, particularly on Grande Terre, where land was taken from its original inhabitants. Land grabbing without discussion or compensation for mining or for settlement no longer occurs. But since decolonisation has not been achieved as of 2024 (Kowasch et al. 2022) and "historic dualism" remains across much of the territory, we argue that both economic models described here – an individualised profit-oriented neoliberal paradigm and a collec-

tive, more "inclusive" economy approach – will continue to endure and overlap on customary land in New Caledonia-Kanaky. New forms of economic models are evolving as socio-economic projects are established on customary lands involving different clans and families. But we should not forget Jean-Marie Tjibaou's reminder that land is more than material wealth or property.

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# Has "White Nouméa" Become More Kanak?

11

Pierre-Christophe Pantz

**Abstract**

During the entire period of the "*Code de l'Indigénat*" (Indigenous Code applied between 1887 and 1946), the Indigenous Kanak people were excluded from the capital city of the New Caledonian archipelago. With this city ban, the colonial administration contributed to the long-term marginalisation of the Kanak presence in Nouméa. In the aftermath of World War II and after the departure of American troops from the territory (1946), Nouméa resembled a small French regional town, without any real Pacific identity, and was thus nicknamed "White Nouméa" (in French "*Nouméa la Blanche*"). There was no sign at that time of the extraordinary demographic shift that would be underway in New Caledonia, and more specifically in the city of Nouméa, throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

This urban expansion was accompanied by ethnic redistribution in the city. After the institutional process of decolonisation that lasted for almost 20 years, the Kanak presence in the city (one inhabitant in four) became indisputable from a demographic point of view. Yet, the continuing urban marginalisation of Kanak people shows the limits of the framework that was extolled on signing the Nouméa Accord (1998) for living together and sharing a "common destiny". The persistence of acute spatial, social and political inequalities raises the question of the place of the Indigenous people in Nouméa today.

**Keywords**

Urbanisation · Nouméa · Kanak · Decolonisation · Inequalities

## 11.1 Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, New Caledonia was a predominantly rural archipelago. Its capital, Nouméa, was a small town in this French overseas territory in the southern hemisphere. Created in 1854 under the name of Port-de-France to serve as an administrative and military centre for the French presence in New Caledonia, it took the name "Nouméa" on 2 June 1866. It developed with colonisation, notably due to the presence of the Bagne (prison), but also thanks to mining activity since the 1870s. The town population was essentially made up of Europeans and of a small diverse minority (Kanaks, Asians, other Pacific people, foreigners, etc.), and it had been stagnating at around 11,000 inhabitants since the start of the twentieth century (1901–1936) (Dussy 2005). Several factors may explain the slow demographic growth in that period. The policy of land grants encouraged people to relocate to rural areas (the "bush"). At the same time, the difficult economic situation observed from the end of the 1920s made many people return to mainland France (Dussy 2005).

After the withdrawal of American troops stationed there during the Second World War in 1945, Nouméa was again a small regional French town with no real and visible Pacific identity and was labelled "White Nouméa" (in French "*Nouméa la Blanche*"), in reference to the ethnic composition of its population. There was no sign of the extraordinary demographic shift that New Caledonia, and more specifically the city of Nouméa, was to go through in the second half of the twentieth century. The population of New Caledonia increased fourfold in more or less 70 years (1946–2019), rising from 62,700 in 1946 to 271,407 in 2019. Nouméa absorbed a large part of this population growth. Nouméa alone increased its population tenfold over the same period, which grew from 10,605 inhabitants in 1946 to 94,285 in 2019 (INSEE-ISEE 2020).

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Nouméa's strong demographic growth has contributed to the lasting transformation of the New Caledonian population. Indeed, New Caledonia has shifted from a predominantly rural society to a mainly urban one. This urban expansion has been accompanied by a large ethnic redistribution, in favour of Kanak people and other Pacific communities (Wallisian, Tahitian, Ni-Vanuatu, etc.). From 1887 to 1946, Kanak people had been subject to the "*Code de l'Indigénat*" (Indigenous Code), which forbade them from travelling outside Indigenous reserves and staying in Nouméa. Kanak people were granted freedom of movement and residence when that Code was abolished in 1946. While Kanak people represented approximately less than 10% of Nouméa's population in 1946 (Terrier and Defrance 2012), one in four inhabitants declared to be of Kanak origin in 2019 (48,071 people, i.e. 26.4% of the population of the Greater Nouméa comprising the municipalities of Nouméa, Dumbéa, Païta and Mont-Dore) (INSEE-ISEE 2020). Was this significant increase in urban population among Kanak people a homogeneous phenomenon? What is the place of the Kanak people in Nouméa today? In order to answer these questions, I will first analyse the population growth that has contributed to the ethnic composition of the urban population in Nouméa. I will then argue that although this ethnic composition has fostered the emergence of a Kanak presence in the city, it has also been characterised by significant social-economic disparities.

## 11.2 From a Rural Archipelago to the Hyper-Centralisation of Nouméa

The second half of the twentieth century profoundly transformed the population distribution in New Caledonia, by changing the country from an essentially rural population into a territory hyper-centralised around Nouméa within a few decades. In that respect, a particularly significant social-demographic reorientation took place during the three decades that followed Second World War.

### 11.2.1 The Population Redistribution of Nouméa in the Context of the Post-war Boom and the Nickel Boom (1946–1976)

The demographic growth of the city of Nouméa was, first of all, part of a global post-war boom, characterised by economic wealth (especially in the tertiary sector), urban growth, and a population upswing. Thus, in the aftermath of the war, Nouméa benefited from an exodus from rural areas by settlers of European origin, Asians (Indochinese and Javanese) and Indigenous Kanak people. The abolition of the Indigenous Code in 1946 granted Kanak people freedom of movement and residence. Nouméa's economic rise in the post-war period and its growing need for labour encouraged significant population growth from 10,605 inhabitants in 1946 to 56,078 inhabitants in 1976 (Fig. 11.2). This trend was based on two major components: natural increase (the difference between the numbers of births and deaths) and the net inflow in migration (both domestic and international).

After a decline in the average annual population growth rate between 1963 and 1969 (3.03% in this period compared to 6.63% in 1956–1963 period), Nouméa experienced a second period of demographic growth during the "nickel boom" (1968–1972) (Terrier and Defrance 2012) (see Fig. 11.2).

Internationally, the demand for nickel doubled in less than 10 years, and so did nickel prices. This led to the opening of new mining centres, the expansion of the Doniambo processing plant (SLN) and the immigration of an overseas workforce, estimated at 20,000 people during that period (Guiart 1996, p. 245). Prosperity spread to all sectors in New Caledonia (construction, trade and services) and promoted full employment. The 1976 census recorded 56,078 people living in Nouméa, that is, five times more than 30 years earlier (INSEE 1976). The average annual rate of population growth in the period 1969–1976 rose to 4.29% for the city of Nouméa alone. By way of comparison, in the rural areas, this rate was about half as high (2.34% per year) over that same period.[1] It is therefore estimated that during that period Nouméa attracted most of the international migration growth, which led to rapid demographic growth.

### 11.2.2 Natural Increase and Demographic Transition

While domestic and international migration was a determining factor in Nouméa's demographic growth between 1946 and 1976, the natural increase (the difference between the numbers of births and deaths) of the city was also paramount.

During that period, the number of births in Nouméa increased 12-fold (202 births in 1945, compared to 2412 births in 1971), while the number of deaths increased too but in much smaller proportions (131 in 1945 compared to

[1] https://www.isee.nc/component/phocadownload/category/195-donnees?download=764:la-population-aux-differents-recensements

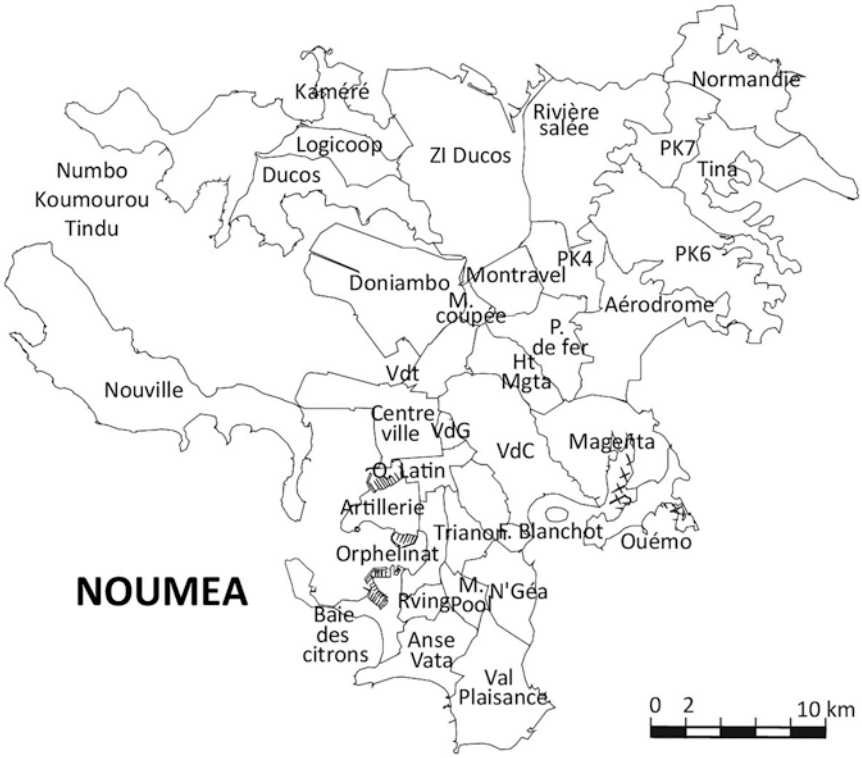


**Fig. 11.1** Map of the districts of the city of Nouméa. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2011)

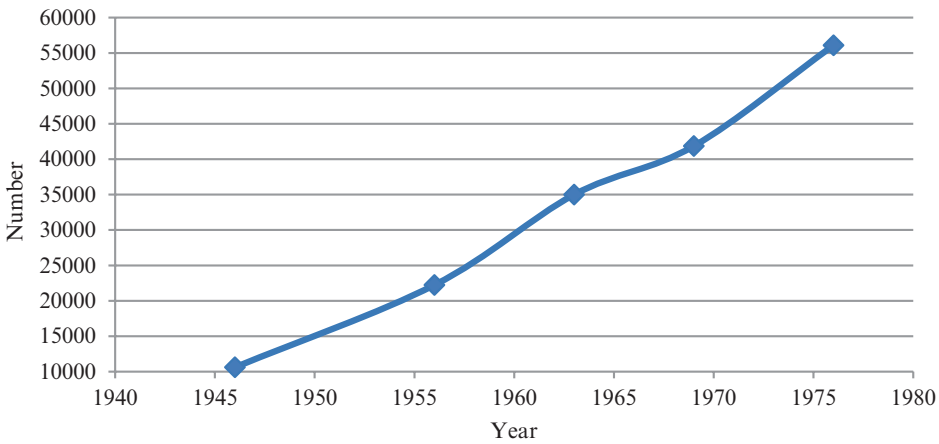


**Fig. 11.2** Population trend in Nouméa (1946–1976). (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2020. The results of the censuses between 1956 and 2019 are fully detailed on the ISEE website: https://www.isee.nc/population/recensement/structure-de-la-population-et-evolutions)

539 in 1971). The increase in the death rate does not mean an increase in mortality. It merely reflects the consequence of the sharp increase of Nouméa's population (Fig. 11.3).

This graph (Fig. 11.3) shows that the discrepancy between the increase in the number of births and deaths has contributed to a significant increase in the natural population surplus. Thus, the natural increase in Nouméa rose from 71 persons in 1945 to 1873 in 1975. This rapid growth of Nouméa's natural population surplus is similar to the process of "demographic transition" that most countries have already been through. It is a historical process by which a population moves from a high death rate and birth rate to a low death rate (due to medical progress and life expectancy) and then a low birth rate.

### 11.2.3 Unprecedented Growth in the School Population

From a historical viewpoint, the demographic growth of a municipality is usually accompanied by the opening of many new schools. Conversely, a municipality with a decreasing population is often forced to close certain classes or even entire schools.

In the context of the aforementioned demographic transition (cf. above), Nouméa was no exception. From the end of Second World War, several primary schools opened in the outer suburbs of Nouméa, for instance: in the Orphelinat district in 1948 (Marguerite Lefrançois school), in Nouville in 1952 (Amélie Cosnier school) and in Faubourg Blanchot in 1953 (Paul Boyer

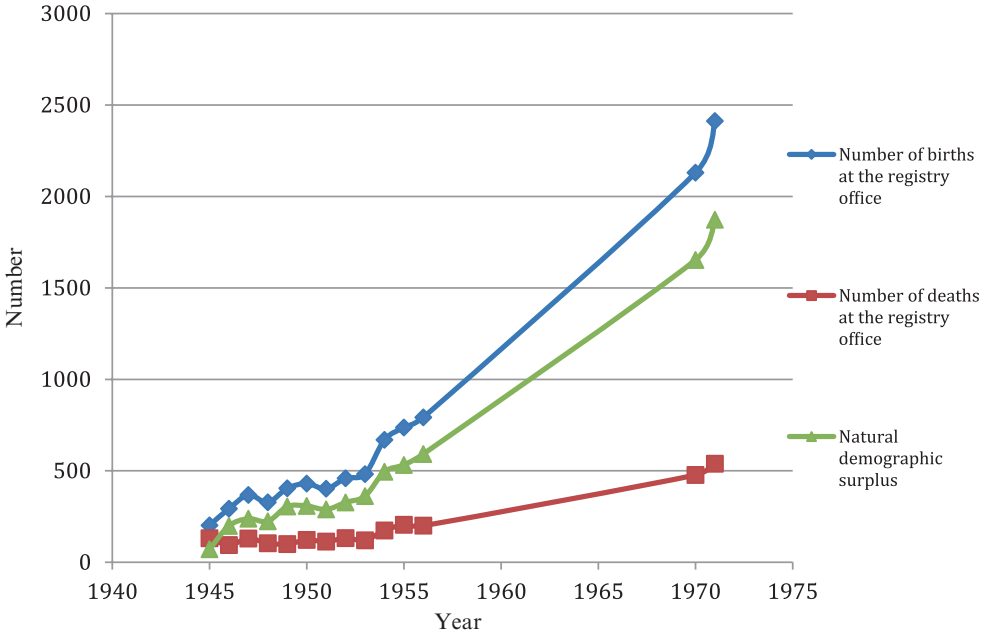


**Fig. 11.3** Trends in the number of births and deaths recorded in Nouméa (1945–1971). (Source: Archives de l'État civil, City of Nouméa 1957 and 1971)

school) (Fig. 11.1). Altogether, 29 public schools opened (or reopened) between 1945 and 1975. This contrasts with the few schools that existed up to 1945 (Fig. 11.4). In fact, 70% of the primary schools currently opened in Nouméa (for a total number of 41 primary schools, kindergarten excepted, according to the city of Nouméa's archives) opened or reopened during the period spanning the years 1945–1975 (archives of Nouméa city hall, 1957 and 1971).

The map shows that the emergence of schools progressively accompanied the population densification of the outer suburbs. The distribution of the number of new schools gradually accelerated in a concentric circle, reaching the northern margins of the city between 1965 and 1975, which clearly corresponds to the demographic "spike" of the nickel boom (see map above).

### 11.2.4 "Greater Nouméa"[2]: The Birth of the Hyper-Centralisation of New Caledonia

The strong population growth of the city of Nouméa has contributed to a lasting change in the characteristics of the New Caledonian population, by concentrating the bulk of it in the capital, Nouméa. Similarly, to the well-known expression of Jean-François Gravier "Paris and the French Desert" (1976), the distribution of the New Caledonian population and the high concentration of activities and services in Nouméa has contributed to reproduce, little by little, a certain form of hyper-centralisation in New Caledonia, in the same manner as the Paris conurbation has vis-à-vis mainland France (Gay 2014).

During the periods of massive population influx, Nouméa was faced with a housing shortage and rent inflation. In the city, that period (particularly that of the "nickel boom") coincided with a redistribution of the population towards residential suburbs in the north and south of the city. Faced with escalating prices, some people decided to settle in the outskirts of Greater Nouméa, in the municipalities of Païta, Dumbéa and Mont-Dore, feeding new migratory flows from the centre to the periphery. Indeed, in 1976, three out of four inhabitants of Greater Nouméa lived in the municipality of Nouméa, whereas in 1956, this ratio was nine out of ten (INSEE 1956, 1976). By way of comparison, in 2019, one out of every two inhabitants (51.7%, source: INSEE-ISEE 2020) of Greater Nouméa lives in Nouméa. This dual movement (rural neighbouring areas to Nouméa and Nouméa to the rural neighbourhood) marked the beginnings of what would later become the Greater Nouméa conurbation. The shift is quite clear across the archipelago (Fig. 11.5). Greater Nouméa – particularly with the fast-increasing population in the outlying municipalities of Dumbéa and Mont-Dore – accounted for the majority of the population in 1976 (74,335 people representing 55.8% of the total population; INSEE 1976).

Figure 11.5 shows that the proportion of the population of Nouméa alone tended to remain at around 42% between 1963 and 1983, while the proportion of the Greater Nouméa population continued to increase. Concomitantly, the proportion of the population living in the bush and on the Islands has been declining since 1945. The average annual variation

[2]The agglomeration of Greater Nouméa includes the municipalities of Nouméa, Païta, Dumbéa and Mont-Dore.

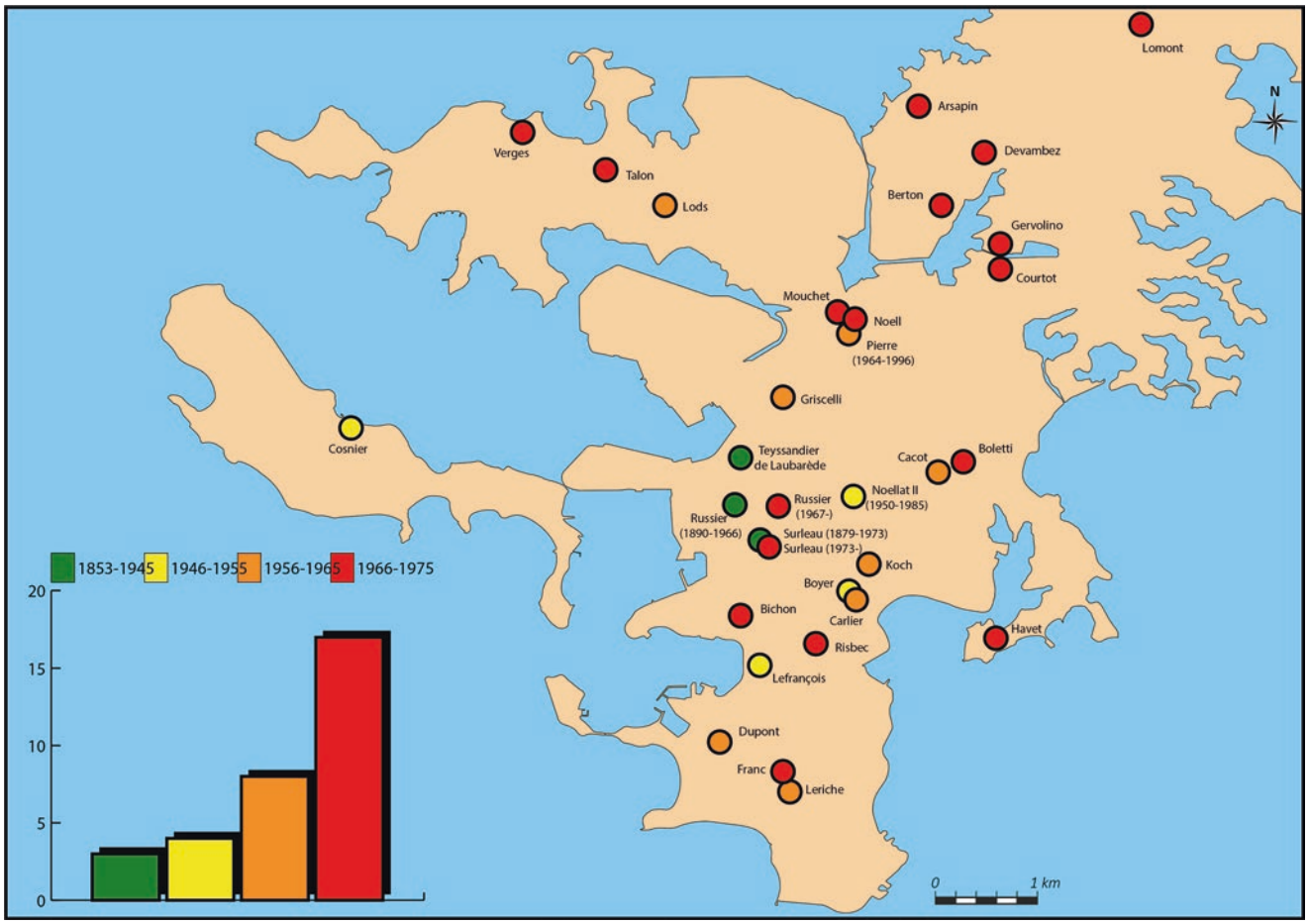


**Fig. 11.4** Map of public primary schools in Nouméa from 1945 to 1975. (Source: Archives of Nouméa city hall 1957 and 1971)

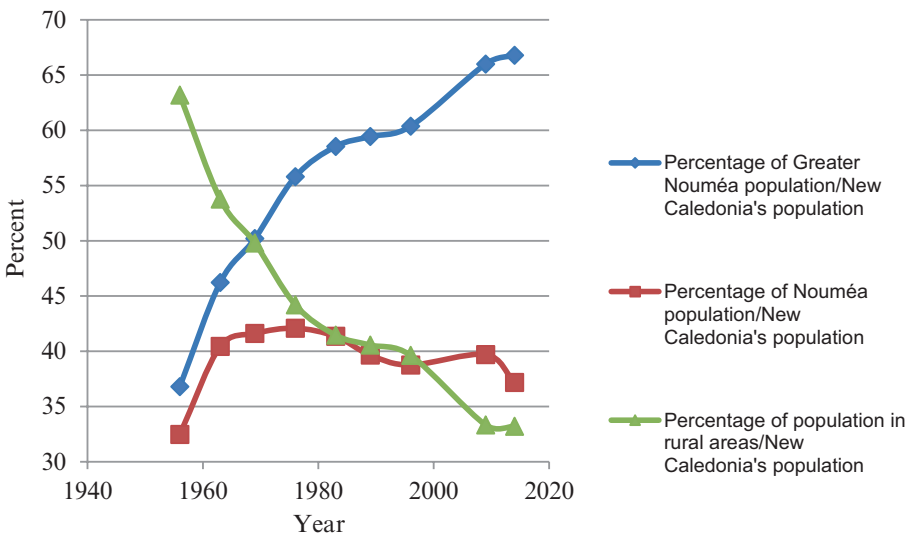


**Fig. 11.5** Evolution of the proportion of the population of Nouméa, Greater Nouméa, the bush and the islands between 1956 and 2014. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2021)

rates (see Fig. 11.6) show a very strong increase in Dumbéa (+14.4% per year between 1956 and 1976) and in Mont-Dore (+11.1% per year between 1956 and 1976), while the rates recorded at the archipelago level are smaller (+3.4% per year between 1956 and 1976) (INSEE-ISEE 2021).

Between 1976 and 1996, the population growth of Greater Nouméa continued at a sustained rate (+2.37% per year between 1976 and 1996), mainly due to the outer municipalities (+6.17% per year for Dumbéa, +4.27% per year for Païta and + 3.4% per year for Mont-Dore) (INSEE 1976, INSEE-

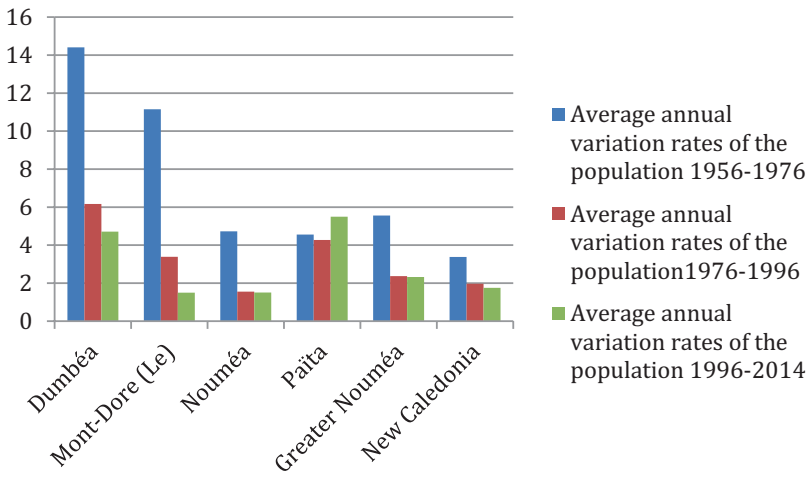


**Fig. 11.6** Comparison of average annual variation rates of the population of Greater Nouméa between 1956 and 2014. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2021). (The annual rate of change is the average population change per year. This is the population growth rate divided by the number of years between two censuses)

ITSEE 1996). Complex movements explain this increase over that period. The period after the economic boom (1976–1984) was first characterised by a short population decrease, followed by an upsurge. This increase of Nouméa's population was partly due to workers from mining settlements moving back to the city once their contract had ended. From a demographic point of view, the subsequent period of the civil war, euphemistically called "Events" by the French state (1984–1988), was nuanced: on the one hand, the influx of refugees from the "bush" and the Islands, who concentrated mainly in Greater Nouméa, was counterbalanced by a negative international migration rate. On the other hand, the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) and the restoration of peace helped to revitalise the population of Greater Nouméa, particularly in the outer municipalities.

Finally, between 1996 and 2014, the population growth continued thanks to a positive natural population increase and significant migration flows. It should be noted that within Greater Nouméa, Païta – the farthest and most northerly municipality of the conurbation – had the greatest population growth over that period (+5.5%/year) (INSEE-ITSEE 1996, INSEE-ISEE 2014). If Nouméa remains the central city of the conurbation (51.7% of the population of Greater Nouméa in 2019; INSEE-ISEE 2020), the development of the other municipalities is significant. In 60 years, the combined population of the three outer municipalities (Païta, Dumbéa and Mont-Dore) rose from 11.8% of the total population of Greater Nouméa in 1956 to 48.3% in 2019 (INSEE 1956, INSEE-ISEE, 2020). In addition, the statistical data highlight significant migration flows from Nouméa city centre to the inner suburbs. It is also worth highlighting the recent population growth of another "conurbation" in the North: the Voh-Koné-Pouembout (VKP) area, with an average population growth of 6.2% per year over the 2009–2014 period and a total population of 13,752 (INSEE-ISEE 2020).

The three municipalities of Voh, Koné and Pouembout (VKP) are located in the North Province, on the west coast, and include two mines, Kopéto in the south and Koniambo in the north. Following the example of Greater Nouméa, the strengthening of inter-communal collaboration in the VKP area is being sought on the basis of a common development and urban planning master plan. However, the VKP entity is recent, having emerged only in the last 20 years, with the "*usine du Nord*" (North smelter) project driving the development of the municipalities. The development of this agglomeration highlights a double challenge: not only that of rebalancing north/south on a territorial scale but also that of the west/east imbalance within the North Province (Kowasch 2012).

## 11.3 Kanak People and the City: Between Reconfiguration and Marginalisation

Since the end of Second World War, Nouméa has been profoundly transformed by "demographic booms". This unprecedented urban expansion has been accompanied by a profound ethnic reconfiguration, giving rise to a cosmopolitan and multicultural city. From the founding of the city in 1854 to the end of the colonial period in 1946, the Kanak presence in Nouméa remained very marginal. Throughout that period, non-Europeans could only move around the city if they held a work contract, and they had to abide by a curfew. Kanak people were not counted in the population census until 1946, the year when they began to access French citizenship. Nevertheless, it was not until 1956, 10 years later, that all Kanak became French citizens. They represented less than 10% of the city's population in 1945 (Terrier and Defrance 2012).

### 11.3.1 Kanak People: From the Indigenous Code to the Nickel Boom

It should be noted that, prior to 1946, in spite of the restrictions and prohibitions put in place by the Indigenous Code, the Kanak presence was fluctuating: between 6% and 13% of the Nouméa population during the first half of the twentieth century (Roux 1981) depending on the need for the workforce. The proportion of Kanak people in the Nouméa conurbation increased steadily from the 1950s onwards. From 10% in 1956, it grew significantly during the nickel boom of the 1960s (reaching 18% in 1969) and again in the years following the 1988 Matignon Accords. By 2019, the Kanak population accounted for one-fourth of the population of the four municipalities of Greater Nouméa (26,4%; INSEE-ISEE 2020).

The proportion of Kanak people living in urban areas to the total Kanak population has increased sharply over the last 60 years. It rose from 10% in 1956 to 43% in 2019 (INSEE-ISEE 2020). If one takes into account Kanak people living in Greater Nouméa but who declared in the census their usual residence in other municipalities, it is likely that half of the Kanak population now lives in urban and peri-urban areas (which can be defined simply as an area with a densely populated human settlement with an urban infrastructure, such as the municipalities of Greater Nouméa and/or the towns of certain rural municipalities (VKP, Bourail, Koumac, etc.) (Fig. 11.7).

Initially, at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, only individuals moved to Nouméa (Guiart 1996). Afterwards, family reunions gradually took place. In the 1960s, there was a noticeable concentration of Kanak people, forming pockets of population in which several individuals from the same extended family, clan or tribe stayed under the same roof. It was not uncommon in the 1960s and 1970s to see Kanak households of 20 or even 30 people, reflecting a form of solidarity between Kanak people in their efforts to settle in the city. At the time, there were still few Kanak people in Nouméa and renting an apartment or a villa necessitated holding a work contract. Kanak people who managed to get hired and who could have access to property rentals became gateways for other Kanak people – family, relatives and those they were connected to in the Kanak kinship system. The settlement of Kanak people in the city during that period was therefore supported by the dynamic of the Kanak customary kinship system (Guiart 1996) (Fig. 11.8).

Kanak people, mostly from the Loyalty Islands (Roux 1981), thus benefited from the emergence of paid employment and the job opportunities available in urban areas (particularly in the nickel and construction industries) in particular during the two economic booms: the post-war boom and the nickel boom (but not only, there have also been employment opportunities "outside" these booms). Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the 1970s, the first oil crisis and the nickel crisis led to a temporary reduction in Kanak migration to the city, and some, who were unemployed, returned to their tribes.

### 11.3.2 The Marginalisation of Kanak People in Greater Nouméa: The Failure of the "Closing the Gap" Policy?

In the aftermath of the civil war and the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988), the Kanak presence in the city is indisputable from demographic and land tenure points of view (Dussy 1998; Freyss 1995; Gravier 1976). However, it remains highly marginalised. In 1989, Kanak represented one out of five inhabitants (22%) of Greater Nouméa population and about 28% of the total Kanak population (INSEE-ITSEE 1989).

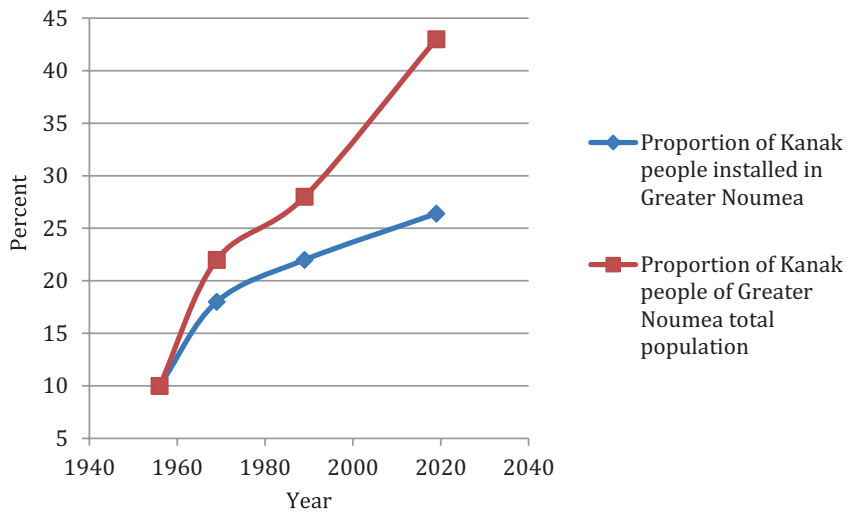


**Fig. 11.7** Evolution of the proportion of the Kanak population in Greater Nouméa in percent between 1956 and 2019. (Sources: INSEE 1956; INSEE-ISEE 2020)

**Fig. 11.8** Postcard from 1950 to 1960. Kanak women's sports event near Bir Hakeim Square, in front of the French military barracks Gally-Passebosc. (Source: Nouméa City Museum 2010)

As previously mentioned, in 2019, 26.4% of the population of Greater Nouméa was Kanak. This is 43% of the total Kanak population (source: INSEE- ISEE 2020).

From a demographic point of view, the Kanak urban population was young (2/3 were under 20 years of age; INSEE-ITSEE 1989), had a low level of school education and a high unemployment rate (Freyss 1995, p. 255) and lived mainly in the poor and working-class districts of the city (Montravel, Kaméré, etc.) (Fig. 11.1). To this day, and in spite of a desire for ethnic rebalancing policies[3] (in education as well as in social and economic aspects) and of affirmative action in favour of Kanak people, their marginalisation is still particularly visible in the space of Greater Nouméa for two main reasons: social and political.

### 11.3.3 Spatial Marginalisation

First of all, from a spatial point of view, while the increase of the Kanak urban population has been significant (see above), especially since the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988), it has not been uniform. In the city of Nouméa, an ethnic contrast has grown between the northern and the southern districts of the Nouméa peninsula.

In all of the north-western districts of the city of Nouméa, from the Nouville peninsula to the Kaméré peninsula, one inhabitant out of three is Kanak (Fig. 11.9). On the other hand, the southern districts of Nouméa (from the Quartier Latin and Trianon and south) appeared to have been deserted by the Kanak population (less than 5% of the population and less than 150 Kanak live in these suburbs). Between these two ends, the districts in the centre-east of the peninsula (Haut-Magenta, Aérodrome, PK4) record intermediate proportions of Kanak (the Kanak presence is between 20% and 30%) (INSEE-ISEE 2009). Beyond the boundaries of the city of Nouméa, the south of the municipality of Dumbéa appears to be the extension of the north-western suburbs of Nouméa, in which the Kanak population is very large. Apart from this, the Kanak presence still seems marginal in the other suburbs of Greater Nouméa. Indeed, the city of Nouméa alone concentrates more than two thirds of the Kanak population of the conurbation. Kanak populations are also concentrated in the peripheral communities in Mont-Dore (Saint-Louis, La Conception) and Païta (Bangou, Saint-Laurent, Naniouni and N'dé) (Fig. 11.9). Besides, except for

[3]In the preamble of the Nouméa Accord (1998), it is stated that *"(…) The past was the time of colonization. The present is the time of sharing, through rebalancing. The future must be the time of identity, in a common destiny"*.

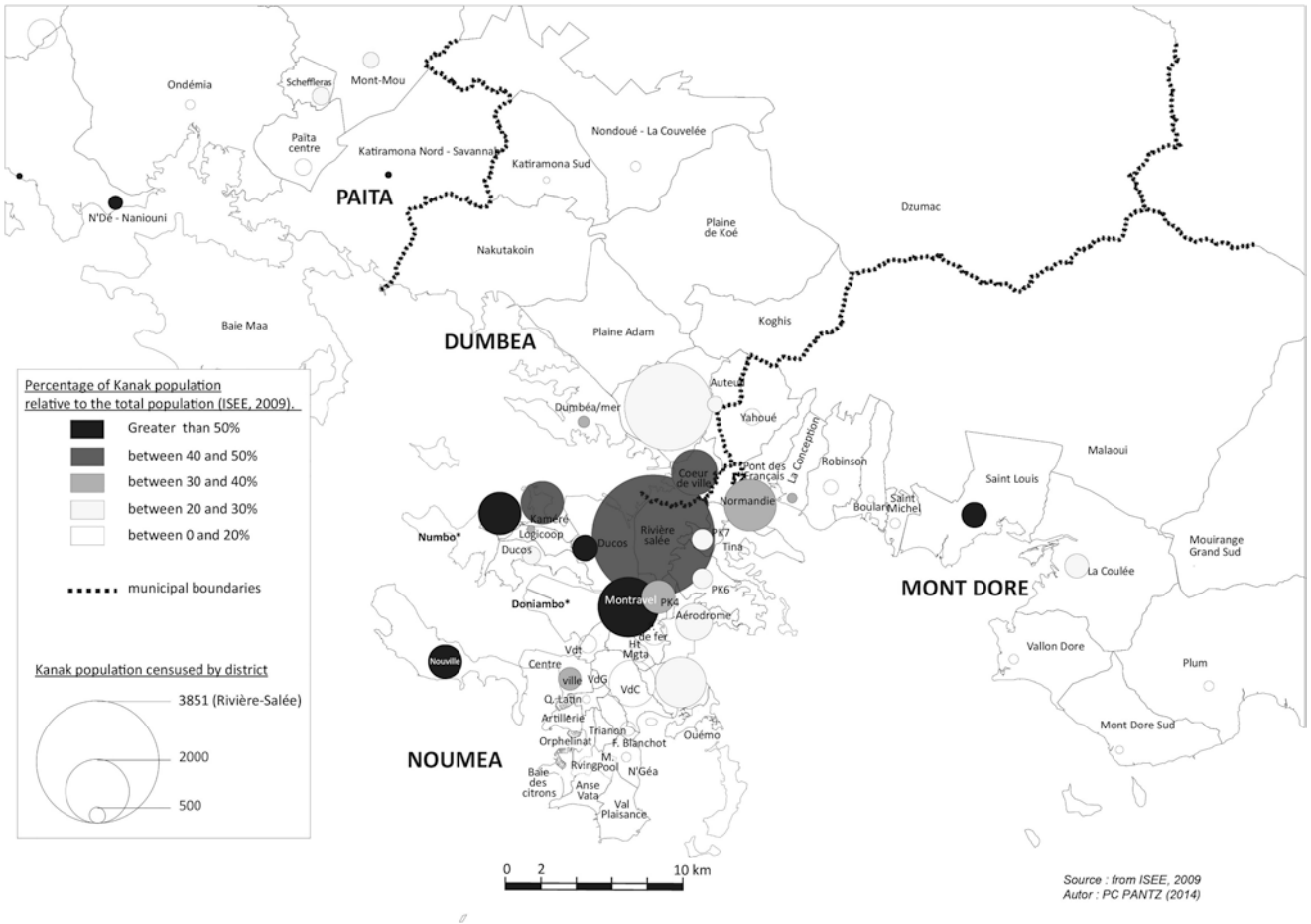


**Fig. 11.9** Map of the distribution of the Kanak population in Nouméa in 2009. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2009)

the districts where the proportion of the Kanak population is significant, it still shows great spatial polarisation. In fact, in 2009 (INSEE-ISEE 2009), one in four Kanak people (about 10,000 Kanak people) of the conurbation (26.5%) lives in one of these four districts (out of the 66 administrative districts that make up the conurbation): Rivière-Salée, Koutio, Montravel and Normandie (Figs. 11.1 and 11.9).

This spatial distribution of the Kanak people in Greater Nouméa is a consequence of their double social and political marginalisation. This distribution corresponds to the stigmatised districts, which have elevated levels of juvenile delinquency. In fact, even if there is no "ethnic" data for the police and gendarmerie areas, there is a consensus on the prevalence of young Kanak in individuals apprehended for delinquency. Despite the policy of economic and ethnic rebalancing implemented since the Matignon-Oudinot (1988) and Nouméa (1998) agreements, the Customary Senate proposed in 2016 a "Marshall Plan to save Kanak society" (p. 4): "... [Kanak] people have been affected. Its youth and vital forces are victims of globalization and economic liberalism, which has been exacerbated over the past fifteen years, of the mode of consumption, of an unsuitable education system and of individualism …" (2016, p. 1) "… In the East Camp prison, more than 90% of the inmates are Kanak, 20% are illiterate and live below the poverty line, and there is massive school dropout" (2016, p. 2).

### 11.3.4 Social Marginalisation

From a social point of view, we can compare the distribution of the districts where the majority of Kanak people live and the socially marginalised districts of Greater Nouméa. Two social criteria illustrate this comparison: the unemployment rate and the level of qualifications. In 2009, the north-western part of Nouméa had the highest number of unemployed people (as did the Saint-Louis community) with rates above 15%, while the south of the Nouméa peninsula, where Kanak people have little presence, never exceeded 5%. This "geographical" correlation is confirmed when we focus on the data relating to the Kanak community specifically. Among the 6,800 people who were registered as unemployed in 2009 (the most recent year with data on ethnic distribution at the municipality level), 45% were Kanak (i.e. slightly more than

3,000). The unemployment rate among Kanak people living in Greater Nouméa was 10.6% (higher than the average of 8.6% for Greater Nouméa). It should be noted that the unemployment rate among Kanak people has declined, since it had been at 14.1% in the 1996 census (INSEE-ITSEE 1996, INSEE-ISEE 2009).

Moreover, the unemployment rate among Kanak varies according to where they live. Indeed, from a general point of view, Kanak who settle around the east or the centre of Nouméa (such as Rivière Salée, PK4, Aérodrome, Magenta, Ngéa and Vallée des Colons) are less likely to be unemployed (with unemployment rates of less than 10%, which is on par with the average unemployment rate amongst Kanak people in the conurbation) than those in the North-West. Other social indicators (such as qualifications, social-professional categories, household size) confirm this trend: the social advancement of Kanak people is likely to go hand in hand with a move to another district to live in. However, this spatial distribution can also be interpreted in different ways. Indeed, if someone has a job, then he/she can afford to settle around the east or the centre of Nouméa.

The level of school education is also indicative of the marginalisation of Kanak people. In 2009, 33,500 people in Greater Nouméa (about 30% of the total population; INSEE-ISEE 2009) did not have any qualifications. As with the unemployment rate, there is a dichotomy between the north-western suburbs of Nouméa and the rest of the peninsula. For example, the proportion of unqualified people (no qualification and/or in the process of obtaining one) exceeds 50% of the population in the largely Kanak-populated districts (inner-city, Ducos, Tindu, Nouville and Saint-Louis) (see Fig. 11.10). The percentage of people without qualification amongst the Kanak people of Greater Nouméa decreased from 59% in 1996 to 42% in 2009 (INSEE-ISEE 2009). Therefore, Kanak people represent 30% of the unqualified population of Greater Nouméa, which seems to be one of the causes of high unemployment rates (Gay 2014, p. 127).

In 2009, only 15.3% of Kanak people had, at minimum, the Baccalaureate (high school diploma), which is far from European standards (more than one in three Europeans in Greater Nouméa had, at minimum, that diploma). Despite such disparities, it is nevertheless worth noting the significant increase in the number of Kanak who passed their baccalaureate: it increased fivefold in 13 years (only 4.7% of the Kanak population in Greater Nouméa had a baccalaureate in 1996).

Ethnic inequalities in educational achievement persist and are accentuated at the extremes: non-graduates and vocational education graduates are overwhelmingly Kanak, and higher education graduates are overwhelmingly non-Kanak. The functioning of the New Caledonian school system implies that the vast majority of young Kanak are oriented towards technological and professional training as soon as they leave secondary school (Hadj et al. 2012).

### 11.3.5 Political Marginalisation

Finally, marginalisation of the Kanak people is also political and electoral. The last referendum on self-determination (held on 4 October 2020), like all other elections, confirmed the existence of a strong relationship between the distribution of the vote for independence in rural and urban municipalities and the distribution of the Kanak population.

While there is a real electoral distinction between Kanak and European settlements in rural areas, there are also significant disparities between polling places in the Greater Nouméa area. At the 2020 referendum, the ballots in favour of independence represented 23.3% of the votes in the city of Nouméa, half of which were cast in polling stations located in the north-western suburbs of the city (Fig. 11.11).

The pro-independence political movement thus obtained its best scores within a triangle connecting the tip of the Kaméré peninsula to the Rivière Salée district and to the Vallée-du-Tir (Vdt) district to the south (Fig. 11.1). These are the districts where Kanak people have settled. On the other hand, the entire southern part of Nouméa, south of the Artillery district, where few Kanak people live, gather less than 10% of the votes in favour of independence (see above).

Moreover, while Kanak people are in the majority in the Congress, the Government of New Caledonia, and in the assemblies of the North Province and the Province of the Loyalty Islands, they are very little represented in the assembly of the South Province and in the city councils of Greater Nouméa (Fig. 11.12).

This inequality of political representation seems to be explained by the growing weight of votes by proxy, election after election, amongst Kanak people from the Loyalty Islands and the north-east of the main island Grande Terre. In these almost exclusively Kanak municipalities, there are sometimes more people registered on the electoral rolls than the number of residents on the census (Pantz 2019, p. 13). In spite of migrating to the city, Kanak city-dwellers have not changed their registration on the electoral rolls and remain registered as residing in their tribe. One could understand this maintenance of their registered residence on the electoral roll of the Loyalty Islands as the real and symbolic anchoring to the tribe to which they belong. Nevertheless, such practice contributes to the political marginalisation of the Kanak people in Nouméa. This can also be partly explained by the voting system (the majority system), which over-represents the lists that come first in the election at the expense of the losing lists, which are consequently under-represented, and that includes pro-independence lists with a Kanak majority.

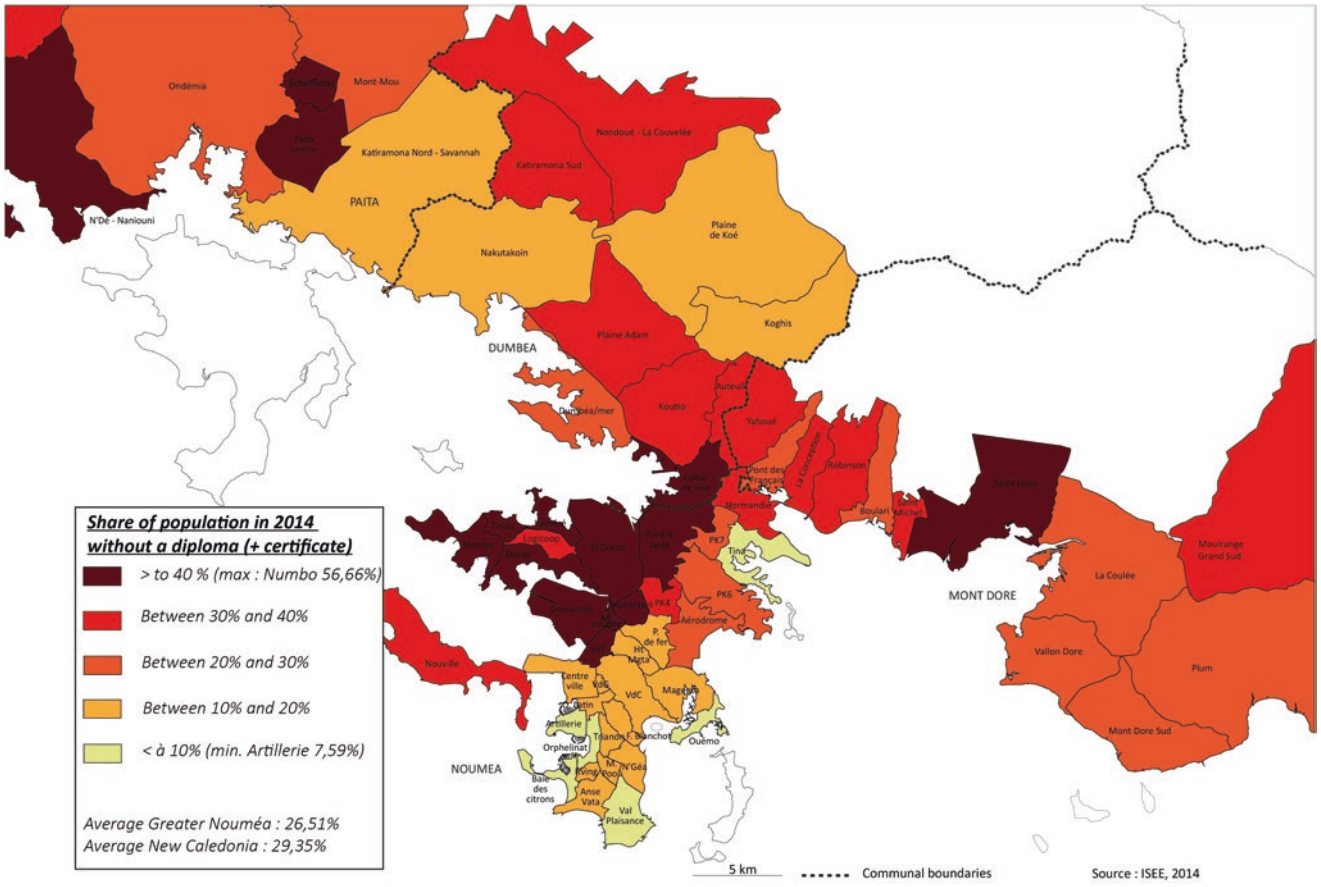


**Fig. 11.10** Map of the distribution of "unqualified" people in Greater Nouméa in 2014. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2014)

The political marginalisation of Kanak people in Greater Nouméa is striking since only 27 (16.7%) out of 162 seats (in cumulative terms in the different municipal councils) are held by Kanak. This under-representation of Kanak and pro-independence people in city and town councils prevents a better consideration of Kanak identity in development and urban planning projects and especially in the choice of oronyms and toponyms for public places (Pantz 2015, p. 380–381). Political marginalisation is thus partly responsible for the lack of Kanak markers across the city's urban landscape.

## 11.4 Conclusion

At the end of the Second World War and for the last 70 years, Nouméa has changed its status from a small regional town in the French overseas territories to that of a diverse and cosmopolitan agglomeration in the New Caledonian archipelago. The contemporary makeup of the Nouméan population has been progressively shaped by successive demographic booms and by an ethnic redistribution, notably in favour of Kanak and other Pacific communities (Wallisian, Tahitian, Ni-Vanuatu, etc.).

Nevertheless, this period of very strong population growth has also been characterised by deepening social and spatial inequalities amongst Nouméa's population. Some authors (Roux 1981; Guiart 1996; Dussy 2005, 2012) have highlighted the fact that, over that period, managerial positions were mainly taken up by European populations (both New Caledonia- and overseas-born), while Pacific and Kanak people (with low levels of qualification) have been competing for low-skilled, menial jobs.

Despite the political will to close the gap since the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988), the persistence of major social and ethnic disparities in Nouméa has obliterated the cohabitation between different communities in some districts (Cugola 2017). In the aftermath of the first referendum (4 November 2018) that split the New Caledonian population, the prospect of a Common destiny – although extolled in the Nouméa Accord (1998) – has never seemed so remote in urban areas in the light of the deep social, ethnic and polit-

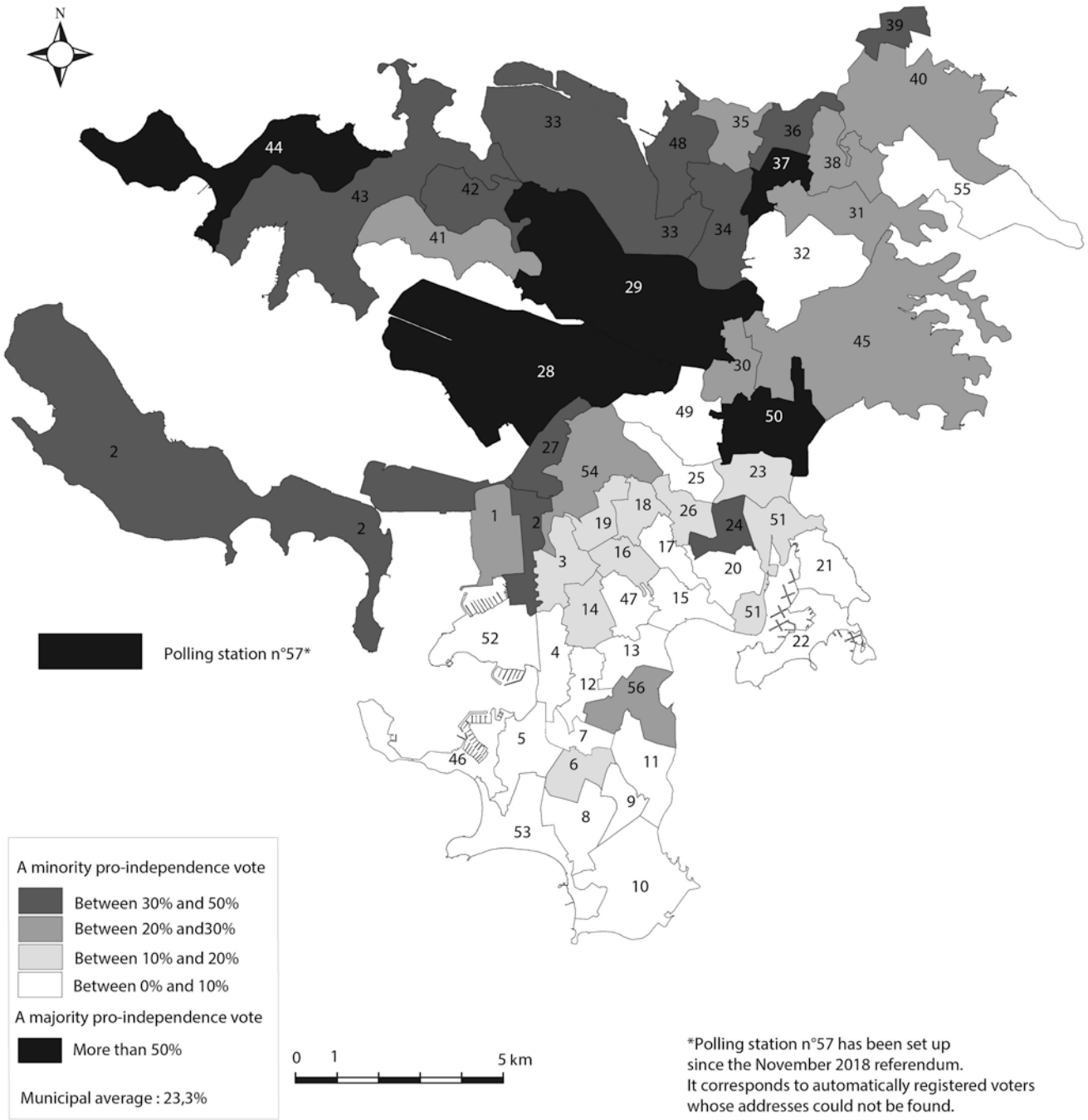


**Fig. 11.11** Map of the votes for independence in the city of Nouméa at the referendum on self-determination held on 4 October 2020. (Source: official results of the High Commission of New Caledonia 2020)

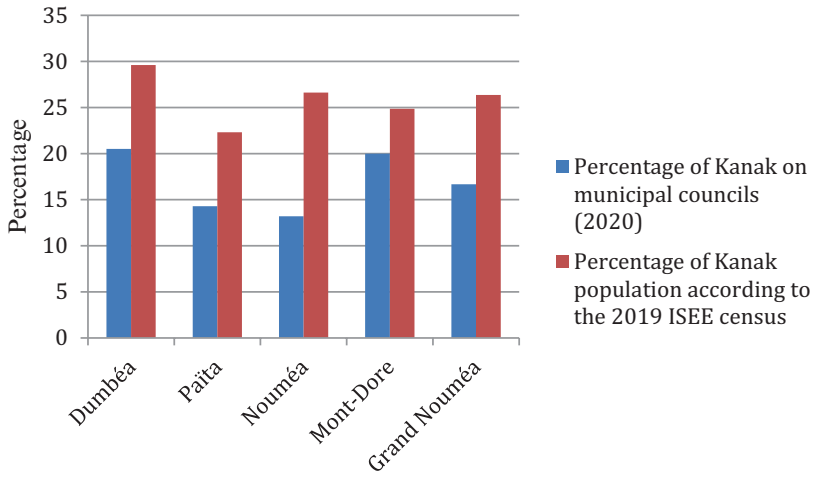


**Fig. 11.12** Percentage of Kanak people in the four city councils of Greater Nouméa. (Source: INSEE-ISEE 2020; LNC 2020)

ical inequalities in Greater Nouméa (cf. above). Regardless of the outcome of the two subsequent referenda that rejected independence, these issues will now need to be addressed.

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# Part V

## Cultural Heritage, Languages and Education

# Kanak Cultural Heritage on Colonised and Damaged Lands

12

Antoine Cano Poady, Chanel Ouetcho, Angélique Stastny, and Matthias Kowasch

**Abstract**

This chapter – co-authored by two Kanak knowledge holders (a clan chief and a singer-songwriter) and two European researchers (from political science and geography) – discusses how Kanak communities deal with cultural heritage in the present, in a context of colonial legacies, institutional conservatism and depleting natural resources. We focus specifically on the communities of Bako and Touaourou in Paicî Cèmuhi and Drubea-Kapumë countries, respectively. We first analyse colonial policies of land dispossession and cultural oppression, as well as the ongoing inadequate support for Kanak languages from school institutions. We then discuss the ways in which grassroots initiatives testify to resilient and resurgent spaces for Kanak languages and cultural heritage in such contexts, by taking the example of (1) the work of the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADCK) to record oral histories, myths and toponyms as important identity markers and (2) Kaneka music as a contemporary transmitter of Kanak languages and cultural practices. In addition to the collection of toponyms in Kanak communities, Kaneka music is popular amongst young people and elders. Bands such as Humaa-gué from Touaourou provide songs engaging with colonial history, Kanak cultural life and practices, the mining industry and current sociopolitical issues. We draw the conclusion that the educational institution responds inadequately to Kanak needs, and initiatives undertaken by Kanak people at the grassroots level are key to the continuance of Kanak languages, cultural heritage and practices.

**Keywords**

Kanak cultural heritage · Toponyms · Customary land · Paicî-Cèmuhi · Bako · Kaneka music · Humaa-gué

## 12.1 Introduction

The preamble to the Nouméa Accord signed in 1998 by the French State, loyalist and pro-independence parties declares that, with settler colonisation,

> *Kanak social organising, even though it was recognised in principles, was drastically disrupted. Population displacements destructured it, ignorance or power strategies too often led to the denial of legitimate authorities and to the establishment of authorities bereft of any legitimacy according to Custom, which exacerbated identity-based trauma.*
>
> *Simultaneously, Kanak cultural heritage was negated or plundered. Limitations of public liberties and an absence of political rights added up to this negation of the fundamental elements of Kanak identity, even as Kanak people had suffered heavy losses to defend France, especially during the First World War.*

This chapter discusses the disruption and devastation of Kanak culture in the colonial period. We interrogate the persistence and continuing consequences of this period, as well as the cultural revival initiated by Kanak people in the last few decades. Based on the examples of Kanak languages (see Chap. 13 by Leblic in this book) and toponyms, Kaneka music and the construction of traditional houses (including a specific example of the tending of straw), we will explain

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how Kanak people deal with cultural heritage in the present. Cultural heritage depends on two core elements to be passed on: land and language. Land is fundamental to Kanak culture and cultural revival and therefore crucial to our testimony and reflection. The question of contemporary Kanak cultural heritage and cultural revival needs to be understood in the context of a lived environment that has been occupied by settler colonists and institutions, industrialised, and in some places deeply damaged ecologically. Access to, and the current condition of, lands and resources impacts the ways in which Kanak clans and communities carry on culture and pass on their heritage to the younger generations. The extent to which Kanak people and clans embrace industrialisation and commodification also influences the continuation or shifts in cultural practices over time. A culture thrives most potently in and through language. Kanak languages have borne the brunt of past policies banning their use and publication across several generations, and a general attitudinal deprecation of their importance. Policies in the last three decades have slowly and partially integrated several Kanak languages in the French school system. However, the continuing challenges that they face and their de facto lesser status (in comparison to French) require amplified mobilisation from Kanak clans and communities.

This chapter is co-authored between the four of us. We each have distinct background and relation to both Kanak cultural heritage and Kanaky more widely. Antoine Cano Poady is a former cultural collector for ADCK (Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture) and president of the environmental association "Environord". He has great knowledge of the Haeke language, and on clan migration, the history of sacred and cultural places, and cultural heritage in Paicî-Cèmuhi country. Cano lives in the community of Bako,[1] close to Koohnê (Kone), the capital of the North Province. Chanel Ouetcho is a singer, composer and one of the founding members of the Kaneka band Humaa-gué from Yaté. He lives with his family in the community of Touaourou in the South of Grande Terre. Matthias Kowasch is a professor of geographical education at University College of Teacher Education in Graz (Austria). He grew up in Germany and lived for around 4 years in New Caledonia-Kanaky where he taught at university and did research at the Institute of Research for Development (IRD). He was welcomed by the Poady clan in Bako, where he built close relationships. Angelique Stastny is a postdoctoral researcher in political science. She is from Europe and grew up in France. She lived on Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung Countries in Narrm (Melbourne), Australia, for 7 years, a time during which she regularly went to Kanaky for her research and wove personal relationships. She engages with issues relating to settler colonialism, whiteness and racism, Indigenous sovereignty and decolonisation.

Our discussion of Kanak cultural heritage – and of two of its constituting elements, land and language – therefore focuses on the communities of Bako and Touaourou in Paicî Cèmuhi and Drubea-Kapumë countries, respectively. While it attends to Kanak cultural heritage and practices of cultural revival that are specific to, or emerged in, these areas, our reflection also draws on the broader settler colonial historical and contemporary contexts in which they have been inscribed. This chapter is organised into two main sections. We will first analyse the ways in which Kanak lands and languages – the substance of Kanak cultural practices – have been the key target of colonial policies and their continuing impact on the practice and transmission of Kanak culture. We will then demonstrate how, in this context, Kanak people have and continue to create resilient and resurgent spaces where languages and cultural heritage can survive and thrive. We focus specifically on Haeke language and culture through the work of the Kanak Oral Heritage Collection in Bako (Paicî Cèmuhi country) and the Nââ numèè language and culture through the art of the Kaneka band Humaa-gué (Drubea-Kapumë country).

## 12.2 Kanak Lands and Languages: The Substance of Kanak Cultural Practices, the Key Target of Colonial Policies

### 12.2.1 Colonised, Damaged Lands

The French-led colonisation of New Caledonia-Kanaky began in 1853 in Hoot ma Waap country, and invasion spread across the main island (Grande Terre) over the following decades. These invasions were met with resistance. Indigenous-settler relations were often marked by brutal physical violence. Mobile columns (*colonnes mobiles*), composed of colonial troops, European settlers and Kanak auxiliaries, were sent to crush the resistance. Settlers used a scorched-earth military strategy, destroying communities and plantations, to starve out Kanak people on the main island (Foucher 1890). From the 1850s to the 1870s, there were "frequent uprisings" (Dousset-Leenhardt 1998, pp. 127–159) and "constant military expeditions" (Saussol 1988, p. 41). Armed conflicts and wars went on for many decades and continued to occur sporadically in the twentieth century, notably in 1878, 1917 and in 1984–1988. Kanak resistance over the decades has been dealt with by means of imprisonment, massacre, capital punishment, displacement and exile. Deploying Social Darwinist theories for colonial ends, the French administration confiscated Kanak land and seas and attempted to exterminate some Kanak clans.

[1] In this chapter, we use Kanak place names and toponyms: Bako instead of Baco in French, Koohnê instead of Koné in French.

Colonisation led to forms of genocide, land dispossession and loss of languages and cultures. According to Alain Saussol (1985, p. 1616), the extent of lands stolen by the French state and granted to settlers increased from 1000 to 230,000 ha between 1860 and 1878. Later, a land tenure system gave 25 ha freely to European children exclusively when they became of age. European landownership increased from 240,000 ha in 1893 to 400,000 ha in 1978 (Saussol 1985, p. 1618). The pace, intensity and geography of spatial appropriation (and expropriation) varied from place to place and over the course of time. Yet, throughout, colonisation disrupted Kanak societal structures, displaced entire peoples and disempowered existing political organisation.

From the second half of the nineteenth century and following episodes of brutal colonial conflicts and wars, the French administration moved to create Indigenous reserves to "pacify" Kanak people through confinement and control and to facilitate land dispossession. Such procedures were called policies of "cantonment" (*cantonnement*) (Bensa 1990; Merle 2000; Kowasch 2010). The Indigenous Code (*Code de l'Indigénat*) applied across the territory from 1887 to 1946 aimed at heavily controlling Kanak people in their movement, work and forms of association. Perceived as "primitive" and "savage", Kanak people were forced to work on the plantations of European settlers and suffered from discrimination and violence. They were not allowed to leave their reserves without the permission of the colonial administration. Based on the Australian model, France attempted to develop the basis of a new society that welcomed both "sentenced" and "honest" French or francophone migrants (Merle 2000, p. 230).

The reserve system and Indigenous Code led to both land and cultural dispossession for Kanak people. In Kanak cultures, land is not apprehended as an objective reality of property, but as a cultural identification (Kowasch et al. 2015). Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a Kanak pro-independence leader, murdered in 1989, once said that "a clan that loses its land, loses its personality" (Tjibaou and Missotte 1976, p. 60). Geographer Jean-Pierre Doumenge (1982) described land as an identity card, a place where the totem acts, and the ancestors rest in peace. The social identity of Kanak clans is built on the clan's history. It is registered in space, as a series of places where the itinerant group passed through and lived. Therefore, the dispossession of land constitutes a loss of identity.

After unabated demands by Kanak people for the restitution of their lands, the Government launched land reform on the main island "Grande Terre" in 1978. This measure was furthered when Tjibaou, at the head of the Government Council (Conseil de Gouvernement) of New Caledonia between 1982 and 1984, established two institutions that promoted Kanak cultures and political rights: the Kanak Technical and Scientific Cultural Office (*Office culturel scientifique et technique kanak*) and the Land Office (*Office foncier*). In the beginning, the restitution of land was determined by the development of economic projects to take place on it (see, e.g. Leblic 1993). As of 1999, however, returned customary lands (*terres coutumières*) became inalienable, unseizable, incommutable and non-transferable, based on the model of the customary reserves. The aim was to disconnect the restitution of land from economic development, which the authorities realised does not grasp the importance of land claims by Kanak clans. The proportion of customary land on "Grande Terre" increased from 10% in 1978 to 18% in 2010 and to 19.3% in 2019 (ADRAF 2019a; Kowasch et al. 2015). Considering that the Loyalty Islands Province was always "customary land", the distribution of the territory's total land area shows that 15.8% of New Caledonia-Kanaky are private land plots, 27.4% are defined as customary land, 46.9% are territorial public land and the rest is State, provincial and municipality land. Finally, 0.4% are still in the hands of ADRAF, which aims to return this remaining portion (ADRAF 2019b) (see Chap. 10 by Batterbury et al. in this book). Bako is a Kanak community which managed to get large plots of land returned to its clans. While, in 1980, the people of Bako only had 800 ha of customary land, this rose to 5000 ha in 2017 (VKP Infos 2018a). The huge land area, proximity to the capital of the North Province (Koohnê) and to the territorial road No. 1 (which connects Koohnê with Nouméa) have resulted in a multitude of economic projects (e.g. a cinema, rental housing, a shopping mall) on the customary lands of Bako (Kowasch 2010, 2011). Those projects explain why Bako is often described as "flagship" for development on customary land in New Caledonia-Kanaky (Kowasch 2018).

Despite the Bako example, the colonial theft of Kanak lands and the slow and insufficient restitution to date, accompanied by poor management from medium- and large-scale farmers and industrialists over the decades, means that Kanak people on "Grande Terre" hold inadequate, and often low fertility lands and resources to continue ancestral cultural practices in a suitable and a thriving environment. The challenges that people face today in Drubea-Kapumë country to build a Kanak house is a telling example of such issues.

Building Kanak houses is the embodiment of social and political organising and consensus. At the basis is the common ancestor that built the ancestral home, to which all patrilineal descendants belong. Each clan is connected to land, and Kanak houses are built and positioned hierarchically according to their time of occupancy (Boulay et al. 1990, p. 18; Tjibaou 2004, p. 93). In a communal Kanak house, the elders are its foundations; the clans are represented by the surrounding wooden poles and the beams that support the great central pole, which symbolises the chief. All elements are tied together and reflect the relations between distinct groups that gathered to build a unified and stabilised social and political system

(Boulay et al. 1990, p. 19). Architecturally, Kanak houses differ in shape (round, oblong, rectangular) and materials, depending on their purpose and their location. The shape of, and materials used in, Kanak houses have been known for their thermal, aesthetic and architectural qualities, which also make them specifically resistant to cyclones. Yet, in the 1930s, the Department of Indigenous Affairs ordered the destruction of Kanak houses to be replaced by rectangular European-style houses, under the pretext that Kanak houses were unhealthy (ADCK 2007, pp. 62–67). These newly built houses were, however, badly built and insulated. From the 1950s, natural materials were increasingly replaced with cement and corrugated iron (Tjibaou 2004, p. 95). Nowadays, both housing types coexist, and it is common to build a Kanak house along with a European-style rectangular one. Nonetheless, the number of Kanak houses has been on the wane (see Table 12.1). While Kanak houses made up almost one quarter of residential homes in 1989, recent surveys notice that "they have disappeared almost everywhere, except for the Loyalty Islands and the northern part of the Grand Terre's East Coast" (ISSE-TEC 2016, p. 58). In 2014, only 1% of households lived in "traditional" Kanak houses (Broustet 2014, p. 1).

Traditional housing design, as an expression of Kanak identity, needs to be reaffirmed. Yet, continuing the practise also faces several contemporary challenges. These broader challenges are to do with the ecological destruction that has resulted from colonisation and land exploitation (mining, forestry, etc.). Despite improvements in environmental performance and the restitution of land, traditional (ecological) practices, including construction, are still viewed as backward-looking and ineffective. We see this in school textbooks, for example, as argued by Stastny and Kowasch (2022).

In Bako, Paicî Cèmuhi country, as well as in other customary areas, the building of Kanak house depends on working with and tending straw, and this is also a key element of Kanak identity. The following section describes this in Haeke, a language that is only spoken in the community of Bako (although there are some dialects such as Bwatoo and Haveke in other communities), approximately 4 km away from Koohnê, the capital of the North Province.

**Ni vaa na mwathâng**

1. A mwathâng je ta hngia a mau ka mwa koon.
2. Nya thipo lu ma doop, ka je cine ni gomwa koon.
3. Je cabwin a juu xuu ca mwathâng.
4. Fitia a mwathâng pwa bala zhee, cia ngibu ca voxa.
5. Fitia mwathâng pwa e zhee, la na bwoa ci pa go xha hame la ai ma pi bwalike.
6. Je wi moathâng, pulane je xatékéa tchiéne tchixate pulane je bala vaa Koohnê.
7. Thitake ma je wii mwathâng, na bwa cau bweezhila.
8. Thitake ma je wii mwathâng, ce la ma je pi cami a thia.
9. A mwathâng je cine a xu ka je nya ca tââ.
10. Fwa nicin ko a mwathâng, ko hmâine ni vaa ne ân.

**Tending the Straw**

1. The straw allows us to cover the roof of the Kanak house and home.
2. To make some cob, we need to mix it with some soil: this allows us to build walls to close the house.
3. We cover the true yams with the straw to preserve them.
4. In the field, we tie a piece of straw on a stick of wood. We then peg it into the ground to signpost a prohibition.
5. We also tie a few twigs on a tree to indicate that we are passing through for the first time.
6. We pull the straw out of the ground, and we dry it for three days. We will then be able to work it.
7. It is forbidden to pull it out if we haven't eaten the new yam yet.
8. It is forbidden to pull it out if we have already planted the yam field.
9. We cover the yam with the straw and we put it into the oven.
10. Straw is precious and has multiple uses. It must therefore be respected.

The word for straw in Numèè language, in Drubea-Kapumë country in the South Province, is "nian", which also means "custom". That's why we say "A nian mën gné réa" ("The straw hasn't arrived yet", which means that "the customary gesture hasn't been made").

To build a Kanak house, we need a central pole and, depending on the size of the house, between 6 and 12 poles to hold the roof structure. These various poles need to be very hard wood so as not to rot when in contact with the earth. The types of wood we use are, for example, the "*wiya*" (Alphitonia neocaledonia), the "*teu*" (gum oak) and other resistant woods. If it is a communal house, the central pole signifies the chief and the clans that make up the community. Because of colonisation and other related factors (land-based conflicts, the displacement of clans and the introduction of "modern" materials), Kanak communal houses are no longer seen in many communities.

**Table 12.1** Number of "traditional" Kanak houses as main residential home according to all types (total), per year

| | 1989 | 1966 | 2004 | 2009 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "Traditional" Kanak houses | 9554 | 6725 | 4270 | 1449 | 940 |
| All housing types | 40,266 | 51,497 | 64 ,45 | 72,637 | 85,063 |

Source: ISSE-TEC (2016, p. 59)

Likewise, another challenge arises when wanting to build the roof structure of the Kanak house. To build the roof, we use the *wayü* (a pine tree native to the far south of the Grande Terre), the *tchèrètee* and other types such as the kaori and the fir. All the woods that are used to build a Kanak house need to be cut when the moon is right. This is when the sap is no longer in the trunk and branches but in the roots, that is, from three days before the full moon to three days after it. To attach the straw, we need a flexible and very resistant wood. In the Touaourou community, we use the *tan*. Due to deforestation, wildfires and invasive plants, the straw is increasingly rare in many places. This is another reason why fewer Kanak houses are built.

The South Pacific region is a hotspot of biodiversity but also has the world's highest concentration of invasive alien plant species (Lenz et al. 2019). Besides, the geographic isolation of the islands produces evolutionary characteristics, which result in native plants being more vulnerable to competition from invasive plants than mainland species (Dyer et al. 2019; Woinarski 2010). In New Caledonia, 83% of the endemic plant species are considered as threatened (Pouteau and Birnbaum 2016). Invasive species include, for example, the *Miconia calvescens* (the velvet tree), one of the world's most invasive, and the *Sansevieria trifasciata*, also known as "snake plant".

For people in Bako (Paicî Cèmuhi country), the straw is more abundant than in Touaourou, but there are only about ten traditional houses in the community of approximately 500 inhabitants. The extent to which Kanak people and clans have embraced industrialisation and cash commodities have influenced shifts in cultural and architectural practices. Pulling the straw out of the ground is hard work, and many people prefer to build concrete or corrugated sheet houses today. The material (concrete and corrugated sheet) can be bought at building supply depots, which is more comfortable. In earlier days, the straw "went together" with the yam season as described above, which represents a customary ritual. Yam and straw were planted in September or October, and the harvest was in February or March. Today, people who wish to build a traditional house do not always respect the straw season; they harvest the straw or buy it whenever they need it.

Challenges and shifts in the practice and transmission of Kanak cultures also affect Kanak languages (see Chap. 13 by Leblic in this book). Pre-colonial multilingualism has been contested and disrupted by the forceful enforcement and domination of French and the French school system, even if, nowadays, Kanak languages are taught in schools and at the university and promoted by the state agency ADCK.

### 12.2.2 Contested and Competing Spaces of Education and the Transmission of Culture

In 1863, first governor of New Caledonia Charles Guillain banned schooling in Kanak languages, a measure that was reiterated in 1883 and 1923 (Rivierre 1985, p. 1694). From 1881 to 1886, Member of the French government Jules Ferry designed laws to introduce free, compulsory and secular primary schooling for children aged 6 to 13. From 1885, a segregated, public, secular school system was set up. In parallel, in 1885, non-compulsory secular Indigenous schools (*écoles indigènes*) were opened and existed until the dismantling of the Indigenous Code in 1946 (Salaün 2005). The Indigenous schools were initially under the authority of the Department of Indigenous Affairs (*Affaires Indigènes*) and then from 1919 under the Service of Public Instruction (*Service de l'instruction publique*). Indigenous schools aimed at controlling Kanak people by creating conciliatory elites and "useful" masses for the colony, through their labour. Likewise, missionaries banned Kanak languages within the missions. Fabrice Wacalie (2011) notes that "learners were punished if they spoke in Kanak language, to the extent that a certain number of 'traumatized' grandparents still forbid themselves from speaking their own language today. This created a rupture in the dynamic of intergenerational transmission". In 1921, publications in Kanak languages were banned. Thereafter, the "French monolingual ideology was implanted in a territory traditionally favouring plurilingualism" (Colombel and Fillol 2009, p. 2).

As we noted above, Kanak languages have been a crucial target of the colonial repression of Kanak people and cultures, and their use and revitalisation is a crucial objective and tool in struggles for freedom and decolonisation. In 1946, the Indigenous code was abolished. Indigenous schools were progressively closed, and Indigenous students relocated to government schools (Bruy-Hebert 2010). In 1951, it was estimated that 50% of school-aged Kanak children attended a public school. In the second part of the twentieth century, the integration of Kanak as citizens within the French Republic and into previously exclusively "white" schools marginalised Kanak languages further (Colombel and Fillol 2009, p. 2). School curricula received increasing criticism and fed the growing Kanak nationalist and liberation movement. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several activist groups were created (e.g. The Red Scarves [*Les Foulards Rouges*] and the 1878 Group) and organised political meetings and demonstrations. One of the key catalysts of the Kanak movement starting in the late 1960s was the publication of tracts against segregation written in French, Drehu and Nengone (two of the 28 Kanak languages) by members

of The Red Scarves that led to the arrest of some activists for publishing in Indigenous languages and subsequent popular uprisings (Rivierre 1985; Chappell 2003 p. 195). At the beginning of the 1970s, the movement for independence placed the government school system at the centre of their political struggle, in addition to the restitution of lands and cultural recognition. The "colonial school" was perceived as a source of alienation and acculturation for Kanak people. The first official request to recognize Kanak specificities in schools goes back to 1971, when local politicians asked that the Deixonne Law – which had regulated the teaching of regional languages in France since 1951 – be applied to New Caledonia-Kanaky (Salaün 2005, p. 264). On assessing the validity of the request, the Vice-Rector appointed in Nouméa responded in 1975 that "the role of elementary school is to give the children the means for communicating, orally and in writing, which are indispensable if one wants to integrate in a changing society (see Chap. 14 by Wadrawane in this book). In light of the foregoing, one can only stress the need for a place where the French language can be used uninterruptedly. In secondary schools, it does not seem justified to compare [the Kanak languages] with some of the large regional languages of France, which support a literature and in many cases have served as a means of communication for hundreds of thousands of people" (Vice-Rectorat de la Nouvelle-Calédonie 1975, p. 3). The Vice-Rector thus argued that French should remain the dominant language in formal school education.

In 1979, Claude Lercari created the Office for Vernacular Languages *(Bureau des langues vernaculaires)* to initiate reflection on the teaching of Kanak languages. During the 1984–1988 war, the independence movement's politics of refusal targeted both the electoral and schooling systems. An active boycott of the school system by Kanak people was put in place across the territory, and Local Kanak Schools (*Écoles populaires kanak*) were created as an alternative (Gauthier 1996; Nechero-Joredie 1988; Small 1996). Despite the fact that these Local Kanak Schools stopped after several years, or a couple of decades for the longest-lasting ones, the school boycott and the ongoing conflict precipitated changes in the public educational system and in government policies more widely.

More proactive measures were taken when pro-independence Kanak people were in power or had stronger leverage. It is only when politician Jean-Marie Tjibaou became head of the government in 1984 that the laws forbidding instruction and publications in Kanak languages were repealed. The vice-presidency of Jean-Marie Tjibaou at the Government Council (1982–1984) was short-lived. However, a second catalyst was the 1984–1988 war. The political urgency of the period made the recognition of Kanak cultures and languages a question that non-Kanak politicians and people could no longer ignore or postpone. The Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADCK) was founded in 1989 with the purpose to promote Kanak culture. Its four key directives have been to (1) enhance Kanak linguistic and archaeological heritage; (2) encourage contemporary forms of expression of Kanak culture, especially in the field of handicrafts, broadcasting and the arts; (3) promote cultural exchanges, especially within the South Pacific; and (4) to define and conduct research programmes (ADCK 2019). As for Kanak languages, the 1951 Deixonne Law – which officially recognised regional languages in France, allowing their inclusion in school curricula and exams, allowing teachers to use them in class to facilitate students' learning – was applied to New Caledonia-Kanaky in 1992, 41 years after it was voted in French parliament. The law included only four of the 28 Kanak languages (Ajië, Drehu, Nengone and Paicî). That same year, the North and Loyalty Islands Provinces implemented the teaching of these languages. The South Province only did so in 2005. The 1998 Nouméa Accord set up the institutional framework for the teaching of Kanak languages and granted the latter "the status of languages of instruction in the same way as French". In 2012, 19 Kanak languages were taught in primary schools and about ten in secondary schools (Vernaudon 2013, p. 116; see also Chap. 13 by Leblic in this book).

The teaching and status of Kanak languages remain precarious, however public instruction continues to be mostly carried out in the language of colonisation, French. This is despite Kanak people and linguists fighting for many decades to implement schooling in Kanak languages, especially in areas where they continue to be widely spoken. What is at stake is not just the instruction of languages but the languages of instruction. Kanak languages continue to be optional and are only offered by the school if parents express an interest (through a survey) in their children learning them. In a televised debate on the place of Kanak languages in public schools, National Education Inspector and Manager of the Service for the Teaching of Kanak Languages and Cultures, Yves Kartono (2017), explained that Kanak languages continue to be optional and minimally offered in schools because "we don't force a pupil to choose a language, it's the pupil […] who chooses". The French language, however, does not abide by this rule, and regardless of the choice of the pupil, it is de facto the language of instruction. The current place and status of Kanak languages in the school system therefore does not abide by the 1998 Nouméa Accord that stipulates that Kanak languages are, with French, official languages of instruction. One study (Colombel and Fillol 2009, p. 3) concludes that "even freed from the 'Parisian' constraints, the New Caledonian school system continues to disseminate a monolingual ideology" and the non-European epistemologies are "only rarely" taken into account. To date, except for one pilot project at the Kuru raa (Coula) school in Wa Wi

Luu (Houaïlou) where teaching is carried out in both French and Ajië, no policies of bilingual education have been put in place in New Caledonia-Kanaky. Thus, linguistic exclusion was (and remains) common, as Kanak people whose native language is not French continue to be forced, by coercive laws and practices, to learn primarily in the dominant settler language. Writing from another settler colonial society, the United States, Iyengar (2014) demonstrates that colonial language policies have been fundamental to the logic of elimination of Indigenous people in settler colonial societies. The languages of instruction are a crucial tool of settler colonial power and remain, to date, a matter of contention between the settler colonial polity and Kanak advocates of decolonisation.

Such policies contribute to the continuing erosion of Kanak languages. Today, 15 of the 28 Kanak languages are classified as "in danger" by UNESCO (Moseley 2010). Fluency in French, on the contrary, has drastically increased in recent decades. In 2000, 70% of school children spoke French as a first language, while only about 30% of their parents did (Vernaudon 2013, p. 117). Therefore, instruction in/of Kanak languages remains precarious, despite the fact that most political powers concerning the matter have been transferred from mainland France to the territory, which benefits from "unmatched institutional resources" in comparison to France's other overseas territories (*ibid*, p. 117). In the face of continuing colonial domination and such institutional reluctance, Kanak people continue to create ways to affirm and pass on Kanak cultural heritage. This "constant reformulation" (Tjibaou 1985, p. 1601) testifies of the flexibility and resilience of Kanak cultural practices (see Chap. 14 by Wadrawane in this book).

## 12.3 Resilient and Resurgent Spaces of Kanak Languages and Cultural Heritage

### 12.3.1 Haeke Language and Culture: The Kanak Oral Heritage Collection

Haeke is part of the Voh-Koohnê linguistic group, which gathers seven dialects and about 1200 speakers in total, recorded in 2009: Bwatoo, Haeke, Haveke, Hmwaeke, Hmwaveke, Vamale et Waamwang (no longer spoken). Haeke was spoken by about 300 people that year (Rivierre and Erhart 2006, p. 13). These seven dialects have strong similarities and interferences between one another. There hasn't been a tradition of written transmission of knowledge in Haeke to date, but the language is still little documented and studied. Some research was conducted by Maurice Leenhardt (1946), G.W. Grace (1955), who published a list of 200 words in Haeke, and then André-Georges Haudricourt (1963). Jean-Claude Rivierre and Sabine Erhart, who conducted surveys in the region in the 1970s and 1990s, published a dictionary in collaboration with Raymond Diéla (2006). Since 2017, Jean Rohleder (University of Bern) has studied the Vamale language, which counts only around 100 speakers, as part of his PhD thesis in Linguistics. He is currently in the process of writing, together with his research group, a dictionary; 2000 words have already been collected (VKP Infos 2018b).

Urbanisation has intensified the use and domination of French and considering the proximity of the community of Bako to the town of Koohnê, Haeke language is on the wane. Many children do not speak Haeke anymore; they communicate in French. Besides, an increasing number of adults in the community are waged workers, which also results in a loss of customary practices and use of the language (Kowasch 2011, pp. 5–6). It is in this context that the 2006 Bwatoo dictionary (which also includes Haeke) was published so as to provide a teaching material that young people could use to relearn their language (Kowasch 2011, p. 6). According to the clans in Bako, the dictionary is an important source for conserving the language. In the last few years, Haeke has been taught in pre-school and primary school "Les Almandas" in Koohnê. Nevertheless, learning Haeke remains an option, it's not compulsory. Kanak institutions have also taken the issue in their own hands.

The collection of Kanak oral history has been an important project of the ADCK. Since 2002, partnerships have been gradually established with the Kanak customary areas of Grande Terre, Hoot ma Whaap, Paicî-Cèmuhî, Ajië-Aro, Xârâcùù, and Drubea-Kapumë (Kasarhérou 2007, p. 28). The public institution appointed Kanak oral heritage collectors in each of these customary areas who, since 2002, have recorded ancestral knowledge such as songs, dances, weaving techniques, rituals, and the history of Kanak clans. Conferences and meetings between the collectors have been organised in collaboration with the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, the New Caledonia Museum, the media library of the North Province (Médiathèque du Nord) and the Pomemie Cultural Centre in Koohnê. It must be noted that due to the limited budget of the ADCK, these Kanak cultural collectors work on a voluntary basis and receive monthly compensation in return. In addition to ADCK, the ALK aims to promote and revitalise Kanak linguistic heritage. The public ALK was created in 2007 and works on the transcription of the 40 Kanak languages and dialects. The objective is to determine, for each of the languages, a writing system, that is, a standardized alphabetic code, and graphic correspondences between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (signs) (ALK 2019).

An example is the collection of toponyms in different Kanak languages. In Bako, the cultural office of the North Province commissioned cultural collectors to conduct a short

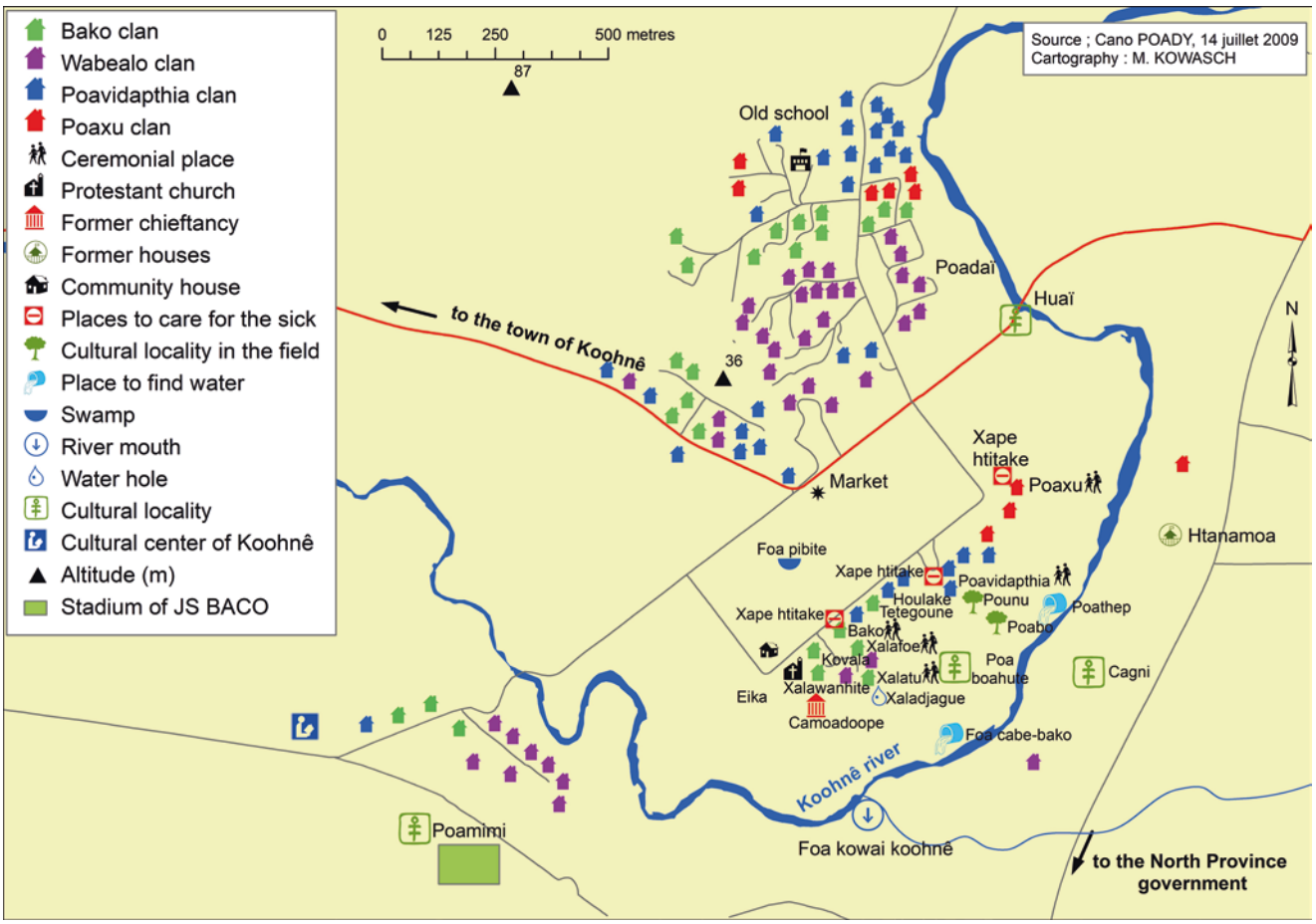


**Fig. 12.1** Map of Bako – spatial organisation and toponyms. (Source: Poady 2009 (personal communication), cartopgraphy: Kowasch and Arroyas 2023)

survey of Kanak toponyms in Paicî-Cèmuhi country. Collection of Kanak toponyms was further developed in Bako and in Netchaot by Antoine Cano Poady (in Bako), Samuel Goromido (in Netchaot) and Matthias Kowasch in 2009 as part of his doctoral studies. Informed by Antoine Cano Poady's ancestral knowledge and clan history and equipped with mapping equipment, over 20 toponyms were collected in Bako. Samuel Goromido, president of the Clan Council and former president of the New Caledonian Customary Senate, and Matthias Kowasch reported and mapped over 120 toponyms for Netchaot alone. The map of these was later presented at the Clan Council and approved by all clans in Netchaot, a Kanak community in the mountain range around 20 kilometres away from Koohnê.

Figure 12.1 shows the structure of housing and toponyms in Haeke language in Bako.

Bako did not exist before the colonial period, and its 22 clans – which arrived at different times – are assembled in four "bigger" clans: Bako, Poawidapthia, Wabealo and Poaxu (Table 12.2). Each "bigger" clan has a different colour on the map. The former chief house, former houses, and

**Table 12.2** Clans residing in the community of Bako

| "Bigger" clan | Clan |
|---|---|
| Bako | Tiaouniane, Poady, Leack, Goa, Vabou-Poithily, Wayaridri |
| Poawidapthia | Poatiba, Poameno, Poadjaré, Ounémoa, Doumi, Oudaré, Nawessa, Wellet, My, Poaraçague |
| Wabealo | Wabealo, Néa |
| Poaxu | Poemate, Nedjiara, Poanima, Poaraoupoepoe |

places where sick people were treated are sacred places; they have been named in Haeke on the map. According to the anthropologist Jean Guiart (1963/1992), the Bako clans, formerly settled in Koohnê, were joined by refugees from various repressions and European killings, notably those of Pouembout and Poya. In Haeke language, we call the clans "moatabo", which means "house where we sit". The families are named "moau" which means "clan", "house" or "lineage". In Bako, the Wabealos are the most numerous clan, followed by the Poawidapthia and the Bako clan (Kowasch 2010). The following table shows the 22 clans residing in the community of Bako:

"Camoadoope", the former chieftaincy (Fig. 12.1), is a significant cultural place. According to the former clan chief of the Tiaouniane clan (pers. inter., 20 July 2010), the term "Camadoope" means "big land" or "big land plot" in Haeke. At the time, it was the Vabou-Poithily clan who resided there. At the death of the little chief, an old Vabou-Poithily, his adopted son Fidèle (also born Vabou-Poithily) was too young to take on the chieftaincy. His brother, Louis Vabou-Poithily, was sick and drowned in the Koohnê river. The chieftaincy was therefore given to the Poemate clan (part of the larger Poaxu clan, who arrived last in the community of Bako). On the death of old Poemate in 1973, the father of Djessé Tiaouniane (of the larger Bako clan) took the leadership "on a whim" (*ibid.),* without consulting his family beforehand. However, he died 2 years later, in 1975. Subsequently, the chieftaincy returned to the Poemate. Gabriel Tibotéa, the uncle of the current president of the clan council, acted as an administrative chief between 1975 and 2001. Since then, the chieftaincy has been vacant in Bako, but the clan council has met regularly until recently. The place "Camadoope" is well known by all families who reside in the community, but the notion of "taboo" or "sacred" is being lost. The former chieftaincy used to be respected by everyone, but Djessé Tiaouniane deplores that "it is no longer taboo" today (pers. inter., 20 July 2010).

Efforts and projects to promote cultural heritage put in place by Kanak institutions and the state are also buttressed by individuals and local grassroots initiatives. For instance, the association Mwafinati based in Bako aims at promoting Haeke language and culture by opening up a cultural class (music, dance, weaving, sewing cloth) and providing learning support to the children in Bako. "Mwafinati" means "house for reading a book/paper" in Haeke, whereby "Mwa" means "house", "fina" "read" and also "counting" and "ti" "book" or "paper". Besides the work done by Mwafinati, another cultural association called "Vee Caa" ran initiatives in education. The latter helped mostly younger school children to do their homework. It also promoted Haeke language and culture. Vee Caa has two meanings in Haeke: the first refers to the coleus plant that is given to the uterine uncles of a newborn so that they receive the strength and knowledge of their uncles; the second means "knowledge" and "learning". After the dissolution of the homework support done by Vee Caa, Mwafinati was founded and set up to restore the former school building (Fig. 12.2b). The former school in Bako was a public school, and the planned taking over of the school building by the Protestant School Alliance is currently being discussed. To date, Mwafinati has not been able to start work, because of a customary conflict in Bako: a family of the Poadjare clan (of the larger Poawidapthia clan) claims the plot of land where the school building is located. The project of the association has been put on hold until an amicable agreement is reached.

In addition to Vee Caa and Mwafinati, several other groups have been created to maintain and promote cultural activities in Bako. There is a youth group performing activities (such as dances) at the parish and a women's group called "Ue Been" that organizes sewing and bingo events, for example. Moreover, there are a market association and two sculptors (Kiki and Simon Wabealo; Fig. 12.2a) in Bako.

### 12.3.2 Nââ numèè Language and Culture: Humaa-gué and Kaneka Music

The Drubea-Kapumë customary area encompasses three Kanak languages: Nââ numèè (in Touaourou, Waho, Goro and Ouen Island), Nââ kwegni (Île des Pins) and Nââ drubea (Unia and Païta). Except for Nââ numèè in Yaté, none of the


**Fig. 12.2** (**a**, **b**) Sculpture *atelier* and former school building in Bako. (Credit: Kowasch 2007, 2009)

Kanak languages taught in schools is from the Customary area Drubea-Kapumë. Nââ numèè is spoken by about 800 people. Nââ numèè also suffers from the fact that some parents favour French as they consider it necessary for their children to achieve at school. In the last decade, projects have been initiated to promote the Numèè language. In 2012, a bilingual (Numèè-French) edition of the oral story of the wild yam Nyùwâxè was written by Adolphe Ouetcho. A year later, Fabrice Saiqë Wacalie (2013) wrote a PhD thesis on Nââ numèè. In 2015, the Academy for Kanak Languages (Académie des langues kanak) has proposed and codified a written form for Numèè (Ihage 2015).

In addition to these institutional projects and programmes, people also have, at the grassroots level, created new ways and different media to express Kanak cultures and use, and to promote Kanak languages. For example, musical creation, as any artistic activity, is part of a historical process, with its contradictions and its social struggles. In the 1970s, socially and politically engaged musicians such as Jean-Pierre Swan, Kiki Karé and Théo Menango started singing about past and contemporary Kanak resistance. A new musical genre, Kaneka music, was thus born from the history of the national liberation struggle of Kanak people. A founding event was the "Tradition and creation" seminar held in Canala in 1986 (Bensignor 2013). The musicians of Kal, Kiki and Krys performed at it, along with Théo Menango, Lionel Weiri and others. Since then, Radio Djiido, the recording studio Mangrove and many concerts in Kanak communities have popularised Kaneka music. Kaneka – coined from the expression "cadence née des Kanak", meaning "rhythm born from the Kanak" (Mwà Véé 2006, p. 2) – is inspired by ancestral rhythms (the *aéaé* chants for instance) and influenced by genres from overseas. This new cultural expression has promoted Kanak cultures and people and testified of the continued creativity of Kanak contemporary art forms. Humaa-gué, a band from the Touaourou community, is another example of Kaneka music and Kanak cultural resurgence in the last few decades.

In 1991, an association whose aim was to gather young people around cultural practices and crafts was created in Touaourou. Four years later, the Kaneka band Humaa-gué was created and initiated by the Ouetcho family (Louis, Emmanuel, Hubert, Pascal and Chanel). The rhythm is based on *tedra*, an ancestral fast-paced rhythm from the south of Grande Terre, mixing ancestral (ex. pounding bamboo poles) and imported instruments (ex. harmonica) and a cappella chorus ("éaé"). Over the years, the members have changed and the musical influences and instruments varied. Regardless of these evolutions, the songs by Humaa-gué (which means "Our History" in Nââ numèè) addresses a large diversity of topics and discusses political issues: cultural life and practices in the community ("Mode de vie") as well as aspects of colonial history (ex. "Iaai"), sociopolitical issues and afflictions facing Kanak people (ex. "Alcoolonisé", meaning Alcoholonised), affirmation of Kanak independence ("Kanakydeal") and the mining industry ("Terre du sud").

**Humaa-Gue – Kanakydeal (2014)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Cher et en mon cœur tu resteras<br>Mon idéal oh ! Kanaky tant d'ignorance<br>A ton égard mais oh pourquoi | Dear and in my heart you will remain<br>My ideal, oh! Kanaky so much ignorance<br>Towards you but oh, why |
| Même si tu es l'exil de la bourgeoisie<br>Tu resteras mon paradis<br>Tant convoitée due à l'éclat de ce système | Even if you are the exile of the bourgeoisie<br>You will remain my paradise<br>So desired due to the flamboyance of this system |
| On oublie trop souvent nos tribus<br>On oublie bien souvent ces ghettos<br>De la ville<br>Même s'ils sont bien fleuris<br>Kanakydéal Kanaky | We too often forget our communitiess<br>We too often forget these ghettos<br>Of the city<br>Even if they are full of beautiful flowers<br>Kanakydeal Kanaky |
| Même si l'idéologie d'être un jour<br>En Kanaky s'en est allé pour<br>D'autres rêves où le système nous désunis | Even if the ideology to be one day<br>In Kanaky has been replaced by<br>Other dreams in which the system pulls us apart |
| N'avons-nous pas le droit d'être un jour<br>En harmonie dans ce pays où le système<br>Nous désuni pour dominer | Haven't we got the right to be one day<br>In harmony in this country where the system<br>Pulls us apart to dominate |
| On oublie trop souvent nos tribus<br>On oublie bien souvent ces ghettos<br>De la ville<br>Même s'ils sont bien fleuris<br>Kanakydeal Kanaky | We too often forget our communitiess<br>We too often forget these ghettos<br>Of the city<br>Even if they are full of beautiful flowers<br>Kanakydeal Kanaky |

The song "Militant" aims at raising awareness among today's youth to work in hand together for the country. In this country, the respect of traditions and cultural differences are precious gifts. As militants for freedom, Humaa-gué encourages people to live in harmony and in peace: the song should be a light on the path when you are in doubt.

**Militant (2015)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Où sont-ils arrivés ces gens-là<br>Avec leurs droits de combattant liés à la cause<br>Les militants de la Kanaky éa<br>Ils ont mené la vie dure<br>Laissant traces et souvenirs liés à la cause<br>L'indépendance de la Kanaky éa | Where have those people got to<br>With their combatant rights attached to the cause<br>The militants of Kanaky éa<br>They've had a difficult life<br>Leaving marks and memories linked to the cause<br>The independence of Kanaky éa |

(continued)

| | |
|---|---|
| Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé | Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé |
| Différent les uns des autres<br>Les combattants de lutte pour la cause<br>Les militants de la Kanaky éa<br>Garder le moral<br>A l'heure où l'on ne parle que de la cause<br>L'indépendance de la Kanaky éa | Different one from the other<br>The combatants of the struggle for the cause<br>The militants of Kanaky éa<br>Keeping the spirits up<br>At a time when we only talk about the cause<br>The independence of Kanaky éa |
| Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé | Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé<br>Eaé éaa éaé |
| Où sont-ils arrivés ces gens-là<br>Avec leurs droits de combattant liés à la cause<br>Les militants de la Kanaky éa<br>Ils ont mené la vie dure<br>Laissant traces et souvenirs liés à la cause<br>L'indépendance de la Kanaky éa | Where have those people got to<br>With their combatant rights attached to the cause<br>The militants of Kanaky éa<br>They had a difficult life<br>Leaving marks and memories linked to the cause<br>The independence of Kanaky éa |

**Without Title**

| | |
|---|---|
| Gué ba va é gön tchotchiri yova,<br>Mön van tchapwé,<br>Më nhgon ba tcha néta vé gue,<br>Kwé aé ön kapé é. | We ask you, my god, you, our Elders<br>That you always catch one of my feet (you show me the path)<br>Like in the past. |
| Gué ba va é gön tchotchiri yova,<br>Mön van tchapwé,<br>Më nhgon ba tcha néta vé gué,<br>Ea on gni rika. | We ask you, my god, you, our Elders,<br>That you always catch one of my feet (you show me the path)<br>Today |
| Gué roe kwan é gon tchotchiri yova,<br>Mön van tchapwé gué,<br>Hgon ba tchané ta vé gué,<br>Ku amán on ta kare. | We sing to you, my god, you, our Elders,<br>That you always catch one of my feet (you show me the path)<br>For our future |
| Na yaro tchan varekin bwë na ni metön Humma-gué,<br>Gou ré tire mwa ré tee moumwar,<br>Kete a man ke a on takare,<br>Na vee bwa mé gnarè ye oe,<br>Vee nare ba tcho ton ön. | You the young, look far ahead of you, because our Elders are no longer here,<br>One day when you will be overtaken by evolution,<br>The sacred word will bring you back to reason. |
| (Refrain)<br>Nuè makaré aé,<br>Gué rö vee nene mi gué. | (Chorus)<br>The same heart as before<br>Working hand in hand. |

## 12.4 Conclusion

After decades of land dispossession, forced labour, oppression and genocides, Kanak people and public institutions have tried to preserve and promote cultural heritage. The ADCK and the ALK work on languages, knowledge on sacred places, toponyms, myths and dances. Taking the example of the community of Bako, we have demonstrated that knowledge of toponyms and language is still present, but school education, the use of mainstream media and the proximity to Koohnê, the capital of the North Province, leads to a loss of language and cultural skills.

By 2000, 70% of school children spoke French as a first language, and by 2010, 15 out of the 28 Kanak languages were classified as "in danger" by UNESCO (Moseley 2010). Some Kanak languages are taught in schools and at university level as we have shown, but their implementation remains largely inadequate to the needs of Kanak pupils and students. Considering that, unlike other settler colonial societies, no policy of bilingual education has ever been implemented in New Caledonia-Kanaky, this deficiency in language policies is all the more glaring. More efforts should be made to implement the teaching of Kanak languages at all education levels, in a more systematic and proactive way. A loss of language is a loss of cultural diversity. Kanak knowledge systems, cultural heritage and practices should guide formal and non-formal education. That means that the entire education system needs to be rethought. Reform would contribute to the full recognition of Kanak identity required by the Nouméa Accord in 1998: "The past was the time of colonisation. The present is the time of sharing, through rebalancing" (Faberon and Postic 2004, p. 15). To achieve this sharing, power relations need to shift to ensure a thriving environment for Kanak languages, cultural heritage and practices.

More importantly, this chapter has demonstrated that in a context of colonial legacies, institutional conservatism and depleting natural resources, the initiatives undertaken by Kanak people at the grassroots level are key to the continuance of Kanak cultural heritage and practices. The work and artistic engagement of clans and associations create opportunities for Kanak that are otherwise not, or inadequately, provided by institutions. Music can be a way to (re)learn a language. Kaneka music is popular amongst young people, and bands such as Humaa-gué, from the community of Touaourou, are thus a powerful vehicle for Kanak cultural heritage and knowledge for the new generations. Humaa-gué's songs are politically engaged and tackle issues that are relevant to today's youth, from the fight for freedom to heavy drinking of alcohol. Considering the political tug-of-war that continues to characterise the territory and the continuing reluctance and fears of a large part of the population to see Kanak people asserting their rights, Kanak clans, grassroot associations and groups remain important resurgent spaces where languages and cultural heritage may survive and thrive.

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# What Future for Kanak Languages? Size and Geographic Distribution

13

Isabelle Leblic

**Abstract**

New Caledonia has 28 Kanak languages in addition to the languages brought by colonial immigration. There is remarkable linguistic diversity, and the recognition of Kanak languages has always been central to independence claims. Since the mid-2000s, about ten of them have been taught from primary school to university (about ten of them are taught as options in primary schools and only four in universities), and it is important to ask what future Kanak languages have among today's younger generations. The heavy impact of the colonial system, and the Nouméa Accord of 1998, means questions of language are still relevant today. Kanak languages and cultures are at the centre of the decolonisation process.

**Keywords**

Kanak languages · Linguistic diversity · Geographic spread · Decolonisation · Teaching

## 13.1 Introduction

> 80.3% of Kanak people aged 14 and older indicate that they fluently speak one or several Kanak languages, 12.6% that they do not speak but understand at least one language, and 7.1% that they neither speak nor understand a Kanak language. (Rivoilan 2020, p. 5)

After nearly 170 years of colonisation and domination of Kanak languages, they still exist. What are the reasons for this? And how will they continue to find their place in Kanaky-New Caledonia of tomorrow? This overview of Kanak languages should allow us to answer these questions.

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## 13.2 Recognition of Kanak Languages and Pro-independence Demands

The above excerpt from the first available analysis of the latest general population census, in 2019, shows that Kanak languages are still very much alive (92.9% of all Kanak people over the age of 14 have knowledge of at least one language), even though these claims are purely declarative. This shows that Kanak people wish to keep their languages alive and consider them a very strong symbol of their identity, especially as the political debates over self-determination continue. There are indications that the vernacular languages on the whole are vibrant, with 28 languages spoken by over 75,000 people, out of a total of 271,407 inhabitants (2019 Census). In fact, Kanak languages have always been at the heart of pro-independence activism, notably during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and more particularly in the 1980s, during the revolutionary period known as the "*Événements*" [Events]—which began with the boycott of local elections and the Lemoine status on 18 November 1984. Notably, this led to the boycott of so-called colonial schools and a movement in favor of Local Kanak Schools (EPK, *Écoles Populaires Kanak*) between February 1985 and 1988, the first real attempt to provide instruction in Kanak languages.

> No language policy favourable to the Kanak was developed before the colonial order was challenged in modern times. (Rivierre 1985, p. 1691)

If we take up in a few lines the colonial history in connection with Kanak languages, the prohibition of their use at school goes back to the decree of Governor Guillain in 1853. This prefigured "the constant attitude of the authorities: the refusal to grant rights to local languages, their banishment from teaching and public life" (Rivierre 1985, p. 1693). As a result, as early as 1921, a decree forbade all use of indigenous languages, even in school playgrounds. According to Rivierre (1985), these repeated bans (the last one in 1923) had little real effect on the daily life of Kanak



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people, who nevertheless continued to speak their languages and pass them on to their children. If Kanak children have had access to the French language, it was for a long time only through missionary action, Catholic or Protestant, and this, only after the first world war (more than 70 years after colonisation.

In this context the use of vernacular languages as the first language of instruction for young children was one of the Kanak demands within the pro-independence movement FI (*Front indépendantiste*) and then by FLNKS (*Front de libération nationale kanak socialiste*) to obtain recognition of their cultural legitimacy and their right to independence. Experiments in Local Kanak Schools (EPK) beginning in February 1985 made use of the vernacular languages for teaching the "traditional" and "school" knowledge that all Kanak children should know (see Chap. 14 by Wadrawane in this book). In contrast to so-called "colonial school," the children learned through participation rather than observation. Nevertheless, Nechero et al. (2015, p. 82) note: "The movement quickly started losing steam: out of the 40 EPK that were set up after school started in 1985, only nine were left 3 years later, following the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords. Only two schools remained in the 1990s."

This demand for local language instruction nonetheless served to ensure that Kanak languages and cultures were factored into the political agreements that followed (the Matignon-Oundinot Accords in 1988, and then the Nouméa Accord in 1998) and established their importance in the school curricula in New Caledonia (Salaün 2017). We will return to this issue after presenting the Kanak languages.

## 13.3 Linguistic Diversity and a Remarkable Geographic Spread

The numbers of languages spoken in New Caledonia over time are difficult to quantify. According to Moyse-Faurie et al. (2012, p. 119; see also Baudchon 1997), there are currently upward of 30. In addition to the Kanak languages, there are those of people who migrated as part of colonization or settlement (Wallisian, Futunian, Tahitian, Indonesian, Javanese, Vietnamese...). There is also Tayo, a Creole language spoken in the region of La Conception Saint-Louis, in Greater Nouméa (including the municipalities of Nouméa, Mont-Dore, Dumbéa, and Païta), developed by Kanak populations from various regions attending the Marist Roman Catholic mission station, mostly from the main island Grande Terre. French became the only official language upon colonisation, but the diversity of Kanak languages has endured. These languages are as much a marker of Kanak identity, reaffirmed to a greater or lesser extent depending on the period in colonial history, as they are a means of communication (see also Vernaudon 2013). Across the New Caledonian archipelago, which includes the main inhabited islands of Grande Terre (450 km long and 50–70 km wide), the Loyalty Islands (Lifou, Maré, Ouvéa and Tiga), the Bélep Islands, Isle of Pines and Ouen Island, about 30 languages were noted at the beginning of colonisation (Leenhardt 1946a, p. XIV).[1] According to Ihage (2014), there are currently 40 languages and dialects spoken in New Caledonia. Among them, 28 languages are divided into three main groups. Twenty-four languages on Grande Terre and four in the Loyalty Islands thus still exist after more than a century and a half of French presence (see also Rivierre 2003). The number of speakers remains high: 75,853 speakers in 2019[2] as compared to 70,428 in 2009, with between 36,309 and 40,115 speakers, respectively, within their own linguistic area, that is, nearly half (47.87%) or three fifths (56.96%). Therefore, the proportion of speakers outside the linguistic area of the languages has increased (see Tables 13.5 and 13.6 and Fig. 13.1).

According to Rivierre (1985, p. 1689), "there are no natural borders between languages and the linguistic communities are closely linked through matrimonial and political alliances. Their social and geographic proximity maintains multilingualism which is more or less pronounced depending on the region." Rivierre (2003, p. 347) specifies: "This linguistic fragmentation can be explained both by the fact that settlement took place over 3000 years ago, and by the structure of traditional Kanak society, broken down into multiple 'chiefdoms' and political configurations striving to be distinct."

Rivierre (2003) establishes a finely grained geographic distribution of the Grande Terre Kanak languages. This served to inform our ISEE map of Kanak languages based on the 2014 general population census data (see Fig. 13.1), the details of which are provided in Table 13.1.

Of remarkable diversity and complexity as compared to other Oceanic languages, these 28 Kanak languages belong to the Austronesian language family (Oceanian subgroup of the eastern Malayo-Polynesian branch). They have grammars

[1] Based on inquiries carried out before the 1930s, Leenhardt (1946b, p. X-XIV) listed 36 languages, although he notes that forty languages or dialects are currently spoken in the New Caledonian archipelago by 29,000 indigenous people. Four have been set by translating the bible (De'u on Lifou 1890, Iai on Ouvéa 1901, Nengone on Mare, 103, Ajiē on Houaïlou […] 1923 […] 1939). I have respected the author's spelling.

[2] For 2019, a number of people who declared speaking a language did not say which one; thus, in Table 13.6 below, there are only 66,122 speakers, of which 36,309 are located in their own linguistic area and 29,813 outside.

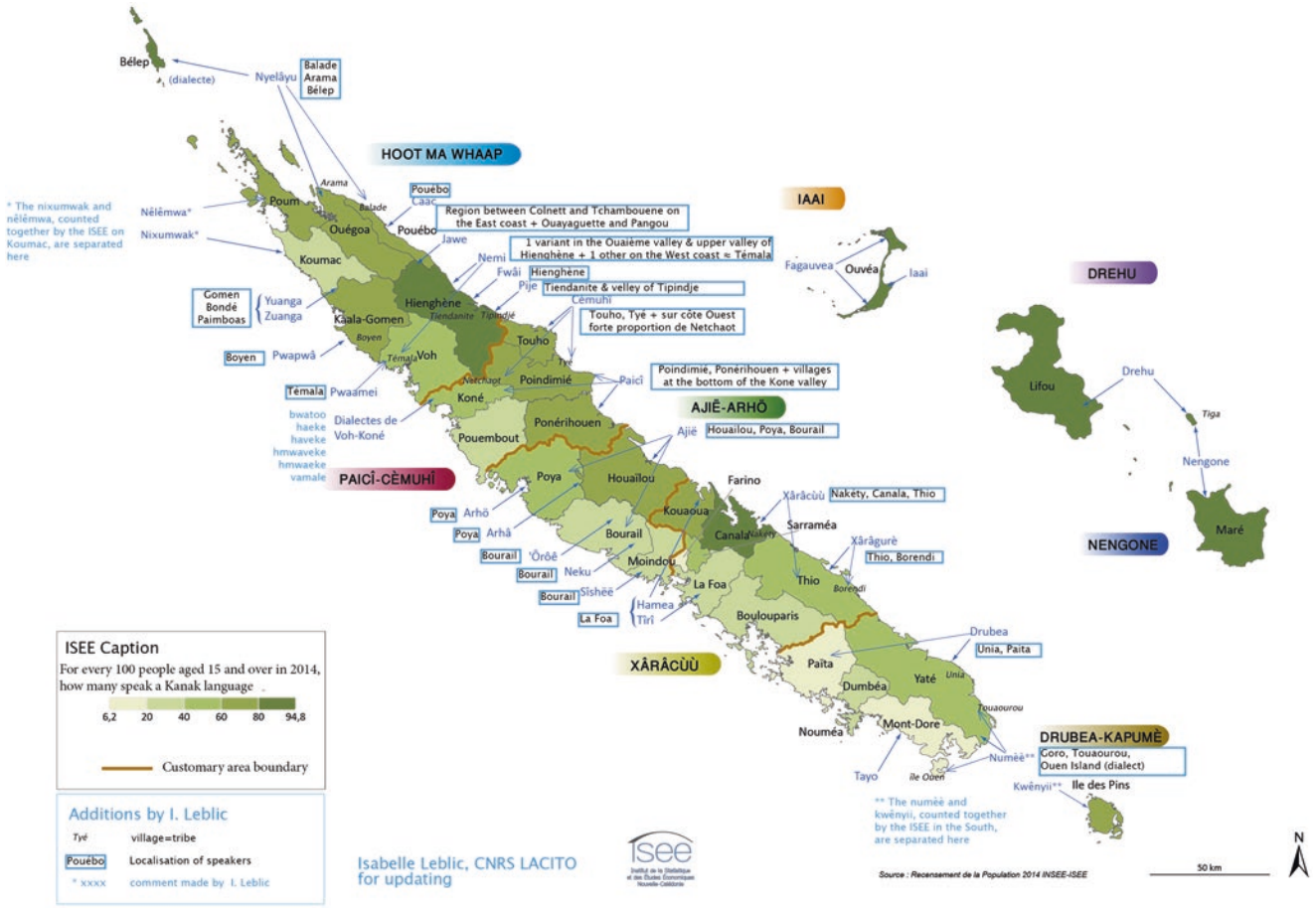



**Fig. 13.1** Distribution of the Kanak languages by customary area, municipality and number of speakers. (Based on the ISEE 2014 Census "Les langues kanak," completed by Leblic based on data on the geographical distribution of languages established by Rivierre 2003)

that are almost as differentiated as their phonological systems.

> All [Kanak languages] belong to the "New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands" sub-group, directly stemming from distant Proto-Oceanic, with the exception of Fagauvea which belongs to the "Nuclear Polynesian" sub-group, a language which was introduced to Ouvéa a few centuries ago following east-west Polynesian migrations from various islands, most probably Wallis, Samoa, Futuna, and Tonga according to oral traditions and the comparative study of the Polynesian languages. (Moyse-Faurie et al. 2012, pl. 26, 120)

Generally speaking, Kanak people were multilingual. Many of them could understand their close neighbours' languages, and alliances beyond their linguistic area made it easier for the children of mixed parentage to speak the languages of both parents and even those of the grandparents if different. Today, the situation is no longer so clear-cut, French having become for many the priority language of communication. The data available from the New Caledonian census nonetheless attest the ongoing importance of local languages.

## 13.4 Comparative Analysis of Data Contained in the General Population Census (from 1996 to 2019)

The 1996 general population census totalled 86,788 Kanak people (44.1%) and 67,151 Europeans (34.1%), out of a total population of 196,836. According to this census, New Caledonia had a total of 53,566 speakers of vernacular languages, with slightly more women than men and roughly half belonging to the 15–34 age group. The languages with the highest number of speakers were Drehu (a Lifou language) with 11,338 speakers, Nengone (a Maré language) with 6,377 speakers and Paicî (a central Grande Terre language) with 5,498 speakers.

The data in Table 13.2 show constant growth in the number of speakers, probably proportionate to demographic growth,[3] but with two significant increases, 14.5% between 1996 and 2004 then 10.9% between 2014 and 2019. These

[3]Unfortunately, I do not have information on speaker population changes by age group.

**Table 13.1** Geographic language distribution (see Rivierre 2003)

| Areas[a] | Languages | Geographic distribution |
|---|---|---|
| Hoot ma Waap | Nyelâyu | Balade, Arama, Bélep Islands (dialect) |
| | Nixumwak | Koumac |
| | Nêlêmwa | Poum |
| | Caac | Pouébo |
| | Yuanga | Gome, Bondé, Paimboas |
| | Jawe | East coast: region between Colnett and Tchambouene; inland: Ouayagette, Pangou |
| | Nemi | Variant in the Ouaième valley and the upper Hienghène valley |
| | Fwâi | Hienghène |
| | Pijé | Tiendanite and Tipindjé valley |
| | Pwaamei | Témala |
| | Pwapwâ | Boyen |
| | Voh-Koné: Bwatoo, Haeke, Haveke, Hmwaveke, Hmwaeke, Vamale (Waamwang) dialects | Voh-Koné region Vamale, a variant of Hmwaveke, is spoken in Téganpaik and Tiouandé, on the East coast |
| Paici-Camuki | Paicî | Ponérihoun, Poindimié, villages in the Koné region |
| | Cèmuhî | Touho, Tyé and on the West coast a high proportion of Netchaot village |
| Ajie-Aro | Ajië | Houilou region, Poya, Bourail |
| | Arhâ | Poya region |
| | Arhö | Poya region |
| | ‘Ôrôê | Bourail region |
| | Neku | Bourail region |
| | (Sîshëë) | Bourail region |
| Xaracuu | Xârâcùù | Nakéty, Canala, Thio |
| | Tîrî | La Foa region |
| | Xârâgurè | Thio, Borendi |
| Djubea-Kapone | Drubéa | Ounia, Paita |
| | Numèè | Goro, Touaourou, Ouen Island (dialect) |
| | Kwênyii | Isle of Pines |
| Nengone | Nengone | Maré |
| Drehu | Drehu | Lifou |
| Iaai | Iaai | Central region of Ouvéa |
| | Fagauvea | North and south of Ouvéa |

([a]in the official spelling of New Caledonia)

languages continue to be spoken, with variations depending on the language and the year.

Today, according to the 2019 census, the number of speakers varies from a few (ten for Sîchëë (Sishë), a language spoken in the centre of Grande Terre) to several thousand (Drehu with 15,875 speakers is still the most widely spoken Kanak language).

Now that a large number of Kanak people live in Greater Nouméa (see Chap. 11 by Pantz in this book), approximately one out of three speakers (1996–2009) to approximately two out of five (2014–2019) live in the capital or its suburbs, outside their original linguistic area (see Table 13.3). Indeed, Greater Nouméa is where most jobs are found. Regular trips back to the community for school vacations have prevented language loss in favour of French among children. Some Kanak children don’t speak their languages properly, but I have the impression that once they are adults their mastery is sufficient to ensure the future of these vernacular languages. And the fact that for the past 20 years, many Kanak languages have been introduced in school teaching in Greater Nouméa, although for a very few hours (wholesale 1/2 hour per week), means that many children could be introduced to Kanak languages and culture. Is this enough to make them fluent in the mother tongues? Nothing is less certain.

Jacqueline de la Fontinelle (2014, p. 8) notes: “The disinterest of a generation signals the disappearance of a language. Can the disappearance announced for the Sishë language be further postponed?”

This is indeed a question that arises regularly with announcements about the extinction of Kanak languages, but the evidence suggests that it is premature. I have witnessed this on the Isle of Pines and around Goro upon returning 20 years after my first fieldwork, and also in Ponérihouen. It is true, however, that some languages are officially endangered (see the documentation of endangered languages at www.sorosoro.org).

Some 84.6% of Kanak between the ages of 14 and 29 declared, in the 1996 Census, continuing to speak a vernacular language, as compared to 94.9% for those over the age of 30. Certainly, in community areas—there are 341 Kanak communities where 28.7% of the population resides—the language spoken daily at home is usually the vernacular language of the region, even if one of the parents if one comes from a different linguistic area. Even though French is used at school, children nonetheless continue to speak their language outside school. Similarly, in daily life, as I observed in Ponérihouen, Kanak people mainly speak to each other in their local tongue. It is only on occasions bringing together people from different linguistic areas that French is used as a lingua franca.

There were 18,528 Kanak language speakers in 2019 in Nouméa, rising to 33,505 if one takes into account the metropolitan area of (Greater Nouméa). This equates to 44.2% of all the territory’s speakers declared in the 2019 general population census. By comparison, back in 2009, Greater Nouméa was already home to 90% of Kanak language speakers living outside their linguistic area. The Loyalty Islands languages (Drehu, Nengone, Iaai, and Fagauvea by number of speakers) are a majority with 12,432 speakers in Greater Nouméa. The high number of speakers of Kanak languages outside their linguistic area is noteworthy, and in the 2019 Census, they still amounted

**Table 13.2** Changes in the number of speakers aged 14 and older per vernacular language

| | | 1996 | 2004 | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of speakers per language spoken[a] | | | | | |
| Extreme Northern group | Caac | 800 | 1,005 | 1,165 | 1,072 | 847 |
| | Nyelâyu | 1,522 | 1694 | 1,956 | 2,005 | 1,871 |
| | Nêlêmwa-Nixumwak | 847 | 739 | 1,090 | 946 | 798 |
| | Yuanga | 1,992 | 2,124 | 2,401 | 2,504 | 1,975 |
| Northern group | Jawe | 729 | 635 | 990 | 892 | 746 |
| | Nemi | 768 | 911 | 908 | 845 | 825 |
| | Pwapwâ | 16 | 84 | 39 | 79 | 27 |
| | Fwâi | 1,131 | 1,550 | 1,859 | 1,690 | 1,561 |
| | Pwaamei | 219 | 210 | 292 | 299 | 223 |
| | Pijé | 161 | 184 | 183 | 160 | 114 |
| | Voh-Koné dialects | 993 | 980 | 1,212 | 1,081 | 952 |
| Central group | Cèmuhî | 2,051 | 2,139 | 2,602 | 2,400 | 2,234 |
| | Paicî | 5,498 | 6,056 | 7,252 | 6,866 | 6,530 |
| Southern group | Ajië | 4,044 | 5,051 | 5,358 | 5,019 | 4,449 |
| | Arhâ | 35 | 59 | 166 | 135 | 19 |
| | Arhö | 62 | 264 | 349 | 291 | 186 |
| | ‘Ôrôê | 587 | 355 | 490 | 429 | 373 |
| | Neku | 221 | 320 | 125 | 86 | 115 |
| | Tîrî | 558 | 481 | 619 | 472 | 393 |
| | Sîchëë | 4 | 3 | 19 | 20 | 10 |
| | Xârâcùù | 3,784 | 4,816 | 5,730 | 5,287 | 5,645 |
| | Xârâgurè | 566 | 632 | 758 | 751 | 589 |
| Extreme Southern group | Drubéa | 946 | 1,154 | 1,211 | 1,268 | 1,022 |
| | Extreme Southern dialects | 1,814 | 1,582 | 2,184 | 1,943 | 1,618 |
| | Tayo | 609 | 376 | 904 | 1,033 | 1,052 |
| Loyalty Islands group | Nengone | 6377 | 7,958 | 8,721 | 8,940 | 9,356 |
| | Drehu | 11,338 | 13,249 | 15,586 | 15,949 | 15,875 |
| | Iaai | 1,562 | 2,464 | 4,181 | 3,821 | 3,714 |
| | Faga uvea | 1,107 | 1,614 | 2,219 | 2,062 | 2,066 |
| Total number of distinct speakers | | 53,566 | 62,648 | 65,510 | 67,589 | 75,853 |
| Changes in number | | | 9,082 | 2,862 | 2,079 | 8,264 |
| Changes in % | | | 14.50 | 4.37 | 3.08 | 10.89 |

Source: New Caledonia population census, INSEE-ISEE, data updated on 28 September 2021

[a]A single person may declare speaking one or several languages. Furthermore, some people declared speaking a Kanak language without specifying which one, which is why the total per language does not necessarily correspond to the total number of distinct speakers

to 88.1% in Greater Nouméa. And, as in 2009, speakers of Loyalty Islands languages are more numerous in Greater Nouméa than on their islands of origin: 59.1% for Drehu, 56.2% for Iaai, 55.6% for Fagauvea, and 52.9% for Nengone. But this is not the case for Grande Terre languages.

Analysis of data provided by successive censuses shows that the proportion of 15 years and older peoples who declare speaking or understanding a Kanak language is increasing (Table 13.3). The last census (2019) establishes that 97.7% of Kanak people from the Loyalty Islands (95.5% of men and 95.9% of women) speak or understand a Kanak language. The figures are 76.2% in North Province (76.6% of men and 75.9% of women) and 31.7% in South Province (30.9% of men and 32.6% of women). In total, 92,794 people declare that they speak or understand a Kanak language, that is, 44% of inhabitants aged 15 and older. The percentage was 38.8% in 2014, 41.3% in 2009 and in 2004, and 37.9% in 1996. Should this revival of vernacular languages of people aged 15 and over be linked to political demands for independence? This is a question that must be asked in light of the recent history of Kanak claims and the results of the 2018 and 2020 referendums (see Leblic 2022).

## 13.5 The Use of Kanak Languages in Teaching

Before specifying the use of Kanak languages in the school system (Anonymous 1989), we should recall that French remains the main language of instruction in schools.

**Table 13.3** Changes in the number of speakers of a vernacular language aged 15 and older per municipality

| | Municipalities | 1996 | 2004[a] | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Province | Bélep | 586 | 612 | 607 | 582 | 665 |
| | Canala | 1,888 | 2,267 | 2,240 | 2,484 | 2,555 |
| | Hienghène | 1394 | 1710 | 1597 | 1596 | 1724 |
| | Houaïlou | 2,320 | 2,708 | 2,402 | 2,313 | 2,276 |
| | Kaala-Gomen | 885 | 922 | 904 | 935 | 824 |
| | Koné | 1,512 | 1,713 | 1,785 | 2,197 | 2,533 |
| | Kouaoua | 708 | 857 | 779 | 767 | 776 |
| | Koumac | 566 | 539 | 802 | 832 | 820 |
| | Ouégoa | 982 | 996 | 1,035 | 1,249 | 1,078 |
| | North Poya[b] | 951 | 936 | 1093 | 1135 | 1093 |
| | Touho | 1,201 | 1,224 | 1,327 | 1,127 | 1,274 |
| | Voh | 858 | 1063 | 1042 | 1154 | 1138 |
| Total North Province | | 15,847 | 15,547 | 17,622 | 18,385 | 18,775 |
| Loyalty Islands Prov. | Lifou | 5,970 | 6,291 | 5,559 | 6,194 | 6306 |
| | Maré | 4,042 | 4,703 | 3,484 | 3,195 | 4,023 |
| | Ouvéa | 2,366 | 3,038 | 2,304 | 2,172 | 2,363 |
| Total Loyalty Islands Province | | 12,378 | 14,032 | 11,347 | 11,561 | 12,692 |
| South Province | Bouloupari | 391 | 522 | 491 | 539 | 584 |
| | Bourail | 988 | 1,020 | 1,094 | 933 | 1,075 |
| | Dumbéa[c] | 1,686 | 2,777 | 3,859 | 5,538 | 7,324 |
| | Farino | 18 | 36 | 34 | 29 | 58 |
| | Isle of Pines | 992 | 1,053 | 1,207 | 1,074 | 1,200 |
| | La Foa | 492 | 455 | 673 | 570 | 607 |
| | Moindou | 200 | 178 | 220 | 190 | 187 |
| | Mont-Dore[c] | 2,155 | 2,465 | 3,083 | 3,590 | 4,549 |
| | Nouméa[c] | 11,577 | 14,206 | 16,523 | 16,039 | 18,528 |
| | Païta[c] | 818 | 1,328 | 2,290 | 2,208 | 3,104 |
| | Poindimié | 2,285 | 2,615 | 2,611 | 2,741 | 2,857 |
| | Ponérihouen | 1,486 | 1,684 | 1,426 | 1,437 | 1,431 |
| | Pouébo | 1,394 | 1,518 | 1,551 | 1472 | 1,479 |
| | Pouembout | 239 | 282 | 448 | 514 | 500 |
| | Poum | 654 | 626 | 749 | 715 | 761 |
| | South Poya[b] | 951 | 936 | 1,093 | 1,135 | 1,093 |
| | Sarraméa | 252 | 339 | 268 | 229 | 273 |
| | Thio | 1,078 | 1,207 | 1,202 | 1,102 | 1,147 |
| | Yaté | 632 | 758 | 821 | 737 | 741 |
| Total South Province | | 28,288 | 34,005 | 39,643 | 40,792 | 47,498 |
| Total Greater Nouméa (***) | | 16,236 | 20,776 | 25,755 | 27,375 | 33,505 |
| Relative number of speakers in Greater Nouméa ([c]) | | 30.3% | 33.2% | 39.3% | 40.5% | 44.2% |
| New Caledonia | | 53,566 | 62,648 | 65,510 | 67,589 | 75,853 |

Source: New Caledonia population census, INSEE-ISEE, data updated on 29 October 2020
[a]Population 14 and older (see Table 13.4 for an example of breakdown by age in 2019)
[b]Total for Poya municipality
[c]For municipalities part of Greater Nouméa

**Table 13.4** Breakdown by age of Kanak population (2019)

| Community Kanak total | Under 10 | 10–19 | 20–29 | 30–39 | 40–49 | 50–59 | 60–69 | 70–79 | 80 and above |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 111,856 | 17,488 | 18,763 | 18,520 | 17,402 | 15,429 | 11,855 | 7,475 | 3,671 | 1,253 |

Source: 2019 Census

**Table 13.5** Number of speakers aged 14 and older per Kanak language and place of residence

| Provinces | Linguistic area | Extreme Northern Group | | | | Northern Group | | | | | | | Central Group | | Southern Group | | | | | | | | | Extreme Southern Group | | | Loyalty Islands Group | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kanak languages / Municipalities | Caac | Nyelâyu | Nêlê-mwa, nixumwak | Yuanga, zuanga | Jawe | Nemi | Pwapwâ | Fwâi | Pwaamei | Pije | Dialect Voh-Koné | Cèmuhî | Paicî | Ajië | Arhâ | Arhö | Ôrôê | Nêku | Tîrî haméa | Sîchëë | Xârâcùù | Xârâgurè | Drubea | Dialect Extr. Sud | Tayo | Nengone | Drehu | Iaai | Faga-uvea | |
| North | Belep | 0 | 630 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 639 |
| | **Canala** | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 4 | 16 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 2208 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 0 | 10 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 2342 |
| | **Hienghène** | 0 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 167 | 373 | 1 | 1051 | 4 | 89 | 11 | 11 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 1758 |
| | **Houaïlou** | 5 | 4 | 7 | 13 | 4 | 17 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 18 | 44 | 2208 | 0 | 9 | 10 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 36 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 35 | 57 | 19 | 8 | 2526 |
| | Kaala-Gomen | 3 | 8 | 14 | 778 | 18 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 20 | 27 | 11 | 2 | 945 |
| | **Koné** | 9 | 5 | 9 | 13 | 6 | 16 | 0 | 24 | 4 | 3 | 240 | 432 | 954 | 55 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 39 | 1 | 13 | 9 | 1 | 31 | 118 | 19 | 6 | 2016 |
| | Kouaoua | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 14 | 492 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 199 | 0 | 177 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 913 |
| | **Koumac** | 24 | 46 | 424 | 127 | 8 | 13 | 0 | 20 | 2 | 0 | 19 | 11 | 29 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 22 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 32 | 35 | 15 | 2 | 857 |
| | Ouégoa | 23 | 101 | 3 | 866 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 18 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 1086 |
| | Poindimié | 15 | 12 | 7 | 14 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 26 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 527 | 2150 | 48 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 39 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 17 | 66 | 11 | 4 | 2972 |
| | Ponérihouen | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 1242 | 193 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 1514 |
| | Pouébo | 644 | 253 | 13 | 77 | 543 | 4 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 12 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 5 | 1 | 1623 |
| | Pouembout | 8 | 11 | 6 | 13 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 15 | 2 | 0 | 13 | 31 | 240 | 46 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 31 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 16 | 17 | 8 | 1 | 482 |
| | Poum | 5 | 261 | 433 | 27 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 15 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 18 | 5 | 3 | 835 |
| | Poya North * | 3 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 114 | 9 | 547 | 334 | 133 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 12 | 22 | 4 | 8 | 1248 |
| | Touho | 4 | 18 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 18 | 0 | 34 | 3 | 47 | 110 | 1033 | 60 | 24 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 16 | 15 | 3 | 2 | 1418 |
| | Voh | 1 | 5 | 2 | 20 | 21 | 195 | 32 | 14 | 192 | 0 | 486 | 2 | 51 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 18 | 25 | 4 | 3 | 1111 |
| Loyalty | **Lifou** | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 143 | 5569 | 27 | 9 | 5803 |
| | **Maré** | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 3544 | 109 | 15 | 0 | 3715 |
| | **Ouvéa** | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 24 | 34 | 1524 | 996 | 2601 |
| South | Boulouparis | 9 | 4 | 1 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 20 | 22 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 327 | 8 | 21 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 19 | 13 | 2 | 533 |
| | **Bourail** | 16 | 16 | 4 | 13 | 24 | 7 | 0 | 13 | 4 | 0 | 14 | 16 | 72 | 279 | 3 | 172 | 441 | 38 | 7 | 0 | 39 | 1 | 11 | 18 | 3 | 41 | 41 | 19 | 10 | 1322 |
| | Dumbéa * | 74 | 70 | 32 | 81 | 20 | 37 | 2 | 108 | 14 | 2 | 29 | 47 | 260 | 191 | 1 | 21 | 1 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 190 | 21 | 35 | 87 | 52 | 530 | 1637 | 341 | 148 | 4051 |
| | Farino | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 39 |
| | **Île-des-Pins** | 2 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 1174 | 4 | 14 | 10 | 3 | 2 | 1245 |
| | La Foa | 2 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 21 | 35 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 96 | 0 | 477 | 0 | 16 | 13 | 2 | 7 | 12 | 16 | 6 | 743 |
| | Moindou | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 39 | 0 | 24 | 10 | 41 | 105 | 10 | 20 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 273 |
| | Mont-Dore * | 66 | 147 | 24 | 20 | 12 | 12 | 0 | 48 | 4 | 6 | 21 | 38 | 181 | 177 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 10 | 13 | 0 | 157 | 17 | 53 | 95 | 726 | 396 | 728 | 157 | 94 | 3211 |
| | Nouméa * | 203 | 287 | 82 | 251 | 82 | 128 | 3 | 339 | 36 | 28 | 85 | 272 | 992 | 860 | 10 | 79 | 12 | 11 | 39 | 7 | 818 | 84 | 191 | 348 | 77 | 3529 | 6441 | 1691 | 771 | 17756 |
| | Païta * | 38 | 39 | 6 | 21 | 7 | 42 | 0 | 58 | 8 | 3 | 18 | 85 | 224 | 182 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 11 | 12 | 0 | 173 | 10 | 429 | 42 | 19 | 204 | 489 | 121 | 126 | 2391 |
| | Poya South * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sarraméa | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 83 | 0 | 177 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 292 |
| | **Thio** | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 20 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 628 | 589 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 12 | 5 | 3 | 1326 |
| | **Yaté** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 17 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 31 | 10 | 374 | 333 | 0 | 5 | 20 | 18 | 2 | 842 |
| | **New Caledonia** | 1165 | 1955 | 1 090 | 2 400 | 990 | 908 | 39 | 1 858 | 292 | 183 | 1 203 | 2 602 | 7 252 | 5 356 | 166 | 349 | 490 | 125 | 596 | 19 | 5 729 | 758 | 1 211 | 2 184 | 904 | 8 721 | 15 586 | 4 078 | 2 219 | 70 428 |
| Total | **Speakers inside linguistic aera** | 644 | 1245 | 857 | 1 848 | 710 | 568 | 32 | 1 051 | 192 | 136 | 849 | 1 992 | 5 244 | 3 506 | 133 | 172 | 441 | 79 | 483 | 10 | 3 856 | 589 | 1 082 | 2 037 | 726 | 3 544 | 5 569 | 1 524 | 996 | 40 115 |
| | Grand Nouméa | 381 | 543 | 144 | 373 | 121 | 219 | 5 | 553 | 62 | 39 | 153 | 442 | 1657 | 1410 | 23 | 115 | 19 | 43 | 71 | 9 | 1338 | 132 | 708 | 572 | 874 | 4659 | 9295 | 2310 | 1139 | 57 |
| | North Province | 749 | 1372 | 936 | 1971 | 834 | 673 | 34 | 1234 | 224 | 141 | 1026 | 2098 | 5389 | 3011 | 136 | 34 | 12 | 2 | 30 | 0 | 2491 | 11 | 54 | 55 | 16 | 256 | 450 | 123 | 49 | 23411 |
| | Loyalty islands Province | 3 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 26 | 29 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 19 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 3711 | 5712 | 1566 | 1005 | 12119 |
| | **South Province** | 413 | 577 | 153 | 423 | 152 | 234 | 5 | 616 | 68 | 41 | 177 | 500 | 1837 | 2316 | 30 | 313 | 476 | 123 | 565 | 19 | 3219 | 745 | 1156 | 2121 | 887 | 4754 | 9424 | 2389 | 1165 | 34898 |
| | **Total speakers** /language | 847 | 1871 | 798 | 1975 | 748 | 825 | 27 | 1561 | 223 | 114 | 952 | 2234 | 6530 | 4449 | 19 | 186 | 373 | 115 | 393 | 10 | 5645 | 589 | 1022 | 1618 | 1052 | 9356 | 15875 | 3714 | 2066 | 75853 |

Source: Data from the 2009 ISEE Census

Note: an individual may speak two languages. *Blue colour blue includes municipalities of Greater Nouméa. *Poya North (North Province) and Poya South (South Province) are not separated. The data for the municipality of Poya appears in Poya North. Figures in bold red type indicate the speakers of each language in the linguistic area

**Table 13.6** Number of speakers aged 15 and older per Kanak language and place of residence

| Provinces | Linguistic area | Extreme Northern Group | | | | Northern Group | | | | | | | Central Group | | Southern Group | | | | | | | | Extreme Southern Group | | | Loyalty islands Group | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kanak languages / Municipalities | Caac | Nyelâyu | Nêlêmwa, nixumwak | Yuanga, zuanga | Jawe | Nemi | Pwapwâ | Fwâi | Pwaamei | Pije | Dialect Voh-Koné | Cèmuhî | Paicî | Ajië | Arhâ | Arhö | Ôrôê | Neku | Tîrî haméa | Sîchëë | Xârâcùù | Xârâgurè | Drubea | Dialect Extr. Sud | Tayo | Nengone | Drehu | Iaai | Fagauvea | |
| North | Belep | | 650 | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | 639 |
| | **Canala** | 4 | 3 | 4 | 6 | | 2 | | 1 | | | 1 | | 16 | 24 | | | | | 1 | | 2365 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 12 | 22 | 9 | 2 | 2342 |
| | **Hienghène** | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 197 | 356 | 1 | 962 | 2 | 73 | 43 | 11 | 6 | 4 | | | | | | | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 1758 |
| | **Houaïlou** | 2 | 5 | 3 | 12 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 12 | | | 4 | 10 | 42 | 1948 | | 5 | 11 | | 5 | | 31 | | 4 | 1 | 2 | 33 | 47 | 13 | 3 | 2526 |
| | Kaala-Gomen | 1 | 3 | 2 | 593 | 21 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 3 | | 11 | 6 | | | 2 | | | | 2 | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 18 | 9 | 2 | 945 |
| | **Koné** | 21 | 14 | 22 | 25 | 24 | 29 | | 45 | 7 | 1 | 229 | 465 | 888 | 76 | 1 | 2 | | 1 | 4 | | 58 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 85 | 200 | 42 | 18 | 2016 |
| | Kouaoua | | 3 | | 1 | 2 | | | 1 | | | | 2 | 6 | 392 | | 6 | | | 159 | | 148 | 3 | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 3 | | |
| | **Koumac** | 9 | 38 | 225 | 87 | 17 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | | 5 | 8 | 35 | 13 | | 1 | | | 4 | | 25 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 30 | 46 | 12 | 2 | 857 |
| | Ouégoa | 15 | 88 | | 784 | 9 | 1 | | 2 | | | 2 | 1 | 23 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | | 6 | 3 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | 3 | 1086 |
| | Poindimié | 9 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 26 | 4 | 3 | 10 | 378 | 2096 | 44 | | | | | | | 31 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 20 | 53 | 10 | 4 | 2972 |
| | Ponérihouen | | 4 | 1 | 2 | | 5 | | 9 | | | 4 | 9 | 1159 | 153 | | | | | 6 | | 6 | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 1514 |
| | Pouébo | 485 | 286 | 4 | 35 | 291 | | | 8 | 1 | | | 3 | 9 | 3 | | | | | | | 6 | | 3 | 3 | | 6 | 13 | 5 | 3 | 1623 |
| | Pouembout | 7 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 3 | | 6 | 1 | 1 | 14 | 23 | 209 | 25 | | | | | | | 18 | | 5 | | | 36 | 29 | 7 | 10 | 482 |
| | Poum | | 237 | 373 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | 2 | 4 | 5 | 12 | | 1 | | | 1 | | 6 | | 3 | 2 | | 23 | 12 | 11 | 2 | 835 |
| | Poya North * | 1 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 | | 6 | 1 | | 77 | 11 | 445 | 261 | 12 | 24 | 2 | | | | 13 | | 2 | | 2 | 11 | 17 | 5 | 10 | 1248 |
| | Touho | 3 | 7 | 2 | 20 | 8 | 3 | 14 | 34 | | 9 | 78 | 916 | 44 | 13 | | | | | 3 | | 7 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 21 | 21 | 7 | | 1418 |
| | Voh | | 6 | 11 | 21 | 16 | 189 | 0 | 13 | 145 | 2 | 339 | 11 | 39 | 16 | | | 1 | | 3 | | 9 | | 1 | 3 | 1 | 23 | 44 | 14 | 6 | 1111 |
| Loyalty | **Lifou** | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 2 | 2 | | 3 | | | 3 | 1 | 16 | 12 | | | | | | | 8 | | | 3 | | 175 | 5745 | 33 | 9 | 5803 |
| | **Maré** | 2 | 3 | | | 1 | 1 | | 6 | | | 3 | 2 | 13 | 4 | | | | 1 | | | 5 | | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3810 | 52 | 8 | 5 | 3715 |
| | **Ouvéa** | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 3 | | | | | 4 | 1 | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 | | 21 | 24 | 1377 | 802 | 2601 |
| South | Bouloupari | 5 | 13 | 1 | 13 | 5 | 4 | | 6 | | | | 8 | 23 | 17 | | 1 | | | 2 | | 299 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 15 | 7 | 2 | 533 |
| | **Bourail** | 6 | 8 | 3 | 13 | 14 | 7 | | 6 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 42 | 179 | | 84 | 339 | 33 | 9 | | 26 | | 4 | 7 | | 17 | 40 | 11 | 3 | 1322 |
| | Dumbéa * | 63 | 80 | 26 | 78 | 22 | 47 | 2 | 83 | 8 | 2 | 26 | 60 | 314 | 236 | | 14 | 3 | 4 | 16 | | 277 | 26 | 84 | 72 | 28 | 1042 | 2493 | 464 | 299 | 4051 |
| | Farino | | | | | 1 | 2 | | 1 | | | | | 3 | 2 | | | | 1 | 2 | | 32 | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 39 |
| | **Île-des-Pins** | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 | | | | 2 | | | | 7 | 6 | | | | | | | | 4 | | 1 | 931 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 1245 |
| | La Foa | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 6 | | | 4 | 8 | 19 | 27 | | 1 | | 1 | 40 | | 399 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 13 | 6 | 2 | 743 |
| | Moindou | 3 | | | | | 1 | | | | 3 | | | 7 | 24 | | 4 | 2 | 52 | 27 | 7 | 18 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | 7 | 3 | | | 273 |
| | Mont-Dore (Le) * | 56 | 171 | 17 | 30 | 14 | 16 | 1 | 47 | 7 | 1 | 10 | 27 | 161 | 192 | | 7 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 197 | 8 | 113 | 105 | 908 | 427 | 900 | 197 | 81 | 3211 |
| | Nouméa * | 126 | 192 | 67 | 203 | 75 | 101 | 3 | 230 | 32 | 10 | 72 | 216 | 722 | 610 | 3 | 33 | 9 | 14 | 32 | 2 | 748 | 64 | 170 | 245 | 54 | 3157 | 5272 | 1291 | 687 | 17756 |
| | Païta * | 23 | 28 | 3 | 15 | 4 | 17 | | 27 | 3 | 7 | 15 | 32 | 138 | 117 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 11 | | 149 | 7 | 292 | 40 | 21 | 330 | 734 | 138 | 88 | 2391 |
| | Poya South * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sarraméa | | | | 1 | | | | 3 | | | | | 3 | 17 | | | 1 | | 56 | | 173 | 7 | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | | | 292 |
| | **Thio** | 2 | 4 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | 2 | | | 1 | 9 | 11 | 9 | | | | | | | 535 | 428 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 7 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 1326 |
| | **Yaté** | | 2 | | 3 | | | | 2 | | | 2 | 4 | 15 | 10 | | | | | 2 | | 33 | 18 | 289 | 160 | 2 | 9 | 13 | 13 | 4 | 842 |
| **New Caledonia** | | **847** | **1871** | **798** | **1975** | **746** | **825** | **27** | **1561** | **223** | **114** | **952** | **2234** | **6530** | **4449** | **19** | **186** | **373** | **115** | **393** | **10** | **5645** | **589** | **1022** | **1618** | **1052** | **9356** | **15875** | **3714** | **2066** | **65 185** |
| Total | **Speakers inside linguistic aera** | 485 | 1261 | 598 | 931 | 197 | 356 | 0 | 962 | 339 | 82 | 660 | 1759 | 4880 | 2933 | 12 | 84 | 339 | 85 | 83 | 7 | 3821 | 428 | 864 | 510 | 908 | 3810 | 5745 | 1377 | 802 | 34318 |
| | Greater Nouméa | 268 | 471 | 113 | 326 | 115 | 181 | 6 | 387 | 50 | 20 | 123 | 335 | 1335 | 1155 | 6 | 56 | 15 | 24 | 69 | 3 | 1371 | 105 | 659 | 462 | 1011 | 4956 | 9399 | 2090 | 1155 | 26266 |
| | North Province | 559 | 1360 | 673 | 1614 | 606 | 626 | 20 | 1134 | 171 | 90 | 811 | 1852 | 5033 | 2992 | 13 | 40 | 16 | 3 | 186 | 0 | 2742 | 23 | 44 | 38 | 29 | 324 | 551 | 159 | 78 | 21787 |
| | Loyalty islands **Province** | 3 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 33 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 4006 | 5821 | 1418 | 816 | 12178 |
| | **South Province** | 286 | 507 | 130 | 368 | 145 | 205 | 6 | 421 | 53 | 24 | 212 | 390 | 1909 | 1701 | 18 | 170 | 359 | 111 | 207 | 10 | 2903 | 566 | 978 | 1573 | 1024 | 5037 | 9520 | 2142 | 1182 | 32157 |
| | **Total speakers** /language | 485 | 1261 | 598 | 931 | 197 | 356 | 0 | 962 | 339 | 82 | 660 | 1759 | 4880 | 2933 | 12 | 84 | 339 | 85 | 83 | 7 | 3821 | 428 | 864 | 510 | 908 | 3810 | 5745 | 1377 | 802 | 34318 |

Source: Data from the 2019 ISEE Census

Note: an individual may speak two languages. *Blue colour blue includes municipalities of Greater Nouméa. *Poya North (North Province) and Poya South (South Province) are not separated. The data for the municipality of Poya appears in Poya North. Figures in bold red type indicate the speakers of each language in the linguistic area


**Figs. 13.2** Teaching of Kanak languages and cultures in public secondary schools as of 14 March 2018 (the 2022 map is currently available on the following website, but is less clear). (Source: https://www.ac-noumea.nc/spip.php?article3161)

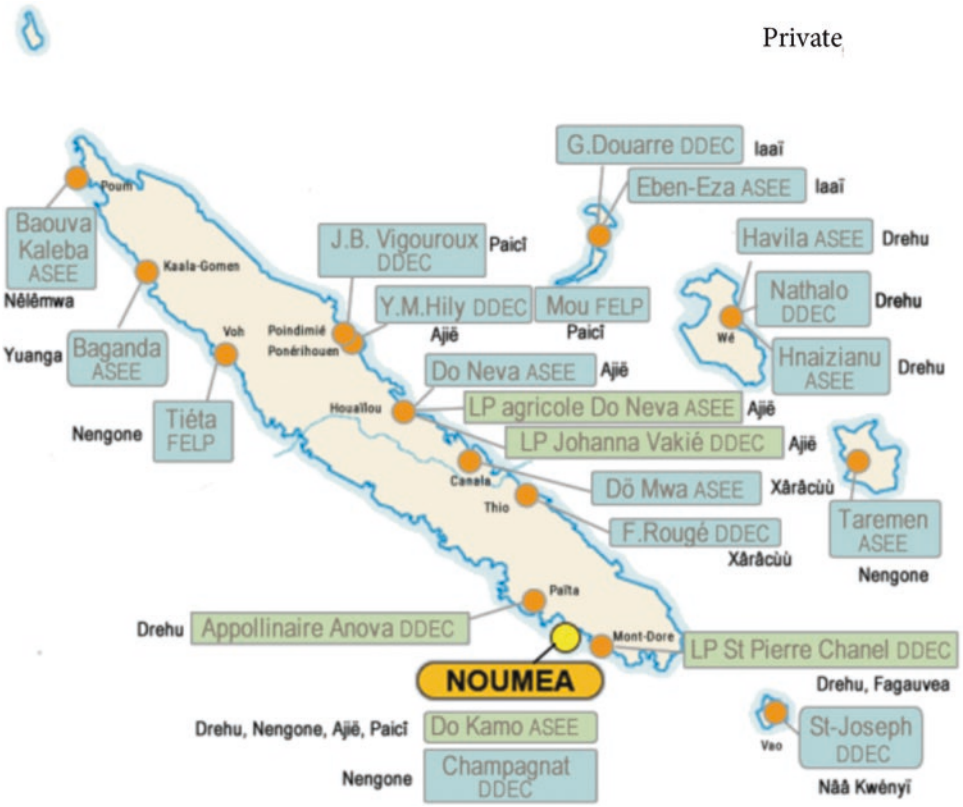
Up to 1984, the Kanak languages were "officially excluded from the educational system" (Moyse-Faurie et al. 2012, p. 122). Following the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988 and the previous EPK experiments, the Deixonne law[4] entered into force in New Caledonia (decrees of 20 October 1992) at the end of the 1990s (May to August 1998). This sanctioned some teaching in local languages—and some are now even taught in high school, for example, Drehu, Nengone, Ajië, and Paicî. Article 1.3.4 of the Nouméa Accord signed on 5 May 1998, stipulates that Kanak culture must be valued, and Deliberation No. 106 of 15 January 2016, on the future of the Caledonian school system specifies in Article 10.1 that "teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture must be compulsory for each student" and thus enjoins the school system to include them in the curriculum (see also Chap. 14 by Wadrawane in this book).[5] Moreover, Article 10.2 requests New Caledonian schools, enriched by the country's cultures, to train students at all levels in the values and practices of citizenship in order to promote the development of living together in the spirit of the Nouméa Accord.[6] In fact, the structuring of the teaching of Kanak languages and culture (LCK) has aimed to establish compulsory teaching of the fundamentals of Kanak culture as well as an offer of teaching Kanak languages in LV2. To do this, resources and teaching tools for the LCK were produced to create a documentary fund. The last point is the improvement of LCK teacher training with the implementation of the authorization and certification processes (2018).[7]

[4]Law 51-46 on teaching regional languages and dialects (Official Gazette, 13 January 1951).

[5]https://denc.gouv.nc/ressources-pedagogiques/ecole-maternelle-domaines-dactivites/langues-et-culture-kanak-ecole.

[6]https://denc.gouv.nc/sites/default/files/documents/deliberationpenc.pdf.

[7]https://denc.gouv.nc/sites/default/files/documents/charte_dapplication-papage-2.pdf.




**Figs. 13.3** Teaching of Kanak languages and cultures in private secondary schools as of 14 March 2018 (the 2022 map is currently available on the following website, but is less clear). (Source: https://www.ac-noumea.nc/spip.php?article3161)

Since 1992, four languages can be chosen as electives for the Baccalaureate (the French high school diploma): Drehu, Nengone, Ajië and Paicî. In 1997, six vernacular languages were taught in middle school and high school: Iaai and Xârâcùù in addition to the four mentioned above. Since 1999, they have also been taught at the University of New Caledonia, as part of the Bachelor's degree in Oceanic languages and cultures (LLCER).

The New Caledonia territorial government acquired jurisdiction over teaching in private primary schools and in public and private secondary schools on 1 January 2012.

The fact that at least four Kanak languages are taught in New Caledonia, from primary school to university, supports the view that the loss of indigenous languages is premature. Moyse-Faurie et al. (2012, p. 122) highlight: "The public primary school curricula in New Caledonia [since 2000], voted in 2005, provides the teaching of Kanak languages and cultures to students whose parents have expressed the wish, in the amount of 7 hours weekly. [...] In 2009, about 1900 pre-elementary public school pupils (out of 9200 pupils at this grade) received instruction in a dozen of Kanak languages." But there is a wide variation. According to data collected for the New Caledonia Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (ISEE), sourced by the Vice-Rectorate in 2005 and between 2010 and 2015, ten Kanak languages were taught over the period. These were Ajië, Drehu, Iaai, Nêlêmwa (in 2005 and 2010 with slightly over 130 pupils at the Boaouva Kaleba private middle school in Poum), Nengone, Paicî, Xârâcùù, and then, from 2013, Djubéa (23 in public middle school in 2013) and Fwâi (in 2013 and 2014 at the Hienghène middle school), and Yuanga with a single pupil in private middle school in 2012 at the Baganda middle school in Kaala Gomen. Therefore, beyond the six main vernacular languages, the others are only taught sporadically and are localized within their geographic area. Depending on the year, the total number of pupils receiving instruction in vernacular languages varies from 3014 in 2005 to 1879 in private establishments, that is, two thirds, with 655 in high school and 2359 in middle school to 778 in 2011, in public schools only (data from private schools being unavailable), and rising to 3365 in 2005. Out of these, 2931 were in middle school and 434 in high school, and in total, 1537 pupils or almost half were in private establishments.

Teaching locations in the New Caledonian archipelago are also diversified (see Figs. 13.2 and 13.3). For teaching Kanak languages and cultures, various pedagogical materials have been developed, for example, a webpage for primary schools to learn Nengone,[8] a textbook "I learn A'jië/Drehu/Nengone/

[8] http://nengone.univ-nc.nc/.

Paici" for middle school students (first level) and a comic book "*P'ti mec*" by Bernard Berger in Numèè and Drehu, in collaboration with the mining company Vale NC, the ALK (Academy of Kanak languages) and Tetemba Production. There is also a document designed for teachers of high school seniors presenting the four notions to be covered with pupils: myths and heroes, areas and trade, places and forms of power, the notion of progress, with, for each of the four themes, bibliographical references and online resources.[9] One must also note, following the Nouméa Accord in May 1998, the official creation of ALK, under the aegis of Déwé Gorodey, Minister of Culture at that time, as a public New Caledonian establishment charged with "setting the rules of usage and participating in the promotion and development of all Kanak languages and dialects" (deliberation n° 265 of 17 January 2007, on the creation of the ALK). Their website[10] offers downloadable documents on 32 languages and dialects, and at the request of the government of New Caledonia, the ALK provides subjects for the civil service examinations (Ihage 2014). It thus promotes Kanak languages and cultures alongside the rectorate, the university and the Tjibaou cultural center (CCT, see below). The Matignon-Oundinot Accords specify that the ADCK must promote Kanak cultures "namely by capitalizing on our heritage – whether cultural, artisanal, archeological or linguistic. Languages are at the heart of our missions, because they are one of the privileged instruments for the transmission of oral traditions" (Tjibaou 2014, p. 5; see also Salaün 2017).

Since 2002, in partnership with the Customary councils, the CCT department for Heritage and research has been collecting oral data, namely, clan narratives, from some 15 languages, as well as putting them in writing (Tjibaou 2014). These local institutions add to the research that has been carried out since the second half of the twentieth century by teams of linguists and ethnolinguists, namely, from the CNRS LACITO research unit in France, beginning with the foundational works of André-Georges Haudricourt (see, e.g., Leblic 2020). Many recordings made of these languages are available online in the Pangloss Collection and in speech corpora.

But in fact, according to the hourly volume specific to each level of education, which breaks down as follows, this teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture is very limited. No real recommendations for kindergarten and elementary schools, 1 hour per fortnight in sixth grade of middle school starting in 2017, gradually extended to other grades from 2018. Indeed, the reform of the secondary schools provides for compulsory interdisciplinary practical teaching (EPI) on the fundamental elements of Kanak culture, in the cycle four course (fifth, fourth, and third grades).

In the general and vocational training high schools, it is recommended to have 1 h fortnight in the second grade of secondary school starting in 2017, which will be progressively extended to other levels in 2018 (first grade or junior) and 2019 (last grade or senior); in vocational training high schools (CAP), 1 h fortnight in first year, which will be extended to second year in 2018. However, the lack of qualified teachers for these courses means that there is often a big difference between the norm and the practice. Therefore, French remains, almost exclusively, the language of instruction at all levels.

## 13.6 Conclusion

In the field of Kanak languages, as in many others, demands of Kanak people led to changes to the legal framework for language instruction and recognition. Languages that preceded colonisation by France persist, even though their speakers have been displaced in the past, or today because greater movement is possible and often linked to occupational opportunities. The constant increase in the number of speakers shows that Kanak languages, including the "languages of culture and teaching," present in the Nouméa Accord initially as a symbolic recognition, are persistent (Leblic 2022). This is despite the various macroeconomic effects and socioeconomic readjustments which fall far short of being ideal arrangements for nurturing different cultures and languages (Leblic 2018). Although the long colonisation period favours French in terms of effective linguistic practices in society as a whole, it no longer necessarily impedes to the use of the Kanak languages, thanks to the fact that Kanak people themselves have taken an interest in the matter, and also to research carried out over more than half a century on Kanak languages and cultures (Leblic 2022). Today, this has been taken over by local institutions , among others by the Academy of Kanak languages and the Tjibaou cultural centre, in conjunction with academics from metropolitan France. It is too early to say however whether this grow tendency of Kanak languages will endure.

**Acknowledgments** This article partially reproduces, with significant updates and the addition of more recent data, a manual I wrote for the *Agence universitaire de la francophonie* in 2000 (Leblic 2000). For more linguistic data, which I do not delve into here, see among others Moyse-Faurie et al. (2012) and the research by the linguists at the CNRS LACITO: Isabelle Bril, Françoise Ozanne-Rivierre, Jean-Claude Rivierre, Claire Moyse-Faurie. I thank the ISE for allowing me to use their map, which I added to the chapter, and Jacques Vernaudon and Caroline Graille for personal communications. I also thank Margaret Dunham for the translation from French into English and Martha Macintyre for English proofreading.

[9] https://www.ac-noumea.nc/IMG/pdf/cycle_terminal_lck-final.pdf.

[10] http://www.alk.gouv.nc/portal/page/portal/alk.

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# Transforming Kanak Knowledge to Teach Students and Train Teachers in New Caledonia

14

Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane

**Abstract**

The reconfiguration of New Caledonian schools and curricula seems to be essential in times of complex political and environmental changes. It should rehabilitate the memory of the Indigenous Kanak cultures and genealogical itineraries. Six fundamental elements of Kanak culture (*éléments fondamentaux de la culture Kanak*, or EFCK) are therefore currently integrated into school curricula following their official introduction in 2016 in the New Caledonian Education Project (PENC). Their implementation in schooling contributes to innovative teaching and teacher training techniques and will progressively lead to socio-school rebalancing. The transfer of Indigenous Kanak knowledge into so-called academic contexts can contribute to a greater balance between humans and their environment. Based on qualitative methods in human and social sciences, I will demonstrate the possibilities for teaching Indigenous knowledge and life skills. Examples for the transposition of Kanak knowledge and cultural practices include the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony on Maré island and a yam calendar produced by teacher candidates in their second year of training. I conclude that schools and universities should encourage teachers, teacher candidates, educators, and students to critically reflect the didactic resources of Kanak and Oceanic cultures.

**Keywords**

Marginalization · Rebalancing · Contextualization · Kanak knowledge · Didactic transposition · *Aengeni hnameneng* · Yam

## 14.1 Introduction

Greater cultural awareness of youth in primary and secondary education is a philosophical, social, and educational necessity. The socioeconomic balancing politics introduced by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, described elsewhere in this book, also involved formal education. The teaching and scientific research on Kanak languages and cultures, which began in 1971 and was later broken off by political decisions, were re-launched by the Accords in 1988. The Nouméa Accord in 1998 accentuated and reinforced Kanak languages and cultures both at the University of New Caledonia (UNC) and the teacher training centers, and in other institutional structures such as the Academy of Kanak Languages, the Tjibaou Cultural Center, and the Kanak Customary Senate.

## 14.2 The Current School Context

For the start of the school year 2021, the New Caledonian government announced that 65,980 students were expected from kindergarten to high school, including 26,340 students at public primary level, 22,898 students at public secondary level, 7415 students in private primary schools, 8902 students at private secondary level, and the remainder, 425 students, in private noncontractual learning arrangements. Some 341 public and private schools were operating, including 258 primary schools, 57 middle schools, 5 general and technological high schools, 12 vocational high schools and 3 vocational high school branches, 5 multipurpose high schools, and 4 rural family homes.[1]

[1]Isabelle Champmoreau, member of the government in charge of education, Érick Roser, Vice-Rector, Director General of Education, Romain Capron, Director of Education, and Jean-Luc Bernard-Colombat, Director of Agricultural Training. Press conference of 10 February 2021, on the start of the 2021 school year, Government of New Caledonia.

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## 14.3 Some Worrying Facts About the Current Education System

Despite some smaller modifications, school curricula have remained almost unchanged since the beginning of formal schooling in New Caledonia. At present, the curricula appeal more to students from metropolitan France and less so for those from the French overseas territories (Wadrawane 2022). Indigenous Kanak and Oceanian knowledge is not sufficiently taken into account in school curricula. After analyzing two locally produced geography textbooks for primary and secondary schools, Stastny and Kowasch (2022) come to the same conclusion that Indigenous Kanak knowledge is marginalized, or described as backward and unprofitable. And ecological practices mostly do not take place in Indigenous milieus. The contextual harmonization of Kanak languages teaching is still delayed, although there is a choice of the four main languages for the high school degree. Each province has its own language teaching policy. But in 2019, the Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of New Caledonia (ISEE) estimated that there were 210,981 speakers of Kanak languages aged 15 and older in New Caledonia (see Chap. 13 by Leblic in this book).

Training and evaluation tools for pre-service and in-service teachers are still very eurocentric. This eurocentrism is omnipresent in teacher training and student teaching institutions. This context makes it difficult to implement a policy of the "oceanization" of schooling, supported by politicians. Decolonizing minds is more laborious than one would think. Other constraints remain in the country's educational landscape, around resourcing and facilities, but the orientation of teacher training is my focus here.

The intensive update and modification of teaching programs remains a highly politicized issue despite the efforts of research and certain institutions to teach Kanak and Oceanian languages and cultures. Language teaching is still underdeveloped. There are just not enough permanent teachers specializing in Kanak languages and cultures for primary and secondary schools. The pedagogical advisors for aiding classroom teachers, and the inspectors for the evaluations of their teaching, remain insufficient. There is also a lack of reflection on the transformation and the didactization of everyday Kanak and Oceanian knowledge in schooling. Apart from some initiatives in private education, this field of research remains deficient for the moment.

Sometimes, parents of students raise concerns about secondary school curricula and schooling, despite the adoption of the territory's educational project in 2016 (NC la 1ère 2020). They highlight an overlap in the timetables between Kanak languages and other disciplinary sessions, for example, making attendance difficult or impossible. Their concerns and resistance to them is hardly surprising since Kanak languages are still considered as foreign languages. It is thus difficult to affirm the sustainability of Kanak and Oceanian languages and cultures in the educational system.

## 14.4 Religion in the History of Schooling

The first rudimentary schools in New Caledonia-Kanaky appeared between 1843 and 1846 on the Loyalty Islands. Between 1854 and 1858, the first two boarding schools were opened in the Rhô community on Maré. The missionaries there set up religious education within Kanak communities (Salaün 2005; Wadrawane 2008) and started to teach fundamental skills from the Roman school: reading-writing-counting. The links between school teaching and religious instruction rapidly led to some Kanak wanting to master this new and unfamiliar knowledge. The knowledge of faith entered the history of schooling at this stage. The missionaries of the London Missionary Society then deciphered and translated the biblical texts into Kanak languages, welcomed by Kanak communities. According to the missionaries, the faith of the Kanaks would arise through the reading of the Holy Scriptures in their own language (Rognon 2018). However, this work of translation was not viewed favorably by the colonial administration of the time, which was wedded to teaching in French.

The arrival and appointment on 17 March 1862, of the Fourierist and anticlerical administrator, Governor Guillain (1862–1870), did not help to settle these disputes. The governor sought to slow down the missionary expansion project. He did not like the Mission, and as a result, he was probably not much loved in return (Merruau 1871). The secular public schools established in 1863, reserved for the children of settlers. Guillain tried to reduce the influence of the missionaries. One of the most famous measures he took was to prohibit the teaching of Kanak idioms and [Kanak languages] in all public and private schools.

## 14.5 Strong Results, Despite the Ban on Kanak Languages

Despite this prohibition, the Kanak continued to learn the fundamentals of scholarship, including writing. Dauphiné (1990) describes a scene where Governor Guillain authorizes the wife of the great chief Boula to write to her husband (a four-page letter written in Drehu language in 1864):

> It was the first time that I saw a woman so close to the Negro race, posed with such ease in front of a writing table, with a pensive and thoughtful physiognomy, writing herself on the paper, her ideas, her reflections and drawing a line of conduct to her husband, the great chief of Lœssi. I could not help but say to myself sadly, that even today, after ten years of our occupation,

> it would be impossible to find its equal in the whole of New Caledonia; and it must be recognized that if the Protestant missionaries have done much harm in the aim of detaching the natives of the Loyalty [Islands] from us, they will have contributed notably to the first education of a large number of them. (Vernaudon 2013, pp. 113–114, translated by author)

Missionary Jones also reported the enthusiasm of Kanak on Maré island for reading. He relates the case of a young man who learned by heart in 15 days several texts from the Gospel of Luke (Leenhardt 2020). The missionary ethnologist Dubois notes the presence of the Kanak Lues Saiwene from the Rhô community as an interpreter. Noticed by Cave in 1876 (in Dubois 1975), he went to study in London. Would he be one of the first Kanak students to be invited to seek knowledge elsewhere?

The decree of 3 August 1905, underlined that only French will be used in primary schools. In 1921, Kanak languages were also banned from publication (Rivierre 1985). The aim was to transmit the civilizing will of the colonizers. This forced the relationship with Western civilization and knowledge, and had very debatable consequences for Indigenous Kanak people, with repercussions throughout the history of the New Caledonian school system.

## 14.6 From the Refusal of Curricula Modification to the Civil War

In 1971, local elected officials demanded Kanak specificities to be taken into account in education, relying on the Deixonne law, which had organized the teaching of regional languages in metropolitan France since 1951. When consulted on the admissibility of the request, the vice-rector in Nouméa replied in 1975 that the practice of the French language must be constant in elementary school and that the presence of Kanak languages among the high school exams could not be envisaged in the short or medium term (Salaün and Vernaudon 2011).

After the civil war in the 1980s and the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot agreements in 1988, eyes were turned with much more interest and benevolence toward Kanak cultural recognition. This recognition was accentuated with the Nouméa Accord (1998), which gave rise to major sociopolitical, structural, and cultural reorientations. The teaching of Kanak cultures and languages, claimed since the 1970s, were specified: "Kanak languages are, along with French, languages of teaching and culture in New Caledonia. Their place in education and the media must therefore be increased and be the subject of in-depth reflection. Scientific research and university teaching on Kanak languages must be organized in New Caledonia. The National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations will play an essential role in this. To find their rightful place for these languages in primary and secondary education, a major effort will be made to train teacher educators" (JORF 1998). Today, local languages and cultures are included in school curricula.

The terms "common destiny," "community of destiny," "shared future," and "living together" entered the official discourse (see Chap. 19 of Guiart in this book). Teachers now strive to use them as the new nomenclature in their teaching activities. "Living together" becomes a leitmotif in terms of teaching sequences. The teaching of Kanak cultures and languages is not only supported by pro-independence political leaders but also by progressive New Caledonian counterparts.

## 14.7 Changes in the New Caledonian Educational Context

In 2000, the French government transferred the competences of primary education to New Caledonia. On 27 July 2006, a decree of the New Caledonian Government was promulgated, opening a special external competition for the recruitment of twelve school teachers for the teaching of Kanak languages and cultures. In 2012, a department of Kanak languages and cultures (*Service de l'Enseignement des langues et des cultures kanakes*, SELCK) at the Vice Rectorate was created. New Caledonia now controls its own private primary and secondary education. On 5 January 2016, the New Caledonian parliament adopted its educational project (*éléments fondamentaux de la culture kanak*, or EFCK), making the teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture compulsory.

Since the beginning of 2017, a practical interdisciplinary teaching programme (Epi) on the fundamental elements of Kanak culture in the four course educational cycle (fifth, fourth, third) was made mandatory in middle schools. Currently, under the aegis of the Vice Rectorate of New Caledonia, a university-labeled training program in Languages, Oceanian cultures, and learning (LCOA) is being conducted by the University of New Caledonia's (UNC) Teacher Training School. In 2020, internal teacher training exams in Nengone (Maré) language were organized by the Vice Rectorate in Nouméa. During the visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron in May 2018, the Minister of Education, Michel Blanquer, announced the creation of a certificate of teaching at secondary school level in Kanak-French languages. In 2022, a laureate in Drehu language was registered, while other candidates were already preparing for teacher training exams in Paicî and Ajië languages (see Fig. 14.1). The training courses for the competitive recruitment for the languages of the North Province are currently being conducted by the UNC Teacher Training School. The new qualifications translate a certain will to extend the field of language competencies.

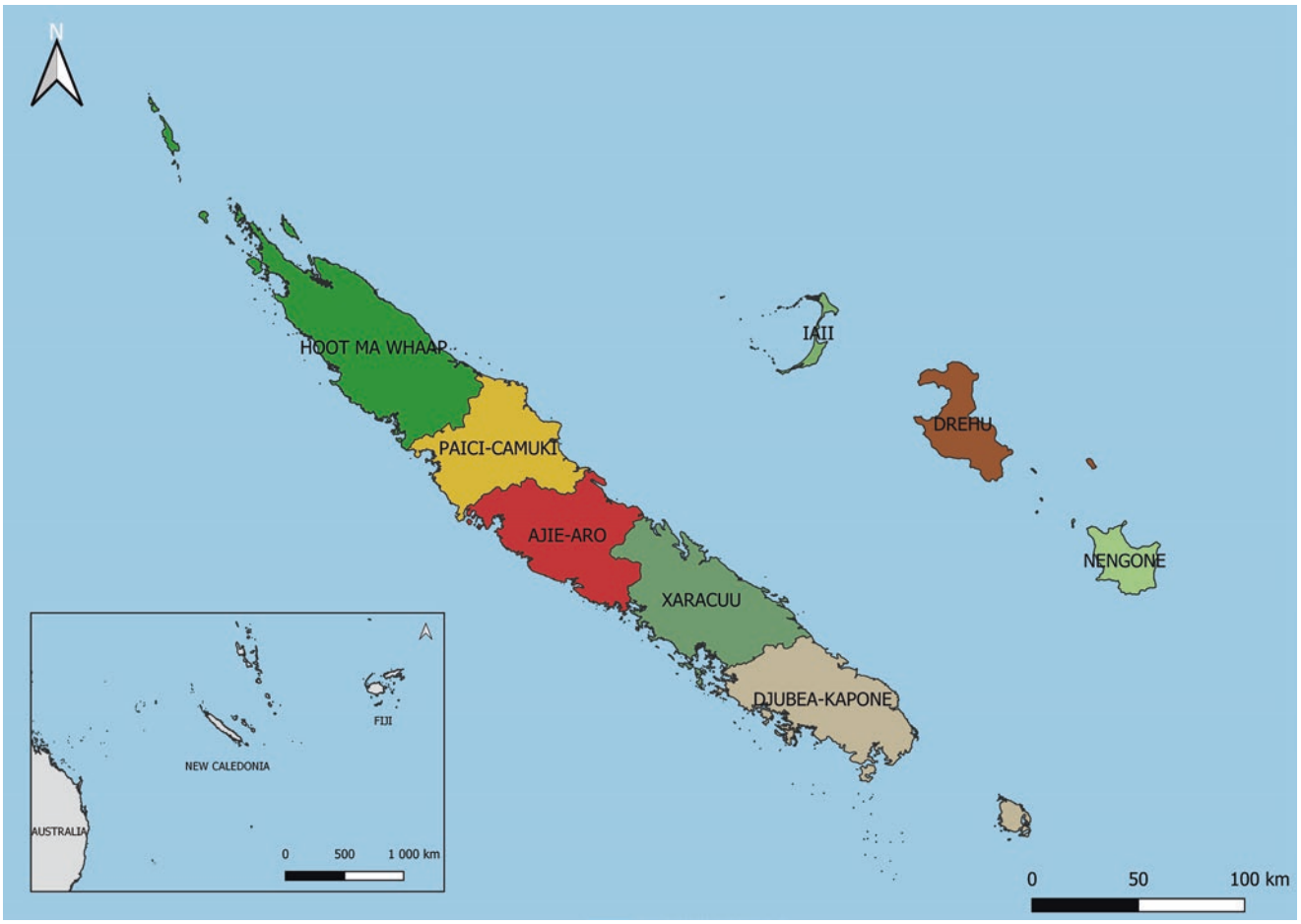


**Fig. 14.1** Customary and linguistic areas. (Source: https://georep.nc/, cartography: Eibl 2022)

However, the recognition of Kanak cultures and languages in the educational context evolves very slowly and timidly. The didactic translation of Indigenous knowledge is still underexplored. Sociopolitical recognition is certainly important but insufficient for intensive modifications of the educational system. The missionaries, because of their commitment to evangelization, introduced knowledge and learning techniques from Western societies in the Pacific islands. But faced with the complex demands of Indigenous communities to rebuild their identity, this utilitarian model was exhausted and reached its own limits. The moral wear and tear of religious knowledge can be seen through behaviors in the social world.

## 14.8 A Rather Disturbing Record Despite a Rebalancing Policy

Today, the period of the Nouméa Accord granted for contextual and institutional rebalancing is coming to an end, and it is time to evaluate various engagements. Different perspectives are in play. For example, the Kanak and Oceanian youth in general are concerned about their social-economic situation and are claiming their place in a changing society. Richard and Niester (2018) highlight the difficult quest for a "common destiny" (see also Chap. 19 by Guiart in this book) and the persistence of social-economic inequalities. In the prison "Camp-Est" in Nouméa, more than 90% of the inmates are Kanak. Inequalities appear on an unflattering balance sheet after some 30 years following the Accords. The daily newspaper "*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*" (2019) added that young people and Kanak in general are the most affected by social inequality. People under 30 have an unemployment rate of 28.3%. Among young people, as in the general population, this rate is strongly linked to school qualifications. It is 41.3% for people under 30 without a qualifying degree. This percentage drops to 26.6% and 20.5%, respectively, with a professional degree (CAP/BEP) and high school diploma. In fact, 20% of Kanak people have a high school diploma or higher, compared to 33% for the total New Caledonian population. Some 34% of Kanak are under 30, compared with 29% for the population as a

whole. Their level of employment is 59.1% (compared to 64.7% for the total population). Finally, the unemployment rate among Kanak women is lower than of Kanak men (17.9% compared to 18.7% in 2019).

The psychiatrist Schonholtzer (2017) alerted public authorities to high suicide rates. He highlights that Indigenous peoples are more affected than others by mental health problems and suicide because of generational gaps and the rapid social transformation process that has increased vulnerability and risks. Social-economic inequalities have encouraged Kanak people to move to the dormitory districts of Nouméa built between the 1960s and 1970s, reinforced by the so-called nickel boom of 1969–1972 (see Chap. 9 by Demmer in this book). The children born in these neighborhoods form a new uprooted youth. They often end up with illusory identities, confined, and lacking perspective.

Schooling can play a major role to give those youth new perspectives and to bring about societal reforms in general. The EFCK is an opportunity to synergize a number of potentialities to produce material, cognitive, and cultural hybridity. Indigenous Kanak knowledge should be integrated into curricula. That institutional presence will allow for the development and reinforcement of the symbiotic relationship between research and teaching. But in what way can the EFCK constitute an opportunity to integrate Indigenous knowledge in New Caledonian education? And how can it become part of anchoring for an educational and social rebalancing through teaching and teacher training? These are two questions that lead to the following hypotheses.

## 14.9 The EFCKs for Innovative Perspectives

The EFCKs opens up a path toward innovative perspectives, both for teachers and students. The inclusion of EFCKs in school curricula allows for the recognition of Indigenous knowledge and contributes to the psychological repair of oppressed cultural practices, promoting reconciliation. The symbiotic approach between research and teaching (Astolfi 1992) converging toward the practices and techniques of Indigenous Kanak life will allow the anchoring of schooling in the social environment, and promote curricular mixing in the material, cognitive, and cultural sense. The inclusion of the EFCKs in the New Caledonian educational context strengthens "Oceanity" and provokes the reversal of being "on the margins of" … it thus leads to a restructuring of identity that uncovers Indigenous potentialities.

In the following, I will focus first on the ethno-sociological reasons for teaching EFCKs. Second, I will use examples to show how certain Indigenous knowledge can become academic knowledge, through transposition.

## 14.10 For a New Ethics and a Cultural Common Good

Koninck (2004) has shown that it is possible to democratically construct an ethic and a common good whose denominator in the life of each group is culture. Whatever the material situation—rich or poor—the cultural spirit of people can, through education, participate in fighting against global environmental and social crises. We should thus restore what history has tried to eradicate in indigeneity, through its dispossession and by its dehumanization.

Kanak Indigenous perspectives and practices and the construction of epistemologies are important for the development of New Caledonian society. In return, Kanak people should accept, with a spirit of co-responsibility, to be confronted with issues of globalization and be capable of managing ontological upheavals that the society is going through. This path of noble reflection can contribute to reducing unconscious conflicts of social imagination (Wadrawane 2022 On the other hand, a detotalization of the Indigenous context can provoke "disadherence" with the educational sociopolitical models that perpetuate societal binaries. The aim is to attempt an innovative renegotiation of endemicity that is neither based on an outdated essentialism nor referring to the imaginaries of "civilizing missions" and "progress" common to European nations (Clément 2021, p. 82).

The issue is not to tear oneself away from one's own world nor from the world of the other, but to combine through education what can be retained from colonial history and what is maintained and transmitted as Indigenous cultural knowledge. Education contributes to a decolonisation of the mind. The reconciliation between Western and Indigenous educational cultures will only be possible if each accepts to break by negotiation certain parts of their social ideology.

## 14.11 Knowledge from the Communities to Rebalance "Differently"

The former New Caledonian vice-rector Jean Charles Ringard-Flament initiated the introduction of the EFCK in secondary schools in 2018 and the creation of the teacher education exam (CAPES) in Kanak languages in 2020. He emphasizes the need for a constructive "break": "We must [be able to] overcome this osmosis between the school and the community by rehabilitating knowledge in a different way" (Interview, 20 June 2018). The inclusion of EFCK in the New Caledonian education project is therefore an opportunity to rehabilitate Indigenous knowledge in a different way, through a transposition process.

The statement of Ringard-Flament translates what the local Kanak schools (*Écoles populaires kanak*, EPK) were

demanding. They requested and campaigned for procedures to develop an educational rebalancing. FLNKS leaders encouraged parents to boycott public schools, which were described as colonial.

On 9 February 1985, the second FLNKS Congress in Nakety on the east coast of New Caledonia-Kanaky decided to create EPKs as part of this boycott (Leblic 2018). At a didactic level, the EPK wanted to create "a dialogue between traditional wisdoms [...] and contemporary sciences. [...]" (Gauthier 1996, p. 133). Salaün and Vernaudon (2014) highlighted that Indigenous education as a practice of resistance questions common knowledge that such schools should enable.

The EPK experience is an important part of the history of education in New Caledonia-Kanaky. By challenging the educational system, EPK seeks an educational alternative, a different way of schooling. There are similarities here with European popular education movements and Freire's (1974) pedagogy of the oppressed. Teaching in EPKs occurred in Kanak languages, in French, and in English. Indigenous knowledge and Kanak culture were central to the project, which aims to train the citizens of tomorrow.

The attempt to dismantle conventional schooling by the introduction of Kanak knowledge and ways of thinking was quickly aborted, but the strategy of vigilance developed by EPK forged ahead, and its overall pedagogy did not go unnoticed. For example, in language teaching, EPK succeeded in abolition of monolingualism (Wadrawane 2017). Currently, New Caledonian and state educational institutions try to keep a double articulation between national heritage and local Kanak specificities.

The EPK cannot therefore be reduced to a simple historical period of Kanak struggle for independence and against educational domination, with some of the schools closing by the end of the 1980s. First, they explored how to rebalance education between the two co-present heritages. Secondly, they showed interest in using the (Kanak) languages of students for a better appropriation of knowledge. The EPK model confirmed the relationship between orality and learning. Seeking balance or rebalancing is therefore an important sociological fact. I will now consider ethnological data from fieldwork to show the importance of balance issues in New Caledonia's social space.

## 14.12 The Indigenous Ethnological Conception of Social and Spatial Balance

The school of Rhô on Maré island serves as our first example. The second example is the school of Näcaao (Netchaot), which is located in the center-east of the main island Grande Terre in the Kônhè region.

The Rhô community on Maré in the customary district of Guahma was in the spotlight when Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society arrived. The first school infrastructures were built in this community. The current school in Rôh was built in 1966 on a border zone between two conflicting family plots of land: the school is located almost at the edge of the community (see Fig. 14.2). The church is halfway, in the middle of the community, while the school infrastructure is pushed further away. The school is thus in a consensual position. It borders the land plants of the Hnassil and Huemone families.

This spatial positioning of the institutional infrastructure has led to a lasting appeasement, and the community has benefited from this rebalancing provided by an exogenous object. We can see above (Fig. 14.2) how the school was positioned on a plan drawn up by the Tadin gendarmerie in 1966.

At the school in Näcaao (Nechaot) (SANC 1962), I conducted interviews with two elders, and I was surprised that this public school straddles an imaginary line dividing the Catholic zone from the Protestant zone of the community. The school thus offers another consensual position. Children of both parishes share the same secular space, where the rules remain the same for everyone. Figure 14.3 shows the location of the school between two confessional zones.

The essential aim is to restore balance. The example of consensual school locations in the community illustrates how power struggles are avoided. When the missionary and anthropologist Leenhardt (1974) used the term "nata" in Nengone language to refer to the pastors, he may not have imagined its impact, both in terms of Protestant proselytizing and in terms of the desire to learn, to transmit new things, and to communicate knowledge.

The aim of rebalancing power relations may be surprising but it is present within broader society, for example giving away a child (a girl or boy) to rebalance a clan (Leblic 2004). The search for balance is also present in the world of education. Wakolo Pouye (Interview, 11 April 2000) said that the older teachers often manage to mix the newest pedagogical advice communicated at official inspectors' visits with their learning techniques from the local social milieu. They pass on school knowledge (an "exogenous imprint") by using didactic local environmental tools (a "local imprint"). They prepare youth to claim, without ostracism, social progress and the culture of their identity.

## 14.13 Polarization of Spaces and Imbalance

Despite the Kanak construction of a "double footprint," school administration has maintained a polarization of spaces in the educational world. The beginnings of a dual school orientation appear: children of settlers orienting

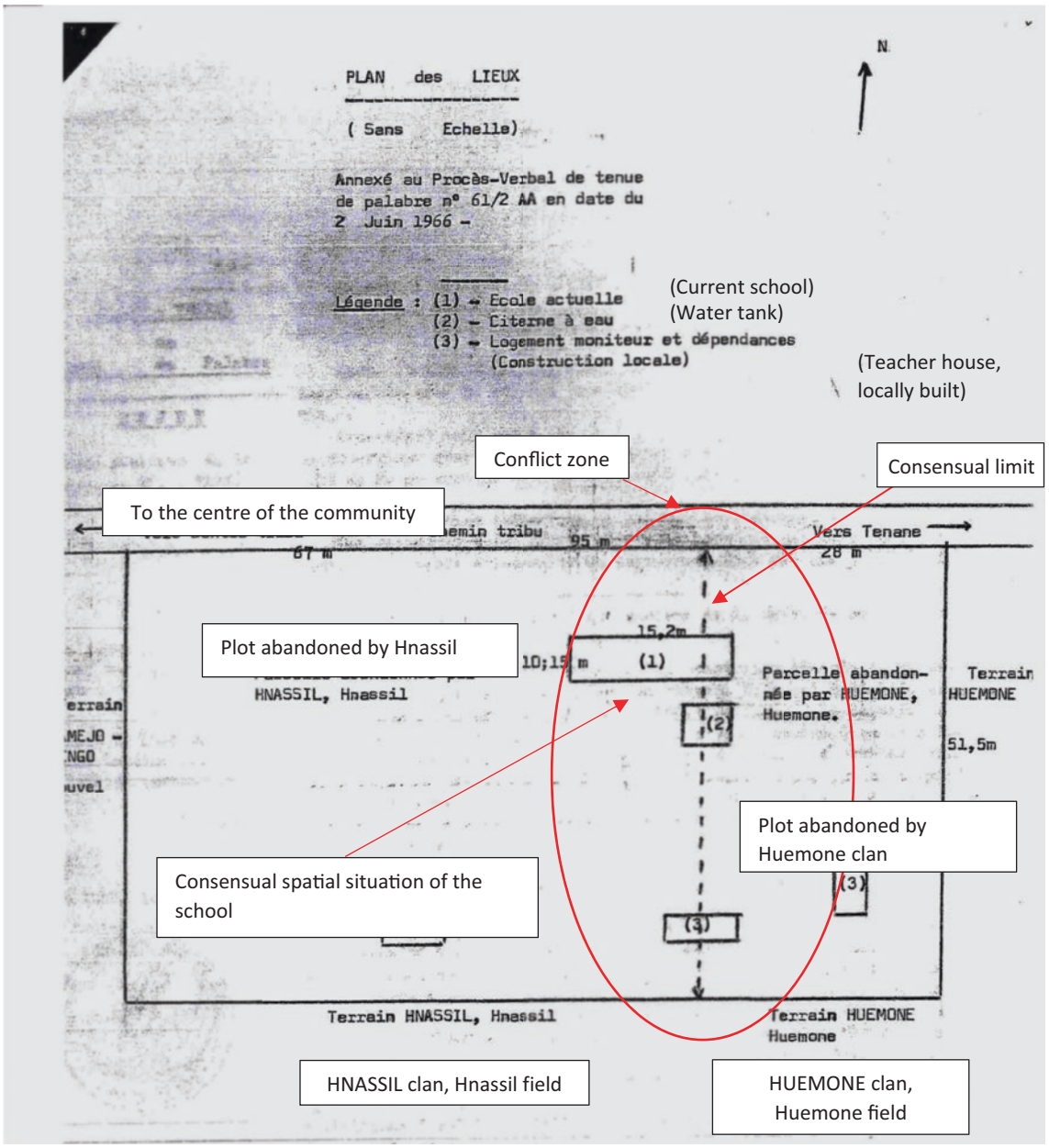


**Fig. 14.2** Localization of the current Rôh school on Maré island. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

toward general curricula and Kanak children toward vocational paths (Hadj et al. 2012). The democratization of these educational paths has struggled.

The polarisation of spaces and the marginalisation of Kanak culture developed during colonisation has been denounced by various researchers in social sciences. Wittersheim (2006, p. 87) for example notes:

> The Melanesians have experienced a major trauma through colonization, which is still a central element in their personalities and in their identity constructions, as well as in their family or historical memory. The relationship with a family memory intertwined with history continues to be a major issue for people who were born well after this period.

However, marginalisation in the colonial period did not prevent the acquisition of new knowledge. After the establishment of missionary schools in communities, a training center, called "School of Indigenous teachers at Mont-Ravel" opened in Nouméa in 1913 (JONC 1913) and lasted until 1942. The creation of the two associations AICLF (*Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens français*) and UICALO (*Union des indigènes calédoniens amis de la liberté dans l'ordre*) allowed the new Kanak elites to assert themselves at the political and social level. The members of these two associations also sought to harmonize the transmission of both conceptual knowledge and their collective social heritage. In spite of this good will, the training

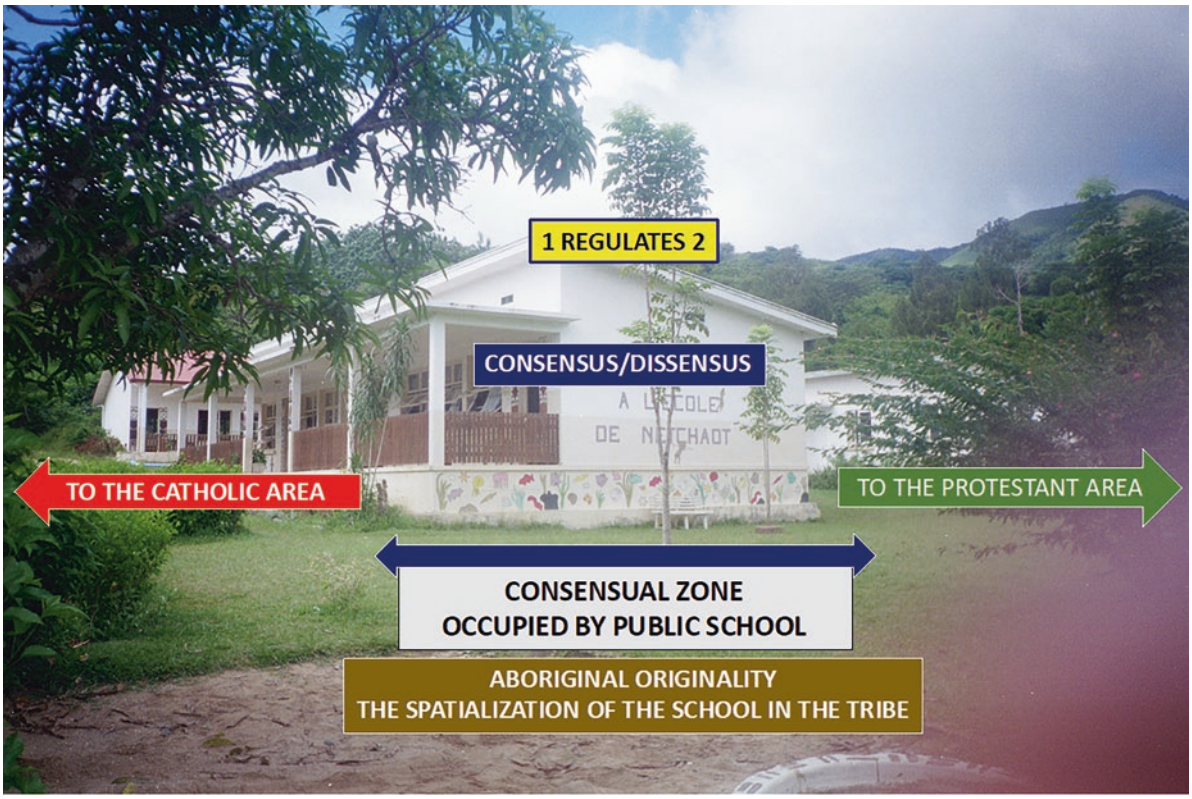


**Fig. 14.3** The school in Näcaao (Netchaot) as a consensual element. (Credit: Wadrawane 2022)

of young islanders to gain qualifications remained marginalized. The failure of young Kanak people in schooling reinforces the point of view of the supporters of independence that schools were colonial (Kohler and Pillon 1982).

Education anthropologists and sociologists (e.g., Ogbu 1985) have shown the ignorance of educators with regard to the culture of their students. Patrice Godin (2019) from the University of New Caledonia notes that efforts must be made to understand Kanak society deeply, because it is often defined around myths, while dialogue and conversation is an important and common practice. The introduction of Indigenous knowledge and its use in teaching can contribute to valorizing the place of formerly marginalized Kanak people in society, and contribute to shared values.

## 14.14 A New Societal Imaginary for New Caledonian Schools

Section 3 of paragraph 4 of the Preamble of the Nouméa Accord emphasizes that it is necessary to lay the foundations of a New Caledonian citizenship. This cannot be done without the school, which trains and educates future generations. EFCKs are one element of identity formation in school. The opportunity to develop research, teaching and training, however, provokes a tussle between different teacher groups—teachers used to the spirit of the secular school since the beginning of their history in New Caledonia, and those who think that it is time to innovate and re-build the institution, taking into account complex local cognitive and cultural realities. The latter position is supported by scientific research and the media. The school however tends to alienate its pupils from their culture and way of life. It is thus seen and experienced as a destructuring colonial object.

The teaching of Kanak and Oceanian cultures and languages, as well as various contextual changes to curricula, the proposal of a new national education project, and the compulsory teaching of EFCKs have all been produced through contestation. The actors include ideological and marginal progressives, independence proponents, and supporters of the EPK initiatives. Paradoxically, and contrary to popular belief, those who criticize formal education are often those who also advance it. The PENC (New Caledonian Education Project) was voted on by the Congress in 2016 and made the teaching of EFCKs compulsory. But this reorientation of schooling was ultimately one of the consequences of the handshake between Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur in 1988 and bears a kind of "double imprint" of colonization and indigeneity.

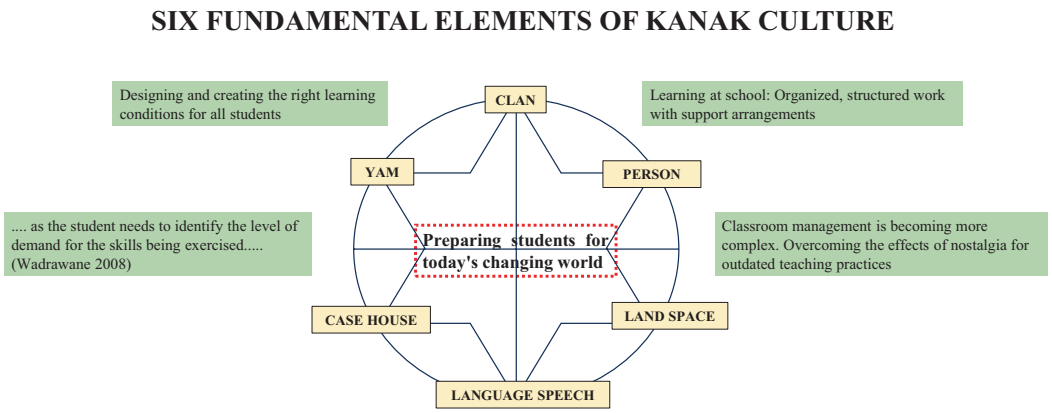


**Fig. 14.4** The six fundamental elements of Kanak culture. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

## 14.15 Rehabilitating Cultural, Social, and Traditional Cohabitation in Schools

The reinvention of identity in the New Caledonian school should occur with the EFCKs. Certain practices and techniques of Indigenous life favour a symbiosis between research and teaching. The EFCKs are an opportunity to promote and strengthen this "double imprint". Moreover, the EFCKs progressively amplify the development of "Oceanicity" through the curricula. Teachers therefore contribute to the rehabilitation of cultural, social, and traditional cohabitation. Ethno-sociologically, the inclusion of the EFCK in the curricula can help reverse situations of being "at the margins of..."

It is essential to make choices when we want to develop the relationship between school and custom. The risk lies in the enclosure of one's own culture. The procedure of didactic transposition therefore seems to represent a way to avoid sinking into "populism" and allows control of the methods of transmission, learning, and acquisition of new knowledge by students. Often, knowledge from the missions is preferred to the detriment of knowledge from public education. The didactic transposition of Indigenous knowledge can thus lead to balance religion and administration.

## 14.16 EFCKs Grasp and Understand Reality: What is their Pedagogical Contribution?

Depending on the fields of research, one of the competences of the scientific expert is to deconstruct reality in order to select, reduce, and build up knowledge. Expert knowledge contributes, on the one hand, to the rational influence of research and, on the other hand, to the modification and perhaps improvement of social life. Knowledge establishes new social perspectives. Indigenous Kanak people discover the scientific validity of certain cultural elements, and this is one of the benefits of scientific research and pedagogy.

I suggest that the transition from Indigenous knowledge into teaching should include documenting social practices and then transforming them into rationalizing objects by the researcher. The transposition into classroom activities is also essential. All these breaks represent a procedural phase before the final status of academic knowledge or knowledge taught through school activities is valorised.

If EFCKs allow to the grasping of Kanak realities, they should not be used in the classroom without first carrying out various transformations so that they can be explained and used. The six fundamental elements of the EFDK[2] are: yam, person, clan, traditional house, land and space, and language and speech (Fig. 14.4).

I will illustrate the EFCKs by examples taken from fieldwork showing that it is possible to transpose Kanak cultural objects into academic knowledge. I have therefore selected two EFCKs as objects of study:

- Language and speech used to describe the intellectual development of children
- Spatial practices, through the practice of *Aengeni hnameneng*

I then present two education elements:

- An illustration of modes of transmission, based on Bruner's theory
- The yam calendar produced by teacher candidates in their second year of training

[2]The new curricula for 2019, voted on 10th January by the Congress of New Caledonia, once again emphasized the value of Kanak cultures by considering EFCKs and other New Caledonian cultures.

## 14.17 Language and Speech: Intellectual Development and Learning Strategies

The study of Indigenous languages is advantageous for discovering and naming the world. Languages are the best mirror of the human spirit (Alin 2010). In Nengone language on Maré island, for example, there is a specialized lexicon to describe the stages of intellectual development in relation to learning. A school child, between 3 and 5 years old, who has mastered a certain number of skills is called *Thu-ni*. The term *Thu-ni* means "who can do." The question "*Bo thuni?*" can be translated with "Can you do?" *Inu thuni co yeno* means that I know how to learn well. Etymologically, *ni* is "the fact" (what is done)—an Indigenous treasure and wealth (Dubois 1980). When a child is at the *thu-ni* stage, it means that he or she is able to learn and to initiate reasoning. Gradually, according to the tasks and responsibilities he or she receives, he or she builds up the *Ngome nata* stage. During this progression among peers, the child learns to strengthen his or her modes of reasoning by linking several types of social knowledge. In Nengone, *Ngome* designates the being or a person (*Ngome* as an emphatic form playing the role of increment, which increases the value of a constant). *Nata* is a mature person, normally the qualification of a religious man. *Ngome nata* means intelligent, skillful, and good at war. The expression *bane yeno ngomenata* can be translated as teaching wisdom.

The *ngome nata* status corresponds to the school situation of a student at the end of the third year at primary school. And it will evolve until the early years of university. The term *yanata* refers to the expression of skill level.

*Ya* is different from *Ye*. *Ye* = to say, *yeye* = to read. *Ye*, which attaches, *ye-edin* (the wood which attaches the outrigger to the main hull of the dugout). *Yeiwe re koe* (wood that attaches to the outrigger). *Yara*: implies repetitive. *Ya* = to lead, to guide. *Nata*: mature, right, right side, history, experience. *Ya* = contracted form of *yawe* = therefore, or again. According to Dubois (1969), *yanata* is constructed from the *Ya* of *yawe*. The *yanata* is the one who is able to tutor and function as a transducer. This function of *yanata* was used many times at Sunday schools by Protestants and in community schools by the old instructors. The student Bob Teddy remembers that, in school, "there was one teacher, and it was a one-room schoolhouse. We had a very long bench, and we were at the very back of the classroom. You could hardly see what was happening on the blackboard. We learned more by repetition, and it was all done orally. There was a big guy who knew a bit more than us, and he helped us to learn by repeating what was on the board" (this is the role of the transducer).

A person is said to be *yanata* because he or she overcomes the slightest difficulties that arise in the school career to build the stage of *ngome nata*. *Yanata* can also be understood in terms of conditions, positions, and circumstances. The condition of *yanata* (Fig. 14.5) may constitute a benchmark for measuring the progress of *ngome nata*. Assessments can be undertaken at different levels to determine the degree of mastery of these cognate skills. When a person is said to be *yanata*, it is because he or she possesses and uses sub-skills to achieve or strengthen the main ones. Also he or she has, in an autonomous way, the capacity to use discernment and to assist students, in the sense of tutoring. The *yanata* child is mostly described as "clever" or "autonomous." It is also the one who learns to cross boundaries. In Nengone, knowledge is caught.

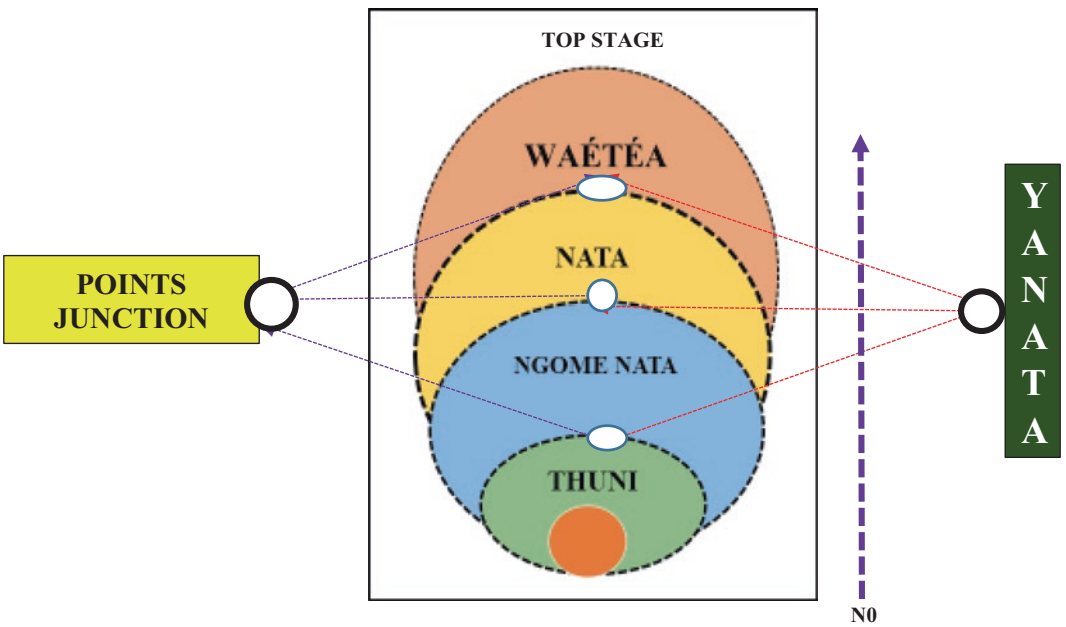


**Fig. 14.5** Children's intellectual development and learning strategies. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

To accentuate the development of *ngome nata*, adults begin to entrust youth with discursive acts. Youth begin to handle speech in the form of discourse and learn to control both cognitive and kinesthetic stress. By extension, autonomy is strengthened. Jokes are used to soften these moments when they learn to handle adult speech.

To sum up, the environment initiates children to leave behind the appearances of immediate experience. The school thus reinforces this "escape" to other spaces, which are attributed to the scholar known as *Waetea*. The term "Waetea" comes from "*Wa*" meaning "end" or "old," "*ete*" meaning "stone," and "*a*" meaning "to shout" or "te declaim" (Dubois 1951). An intelligent person in Maré language is called *Ngome nata*. As for the scholar, he is called *Waetea*. *Natas* elders, pastors in the Protestant world, Catholic seminarians, and some elders who manage the affairs of large chieftaincies were often referred to as *Waetea*. Language can therefore help to reconcile the different worlds of "intelligence."

The expressions *thu-ni, ngome nata, nata*, and *yanata* are very close to the field of metacognitive psychology, referring to the schemas developed by Piaget (1967) and affirmed and extended by Vergnaud (1990) and Vergnaud and Récopé (2000). Such cognitive perspectives gradually draw the contours of *Waetea*, and this way of thinking about ontological elements by cultivating and using discernment when it comes to discussing and analyzing alliances or agreements in custom.

## 14.18 Space: The Multiplexing of the *Aengeni hnameneng*

I have conducted particpant-observation in customary ceremonies. This fieldwork practice puts the researcher in direct contact with custom, in this case a wedding on Maré island in which the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony takes place (see Fig. 14.6). The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony shows that the groom's house is an important part of the Maraean wedding. It can last a whole day. The fieldwork showed how customary practices are thought, and permeate the social context.

At the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, yam gifts from paternal and maternal siblings and from allied clans are arranged in a circle evolving toward the main gift from the groom. This shows how the clans are interdependent and linked by filiation, alliance, and exchanges. The construction of filiations and alliances is reformulated at every customary ceremony, and this is also can be used in a transposition to education.

At the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, we can observe a strong presence of acting, seeing, and saying (speech) in terms of practices and strategies. This conceptual trilogy of transmission in Kanak social life is similar to Bruner's (1960) work on cognitive development in education. Bruner highlights mental strategies that social actors put into interaction in their cultural environment. Such strategies are also expressed at customary ceremonies, included as metaphors

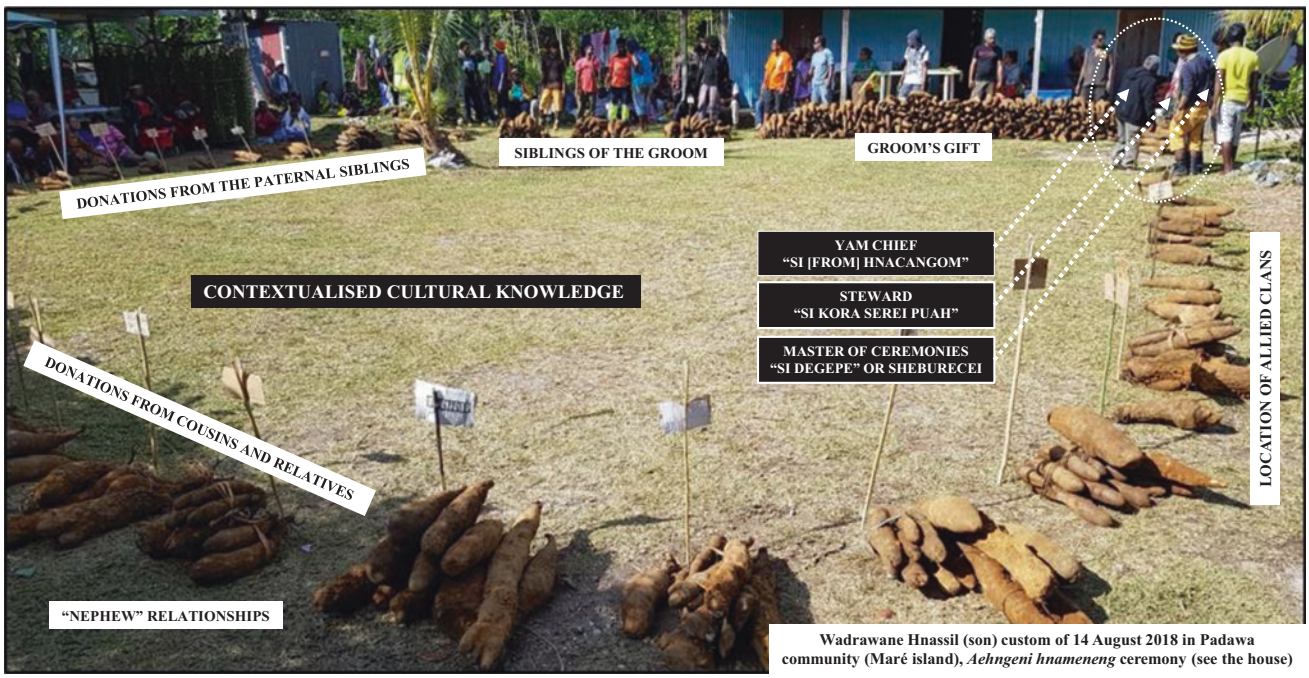


**Fig. 14.6** Socio-ethnological space of the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)

in customary discourses. Several bundles (paternal, maternal, etc.) channel various simultaneous information (the son on the paternal side, son on the maternal side, nephew of, from the clan of, etc.).

The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, which occurs in the presence of the bride's family, is thus organized as a form of communication system where modes (dialogal) and systems of operation (connections) function simultaneously. They sketch the contours of a sociological cartography of the groom's family. The genealogical cartography is spatialized through the hierarchical presence of the yam gifts. This spatialized expression is the interface of what the groom's (inter-relational) house represents.

The interconnections between clan geographical relations are organized in a mode called "multiplexing" (Fig. 14.7). The "multiplexing" mode translates the relationship concerning close family members and other affiliates (siblings, agnate, cognate), concerns (relationships, political geography, allies, resident, and co-resident), and modes of upbringing (values, rights, spiral). Everybody is interconnected in a social network illustrated by various contributions of gifts for the ceremony.

The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony (Fig. 14.7 and 14.8) is a space where gifts to share are first gathered, then positioned, and finally synthesized before being returned to each identified group (unit) entitled to receive shares.

In short, the Kanak custom of *Aengeni hnameneng* on Maré island is organized in a multiplex mode. The development of the concept "multiplexing" was mentioned on local radio stations that announce deaths in families. The messages reveal the interconnections of clans, families, and individuals. Spatialized custom relationships are therefore preserved, maintained, and reiterated when clans are placed in a position of customary contractualization.

## 14.19 Culture in the New Caledonian Educational World

This cultural relationships and modes of thinking outlined above can be of great interest to the world of education. Bruner (1960) uses a metaphorical spiral configuration to signify the modes of thinking linked to culture and particularly the relationships to pedagogy and learning. Abstraction is constructed in a spiral according to three stages for transmissions of customary knowledge, noted by Britt-Mari (1985): doing (practical action), seeing (image), and saying (words). This is unsurprising for those with knowledge of cognitive strategies.

Referring to Bruner (1960), Britt-Mari (1985) points out that the three modes complement each other and that their interaction is crucial for learning. Bruner's spiral identifies

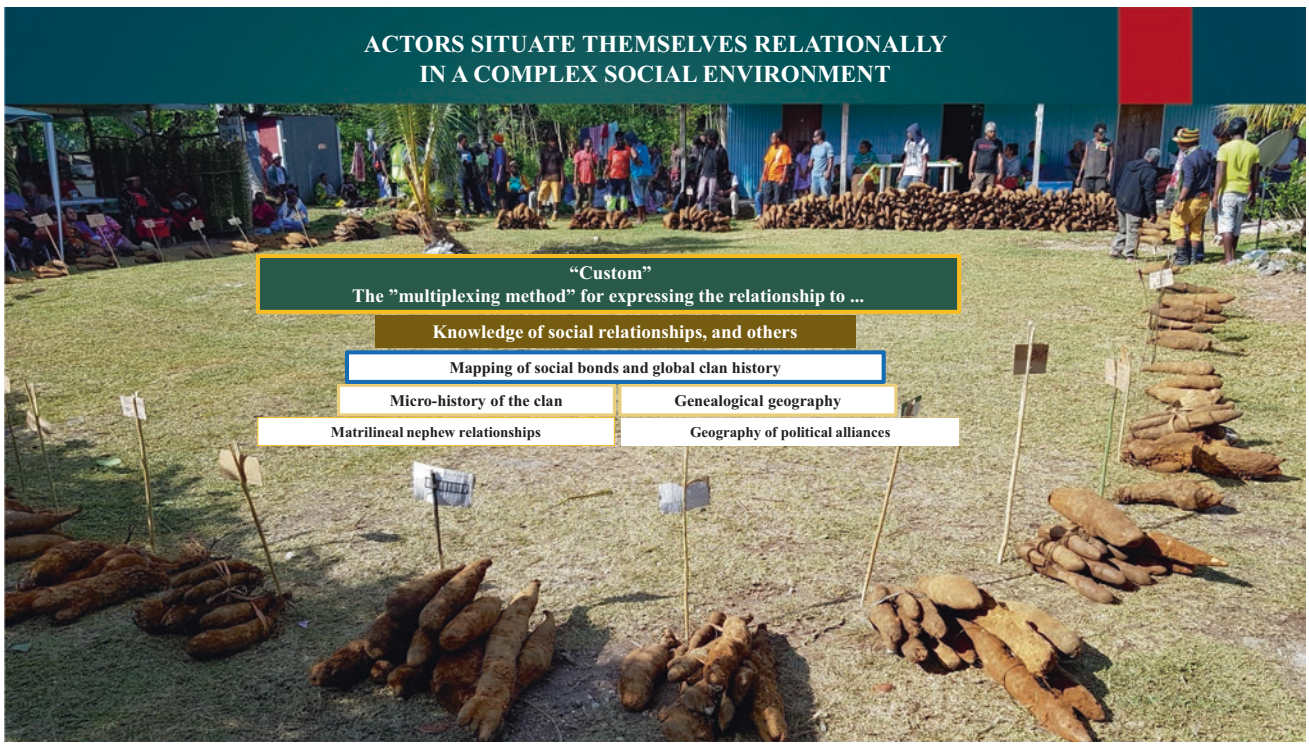


**Fig. 14.7** The multiplexing of the *Aengeni hnameneng*. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)

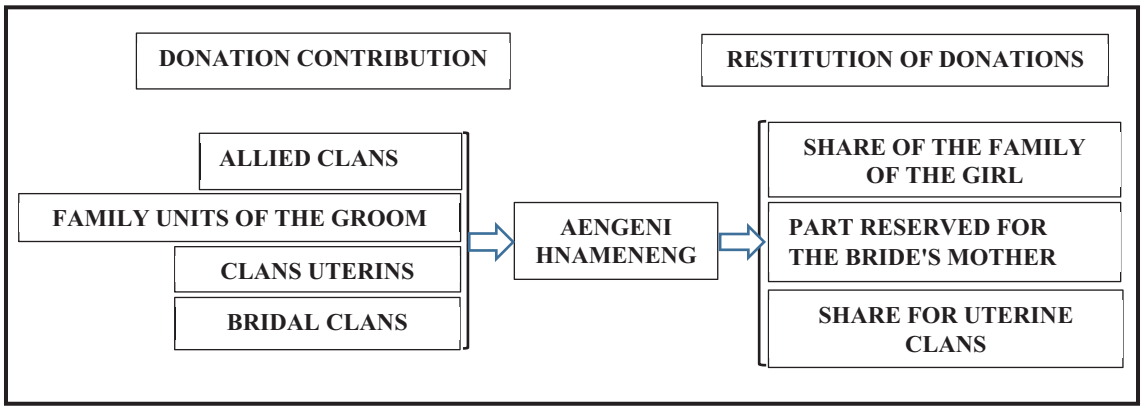


**Fig. 14.8** Schematic—multiplexing—in *Aengeni hnameneng* custom. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

different phases of knowledge acquisition. By moving from one mode of representation to another and by absorbing data in different modes and in different contexts, thinking evolves toward greater abstraction. The conversion of knowledge into a form that can be transmitted to learners is therefore linked to the structuring of knowledge, and to respect for the modes of representation. "The limits of intellectual development" depend on the way "a culture helps an individual to use intellectual potential" (Britt-Mari 1985, p. 53) leading to the geometry term of "fractal" (Fig. 14.9a–c).

The fieldwork carried out by archeologists shows the materiality of the spiral figure (Fig. 14.9a) expressed on ancient Kanak petroglyphs (Fig. 14.9b, c). There is also an inventory that was carried out by Sand and Monin (2015) in Païta district in southern New Caledonia, which shows the numerous expressions of axial, radial, and bilateral symmetries exposing a fractal geometry (Fig. 14.9a). It is not uncommon to see the expression of the spiral in social practices. Spiral configurations thus also appear in traditional mourning ceremonies. We can again draw on this customary knowledge for transposition into formal education. Figure 14.9b also shows how school children discover with enthusiasm this sociohistorical heritage.

## 14.20 Modes of Transmission: "Doing-Seeing-Saying"

In 2019, I applied the practice-image-speech trilogy at a training session in a Kanak community. For the transmission of cultural knowledge, family and clan members use the conceptual succession as presented in Fig. 14.10. First, there is the observation of a *"Do" (Kuca)* performed by an expert. Then someone performs "under the gaze of..." *(Goeën)*. This moment is crucial since the performer attempts a realization according to a constructed and memorized representation. The assistants observing can participate through giving advice. Representations, proposals for modeling, and algorithms appear. The last step consists in fixing the knowledge through the word ("Saying"). This is also a crucial moment because the knowledge is rooted, accompanied by jokes. Hilarity and irony support the cultural transmission.

In 2013, some trainee teachers benefited from such a training session. In an interview, Julia Duparc highlighted that this "immersion" in a customary context in the North Province for a week was a great adventure (Interview with Julia Duparc 2013). It allowed the discovery of teaching conditions in several municipalities and to understand the realities in community schools, "lost in the greenery." This training course also brought teacher candidates closer together: living together for five days created links that could result in greater collaboration in training and in the preparation of classroom lessons. The purpose of this trip was to immerse participants in living and teaching conditions where the expression of Kanak culture is much more prevalent than in the New Caledonian capital, Nouméa. Duparc argued that they all benefitted from experience, and the meetings were very touching, whether it was with the inspector, the school directors, the teachers, and the students, but also with the chiefs and their families who spend time exchanging ideas and even welcoming the teacher candidates in their homes. In the opinion of Duparc, the course is essential to get an experience and a feeling for the working conditions in schools well beyond the greater Nouméa area and the South Province in general. It should be repeated for future classes of teacher candidates (Interview with Julia Duparc 2013).

Following these different examples of customary knowledge transposition, we can see how Kanak society is organized and maintains social links. Customary practices constantly update these relationships. The permanent update and recreation of relationships by referring back to experiences already accomplished, is at the center of social and cultural construction. The different examples have shown how the social world assiduously uses analogical processes and modes of reasoning. In our opinion, this is of great pedagogical interest.

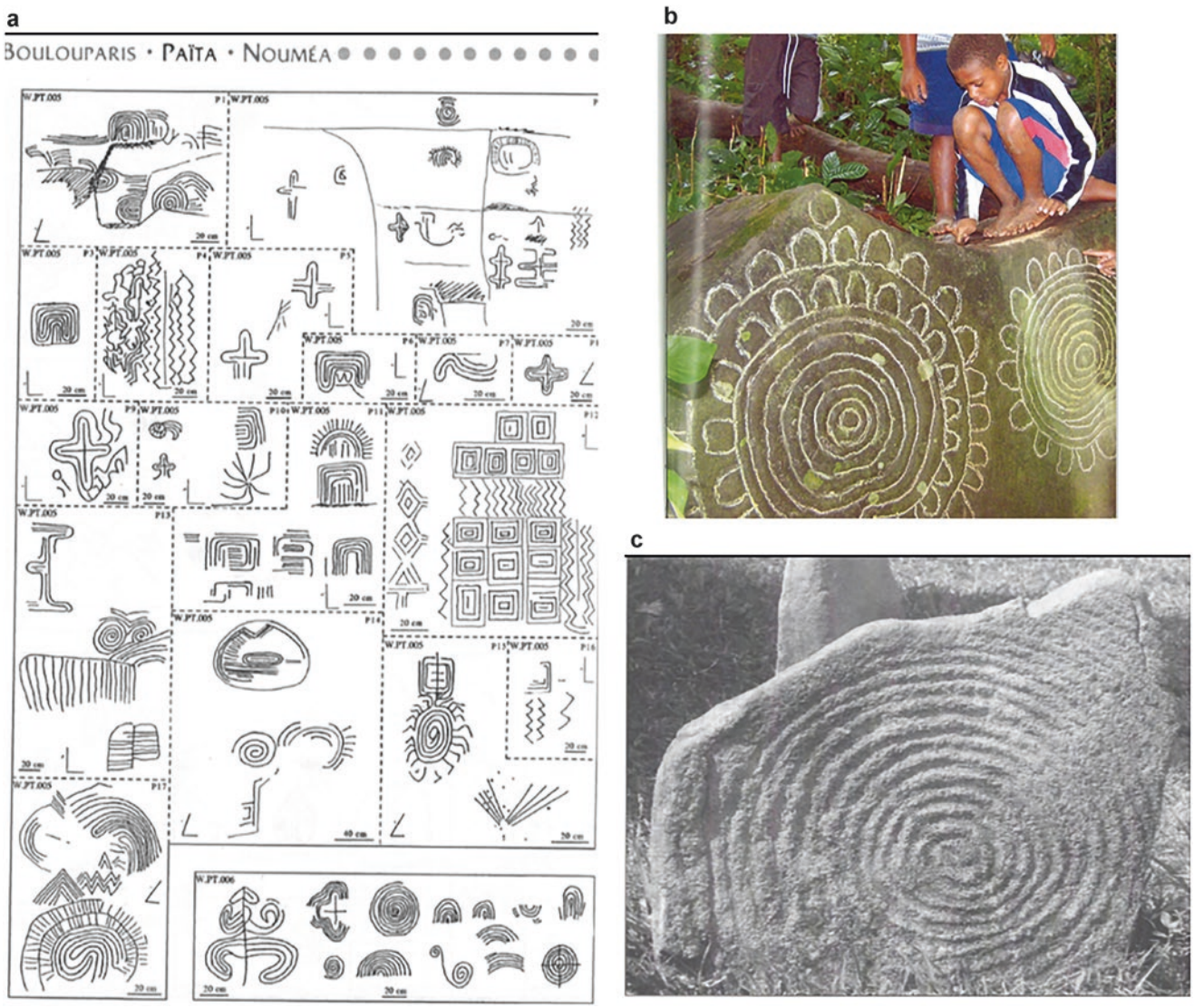


**Fig. 14.9** (**a**–**c**) The spiral and fractal configuration in a plural context: Geographical inventory of petroglyph sites (Païta region, South Province) (left), school children discover the petroglyph site of Necharihouen in the Ponérihouen valley (right above), example of a spiral on a slab (Tchamba community, North Province) (right below). Sources: Sand and Monin 2015 (left), Sand et al. 2008 (right above), (right below)

## 14.21 The Yam Calendar

Our last example took place in 2022. This yam calendar (Fig. 14.11) was developed by trainee teachers in their second year. The exercise was to transpose the yam calendar and the Gregorian calendar. They were able to translate, through the yam calendar, both the Gregorian annual chronology, the symbolism of plants and animals corresponding to the development of the tuber, and the physiological modifications of the fauna and flora.

The teacher candidates greatly appreciated this course. On the one hand, it allowed them to experience the expression of the EFCKs in context. The interactions developed from the cultural activities strengthened mutual and interpersonal relationships. Many of them discovered potentialities (sculptures and arts) and data collection that could be used in the classroom when teaching about Kanak languages and cultures.

The acquisition of new conceptual tools from Kanak cultures revealed the ability of these young teachers to master and evolve their representations and mental constructs. The situation of cultural dualism is not only rich, but it is also a way to push beyond one's own limits and to apply principles of social inclusion.

This kind of project, in which interesting outcomes emerge from school and adult education, helps to draw new

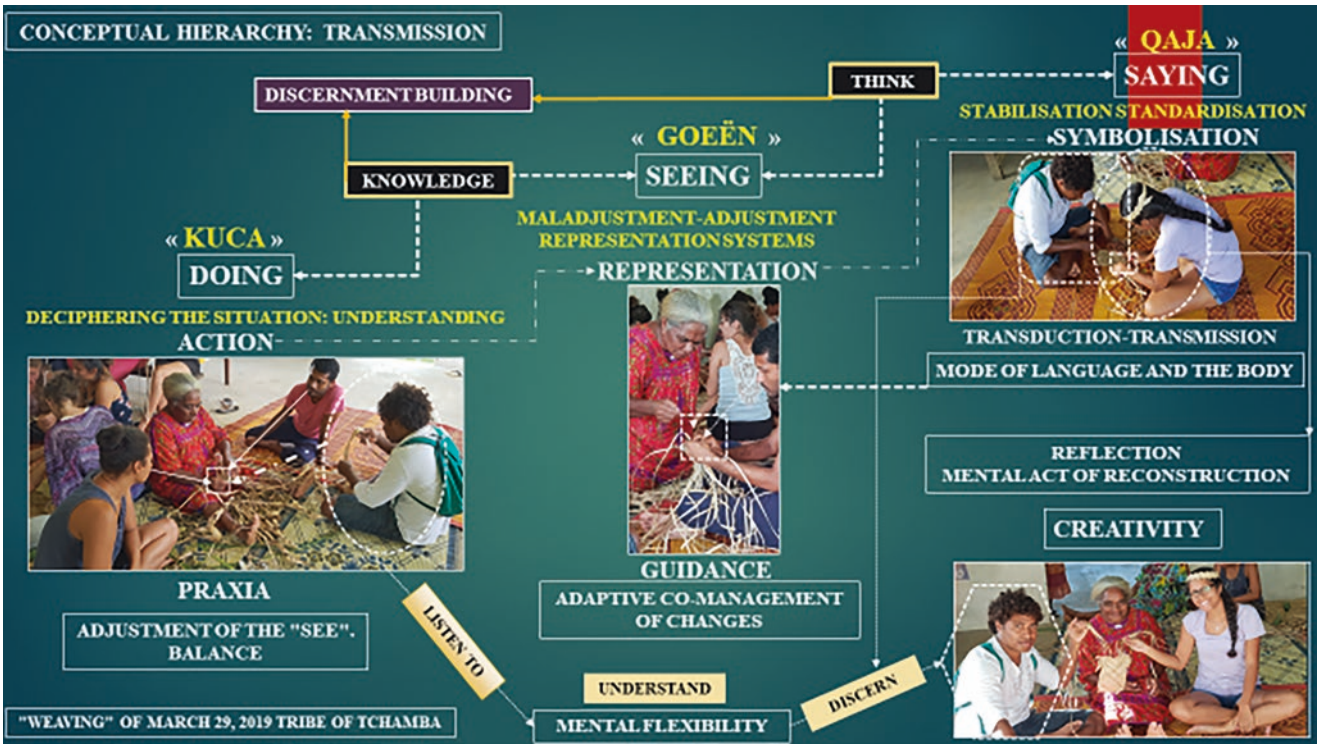


**Fig. 14.10** Training session "doing-seeing-saying" on weaving practice. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)

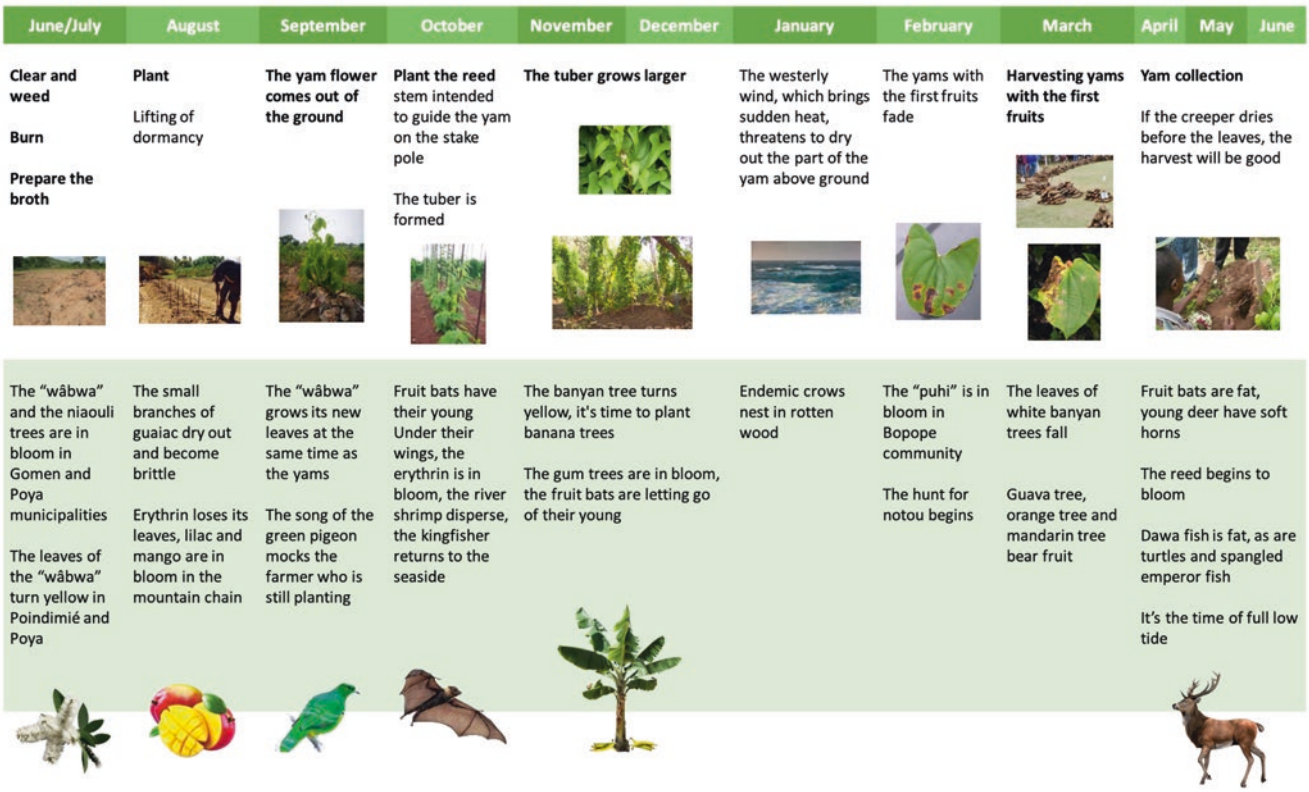


**Fig. 14.11** Yam calendar developed by second year trainee teachers. Tutorials during the first year university diploma course at the Teacher Training Institute of New Caledonia (IFMNC-UNC). (Credit and translation: Larissa Robert "*L'igname, patrimoine d'avenir*," cartography: Kowasch 2023)

contours of an emancipated and decolonised school. Referring to Elie Poigoune (Interview on 1 May 2001), I argue that we should make schooling better than it is now (see also Wadrawane 2010). It is therefore necessary to continue to nurture creativity and innovative intelligence on a human scale (Bensa 2010). It is imperative to co-construct educational references to develop New Caledonian citizenship, a mark of the "double footprint."

## 14.22 Conclusion

On 7 September 2011, the program "*Comité 30 ans Pierre Declercq*" was broadcast on Radio Djidoo, the local pro-independence radio station. Afterwards, Gérard Sarda, a senior government official and member of the local section of the League of Human Rights, emphasized: "This formidable humor of everyday life, very frequently practiced by Kanaks to such an extent that it is undoubtedly constitutive for you, has a resilience function." Illouz (2000, p. 195) noted that we can associate the power of humour with the Nengoné language, so that Maréans pass without transition "from serious mutism to hilarious prolixity." This society has the art of discerning the interlocutor and strategically accommodating solemnity and self-mockery. The hilarity and the irony were undoubtedly good companions of Kanak people during the lack of balance and violence under colonial rule.

During the 1980s, the independence supporters derided Republican schools as colonial, and many supported the more radical alternative, the EPKs. Even if the attempt to readjust the school system by demanding recognition of Kanak knowledge and ways of thinking was aborted when many EPKs disbanded after a few months or years, the introduction of elements of Kanak culture has since occurred. Currently, New Caledonian and French State educational institutions are attempting to work alongside each other.

The clumsy and sometimes fatal arguments that are still produced today around the teaching of culture, and particularly Kanak languages, show the lack of understanding of the relationship between Indigenous cultures and learning. The EPKs confirmed didactic relationships which are now thought to be fundamental. The EPKs cannot be reduced to simple instances of the struggle of Kanak people against educational domination. If New Caledonian society is truly aware of their insights, it will then be possible to establish a more inclusive school that, through its curricula, will impel the foundations of a true "common destiny" contributing to a New Caledonian citizenship. The EFCK programme is taking this forward.

Alongside political and trade union activists, social and cultural actors, Kanak and non-Kanak teachers are invited to seize these schooling principles, in an institution of transmission and transformation, to re-establish new philosophical positions. Culture can be reinterpreted, reconstructed, and taught, beginning with the foundations of Kanak and Oceanian civilizations in order to train future citizens of the country that will endure the end of the Nouméa Accord. Youth will be central to developing a new social and scholastic imaginary. But this perspective will depend on the willingness of adults and elders to accept the creation of new social links for the realization of a New Caledonian citizenship.

**Acknowledgments** I am very grateful to the editors Matthias Kowasch and Simon Batterbury for launching this book on the geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky and to Martha Macintyre and Simon Batterbury for English corrections and proof reading, which helped to improve the chapter.

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# Part VI

## Small-Scale Politics and Gender Questions

# Gender, Politics and Power in New Caledonia

15

Kerryn Baker

**Abstract**

This chapter explores women's engagement in politics in New Caledonia over time. Despite widespread resistance to western conceptualisations of feminism, women's organising in New Caledonia has a long history. Although women's movement has historically been fragmented along ethnic and ideological lines, a strong women's coalition emerged during the debate over the French parity laws. Activists from both the pro-independence and loyalist sides of politics campaigned strongly to ensure the parity laws would be implemented in the territory. These laws, and the advocacy from local women's groups, have ensured that since 2004 women have been represented in New Caledonian politics in near-equal numbers to men. Men still dominate key positions of political power, and in the complex political environment of New Caledonia, gender is just one political identity among many, making issues of representation fraught. Yet women's increased access to politics has had a substantive impact in New Caledonia: enabling the articulation of diverse viewpoints, enhancing women's status as leaders and increasing attention paid to key gender policy issues. Building on a long history of women's participation in decision-making, collective action and political activism in the territory, the parity laws have created an expanded political sphere for women.

**Keywords**

Politics · New Caledonia · Parity · Gender quotas · Feminism

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## 15.1 Introduction

New Caledonia is just one of six *collectivités* outside of Europe under the control of France, along with five *départements*. This collection of overseas territories gives France an expansive global footprint across the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans, as well as the largest exclusive economic zone in the world (Fisher 2013). The political statuses of these *collectivités* and *départements* are complicated, with as many different arrangements as there are territories (Mrgudovic 2012). Yet New Caledonia is especially distinctive politically in the French sphere of influence, given its unique status under the French constitution as a special collectivity.

It is also distinctive within the Pacific Islands region, not least due to its consistently high levels of women's political representation, paralleled only by French Polynesia. The French parity laws, as implemented in New Caledonia, offer unprecedented access to political institutions and positions for women, even within the confines of masculinised customary and formal power structures. Close to half of the seats in New Caledonia's three Provincial Assemblies and Congress are held by women, and the number of women in politics is also high in the other French Pacific territories of French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna. Elsewhere in the region, women's political representation lags behind. As of April 2020, women occupied just 6% of seats in the legislatures of the independent Pacific, and the only three countries in the world with no women in the national parliaments – Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Federated States of Micronesia – were all Pacific neighbours (IPU 2020).

New Caledonia could be described from a political science perspective as a polarised polity. The primary political cleavage is around the issue of independence from France (see Chauchat 2017; Forrest and Kowasch 2016). A referendum on the issue was held in November 2018, resulting in a relatively narrow defeat for the independence option (Chauchat 2019; Maclellan 2019b). In a second referendum


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in October 2020, the proportion of pro-independence votes increased further, although at 46.74%, it was still short of a majority (Fisher 2020). A third referendum in December 2021 was largely boycotted by pro-independence voters, leaving the question of New Caledonia's future political status unsettled.

The independence debate in New Caledonia is largely – albeit simplistically – conceptualised along ethnic lines, with the Indigenous Kanak population the strongest supporters of independence, while the settler populations, and in particular those of European descent, more likely to support remaining with France. Yet within these two broad pro- and anti-independence camps, there is significant diversity of perspectives, informed by different experiences of colonisation, ethnicity, class and other identities and individualities. These differences can perhaps be seen in the intense fragmentation of New Caledonian politics beyond simple pro- and anti-independence groupings (see Maclellan 2005, 2015).

In this complex political environment, the parity laws have meant more than a simple numerical increase in women's political representation. They have ensured a diversity of women's views and perspectives are represented within political institutions. That is not to say they have been a panacea; politics in New Caledonia, especially at its highest echelons, remains male-dominated. Yet in the context of the Pacific Islands region, with the lowest levels of women's representation in the world, the implementation of the parity laws has had a profound effect on politics.

This chapter will explore women's involvement in New Caledonian politics both before and after the introduction of the parity laws. The following section examines the history of women's political organising in New Caledonia. Then, women's representation in formal politics, including the introduction of the parity law, is discussed. The final section will look at the complexity of gender as a category of analysis in New Caledonia, using the lens of intersectionality (see Crenshaw 1991).

## 15.2 Feminisms, Anti-feminisms and Women's Organising in New Caledonia

Feminism as a movement has never been wholly embraced by women activists in New Caledonia. Alan Berman (2005) argues: "The feminist movement in New Caledonia is, for the most part, non-existent". This is largely because, for Kanak activists, feminism is seen as linked to Global North agendas and potentially detracting from the wider goals of the nationalist movement. In the Pacific Islands, feminism is often perceived as a western construct and not especially relevant to the Pacific context (George 2010). Where feminism is articulated in the region, it is often linked to maternal narratives and imagery, while western feminism is seen as individualistic or even anti-family (George 2010; Leckie 2002). Pacific feminism is also closely linked to Christian values (Jolly 2000), understandable in a region where the overwhelming majority of the population identifies as Christian and where Christian-based women's organisations are viewed as much more acceptable to the wider community than secular groups (Monson 2013). Yet for the most part, feminism is seen as an unhelpful framing, too far removed from Pacific realities and values to be of use to Pacific women activists and the women's movement more broadly.

This is not to say that there are no localised articulations of a feminist agenda. In Berman's work, he noted that while numerous high-profile Kanak women leaders he interviewed rejected the label feminist, some were more open to it. This latter group included prominent pro-independence activist and former Vice-President of New Caledonia Déwé Gorodey who stated in an interview: "I think it's through ignorance that the term 'feminist' is not adopted here" (quoted in Berman 2005). An Indigenous feminist movement does exist in New Caledonia. One of the founding groups of the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS), historically the dominant political faction on the pro-independence side, was the Group of Kanak and Exploited Women in Struggle (GFKEL). Led by Sussana Ounei, the GFKEL was explicitly a radical feminist organisation that was set up in response to the failure of PALIKA, one of the largest groups within the FLNKS, to establish a women's section (Salomon and Hamelin 2008). While the group became defunct in the late 1980s, its existence proves the presence of a feminist agenda in the nationalist movement (Baker 2019; Chappell 2013). The radical, yet short-lived, overtly feminist dimension of the nationalist movement was succeeded by well-subscribed and politically active women's associations throughout the country (Salomon and Hamelin 2008).

Younger women, many of whom had been educated abroad, were critical in the establishment of politically active religious and secular women's groups in the 1960s and 1970s. These educated young women often held leadership positions in the newly formed groups (Paini 2003). These groups were an important space for activism, but they were clearly modelled on Western social and religious structures (Beboko-Beccalossi 2017). Thus, influences from overseas were keenly felt in women's activist spaces in New Caledonia, as in men's and mixed groups (see Chappell 2013).

Historically in the Pacific Islands region, much of women's organisation occurred through religious channels and networks (see Douglas 2003). This was also true of New Caledonia: "Religion undoubtedly provided a stimulus for the formation of [women's] groups and collective moments" (Beboko-Beccalossi 2017, p. 183). Religion in New Caledonia as elsewhere in the Pacific has been thoroughly

indigenised (Paini 2017). Christianity, along with culture, is critical to self-identity for many Kanak people; religion and custom are interrelated and act to reinforce even as they transform one another (Eriksen 2008; Keesing 1989).

Church women's groups take on significant importance in communities and are often highly respected. While they may have apparently conservative agendas (Jolly 1991), Christian women's groups across various denominations have nevertheless important forces for development activity, social activism and collective mobilisation, especially in rural areas (Pollard 2003; Scheyvens 2003). Church-based women's groups provide space for women to organise collective action and to build leadership skills and experience. This element of church women's organisations is not unique to the Pacific region; in Europe and the United States, Christian women's associations were commonly at the forefront of early women's rights activism (see Douglas 2003; McCammon and Campbell 2002). Collectivism and social organisation, often most effective when conducted through church women's groups, are important strategies where women are excluded from most positions and spheres of political power.

Women also became increasingly visible in government agencies from the 1980s (Beboko-Beccalossi 2017). This institutionalised the women's movement to an extent. In academic scholarship, institutionalisation is traditionally treated as the death knell for a social movement, but Merrindahl Andrew (2019) argues this is too simplistic. In New Caledonia, the correlation between increased women's representation and strengthened women's policy machinery (discussed below) shows the dynamism of interactions between the women's movement and the state.

As demonstrated, even if feminism remains a highly contested concept in New Caledonia, there is evidence of widespread effective women's organisation inside and outside government structures. The women's movement insofar as it exists in New Caledonia, however, is still affected by underlying political currents and divisions. One early example of this polarity was the creation of the *Conseil des Femmes de Nouvelle Calédonie* (CFNC) in 1983. Initially established as an umbrella organisation for women's associations in New Caledonia, open to groups with memberships of all ethnicity, rising ethnic tensions soon affected its work:

> Soon after the country was deep in rivalries and resentments, different ethnic groups regarded each other with suspicion, and the two main political alliances fought like bitter enemies. Such a climate of tension inflamed people's minds, and eventually it infiltrated within the women's council. Many among the association leaders ceased taking part in the meetings, and those who did attend brought with them proposals that were biased by their political sympathies (Beboko-Beccalossi 2017, p. 187).

In 1989, the CFNC became the Council of Melanesian Women of New Caledonia and later the Federation of Melanesian Women's Associations of New Caledonia (Beboko-Beccalossi 2017). The experience of the CFNC shows the challenges in establishing a cross-partisan women's movement across the pro- and anti-independence divide.

## 15.3 Women in New Caledonian Politics

The under-representation of women in New Caledonian politics until the turn of the twenty-first century was profound. This was particularly acute for Kanak women, described by Berman (2005) as "token participants historically in the political affairs of New Caledonia". From the establishment of the Territorial Assembly of New Caledonia in the 1950s until 1999, there were no female members (Berman 2005; Drage 1995). In 1999, the first post-Nouméa Accord elections were held, although the parity laws were not yet implemented. In that election, nine women were elected. This number included four Kanak women. While women's representation at the municipal level was slightly higher than at territorial level, it was still extremely low. In 1998, out of 700 councillors, only around 20 were Kanak women (Berman 2005).

In 1999, a series of constitutional amendments were passed in France, colloquially known as the parity laws. These laws ostensibly mandated gender parity in political representation. Since the passage of the parity laws, women's representation in the French National Assembly and Senate has increased; as of April 2020, two out of every five delegates to the National Assembly and a third of the Senate are women (IPU 2020). Full parity has yet to be achieved, however, and this is largely due to a lack of political will on the part of political parties, many of which elect to pay financial penalties rather than appoint equal numbers of women and men as candidates (see Murray 2007). While the laws were passed in France, it was expected that they would apply in all overseas territories. Furthermore, in the French Pacific territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna, parity would be more strictly enforced than in mainland France because of the electoral system used, list proportional representation. In this system, according to parity, lists must be made up of equal numbers of women and men in alternating order; if parity on the list was not achieved, instead of financial penalties, the party would simply not be registered to contest elections. In each of the French Pacific territories, there were attempts to delay or block the implementation of the parity laws (see Baker 2019).

In New Caledonia, Simon Loueckhote, at the time a member of the French Senate for New Caledonia as well as the Speaker of the New Caledonian Congress, proposed an amendment to delay implementation of the parity laws in the territory until 2007. Arguments against the parity laws in New Caledonia coalesced around three key themes: that women, and especially Kanak women, were not prepared to

enter politics; that the laws would detrimentally affect Kanak culture and custom; and that the laws were colonially imposed and should be opposed on those grounds (Berman 2005). As evident by the arguments used, male political leaders attempted to situate the parity laws within wider debates on independence and on the protection of Kanak culture, traditions and ways of life, in order to delegitimise them.

The parity laws were presented as a colonial imposition and as a distraction for the pro-independence movement. When the Loueckhote amendment was put forward, a spokesman for the pro-independence group *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS) criticised parity as a threat to the independence movement:

> The political arm of the FLNKS … regrets that during this heated debate, certain politicians have hoped that the law on parity would apply "ipso facto" in our country, thus calling into questions the will for decolonisation and self-government sanctioned by the Nouméa Accord (quoted in Claudel 2000, p. 2).

Nicole Waïa, a Kanak woman leader who was a member of the Congress at the time, questioned the idea that the parity laws were a threat to the decolonisation process: "How does the fight for parity between men and women harm the process of decolonisation? For me, decolonisation should result in advancement, change, progress" (Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes 2000, p. 8). Other supporters of parity countered that this law was no different to other French laws imposed on New Caledonia in the post-colonial era (Berman 2005). These include laws relating to gender that are far more liberal than those of New Caledonia's independent Pacific neighbours, notably regarding access to abortion, as well as same-sex marriage and adoption.

Opponents of the parity law also portrayed the move as a threat to traditional gender roles and, by extension, to Kanak values and culture. Members of the Customary Senate, an advisory body made up of Kanak elders, voiced fears that the parity laws would cause societal problems for the Kanak population (Berman 2005). César Qenegei, a Kanak public figure, argued that parity would disrupt the Melanesian way of life (Fléaux 2000). This attempt to frame parity as antithetical to custom was resisted by many prominent Kanak women (Baker 2019).

The Loueckhote amendment was publicly condemned by women, as well as some men, from both sides of politics. Protests were held in the capital of Nouméa and other towns, and a petition to the French Minister of the Interior in support of the implementation of the parity laws gathered 1600 signatures. The strength of the pro-parity movement in New Caledonia was notable, but equally so were the sources of support for parity. The parity laws debate was a unifier of women in New Caledonia (Berman 2005). A genuine cross-partisan political movement emerged to oppose the Loueckhote amendment and ensure the parity laws were applied in the territory. This in itself was notable, given the historic difficult in creating a united women's movement in New Caledonia, as seen by the CFNC experience (Bebokо-Beccalossi 2017). Ultimately, the Loueckhote amendment was withdrawn, and parity was first implemented in the 2004 territorial elections.

The immediate effect of the introduction of parity was the numerical increase in women's representation. In the 2004 election, the number of women in politics in New Caledonia increased substantially. Women won 47% of the seats in the Congress and up to 50% of the seats in each of the three provincial assemblies (Chappell 2005; Maclellan 2005). Furthermore, Marie-Noëlle Thémereau – leader of the *Avenir Ensemble* party and an outspoken proponent of parity – was elected as the first female President of New Caledonia. Thémereau, formerly a member of the right-wing and firmly anti-independence *Rassemblement pour une Calédonie dans la République* (RPCR), had joined the more centre-right and "reconciliatory" party (Chanter 2006, p. 150) in 2001. During her tenure as leader, *Avenir Ensemble* became the RPCR's main contender for dominance in the loyalist political sphere. Gorodey, who had been Vice-President since 2001, was re-appointed in her post.

The initial gains of parity in terms of women's representation in the legislatures have been maintained. In the 2019 elections, women won 25 out of 54 seats in the Congress (46%), seven out of 14 seats in the Loyalty Islands Provincial Assembly (50%), ten out of 22 seats in the Northern Provincial Assembly (45%) and 19 out of 40 seats in the Southern Provincial Assembly (47.5%). Women were underrepresented at the heads of party lists in the 2019 elections; of the lists that won at least one seat, women headed one of four in the Loyalty Islands, zero of three in North Province and one of four in South Province (République Française 2019). This accounts for the slight over-representation of men in the Congress as well as in the Northern and Southern Provincial Assemblies, while the two female-headed lists returned even numbers of elected members – and thus even numbers of male and female representatives – four of the male-headed lists returned odd numbers.

The parity laws have indeed resulted in near-parity in political representation in New Caledonia. In terms of women's political leadership, however, progress in the post-parity era has been less impressive. In 2019, one of the female-headed lists, the hardline anti-independence grouping *Avenir en confiance*, whose list was headed by Sonia Backès of *Les Républicains calédoniens*, won the most seats, winning half the seats in the Southern Provincial Assembly and 18 seats in the Congress. After negotiations in the power-sharing government were concluded, however, Thierry Santa, head of the *Rassemblement-Les Républicains* party and another key figure in the *Avenir en confiance* coalition, was elected president. The vice-president was Gilbert Tyuienon of the

pro-independence UC-FLNKS – both are men. Only two of the 11 members (18%) of the government are women.

While there have been two female presidents of New Caledonia since the parity laws were introduced – Thémereau and Cynthia Ligeard – neither served a full term. The Thémereau administration had a rocky start, with members of her former party resigning from government just hours after she was confirmed in the position, thus bringing down the government. Both Thémereau and Gorodey were eventually reinstated in their positions, but Berman (2005) cites this incident as evidence that the political climate for women in high-level political positions remained "very chilly" even after parity was introduced. Thémereau resigned as President in 2007 and was replaced by another *Avenir Ensemble* politician, Harold Martin. Ligeard won the presidency following the 2014 election, but her administration lasted less than 6 months. The political turmoil faced by both Thémereau and Ligeard stemmed from disputes among the anti-independence parties.

Despite this mixed report card on the political advances won by parity, there has been noticeable progress in terms of the substantive representation of women and women's interests. Studies have found that issues of women's rights were paid more attention in political debate in New Caledonia after parity was introduced (Bargel et al. 2010; George 2013, 2015). This turn has had substantive impacts, notably in the provision of more funding for women's policy machinery since the introduction of the parity laws and in new measures to support women's educational opportunities and economic empowerment.

One noticeable shift has been in renewed attention from the government to the issue of violence against women. This is a major issue in New Caledonia, as elsewhere in the world; a 2017 study reported that one in five women in the territory had experienced spousal violence in the past year (Rivière and Ronai 2017). Political actors including Déwé Gorodey have been instrumental in driving the government's agenda on this issue. Recent progress in this area has included additional government funding for civil society organisations working to combat violence against women, the creation of an emergency telephone line for victims of sexual and domestic violence and the provision of emergency accommodation (Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie 2019).

Parity was an exogenous process in New Caledonia – imposed externally from the French *"métropole"*, in a debate that paid limited attention to how it may be perceived and implemented in overseas territorial contexts (see Baker 2014). Nevertheless, women in New Caledonia took control of the parity laws debate in the territory, firstly to defeat the Loueckhote amendment and ensure the laws were introduced and secondly to utilise a newfound strength in numbers to promote women's issues on the policy agenda. The women's movement that arose in support of the parity movement in New Caledonia is perhaps especially notable in the context of the complicated ethnic and nationalist politics of the territory, as discussed more below.

## 15.4 Intersecting Identities

Gender as a political identity cannot be considered in a vacuum. In the Pacific Islands, as in all other regions of the world, "historical, cultural and special specificities complicate an understanding of women's agencies and alert us to the dilemma of treating the category 'women' either as unified or as infinitely fragmented" (Leckie 2002, p. 175). While issues such as women's underrepresentation in politics, maternal health and violence against women cut across distinctions of ethnicity, culture and class, they do not affect all groups equally. Intersectionality is an analytical tool that highlights how the marginalisation of groups and individuals can be compounded through overlapping forms and types of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social identities (see Crenshaw 1991; Smooth 2011).

The politics of intersecting identities can be especially fraught in the contexts of nationalist movements, as in New Caledonia. Resistance movements with male-dominated leadership hierarchies can treat women's issues an unimportant or even as a distraction to the cause (Horowitz 2017). The specific struggles of women are subsumed within a wider movement, and explicit attention to them is seen as divisive, with political movements in this way echoing the gender blindness of state structures they are fighting against: "indigenous women fall between the edifice of rights constructed by … states and political movements" (Radcliffe 2002, p. 149).

While nationalist movements may be inconsiderate of gender issues, the broader feminist movement is seen as uninterested in issues of nationalism and Indigenous rights. Writing of her experiences in the Hawaiian nationalist movement, Haunani-Kay Trask (1996) positions Western feminism as diametrically opposed to Indigenous rights: "More than a feminist, I am a nationalist". This is reflected in the New Caledonian context in a quote from Marie-Paul Tourte (in Berman 2005):

> I think feminist is understood to mean fight against men. Kanak women want a balance. They think the struggle for independence, for Kanaky, necessitates unity among the Kanak people; division must be avoided … Because we're in a colonial situation, I think that Kanak women subordinate their own internal problems to the struggle against colonialism.

In his writing, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (2005) – the celebrated Kanak pro-independence leader who was assassinated in 1989 – emphasised the role Kanak women had to play in the nationalist movement. He articulates the role of women as mothers and custodians of culture:

> It is they who give the single co-extensive gift of life and blood, the one through the other. The father gives name, rank and social status, but the child, boy or girl, will always remember the cord which ties him to the mother's clan … the women of Caledonia, like all the mothers of the world, give life at birth and again every moment of the daily round (Tjibaou 2005, p. 28)

He notes the key role played by women's associations in standing against alcoholism, violence against women and other societal ills and in promoting Kanak culture. He credits these associations with the original idea to hold a festival of Melanesian art, which became Melanesia 2000 (Tjibaou 2005). The festival, the first of its kind in New Caledonia, was held in Nouméa in September 1975 under the direction of a committee led by Tjibaou and was a turning point in the revitalisation of Kanak cultural identity and the creation of a unified Kanak political voice. Women were active in the conceptualisation and organisation of the festival, as well as performing (see Graille 2016).

As detailed above, women asserted themselves within the Kanak nationalist movement both in collaboration with men and in separate affiliated organisations, including the GFKEL. In many ways, the nationalist movement was an opportunity for women to engage more fully in the political space. Yet many female nationalist activists articulated a perceived tension between fighting for the nationalist cause and promoting a women's rights agenda (see Berman 2005). On the anti-independence side, too, politically active women need to position themselves in relation to their social identities, not just gender, but other cross-cutting identities such as class that complicate an already fragmented political system (Chanter 2006) and make issues of representation more fraught. In the 2014 territorial election, women headed the three most conservative of six lists registered in the South Province; in 2019 again, the most conservative list was headed by a woman (Maclellan 2015, 2019a). These tensions reflect the complexities of navigating intersectional identities for political women.

## 15.5 Conclusion

Women's political representation is often highlighted as an issue, yet the claim that half of the world's population has any kind of collective basis for mobilisation and representation has commonly been resisted, by both men and women. Nonetheless, there are strong cases to be made for the need for women to be represented and to represent women's issues in political institutions. Young (2002) claims that women share a social status as a result of structural inequalities, and this shared status informs their contribution to politics. Phillips (1995, 1998) makes the case that women have shared interests that are formed from the lived experience of being a woman and that women are uniquely qualified to represent these interests in politics. It can certainly be argued, as by Carol Kidu, one of the few women to be elected to the Papua New Guinea Parliament, that "when there is only less than 1% of half the population in Parliament, it is not a representative democracy" (quoted in Garrett 2013).

Gender is, of course, not the only or even the most important identity that shapes political consciousness and action. As I have shown in other research related to women voters in the Pacific Islands (Baker 2018), men are afforded a complex calculation taking into account their various identities and allegiances, while women are often expected to vote on, and are heavily criticised for not voting on, gendered lines. In New Caledonia, there is a diversity of perspectives among women (and men) informed by different experiences of colonisation, ethnicity, class, the exacerbating divisions with the pro- and anti-independence movements and a myriad other identities and factors.

Despite this diversity and despite the deep political cleavage of independence that still defines New Caledonian politics, common ground was found by women in the debate around the implementation of the parity laws in the territory. This political alliance of women from across the political divide was arguably short-lived (Baker 2019). Nevertheless, it demonstrated commonalities in women's experiences of being excluded from formal politics, and the existence of a shared women's political agenda, at least in terms of descriptive representation. Women are now present in New Caledonia's formal political institutions in remarkable numbers, both in terms of historical representation in the territory and from a global perspective; if New Caledonia were to be included on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's list of women's representation, which only includes independent countries, it would place among the highest-performing countries in the world (IPU 2020).

Men still dominate key positions of political power in New Caledonia. Yet the parity laws have provided space for women's interests to be represented, articulated and (equally importantly) funded through policy machinery and initiatives on violence against women and women's economic empowerment, among other issues. Women's increased access to political positions has enhanced their status in communities and empowered them to challenge their lack of access to other institutions – notably, through a campaign instigated by female politicians and Kanak women's groups to open membership of the Customary Senate to women (Naisseline 2005; Salomon and Hamelin 2008).

In the Pacific Islands region, women are mostly underrepresented as representatives in legislatures. Where they are the sole female representative, they are tasked with representing all women as a group; where there is a small cohort, they are often criticised for not working together (Baker

2018; George 2015). As the number of female representatives increases, the expectations associated with the role become easier to manage (Baker 2018; Corbett and Liki 2015). This, among other reasons, is why numerical increases in women's representation are important; women are better served when there is a range of backgrounds, perspectives and lived experiences represented in political institutions. What the parity laws have accomplished in New Caledonia is to create unprecedented space for such a diversity of views to be represented.

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# The Emergence of an Autonomous Political Arena in Ouvéa: An Ethnography of Its Local Council

16

Mélissa Nayral

**Abstract**

The sessions of the Ouvéa local council attract the ethnographer's attention because of the discrepancy between their discussions and local daily life on the island. On the one hand, these sessions look like any other local council sessions, including those of metropolitan France. But on the other, they also present various peculiarities characteristic of Ouvéa's social and cultural context.

As elsewhere in the world, the organisation of political power observed and experienced during local council sessions is not simple. On the contrary, it exhibits hybrid characteristics from both a French institutional republican political world and from the so-called Kanak customary political universe. This chapter explores what J.-M. Tjibaou named "colonisation within the Republic" (Tjibaou, La présence Kanak. O. Jacob, Paris, 1996) by exploring this aspect of hybridity in a case study based on a long-term ethnography of local political practices and, more particularly, of the local council sessions held between 2007 and 2010.

**Keywords**

Political anthropology · New Caledonia · Ouvéa · Local council · Autonomous political arena

## 16.1 Introduction

The sessions of the Ouvéa local council attract the attention of ethnographers because of the discrepancy between their deliberations and local daily life on the island. On the one hand, these sessions look like any other local council sessions, such as those of metropolitan France, but on the other, they also present various peculiarities characteristic of Ouvéa's social and cultural context. This particular "political spot" (Abélès 2007, p. 13), the local council, is occupied by men with customary responsibilities and high status, along with women who, by definition, have no such responsibilities. The customary political organisation of Kanak chiefdoms, which includes both councils and the council of elders, is characterised by a strict distinction between men, who have a monopoly concerning public speaking, and women who, while not necessarily excluded from political knowledge, have no place in the so-called political life of the chiefdom (Nayral 2018). There are also other men who do not belong to the first category of prestigious, fairly powerful men. This recent and particular configuration of the local council, as well as the political practices observed during these meetings, call into question the relationships between Kanak custom and French republican institutions, which both possess their own forms of political organisation. As elsewhere in the world, the organisation of political power observed and experienced during local council sessions is not simple. On the contrary, it exhibits hybrid characteristics from both an institutional republican political world and from the so-called customary political universe.

This chapter seeks to analyse the way in which hybridity can emerge from different levels of organisation and control within the territorial community of Ouvéa. It explores a case study based on observations of local council sessions held between 2007 and 2010. Although these observations are thus slightly dated, they remain relevant and useful because the general local political situation regarding local councils is much the same now as it was a decade ago and the current mayor held the same role in 2010. In order to introduce the situation in 2010, the chapter will first summarise how Kanak people have progressively become part of Caledonian "municipalities" (local councils) since the end of the *code de l'indigénat* ("native regulations") system in 1946.

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## 16.2 From Being "Indigenous" to Becoming a Member of the Local Council (*Conseiller Municipal*)

### 16.2.1 Citizenship and Republican Elections

From the arrival of the French administration in New Caledonia in 1853, Indigenous Kanak people and Europeans were treated differently. However, these differences were only formalised in 1887 with the creation of a system of administrative law codified as the Native Regulations (*Indigénat* in French), which made a distinction between citizens and indigenous non-citizens. As in Algeria or Cochin China where this regime also existed, Caledonian "native non-citizens", in other words Kanak people, were subjected to French sovereignty but could not vote. This discriminatory political system had a criminal equivalent as well as a civil jurisdiction, which also made a distinction between citizens and "natives" who remained subject to their own traditions and customs. "Citizens" and "native non-citizens" were therefore differentiated by a triple discrimination affecting political rights and criminal and civil law. However, the official definition of the "native" (*indigène*) only appeared in 1915.

In 1946, while the civil distinction remained, the other two distinctions, political and criminal, were removed (Merle 2004). It was then, in 1946, with the abolition of the "Native Regulations" (*Code de l'indigénat*), that the Kanak started to be considered as "natives from New Caledonia" and therefore began to be able to participate in elections for the very first time. It should be noted that the electorate at this time only included 10% of those Kanak people old enough to vote. In 1951, this figure increased to 60%, before finally reaching 100% in 1956 (Kurtovitch 1999). We should also add that the 1956 elections saw a high participation of Kanak people (Soriano 2000a, p. 243). However, this participation was not simple even for Kanak leaders themselves. Soriano, who has done in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, writes that, due to their hold over the Kanak population, it was the mission schools that actually controlled this process (Soriano 2000b, p. 88). He stresses the missions' influence over the Kanaks' electoral mobilisation, considering that "it is on the one hand, what made people vote massively, and on the other hand, what made people vote upon its elite's recommendations" (Soriano 2000a, p. 251). It was the fear of a rising local communist movement that led both the Catholic and Protestant Churches to ensure that Kanak people entered politics. UICALO (Union of Indigenous Caledonians Going for Freedom within Order (UICALO) and the Association of French Caledonian and Loyaltian Indigenous People (AICLF),[1] two missionary-inspired parapolitical organisations (Kurtovitch 1999), were the most prominent movements. As Wittersheim has also written, "churches are what encouraged and set up the natives' participation in politics" (Wittersheim 2003, p. 64). In addition, Trépied stressed the "social control practiced by collective structures (chiefdoms, churches, clans)" and emphasised the role of churches in controlling "the Melanesians' vote" (Trépied 2007, p. 59; 69). My research has not allowed me to do such an analysis in Ouvéa; however, I would like to underline how close political and religious local networks are to each other, to the extent that they are embedded in one another. I would also like to highlight that, in New Caledonia, all the Christian churches have always played a big part in daily life, just as they do in the territory's republican political life.

As mentioned above, during the 1950s and 1960s, the missions encouraged Kanak people to actively participate in republican elections, which led over time to a form of "great respect for democratic institutions" (Wittersheim 2006, p. 101). From this period on, Kanak gradually became involved in republican institutions, in an institutional logic that they abandoned in the 1970s when they radically protested against the entire colonial situation. When the Matignon Accords were signed in 1988, "once and for all, Melanesian leaders became involved in the republican system" (Soriano 2000b, p. 91–92) but this time from a different perspective.

### 16.2.2 The Municipality of Ouvéa

In New Caledonia, the first municipal commissions were created in 1879 on the main island Grande Terre, and only French citizens were allowed to take part in them. In 1953, these municipal commissions were opened up to mainland Kanak people, and at the same time, regional commissions (the equivalent of the municipal commissions mentioned above with a different name) were created in the Loyalty Islands, including Ouvéa. However, the first elections did not take place until a year later, in 1954. In 1961, both municipal and regional commissions became "municipalities". In 1969, with the 3 January 69-5 law, 32 of the 33 current councils of New Caledonia, including that of Ouvéa, were given a new administrative and legal statute, evolving towards the status of "full exercise municipality". This term meant that it was

[1]UICALO: Union des Indigènes Calédoniens Amis de la Liberté dans l'Ordre; AICLF: Association des Indigènes Calédoniens et Loyaltiens Français.

(and still is) a civil territory where French common law was – and still is – applicable (Trépied 2007).[2]

In 1990,[3] the financial and administrative authority of France over the municipalities was abolished and taken over by New Caledonia. They now have the same rights as French municipalities, except in relation to laws concerning economic development, and territorial planning and development. They have autonomy in public finances, which come under the jurisdiction of a larger institution: the provinces.

Like French municipalities, those of New Caledonia are legal entities with their own budget and subject to public law. Local councils consequently have considerable decision-making power. In spite of this, it should not be forgotten that since 1999,[4] all New Caledonian municipalities have come under the authority of one or other of the three local provinces, that for Ouvéa being the Loyalty Island Province, each with its own substantial budget.[5] That is why some very important decisions related to Ouvéa are taken in the neighbouring island of Lifou, the administrative centre of the province. As in France, all the municipalities of New Caledonia, as republican territorial collectivities, are free to manage their own affairs through an elected board: the *Conseil Municipal* (local council). Once elected by the population, the board elects from among its members a mayor and his or her councillors. As a government official, the mayor can sometimes have specific roles, in particular regarding the management of the registry office and military matters.

The municipality of Ouvéa had 3401 inhabitants at the last census (ISEE 20192019), most of whom are Kanak. Unlike Kone on Grande Terre, where challenging and contested colonial relationships progressively led the Kanak to political power (Trépied 2007, p. 60), since its first mandate in 1954, the local council of Ouvéa has always been run by Kanak teams, most of them affiliated to the pro-independence political party *Union Calédonienne* (UC).(Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (Nouméa) n.d.).

It is nonetheless difficult to rigorously investigate these political affiliations in much detail, since local records on this topic are lacking. Firstly, the local council building was burnt down during the "events of Ouvéa" in 1988, a paroxysmal episode in the biggest social and political crisis ever faced by New Caledonia, and the records stored there since the 1950s were hence entirely destroyed. Secondly, Ouvéa's local council has been working in a new building since 2009, and moving from the old building to the new one has caused problems regarding the storage of about ten boxes containing amongst other things the registers of births, marriages and deaths and election results. Consequently, besides oral memory and digital information,[6] the only official written documents available today in Ouvéa are the municipal registers written during local council sessions since 21 February 1987. These registers, which often have blank pages, only mention UC (pro-independence party) mandates, apart from 2002 to 2008 mandate held by PALIKA (another pro-independence political party, which has been running the council since 2014). Before proceeding with this analysis, it should be pointed out that though the interviews and observations conducted in various situations (meetings, councillors' office, information desk, election campaign, etc.) constitute the core of the ethnographic material, these analyses are supported by a certain number of official documents, as well as posters, electoral lists, election results and many files from the 97 W series of the Nouméa archives. Amongst these is correspondence between the local police and both local and French authorities, along with letters sent by missionaries. However, all these documents provide us with little information concerning the socio-historical trajectories of the local council's elected members.

The name of Ouvéa immediately evokes the sociopolitical crisis of the 1980s and "the Ouvéa cave affair", which lead to the death of 19 Kanak activists in the course of a military intervention, followed by the assassination of the Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou a year later. We could almost say that Ouvéa is a political issue in itself. However, as this appears to be something of a paradox, the island was neglected by public policies for long periods, and the geographer Faurie (2011) has demonstrated how the public authorities never bothered about the economic development of Ouvéa until its inscription as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. In other words, if everything related to Ouvéa appears highly political, in some way or other, it also seems that everything is always viewed through the distorting prism of the so-called "Events" of the 1980s, which end up acting as a screen between the role they still play in everyday life on the island and everything else that is at stake locally.

Focusing on the municipality of Ouvéa and on its local council is therefore relevant, not so much in order to distinguish what is at stake on this scale regarding the destiny of

[2]The commune of Nouméa was created on 8 March 1879.

[3]Law N°90–1247, 1990, 29 December.

[4]19 March 1999 law.

[5]The municipality of Poya is however an exception to the rule as its territory is spread over both the North and the South Provinces (since 1989). ISEE, 2014.

[6]Wikipedia for instance provides a list of all mayors of the council: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouv%C3%A9a (website visited 10/12/2020) which matches official Republican administrative records.

New Caledonia or even the Loyalty Island Province but rather to understand and to propose a new way of understanding how this local republican institution operates in a Kanak context, in which customary ideology occupies a key place but is not the only level of identification. As mentioned earlier, Ouvéa's local council implements protocol practices that somehow make it seem alien to local daily life while at the same time being steeped in customary norms.

## 16.3 The Local Council

The local council (*Conseil Municipal*) of Ouvéa meets about four times a year, in the new council building located in Hwadrilla, in the north of the island's central district. This building is part of what I call the island's "administrative centre". The place is not referred to as such locally, but it is where the Loyalty Island building, the local library, the bank, the customary council building and the airline sales office are found alongside each other. For this reason, there is free public transport to this administrative centre, and many people make their way there in order to complete administrative formalities (birth, death and marriage registrations, plane ticket purchases, banking, etc.). This place, which I perceived methodologically as a "neutral", favourable place for meetings, can also be described as a "spot for politics" (Abélès 2007, p. 13). Here people can run into each other, in particular people who do not routinely interact with one another: people from the north and the centre, European residents, administrative staff, tourists and local councillors who have working facilities there where anyone can meet with them.

All of the elected members of the local council gather in this building on a regular basis. Their meetings always take place in the council room, on the building's ground floor. This large room has rather expensive, modern furniture (a very long oval table around which there are about 30 large comfortable seats) and is always excessively air-conditioned. This is significant in a situation where the vast majority of local houses have no running water and some of them no power either. At the back of the room, there are four chairs in case anyone else attends the meetings. The council secretary delivers session convocations to the councillors by hand. Sessions are usually planned to start at 10 am but seldom do. They often start a lot later, when they are not postponed due to the lack of the required quorum (half of the elected members plus one):

> It is 10:30, and they need two more members to reach the required quorum. The session cannot start. The mayor suggests that those who never show up to local council sessions resign from their functions. Joking, he adds: "We are going to hire staff specifically in order to pick them up from home and bring them here! We're gonna have to, you know!" (Fieldwork diary, local council, 27 September 2010)

Of the five sessions that I attended in full between 2009 and 2010, three had to be convened a second time due to the failure to gather the required quorum on the initial day. Moreover, from 1987 to 2010 period, I noted 127 postponed sessions out of around 250, that is to say roughly 50.8%, and the second sessions sometimes had only a few participants. These elements are sufficient to realise that local council sessions are not a priority for members except for a few deeply involved individuals: the mayor and one or two of his councillors. This is in contrast to what happens in customary life where at the time of weddings, funerals or any other type of ceremony, whether to attend is not even up for discussion. People are expected to do so, and they do. This observation indicates an initial distinction among the elected members of the council themselves. On the one hand, we have the "ordinary members", the grassroots, and on the other hand members whose habits and attitudes are closer to those of "professional politicians" (Lagroye 1994, p. 5).

## 16.4 The Institution's Considerable Role in Ideologies and Practices

### 16.4.1 The Importance of Protocol

In the local council room, the councillors' behaviour during sessions displays specific norms that cannot be observed in any other context in Ouvéa. For example, the dress rules for attending a session differ significantly from those that apply in daily life. This difference is especially noticeable among the "professional politicians" already mentioned. The mayor and general secretary wear trousers and buttoned up shirts, and every single time I attended the sessions and unlike everyone else, they were wearing closed shoes (the annual average temperature on the island is around 27 °C). A few other men also wear buttoned up shirts for the occasion although we know their daily clothes are more likely to be shorts, shirts and sandals or no shoes at all.

Yet this is not the case for all council members, and among those I call "professional politicians" most dress for sessions just as they would in any other context. It could be suggested that the solemnity of the moment is what makes people dress up, but it should be pointed out that in other solemn moments, like weddings or funerals for instance, appropriate clothing does not necessarily imply wearing Western clothes. However, this is what people do at these local council sessions.

Moreover, the high-ranking councillors spend a long time greeting every single person already in the room. They also usually walk in with briefcases, diaries and pens, and some of them arrive straight from their flight from Nouméa: several members of the Ouvéa local council, all of whom belong to the analytical category of "professional politicians"

(Lagroye 1994), no longer live on the island on a daily basis but base themselves in the Nouméa urban area. This is the case, for example, for the former mayor, B. Ounou. The fact that the mayor of Ouvéa did not live or lives only part of the time in his municipality seems to bother no one in Ouvéa. This situation might appear surprising as the mayor is thus in some respects positioned outside the municipality in which he occupies the highest office.

The general secretary and the mayor, whose offices are both on the first floor of the council building, generally walk into the room when there are already a few people present and their entrance usually signals the start of the session. When they enter the room, everyone stops talking. The secretary, who is carrying documents, follows the mayor, and the youngest member of the council is asked to confirm the councillors' presence:

> S. Poumeli walks into the room, holding the council register and the list of councillors. The mayor whispers to her "S., you should check the list now". He starts talking.
> 10.25 am, the mayor: "I think we will soon be able to start. Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Today we are going to deal with questions previously debated in the financial working group. I am going to ask the youngest member of our assembly to check the list. […]"
> (Fieldwork diary, 4 October 2010, session)

The mayor considers that the youngest member of the council has to start her apprenticeship in political life doing easy tasks and leaves her little alternative. During local council sessions, most of the councillors' speech is punctuated by references to "Sir, Mr Mayor, Mrs X the councillor in charge of this or that working group" etc. The behaviour and the way people speak to each other during council sessions are so different from what happens in everyday life that one can almost forget that this is taking place in Ouvéa. In daily life, it is very unusual to hear people speak French; people do not use the formal terms of reference in talking to one another, and when someone calls out to somebody else, only first names or kinship address terms are used (cousin, sister, mother etc.) and never their civil status (Mr, Miss etc.), as here.

Since 2001, the Ouvéa local council has also included women. Apart from the first and second councillors (in the council hierarchy), all the other women, wearing missionary or island dresses, always sit next to each other, directly opposite the men, who also sit next to each other. At customary events or during mass, men and women also sit in separate places. Here, at the council, their conversations are always whispered, in *Iaai* or *Fagauvea* (the two local languages) although, as mentioned earlier, local council sessions take place in French. These women councillors only speak according to certain modalities, and this is what makes them appear pushed aside during the discussions, which mostly happen on the men's side of the table and, more specifically, at the end of the table where the mayor and the "professional politicians" are seated.

When discussing a particular council session with one of these women, I asked her why, in her opinion, no requests had been made by the working group on women's issues, and she said: "We do everything, we pray, we do weddings, but we never make requests" (Interview with M.A, 23/6/2009, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa).

With this statement, the councillor shows that women are strongly committed to custom – as she said "we pray, we do weddings" – to the detriment sometimes of their other social positions such as being a member of and actively participating in the life of the local council, for example by making requests. For these women councillors, other social roles come second to custom and the church, when they are not completely ignored. All these observations concerning behavior during local council sessions reveal a primary dividing line between councillors belonging to the "professional politicians" category on the one hand and, on the other hand, the ordinary members, the grassroots, on whom republican norms have less influence. This situation no longer sounds so surprising once we consider what Garrigou (2002) has written about the inevitable professionalisation of the political body, which is accompanied by the mastering of political strategies and appropriate behavior such as the ones described above.

### 16.4.2 The Mayor's Authority: Concerning New Elites

Maurice Tillewa was mayor of Ouvéa from 2008 to 2014 and has been elected once more in 2020 after a mandate held by Boniface Hounou between 2014 and 2020 (who was also elected mayor from 2002 to 2008). M. Tillewa is about 50 years old and comes from Banutr in the island's central district. As a professional nurse, he began as a health educator in Ouvéa before becoming a fully qualified nurse at the small local clinic (in Hulup) for five years. He was then trained to take higher responsibilities and was appointed local manager of the whole clinic. He did this until July 2010, before becoming the head of the Loyalty Islands Province delegation in Ouvéa. He describes himself as "one of the first political militants". He joined the UC political party in 1988, immediately after "the Events". He explains that he got involved in politics at the age of 25, as a strong supporter of Simon Loueckhotte (a well-known politician from the island whose opinions tend to the right and who was a long-term senator in the French Senate between 1992 and 2011), one his mother's close cousins. Tillewa says he got onto the council without having planned it. He says:

> Well, in a way, I am the mayor, but it was never my plan. Three years ago, I wasn't even going to be up for election, and the party, I would say, was somehow lacking new leaders, especially here in Ouvéa. Hence, they needed someone to boost the list so as to, you know… therefore they asked my opinion on this. And in the end, I agreed. [...] Between two or three in the morning, I was asked, here Maurice, since you have a job with a lot of responsibility at the health centre, I was asked, Maurice, would you mind leading the list? Well, I said, ok then, why not? And actually, hum... no later than ten minutes afterwards, the meeting was over [he laughs] (Interview with Maurice Tillewa, mayor of Ouvéa, 22/10/2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa).

The mayor of Ouvéa has a good deal of social, academic and professional capital, unlike most people of his generation from Ouvéa who have never studied or had long-term high responsibility jobs. In light of these aspects, he clearly belongs to the sociological category of new elites. During local council sessions, he appears as an important and powerful character, whom people hardly ever contradict and to whom they show respect. For example, when the list of councillors is being checked, it is he who answers for those present. He also moderates and monopolises discussions during the sessions:

> The second topic of the day regards public funding for non-profit organisations. The mayor starts listing various cases that still need dealing with:
> The mayor: "C., can you please briefly present what's been discussed during the sessions of the working-group on culture".
> C.: "Thank you Mr Mayor. As for the cultural and business..."
> The mayor makes comments.
> (Fieldwork diary, 4 October 2010 session)

Debates are supposed to be held during working group meetings, which take place before each local council session. So, during the sessions, the mayor very briefly jumps from one case to another without suggesting any form of discussion. Then, he asks a councillor to read out the proceedings:

> The mayor: "Here, ladies and gentlemen, are there any objections? [nobody answers.] If there is no objection, we will then consider that all the councillors accept this. I am therefore going to ask Miss S. Poumeli to read out the proceedings".
> S. Poumeli struggles to read the pre-written, typed up document, which only concerns budget figures (Chapter 65, article 65, 74 etc.). The very slow rhythm starts to annoy the mayor enough for him to interrupt her firmly.
> The mayor: "Here, give that to me, I'll continue reading it out". He reads louder, faster and more distinctly. He finishes. No one says anything.
> (Fieldwork diary, 27 September 2010)

> Indeed, during the local council sessions, the mayor moderates the discussion, deciding who can speak and when and also when it is time for him to do so.
> The mayor: "What about teaching, Mrs Gagne? I believe Nathalie has given you instructions".
> J. Gagne: "Thank you Mr Mayor. First of all, the students…"
> The mayor: [he interrupts her] "Start by reading what is already in the proceedings, that way it is easier for us to take notes".
> J. Gagne begins to read the requests that are already in the proceedings. The mayor interrupts her again, starts speaking and continues reading that same document.
> (Fieldwork diary, 4 October 2010)

As these two extracts from my fieldwork diary show, the mayor frequently interrupts women councillors, something he rarely does with male councillors. Moreover, since he speaks a great deal during the sessions, he in fact imposes a pace, characterised by a quite vertiginous decision-making rhythm.

> The mayor: "Public funding for the non-profit organisation of Saint Paul tribe".
> [He looks up. No one says anything. He then turns to a councillor from Saint Paul community.]
> The mayor: "Mr Waisselotte, the non-profit cultural organisation? Is it active?"
> G. Waisselotte: "Hum, yes, yes".
> The mayor: "So! Here. 100,000 francs[7] for the non-profit cultural organisation of the Saint Paul community. Are there any objections? It's ok then. About providing funds to the non-profit organisation of Loyalty Island students.... Well, ok we'll give them 100,000 francs".
> [He looks up. No one says anything]
> The mayor: "Ok, approved".
> (Fieldwork diary, 4 October 2010)

These two extracts raise several questions. The first has to do with the lack of debate and discussion during sessions. The example above could lead us to believe that giving public funds to non-profit organisations is of no importance – which is true in a way since Caledonian municipalities have relatively large budgets – but it should also be understood that there are hardly more debates on other topics.

Local council sessions therefore appear to be mere formalities. Indeed, since the topics under discussion hardly ever generate any conflict, these sessions look more like rubber stamps of approval than real democratic spaces for debate. This realisation leads us to put the power of local councils into perspective. Although they are in charge of various domains, local councils remain subordinate to the customary authorities for everything concerning land. Therefore, it can also be speculated that there are other places where real debate takes place: in political party meetings and the mayor's office, as well as in the sessions held by the different working groups. Moreover, local council sessions prove to be areas where several dividing lines appear. The first concerns the standards of behaviour specific to this context and they have a variable influence over people. Certain external signs of compliance with the institution's norms (vocabulary, clothing, attitudes etc.) are obvious. This is particularly the case for the "professional politicians" who stand in contrast here with the "ordinary councillors", the grassroots. Unlike the former, the ordinary councillors do not dis-

[7] 834,73 €. The current local currency of New Caledonia is indexed on the European currency Euro (€).

play these outer "institutional" signs conforming to institutional norms. However, these norms still have an influence over the "ordinary councillors" since not mastering them marginalises the latter. The second opposes two logics in the same sphere: the logic of the institution and that of custom. As I mentioned earlier, the mayor interrupts people. This practice, obviously tolerated and frequent during sessions, is nonetheless totally prohibited in customary life where it is on the contrary considered an affront to custom. A possible explanation of this situation would seem to be Lagroye's hypothesis that "electoral legitimacy does empower" (Lagroye 1994, p. 10). This is precisely what happens with the mayor who, in daily life, is not overly prescriptive and yet in local council sessions can ask someone to speak or not or even speak whenever he thinks it is necessary. We can therefore theorise that, in this case, it is specifically his status of mayor that empowers him to behave thus without hurting or frustrating anybody. Likewise, during local council sessions the decision-making rhythm is extremely fast, which again is in strong contrast with customary processes. For in custom, decisions always require speeches of several minutes that must never be interrupted. When someone's words give rise to a question, it is hardly ever asked directly, and the same could be said about answers to specific questions.

Hence, the discussions taking place during local council sessions differ considerably from customary practices. They are so different that sometimes they are their exact opposite. However, and in spite of all these differences, local council sessions also reveal a big influence both of and on customary ways of acting.

## 16.5 The Influence of Custom

### 16.5.1 Some Hybrid Files: The Airport Extension

In Kanak New Caledonia, very much as elsewhere in the South Pacific region, custom requires any piece of land given to remain given for ever (Ponsonnet and Travési 2015). As the mayor of Ouvéa explains himself:

> M.T.: "We [the municipality of Ouvéa], we don't own the land. We don't. Unlike the other councils... of the territory, on Grande Terre [...]".
> M.N.: "So when the council negotiates land with one particular chiefdom and the elders agree to give that piece of land, does it remain the chiefdom's property?"
> M.T.: "Well...There is a customary act [a legally approved document] in which it is stated that the use of that piece of land has been given to the municipality".
> M.N.: "Does this agreement mention for how long?"
> M.T.: "No, there is no such thing as duration".
> (Interview with M. Tillewa, mayor of Ouvéa, 22/10/2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa.)

These legally approved documents are much like life-long leases and therefore imply that the use of the piece of land given no longer belongs to its original "owner". Likewise, they mean that people who inherit that same piece of land will not be able to cancel their ancestor's contracts. Nonetheless, such situations do exist:

> M.T.: "What you need to know now is that even when customary authorities agree to give a piece of land, sooner or later this piece of land is always claimed. This is a bit the case for the extension of the airport. We are currently working on the writing of a new customary act although years ago, the elders, they had already agreed but now, the young disagree! And they are protesting against the agreement that has already been signed. So, we have to rewrite an agreement. And in order to do that we have to discuss it again. And this is what we are currently working on".
> M.N.: "Talking about this specific case of the airport's extension. Can an agreement be broken?"
> M.T.: "[...] Well, the airport stays. But its extension is what we are discussing again. Years ago, they agreed to give a piece of land in order to build an airport but now we are being asked to renegotiate it. But this piece of land has already been given! In 1959 they'd already agreed to its potential extension because they thought it would become a big airport, but the young, they disagree, they disagree and they want to break the agreement. So we're discussing it".
> (Interview with M. Tillewa, mayor of Ouvéa, 22/10/2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa)

The problems regarding the question of the airport require us to look deeper into the conflict and to try and understand why the mayor is so angry when talking about it. In Ouvéa, the airport, just like the port, is managed by the Loyalty Islands Province. The province is also in charge of the main road linking all the places under its jurisdiction: the airport, the health centre, the province's local building and the port.

In 2010, the province decided to start extensive renovation work on a portion of the main road. Since there are no road construction materials or trucks on the island, it was decided to have them brought by a special cargo boat. Bringing rollers, pneumatic drills, sand, etc. to such a small island is very expensive, so in order to reduce costs, the province agreed to take advantage of having all this available and to also start extending the airport, a project planned in a legal document signed back in 1959. The land for the extension belonged to various clans from the community of Hulup. People from the province arranged a meeting in order to inform them about the building work to come. But, far from agreeing to this, they found the project useless and extremely expensive. This is when the mayor came into the picture. In him, the province saw a very suitable mediator, and this is how he became responsible for the airport extension issue. He was instructed to go and negotiate, with the help of the "Iaai customary council" (an institutionalised council of elders), for the plots of land required for the extension so that work could start on this once the road was finished. As a French collectivity, the municipality is enti-

tled to subsidies, which must be spent within a certain time. If not, they are deferred (rarely) or withdrawn (most of the time). Anger expressed by the mayor was in fact due to the fear of losing the public money designated for the airport extension, which would lead to everyone giving up the project definitively. The mayor was in a difficult position since when renegotiating for this land, he had to deal with custom and its way of managing land on the one hand and, on the other, the French state, based on radically different fundamentals. He also had to get the work started or the budget would be withdrawn. In this specific case, custom as a legal system appears far more flexible than the French legal system.

### 16.5.2 Occupation of Space and Ways of Speaking

The seating arrangements of the councillors remind us very much of what happens in customary contexts: men on one side, women on the other. The few, but rather long, speeches always end with *"oleti"* or *"de na guati"*, both expressions used to end speeches in customary contexts. They could be translated literally by "here, I've finished" or "well, I've finished now". When they are pronounced, these words always call for a group "oleti" (thank you) from all those who have listened to the speech, just as in a customary context. Moreover, the speakers very often use other expressions employed in customary contexts. They speak in French most of the time, but sometimes they also speak in the *Iaai* or *Fagauvea* language, especially when their French is not too good:

> A discussion begins about security in the local high schools and the fact that some parents have requested that a security company be hired to keep an eye on the buildings during weekends and school holidays. For the very first time in the session, a man (who is angry too) starts speaking. He wants to express his disagreement with the parents' request. His French is not very good, and his sentences are regularly punctuated with expressions and words in *Fagauvea*.
> P.I.: "Please forgive me for raising my voice, but where is the community police? The chiefs? People no longer show respect to anything or anyone. That's all I wanted to say, thank you".
> (Fieldwork, 20 March 2009 session)

In this example and just as he would be expected to do in a customary context, the councillor apologises for "raising his voice" before saying what he has to say and ends his very short speech with "that's all", which is the French equivalent of *"de na"* in *Fagauvea*, his mother tongue. All these elements show the prevalence of customary habitus within the space of the Council sessions.

### 16.5.3 Customary "Gifts" and Hierarchy

Besides forms of behaviours and speech, which are also those used in customary contexts, it should be noted that "customary gifts" are also frequent during local council sessions. Visitors (researchers, people from the province, etc.) who wish to introduce themselves to the team before starting their own work may make these, or sometimes even, they may be made by council members themselves. This happened on 4 October 2010: M. Wea, one of the local councillors, had only just come back from the shooting of the movie "Rebellion" (released in 2012, dir. Mathieu Kassovitz) on Anaa island in French Polynesia:

> Maki Wea wishes to present a gift to the local council to thank the municipality for backing this project and also to say "hello" to everyone still on the island [the shooting of the movie was still going on]. He wants to try and create a twin-island partnership with the people from Anaa island in French Polynesia. He speaks in *Iaai*. While he's speaking, everybody looks at the ground. He ends with "oleti". The people are still looking at the ground and reply with a group "*oleti*".
> The mayor briefly thanks him for his gesture and passes the gift [a piece of fabric and a bank note] to old Cyriaque without saying anything more. The old man stands up, takes the gift and starts thanking the donor for it. Meanwhile, everyone is quiet and looking down. The old man extends thanks for the gift on behalf of all the councillors, the mayor, the "19 and their families". Everyone says "*oleti*".
> (Fieldwork diary, 4 October 2010 session)

In situations like this, the gift, a piece of cotton fabric and a bank note, is always presented to the mayor first. However, despite holding the highest office on the island, he was fairly "young", around 50 years old, and does not belong to a prestigious clan or have a high-ranking position within his clan. Hence, when he is given a customary "gift" during a local council session like the one mentioned above, he does not keep it himself but passes it on to what the customary hierarchy considers a "greater person", someone older, who then extends thanks for the gift, out loud, on behalf of the members of the local council. In such situations, it is obvious that the customary hierarchy is the norm of reference for everyone, even the "professional politicians".

Moreover, the language used also changes, and people almost always express thanks for "gifts" presented in such contexts in *Iaai* or *Fagauvea* (depending on the mother tongue of the person doing so). According to the situations, customary norms and habits can also have a certain influence on the way local councils operate as the following situation illustrates.

The role of custom is particularly evident when one looks at what women councillors can and cannot do. One of them talked to me about her role in setting things up for the Festival of Melanesian Arts in October 2010:

> C.A.: "The mayor said 'Christiane you have to do this!' It's true that it is my job after all! But it is also true that [...] the people who do the work are older men, so for me [...] We Kanak people are not allowed to speak to an older man, but it's my job! This is what I have to do".
> M.N.: "So, you're not allowed to speak to an older man but if you have to do so as a councillor then people tolerate it?"
> C.A.: "Precisely".
> M.N.: "But this is hard for you, isn't it?"
> C.A.: "Yes, it is very hard, when I'd finished with the festival, well, I went down there to give them a customary thank you gift, because … they are older men you know! And I cannot tell them what to do! But it is my responsibility, this is what I have to do. It is my working group's responsibility! So, when I'd finished with it, well I went to them and apologized. Because when they did the work, I was above them, I was put above them, but when they finished, well, I thanked them. [...] They did everything I asked them to do! At first, they were meant to build big tents. And then, the mayor came to me and said 'they have to use steel sheets'. Therefore, they used steel sheets. It meant I was bothering them you know. They are older men, remember! But I went to them and apologized, it was to show them that they are a lot more important than me [...] to apologize [...] for having asked them to do this, when they are older men, like fathers you know".
> (Interview with C. A., 11/10/2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa)

The woman councillor describes the very difficult position she ended up in before and after the festival, due to her responsibilities as a councillor. On the one hand, as a councillor, she was in charge of supervising tent-building, but, on the other hand, this status put her in a doubly difficult position of domination, being both young and a woman. This situation clearly stems from the specific social relation mechanisms prevailing in daily life, which once more reminds us of what Lagroye (1994, p. 7) has written about the behaviours elected representatives can be led to have: "One social relationship configuration cannot be substituted for another according to a system which seeks to reduce social forms, but [...] progressively, partly, new social relationship systems are appearing and affecting all groups in various ways".

As a Kanak woman, she says, a woman councillor must not give orders to older men, to people whom the customary hierarchy system considers higher on the social scale. To find a solution to this issue, the woman councillor decided to make a choice, which she elucidates very clearly and which must be stressed since she could also have decided not to do this at all: to do what she had to as a councillor even if this led to a difficult position for a Kanak woman but, once the work was done, to go to these older men and apologise for giving them tasks. This woman councillor's behaviour clearly echoes with Lagroye's argument regarding new the emergence of new relationship systems that, amongst other things, can include multimodal ways of addressing to one another depending on which social position is considered (Lagroye 1994, p. 13).

By apologizing, the women councillor tells the older men she is well aware of the customary hierarchy, especially in regard to those who are "above her". This case is a typical example of the real difficulties that women councillors have to face when forced to deal with two different social statuses. This situation is also obvious during local council sessions:

> C.A.: "Personally, I do try to motivate them! [women who attempt to speak out during meetings]. I tell them that men always being above us in the hierarchy is not a good thing! We women also have to be as high as them, both men and women, or even higher than them, we might as well [she laughs]. But at the same time, we have to remember that, we are women! So, in order to speak out, I believe that...when I speak out during meetings, I know it's good when there are only women … only women. But when men are there too, that's when I...." [silence]
> M.N.: "When there are men, is it harder?"
> C.A.: "It's not harder, but there are men I mean, and I am way lower than them. The mayor, I respect him. But he's lower than my husband even! But I respect him, because, he holds the highest public office (position?) on the island".
> (Interview with C. A., le 11-10-2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa)

As we can see once again, seniority and the male/female hierarchy both have a very big influence on the practices in council sessions and on the job of "local councillor". Within this job, these two hierarchies thus apply: "There is no doubt that being a local councillor, is first modelled by the configuration of specific social relations in a certain place, at a certain time. The ways a mayor acts, as 'part of an elite', 'an entrepreneur', are the result of the dominant social relations system of his society, of conceptions of what is legitimate and required, and of socially valorized practices in all their forms" (Lagroye 1994, p. 6–7).

We now understand that in spite of exhibiting norms (fast decision-making, interrupting people etc.) that we never see anywhere on the island, or in Kanak New Caledonia in general, local council sessions do not ignore social obligations that apply in everyone's ordinary daily life and are dictated by the ideology of custom. Indeed, these appear to be the basis of the power relationships and interests characterizing this new political arena being formed in the context of the local council institutions and by the practices of the elected representatives, the councillors. As Lagroye (1994, p. 8) writes concerning their behavior:

> "We are therefore looking at a real sedimentation mechanism, through which role prescriptions matching successively both social relations and knowledge systems coexist, one characteristic of a politician's job being the management of these co-existing systems on a day-to-day basis".
> And, it is precisely this sedimentation mechanism that ends up empowering the mayor and gains him special respect even during customary events:
> M. T.: "Personally, I would say that yes, it makes a difference being the mayor. It changes things. Yes. People see you differently. In the end, they look at you differently because you are the

> mayor of the island. He is in charge of the whole population. I mainly notice that coming from older people, I can feel the respect owed to the person holding the highest public office".
> M. N.: "How would you say they express this respect? [...]"
> M.T.: "They call me Mr Mayor … yup … when younger people, people my age, well, they call me by my first name!"
> (Interview with M. Tillewa, mayor of Ouvéa, 22/10/2010, Hwadrilla, Ouvéa.)

In other words, in spite of custom being unanimously considered the foundation of both the social and political life of Ouvéa and in spite of achieving independence for New Caledonia being a goal for an extremely large majority of people on the island, this does not preclude continued recognition of republican institutions and of the state more generally. This paradox reminds us of the argument of Bazin who considered that "State machinery is a trap in which everyone gets caught without understanding how it happened" (Bazin 1988, p. 711). This also introduces new questions, this time regarding the presence of pro-independence elected representatives within republican institutions and what Jean-Marie Tjibaou used to call "decolonisation within the Republic" (Tjibaou in Wittersheim 2003, p. 19).

## 16.6 Pro-Independence Elected Representatives and Decolonisation

Concerning the "State machinery" project (Bazin 1988, p. 711) in New Caledonia, Wittersheim (2006, p. 128–129) notes: "Yes, State projects of all sorts, are necessarily confronted with local and regional powers but in the case of Kanak New Caledonia, the idea of a Melanesian independent state itself is still only a young ideology, and social strategies find their roots in customary political systems". In saying so, Wittersheim points out that regarding New Caledonia, any political issue is, at least partially, ruled by custom and more specifically, its political system from which emerge specific social strategies.

The local council of Ouvéa is therefore a typical case study of the implementation of the "social strategies" quoted above from Wittersheim's work. It would seem that we are currently witnessing, at the heart of this republican institution, the local council, the ongoing process of the construction of a Kanak political arena, which oscillates between customary rules on the one hand and republican protocols on the other. Since New Caledonia is not yet fully decolonised, the importance of this political arena needs to be stressed. Indeed, Republican institutions have proved to be the main place for Kanak people to express their political demands more recently along with international opportunities such as the United Nations (Demmer 2007; Fischer 2013, 2019; Forrest and Kowasch 2016):

> Since French people became citizens in 1946 and able to vote in 1951, they have only been given the chance to express their opinion (pro-independence, pro-autonomy, or other) within republican institutions (municipalities, territorial assembly, provinces) which set a frame for French politics in an arena that makes the expression of a native nationalism very hard (Wittersheim 2006, p. 114).

As mentioned earlier, the Kanak entered republican institutions via the missions, before turning their back on these institutions and protesting against them during the 1970s and 1980s. Since the Matignon Accords were signed in 1988, pro-independence Kanak activists have decided in favour of "decolonisation within the Republic", which has led them to once more become involved in republican institutions in order to change things from the inside. This echoes the work of Lefebvre on socialist politicians at the start of the twentieth century and that of Mischi, who focused on communist politicians (Lefebvre 2004; Mischi 2002). Both authors explored, for each of the political parties studied, the presence of revolutionaries within republican institutions and their ability (or inability) to subvert the institution from within. Their analyses tend to prove that in the end it is the institution, due precisely to the fact that it is an institution, which ultimately subverts the revolutionaries. In New Caledonia, the political strategies aimed at building an independent state using French republican institutions to do so is still the current general strategy of most pro-independence Kanak (Tjibaou, 1996). Not surprisingly, this remains a significant challenge. To what extent can Kanak customary norms prevail when acting within an institution which, as shown here, is organised around different hierarchies and norms?

## 16.7 Conclusion

This study of Ouvéa local council, a Republican institution imported directly from France, shows that two forms of organisation and exercise of local power are embedded within one another. In his work on Kone in the north of Grande Terre, Trépied (2007) demonstrated that, after the end of the Native Regulations, the first Kanak elected representatives all belonged to prestigious clans and most of them were chiefs. After the 1960s, however, this recruiting logic disappeared and was replaced by another one still in use today based on the possession of academic, intellectual and economic capital (*ibid*). The sessions of the Ouvéa local council and the political character of the mayor both show that the current situation in Ouvéa remains very much the same. For the mayor between 2008 and 2014, like both his predecessor and successor,[8] had a university education and a long-term job with considerable responsibilities.

[8]B. Hounou, who was mayor between 2002 and 2008, was re-elected in 2014.

Moreover, during the sessions, the influence of protocol generates "behaviour repertoires" (Lagroye 1994, p. 7), which are not observable anywhere else on the island and are instead those of professional politicians. This analytic category leads us to operate a distinction between "professional politicians" and "ordinary local councilors". If both are still expected to respond to customary norms in certain customary contexts, customary norms and logics seem to be of greater importance for so-called "ordinary local councillors" than any others. Questioning the embedding of these two logics within the same "place of politics" leads us to the idea of the ongoing construction process of an autonomous political arena. This process, on which local councillors work day after day, is in that sense far from being just an extension of custom. As I have tried to demonstrate, it can generate specific practices and behaviours in that political arena.

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# Part VII

# Decolonisation and Political Independence

# Indigenous Rights or National Independence: Paths of Self-Determination in New Caledonia

17

Natacha Gagné

**Abstract**

In New Caledonia, national independence is still on the agenda, but the "Indigenous strategy" – which relates to the global Indigenous movement and UN norms regarding Indigenous rights – is also being explored with a view to furthering decolonisation. The latter is, however, relatively new in the struggle to regain sovereignty and occupies a marginal place in the political field of this French territory. This chapter seeks to explain why arguing for the particular colonial situation of the territory and the demography of the Indigenous population has led them to pursue dual strategies towards self-determination.

**Keywords**

Decolonisation · Sovereignty · Indigenous rights · New Caledonia · Kanak

## 17.1 Introduction

From the end of the Second World War among the colonies of European powers, movements to recover sovereignty and political independence (full sovereignty under international law) began in earnest. Indeed, if the colonial moment denied sovereignty, decolonisation tried to recover it, and the independent or sovereign state is, in theory at least, the exact antithesis of the colonial dependent state (Gagné and Salaün 2017, p. 18). The "traditional" path of decolonisation in Oceania, as in Africa or Asia, was the creation of sovereign states, beginning relatively late with the independence of Samoa in 1962, followed by Nauru in 1968, Tonga in 1970, Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975, Tuvalu in 1978, the Solomon Islands in 1978, Kiribati in 1979, Vanuatu in 1980, then the Marshall Islands in 1990 and the Federated States of Micronesia in 1990.

Historically, in New Caledonia, a territory annexed by the French colonial Empire in 1853, the leaders of what became in 1979 the Independence Front (FI) and, in 1984, the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) promoted socialist Kanak independence. The 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords, which ended the violent period known as *"les Événements"* (the Events),[1] included a referendum on self-determination. The 1998 Nouméa Accord, which was incorporated into the French Constitution, extended the first Accord and proposed an original mode of decolonisation, based on a timetable setting the gradual and irreversible transfer of French state powers to local representative institutions. This process could lead, at term, to full independence after a local consultation on the handover of sovereign powers (defence, public order, currency, justice, foreign affairs), which would signify New Caledonia's accession to full sovereignty. A first referendum was held on 4 November 2018, and the No vote prevailed. Given the victory of the "No" in the first referendum, the Accord provided for a second one. It took place on 4 October 2020. Since the result was negative again, a third and controversial referendum[2] was scheduled

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[1] "The Events" refers to the violent uprisings that shook the territory and the insurrectionary climate that took hold between November 1984 and May 1988 and that saw independentists opposed loyalists, the latter being loyal to the Republic and therefore in favour of keeping New Caledonia in the French Republic.

[2] According to the Organic Act 99–209 relating to New Caledonia, in order to take place, a third referendum had to be requested by one third of the elected representatives of the New Caledonia Congress, that is to say 18 of the 54 members. On 8 April 2021, a coalition of 26 pro-independence representatives asked the French State to hold a third referendum.


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on 12 December 2021, "on the same issue and with the same electoral body" (Trépied 2018b).[3]

Given how close the votes were in 2018 and 2020,[4] path to national independence was still on the agenda, en route to the third referendum (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book). Moves in that direction in France's other large Pacific territory, French Polynesia, have also continued – it is on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories administered by the Special Committee on Decolonisation (C-24), added at the initiative of independentists in 2013.[5] Despite this, the accession to full sovereignty seems to be less evident today for these French territories where decolonisation remains "unfinished". Other options are on the table, such as free association with France (an independence-association or independence with partnership) or the "Indigenous strategy" in reference to the world Indigenous movement and UN Indigenous rights instrument. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 provides for various forms of internal self-determination for Indigenous peoples, since it emphasises the principle of territorial integrity of sovereign states. The Indigenous rights path is relatively new in the struggle to regain sovereignty in New Caledonia. A very small number of community leaders, in particular, began to explore the possibilities offered by this strategy in the early 1990s[6] by participating only irregularly in United Nations meeting about Indigenous rights. At the beginning of the 2000s, the construction at the southern end of the main island of New Caledonia of a new nickel processing plant (first known as Goro Nickel and, after 2008 until more recently known as Vale Nouvelle-Calédonie), with its polluting acid refining process[7] and its questioning of the economic rebalancing policy prevailing since the 1990s,[8] was a defining moment in claiming Indigenous Kanak rights. The Kanak environmental organisation Rhéébù Nùù – which means "Eye of the country" – was created in 2001 (Leblic 2018a; see also Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book) specifically in connection with the new processing plant to represent the environmental and economic interests of the Indigenous people of New Caledonia's Great South region. By 2005, the Indigenous Natural Resources Management Committee (CAUGERN) extended Indigenous actions across the country. The claims focused on guarantees about governance and ownership of resources, the duty to consult, and obtaining royalties for the Kanak Indigenous people (Demmer 2007). This "new Kanak strategy" (Demmer 2007) made several gains, with the support of various local and international organisations (see Demmer 2007; Horowitz 2012, 2017).

Why have self-assertion as Indigenous, and Indigenous rights claims emerged much later in the French territories of Oceania than in anglophone ones? Why have they occupied a marginal place in the political field of this French territory? The contexts in which the peoples of the French territories of Oceania like New Caledonia have struggled differ radically from those of other groups that have been seen as emblematic of the category "Indigenous peoples", such as the First

[3]The date – chosen by the French state and announced by the Minister for Overseas France on 2 June 2021, after a week of discussions with New Caledonian elected officials in Paris – was not the subject of a consensus. The independentists wanted it to be held in fall 2022, closer to the end of the Nouméa Accord, and the loyalists were leaning towards a consultation in the fall of 2021, which is before another important electoral deadline, the presidential election of April 2022. See Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book for details on date selection and events in the months leading up to the third referendum.

[4]I will come back to the results of the three referendums later.

[5]The *Établissements Français de l'Océanie* (ÉFO, the former name of French Polynesia) were first placed on the UN list in 1946, at the same time as New Caledonia, and the two territories were removed in 1947 under pressure from the French government. New Caledonia was re-registered in 1986 as a non-self-governing territory (see Gonshor 2013; Regnault 2013).

[6]Morin (2008) traces their first participation in the UN's work on the rights of Indigenous peoples back to 1993, the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. In New Caledonia, 1993 was also the year of the founding of the Association for the Celebration of the Year of the Indigenous People in Kanaky (ACAPIK), which in 1995 became the National Council for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (CNDPA) (Demmer 2007). Graff (2012, p. 75) attributes this first development of an "Indigenous strategy" to the divisions between Kanak independentists in the aftermath of the 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords. However, up until 2001 – that is until the UN meetings on Indigenous peoples came to New York with the creation of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – the presence of Kanak representatives was only sporadic (Graff 2012, p. 68). Like their Kanak counterparts, French Polynesian people came late to Indigenous rights meetings and only irregularly (see Gagné 2015; Morin 2008). An analysis of the local press, informal discussions and interviews with local actors in French Polynesia and New Caledonia shows that, beyond the small associations they represent, their work remained largely unknown on the local scene until 2002, in the case of New Caledonia, and until 2010, in the French Polynesian case.

[7]Acid is used under pressure to extract nickel and cobalt from the ore. The resulting liquid residues are released at sea. Following a few industrial accidents (notably in 2009, 2010 and 2014), acid leaks affected the fauna and flora of a stream and part of the lagoon.

[8]After the period of the "Events", the Kanak backed up their independence claims with assertions that the nickel sector should be locally controlled. Since the 1980s, a "mining nationalism" movement has developed, in which nickel is seen as "the economic tool of political emancipation" (Le Meur 2017, p. 41). The Bercy Accord officially recognized the "mining precondition", which brought the mining issue into the negotiation of decolonisation, on 1 February 1998. Although mining nationalism first aimed at a North/South economic rebalancing, it has gradually broadened its reach so as to support the country's emancipation through "the nationalization of the nickel resource (...) by ensuring that the dividends reaped by companies benefit New Caledonia rather than the French State or private shareholders" (Demmer 2018b, p. 42). At the start of the 2000s, the "Southern Processing Plant" project was clearly in contradiction with this movement since this project did not provide for mining royalties for the local populations and the provinces only held 5% of the shares of the new factory. This situation helped to create local dissatisfaction. For more on mining nationalism and the developments to which it gave rise in New Caledonia, see, among other, Batterbury et al. (2020), Demmer (2017, 2018b), Demmer et al. (2018), Kowasch (2018), Le Meur (2017) and Chap. 9 by Demmer in this book. In 2020 and with the approach of a possible third referendum, the nickel issue once again came to the fore in the context of the sale of the Southern Processing Plant to the Swiss group Trafigura.

Nations and Inuit of the Americas, New Zealand Māori and Australia's First Peoples. I will focus here on four main factors, which help us to understand the particular colonial situation of these territories, focusing on the situation of New Caledonia: the *"enclavement"* of the French territories of Oceania, peculiarities relating to the construction of the French nation, the colonial heritage – particularly with regard to the settlement policies of New Caledonia – as well as the original measures put in place by the Nouméa Accord. As we shall see, the relevance of the "Indigenous strategy" to the colonized populations is not self-evident. This chapter intends to shed some light on this situation thanks to the understanding acquired over the years through literature reviews, media surveys, informal discussions and semi-directed interviews with research participants during regular fieldtrips to Oceania since 2001.[9]

## 17.2 "Franconesia" or the Great Colonial Division of Oceania

While "Indigenous" mobilisations began in the 1970s in New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii, people in the French territories of Oceania did not participate and remained isolated from their regional environment. As the historian Jean Chesneaux (1987, p. 53) explains, "[t]he colonial domination had an effect of enclave, of dissociation from the natural regional environment" in a space he calls Franconesia. This was due in part to the very great control exercised by the French state over local governance until the 1970s, through the direct administration of the governor in French Polynesia and, in the case of New Caledonia, to the power exercised by representatives of European origin.[10]

It has also been due to an economic and political orientation toward metropolitan France and the rather widespread lack of fluency in English, which has become the dominant language in the region. The installation of the Pacific Experimentation Centre (CEP) in French Polynesia and the nuclear bomb tests, from 1966 to 1996, also accentuated isolation from anglophone neighbours (Barrillot and Doom 2005; Kahn 2011; Regnault 2005). France and its nationals have been the subject of a wave of significant protests across the Pacific and internationally. Over the years, participants in my research emphasised that regional opposition to "French nuclear colonialism" has had a strong effect on the Indigenous populations of the French territories of Oceania, including on their travel and networking. There were some francophone contributors to regional movements, whether faith-based, ecumenical, environmental or anti-nuclear, and exchanges took place from time to time, but they were rather sporadic. France's nuclear testing accentuated the isolationism of its territories, deepening the colonial division of Oceania, which already had the effect of breaking the pan-Oceanic trading networks and restructuring economic and political relations towards the logic of the French and British colonial empires.

## 17.3 The Fabric of the French Nation

Another fundamental point is that the French constitutional framework does not recognize collective rights,[11] which has for a long time limited the emergence of claims on this basis such as claims of "rights as Indigenous peoples".[12] Indeed, there is no precedent for asserting collective rights, for example, in the name of prior occupation of the land. This difficulty with collective rights is not new, but was evident in the ambiguous position of French state representatives in the pre-vote debates for the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the Human Rights Council in 2006 and the UN General Assembly in 2007. In 2007, although he was in favour of the Declaration, the representative of the French state said that France had identified legal difficulties with its application. He specified that under the principle of indivisibility of the French Republic and in accordance with the principle of equality and its corollary, the principle of non-discrimination, collective rights cannot override individual rights.[13] Benoît Trépied (2012) offers the following clarification regarding the noun "people", which has a collective significance: "In the name of the indivisibility of the Republic, the Constitutional Council had already censored in 1991 the (…) reference to the 'Corsican people, a component of the French people'". Similarly, the state recognizes only "overseas populations" (constitutional revision of 28 March 2003) and, among them, "Indigenous populations" (see also Guyon and Trépied 2013, p. 98–99).[14] Even in the case of New Caledonia, where an exception to the

[9] These include two stays in New Caledonia in 2006 and 2011, and twelve stays in French Polynesia between 2005 and 2023, totalizing more than 2 years of fieldwork in the French territories of Oceania. I also did fieldwork for more than 2 years in New Zealand between 2001 and 2016.

[10] For details, see Moyrand (2012), Saura (2008) for French Polynesia and Kurtovitch (2003), Le Meur (2017), Soriano (2014), and Trépied (2010) for New Caledonia. For a summary, see Gonshor (2013).

[11] Collective rights, also called group rights, are rights held by a group as a group, rather than by individuals.

[12] The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states in its preamble "that Indigenous individuals are entitled without discrimination to all human rights recognized in international law, and that Indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples". The declaration notably affirms their collective rights to "autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs" (Article 4) and "to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions" (article 5).

[13] See http://www.gitpa.org/Processus%20GITPA%20200/gitpa%20200-2-DDPApositionfrance.pdf. Accessed 22 Dec 2020.

[14] For more on France's historical reluctance to recognise or even value any sub-national collective identity and on the idea of the indivisibility of the French Republic (see Gagné and Roustan 2019).

indivisibility of the French Republic already exists – "since 1998 in fact, under the Nouméa Accord attached to Title XIII of the Constitution (Articles 76 and 77), the Republic officially recognizes the existence of the 'Kanak people' in New Caledonia" (Trépied 2012) – negotiations about power sharing are taking place between the French state and the local government, that is on a territorial basis with New Caledonia as a whole and not with the Kanak Indigenous people. I will come back to this last point later.

On closer inspection, the territorial anchoring of the principle of the equality of all citizens of the French Republic has unsuspected effects that make it possible to understand certain concerns of the populations of French overseas territories. Here is an example that is indicative of the ambiguity of the word "Indigenous" in this context. It is a text by the Polynesian poet Isidore Hiro, brother of the late poet and playwright Henri Hiro (1944–1990), a key player in the cultural revival movement in French Polynesia from the 1970s (see Saura 2008). This text appeared in 2011 in a special issue on indigeneity and Indigenous peoples of the journal *Littérama'ohi*:[15]

> From what I remember, it was in the late 1980s that I first heard the word "autochtone" [Indigenous]. What amazes me a lot is how widespread its use has been today. At the time, we could no longer understand who we were exactly, where we were and how we could relate to this new expression: "Indigenous". Who really was this person called "*autochtone*"?... As I understand it, we were no longer Tahitians, we were no longer Paumotu, we were no longer Mangarevians, nor Marquisians, nor inhabitants of the Austral Islands, nor Maupiti, nor other people of the Leeward Islands, nor Maiào, nor "Moorenians", this meant that we were no longer Maóhi but rather autochtones, that is people from this country... But who? ... Where do they come from? ... Who are their parents? ... All these questions are irrelevant, they were born in this country so, they are from this country, do not ask questions, do not try to understand, that's it... But can we trust that? (Hiro 2011, p. 37)

Isidore Hiro is wary of the idea of an Indigenous identity since it is one imposed on them from the outside and which helps to erase difference.

For him, the ambiguity of the word "*autochtone*" is also, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that it can be used to identify two categories of people. In his text, he thus distinguishes between "*autochtones natifs*" (native Indigenous) and "*autochtones de souche*" (ancestral Indigenous). According to his definition, the *autochtone natif* is "someone who was born in our country. But what needs to be said is that it is not a person from this country but a person whose parents or ancestors came from outside" (*ibid*. 2011, p. 38). These are the descendants of people from metropolitan France (administrators and settlers) who came to settle in the colony and descendants of other foreign populations who also settled there. In contrast, the *autochtone de souche* is "originally from this country, attached to the base of his land, connected to his ancestors by name since the dawn of time, for generations and generations to this day. This person has a connection to his/her land, a connection with his/her genealogy and is united with his/her country" (*ibid*. 2011, p. 38).

The distinction between these two categories is fundamental and, as can be seen, has important political implications. The key to understanding the distinction can be found in the French conception of citizenship and the public debates that surround it: French citizenship is based on the "right of the land" (*jus soli*). Being a citizen of the French Republic therefore means being a member of a political community, which officially has no ethnic basis and has nothing to do with ancestry and a "blood right" (*jus sanguinis*) (see, among others, Schnapper 1998; Weil 2008). Being a French citizen therefore implies the idea, in a certain sense, of being "Indigenous" in France, an idea that is heard in French public debates, especially with regard to immigration where a distinction is drawn between *autochtones* (natives, thus citizens) and immigrants.[16] This idea is also perpetuated by (some) metropolitan French people who live in the overseas territories, as well as by their children who were born there and insist on their rights to be and live there, hence the need, for Isidore Hiro, to distinguish between two categories of "Indigenous" people.[17]

[15] A literary journal produced in Tahiti.

[16] In recent years, the far right in metropolitan France has used the term *autochtones* (Indigenous) in a completely different sense to express anti-immigration positions, distinguishing two classes of citizens: those of (ethnic) French origin – the *autochtone* – and those who are not. This distinction contravenes the principle of equality for all citizens of the French Republic. Indigeneity is often presented in France as a synonym for exclusion or even communitarianism, that is, ethnic isolationism or sectarianism, or even independence, and many are wary of it (Spitz 2011, p. 98). This mistrust also extends to the French oversea territories, even if a segment of the local population supports the positions of the extreme right in relation to immigrants. The high levels of intermarriage, particularly in French Polynesia, also makes such a dichotomization between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people more problematic. Knowing that independence, for segments of the population of the French territories of Oceania, is associated with political uncertainty, poverty, racism, exclusion and even civil unrest and armed conflict, as occurred in some states of Oceania since independence, indigeneity suffers from a negative perception on the part of the general public.

[17] I, for one, have not seen this distinction being made in the New Caledonian context. However, on the connection to land and to the country experienced as a substantial part of oneself among Caldoches, see Carteron (2015). As explained by Carteron (2015, p. 165), "[t]he word Caldoche designates Caledonians of European origin: descendants of settlers, but also long-established metropolitans and people of mixed European and other ancestry who are an integral part of the group by adopting its ideals and its lifestyle".

## 17.4 The Consequences of French Metropolitan Settlement Policies

The demographic weight of the people from metropolitan France (administrators and settlers) in the colony, which can be increased by the "import" of foreign populations (workers, convicts, etc.), appears fundamental in the configuration of the colonial situation as well as in the possibilities for exiting the colonial situation. New Caledonia was a settler colony from the 1800s in which the mass displacement of nationals from the French mainland was organized in order to form a new society, to the detriment of the Indigenous population that was set to disappear at some point in the future. In settler colonialism, settlers are there for good. It is therefore necessary to try, at best, to establish modalities of living together that are relatively satisfactory for all.

New Caledonia, like Algeria, "was conceived as early as the 1860s as a welcoming place for a French population" (Merle 2013, p. 50; see also Merle 2020). The policy of settlement was reaffirmed several times thereafter, in the 1950s for agricultural development (Graff 2017, p. 25), and again at the beginning of the nickel boom in the early 1970s, when the first signs of Kanak protest emerged.[18] The intention of French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer was explicit in a letter to his Secretary of State for DOM-TOM,[19] dated 19 July 1972:

> New Caledonia, a settlement, although doomed to multiracial variegation, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory in the world where a developed country can emigrate its nationals. We must therefore seize this ultimate opportunity to create an additional French-speaking country. The French presence in Caledonia can only be threatened, except by world war, by a nationalist claim of Indigenous populations supported by some potential allies in other ethnic communities from the Pacific. In the short and medium term, the mass immigration of French citizens from the overseas departments (La Réunion) should avoid this danger by maintaining and improving the ratio of communities.[20]

This last "wave of settlement significantly increased the population of New Caledonia, causing the Kanak people to [definitely] switch to a numerical minority" (Graff 2017, p. 26). Kanak people now account for just over 41%[21] of New Caledonia's total population.

In this context of minorisation, as early as 1975, the Kanak independentists called for a referendum on self-determination. In 1983, a first negotiation between the Independence Front (FI) and France took place in Nainville-les-Roches, which was also attended by parties representing non-independentists, mostly made up of people of European descent. At this time, the Kanak of the FI agreed to recognise that the "victims of history", which are the descendants of convicts, settlers or mine workers from Asia or the Pacific, have the right to vote in a possible referendum on self-determination. This moment marked a turning point in at least two respects: the question arose as to who would vote, and as the anthropologist Stephanie Graff pointed out, there was a shift "from the question of the self-determination of the Kanak people to that of the entire territory of New Caledonia, since its entire population is concerned, 'for historical reasons'" (*ibid* 2017, p. 27). In the statement that was drafted after this negotiation, the term "victims of history" was replaced by that, much more inclusive, of "other ethnicities", which, according to Graff, was "the basis of all the future controversies over the definition of the electoral body" (*ibid* 2017, p. 28).

With the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, it was agreed that the "interested populations" in the future of the territory would be the only ones to be empowered to vote in the elections that would be decisive for the future of New Caledonia, which included elections to the Congress of New Caledonia and provincial assemblies as well as the vote of self-determination. The Nouméa Accord subsequently defined a "New Caledonian citizenship" (see Chap. 20 by Robertson in this book) that limited the "common destiny" and established "restrictions on the electoral body for elections to the country's institutions and for final consultation" (Preamble to the Accord). The restriction of the electoral body for elections to the country's institutions is a fundamental point of the Nouméa Accord on which the definition of citizenship of New Caledonia is based, which can be transformed into nationality if the consultation on full sovereignty leads to the independence of the territory.[22]

## 17.5 The Issue of the Electoral Body and the Referendums on Self-Determination

The criterion used to restrict the electoral body was the source of heated conflicts. Indeed, the independentists and non-independentists did not agree on the criterion of 10 years of continuous domiciliation in New Caledonia to be registered on the special electoral list for provincial elections

[18] More than 8000 French citizens from metropolitan France came to live in New Caledonia between 1969 and 1972 (Forrest and Kowasch 2016:6).

[19] The DOM-TOM is the abbreviation for "overseas departments and territories".

[20] Letter quoted on the following website: https://rebellyon.info/Kanaky-une-lettre-oubliee-de. Accessed 19 Dec 2023.

[21] People identifying as Kanak make up 41.2% of the population, those identifying as Europeans, 24%, those identifying as Wallisians and Futunians 8.3%, and those claiming to belong to other "communities" 8% (ISEE 2019).

[22] For more details on the three electoral lists existing in New Caledonia and the "transitional" disconnection between Caledonian citizenship and "French nationality" (see Chauchat 2008; Graff 2017).

(LESP):[23] the independentists defended the idea of a "frozen" electoral body comprising only those present in New Caledonia before the signing of the Nouméa Accord and able to justify a 10-year residence, while non-independence supporters [loyalists] proposed a "sliding" electoral body, including all those who can justify a continuous 10-year residence. On the independentist side, the important issue was to prevent immigration from further increasing the imbalance against the Kanak minority[24] population. The Constitutional Act 2007-237 of 23 February 2007 finally established the freezing of the electoral body.

In view of the referendum that took place on 4 November 2018, the question of the electoral body was again the subject of debate. It was clear in Organic Law 99-209 of 19 March 1999, relating to New Caledonia that the question of independence would be decided by the electoral body made up of persons of customary civil status (the Kanak people), natives of New Caledonia as well as non-natives who may justify a 20-year continuous residence in New Caledonia by 31 December 2014, or who have been admitted to the consultation on 8 November 1998, which assumes to have been able to justify 10 years of residence on that date. However, various irregularities have been noted and denounced in recent years with regard to the Special Electoral Consultation List (LESC). One of these involved 20,000 Kanak who would not have been on the general electoral list (LEG, allowing voting in national elections, i.e. presidential, legislative and European elections), which is a prerequisite to vote in the referendum on self-determination. This situation was due to several factors: the fact that a number of Kanak people do not feel concerned about the French elections in general and have therefore never been included on the general list, the fact that young Kanak can be refused registration for lack of correct documentation, and the partisanship of members of the special administrative commissions (Graff 2017, p. 32–33; see also Chauchat 2016). A "political agreement" was finally reached after a meeting of the committee of signatories to the Nouméa Accord on 2 November 2017,[25] which was approved some 20 days later by an unanimous vote (except two abstentions) of the New Caledonian Congress on the proposed amendment to the organic law. With the adoption of the Organic Law of 19 April 2018, on the organisation of the consultation on the accession to full sovereignty of New Caledonia, about 11,000 natives of New Caledonia were added to the special list. This comprised 7000 through customary civil status and 4000 by ordinary civil status that could justify a three-year residency in New Caledonia.[26]

In the end, 174,165 people were called to vote on the future of New Caledonia on 4 November 2018.[27] To the question "Do you want New Caledonia to gain full sovereignty and become independent", 56.4% answered "No" and 43.6% "Yes" (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book). The difference between the two options was 18,000 votes. For the independentists, however, it was a first battle won since the polls and political commentators had predicted a landslide victory of "No" to the tune of 70% (Trépied 2018b).[28] The historic turnout in the poll at 80.63% of the registered voters was also gratifying. Trépied (2018b) said that New Caledonians "have given unprecedented importance to the vote – no other local or national referendum has ever mobilised such a high proportion of voters in the archipelago". For the second referendum that took place on 4 October 2020, 180,799 people were registered on the LESC.[29] The turnout rose to 85.69%. The gap narrowed between the "Yes" and the "No" to independence. The "No" option won with only 53.26% of the vote. The gap between the two options was 9970 votes. This result gave the independentists more hope for a victory in the third referendum. In the days following this referendum, the situation was also pushing loyalist partisans to dialogue, especially the more moderate ones who wish to find a compromise governance solution.

After the 2018 referendum, Trépied also mentioned that "[t]he proponents of independence remain overwhelmingly Kanak and those of remaining in France in the majority non-Kanak" (Trépied 2018b). This conclusion is evident from the analysis of the results by commune. Those with a large majority of Kanak voters showed a strong majority in favour of full sovereignty, while those with a strong non-Kanak majority also voted overwhelmingly in favour of keeping New Caledonia in the Republic (for details, see Huc and Martin 2019; Gay 2019). This is still true in view of the results for 2020, but they might also suggest that some non-

[23] See the Organic Act 99-209 of 19 March 1999, relating to New Caledonia.

[24] On the issues of "rebalancing" between communities, including in its demographic dimension, see Rallu who states that "the economic development induced by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords resulted in a net increase of 7670 male and 6370 female jobs between 1988 and 1996. But, according to the census, nearly 8000 net migrants, mainly Europeans and much fewer Wallisians, entered over the period" (2018, p. 399).

[25] Discontents nevertheless persisted among the New Caledonian population.

[26] See https://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/dossier/nouvelle-caledonie/nouvelle-caledonie-referendum-autodetermination-du-4-novembre-2018.html. Accessed on 19 Dec 2023.

[27] Some 35,000 French citizens registered on the LEG and settled in the archipelago after 1994 did not meet the criteria to be registered on the LESC (Trépied 2018b).

[28] For details on the polls and debates on the wording of the question (see Leblic 2018b).

[29] The increase in the number of voters between 2018 and 2020 is mainly attributable to the registration of young people who have reached the age of majority, which represents approximately 3000 people per year (Lassauce 2020).

Kanak joined the ranks of the independentists. What is interesting is that the results also confirmed that the Kanak's drive for independence has not waned despite the improvement in their socio-economic conditions in recent decades and the diversification of their social trajectories (inclusion into the wage economy, increased schooling, urbanisation, etc.) (Trépied 2018b).

In the aftermath of both referendums, the independentists rushed to mobilise their supporters and were appealing to voters for the third referendum. One of the challenges for the independentists was to convince those who abstained in the 2020 referendum to vote – especially those from the Loyalty Islands (Maré, Lifou and Ouvéa), traditionally an independence stronghold populated almost exclusively by Kanak.[30] It was also certainly a matter of trying again to convince non-Kanak to join the pro-independence camp.

Taking into account the contextual elements described here, one thing was certain despite the optimism generated by the outcome of the 2018 and 2020 referendums and the position that the Kanak have acquired in recent decades within governance institutions: the path to full sovereignty was paved with obstacles, and the Kanak could hardly achieve this alone as they were 41.2% of the total population, which translates into 18,000 fewer votes than non-Kanak (Trépied 2018b). In addition, they were divided among themselves on the issue.[31] This has been the whole point of a long period of reflection based around "common destiny" in recent years (Faugère and Merle 2010; Graille 2018; Le Meur 2017; Salaün and Vernaudon 2009).

This is also, in my view, one of the reasons for the exploration of an "Indigenous strategy" by a segment of the Kanak population. For a number of them, given their demographic context, it is a question of ensuring, at best, the recognition and consideration of their customs and languages as well as the existence of mechanisms guaranteeing their presence in various sectors and institutions in tomorrow's New Caledonian society.

## 17.6 The New Era of the Nouméa Accord

The 1998 Nouméa Accord, "explicitly defined in its preamble as a 'decolonisation Accord'" (Guyon and Trépied 2013, p. 109), has made possible the emergence of Indigenous claims in at least three ways. First, by paving the way for large-scale industrial mining operations as part of the economic rebalancing between the provinces, the Nouméa Accord raised unprecedented environmental concerns (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book).

Second, by officially recognising "Kanak identity" and strengthening the weight of customary authorities, lands and law, it initiated a set of measures to promote institutions and structures described as "customary", including the creation of a Customary Senate (Guyon and Trépied 2013, p. 110). The Customary Senate – created by organic law 99-209 of 19 March 1999, to reflect upon institutional arrangements meant to take into account Kanak culture (Demmer 2018a) – has been behind a set of relatively new reflections and actions within the French Republic concerning the promotion of the teaching of Kanak languages and arts, the protection of intellectual property rights over traditional knowledge, but also the codification of customs in order to strengthen institutional legal pluralism (Demmer 2007; Demmer and Salomon 2017; Horowitz 2012). It should be noted that "since the 1990s, civil litigation between Kanak of customary status is decided by professional judges (almost all French metropolitan) and Kanak customary assessors (...), who explain what 'custom' provides and judge in its name" (Trépied 2018a, p. 66). The "customary status", renamed by the Nouméa Accord, was called "special civil status" before 1998. It corresponds to the maintenance, after the extension of citizenship to the Kanak in 1946, of the civil status of "native subjects" in colonial times.[32] This "differentialist" project (Demmer 2018a) was enshrined in the "Charter of the Kanak People: A Common Foundation of the Fundamental Values and Principles of Kanak Civilization", adopted by a significant number of officially recognised Kanak customary authorities in April 2014, following a consultation process led by the Customary Senate.[33] In this Charter, the signatories – notably "[g]uided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted on 13 September 2007" (Preamble, p. 8) – strongly assert the collective rights of the Kanak people as New Caledonia's Indigenous people, and affirm their commitment "to work for the affirmation of legal pluralism" (Preamble, p. 11). The Customary Senate has thus become the rear base of the Indigenous movement in New Caledonia.

[30] Turnout was only 61.17% in 2018 and 74.72% in 2020. For an explanation for 2018, see Trépied (2018b). Internal divisions among independentists seem to largely explain the situation.

[31] There is indeed a stable "'Loyalist' Kanak minority" (Trépied 2013). But the independence option received strong support for elections from Kanak voters over time, with between 70 and 80% of the vote (Soriano 2001).

[32] For details on the *indigénat* regime that took place in New Caledonia from 1887 to 1946, see Merle and Muckle (2019).

[33] On the consultation process that led to the adoption of the Charter of the Kanak People and the ways in which it sketches the contours of "legal pluralism" in New Caledonia, see Dickins Morrison (2016). The Charter can be accessed online on the Customary Senate website: https://www.senat-coutumier.nc/phocadownload/useruploads/nos_publications/charte.pdf. Accessed 19 Dec 2023.

Finally, by moving FLNKS activists into elected positions and management – the provincialisation of the New Caledonian archipelago has given them authority over the North and Loyalty Islands Provinces through the ballot box – the Nouméa Accord has reconfigured power relationships within the "Kanak people" and Kanak political representation. In recent years, some customary leaders have been critical of elected Kanak officials, saying they lack authority to speak on behalf of all Kanak people (for details, see Demmer and Salomon 2017). This excerpt from a press release by Rhéébù Nùù in May 2006, when it was still arguing against Goro Nickel and speaking as the representative of the customary authorities of the far south of New Caledonia[34] (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book), illustrates the conflict of legitimacy at work:

> Ask yourself the question: which elected official, which president, which mayor, which political party will be able tomorrow to stand up and say stop to pollution, stop looting our wealth when the damage is done and when the factory is operational? [...] The elected officials have a partial responsibility corresponding to their mandate. Chiefdoms and clans will be accountable in more than a hundred years to their descendants and future generations.

If the dissensions might have decreased during the period of the referendums, in recent years, Demmer and Solomon (2017, p. 131–132) note that some customary authorities overtly criticise the Kanak elected officials whom they consider incapable of improving the lot of the Kanak people. Some of them "are rather hostile to the struggle for independence, which they accuse of causing a 'loss of young people's bearings', and more broadly of having questioned a certain moral and political order in the [Kanak] community" (*ibid* 2017, p. 131–132). The 2014 Charter of the Kanak People clearly affirms that the legitimacy of customary authorities prevails over the legitimacy of democratically elected authorities (see Preamble, article 55, and chapter 3). Internal splits, however, are nothing new, and the French state has exploited them in the past. Back in the 1980s, the "Great Chiefs" Council, for example, was promoted by the French State and loyalist parties in opposition to independence. Some loyalist Kanak customary leaders were behind it: those who owed their power to the indirect administrative structures put in place during colonisation (for details, see Demmer 2016; Demmer and Salomon 2017).

## 17.7 Conclusion

The relevance of "Indigenous identity" and the "Indigenous strategy" in New Caledonia is a product of its unique colonial situation. Indigenous identity is largely relational and becomes – or does not – an attractive strategy in particular contexts of struggle. In the French territories of Oceania, the partial success of the Indigenous movement and the struggle for Indigenous rights are unique to the New Caledonian context. There is no equivalent in French Polynesia, for instance. French Polynesia's history differs from New Caledonia's in many respects. There is no such official recognition of Polynesian or Mā'ohi customs or of any kind of official "customary status" for the descendants of the Indigenous people. In civil matters, a large proportion of them have been formally subject to the Civil Code since 1880 and all of them since 1945 (for details, see Gagné et al. 2018). As I mentioned elsewhere (Gagné 2015, p. 389), in addition to the differences in timing, this may partly explain why the environmental concerns raised by nuclear testing in French Polynesia – in contrast with those caused by the new mining project of the 2000s in New Caledonia – have not worked as a catalyst for the formation of a strong Indigenous movement. This could also explain the very limited success in the political arena of people whose demands have centred on the reestablishment of customary institutions or the restoration of hereditary monarchy or chiefdoms, even if they enjoy a certain sympathy because of what they represent culturally. These initiatives are usually met with opposition since French Polynesians generally favour democratic legitimacy – beginning with the ballot box (e.g. see Gagné 2020, p. 152–153; Saura 2010, 2015). The exceptionalism of New Caledonia relative to French Polynesia also arises from its history of settlement, and the way it impacted on the demographic weight of the Kanak population in the archipelago through time. Kanak people now represents only 41.2% of New Caledonians. This situation is very different from that of the population of Indigenous origins in French Polynesia, which is almost 83%[35] of the population.

However, even if New Caledonia as a political entity began as a settler colony, the context in which the Kanak live

[34] As underlined by Horowitz, if Rhéébu Nùù was successful at first "in publicly winning customary authorities' support for its activities and reinforcing its legitimacy through this association" (2017, p. 89), during 2006, customary authority's support for Rhéébu Nùù began to erode (*ibid* 2017, p. 91). Customary authorities then expressed their disagreements regarding Rhéébu Nùù's violent actions as well as regarding the ends the organisation was trying to achieve, since they fear that they could jeopardize the processing plant project altogether while "employment with the mining project would be in the best interest of the next generation" (*ibid* 2017, p. 93). Some even felt used. Even though Rhéébù Nùù succeeded in convincing the customary authorities to sign the "Pact for sustainable development in the Great South" in 2008, the disagreements persisted between Rhéébu Nùù and customary authorities thereafter (for details see Horowitz 2017, and chapter by Kowasch and Merlin in this book).

[35] This percentage comes from the 1988 census, the last to have measured ethnic identity. According to this census, about 12% of the population is of European origin, and about 5% are of Asian origin, mainly of Chinese origin (see Merceron 2005).

also differs radically from the context of other groups that are emblematic of the category "Indigenous peoples", especially in the States of the former British Empire in Oceania. Specifically, it is characterised by the particularities of French national political history and by the demographic weight of the Indigenous population. Both in Australia and New Zealand, the relatively low demographic weight of the Māori people (17,4% of the New Zealand Population, Stats NZ 2022) and of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (3.2% of the total Australian population, Census 2021) alone tends to make full sovereignty a solution that is difficult to envisage. This situation makes the path of the promotion and assertion of Indigenous rights all the more attractive.

To return to the third referendum held on 12 December 2021, the "No" to independence won a massive victory, with 96.49% of the votes cast, against a backdrop of a record low turnout.[36] This was the result of the call for "non-participation" by the pro-independence parties in the face of the French government's refusal to postpone the third consultation, as they requested because of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the archipelago hard from September 2021.[37] (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book) Because of its intransigence, the French state betrayed its commitments of more than 30 years to a peaceful and inclusive decolonisation, by organizing a referendum without the participation of a large part of the Kanak people. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the referendum, the independentists did not recognise the outcome as legitimate.

After what can be considered a failure of the self-determination process set up by the Matignon-Oudinot and Nouméa Accords, what's next for New Caledonia? As provided for in the Nouméa Accord, in the event of a third "No" victory, "political partners will meet to examine the situation thus created". At the time of writing, discussions, in which the independentists finally agreed to participate, are currently underway with a view to arriving at an institutional project for New Caledonia within France. Negotiations took place in 2023 but are not resolved. The aim is now to establish a new status for New Caledonia by March 2024, but the possible unfreezing of the electorate body and restrictions on the right to self-determination are among the stumbling blocks in the negotiations. Does this mean that New Caledonia is necessarily done with independence? Will the Indigenous strategies end up being essential or could new convergences between both strategies emerge? Interestingly, until now, the struggles for independence in New Caledonia have coexisted with the Indigenous strategy which, according to the UN frameworks on Indigenous rights, allows for the development of areas of sovereignty within the institutions of the colonial situation. It remains to be seen if and how this dual strategy of self-determination, which reveals a certain ambivalence concerning decolonisation, will influence the future of the Kanak people and of New Caledonia as a whole. Is it not even possible to imagine that new paths to self-determination could emerge?

[36] Turnout was only 43.87%.

[37] See Trépied (2021) on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and mourning ceremonies among Kanak and Oceanian people in New Caledonia.

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# New Caledonia's Self-Determination Process

18

Denise Fisher

**Abstract**

New Caledonia has been under French tutelage from 1853. From the early-twentieth-century local parties have sought increasing autonomy, and some, mainly indigenous Kanaks, independence, culminating in a civil war in the 1980s. The 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords ended the violence and, together with the 1998 Nouméa Accord, delayed a promised independence referendum by 30 years, in return for increased autonomy with scheduled handovers of certain responsibilities by France, and more equitable distribution of nickel returns, in a common destiny across communities. The final, self-determination phase of these agreements is now formally complete, with three independence referendums held in 2018, 2020, and 2021. The first two votes, returning a slim and narrowing majority for staying with France, revealed the continuing deep ethnic divide over independence. A call for nonparticipation by indigenous leaders, after the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on their communities, widely heeded, effectively nullified the political effect of the final December 2021 vote, again favouring staying with France. Independence leaders are now calling for another vote. This paper reviews the historical context, the next steps, and key issues in the ongoing self-determination process, including issues engaging important geostrategic interests for France and, briefly, some implications for the South Pacific region.

**Keywords**

New Caledonia · France · South Pacific · Indo-Pacific · Independence referendum · Kanak · Kanaky

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## 18.1 Introduction

The French overseas territory of New Caledonia has formally concluded a long-promised referendum process to decide its future after decades of compromises to end civil conflict over independence in the 1980s, amidst continuing controversy. New Caledonia alone of France's overseas possessions has a special sui generis status within France[1] with autonomies that are irreversible. This paper will examine the circumstances leading to this special status, the self-determination process currently under way to define future governance, and the issues at stake for New Caledonia, France, and the wider South Pacific region.

France took possession of New Caledonia in 1853 (the following brief history is drawn from Fisher 2013 and Chappell 2013). Missionaries were the first French residents followed by the arrival of settlers and the establishment of a penal colony from 1864 to 1897. Encouragement of free settlement in the late nineteenth century saw the dispossession of Kanak clans from their customary lands on the main island of Grande Terre (see also Merle and Muckle 2019). From 1887 an "indigénat" (native) scheme was imposed confining the country's indigenous Kanak peoples to certain areas and restricting their movement and economic activity, remaining in force until 1946.

Nickel was discovered in 1874. Experts from other parts of France and immigrant labour from then Indochina (Vietnam), Indonesia, and Japan came into New Caledonia to develop the resource. New Caledonia's reserves today represent at least 25% of world reserves (see Bencivengo 2014).

[1]New Caledonia has the legal status of "pays sui generis". The other French Pacific possessions include the "collectivities" of French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna and the uninhabited Clipperton Island in the Pacific, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Martin, and Saint Barthélemy. Elsewhere, France has five overseas "departments" with the same status as those in mainland France: Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Reunion, and Mayotte and the "territory" of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.


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Apart from early indigenous resistance to French domination and a major indigenous rebellion in 1878, contemporary local moves for more autonomy from France began in 1932, initially by the locally born white settlers or Caldoches. These efforts only developed momentum from the 1940s; when in the early years of World War II, local personalities challenged the Vichy Governor. During the war Nouméa became the US South Pacific headquarters from which major battles such as Guadalcanal and the Coral Sea were launched. The presence and experience in Nouméa of large numbers of Americans, including black Americans, heightened the awareness of the Kanak people about what might be possible for them. Some Kanaks could vote by 1946, with universal indigenous suffrage introduced in 1956.

Early political activity coalesced largely around the *Union Calédonienne* (UC), a party of Kanaks and Caldoches, which was formed in 1953 from two indigenous associations created in 1946 by the Catholic and Protestant churches, respectively (the Catholic Union of Indigenous Caledonian Friends of Liberty in Order and the Protestant Association of Indigenous Caledonians and French Loyalty Islanders). The motto of the UC, which still operates today, was then "two colors, one united people". Calls for greater autonomy were treated within French President De Gaulle's larger post-war policy of forming a French "community" of dependencies, with a promise of increased autonomy. France, therefore, refused to allow its overseas territories to be considered as non-self-governing territories in the newly formed United Nations. Against the background of promised further autonomy, in a 1958 referendum, 98% of New Caledonians who voted (77% of the then 35,163 registered voters) chose to stay with France (Journal Officiel 1958).

In the 1960s, nickel exploitation was expanding, and the local people wanted to invite a Canadian company, INCO, to develop the resource. To counter this, France began to roll back some of the autonomies it had promised. It brought in French experts to develop the nickel industry and others from the metropolitan and other overseas French territories specifically to outnumber the local indigenous people, many of whom wanted independence. On 17 July 1972, French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer wrote to his Secretary of State for the Overseas Territories and Departments that indigenous nationalist claims could only be avoided if residents coming from elsewhere in metropolitan or Overseas France became the democratic majority (Sanguinetti 1985, p. 26; Tutugoro 2020, p. 13). There was a veritable waltz of statutes, with some 10 statutes introduced from 1957 to 1988, most restricting local autonomies and certainly not responding to calls for independence.[2]

[2]The 1957 Defferre Law, 1963 Jacquinot Law, 1969 Billotte Law, 1976 Stirn Statute, 1979 Dijoud Law, 1984 Lemoine Law, 1985 Pisani Plan, 1985 Fabius Plan, 1986 Pons I Statute, 1988 Pons II Statute, each briefly summarized in Fisher (2013 Appendix 2).

By the late 1970s, the unitary UC had fragmented. Some Kanaks had formed autonomist parties (among them the *Foulards Rouges* (Red Scarves) in 1969 and the *Union multiraciale* (Multiracial union) in 1975). When in 1977 the UC supported independence, many Europeans left the party. In 1977, Jacques Lafleur formed the loyalist *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie*, which became in 1978 *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République* (RPCR, Rally for Caledonia in the Republic), and was to remain the principal loyalist party for decades. In 1984, a coalition of independence groups was formed, known as the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS, Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front), which endures to this day, with the UC as one of its constituent members. Key related issues were pro-independence parties' concern about immigration and distribution of nickel revenues.

Tensions grew and by 1984, New Caledonia was in a state of civil unrest, a period euphemistically called *les événements* (the events). In 1987, an independence referendum was boycotted by the FLNKS because it allowed residents of only 3 years standing to vote. FLNKS calls for independence and protests accelerated and, by 1988, became enmeshed in France's national presidential election process. An attack on French police and hostage-taking at Gossanah (Ouvéa island) in April 1988, in between the two rounds of the presidential elections, led to a forceful French strike back on 5 May, resulting in the deaths of 19 Kanaks, 4 police, and 2 military personnel. Eye-witness accounts note the excess of brutality exercised by French forces engaged in the events at Gossanah (Fisher 2012).

## 18.2 Matignon-Oudinot Accords: A Path to Peace

Immediately after the French presidential elections, the newly re-elected François Mitterrand sent a mission to New Caledonia to end the bloodshed. The resultant Matignon/Oudinot Accords were signed in June 1988 by FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou and RPCR leader Jacques Lafleur. Negotiations for these Accords were difficult. The agreements provided for a redistribution of economic benefits throughout the territory, beyond the wealthy mainly European southern area around Nouméa into the mainly Kanak north and islands areas, with specific provision for the north to participate in nickel production and revenues. They created three provinces, South Province, around Nouméa, and North and Loyalty Islands Provinces in the Kanak heartlands. Each province had an assembly, with representatives voted for by a restricted electorate, essentially those resident in 1988 and their descendants, who would also vote in an independence referendum to be held within 10 years. A training program for Kanaks, called 400 cadres, was initiated.

Support for the agreements was fragile, evident in the assassination, less than a year later, of Tjibaou by a radical FLNKS supporter.

The Accords presided over 10 years of general growth and development, but tensions remained. Both independence and loyalist parties were contending with extremists opposed to the compromises. In 1991, Lafleur proposed a "consensual solution" to head off an independence referendum, citing sensitivities and the risk of returning to war (Chappell 1998, p. 441). In 1993, the FLNKS took up the idea of a "negotiated independence" (Fisher 2013, p. 69; Mohamed-Gaillard 2010, p. 149). Politically both sides were experiencing fragmentation. The loyalist RPCR was dealing with splinter groups including the right-wing *Front National* (National Front) and the more centrist *Calédonie pour Tous* (Caledonia for All). The independence side likewise fragmented into a loose coalition, the UC-led *Fédération des Comités de Coordination des Indépendantistes* (FCCI, Federation of Independentist Coordination Committees), and including a new, mainly Wallisian *Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien* (RDO, Democratic Oceanic Party). Eventually all parties came to agree to the idea of deferring the potentially explosive referendum. The independence side hoped that with more time they could develop the expertise and experience needed to manage an independent New Caledonia or Kanaky as they saw it. The loyalists saw an extension as providing time for further development and re-balancing of economic activity in the hope that those who sought independence would come to see the benefits of remaining with France.

## 18.3 The Nouméa Accord: A Common Destiny

On 5 May 1998, the French State and leading personalities from the loyalist and independence parties signed the Nouméa Accord (Nouméa Accord 1998) extending the date of the referendum to 2018. An Organic Law was gazetted by France on 21 March 1999 to give it effect (Organic Law 1999).

The Nouméa Accord for the first time specifically acknowledged the Kanak people and their particular link with the land (Preamble 1) and stated that colonisation had attacked the dignity of the Kanak people and deprived them of their identity (Preamble 3). It referred to a New Caledonian citizenship affirming a common destiny for its people (Preamble 4), meaning that the Kanak people and all other communities, including long-resident European, Wallisian, and Asian residents, shared a rightful place in New Caledonia.

The principal provisions of the Accord were for the following:

- A Congress drawn from the provincial assemblies to be elected by an electorate confined essentially to those with 10 years' residence to 1998, every 5 years for the duration of the Accord, with a collegial government or cabinet
- A scheduled handover of a number of specified powers, with France retaining the five "regalien" or key sovereign powers (defence, foreign affairs, currency, law and order, and justice)
- A self-determination referendum process to begin in the final term of the Nouméa Accord (by November 2018), which would address New Caledonia's future international status, the remaining five regalien powers, and citizenship issues (essentially preserving employment and voting rights for long-term New Caledonian residents) (Article 5)

Uniquely for France's overseas possessions, New Caledonia has the power to legislate on its own in areas that fall within its powers, albeit subject to appeals to the French constitutional courts (Article 2.1).

The Accord was underpinned by "economic re-balancing" to address economic inequities. The related 1998 Bercy Agreement, building on an earlier engagement of the main Kanak North Province in the nickel industry, enabled that province to own a majority share (51%) in a new multibillion dollar nickel processing plant at Koniambo. At the same time, a massive new plant would be constructed at Goro in the South Province (see Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book; also Batterbury et al. 2020; Kowasch 2018; Pitoiset and Wéry 2008).

A share of the 150-year old nickel production plant at Doniambo on the outskirts of Nouméa was also granted to New Caledonia, through its Territorial Company for Industrial Participation. New Caledonia was allocated 30% of shares in SLN (Société le Nickel), the company running the plant, and 5.1% of shares in the French parent company Eramet. While this did not meet the 51% sought by the pro-independence groups, it was a beginning. Within a few years of signing the accord, New Caledonia's share of SLN rose to 34.1%. Eramet, owned partly by the French state (30%) and the French Duval Family (37%), currently owns 56% of SLN, and Nishin Steel Japan, 10%.

A further related undertaking was secured, at the demand of the pro-independence group, that France would acknowledge its responsibility to report on New Caledonia as a non-self-governing territory to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee (C24) as administrating authority (personal communication to author 2017). It began to report annually to the UN after signature of the Nouméa Accord and thereafter became subject to UN decolonisation principles, prescribing one of three outcomes: "(a) Emergence as a sovereign independent state (b) Free association with an independent state (c) Integration with an independent state" (UNGA 1960).

## 18.4 Implementation of the Accord 1999–2018

The 1988 and 1998 accords have undoubtedly presided over 30 years of stability and, subject to the volatilities of the nickel market, economic growth in New Caledonia.

The fledgling new political institutions, based on collegial government, have generally worked well, although remain fragile, especially given the increasing fragmentation of both loyalist and independence groups since 1999. Five-year elections return provincial assemblies in the North and Loyalty Islands Provinces, which are predominantly Kanak, and the main European South Province. The Congress is made up of 54 seats, drawn from 32 of South Province's 40 provincial assembly seats, 15 of the North Province's 22 provincial assembly seats, and 7 of the Loyalty Islands Province's 14 provincial assembly seats (Nouméa Accord Article 2.1). The North and Loyalty Islands Provinces have remained predominantly Kanak and the political base of the pro-independence groups. The South Province remains centred on Nouméa and its surrounds and is predominantly European, although with significant increased inflows of Kanaks in recent years.

Over the first four elections held from 1999 to 2014, the pro-France groups retained the majority, albeit reducing, in Congress, with the independence groups correspondingly gaining strength. By 2014, of the 54 Congress seats, the strength of representation of the pro-France groups declined from a maximum of 36 seats in 2004 to 29 seats, with that of independence groups increasing from 18 to 25 seats in the same period.

The two main political groups became more divided, the loyalists seriously so. Lafleur's RPCR disintegrated into a number of different parties and coalitions. The 2014 elections (Government of New Caledonia 2014) returned the loyalists 29 seats; 15 of which were held by their largest party, Philippe Gomès' Calédonie Ensemble (CE, Caledonia Together). Their remaining 13 seats were held by a range of smaller parties including what remained of Lafleur's RPCR (renamed the *Rassemblement-UMP* (R-UMP Rally-Union for a Popular Movement, with just 5). The loyalist side saw various realignments and coalitions over the 20 years of the Nouméa Accord. As late as November 2017, a new hardline loyalist party (Sonia Backès' *Les Républicains calédoniens*, LRC Caledonian Republicans) emerged, which was soon to displace Gomès group (see Outremers 360 (2018) and below on the 2019 provincial elections).

The pro-independence FLNKS has remained a loose coalition, marked by the dissidence of elements of the UC, divided mainly on a north-south geographical line. A new small radical independentist party, the *Parti Travailliste* (PT, Labour Party) emerged in 2007. In the 2014 elections, the pro-independence side won 25 seats of which the UC/FLNKS won 15 (consisting of Roch Wamytan's core FLNKS with 6 and the UC element, 9), the *Parti de Libération Kanak* (PALIKA, Kanak Liberation Party) won 7, the PT, *UC Renouveau* (Renewed UC), and the *Libération Kanak Socialiste* (Socialist Kanak Liberation) one seat each.

Such division put pressure on the collegial "government" which is the political Cabinet reflecting the proportionate party strength in the 54-member Congress. Members can decide the number of government members but have agreed on 11 members since 1999. From 1999 to early 2021, loyalists held the majority in the 11-member government. As the work of government picked up pace from 1999, necessarily demanding votes on key issues, inevitably a majority pro-France vote prevailed over the collegiality designed by the Accord. However, the proportionate composition of the Government demanded ongoing collaboration and consultation, a strong basis for discussion and cooperation in the preparation for the referendum.

Collegiality has succeeded in another way. While the fledgling institutions generally worked well, there were strains. Issues such as which flags to fly, nickel exports to China, and even the election of a president, at times caused the Government to be moribund for months at a time. Indeed, divisions over electing a president ground Government to a halt at the end of 2017, less than a year before the final referendum. The deadlock, caused by intra-loyalist rivalry, was broken, as in past ruptures, not by loyalist unity but by support from the pro-independence side. Such collaboration reflects the fundamental spirit of the Nouméa Accord and may provide a basis for productive consultation on the future beyond the Accord.

In addition to these political institutions, a critical element of the Nouméa Accord political machinery has been the generally annual meetings of the Committee of Signatories to the Accord, chaired by the French Prime Minister and usually held in Paris. The committee process, including a range of sub-committees focusing inter alia on implementing aspects of the Accord, developing the nickel industry in an equitable way, and more recently, preparation for the final referendum, has generally worked well, albeit with the occasional withdrawal of one or other member to express dissidence. Because the committee has expanded to include newer political leaders who had not signed the Accord, including numerically more loyalist leaders owing to the fragmentation of that side, it has been limited by the fact that it does not reflect electoral strength.

Despite the limitations, the Government and the Congress, and the Committee of Signatories, have been able to deliver many changes, securing the handover to the local government, and sharing, of many of the responsibilities as provided for under the Accord. Differences remained over many issues, including the handover of responsibility for land distribution, as well as the so-called Article 27 responsibilities. These were responsibilities for broadcast media, tertiary

education, and aspects of administration and control of the communes and provinces, which under Article 27 of the Organic Law could have been handed over with agreement of the Congress. By early 2018, it was clear that local authorities would not be able to agree on these transfers, suggesting that they will be part of the subject matter of negotiations defining New Caledonia after the referendum.

New Caledonia was also slow to take up some powers shared with France under the Nouméa Accord, for example, in foreign policy, where the Accord allows New Caledonia to engage in regional diplomacy and membership of some international organisations in its own right. Agreement on an Economic Arrangement with Australia and a cooperation agreement with Vanuatu were speedily concluded, in 2002. Thereafter, New Caledonia's external engagement stalled for years. Still, by the end of 2017, it was a member of major regional organisations including the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, many of the associated Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific technical organisations, as well as of the World Health Organisation and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. New Caledonia has had a diplomatic delegate of its own in the French Embassy in Wellington New Zealand from 2012. After years of dispute over further appointments, nominees have since been attached to French Embassies in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji (Government of New Caledonia 2019). New Caledonia's External Affairs Unit was run by a French senior Overseas France Ministry official, François Bockel for 9 years to 2019.

The promise of more equitable sharing of nickel production and revenue has generally been kept. As noted, 34% of the revenues of the longstanding SLN company in Nouméa has been granted to New Caledonia, and 51% of the nickel project at Koniambo to the North Province Government. Dominique Katrawa, the first Kanak Chairman of the longstanding colonial company operating on the outskirts of Nouméa, SLN, was appointed in 2017. There has been investment of over $US 5b in each of two major new plants, at Koniambo in the North (Koniambo Nickel SAS 2020) and Goro in the South ($US 4.3 b. construction costs, (French 2009), with Vale committing $US 500 m., MiningCom 2018). Despite major technical problems at each site, and against the background of extreme volatility in global nickel markets, each is finally in production (see Chap. 9 of Demmer, and Chap. 8 by Kowasch and Merlin in this book). At times of plunging nickel prices, the French state stepped in with major fiscal support, shoring up confidence as the referendum date approached.

Despite the general success of the Accord in underpinning stability and growth, there have been some serious weak points. There have been ongoing concerns about the specially-defined restricted electorates negotiated under the Accords, which were fundamental to reassuring Kanak pro-independence groups, fearful of being outnumbered after years of concerted immigration policies. The Nouméa Accord restricted the electorate for the Provincial elections essentially to only those with 10 years' residence to 1998. Within the very first term, pro-France groups challenged this interpretation, claiming that the real intent was for voters to have 10 years' residence to the year of each 5-year election (i.e. 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019). Pro-independence concern was immediate and bitterly expressed. It took years for this to be sorted out. Only in 2007 did the French clarify the interpretation via legislative amendment, in favour of the pro-independence fixed 1998 interpretation, and this only after loyalists had taken the issue to the EU and the International Courts of Human Rights, both of which endorsed the pro-independence view (Fisher 2013, p. 103; Chauchat 2007, p. 57) (see Chap. 17 by Gagné in this book). The lengthy process to resolve such a core issue raised concerns among the pro-independence groups about the good faith of the loyalists and indeed of the French State.

Another fundamental area of weakness in the implementation of the Nouméa Accord has been ongoing social and security concerns. Longstanding ethnic violence continued at St Louis, on the outskirts of Nouméa, involving Kanak and Wallisian groups, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The ethnic differences at the time were controlled only when the French State resettled the Wallisians elsewhere. But the St. Louis area remains troubled, with ongoing outbursts of violence by local Kanak youth. The community occupies a strategic position, straddling the main arterial road between Nouméa and the Mont Dore dormer suburbs inhabited mainly by wealthy Europeans. Continued sporadic violence there, and in other regional towns on the main island, is symptomatic of deeper problems experienced by young Kanaks.

The most significant failure of the period of the Accords has been the inability to achieve full integration of many Kanaks, particularly Kanak youth, into the economic life of the territory. Forrest and Kowasch (2016) addressed issues of belonging and identity. Kanak young people living in communities find it difficult to succeed in the rigid metropolitan French education system that operates in New Caledonia, with consequent socio-economic disparity and ongoing ethnic discrimination (Kowasch 2010; Ris 2013), as basic as discrimination in employment, with young Kanaks paid less than Europeans for doing the same job (Gorohouna 2011). Dropping out, turning to drugs and to music and wafting between communities and Nouméa's squatter settlements is the fate of many, with some turning to petty crime. A visiting UN Special Rapporteur James Anaya gave a devastating account of the social place of Kanaks in his 2011 Report, even after years of implementation of the special "400 Cadres" training programme, noting.

"There are no Kanak lawyers, judges, university lecturers, police chiefs or doctors, and there are only six Kanak midwives registered with the State health system, out of a total of 300 midwives in New Caledonia"… "The Kanak people are experiencing poor levels of educational attainment, employment, health, over-representation in government-subsidised housing, urban poverty, … and at least 90 per cent of the detainees in New Caledonian prison are Kanak, half of them below the age of 25" (Anaya 2011, pp. 15 and 16).

Very little has changed since his visit. Clearly, Kanaks are involved in successfully running the North and Loyalty Island Provinces, although there remain numbers of French administrators. Kanak university lecturers and lawyers remain extremely rare (this author is aware of just three lecturers – Edouard Hnawia, Samuel Gorohouna, Suzie Bearune – and one Kanak advocate, Francky Dihace). Somewhat belatedly, at recent Committee of Signatories meetings and during the November 2017 visit to Nouméa by French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, all parties acknowledged the problems in engaging Kanak youth, and committed to working together to address the underlying issues (Government of New Caledonia 2017).

Working on inclusiveness for young Kanaks will undoubtedly be a major subject of discussion about New Caledonia after the Nouméa Accord. But meanwhile, there was an escalating pattern of violence, mainly perpetrated by Kanak youth, involving burglary, stoning of cars and motorbikes, and even rape, against middle class Europeans and others on the outskirts of Nouméa and in major town centres (see Fisher 2019a, p. 12; La Depêche 2018). Independence parties condemned the violence describing it as being perpetrated by individual offenders and reject broad labelling stigmatising Kanak youth. By March 2018, the FLNKS was warning that the "*Kanaky-Nouvelle-Calédonie*" vision should not be undermined by the acts of a few individuals (FLNKS 2018b).

All of this made for a fragile underlying security situation as the final self-determination phase of the Nouméa Accord began in late 2018.

## 18.5 The First Referendum: 4 November 2018

The Nouméa Accord (Article 5) provided for an independence referendum process to begin any time after the election of the 2014 Congress, on the basis of 3/5 support of that Congress. The process involves the holding of a referendum on independence. If the answer were no in the first vote, a second referendum could be held within 2 years, with 1/3 support of the Congress, and a third on the same basis. If the answer remained no after three votes, the parties must discuss the situation. Thus, the process extended over years, with the remaining, most bitterly divisive issues between the major political groups that had been set aside for 30 years, front and centre.

Indeed, the independence and loyalist parties could not agree to initiate the process until the very latest time possible (April 2018), finally agreeing to a first referendum on 4 November 2018. Differences over the question to be put (which was the same for each of the three potential referendums) were such that only at a 15-hour marathon meeting in Paris chaired by the French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe could the parties even agree to the wording, which was: "Do you agree that New Caledonia should accede to full sovereignty and become independent?"

One consequence of the late agreement on the date for the first referendum was that local provincial elections became a distraction that hardened the positions of both sides for that referendum. The Nouméa Accord had envisaged that if the 2014 Congress had agreed immediately to initiate the first referendum, the 4-year process would have been complete by the end of 2018. New Caledonia would have been independent, or have decided on future governance after 2018, by then. In the event, with the first referendum taking place only in November 2018, to pursue the remaining processes, it was necessary to hold provincial elections in May 2019 to renew the Congress at the expiration of its 5-year mandate.

Local parties were positioning themselves for those elections in the lead-up to the referendum, in the knowledge that it would be the May 2019 provincial elections that would define the political balance for the remaining critical phases of the Accord. Just a few days before the referendum, some loyalists called for the cancellation of a second and third referendum and the restricted electorates, seemingly revoking critical elements of the Nouméa Accord (L'Obs 2018), and one radical independence group had earlier called for a boycott of the referendum because of allegedly inaccurate voter lists (Parti Travailliste 2018).

Because of the importance of the restricted electorate, the voter lists were themselves a sensitive subject, having been challenged for years by both independence and loyalist groups. The UN sent supervising missions to oversee the list preparation process in the 2 years before the referendum. France also made unique provisions for voters to appeal their eligibility even up to the day of the vote. To ensure non-contestability of the process, France invited UN and PIF missions, and over 100 international journalists, to observe and report.

In the event, the turnout for the referendum was a recent historic high of 81.01%, giving legitimacy to the result. For comparison, New Caledonia's turnouts for the 2014 European elections had been 27%; for French legislative elections, around 40%; and, for the previous local (provincial) elections, 69%. The result of the vote was 56.7% in favour of

staying with France, and 43.3%, supporting independence (Government of New Caledonia 2018b).

Many were surprised by the relatively high level of support for independence, as a number of polls (albeit with high margins of error and questionable samples) had pointed to at least 60% favouring staying with France (NC la 1ère 2018; I-Scope 2017). Some loyalist parties had predicted a 70% "stay" vote (Le Figaro 2018). However, the result is consistent with the trend in provincial elections since 1999, with the disposition of seats in the 2014 Congress 53.7% loyalist and 46.3% pro-independence.

The real shock in the results, for France and for loyalists alike, was the clear, overwhelming ethnic division, whereby virtually all of the pro-independence vote were indigenous Kanaks (see Pantz 2018). While some non-Kanaks may well have voted "yes", one well-placed senior French official told this author that a map of the "yes" voting pattern almost completely matched a demographic map of Kanak areas (Private communication 2019). The "yes" vote to independence reached as high as 80%–90% in the Kanak heartlands (the Loyalty Islands and North Province's north and eastern communes), and the "no" vote equally reached as high as 80–90% in some wealthy European communes in South Province, with about 26% "yes" votes in the communes around Nouméa with a Kanak population (Government of New Caledonia 2018b). The undeniable reality was that after 30 years of compromise, concessions, and power handovers, the vast majority of Kanaks, including the many young Kanaks who were evident in the televised queues at polling stations, had voted for independence.

This result was difficult for loyalists to accept. Some called for removal of the restricted electorates for the remaining provincial elections and possible future referendums. France speedily reconfirmed the continued application of the Nouméa Accord provisions in a Committee of Signatories meeting in early December 2018 (Relevé de conclusions 2018), although some loyalists maintained their opposition.

In the years leading to the first referendum, independence parties had paid great attention to young Kanaks, in community meetings and through travelling campaigns, to encourage them to vote and to support independence. They had also specifically courted non-Kanak islander support among Wallisians, Vanuatu and French Polynesian voters, even visiting Vanuatu and French Polynesia to urge clan influence in their favour. French Polynesian independence leader Oscar Temaru was in New Caledonia supporting the independence side in the campaign, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), comprising Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia's FLNKS independence coalition, also gave its support (Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes (LNC) 2018a).

The first referendum had the effect of heightening loyalist fears about the future. While voting took place peacefully, a major achievement in itself, as soon as polls closed, there were burnings of cars and buildings and blockades at the troubled Saint-Louis area but also in the Païta area along the main highway north of Nouméa, which involved throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and even shooting on police, by young Kanaks.

There was also a degeneration in an ongoing dispute at an SLN mining site at Kouaoua on the eastern coast, in the months before the referendum. Some young Kanaks disagreed with their elders over SLN activity in the area, for environmental reasons and because they claimed they had not been sufficiently included in consultations (Salenson 2018). They had engaged in numerous arson attempts on the pipeline at the site at Kouaoua for 2 years before the referendum. They imposed a blockade there from August 2018 until voting day itself, with independence leader Paul Néaoutyine publicly describing SLN as prone to blackmailing New Caledonia just weeks before the vote (Radio New Zealand 2018). Arson attacks there, and continuing petty burglaries and assaults on middle-class Europeans and others more generally, continued into 2019.

## 18.6 May 2019 Provincial Elections

Before a decision could be made for a second referendum, the scheduled May 2019 provincial elections intervened. These elections determined the composition of the Congress for the final self-determination stages under the Accord.

Loyalists were divided. The then largest loyalist party, *Calédonie Ensemble* (CE), ran on a platform of dialogue with independence groups to negotiate a new agreement that would obviate the need for a second and third referendum (Calédonie Ensemble 2019). The hardline *Les Républicains Calédoniens* (LRC) under Sonia Backès organised a coalition called *Avenir en Confiance* (AEC, Future with Confidence), drawing in many remaining loyalist parties, but not the CE, which had been a leading force in local and French political institutions since 2014. The AEC favoured bringing on a second referendum as soon as possible. While not ruling out dialogue with independence groups, Backès said that discussions would be "firm" and without "unilateral concessions". In apparent challenge to Nouméa Accord recognition of the Kanak identity, she said that "no one community" should have an advantage. The AEC platform statement opposed restricted electorates (Avenir en Confiance 2019 and see LNC 2019c).

While independence parties had their differences (see Tutugoro 2020), they were able to agree on one list in the mainly loyalist South Province, gaining support there. However, the loyalist parties could not agree on single lists in either of the mainly pro-independence Kanak North and Island provinces. In the event, only the AEC won some small loyalist representation in the North Province.

The final outcome (Elections-NC 2019) reflected the serious lack of unity on the loyalist side. Their representation in the Congress dropped from 29 to 25 seats. Independence groups increased their support from 25 to 26 seats, for the first time winning more seats than the loyalists. A new Wallisian-based party, *L'Éveil océanien* (LEO, Pacific Awakening), claiming not to be aligned with any major side, won the remaining three seats. Reflecting loyalist concern heightened by support for independence in the first referendum, the more hardline AEC displaced the moderate CE as the largest loyalist party, winning 18 Congress seats to the CE's 7 (as opposed to CE's 15 previously). The two groups immediately said they would work together, although failed to do so 2 weeks later when electing a president of Congress (Radio New Zealand 2019), replicating the many unsustained efforts at loyalist coalitions over the last 20 years.

Independence leaders expressed themselves satisfied with the results, with Roch Wamytan (FLNKS) noting the low participation rate (64% in North Province) but indicating that young Kanaks did not generally vote in provincial elections, favouring the referendums. Key leaders Paul Néaoutyine (PALIKA), Daniel Goa (UC), and Roch Wamytan (FLNKS) retained their support bases (Fisher 2019b).

While independence parties maintained their representation in the South Province, and AEC won two seats in the North Province, loyalists did not win any seats in Loyalty Islands. Moreover, the three LEO seats increased loyalist vulnerability. LEO leader Milakulo Tukumuli claimed his Wallisian-based party was "French" but emphasised the goal of protecting the community spirit within New Caledonia (LNC 2019a). Independence leader Roch Wamytan noted, early, the inclusion of former independence supporters in the LEO (LNC 2019b). The kingmaking role of the LEO was soon demonstrated, when after a loyalist impasse over the election of the President of the Congress, the LEO cast its support behind Wamytan, who won (Radio New Zealand 2019).

European loyalist fears were heightened by strong Kanak support for independence in the November 2018 referendum, continuing social unease, and increased pro-independence representation in the Congress after the May 2019 provincial election at the expense of their own numbers. Their fears will have been reinforced by the stance of the hardliners who now had the ascendance in loyalist ranks and the power-broking role of the Wallisian-based LEO.

## 18.7 The Second Referendum: 4 October 2020

In June 2019, the newly elected local Congress, with the necessary 1/3 support, this time led by the loyalist AEC, duly called for a second referendum. There were differences over the date, the AEC preferring an early vote, in August or September 2020, and independence parties as late as possible. After initially deciding on September 2020, with the advent of the COVID pandemic, restricting movement and requiring the postponement of municipal elections, in May 2020 Prime Minister Édouard Philippe deferred the vote to 4 October 2020.

Independence parties, invigorated by their relatively strong showing in the first referendum and their gains in the 2019 provincial elections, campaigned actively. Their campaign was boosted with the decision by an extreme left component, the *Parti Travailliste* (PT Labour Party), which had boycotted the first referendum, to participate in the vote. Independence leaders decried a decision by France to allow loyalist parties to use the French flag in their campaign. However, independence leaders were able score points on two major territory-wide fronts: health and nickel.

In May, in an open letter, UC leader Daniel Goa demanded the removal of the French High Commissioner, invoking serious health concerns about the handling of the COVID pandemic. Goa accused him of siding with loyalists in the lead-up to the referendum. He accused the French government of ignoring local government powers over health under the Nouméa Accord, including by not closing its borders to the rest of France despite New Caledonia's COVID-free status, and variable application of local quarantine requirements, putting locals at risk. He likened France's approach to the mass deaths of Kanaks from influenza after the arrival of French colonialists (Goa 2020). The High Commissioner responded with seriatum rejections of the claims (Haut-commissariat 2020b), but Goa's letter had had its effect. In May 2021, the High Commissioner was replaced well before the end of the usual term.

Meanwhile, nickel once again became the subject of political activity. In December 2019, the owner of the large nickel plant in the south, Vale Brazil, announced its intention to sell. An Australian company, New Century Resources, was considering the purchase. In July and August, independence party leaders made public calls for local, New Caledonian ownership rather than foreign control. In September 2020, just weeks before the second referendum, New Century Resources withdrew its interest. On 10 September, independence supporters marched against foreign control of the plant. In a separate development, on 23 September, days before the second vote, young Kanaks blocked a mine at Népoui.

As in the first vote, independence leaders were supported by French Polynesian independence leaders and the MSG. Notwithstanding the effects of the COVID pandemic, the UN once again supervised preparation of voter lists in February 2020 and sent observers, complying with local quarantine requirements, to the October vote. Owing to COVID restrictions, the Pacific Islands Forum designated its members with local resident missions (Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu) as observers.

On 4 October, the vote was held, returning 53.26% no to independence and 46.74% yes, with just 9970 votes separating the two sides (as opposed to 18,000 in 2018). The turnout was a massive 85.6%. The vote took place peacefully, although loyalist parties complained at allegedly intimidatory tactics at some Nouméa voting booths by groups of independence party supporters (Steinmetz 2020). The electoral commission subsequently reviewed their concerns but said that these activities had been unlikely to have changed the result (NC la 1ère 6 October 2020).

The outcome of the second referendum deepened division between the two sides and heightened loyalist concerns (RJPENC 2020, pp. 75–159; Léoni 2020).

## 18.8 Preparation for the Third Referendum: 12 December 2021

Preparation for a third referendum began in this deeply divided climate. Ongoing division within the loyalist camp compounded their growing concern at the trend of strengthening independence inroads into their political majority. Independence groups were re-energised by their consecutive successes in increasing their support over the first two referendums and in the local Congress after the May 2019 election. They were also conscious that this would be the last vote under the restricted electorates that have boosted their position.

Both groups targetted the 25,881 eligible voters who abstained in 2020, with a view to overcoming the 9970 difference in support for the two sides. The results of the 2019 census, released in mid-2020, added a new element, showing a net emigration from the territory for the first time. From 2014 to 2019, even before the effects of the COVID pandemic, there was a net outflow of 2000 people per year (ISEE 2020). If this trend continued over 2020 to 2022, the final deadline for a vote under the Nouméa Accord, a further 6000 departures could potentially dent the pro-France vote, since those leaving are less likely to be indigenous Kanaks.

Again, nickel management was an arena of political contest. After the withdrawal of Australia's New Century Resources from the purchase of the southern nickel plant, independence leaders in North Province proposed a venture with a Korean company, which was opposed by loyalist parties in South Province, who favoured European investment proposals. At the end of December and early into 2021 protests and demonstrations took place, led by Kanak independence party supporters, including road blockages, and throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at police. These protests intensified, and protestors invaded the high-tech Goro plant offices, setting fire to buildings and destroying equipment.

On 2 February 2021, the two main independence coalitions withdrew from the collegial local Government, or Cabinet, citing inter alia concerns over the lack of implementation of collegiality and mishandling of the nickel plant sale issue (NC la 1ère 2 February 2021a). In the subsequent re-election, independence parties displaced the loyalists as the majority in the local Government for the first time. They were less successful in agreeing on who among their number should be elected president of the Government, grinding government to a halt for 5 months and requiring France to step in to pass a budget. On 2 July 2021, they agreed to elect PALIKA leader Louis Mapou, as president of the Government.

To address differences over the sale of the Goro nickel plant, French Overseas Minister Lecornu convened consultations with loyalist and independence party leaders in Paris. On 4 March, a compromise was reached, whereby New Caledonia would retain 51% share in the plant, with the shares of a Swiss-based investor set at just 19%, and a newly formed French company Compagnie financière de Prony, the remaining 30% (LNC 2021a). The change was a significant win for independence leaders in their push for local control of the nickel resource.

At this point, the independence side duly implemented Nouméa Accord provisions allowing for a third referendum. Independence parties held well over the 1/3 of Congress seats (18) necessary, and on 8 April 2021, their 25 representatives supported the call, but with all loyalist parties abstaining.

Independence leaders scored another political success on 28 July 2021 when their candidate for president of the local Congress, Roch Wamytan of the UC, won after disputing loyalist parties failed to agree over a candidate. This meant that for the first time, independence parties dominated both the Government and the Congress.

### 18.8.1 France's Role Organising the Referendum

France responded to the call to organise the third referendum amidst the growing confidence and institutional influence of the independence parties and disarray among the loyalists.

These factors, together with the decisive nature of this last vote under the Nouméa Accord, saw a more concerted effort by France to highlight the risks of supporting independence and thereby encourage voters to vote to stay with France, albeit while working for neutrality in overseeing the practical arrangements for the vote. France continued to exert considerable effort, so far fruitless, to encourage dialogue among all parties about the shape of New Caledonia's future the day after the Accord ended.

France has been in a delicate position as organiser of the referendum process (Fisher 2017b). The poor history of numerous statutes altering autonomy provisions from the 1970s to 1980s, the violence of those decades and the boycotted 1987 referendum preceding the calamitous hostage situation in early 1988 were all events closely watched and condemned by Melanesian and wider regional neighbours. The MSG was formed in the mid-1980s specifically to support the Kanak independence movement. PIF members had played a major role in having New Caledonia put on the UN decolonisation agenda in 1986 and subject to UN oversight, over French opposition. The UN was thus also watching, passing resolutions on New Caledonia every year since.

While clearly favouring New Caledonia staying with France, France has often had to play the arbiter when implementing the Nouméa Accord. It knew the referendums had to be seen as impeccable, for a durable inclusive long-term future shared by independence and loyalist parties alike, and to sustain international scrutiny to maintain support for France as a power in the region and beyond. Thus, France engaged the UN in finalising voter lists and invited UN and PIF observers and international journalists to the first two referendums.

While seeking to project impartiality (Fisher 2018), France toughened its approach from mid-2020. First, French President Emmanuel Macron replaced all senior officials involved in handling the New Caledonia portfolio. For the first vote, it was the French Prime Minister, then Édouard Philippe, who led the process. He personally engaged in negotiating agreement over preparations and to address key issues of governance beyond the Nouméa Accord, choosing to by-pass the regular meetings of the Committee of Accord Signatories, the steering group for implementation of the Nouméa Accord, but nonetheless engaging a wide number of party leaders. He initiated a series of dialogue processes with limited success, as various parties on occasion withdrew. In July 2020, Macron replaced Philippe with Jean Castex and also appointed a new minister for Overseas France, Sébastien Lecornu, the first Overseas Minister in 9 years who did not come from a French overseas territory. It was the Minister of the Overseas, not the new Prime Minister, who was charged with overseeing the third referendum process.

Lecornu took up his position in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. He visited Nouméa in October, just after the second referendum, holding online zoom meetings while quarantining. He hand-picked just five independence and five loyalist leaders to meet, a smaller group than involved in Philippe's dialogue efforts, on the island of Leprédour. He had no more success than Philippe in maintaining the cohesion of the dialogue group. There was no conclusive outcome, and independence members, at that time protesting against the Goro nickel sale, withdrew.

Responding to the 8 April call for a third referendum from the Congress, Lecornu again selected a small group of leaders to come to Paris from 25 May to 1 June 2021, to consider the date of the vote, and discuss the "institutional future" and expectations of France in the period immediately afterwards, whatever the outcome. France's most senior representative in New Caledonia, the High Commissioner, was replaced on 19 May just days before the meeting.

Immediately before the meeting, France also sought to shape public opinion in New Caledonia, focusing on the negative aspects of a yes vote (Maclellan 2021a). On the eve of the meeting, the territory-wide daily newspaper published the results of a survey the French government had commissioned, underlining that 94% of respondents saw the link with France as important, 43% opposed independence and 31% favoured it. The survey projected the departure of between 10,000 and 24,000 people in the event of independence, with a further 59,000 unsure about staying (in a total population of 271,407 people) (LNC 2021b). The daily also published a leaked, 46-page French paper detailing the respective consequences of a yes and no vote (see section on yes/no paper below). It highlighted in some detail the negative impacts of a yes vote, notably the significant loss of funding and French personnel, threats to French nationality, and flagging the departure of 10,000 to 70,000 individuals (LNC 2021c). Literally on the eve of the Paris meeting, another French government-commissioned survey was released showing that 66% of metropolitan French people favoured full sovereignty for New Caledonia. All of these undoubtedly heightened local concerns at the likelihood, and negative consequences, of a yes vote.

The meeting was difficult. Divisions between the parties were acute, particularly over the date of the final referendum. The loyalists wanted a vote as early as possible. They cited the two earlier outcomes favouring staying with France and saw an early final vote to confirm that result as essential for the sake of the economy and investment, which had stagnated in view of the uncertainties about the future. Independence leaders preferred as late a date as possible, in October 2022, to give them the maximum chance of securing majority support.

While UC representatives attended, senior leaders of PALIKA declined to participate, saying the agenda was "fluid and ambiguous". This group had flagged in the past that it preferred bilateral talks with France. A senior loyalist

leader, Pierre Frogier, also withdrew, refusing even to consider the idea of a date beyond 2021, for the final vote.

Some limited progress was made. Daniel Goa, leader of the UC, signalled a change in position when he said the party would consider partnership with France in the event of a yes to independence (Goa 2021). PALIKA leader Paul Néaoutyine had announced his party's consideration of the option of "full sovereignty in partnership with France" in November 2017 (later elaborated in PALIKA 2018). The Paris group considered a French paper on consequences of a yes/no vote, which was expanded upon after discussion, but not released publicly. The paper was a discussion paper only, not an agreed statement.

### 18.8.2 Declaration About the Future

A short declaration was agreed, setting out some parameters for the future (Declaration 2021). Those present (and it must be emphasised, as indicated earlier, that some key independence leaders did not attend) endorsed working together for a common future, with an 18-month transition period to follow the vote. This was a compromise by independence groups, who had previously proposed up to 3 years for transition in the case of independence. Territorial partition was ruled out. In the case of independence, the declaration identified some immediate transitions (such as curtailed financial transfers), longer-term transitions in sensitive areas such as justice and law and order, and some access (not defined) to double nationality. Efforts towards a partnership with France were agreed, although heavily qualified as "without guarantee of success". In the case of a no to independence, the right to self-determination would remain, New Caledonia would stay on the UN list of non-self-governing territories for the transition period, responsibilities already transferred would remain, and France would continue its support.

Most significantly for independence groups, in the case of a no to independence, the restricted electorate, which had underpinned their electoral success throughout the Nouméa Accord period, would be "partially opened". Details were not provided.

The declaration noted that there would also be a "référendum de projet", or "programme referendum" at the end of the 18-month transition period, whatever the outcome of the third referendum. It is unclear what this "programme referendum" refers to after an independence outcome. Such a vote is understandable in the case of a no vote, against independence, as it would be consistent with French practice, to endorse in French law whatever future governance provisions are agreed after the lapsing of the Nouméa Accord. But in the case of independence, given the restricted electorate for the third and final vote under the Accord, it is difficult to see independence leaders agreeing to a further territory-wide vote, where they would no longer benefit from eligibility of longstanding residents only, to endorse independence at the end of what would be likely to be a disruptive transition period.

### 18.8.3 Date of the Referendum

The meeting was unable to agree on the date of the third vote. On 3 June, Overseas Minister Lecornu announced that the date of the final vote would be 12 December 2021, over the opposition of independence leaders. He did so unapologetically, noting that the decision was not by consensus, but lay within his statutory powers, and was taken to secure the end of the Nouméa Accord (NC la 1ère 2 June 2021b).

No doubt one consideration for Macron's administration would have been the timing of presidential and national parliamentary elections in April and June 2022, respectively. The tragic hostage-taking event between two presidential election rounds in 1988 highlighted the potential for the French political calendar to impact New Caledonia. Although New Caledonia's future is not on the national agenda, national parties have links with particular local parties and could take positions on a New Caledonian referendum campaign, entangling the two sets of campaigns. On the other hand, consequences from a December referendum could conceivably impact national campaigns if, for example, a yes outcome were seen as the "loss" of New Caledonia or in the event of violence in New Caledonia.

It seems that the calculation underlying an early date was that of a more likely vote to stay with France, and a preference to hold the vote while the current administration was in power. In this respect, the need to minimise the distraction of other elections was underlined by the subsequent poor performance of Macron's *La République en Marche* party in French regional elections at the end of June 2021.

Independence leaders noted that the decision on the date was unilateral, and they did not support it. On 23 June, the Congress endorsed the referendum date, with loyalists voting for it and independence parties abstaining or opposing. Leaders later referred to remarks by the French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe after a Committee of Signatories meeting in 2019, reporting collective agreement not to hold any third vote between September 2021 and August 2022, to separate the New Caledonian vote from national French presidential and legislative elections in April and June 2022 (LNC 2021f).

### 18.8.4 Paper on Consequences of a Yes/No Vote

On 16 July 2021, the French High Commissioner publicly released an expanded version of the French document outlin-

ing the consequences of a yes/no vote. Here, French practice has again differed compared to the first two referendums. The French Government is statutorily required for such referendums to issue a document explaining to voters the consequences of their vote. In the first two cases, short non-controversial three-page papers simply setting out likely consequences, with equal space to each side, were published without fuss (Government of New Caledonia 2018a; Haut-commissariat 2020a). Since the second vote, the paper became a discussion paper, evolving into 40 pages by the time of the Paris meeting, and by July, a 101-page document. For this final vote, France wanted discussion and clarification of what local parties saw as France's immediate future role, whatever the outcome.

### 18.8.5 Earlier Work on Re-shaping New Caledonia's Post-Accord Future

France had already invested considerable resources in consulting local party leaders and reflecting on options for a future for New Caledonia after the Nouméa Accord. The French State formed two separate commissions focusing on legal and political questions, respectively. In 2013, two French jurists, Jean Courtial and Ferdinand Mélin-Soucramanien, prepared a report on the Institutional Future of New Caledonia as a basis for discussion by the parties. In this paper, the two jurists set out the legal consequences and requirements under four possible future options: full sovereignty, partnership with France, extended autonomy, and continued autonomy or the status quo (Courtial and Mélin-Soucramanien 2013). These options were consistent with UN principles (UNGA 1960).

The French State also set up a commission, from 2015, headed by a founding negotiator of the Matignon and Nouméa Accords, Alain Christnacht. The commission made numerous visits to New Caledonia, to listen to all political parties both on a round-table and one-on-one basis, in order to identify the principal areas of agreement and of difference.

Christnacht's report noted that all parties agreed on maintaining the current three provinces, albeit with pro-independence groups wanting a separate election for members of the territory-wide Congress (currently determined by members of the provincial assemblies) (Christnacht 2016). Pro-independence groups and some pro-France groups wanted the more grassroots communes to belong to the New Caledonian government rather than to be run by the French State as is currently the case. All groups favoured continuing the current collegial system of "gouvernement", or Cabinet, with membership proportionate to party representation in the Congress. One pro-France group supported a majority supplement to boost the representation of the majority party, and one pro-independence group wanted to include a member of the Customary Senate.

All parties supported continued economic re-balancing between the mainly European south and the mainly Kanak North and Loyalty Islands provinces, although pro-France groups wanted an adjustment of the formula of Congress seats to reflect better the influx of people into the south.

Significant differences centred on citizenship (see Chap. 20 by Robertson in this book), with pro-independence groups favouring full nationality and pro-France groups preferring a New Caledonian citizenship within France. But even here, all groups agreed on a "clear and accessible citizenship" to replace the current (temporary) fixed definition of citizenship limiting the number of those who could vote in provincial elections.

On the five key sovereign powers (defence, foreign affairs, currency, justice, and law and order), which remain with France currently, unsurprisingly, differences were wide. Pro-independence groups wanted to create a new state that would then decide on what partner might take up these powers, whether it be France or some other state, inspired by assassinated leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who said a fundamental demand was the "right to choose with whom we shall be interdependent" (Tjibaou 1996 transl. 2005, p. 66). Pro-France groups instead preferred a sharing with France of such powers as foreign affairs, justice, and public order, with guarantees on public freedom.

Christnacht found some agreement on defining common New Caledonian values, drawing on both Christian and Melanesian traditions. The team drafted a seven-page Charter of Values that could shape any new arrangement. However, in 2018 when a Dialogue on the Future Group set up by French Prime Minister Édoaurd Philippe prepared a Draft Charter of Caledonian Values (Charte des valeurs calédoniennes 2018), it was rejected by the hardest-line loyalists who later formed the AEC, now the dominant loyalist group in the local Congress.

Another statement that may underpin future discussion on the independence side is the Charter of Kanak Values agreed by customary (Kanak) leaders in 2014 (Charte du Peuple Kanak 2014). For their part, in 2018 the FLNKS presented an updated version of their proposal for Kanaky-New Caledonia (FLNKS 2018a).

### 18.8.6 The July 2021 Yes/No Argument

France's yes/no paper released in July 2021 (Ministère des Outre-mer 2021), 6 months before the final vote, appeared to be at the least unbalanced. It included 41 pages of detailed consequences of a yes to independence, as opposed to just 10 pages in the case of a no vote, with a further 44 pages of detailed annexes, principally related to a yes vote. The yes

section consisted entirely of precise detail of multifarious aspects of governance, specifying financial support from France that would need to be met somehow once withdrawn and projecting the numbers of personnel and others who would depart an independent New Caledonia. The areas covered include health, education and land management, together with significant sovereignty powers not yet delegated, such as defence, foreign affairs, currency, law and order and justice. Options and questions around the sensitive issue of the future of French (and EU) nationality were raised. Discussion points after each section raised questions about how the new state would operate the existing programmes and flagged the need for special bilateral negotiations and treaties with France for programmes to continue. While the paper claimed to be spelling out implications for the French State after a vote, nonetheless in its repeated references to negotiating links with France, it bordered on the prescriptive for a newly independent country.

Annexes presented various consequences of independence for French nationality; analogous arrangements made in other territories on independence, albeit in different conditions, such as Comoros and even Algeria (which became independent only after years of blood war); a paper on currency presenting only the options of a new currency or continued attachment to a French Pacific currency and the euro, with no mention of adopting an existing alternative currency such as the $US, $A or $NZ; and 10 pages of further financial detail about the 1.5 billion € French support granted to New Caledonia annually that would be withdrawn, followed by a brief list of the far lower amounts (in the millions or tens of millions at most) granted to now-independent territories under France's aid programme. Vanuatu was cited, to whom France gave aid worth 3.16 m. euros in 2019.

The no section flagged in general terms the need, notwithstanding the irreversibility of transfers of powers under the Nouméa Accord, to address, on its lapsing, necessary future changes. It noted that the restricted electorates and employment protection for longstanding residents would be incompatible with the French constitution after the Accord expired and that parties would need to redefine voter eligibility and employment rights consistent with the French constitution and international treaty commitments. The no section only briefly referred to these and other complex, fundamental areas needing to be addressed, including the very continuation of the existing governance institutions themselves (e.g. the Congress, provincial assemblies), the current collegiality of the executive, and the distribution of responsibilities between territory and provincial governments. No detailed options were presented. It flagged possible new transfers of responsibilities, including so-called Article 27 responsibilities (tertiary education, media and local administration) which could already have been handed over but on which local parties had not been able to agree. It referred to a continued right of self-determination and role for the UN at least in the transition period.

What is clear from the yes/no paper is that regardless of the outcome of the December referendum, extensive negotiations were foreshadowed in the subsequent 18-month transition period, between local political leaders and France. While the referendum question was formally "Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?", the paper in fact posited a choice for voters between independence with a network of partnerships with France, or staying with France with re-negotiated governance provisions.

Since the paper was released, the territory-wide daily newspaper regularly released articles highlighting in detail consequences of a yes vote in sensitive areas (potential effects on French citizenship, higher education and health).

### 18.8.7 Reaction of Loyalist and Independence Leaders to the Yes/No Document

Loyalist parties endorsed the document. At a meeting in August 2021, they decided to unite under a new banner, *Voix du Non* (Voices for No). They extolled the virtues of the yes/no paper which, they said, would "make the difference" (LNC 2021d). Christopher Gygès, director of the campaign, said that they would be focusing on those who had abstained, the undecided and newly registered voters, armed with the yes/no document to convince voters. The loyalist-led South Province said it would post the paper in every letterbox in the province.

While the major independence groups within the FLNKS coalition initially in principle welcomed the "partnership with France" aspect of the paper's yes section, consistent with their support for an ongoing relationship with France after independence, independence leaders at a meeting of the FLNKS Congress in August slammed the yes/no document as favouring the loyalist position (FLNKS 2021a). Roch Wamytan said that the FLNKS coalition "did not want to reject France, it is a great nation. We simply want to change our links, our relationship with her". However, various FLNKS leaders referred to the "destabilising actions by the administering state during this last stage of the Nouméa Accord" through the "taking of sides in the yes/no document which is nothing more than an indictment against the yes case". A leader of a more extreme group, the *Union syndicale des travailleurs Kanak et Expoités* (Federation of Unions of Kanak and exploited workers), referred to the French government's "sinister moves… This document produced by the State, against the yes, reveals its support of the no and its undeniable support of the loyalists in this campaign" (LNC 2021e).

FLNKS Spokesman Daniel Goa called for unity to respond to the challenges put by France in the document.

Anthony Lecren (UC) referred to the document as "no more nor less than propaganda for the no". He said that a number of working groups were considering questions raised in the document and would respond. Other teams were working on the FLNKS' own version of a yes document.

### 18.8.8 The Vote and France's Security Guarantee

France, at the highest level, just months before the vote, also sought to underline the potential effect on New Caledonia's security should it, or others of France's territories, vote for independence.

In the preceding two referendums, external security highlighting the threat of a rising China in the region to any independent small island government had played a role. Indeed, President Macron had opened the referendum campaign for the first vote in 2018 when he visited New Caledonia by defining for the first time his Indo-Pacific vision for France, in which he based France's claim in the Indo-Pacific squarely on its territorial sovereignty in the two oceans. But he also directly raised the threat of a hegemonic China (Macron 2018).

The theme was enthusiastically taken up by loyalist leaders in the final weeks of the three referendum campaigns, warning of the risks of China taking France's place if the independence side won. For example, loyalist leader Philippe Gomès suggested New Caledonia was at risk of becoming a Chinese colony in the event of independence (LNC 2020).

Before the third vote, on 29 July 2021, during a visit to French Polynesia, President Macron gave a speech (Macron 29 July 2021a). While the purpose of his visit was to address outstanding issues relating to French compensation for victims of its nuclear testing there from the 1970s to the 1990s, the timing of the visit and key elements of his speech were designed to send a clear message about security to New Caledonia, to the other French territories, and indeed to the rest of the region.

Early in his speech he expressed great confidence in New Caledonia's future, "in their capacity to pursue the dialogue which had begun 30 years ago". Referring to the 12 December vote, he noted that the document he had commissioned to clarify the choice between independence or staying with France had been "discussed for the first time and made public". Taking up a comment he had made when opening the first referendum campaign in Nouméa in May 2018 (see France in the region section below), he repeated that "France will be less beautiful without New Caledonia". He said that before June 2023 (the end of the 18-month transition period), new sustainable institutions would need to be constructed, for a future which must remain a common one.

After reviewing France's support for French Polynesia in his speech, Macron lingered on the crucial role of that territory, through past nuclear testing there, in ensuring France's nuclear deterrence capability, which he said well served both France and French Polynesia.

He concluded by referring to his Indo-Pacific strategy in which French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna played "an essential part". France was an Indo-Pacific power, he said, and after years of seeing its overseas territories as sources of confrontation, France now appreciated the unique opportunity to be at the heart of zones where "the world was being made". In the Pacific "confrontation between the two major global powers was playing out".

He warned "Woe betide the small, woe betide the isolated", who were facing influence and attacks from "hegemonic powers who will come for their fish, their technology, their economic resources". He said that "to be French here, in this context, is an opportunity… For we have an Indo-Pacific plan", which would protect them, including through partnerships France had built with allies including Australia ("an essential partner"), New Zealand, India, and Japan. "Let us tie ourselves to the mast and hold on".

The China threat was also invoked by the publication, just before the third referendum, of a small section on New Caledonia, of a massive 646-page report by France's Military Research Institute on China's activities in France (IRSEM 2021). The comments on New Caledonia were prominently publicised. They warned that an independent New Caledonia would be under Chinese influence, and part of a broader Chinese strategy in the Pacific, highlighting independence party engagement in the local Sino-Caledonian society.

Whereas the China threat has been used politically by loyalists and France in the referendum campaigns, this should not be misunderstood as the independent side favouring Chinese engagement in New Caledonia (Morini 2022). Roch Wamytan responded to Macron's 2018 introduction of an Indo Pacific policy by noting that independence groups had pursued a regional concept for New Caledonia for years and that New Caledonia had a place in the region regardless of whether it stayed French or became independent (LNC 2018b). In December 2021, responding to news reports focusing on China's interest in New Caledonia, senior UC official Johanito Wamytan said: "We know that China, like Russia, once they penetrate the space, it is difficult to get them out, we know that, we're not stupid. We can make choices" (France Info 2021).

### 18.8.9 Impact of COVID: Independence Leaders' Call for Postponement, Then Non-participation

Preparation for the third referendum, as for the second, took place during the COVID pandemic. The pandemic had little impact on the referendum campaign before early September 2021, although on 12 August France banned entry into the

territory except for those residents being repatriated and visits other than for undefined "motifs impérieux" (compelling reasons) until 31 December, effectively restricting visits from outside New Caledonia until after the third vote.

Owing to strong local measures taken and good compliance, New Caledonia had not experienced any mortalities from COVID to early September 2021. Then, the delta variant of COVID started to have a serious effect, resulting in deaths. By October, deaths exceeded 200 (of a population of 270,000), many, indeed most, in Kanak areas. On 4 October, independence leaders requested a postponement of the vote on the basis of the impact of the many deaths from COVID-19 in their community and their cultural practice involving lengthy mourning ceremonies of up to 12 months, impeding the capacity to campaign and vote (FLNKS 2021b).

The call for postponement was supported by numerous regional Pacific dignitaries, including Polynesian independence leader Oscar Temaru, Vanuatu's Prime Minister Loughman and several former leaders of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia who wrote a letter to President Macron (Maclellan 2021b). The PNG Ambassador to the UN publicly sought postponement on behalf of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (World Today 2021). Pacific leaders emphasised the need to respect indigenous wishes and the need for fairness and credibility.

Overseas Minister Lecornu visited New Caledonia in October, a direct French intervention not seen in the lead-up to the first two referendums. He listened to all views. Still, France decided to proceed with the 12 December date for the vote (LNC 2021g). Independence leaders then called for peaceful non-participation in the referendum (FLNKS 2021c). They took pains to eschew the term "boycott" with its resonance of the 1987 vote and its disastrous consequences. On 10 December, independence leader Roch Wamytan briefed a specially convened meeting of the UN Decolonisation Committee on the reasons for the call for non-participation.

### 18.8.10 Result of Third Referendum

The vote was duly held on 12 December. It was conducted peacefully, with pro-independence mayors quietly organising polls in their areas, as instructed by independence leaders when they made the call for calm non-participation. The turnout was 43.87%, almost half that of the previous two referendums. The exceedingly low turnout in Kanak areas indicated that the non-participation call was heeded by independence supporters (Pantz 2021). Unsurprisingly, the vote returned a minuscule support for independence: only 3.5%, with 96.5% support for staying with France. The low turnout and virtually nil support for independence, in their dramatic departure from the trends of the first two referendums (see Table 18.1), effectively nullified the political effect of the third vote (Pantz 2021; Kowasch et al. 2022).

**Table 18.1** Results of the three referendums on independence

| | 2018 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eligible voters | 174,165 | 180,799 | 184,364 |
| Number voting | 141,099 | 154,918 | 80,899 |
| Turnout | 81.01% | 85.69% | 43.87% |
| Votes for staying with France | 78,734 | 81,503 | 75,720 |
| Percentage for staying with France | 56.67% | 53.26% | 96.50% |
| Votes for independence | 60,199 | 71,533 | 2747 |
| Percentage for independence | 43.33% | 46.74% | 3.50% |

Source: Résultats définitifs des consultations de 2018, 2020 et 2021 at nouvelle-caledonie.gouv.fr

### 18.8.11 Reactions to the Referendum Result

Independence parties rejected the referendum result and declined to participate in discussions with anti-independence leaders. They said they would only discuss future arrangements with a renewed French administration and, then, only after national presidential elections in April 2022 (Comité stratégique indépendantiste de non-participation 2021). Since independence parties had invoked a 12-month mourning period from the time of the effect of COVID-19 deaths (9 September 2021) as the principal reason for their non-participation on 12 December, they would be unlikely to engage in formal discussion or other major political activity locally before September 2022.

Independence leaders have asked for a further referendum. Palika proposed a new vote under UN auspices, saying they will not accept yet another statute or agreement (LNC 2022a). The UC called for a fourth referendum and the continuation of restricted electorates (NC la 1ere 2022a).

For their part, the anti-independence groups have claimed their third victory, indicating their preparedness for discussions while agreeing that discussions would not be optimal during national presidential or legislative campaigns, i.e. before June 2022 (Backès 2021). They saw the independence parties as instrumentalising Kanak cultural practices to undermine the referendum which, in the anti-independence view, they could not win after a turbulent year of violence over the nickel resource causing a collapse of the government and delays in reinstating it and the evident critical role of France in managing the COVID pandemic (Personal communication by senior loyalist signatory to Nouméa Accord, December 2021). Since the vote, anti-independence parties have organised meetings with civil society (which have not included independence groups) to plan for a common future.

France has, like the loyalists, presented the result as voters "freely deciding" to stay within the Republic. Initially, President Macron said that voters had "massively" pronounced against acceding to full sovereignty and indepen-

dence, albeit "in a context of strong abstention" (Macron 2021b).

Since then, he has simply claimed that the three referendums supported staying with France (NC la 1ere 2022b, Macron 2023). He promoted Overseas Minister Lecornu to become Defence Minister. Minister for Interior Gérald Darmanin took over the handling of New Caledonia. He also appointed hardline loyalist Sonia Backès to a national ministerial position as Secretary of State for Citizenship, to the bitter criticism of independence leaders (LNC 2022b).

## 18.9 Next Steps

New Caledonia appears to be at an impasse. Independence leaders want a further independence vote and refuse discussions with loyalists. They are wary of France after its disregard for their cultural and other concerns and its clear efforts to shape the result of the third vote. Among loyalists there is fear and concern about the gathering political weight of the pro-independence side, as shown in Congress, in the nickel arena, in the first two referendum outcomes and in the strong indigenous heeding of the call for non-participation in the third referendum. Positions, already polarised, have hardened.

While the local Congress, now dominated by the independence side and with an independence leader as president, continues to operate even as the Nouméa Accord upon which it is based has technically expired, it has become increasingly dysfunctional since the third referendum. Loyalists abstained on the budget and withdrew from some government (cabinet) meetings in March 2022.

The Nouméa Accord provides for discussions of the situation obtaining after any three votes favouring staying with France (Article 5). Although the Accord provided for the irreversibility of powers already transferred by France to New Caledonia, other aspects of the Accord have now lapsed. These include the governance institutions themselves, their composition and powers, and even their mode of election, with restricted voter eligibility again a major question.

Since December 2021 to the time of writing, the French government has unsought unsuccessfully to convene numerous dialogues to secure agreement about future governance, or at least to alterations to the restricted electorate to enable provincial elections by May 2024, including by threatening to impose a solution if parties could not agree (see LNC 2023). Some FLNKS elements have maintained their opposition to participating in trilateral talks with both the French government and loyalists (UC 2023). Loyalists have dug in over their push to remove or significantly modify the restricted electorate (NC la 1ere 2022c).

To assist discussion, in mid-2023 France released two broad documents, an Audit on Decolonisation (Audit 2023) and an Institutional, Administrative and Financial Review of the Nouméa Accord (Bilan 2023). These reviews received a muted reaction from the FLNKS, which reaffirmed its commitment to independence negotiated bilaterally with France, irreversible decolonisation and independence (FLNKS 2023).

President Macron visited Noumea in July 2023 and spoke in conciliatory tones of a "path of forgiveness". Still, he reaffirmed the three referendums in favour of staying in France, and urged tripartite discussions to agree on a new statute for the future, reminding his audience of French economic support, particularly for the three nickel plants, none of which he noted was viable (Macron 2023). He received a resounding welcome from loyalists, but independence leaders described the visit as a "one-man show" and his speech as "paternalistic, imperialist, neocolonial" (cited in Fisher 2023a).

The FLNKS were re-energised by two important victories. They won a national Senate seat on 24 September 2023 (Fisher 2023b), while loyalist leader Sonia Backès lost, subsequently resigning her ministerial portfolio. The win followed the re-election of independence leader Roch Wamytan as President of the Congress on 30 August in a bitter contest.

France presented a draft document on the institutional future in September 2023 (NC la 1ère 2023a), but ongoing differences deepened. Interior Minister Darmanin was obliged to cancel a planned visit in early December, while renewing threats to impose a solution on the restricted electorate if there was no progress by year's end (NC la 1ère 2023b). In response to a question in the French Senate, loyalist Senator Georges Naturel referred to provincial elections possibly being held some time before the end of 2024 (rather than by May) (DNC 2023a).

So the future beyond the third referendum remains uncertain. Dialogue and negotiation in the spirit of past Accords will be required if tension and violence are not to re-emerge now that the Nouméa Accord has expired.

The recent history of attempts at dialogue is not promising. Moreover, in this highly polarised political climate, the focus of dialogue, as suggested by independence positions, the Paris declaration and the yes/no document, will necessarily be on the most complex and divisive elements of future governance and of self-determination including the following:

- The question of whether or not a further independence referendum will be held
- The three subjects which the Nouméa Accord (Article 5) specifically states must be addressed in its final process:
  - The disposition of the final five core sovereign powers of defence, foreign affairs, currency, justice and law and order

  - The precise future international status and powers of New Caledonia, including whether or not it will have a UN seat
  - The definition of New Caledonian citizenship and ways to protect employment and voting rights of long-standing New Caledonian residents
- The nature and operation of the key political institutions (the three provinces, the Congress, the Government) and the electorate voting for them
- The remaining Article 27 powers of tertiary education, broadcast media and provincial and communal administration
- The handling of nickel and hydrocarbons development and revenues
- The control of immigration
- The future of the land distribution agency
- Redressing the social isolation of young Kanaks

## 18.10 Some Regional Implications

The new uncertainties in New Caledonia, a Melanesian archipelago that has been stable for the last 30 years, will impact its Melanesian neighbourhood and the wider region.

The South Pacific island countries have long held a close interest in French policy in their region. In the 1970s, they avidly opposed France's nuclear testing in French Polynesia and its handling of independence demands from its territories. Indeed, the PIF was formed (initially as the South Pacific Forum) because France banned discussion of its policies in the South Pacific Commission (now Secretariat for the Pacific Community), which is headquartered in Nouméa (Cordonnier 1995). The PIF is now the region's pre-eminent political forum. It was Pacific island states who sponsored a successful resolution in the United Nations General Assembly in 1986 placing New Caledonia on the UNGA's list of non-self-governing territories, over France's opposition. The UN General Assembly has unanimously passed a resolution watchful of New Caledonia every year since. In a surprise move, Pacific islanders similarly secured the re-listing of French Polynesia in 2013, again over strong French opposition, with similar annual resolutions of concern.

PIF interest in New Caledonia's de-colonisation process has been enduring. The PIF sent missions to New Caledonia in 1999, 2001 and 2004, to report on implementation of the Nouméa Accord. The Forum observed all three referendums and, in a historical first, the May 2019 provincial elections (Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Committee 2018). After the first two referendums, PIF observer teams simply submitted their reports to the PIF, who in turn submitted them to the UN. In the case of the third referendum, however, the seven-member PIF observer team issued an early public statement. On 14 December, it noted the significant non-participation rate in the third vote and the importance of civic participation as an integral component of any democracy. It noted that the spirit in which the referendum was conducted "weighs heavily" on the Nouméa Accord and the self-determination process (Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Committee 2021).

The PIF observer mission issued their report on the third referendum in July 2022. It concluded by saying "The result of the referendum is an inaccurate representation of the will of registered voters and instead can be interpreted as a representation of a deep-seated ethnic division in New Caledonia, which the Committee fears has been exacerbated by the State's refusal to postpone the referendum" (Maclellan 2022).

Closer to home for New Caledonia, the MSG was formed in the early 1980s primarily to monitor decolonisation in New Caledonia (Maclellan and Chesneaux 1998, p. 197; Bates 1990). The various steps of the self-determination process were closely watched by the MSG and are not irrelevant to other Melanesian separatist demands. The MSG supported the independence groups during all three referendum campaigns in New Caledonia (LNC 2018a; Daily News 2020). As indicated, it called for postponement of the third referendum in New York. When that vote proceeded, the MSG issued a communique describing it as transgressing Article 1 of the UN Charter and UN Resolution 1514 on self-determination. The MSG warned against imposing the result on the Kanak people and called on the UN to engage with France and New Caledonia (MSG 2021). In August 2023 the MSG formally reiterated its "united" support for New Caledonia's decolonisation (MSG 2023).

New Caledonia's self-determination coincides with a similar process on the Papua New Guinea island of Bougainville. PNG is a member of the MSG. The 1998 Bougainville Agreement suspended secessionist demands on this island, whose wealth was based around copper production. The Agreement is based in part on the Nouméa Accord, setting aside differences pending an independence referendum. Their referendum was held from 23 November to 7 December 2019, when voters overwhelmingly (97.7%) supported independence. Uncertainties remain about the future, as this result must now be considered by the Papua New Guinea parliament (Batley 2019).

Meanwhile, a longstanding West Papuan separatist movement in a part of Indonesia that also engages mining interests is pursuing secession and seeking MSG support (May 2021). The MSG is divided over the application for full membership by the United Liberation Movement of West Papua (ULMWP), with Indonesia now an observer. After an attack in West Papua just a month after New Caledonia's first referendum, a West Papuan Liberation Army leader called for a referendum for West Papua (Chauvel 2018).

The situation in the Solomon Islands, also an MSG member, is at a fragile stage. For 14 years, a complex Regional Assistance Mission, led by Australia at the Solomons' invitation, restored peaceful administration after serious ethnic-based separatism. The Mission concluded in 2017 (Sloan et al. 2019). In April 2022, China and the Solomon Islands signed a 5-year security agreement, sparking regional concern at the potential for China to establish a military base there (PRC MFA 2022; Australian DFAT 2022).

Any instability around New Caledonia's unfolding referendum process has the potential to influence the management of these separatist challenges, and any related Chinese forays, in its immediate region. The MSG and PIF countries retain a close watching brief on France and developments in New Caledonia following the expiration of the Nouméa Accord, and as their recent stances have shown, advocate an approach respectful of the commitments made so far and particularly respectful of the indigenous Kanak people. As in the past, members of these regional forums, like the local independence groups, will continue to invoke the support of the United Nations as necessary.

The divisive and ultimately politically inconclusive result of the third referendum heightens instability and uncertainty, not only in New Caledonia but in the immediate region. Because fundamental issues such as the future governance and status of New Caledonia remain in dispute, with the large indigenous minority standing firm on its demand for independence, a redefining of the nature of France's sovereign base in the South Pacific is inevitable. This engages broader strategic interests in the region.

### 18.10.1 France in the Region

For France, as described by Macron in Papeete in 2021, the stakes are high. Whatever is decided for New Caledonia can be sought by French Polynesia and potentially others of its overseas territories around the globe, and France does not want to lose these territories. As numerous French strategic assessments in recent years have shown (enumerated in Fisher 2017a, p. 43), it is France's overseas' possessions in the three oceans (Atlantic, Indian and Pacific) which underpin its status as a global power, one of only five permanent members of the UN Security Council, leader of the EU, member of NATO and US ally. France is number two world maritime power (after the United States and before Australia) by virtue of its extensive exclusive economic zone surrounding its overseas possessions, particularly in the Pacific, which alone contribute over 7 m. square hectares of France's 11 m. square hectare EEZ (Fisher 2013, p. 50). France's presence in New Caledonia gives it a valuable strategic listening post in the Pacific, its regional military headquarters, access to its minerals and fisheries, a basis for its scientific and technical expertise, and its contribution to the European space programme, and a place in regional Pacific, Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific forums at a time when the influence of a newly emerging Pacific power, China, is rising (Fisher 2015).

In his keynote speech opening the first referendum campaign when visiting New Caledonia in May 2018, President Macron acknowledged these assets, which he framed within his Indo-Pacific strategic vision. He pointed to New Caledonia's contribution to France's status, and inviting a continued New Caledonian role, as part of France (Macron 2018). He came as close as he had ever done to saying he wanted New Caledonia to remain in France. This was despite having claimed explicitly that the French State would not take a position on the outcome of the independence referendum and that France's aim was instead to hold an incontestable referendum seen to be legitimate by the territory, the region and the UN (Macron 2018). He said that the referendum process was one of "constructing a sovereignty within a national sovereignty" and argued that France would be less without New Caledonia. Invoking in Gaullist terms the power and global role of France in the Indo-Pacific, which was underpinned by its overseas possessions in the two oceans, he invited New Caledonia to become part of this Indo-Pacific strategy. He referred to three strong benefits. The first was France's security and protection, as he said the US had turned its back on the region; China was seeking regional hegemony; and with Britain leaving the EU, France was the last European power in the Pacific. The second was French support in economic development, promising to strengthen the nickel and tourism sectors, to build food production, energy, forestry and marine exploitation. The third was support for New Caledonia in dealing with climate change.

Macron elaborated on these arguments when he visited Papeete in 2021 (see earlier section), as indicated, sending a message to New Caledonia but also firmly situating French Polynesia within his Indo-Pacific strategy and in effect cautioning both about the risks of losing French protection. By invoking the role of France's nuclear capacity, founded on tests in French Polynesia, and the limits of small island defence capability, he projected a message of French protection to the wider region.

From the late 1990s, France had embarked on a number of initiatives to improve its standing and acceptance in the South Pacific (Fisher 2017a). It finally stopped its nuclear testing there in 1996, and with the conclusion of the Matignon and Nouméa Accords by 1998 to better address New Caledonian decolonisation demands, it was able to build more constructive relations in the region. It contributes to maritime surveillance and sharing of fisheries intelligence and emergency activity under the 1992 France Australia and New Zealand (FRANZ) arrangement. France actively participates in regional technical organisations and provides modest bilateral aid, worth about $US 100 m. a year. It con-

ducts defence and military cooperation including with Australia, New Zealand and the US in quadrilateral talks and defence ministers' meetings. It engages these countries and other regional island partners (Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji) in regular defence exercises in the region. It has also led a larger EU role in the Pacific.

So far, France's enhanced engagement in the region has been welcomed by island countries. But France's involvement, like that of Australia and New Zealand, is taking place in a region which itself is changing. The impact of structures of the PIF and the SPC, which routinely engage Australia and New Zealand, is being diluted by the increasing tendencies, and necessity, of independent island countries to work with new partners. In multilateral organisations, the island governments tend to relate more frequently with other island countries around the globe than Australia and New Zealand. Within the region, the islands' economic vulnerability and potential to offer support in their numbers in the UN has led them to welcome new relationships with partners as varied as Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea and others (Fisher 2015, p. 26). But some key partners such as the EU (led by France) and China have preferred bilateral arrangements rather than through the existing cooperative structures of the PIF or the SPC that have prevailed from the 1970s to early 2000s. The ascendance of China's presence in the region also inevitably brings with it new pressures and disruptions as this major global power seeks to shore up its resource sources and influence (most recently canvassed in Institute for Regional Security 2020 and see also Shie 2007; Yang 2012; Yu 2014). The region's renewed engagement with France and its territories must be seen in this context.

China's increased visibility in the region coincided with uncertainties arising from the mercurial US presidency of Donald Trump and the departure from the European Union of the United Kingdom, one of the largest financial contributors to the EU, which is a major regional aid partner. The most recent Chinese agreement with Solomon Islands, and its proposal for similar agreements with other Pacific island countries, have added to the mix of fragility and uncertainty.

As indicated, in his address to New Caledonians before their first referendum, Macron drew on these trends to argue for a vote favouring continued French sovereignty in New Caledonia (Macron 2018). In his Papeete speech before the third independence vote, he was more direct in warning of the threat to "the small and isolated" from hegemonic powers (Macron 2021a). He repeated the theme in July 2023 when he visited Nouméa, offering France's Pacific territories "true" independence, that of "the respect of the Republic", while "not ceding to hegemonies and imperialisms", with France offering a refuge and a future (Macron 2023).

There is no doubt that leading regional countries Australia and New Zealand see France as a useful ally and resource in the South Pacific neighbourhood. Both have concluded enhanced strategic arrangements with France, largely centred on defence cooperation in the Pacific. Both were quietly supportive of the full implementation of the Nouméa Accord, including the final referendums which they expected France to conduct with impartiality (Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs 2020; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2020). While the Ministers for Foreign Affairs for Australia and New Zealand, respectively, welcomed the peaceful conduct of the third referendum, each underlined the importance of self-determination and pointedly referred to the need for talks and continued cooperation between the parties (Mahuta 2021; Payne 2021).

At a time of increased Chinese presence in the immediate region, Australia and New Zealand will want continued constructive French engagement in the South Pacific, and indeed in the wider Indo-Pacific. Both Australia and New Zealand prioritise the peace, stability and prosperity of their immediate region. They would be concerned at any re-emergence of violence or instability in New Caledonia.

Australia's relationship with France came under strain in September 2021 when United States President Biden announced a new cooperation arrangement between the US, the UK and Australia (AUKUS), which would extend military technology sharing with Australia, including through the construction of eight nuclear submarines. For Australia this meant rupturing a 2016 contract with France's government-owned Naval Group to build 12 diesel-powered submarines (Australian Department of Defence 2016), albeit at a planned contractual decision-point. France's Foreign Minister reacted strongly, expressing bitterness and anger at the announcement. While France's disappointment is understandable, its substantive interests in collaborating with Australia to advance shared strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific are enduring.

France declined to participate in a June 2022 meeting of its allies the US, the UK, Japan, Australia and New. Zealand as part of US President Biden's Blue Partnership initiative. Still, French Defence Minister Lecornu hosted the 2023 Meeting of Pacific Islands Defence Ministers in December. On the eve of the meeting, 1500 indigenous independence supporters marched in central Noumea against the "remilitarisation of New Caledonia". Senior union leader André Forest described the meeting as a "heavy provocation" while New Caledonia was on the way to emancipation, referring to Lecornu, former Overseas Minister who had presided over the third referendum, as one of the saboteurs of the Nouméa Accord (DNC 2023b).

Regional expectations of France and the local parties in New Caledonia are therefore high, at a time of change. After a divisive third and final referendum bringing the 30-year Matignon-Oudinot/Nouméa Accords process to an end in a politically inconclusive way, it is not a foregone conclusion

that France can retain the strategic support it wants for a place in the Pacific if it does not succeed in securing peaceful agreement about the future of its pre-eminent overseas territory.

## 18.11 Conclusion

New Caledonia's recent history of stability, economic development and peace, and therefore its contribution to regional stability, has been based on compromise and the relatively successful implementation of fragile agreements by France, pro-independence and pro-France groups over three decades. That predictability is at an end. The people of New Caledonia, now deeply polarised, are facing the challenge of surmounting their differences over self-determination to continue peacefully to redefine their relationship with France and their participation in the Pacific region. The process will not be straightforward and will continue to be watched with interest and concern by regional neighbours and the United Nations.

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# A Critical Reflection of the Notion of "Common Destiny" in Kanaky-New Caledonia

19

Jean-Michel Guiart

**Abstract**

This chapter critically reflects the notion of "common destiny" in Kanaky-New Caledonia. I argue that the binary political landscape also leads to binary social arrangements, which have the effect of hampering "living together". The capitalist economic growth model adopted by both pro- and anti-independence parties promotes rationalism to the detriment of social and cultural coexistence and reinforces inequalities. There is currently a lack of viable alternatives to this "uncommon destiny", and strong environmental protection measures and economic models based on solidarity are, at present, not on the agenda of political authorities. A broader vision of social and cultural change involves sustainable appropriation of the commons.

**Keywords**

Common destiny · Kanaky-New Caledonia · Referendums · Commons · Ethnic pluralism · Inequalities

## 19.1 Introduction

"Common destiny", a widely used term in Kanaky-New Caledonia to signal a shared sense of belonging and inclusion, is part of a desire for social peace. The Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988 – putting an end to a situation of civil war (1984–1988), and then, the Nouméa Accord in 1998 have led to the sharing of political sovereignty with France, in a decolonisation process leading towards full sovereignty. Other chapters explain (see Chaps. 17, 18, 20, by Gagné, Fisher and Robertson in this book) that the question of access to full sovereignty (or political independence) was unsuccessfully put to the test in three referendums between 2018 and 2021. The Nouméa Accord also promoted a greater recognition of Kanak identity. With Indigenous Kanak customary status recognised by civil law, new institutions have been created. Over the past 20 years, these have included an Academy of Kanak Languages, the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture (ADCK), the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, a Customary Senate, and the inclusion of Kanak languages and culture in schools (see Chaps. 13 and 14 by Leblic and Wadrawane in this book). Nevertheless, studies reveal that social-economic and ethnic inequalities persist (related in particular to participation in higher education, employment levels and housing availability) (Gorohouna 2011).

In spite of its solid historical foundations, the concept of common destiny shared by the different ethnic groups is opaque, as I explore in this chapter. Is there really a New Caledonian politics conducive to the construction of a "common world" or "common future", with plurality, diversity and respecting personhood (Arendt 1958)? According to Achille Mbembe and in contrast to Carl Schmitt (Schmitt 1992, cited in Mbembe 2018), politics discriminates between friends and enemies and often through magnifying topical issues like terrorism threats, the settlement of migrants or the dangers of communitarianism found in Melanesian societies.

European ethno-nationalism,[1] for example, becomes xenophobic when the "other" threatens social peace through aspiring to a European standard of living, with its supporters assuming this will be detrimental to European's own comfort. The "common destiny" is really a nostalgic vision of politics, a creator of the "common" as Hannah Arendt (1958)

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[1] I do not use the term "populism" which is a misnomer, in the sense that populism gives power back to the people regardless of race. However, in the rise of European populism, the question of race seems to be a *sine qua non*. This is why the use of the term "ethno-nationalism" seems more appropriate to describe this phenomenon.



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argued, and also promoted by the political class of Kanaky-New Caledonia.

## 19.2 The Referendum Series

A series of three referendums on the access to full sovereignty has taken place in Kanaky-New Caledonia (Kowasch et al. 2022; see also Chaps. 17, 18, 20 in this book). Loyalists were always in favour of remaining with France. They have focused their arguments on the fact that it is important to retain the chance to be French (travelling to Europe without a visa, etc.). But they have not developed a strong political project in over 25 years of the Nouméa Accord. From their point of view, independence would be a break in the pseudo-filial connection with metropolitan France. This is shown in the loyalist electoral campaigns promoting pathos, essentially fear, arguing that independence will result in a "banana republic". Loyalist speeches reveal a certain discrimination through the objectification of Kanak communitarianism, also stigmatizing the sovereignty project of Kanak independence leaders. An example was an electoral video clip published before the last referendum in 2021 by the collective of "No" voices, which has since been withdrawn because it was discriminatory. The choice of "No to independence" reaffirms a pre-established social order, a kind of colonial footprint.

However, France has been promoting a social-ethnic politics of rebalancing in Kanaky-New Caledonia since the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, by subsidising for example training programmes aimed at establishing a Kanak middle class. These include the *Cadre avenir* (Future economic and political leaders) programme. The programme allows the former colonial power (France) to institute, through meritocracy, its manifest goodwill, with the aim of "colouring" the administrations to some extent, and to train executives who believe they have improved their social or economic status. I question if this is an effort to wash away certain social and racial ills, caused by the colonial hierarchy and the widespread prejudices that Kanak people suffered. We cannot overlook the real violence endured by Kanak people during the colonial period in Kanaky-New Caledonia nor the plight of their Aboriginal neighbours in Australia.

The pro-independence leaders, on the other hand, defend a multilateral project, meaning that everything is a question of managing interdependencies. They try to reassure their detractors, not all of whom are against independence, but there is a concern that the pro-independence leaders are not ready (yet) to assume office. For these detractors, the financial health and the success of the Koniambo project (a live issue in 2024, see Chaps. 8 and 9 by Kowasch and Merlin, and Demmer in this book) are indicators of the reliability of the independence project and its leaders. The Kanak independence project adopts Marxist ideas, similar to the early leaders of independence in former African colonies. They have adopted a policy of appropriating the means of (nationalized) production in order to realise added value. This is an emancipatory project, to release Kanak peoples from the French state. However, it is worth remembering that a net trade deficit, ongoing social inequalities and financial debts thwarted the emancipatory ambitions of many African countries by the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, the initial Kanak independence project that wanted a return to an agrarian society has shifted considerably once control of mining revenues became involved. Mining revenues can fuel Dumazedier's leisure society (2018), with productivity and wage labour obtained thanks to technologies that allow societies to release more time for leisure, thereby centring custom and cultural events in a very different way.

The expression of Kanak or French social and political projects varies according to the different parties proposing these frameworks but against a background of ethnocentrism. This tends to make the debate a "dialogue of the deaf". Moreover, both Kanak and French ethnocentric sentiments are subject, particularly because of the engagement in corporate mining and global markets, to an overarching political economy guided by neoliberalism.

Despite alliances between pro- and anti-independence parties, the political landscape is characterized by a dualistic partisanship of the local political class. For the loyalists (some of the conservative parties come close to extreme right-wing viewpoints), the dualistic partisanship starts with preconceived notions of an insoluble civilisational differential, based on the claim that Kanak are ontologically opposed to a "white" society and its ideals. There is a hint of determinism here, denying intermarriages and political alliances and also refusing a possible associated State (Kanaky-New Caledonia) as a compromise or third way between political independence and a future as an integral entity of the French Republic. The pro-independence leaders, on the other hand, denounce a racialisation of the figure of the other, as a source of social exclusion (at least of certain social strata). In the current state of affairs, living together in Kanaky-New Caledonia is hampered by an electoral ambition that reinforces political and social tensions. Identity construction is thus parasitised by binary electoral issues. The series of three referendums became political matches (as did other territorial elections). The question remains, how can people be united when the referendums feel like a defamation of the other, with celebration of "victory" and "defeat"? In this difficult context, the construction of a New Caledonian identity and "living together" is solidly linked to politics and political institutions and appears to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## 19.3 French Political Parenthood

At the third and last referendum on political independence in December 2021, the abstention of the pro-independence proponents followed the refusal of France to postpone the referendum date (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book). The independence cause was confined in the meanders of French bureaucracy, so that the pro-independence parties felt forced to opt for an empty chair policy. The independence leader's request for postponement was justified by an outbreak of COVID-19 infections which impacted the whole island and led to a rapid increase in mortality (Kowasch et al. 2022; Leblic 2021). Mourning the dead, like any other cultural ceremony in Melanesian society, needs time for custom to take on its full, collective meaning. The cards of the independence question were dealt by a twist of fate, a conjunction of events, and the pro-independence movement did not seem to be up to the challenge. For example, the ruckus in December 2020 related to the selling of the Vale nickel smelter, in the south of Grande Terre impacted the serenity of the independence campaign (see Chaps. 8 and 9 in this book). Dissent between two independence parties PALIKA *(Parti de Libération Kanak)* and UC *(Union Calédonienne)* over the election of the first ever pro-independence candidate as President of the New Caledonian government in Spring 2021 was only resolved after several months of negotiation. Of course, the hand that feeds is the hand that leads, and the French government reshuffled and controlled the cards of the New Caledonian political game. It was difficult for the pro-independence parties to assert their claims in this context. The latter are still political outsiders in their own territory. They did achieve a solid result in the second referendum. But gaining the presidency of the 17th government of Kanaky-New Caledonia, now led since July 2021 by the PALIKA member Louis Mapou, seems to be a meagre consolation prize for the pro-independence movement, which is not a homogeneous block.

The position of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, towards (ethnic) pluralism is outdated, as his visit to the archipelago in 2023 revealed. Nevertheless, he began fine-tuning his communication towards minorities through a full-scale charm offensive during his first term in office. At the last France-Africa summit in Montpellier on 8 October 2021, he made paternalistic announcements, covering the entire continent. In the francophone Pacific, it was difficult to imagine the French government indulging the request of the pro-independence movement to delay the third and last referendum, given that France has an interest in keeping this South Pacific archipelago and its resources under its yoke. One reason for this is the maritime zone, with large minerals resources on the seabed, which ensure a strategic position for France. The presence of France in a region where the US and China have strategic (military and economic) interests, is another argument for France to keep Kanaky-New Caledonia, the largest of the French overseas territories in the Pacific region.

It is debatable whether the term "independence" means so much in a context where the Pacific is enmeshed in global networks and relations. Neoliberalism is also a colonial project. Some pro-independence leaders have suggested that "association" (or independence-association) could characterise future governance arrangements with France, partly placating some of their loyalist detractors. Other sceptics see independence association as similar to the unequal relations between France and African nations, characterised by a neo-colonial pyramidal system of domination, which has endured well past so-called "liberation". The history of relationships between France and its former colonies gives a glimpse of an institutionalised form of neo-colonialism: a façade of administrative decolonisation but with a stranglehold on some resources. In addition, rebel operations in Mali and Burkina Faso and a military coup in Niger have not been solved by French military intervention, and a French currency bloc remains in place: there is widespread dissatisfaction with elements of the ongoing neo-colonial relationship.

## 19.4 The Management of French Pluralism Leaves Something to Be Desired

The French political class knows the potential threats from referendums. There was the resignation of General De Gaulle on 28 April 1969 following his earlier referendum on the creation of regions and the renovation of the Senate in France, and on 29 May 2005, the vote against the establishment of a European Constitution. Although the majority of French voters were against, the Treaty of Rome was signed a year later and the result of the referendum was not respected. In 2018, the *Gilets Jaunes* movement proposed a citizens' initiative referendum, with a pro-citizen constitutional change, but their ideas were dismissed. Emmanuel Macron tried to organise a referendum on the climate issue but this foundered in the French Senate in 2021 (France24 2021).

In 2021, the Macron government therefore broke its "neutrality" promises established in earlier decades (Kowasch et al. 2022). The government commissioned a study to shed light on the effects and consequences of possible independence for Kanaky-New Caledonia (Ministère des Outre-Mer 2021). The 104-page study, published in July 2021, was hardly objective or, at the least, unbalanced. It focused "on the financing granted by France over the last 30 years and offered only historical reminders (now rather

dated) to illustrate the effects of independence in its most visible aspects, for example on nationality" (Kowasch et al. 2022, p. 14). The results and consequences of the study were discussed by French and international researchers, especially after the third referendum in December 2021 (e.g. David and Tirard 2022; Fisher, 2021; Trépied 2021; see also see Chap. 18 in this book). Trépied (2021), for example, explained that the study highlighted the expense of the "yes". David and Tirard (2022) noted that it underlined the reduction of French financial support for New Caledonia in case of independence. The French government is thus rehabilitating an image of good Samaritan, by flying to the rescue of the New Caledonian archipelago.

Apart from the administrative conveniences (passport, diplomas, etc.) linked to the fact that New Caledonians remain French, the vision that the territory cannot evolve without France remains. This perception was supported by the disagreements over the selling of the Vale smelter and mine. A peaceful and harmonious future seemed to be far away at that time. And in 2024, New Caledonian society is still struggling to create its own identity. The French government intends to give birth to this identity by forceps.

At the same time, the shadow of the Chinese ogre floats over the territory and China seems to be keen to bite into the archipelago. Staying French is all very well, but what exactly does "being French" really mean? At the last French presidential elections in particular, the electoral campaigns were struggling with the question of national identity, impacted by a shift to the right of the political landscape and later of the new Macron government. The electoral campaigns sometimes showed a contest of hatred towards minorities. And under the guise of assimilation, national identity actually allows ethno-nationalists to promote cultural hegemony. There are valid reasons to be sceptical about the development of a Caledonian identity under French tutelage. France often uses electoral clientelism towards its national subgroups (including Africans, Arabs, and also Kanaks), although recognising communitarianism (seeing a community of people in a given place). Minorities, in the collective imagination, participate in the glory of the nation in proscribed ways, for example, through performances in international sports. However, identities and cultures, rightly or wrongly, mix and evolve in line with reality which means that national identity is never immutable.

## 19.5 A Model of Society Yet to Be Built

Kanaky-New Caledonia has begun a process of decolonisation, apparently stuck in a kind of institutional marasmus. The Matignon-Oundinot and Nouméa Accords appear to have locked the country into developing some political competencies through transfers from France (e.g. primary school education, labour laws, etc.). In addition, appropriating the means of production with local infrastructure, heavy industries and a productive labour force as the base of a Caledonian society has been the project of Marxist intellectuals and leaders.

The binary referendum choices from 2018 to 2021 reflect the political landscape described above. Bipartisanism, as a norm, permeates the society, determining power relationships. Loyalist vs. independentist political identities thus appear as fixed social representations. In binary social arrangements, one group is always subject to the will of the other. Questioning this binary identity would also call into question the very identity of the individual, who constructs her- or himself inside this intrinsic political scheme. Therefore, referendums lock individuals into political identities linked to the question of the future political status but do not deal with the construction of a common identity. A crystallised political identity takes precedence and holds back a unitary common destiny.

Domination by democratic means has occurred as the result of the referendum cycle. The political institutions allow the elected representatives to claim defence of the people, while at the same time enjoying the privileges linked to their official functions. Indeed, voters feel unrepresented. Political and economic leaders do not like to give up their privileges or have their positions challenged. Moreover, almost all of them support an economic growth model that ultimately contributes to global environmental change, biodiversity loss and global warming (Kopnina 2020; Rockström 2015; Washington 2015). Omnipresent mining activities of course make Kanaky-New Caledonia a major emitter of greenhouse gases. However, the trickle-down theory of economic growth appears to be a dogma. Therefore, I argue that decolonisation is also about deconstructing a form of capitalism that establishes an individualistic rationalism, challenging a certain dollar-chasing mentality.

To build a common identity and to establish greater intercultural connections, we should first of all deconstruct notions such as "colonisation" and "equality". We should be aware that the various forms of discrimination (in hiring, in access to rental housing, in health care, etc.) are often suffered by the same individuals. Others would say that we need to have the courage to question our current economic model. One way to emerge from the abyss of capitalism and increasing social inequalities can be a reappropriation of the commons.

## 19.6 A Reappropriation of the Commons

The pro-independence umbrella party *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS) has the vocation of being a revolutionary party and to create a bulwark against economic imperialism.

The pro-independence leaders have copied an economic growth model to promote local economic development and political emancipation (see Chap. 9 in this book). There is no alternative offered to ensure a (slow and not brutal) transition and/or a co-existence of Kanak traditional activities (such as subsistence farming and fishing) and mining on an industrial scale. However, the range of possibilities for promoting and valorising traditional activities and sustainability measures is vast. There are, for example, plant nurseries, sandalwood cooperatives and small-scale coffee farms. Moreover, the agricultural know-how of communities and clans can be promoted as well as organising traditional Kanak pharmacopoeia through women's cooperatives. Paul Fokam's *Mutuelles de Croissance Communautaires* (MC2) was established in Cameroon in the 1990s, offering microcredit specifically for African villagers. They can submit a traditional cultural relic as a guarantee in order to get a small loan for buying land or agricultural tools. The emphasis here is on the symbolic aspect of cultural items as leverage to invest reasonable sums of money, from the perspective of an economy of the common good (Felber 2018). On Pentecost island in Vanuatu, there is an initiative called the Tangbunia Bank. The bank is run by the Indigenous Turaga movement and uses traditional currencies, such as handwoven mats, shells or pig tusks. It was set up in accordance with the national government's support for customary community economies. There are opportunities in Kanaky-New Caledonia to establish similar initiatives to support local customary activities.

The pro-independence project focuses on managing interdependence, without empowering its militant base. Therefore, pro-independence representatives mainly focus on strengthening public institutions and income streams to promote a Kanak nation in potential development. Some young pro-independence activists feel disconnected from the institutions governing them, and struggle to find any real meaning in the fight for independence. The agrarian character of traditional Kanak communities is not promoted, although it could play a major role in food sovereignty. Family farming still supports good nutrition in Pacific island communities, but the impact of imported food – and malnutrition – is growing fast and is present in Kanaky-New Caledonia too. Although the independence movement is not a homogeneous bloc, subsistence activities, food self-sufficiency and environmental issues more generally are not its central foci.

The role of the Customary Senate, created with the Nouméa Accord in 1998, is a guardian of the land and Kanak culture. However, the Senate seems to be caught up with gaining a greater institutional role, including legislative powers. Moreover, the representativeness of Senate members is sometimes contested, often based on conflicts over customary legitimacy.

Collective memory is essential to remember the real history of colonisation and its ongoing repercussions: The territory cannot get bogged down in amnesia. Indigenous Kanak culture is not a brake on social-economic development and well-being. Faced with global environmental crises and the climate emergency, we cannot remain impassive. We need to move beyond endless consumption, promoted by globalisation, leading to environmental damage and overproductivity. The New Caledonian identity debate is hampered by its economic growth model, which promotes modernity and rationalism to the detriment of social and cultural issues.

## 19.7 Conclusion

Given the climate crisis, the fate of Kanaky-New Caledonia should not be decided at the ballot box, because the three referendums have highlighted the bipolar character of the political landscape and increased the gap between the different (ethnic) communities. It is based on the idea that the stability of democracy will emerge from homogeneity. However, democracies thrive on difference, pluralism and diversity. Citizens mobilise through demonstrations and awareness-raising actions to express their points of view, to resist and to take social responsibility. Activism and demonstrations are a form of bottom-up movement essential to engage in political debate and discussion. For citizens, these social actions consist of reappropriating public debates in a democratic dynamic, with reformist overtones.

The lack of viable alternatives to the "uncommon destiny" that is evolving in Kanaky-New Caledonia is the source of its ills. In this sense, citizen initiatives found in other island economies should multiply via a social economy of solidarity in Kanaky-New Caledonia and not only to reduce the climate crisis (local chains of production, recycling centres, food banks, etc.). Kanaky-New Caledonia's questioning of its identity is stymied by its pro-industrial model of society. A "common destiny" imposes on subaltern peoples a voluntary servitude towards the capitalist system. To qualify "destiny" as "common" is paradoxical, because capitalism still profits from competition between individuals.

At the same time, certain citizen aspirations are reflected in the appearance of new political parties, such as *Construire Autrement* or *Souveraineté Calédonienne*. They present themselves as ruptures or complements to the traditional parties. They illustrate a reappropriation by civil society of political and social-economic issues in order to engage and participate in political dialogue. In this respect, Kanaky-New Caledonia needs to free up its voice, to find a way out of the political and cultural divide through talk, and by accepting difference. And as Marx (1888 [1845]) underlined, it is no longer a question of understanding the world, but of transforming it.

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# The Citizenship Dilemma in Decolonising New Caledonia

20

Scott Robertson

**Abstract**

A "citizenship of New Caledonia" has proven to be one of the most significant yet polarising aspects of the 1998 Nouméa Accord. Citizenship of New Caledonia restricted who could vote in provincial elections and for the Congress but also shaped efforts to promote local employment. In the Accord, it is the political and moral basis for New Caledonia's common destiny and endeavours to transcend pro- and anti-independence divisions. This chapter outlines the historical roots of the notion of citizenship within New Caledonia and how it has emerged within competing understandings of decolonisation and self-determination. Citizenship of New Caledonia rejects the universal assumptions of French decolonisation in favour of a new political community with the Kanak people at its centre. This chapter highlights the difficulties of agreeing to boundaries of citizenship due in part to citizenship's role as a political mechanism to achieve balance between the two opposing forces.

**Keywords**

Citizenship · New Caledonia · Nouméa Accord · Electoral list · Referendums · Kanak independence · Victims of history

## 20.1 Introduction

New Caledonia's place within the French Republic, or its legally recognised "autonomy", has evolved over time, often in accordance with the prevailing metropolitan French politics of the day. However, following the signing of the 1998 Nouméa Accord, New Caledonia became a *sui generis* territorial community of the French Republic,[1] bestowing on it a unique status and allowing the gradual and irreversible acquisition of sovereign powers in line with the wishes of local, democratically elected representatives. This highly complex and politicised debate on New Caledonia's legal status has mirrored the sociological differentiation between "New Caledonians" and the rest of the Republic's *body politic*.

The creation of a "citizenship of New Caledonia" under the Nouméa Accord emerged as one of the most polarising issues and continues to be so despite the consultations of 4 November 2018 and 5 October 2020 that marginally rejected independence. For this reason, it has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest, though heavily dominated by legal scholars (see Chauchat 2008; Chauchat and Cogliati-Bantz 2008; Garde 2011; Faberon 2013). The matter of citizenship, like much political and geographical division in New Caledonia, has its roots in the colonial experience (Christnacht 2009). This chapter examines these historical origins of the citizenship question, before considering its formal appearance as a key element of the Nouméa Accord. The historical, social and cultural dimensions of citizenship in New Caledonia have challenged the highly territorial notion of French nationhood and citizenship as the "one and indivisible Republic". It is argued that citizenship in New Caledonia cannot be understood without grasping the difficulties associated with New Caledonian decolonisation and the contested boundaries of the political community. Despite its strong rhetorical connection to the "common destiny" theme that many political leaders appeal to, citizenship's manipulation as a political tool has undermined its potential to be a unifying concept beyond the pro-/anti-independence divide.

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[1] In French, a *collectivité d'outre-mer sui generis*.



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## 20.2 Theoretical Approaches to Citizenship

Ideas and practices associated with citizenship are often tied to the sovereign nation-state. Although the seeds of modern citizenship emerged in Ancient Greece and Rome, citizenship appears a far more real and tangible idea in the present day largely because state borders also appear more real than ever. States can mobilise an array of technologies and forces to regulate the comings and goings of citizens and non-citizens, their behaviour and the means by which foreigners accede to full or partial membership of the political community in another country. For example, for many people, citizenship becomes much more real when they present their passport or are required to present identity papers at a border crossing or try to access services in a new country. Citizenship grants membership of the state and emerges as a key basis for claiming rights, seeking protection and regulating various social norms and practices (Isin and Wood 1995).

While there is little doubt that the state is the primary basis for citizenship in the contemporary world, our understanding of it has evolved considerably in recent times in response to the phenomenon widely called globalisation (see Isin and Turner 2002). The interaction between our local and global context is constantly shifting as we travel, work and live in territories other than those in which we were born. The legal regimes that mediate states and citizens reflect, in part, various external influences. We have seen the emergence of the European Union and the complex layers of rights and responsibilities that regulate the behaviour of its member states including the departure of the UK in 2020. International human rights have continued to play a critical role by imbuing a sense of human connectedness beyond state citizenship and adopting a language of global citizenship in response to major issues such as climate change, health security and economic justice (Benhabib 2016).

In its simplest form, citizenship can be viewed as a legal status bestowing particular rights and responsibilities upon the individual, though these vary greatly from place to place. Though we tend to think of citizenship status as a universal phenomenon – i.e. we are all citizens of somewhere – it is also true that the lived experience of citizenship is by no means universal. While citizenship might enable people in France or Australia access to the welfare state, public healthcare and free education, in many parts of the world, this is simply not the case. Moreover, as history has proven time and time again, legal citizenship does not necessarily ensure that human beings are treated as equals by the government or by their co-citizens (Brubaker 2010). It is certainly true that some people might not think their citizenship means much at all. But there can be little doubt as to its importance as an organising principle for nation-states, especially evident in the recent refugee crises arising from conflicts in Syria, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. For the millions of people around the world who are officially "stateless" and denied membership by sovereign states, citizenship can be a matter of life and death. It is for this reason, Article 15 for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares a "right to a nationality" for all people.

In Western political thought, much of the conversation on citizenship has been between liberal and communitarian conceptions. Liberals have tended to emphasise individual liberty and expressed caution toward according any rights to distinct social groups within a political community (Kymlicka 1995). Communitarian theories of citizenship became increasingly popular in response to the end of the Cold War and proliferation of ethnic conflicts in Africa and Eastern Europe. But they also emerged in part due to identity political movements, such as the US civil rights movement, indigenous and feminist activism, among others, which rejected the exclusion of particular marginalised groups in liberal societies (see Balibar 1988). Communitarians view individuals as inherently constituted by their place within social groupings, and citizenship is understood through the lens of belonging to such groups. Communitarians favour the recognition of the layering of human identity through such groups as essential to human flourishing and citizenship. In one of the most well-known critiques of liberal conceptions of citizenship, Iris Marion Young (1989) argued that liberal views of citizenship, in attempting to promote equality by ignoring social differences, tended to exacerbate inequality. Individuals, Young argued, must be viewed as embedded within particular groups. A "differentiated citizenship" has to take into account how identification with the political community is mediated by these various social groupings. While many liberal scholars recognise the importance of social groups, they are wary of undermining the social cohesion deemed necessary for a democratic nation-state to flourish, and they express concern about the potential for a contagious identity politics to emerge that erodes national identity (Carens 2000, p. 193). One of the most common objections to, for example, recognising specific indigenous rights in Western societies, has been that it reinforces social divisions between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and fails to address disadvantage.

We will not enter into these debates in any detail here, but it is important to situate the New Caledonian case within the broader politics of citizenship, particularly in France and its evolution over time. In particular, the politics of identity and the decolonisation process in New Caledonia has collided with the strong republican ideology that has driven French nationalism since the French Revolution. This ideology overrode various sub-national and regional political claims, often in defence of the "one and indivisible" Republic enshrined in the various iterations of its Constitution. Thus, France has

historically expressed reservations in the ratification of, for example, the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. In response to multiple pressures, however, France has become more flexible since the 1980s in its recognition of its internal pluralism, including in the organisation of its overseas territories, collectively referred to as the *Outre-mer* (Gohin 2002; Palayret 2004).[2]

Much of the national debate in France on citizenship and national identity has oriented towards the question of migration, given its extensive population from former French colonies (see Cooper 2005; Cooper and Stoler 1997). The *Outre-mer* has tended to occupy a more obscure place in the national debate, despite a population of around 2 million people (Trépied 2011).

The New Caledonian context exhibits many of the global challenges of citizenship. In particular, how does equal citizenship permit the recognition of difference within the same political community? This a key question in relation to New Caledonia's possible future independence. The Kanak independence cause rejects the assumption often voiced by its anti-independence opponents that only France is capable of integrating such a diverse population. Pro-independence leaders have emphasised the importance of placing the Kanak *au centre du dispositif*, or re-imagining the political community in light of the Kanak right to self-determination. Most anti-independence voices remain sceptical of the pluralist potential of Kanak independence and see in it an exclusive form of ethno-nationalism.

## 20.3 A History of Decolonisation

Citizenship as legal status versus lived experience (Rawlings 2012) has featured as an important historical and contemporary dimension of New Caledonian decolonisation. From 1887, the French colonial administration governed the territory through the *Code de l'indigénat*, a legal regime that restricted the indigenous Kanak population to reserves, subjected the population to a head tax and forced labour, and enabled the administration to nominate their own chiefs (Merle 2002). In addition to Kanak subjects, New Caledonia received thousands of Asian indentured labourers whose legal position was determined by their work contracts, the large majority of whom were excluded from legal citizenship (Merle and Muckle 2019).

When the French State granted the Indigenous Kanak people formal citizenship in 1946, just as they did in other parts of the Empire to other Indigenous, colonised peoples, it was framed as a universal horizon to which all mankind should aspire. Many Frenchmen viewed this as the fulfilment of the French civilising mission, legitimising the supposedly virtuous presence of France as a colonial power. But it opened up many questions and conflicts, especially as former colonised subjects began to demand full equality and full recognition for their respective customs and cultures. How could the Jacobin Republic, famous for its assimilationist ideals, integrate an Empire of "100 million citizens" (Cooper 2005, p. 100)?

This tension was lived out in the early life of the Fourth Republic (1946–1958) through the creation of the French Union. The end of colonial subjection gave way to an inherently political problem. Most French political leaders recognised the critical role played by the colonies in supporting the war effort against both Nazi Germany and the collaborationist Vichy regime, both in terms of its manpower and its resources. It was at the famous meeting at Brazzaville in the Congo in 1944 where the Free French government under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle, leading the Resistance from London, committed to reforming the Empire's governance and extending citizenship to colonial subjects (though rebuffed any talk of independence) (Yacono 1985, p. 54). However, many metropolitan French political leaders and the small settler communities living throughout the Empire perceived the immediate granting of universal suffrage as a threat to their power.

The French Fourth Republic (1946–1958) was plagued with debates on what full and equal citizenship meant for the relationship between metropole and the colonies that became overseas departments, territories and associated states of the French Union. The post-war democratic institutions of France reinforced metropolitan power and failed to put ex-colonial representatives on an equal footing. In certain settler colonies such as Algeria and New Caledonia, the French government sanctioned the reconfiguration of electoral boundaries to ensure that minority settler populations remained in power. Failure to resolve the inherent contradiction between full legal citizenship and inferior political rights for many indigenous populations undermined the integrity of the French Union from the outset and in part led to its demise towards the end of the Fourth Republic.

French law maintained a distinction derived from the colonial era between ordinary citizens whose civil status remained under common law and certain Indigenous populations who retained a personal status, allowing them to remain subject to their "traditional" customs and institutions. In New Caledonia and elsewhere, the French government was petitioned by indigenous leaders to ensure that their "traditional" power

[2]The *Outre-mer*, or Overseas, refers to various former colonies, distinct from the French mainland ("the Metropole"), integrated into the Republic following the Second World War. They are defined in Titles XII and XIII of the French Constitution (XIII defines the transitional arrangements for New Caledonia), today referred to constitutionally as *territorial collectivities*.

structures were recognised and valorised (Kurtovitch 2000a, pp. 118–122), a policy supported by the local Communist Party that briefly succeeded in gaining traction among the clans (Kurtovitch 2000b). Recognition of the roles of chiefs and legal enforcement of the inalienability of customary lands aroused the anger of settlers who persistently expressed the distorted view that the indigenous populations were privileged.

Even though only Guinea voted for independence in the 1958 referendum on the new Constitution of the Fifth Republic, much of the once vast French Empire whittled away by 1960 (Aldrich and Connell 1992). The exception was the island, overseas departments and territories, or "DOM-TOMs", which remained in the Republic. In the Pacific region, New Caledonia and French Polynesia (formerly known as the *Etablissement français d'Océanie* or EFO) became overseas territories. In 1962, Wallis and Futuna voted to cease its protectorate status and become an overseas territory, and in doing so received French citizenship. The Condominium of New Hebrides, which France co-administered with the United Kingdom, remained excluded from much of these changes (and its indigenous population unable to obtain French citizenship) until its independence in 1980 as Vanuatu (Rawlings 2012). New Caledonia's status of overseas territory permitted a degree of political autonomy within France, but this remained essentially subject to French control and at the whims of the government of the day. Following the introduction of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic under President Charles de Gaulle in 1958, the French government gradually removed some of the territory's autonomy against most local political leaders' wishes. This proved to be one of the underlying causes of the emergence of the independence struggle in the territory (Le Borgne 2005).

## 20.4 The Emergence of Kanak Independence

New Caledonia already possessed a highly diverse population in 1946 (Kurtovitch 2000a). However, French colonisation depended on significant social segregation, especially between the Kanak and non-Kanak populations. Political changes (namely, the end of the *Code de l'indigénat* and an end to Kanak isolation in reserves) and economic changes (a large increase in French government funds for economic development and the expansion of the nickel industry) saw a large number of Kanak move to the Nouméa agglomeration and other small urban centres, which had hitherto been barred to Kanak.

Even though the Kanak people had become *de jure* citizens of the Republic in 1946, they remained heavily marginalised socially, economically and politically in the post-war period. The increasing presence of Kanak in Nouméa and the towns only accentuated these inequalities (Barbançon 1992, p. 37). For the first two decades following the war, the majority of Kanak supported the *Union Calédonienne* (UC), a political party formed in the early 1950s mostly from church-affiliated associations and union organisations (Trépied 2010). Those Europeans in the UC tended to support New Caledonian autonomy within France and challenged the economic dominance of the large family-owned corporate interests. The UC, whose motto was "two colours, one people", strongly promoted improved welfare, access to infrastructure and economic development of Kanak communities. While some customary chiefs and individuals who had gained important positions in the churches had attained some prominence in the party, political power in the Territorial Assembly remained largely in the hands of Europeans. The economic marginalisation of the Kanak became more evident in the wake of the territory's "nickel boom" (1967–1972), which brought an unprecedented level of wealth to the territory as global nickel prices rose.

By the end of the 1960s, disenchantment with the status quo among Kanak had already led to the emergence of new political parties, such as the *Union Multiraciale de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* led by Yann Celenei Uregei. Young Kanak students, the first to receive university education, returned from France and brought with them various ideological influences borne out of the student protest movements that characterised France during the period, above all May '68 (Chappell 2014).

Arguably the most significant impact of the boom was the sudden surge in the numbers of migrants from France and French territories in the Pacific. Many Wallisians and Futunians, who only became citizens in 1962, allowing them to circulate freely across the Republic, moved to New Caledonia *en masse*, quickly becoming the third largest ethnic community in the territory. The Kanak population declined as an overall population from 51.1% in 1956 to 42% in 1976 (ISEE 2018; Kowasch 2010, p. 63; Vivier 2009, p. 22). Seeing the seeds of Kanak discontent grow at a time where France faced challenges from other indigenous populations and independence movements within the Republic, not to mention international pressure to decolonise, the French government actively encouraged and weaponised migration as a means of "drowning" the Kanak electorate. In May 1972, French Prime Minister Pierre Messmer penned a letter to his Secretary of State for the Overseas, Xaviera Deniau, in which he noted that:

> New Caledonia, colony of settlement, although destined to be a multiracial melting pot, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory where a developed country may send its nationals…In the short and medium term, the massive emigration of French citizens must allow the avoidance of the danger of the pro-independence cause through the maintaining and improving

> of the numerical balance of the communities. In the long-term, the indigenous nationalist cause will only be avoided if the non-indigenous communities represent a democratic majority mass. (cited in Besset 1998, p. 76)

This policy was supported by many in the business community as a means of attracting the skills and expertise required for the economic development of the territory, but rejected by the UC as a threat to local jobs. Simultaneously, the French government retracted elements of New Caledonia's post-war autonomy through a series of laws, including in the important area of nickel (Le Borgne 2005, p. 395).

While we might question the extent to which immigration occurred as a direct result of government policy, a clear nexus had emerged between New Caledonia's demography, namely, the balance between the Kanak and non-Kanak populations and local politics. This has continued to cast a shadow over New Caledonian political life beyond the emergence of the independence movement and into the Nouméa Accord period.

## 20.5 Migration and the Victims of History

When the Kanak independence movement emerged during the mid-1970s, opposition to immigration from France and other territories in the Pacific was a major political issue. However, there was no legal distinction between French citizens and New Caledonian locals, and no legal barriers preventing or hindering the movement of French metropolitans, Wallisians, Futunians and Polynesians with French citizenship to the territory.

The principle of democratic self-determination that framed decolonisation in much of the world and had become enshrined in a growing body of international law presented a dilemma in the New Caledonian case. For the *Front Indépendantiste* (FI), the indigenous Kanak people alone had the right to self-determination. But this excluded the majority of the population, including the European community whose descendants had lived in the territory for several generations. For the French government and loyalist parties such as the *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République* (RPCR),[3] depriving a section of French citizens from democratic participation contravened the political rights guaranteed by the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. However, it should be noted that in the referendums of self-determination in both the cases of the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas (1974, now Djibouti) and the Comoros Islands (1975), voting was restricted to the *populations interessées* (Aldrich and Connell 1992, p. 70); i.e. those with a minimum of 3 years local residence, which excluded temporary French public servants on rotation in the respective territory. Therefore, what were the boundaries of self-determination in the New Caledonian case?

In July 1983, the French socialist government convened a roundtable at the French town of Nainville-les-Roches, bringing together leaders from both the FI, the RPCR and a moderate party, the *Federation pour une Nouvelle Société Calédonienne* (FNSC), which formed a coalition government with the FI in 1982 (Barbançon 2008). Georges Lemoine, the Secretary of State for the Overseas, hoped to strike a political agreement between the two intransigent positions held by the FI and the RPCR. The meeting failed to produce a consensus, with the RPCR rejecting the final declaration. However, the FI and the FNSC agreed in principle to self-determination that included both the Kanak people and those labelled the "victims of history", referring to non-Kanak with a deep historical connection to New Caledonia (the term "victim" evoking the experience of Frenchmen who arrived as part of French colonisation, either as convicts or labourers).

What this translated to in terms of a referendum of self-determination nevertheless remained problematic. The various elements of the FI, which in 1984 formed a loose coalition known as the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS),[4] considered that this should restrict participation to those with at least one parent born in New Caledonia. The RPCR rejected the very idea of "victims of history" as an insult and a denial of French legitimacy and identity. The FLNKS found little support outside the indigenous Kanak population for such a significant restriction of the right to vote for the referendum. On 13 September 1987, when the conservative French government organised a referendum of self-determination, it put in place a 3-year residency requirement, far short of what was demanded by the FLNKS, leading to their boycott and a 98.3% vote in favour of remaining in the Republic.

It was not until the 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords that an agreement was finally struck on who could participate in the referendum of self-determination forecast for 1998, but subsequently postponed until 2014 and 2018 following the Nouméa Accord. The text stipulated that only those residents in New Caledonia at the time of the referendum approving the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (i.e. 6 November 1988) would be eligible; in other words, a residency requirement of approximately 10 years. The Nouméa Accord would ultimately extend the residency requirement to a minimum of 20 years.

[3]Formed in 1977 under the leadership of Jacques Lafleur, it remained the dominant anti-independence or loyalist political party in New Caledonia until soon after the signing of the 1998 Nouméa Accord (see page 9).

[4]The FLNKS, proclaimed on 24 September 1984, was formed from several independence parties. Today, the two dominant parties of the "umbrella party" FLNKS are the UC and the *Parti de libération kanak* (PALIKA).

## 20.6 The Nouméa Accord

On 5 May 1998, the FLNKS, the RPCR and the French government signed the Nouméa Accord. One of the central elements of the agreement was the creation of a "citizenship of New Caledonia" – an electoral body with the exclusive right to vote in the elections for the provincial assemblies and the Congress.

The idea of a distinct body of citizens of New Caledonia (the text refers to a citizenship of New Caledonia, not a New Caledonian citizenship) within the French Nation emerged a decade earlier during the negotiations for the Matignon-Oudinot Accords but did not see the light of day, deemed to be too sensitive at the time and likely to undermine commitment to a consensual solution (Christnacht 2009, p. 112). The historical and political reasons for this new citizenship were articulated in the delicately worded Preamble to the Accord:

> [Section 4] "It is today necessary to establish the foundations for a citizenship of New Caledonia, permitting the original people to form a human community with the men and women who live there, affirming its common destiny".

Citizenship of New Caledonia responded to the historical questions of legitimacy and belonging that emerged out of its colonial past. Affirming their exclusive right to self-determination, the FLNKS in turn recognised the legitimacy of certain sections of the non-Kanak population as fellow members of the political community. The Nouméa Accord should therefore be viewed as a continuation of the debate that began at Nainville-les-Roches in 1983.

Section 5 of the Accord equally states that:

> During this period, symbols will gradually recognise a citizenship of New Caledonia translating the chosen community of destiny, and able to transform into a nationality at the end of the period, if that is what is decided.

The noted distinction between "citizenship", on the one hand, and "nationality", on the other, speaks to ongoing sensitivities surrounding the language used in New Caledonian identity politics (Chauchat and Cogliati-Bantz 2008; Faberon 2013). The Nouméa Accord does not refer to a New Caledonian "nation" and avoids any perceived erosion of the "one and indivisible" nature of the French Nation.[5] New Caledonia can only become a nation, with its own distinct nationality, in the event that they accede to independence and break away from the French Republic.

Even though the Accord introduced a distinction between citizens of New Caledonia and other French nationals (though New Caledonians remain French nationals), this distinction is limited to the right to vote for provincial elections and the Congress and provisions promoting local employment. Otherwise, there is virtually no formal differentiation between them, despite the efforts to expand its scope beyond those two areas identified in the Nouméa Accord. Despite the political furore around migration, the Accord did not put in place any restrictions on the numbers of French citizens entering the country, though the promotion of local employment is undoubtedly a disincentive to prospective migrants. For the FLNKS and other pro-independence parties, citizenship is and remains a critical mechanism for protecting its electoral weight from being undermined by people they see as illegitimate. Further, it constitutes the centrepoint of a new political community, placing the Kanak at the centre, and reconstructs their relations with non-Kanak communities from this perspective, rather than shared French citizenship. Most political leaders accept the principle of local citizenship, often noting that New Caledonia's small population and landmass, and the limited scale of its economy render some sort of restriction justifiable (as noted in Section 4 of the Preamble to the Nouméa Accord). However, the traditional anti-independence parties have vociferously opposed the more severe restrictions on voting rights and local employment (see next section) as contrary to the spirit of the Accord and damaging to the economy.

Nevertheless, some parties successfully mobilised citizenship as a discursive means of distinguishing themselves and challenge the *Rassemblement* movement that had hitherto dominated New Caledonia's anti-independence politics under the leadership of Jacques Lafleur. During the 2004 provincial elections, RPCR dissidents formed *Avenir Ensemble*, which succeeded in toppling the RPCR as the largest anti-independence party in the Congress, with Marie-Noëlle Thémereau elected as President of the New Caledonian Government. In her maiden speech, Thémereau invoked citizenship as an important mechanism for realising the common destiny and suggested certain policy initiatives that would lend it greater significance (Thémereau, 17 August 2004). *Calédonie Ensemble,*[6] led by Philippe Gomès, became the largest party in the Congress following the 2014 provincial elections, mobilising citizenship as a central theme of its political discourse. Gomès has unashamedly referred to New Caledonia's place within France as a "small nation in a large nation", crossing a threshold (i.e. referring to New Caledonia as a nation) previously considered anathema by many anti-independence actors (Robertson 2018, pp. 148–149). The resonance of a strong "multi-ethnic New Caledonian identity within France" might in part explain the success of *Calédonie Ensemble* in recent years.[7]

[5] Note that the word "nation" is capitalized in French when referring to France, *la Nation*.

[6] Formed in 2009, mostly from *Avenir Ensemble* and *Rassemblement* dissidents.

[7] Soon after this article's submission, *Calédonie Ensemble* experienced a considerable defeat in the May 2019 provincial elections, losing its dominance to the more traditional anti-independence coalition, currently known as the *Républicains (Avenir en confiance)*.

Apart from the matter of voting rights, the politics of citizenship has been most visible in disagreements over the adoption of new symbols to represent the country. While New Caledonia has adopted a new anthem, banknote designs and a motto,[8] political leaders have failed to reach consensus on changes to two of arguably the most significant symbols identified in the Accord: the flag and the country name (Robertson 2018, pp. 244–255). To this day, New Caledonia flies two flags: the French tricolour and the flag of the FLNKS. The recognition of the FLNKS flag in 2011, the result of a surprising move by the anti-independence *Rassemblement-UMP* to symbolise the "Melanesian identity" of the territory was roundly opposed by *Calédonie Ensemble* and other anti-independence parties but supported by both the FLNKS and then President Nicolas Sarkozy (Lindenmann 2004, pp. 11–15). Unlike the other French territories of the Pacific, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonians have failed to rally around a single flag marking their identity. Political leaders have largely sidelined the matter of the country name, despite some pro-independence leaders referring to "Kanaky" or "Kanaky-New Caledonia", the former being the name invoked by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in the early 1980s.

## 20.7 The Right to Vote

The stakes surrounding the referendum on self-determination only reinforced the importance of voting rights. Kanak pro-independence parties have sought the exclusion of more recently arrived French nationals in order to counterbalance non-Kanak dominance at the ballot box. The French law officially forbade any deprivation of citizens' rights, especially democratic equality. For this reason, the FLNKS has often appealed to international law to aide their cause, especially UN General Assembly resolutions 1514 and 1541 on the right to self-determination for colonised peoples. The crux of the question remained "who" held such a right to self-determination and how this determined the parameters of suffrage, a question finally resolved by the 1988 Matignon-Oudinot Accords.

In rendering New Caledonia *sui generis*, the Nouméa Accord paved the way for expanding suffrage restrictions beyond the referendum alone. The Constitutional Bylaw of 15 March 1999[9] enumerated enrolment criteria for the special electoral list of citizens of New Caledonia, including continuous residence in New Caledonia prior to 8 November 1998 (i.e. the date of the Nouméa Accord referendum).[10] Those who did not have the minimum residency period were placed on an auxiliary roll[11] until they reached 10 years of continuous residency. Exceptions were granted to those whose residence was interrupted for valid educational, professional or medical reasons. The date on which residency in New Caledonia commenced was not the date of arrival *per se* but the date on which the individual enrolled on the general electoral list at their local municipal town hall – a point that would become problematic for certain metropolitan French who arrived in New Caledonia but failed to take the necessary steps to change their enrolment details.

The seemingly innocuous creation of the auxiliary roll produced major political division. On 19 March 1999, France's highest legal body, the Constitutional Council, determined that the auxiliary roll would be renewed for each election. This interpretation of the Constitutional Bylaw meant that any person would be eligible to enrol on the special electoral list of New Caledonian citizens as long as they had 10 years' continuous residency, regardless of their arrival date (see Clinchamps 2008; Chauchat 2008, 2012). According to the FLNKS, this contravened the underlying intent of New Caledonian citizenship, which was to prevent new arrivals from having an undue influence in the balance of power in the provincial assemblies and Congress. Instead, they demanded the auxiliary roll be fixed, meaning that only persons who had arrived in New Caledonia prior to 8 November 1998 "and" had 10 years of residence would be eligible and individual who arrived after this date excluded. Predictably, anti-independence leaders considered the permanent exclusion of new arrivals as the deprivation of democratic rights associated with French citizenship and contrary to the spirit of the Nouméa Accord.

The French government at the time, led by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, criticised the Constitutional Council for its interpretation, supporting the FLNKS view that the negotiations had favoured a reading in favour of a "frozen electorate" (Maclellan 1999, p. 249). The conservative President Jacques Chirac committed to revise the Constitution in line with FLNKS views (Maclellan 2010), while anti-independence political leaders lobbied their political allies in Paris in a bid to maintain the more open definition of New Caledonian citizenship.

Chirac convened a Congress[12] of the French Parliament in February 2007, which overwhelmingly adopted a revision of the Constitutional Bylaw of 15 March 1999. New Caledonia's two deputies in the National Assembly and the single senate

[8] The New Caledonian Government organized a local competition in 2007 to determine a shortlist for the anthem, bank notes and country motto.

[9] Fr. *la loi organique du 15 mars 1999*.

[10] The various criteria render the voting rights matter very complex. For the sake of brevity, the author has simplified it considerably. For more detailed analyses by legal scholars, see Chauchat and Cogliati-Bantz (2008) and Clinchamps (2008); see also Robertson (2018).

[11] Fr. *Tableau annexe*.

[12] A joint sitting of the French National Assembly and the Senate.

**Table 20.1** Electoral list figures

| Year | 1998 | 2014 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|
| General list | 112,946 | 175,989 | 210,105 |
| Provincial | 104,078 | 152,462 | 169,635 |
| Auxiliary register | 8868 (7.8%) | 23,527 (13.4%) | 24,335 (13.4%) |

representative (all from the RPCR) voted against the measures. The alteration of the text froze the special electoral list, meaning that any individual who arrived in New Caledonia after 8 November 1998 would be excluded from voting in elections for the provincial assemblies and the Congress until the Nouméa Accord period ended (Table 20.1).

Despite the overwhelming adoption of the revised text in the Congress, citizenship remained as polarising as ever in New Caledonia, due in large part to its importance for determining the balance of power in the Congress and its favouring of Kanak populations (and therefore the pro-independence vote). Despite the changes, the FLNKS did not succeed in obtaining a majority in the legislature in both the 2009 and 2014 provincial elections, even though its results did improve marginally over this period (23 seats in 1999; 18 in 2004; 23 in 2009; 25 in 2014).

The makeup of the special electoral list, distinct from the general electoral list of all French citizens, became an intensely bitter point of contention, fought out in the courts, especially in the lead up to the 2014 provincial elections. From 2010, pro-independence parties appealed on numerous occasions to have certain individuals removed from the special electoral list who they suspected did not have the requisite residency requirements. Anti-independence parties in turn committed resources to assisting voters to defend themselves in the courts. The FLNKS lay considerable blame on municipal governments responsible for admitting individuals on to both the general and special electoral lists for circumventing the enrolment criteria (Chauchat 2016).[13] The issue became so important that in 2016 then Prime Minister Manuel Valls commissioned legal expert Félix Mélin-Soucramanien to investigate the true extent of the number of *les indûment inscrit* ("unduly enrolled") persons (Premier Ministre 2016). Political leaders eventually agreed to Mélin-Soucramanien's recommendation to re-examine some 1062 cases and that the matter of enrolment on the special list was "politically closed", though his report failed to restore trust in the electoral enrolment process among most pro-independence leaders and court disputes on persons incorrectly admitted to the list continued (Robertson 2018, pp. 189–190).

The creation of the special electoral list had the unintended side effect of excluding a considerable number of Kanak voters as well (see Pantz and Robertson 2018; Robertson 2018, pp. 180–186). Since enrolment on the special electoral list was not automatic and required submitting the relevant paperwork proving the residency required, many Kanak did not undertake these steps. Alternatively, considerable numbers originally from the Loyalty Islands who moved to the urban agglomeration of Nouméa did not update their enrolment details, meaning they were excluded in their commune of residence (Pantz 2015; Robertson 2018, pp. 180–186). For certain Kanak living in "squat" communities in Nouméa, it was often difficult to find the necessary paperwork enabling their enrolment. Maximising Kanak participation in the South Province was a political necessity for the FLNKS. Dominant in the North and the Islands due to Kanak demographic dominance, the FLNKS considered that it could greatly improve its overall representation in the Congress should the increasing Kanak population in the South turn out in sufficient numbers. The FLNKS *Commission* recognised this and sought to reach out to Kanak voters to encourage everyone to verify their enrolment. Despite their efforts, right up until the 2018 referendum, pro-independence parties have maintained that thousands of Kanak remain excluded from voting, both in the provincial elections and in the referendum itself. Any significant absence of Kanak voters could certainly undermine the democratic legitimacy of a political settlement between pro and anti-independence parties.

The battle in the courts concerning New Caledonian citizenship created a similar debate on the 2018 referendum. While it is beyond the scope of this article to deal directly with the referendum (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book), there are noteworthy parallels between the two different electorates, even if the criteria for voting in the referendum are slightly different.[14] To qualify for the special electoral list for the referendum, an individual needed to have had continuous residency in New Caledonia since 1994 or a parent who satisfied this criterion. Additional provisions allowed for some who are born in New Caledonia and could demonstrate a durable attachment to the territory to also be enrolled. In both cases, legitimacy and belonging resulted in competing notions of who should and should not be eligible to vote.

For these reasons, New Caledonia's political leaders have deliberated at length on which categories of persons, if any, should be automatically enrolled on the special electoral list

[13] Each of the municipalities has a special administrative commission that oversees the revision of electoral lists. In New Caledonia, these commissions consist of a five-person panel: The representative of the mayor, a magistrate, a representative of the State and two representatives from each of the main political parties. The FLNKS considers that in Greater Nouméa's municipalities the bias of mayoral delegate and the State would mean their delegate's views would be rejected out of hand, likely three against two.

[14] For a full discussion on the legal cases dealing with this issue see Chauchat (2016).

for the referendum – an issue that dominated both the 2016 and 2017 Committee of Signatories meetings. The FLNKS originally maintained that only persons of "customary status", essentially the Kanak, should be automatically enrolled. However, following anti-independence opposition to the idea of elevating one segment of the population above another, a compromise agreement was achieved on both Kanak and those born in New Caledonia. The enrolment debate continued beyond the 2018 consultation and remains a key point of discord in the lead up to the second consultation, scheduled for 4 October 2020.[15]

The ongoing sensitivity of the definition of citizenship, with all its political consequences, prompted France to eventually accept the FLNKS demand for United Nations oversight over the enrolment process. Since 2016, the UN Special Committee for Decolonisation has sent teams of experts to observe the special administrative commissions, as well as the conduct of the 2018 referendum. The yearly reports submitted by the UN thus far have highlighted the inconsistent approaches within and across the special administrative commissions, though arguably not to the extent claimed by the FLNKS (UN 2014, 2016, 2017).

## 20.8 Employment and Social Rights

Local employment restrictions have been another important, though less salient, dimension of citizenship in New Caledonia. The Nouméa Accord prescribed that citizenship of New Caledonia would, in addition to the right to vote, serve as a basis for the promotion of local employment. In other words, the Accord recognised the importance of finding some mechanism to lend an advantage to "New Caledonians" in the labour market. Demands for protecting local employment against foreign workers had existed in New Caledonia since the colonial period. For example, following the Second World War and the granting of French citizenship, local settlers demanded the repatriation of Asian and Pacific Islander indentured labourers who arrived in New Caledonia on private work contracts (see Adi 2014; Kobayashi 1992; Merle 1995, p. 203). Similarly, following the nickel boom (1967–1972) local labour unions mobilised against efforts by large businesses to encourage skilled migration to the territory (Barbançon 1992, p. 195).

As New Caledonia entered the twenty-first century, it remained highly dependent on the economic prosperity brought both by its nickel industry, not to mention French state investment. The nickel industry, historically dominated by French state-owned companies such as *Société le Nickel* (SLN), transformed from the late 1990s, largely in response to local political pressure from pro-independence groups to break up the monopoly of the French giant Eramet (the parent company of SLN). Multinational companies including Falconbridge (Canada), Inco (Canada), Xstrata (Switzerland), Glencore (Switzerland), and Vale (Brazil), invested in new and existing mining projects Nickel prices rose considerably once more at the turn of the new millennium in response to China's growing demand, and with it, increased attraction for both French metropolitans and foreigners alike to move there. New Caledonia's increasing exposure to the free market and its requirement for the free movement of labour juxtaposed with its strong orientation towards local protectionism.

Through introducing a legal distinction between local citizens and non-citizens, the Nouméa Accord paved the way for stronger protections of New Caledonia's labour market. Section 4 of the Preamble to the Accord states that "the size of New Caledonia, its economic and social balance do not permit a significant opening of the labour market and justifies measures of local employment protection". And further, "in order to take into account the tightness of the labour market, mechanisms will be defined in order to prioritise access to local employment for persons durably settled in New Caledonia". This text recognised New Caledonia's geographical position as an island with a small population and the economic and social consequences associated with migration. However, the underlying disagreement on the boundaries of New Caledonian citizenship hindered any political consensus to implement the local employment agenda, while some anti-independence leaders opposed in principle any discrimination in the labour market and emphasised the importance of an open market in order to attract those with the best skills.

The first attempts at passing a law protecting local employment occurred in 2005 under the *Avenir Ensemble* government of Marie-Noëlle Thémereau, who came to power in 2004 after splitting with the RPCR. However, her government's proposed law, limited to the public sector, failed to pass through France's *Conseil d'Etat* because it was ruled to overstep the parameters pertaining to New Caledonian citizenship in the Constitutional Bylaw of 15 March 1999 (Gavard 2013).

It was not until 2012 when political leaders passed a bill on protecting local employment in the private sector (Gavard 2013). A separate law was created in 2016 for the public sector. Neither law made New Caledonian citizenship, strictly speaking, the basis for local employment. Instead, the private sector law created a mechanism that favoured those with longer durations of residence. The government publishes a detailed table of professions and attaches a mandatory duration of residence required to fill a position in the role, with the maximum duration required

[15]This chapter was originally submitted prior to the 2018 referendum, and subsequently revised in early 2020. The evolution of the voting rights debate beyond 2020 is not detailed here.

for a profession being ten years.[16] The greater the difficulty of filling the role locally, the lower the duration of residence required and, conversely, the easier a role can be filled by local labour, the higher the residency threshold. In effect, the mechanism sought to ensure that in the hypothetical scenario of two individuals with equal skills, qualifications and experience, the individual with the greater duration of residency would fill the role. Reflecting the political divisions on the issue, it struck a middle ground between demands for the protection of local employment, especially from unions, and concerns over preventing higher skilled individuals from coming to New Caledonia (Robertson 2018, pp. 198–221).

To oversee and enforce the mechanism, the legislation created a special committee, known as the *Comité paritaire d'emploi local* or CPEL, half consisting of union representatives and the other half, employer organisations, which deliberated on contentious cases brought by aggrieved parties. However, it is widely acknowledged that the lack of enforcement powers of the CPEL has enabled most companies to sidestep the laws (Robertson 2018, pp. 205–206).

A separate law in 2016 introduced local employment preferences in the New Caledonian public service, working according to a similar principle to the private sector. The delay in passing this law, despite the first attempt occurring ten years beforehand, was in part due to the courts cautioning the need to stay within the confines of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which guarantees French citizens equal access to the public service.

In neither the private nor public sector laws protecting and promoting local employment did citizenship of New Caledonia as defined in the Constitutional Bylaw of 15 March 1999 become the basis for defining locals and non-locals. Rather, local employment continues to reflect the multiple and contested notions of citizenship, not to mention the kind of economic model New Caledonia should pursue and how it engages with the global economy.

## 20.9 Turning to the Future

On 4 November 2018 and 5 October 2020, New Caledonians went to the ballot box to vote on the following question:

> Do you wish for New Caledonia to become fully sovereign and become independent?[17]

In the first referendum, 56% of the population rejected independence, which proved a closer result than polls expected. In the second referendum, the result was even closer, with 53% of voters rejecting independence. A final third consultation is possible under the Nouméa Accord. The higher than expected vote for independence demonstrated the potential of the Kanak electorate, which participated in greater numbers than ever before, and has given supporters of independence some hope that victory is possible in the next ballots (see Pantz and Robertson 2018).

The surprising closeness of the result will only add to the importance of citizenship and voting rights. Indeed, the continued exclusion of certain French citizens from voting in local elections gathered renewed following the second referendum. The Nouméa Accord foresaw these referendums as the "exit" (fr. *la sortie*) from the period of transition and will address the full transfer of sovereign powers to New Caledonia, the transformation of citizenship into nationality and the accession to a full international status. In short, in the event of a "yes" vote, New Caledonia will become an independent state. With this in mind, three key dimensions of the citizenship question should be considered. What would happen to French citizenship/nationality? Who would be a New Caledonian citizen? Finally, what would happen to other parts of the French Pacific and their relations to New Caledonia?

The problem confronting voters is the lack of certainty in the event of a vote for or against independence. The French government has expressed its openness to respect New Caledonians' democratic decision and work with them to implement a way forward.

No French political leader has explicitly stated that New Caledonians would lose their French nationality in the event of independence, and France remains a country where dual nationality is possible. Even pro-independence leaders have accepted that an ongoing link to France is possible. For example, the UC *projet de société* articulating their vision of what an independent New Caledonia looks like for the 2018 referendum suggests that a form of double nationality would be desirable if France agreed (UC 2017, p. 12). They state that French nationals who do not qualify for or want to acquire New Caledonian nationality are permitted to remain according to the conditions of the law. It is important to highlight that this is very different to the much more rigid approach taken by the independence movement in, for example, the 1987 FLNKS Constitution of Kanaky, which rejects dual nationality (FLNKS 1987). This may suggest that at least some pro-independence leaders are more favourable to an ongoing partnership of sorts with France in the long-term. It might be possible to introduce some form of free circulation of citizens, similar to that which existed in the aftermath of the 1962 Evian Accords with the newly independent Algeria, though the details would likely need to be worked

[16] The table, referred to as the *tableau des activités professionnelles* can be found at: https://dtenc.gouv.nc/sites/default/files/documents/emploi_local/tableau_des_activites_professionnelles.pdf

[17] "Voulez-vous que la Nouvelle-Calédonie accède à la pleine souveraineté et devienne indépendante?".

out, as would the consequences for the population's European citizenship enjoyed by virtue of their belonging to France.

There is certainly no shortage of examples in the Pacific that could inspire New Caledonia's path forward, ranging from Cook Islands' self-government in free association with New Zealand or the Micronesian states' compacts with the United States. While the resident population of the Cook Islands are New Zealand citizens, this is not the case in the United States compact states, although the resident populations possess various legal privileges around living and working in the United States. This willingness to maintain links between France and New Caledonia, even in the event of independence, has not prevented some sections of the anti-independence camp from stating that independence would mean the deprivation of French nationality. Is it possible to guarantee that France, which is facing its own economic difficulties amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, would commit to ongoing forms of economic assistance or free access to an independent New Caledonia.[18]

Arguably the biggest challenge in regard to citizenship is simply that there remains no internal political agreement on its boundaries. The 2007 revision of the Constitutional Bylaw defining citizenship of New Caledonia remains very much contested. Indeed, France's Constitutional Council noted that New Caledonia's provincial electoral lists can only remain "frozen" until the end of the Nouméa Accord period, since it would be constitutionally difficult to justify permanent exclusion of French citizens from the right to vote (ECHR 2005). This view of course assumes that the two referendums thus far, or the third referendum that may follow, marks the end of the decolonisation process and a moral and legal justification for a restricted electorate. New Caledonia's anti-independence parties, especially those affiliated to *Les Républicains calédoniens*, have often repeated that the conditions for acquiring citizenship need to be changed. The approximately 13% of the local population without New Caledonian citizenship at present is likely to be unsustainable long-term.

Any new status would also need to take into account the relationship between New Caledonia and the rest of the French Pacific, especially Wallis and Futuna (Robertson 2018, pp. 155–160). More than 10% of the New Caledonian population identifies as Wallisian or Futunian, and there continue to be important customary, economic and religious links between the two countries. New Caledonia remains a primary destination for Wallisians and Futunians seeking more advanced health treatment, with a special arrangement existing between the French Government, New Caledonia's major hospital and Wallis and Futuna. Historically, most of the Wallisian and Futunian community has supported anti-independence parties and helped ensure their democratic majority in the Congress. As the "third community" of New Caledonia, their support has been important for anti-independence parties maintaining a democratic majority. For the provincial elections in May 2019, a new political party, *L'Éveil océanien*, secured 8.56% of the South Province vote, and three seats in the Congress (four in the South Province Assembly) (see Chap. 18 by Fisher in this book). With an agenda focused squarely on supporting the needs and aspirations of the Wallisian and Futunian communities in New Caledonia, *L'Éveil océanien* reinforced the political importance of the Wallisian and Futunian community as "kingmakers" in New Caledonian politics. Despite its anti-independence platform, the party surprised many when it threw its support behind UC-FLNKS leader Roch Wamytan for Congress president, demonstrating its willingness to assert its own interests (Vili 2019).

The different views of citizenship among New Caledonia's political leaders and the population at large are a reflection of competing notions of decolonisation. For many Kanak people with sympathetic views on independence, citizenship is primarily a vehicle for re-affirming their primacy within New Caledonia and ensuring they are not victims of any future demographic and democratic marginalisation. Some anti-independence parties view citizenship of New Caledonia as a political necessity. Further, citizenship lends legitimacy to the non-Kanak population as co-citizens of the political community. Perhaps the sole point of agreement is that citizenship is a language in which realise the "common destiny". Indeed, New Caledonian citizenship invites a re-thinking of what it means both to belong to both New Caledonia and to France and endeavours to reconcile New Caledonia's multi-ethnic character with the particular claims of the Kanak people to constitute the basis of a self-determining political community. Whether it survives the Nouméa Accord process remains to be seen.

[18] As this chapter is being readied for publication, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has created enormous human health and economic damage, especially in France, the long-term consequences of which are uncertain.

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# Conclusion: Future Reflections

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Simon P. J. Batterbury, Séverine Bouard, Christine Demmer, Denise Fisher, Matthias Kowasch, Isabelle Leblic, Pierre-Christophe Pantz, and Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane

**Abstract**

This multi-authored chapter covers some statements and reflections on the geopolitical but also environmental, societal and economic futures in the aftermath of the third referendum in 2021 on political independence, and after the visit of French President Macron to New Caledonia-Kanaky in July 2023. While for the current French government, the future of the country lies within the French Republic, pro-independence parties see the decolonisation process as unfinished and continue fighting for independence from French authority. The political landscape thus remains strongly divided. References to historical events and social and ethnic aspects of voting patterns complete some of the reflections. We also highlight the profound changes which are taking place in rural communities, the future of the nickel sector, and educational reforms.

**Keywords**

Independence · Nouméa Accord · Decolonisation · Nickel sector · Rural economy · Education

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This short chapter offers reflections by some of the book's authors, in the form of short statements, on the geopolitical but also environmental, societal and economic futures for New Caledonia-Kanaky in the aftermath of the third referendum in 2021 on political independence, which was largely boycotted[1] by pro-independence supporters. The visit of President Macron to the archipelago in July 2023 was an important further development.

***Simon P.J. Batterbury*** This book has revealed how, caught at the intersection of geopolitical and economic interests, New Caledonia-Kanaky's political path has never been smooth. The focus on political negotiations in several chapters should not detract from recognising that they also have significant effects on everyday livelihoods and lifeways. Uncertainty persists and the "future together" or "shared destiny" enshrined in some political discourse is still a long way off. The work of Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2023), for example, shows how "the colonial and racial divide persists in structuring selves and society by corroding relationships to space, land, and people; erasing histories; and regulating life". This is particularly the case for mixed-race (*métis*) Kanak-White people who traverse boundaries of identity that are imposed

[1]Pro-independence leaders avoided the term "boycott" and called for "non-participation".


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and reproduced in political discourse and in everyday life. Troubling a "binary political landscape" will never be easy, in formal politics or at a personal level.

While acknowledging the sensitivity of racial differences and the need for negotiation in what he called a "profound, sincere political exchange", President Macron's visit to New Caledonia-Kanaky in July 2023 reaffirmed France's intention to remain a significant force in the Pacific and across the archipelago, not least because of continuing tensions resulting from Chinese expansionism. His conciliatory visit to the North Province and to Tiouandé and Touho was followed by a speech back in Nouméa where he asserted that "New Caledonia is French because it has chosen to remain French". To many observers, this statement was inaccurate, given that the third referendum on independence in 2021 was widely boycotted and conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kowasch et al. 2022). It is unfortunate that this "economy with the truth" was not challenged more widely, having passed with barely a ripple of dissent across the Pacific and Australia, a powerful neighbour. Australia has a centre-left labour government, which treads carefully with its renewed support for France after a period of diplomatic tensions, but at the same time, it has developed strong support for Indigenous self-recognition across its Pacific neighbours, appointing the first Australian Ambassador for First Nations People, Justin Mohamed. In addition, Australia saw a major campaign and a national referendum for constitutional amendments to recognise and establish its own Indigenous government assembly, something its Pacific neighbour has had since 1999. Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong visited New Caledonia-Kanaky in April 2023. A year earlier, she said she was "determined to see First Nations perspectives at the heart of Australian foreign policy" (in Wadrawane et al. 2023), but during her visit, she had to remain neutral on the archipelago's disputed governance arrangements.

During his own visit, President Macron reversed some of his government's earlier statements. He wishes to replace the Nouméa Accord with a new agreement in 2024, which means amending the French Constitution, to open up electoral rolls to allow more French citizens to vote on island affairs, and his administration supports an increase in military training on Grande Terre. In this speech and in draft documents, he is following a hard line on French interests, and in my view, this is really bad news for independence supporters and for the process of decolonisation. As this book goes to press, we are waiting to see if they will really be implemented "from above" in Paris from 2024 onwards, continuing a tradition of imposed governance that dates back over 170 years.

***Séverine Bouard*** What do environmental, societal and economic futures hold in the aftermath of the third referendum on political independence?

As elections, meetings, referendums and presidential visits (the last in July 2023) come and go, on the ground, the Kanak domestic economy continues to change and evolve. Recent studies show that agricultural activity is holding up rather well in the communities, and the gamble taken by the Kanak leadership in the North Province on the large KNS (Koniambo Nickel SAS) nickel project has increased opportunities for marketing (Sourisseau et al. 2021).

The resilience of the rural economy will enable increasing autonomy, which is helpful given the rising cost of living experienced even in rural communities. However, it is still difficult to know whether the non-market economy will eventually dissolve completely as commodification and urban development advances and whether it will be able to meet the need for food self-sufficiency, particularly in the particularly tense geopolitical context of the Pacific. The spread of salaried employment in the nickel sector and climate change are disturbing semi-subsistence food production as well as traditional cultural practices. Socially, part of the Kanak rural world and the functioning of households is undergoing profound changes with the development of women's employment, particularly in the mining industry. Households in the villages located close to the mines, as well as those further afield, sometimes supply large numbers of women who now find it very difficult to fulfil the traditional gender roles assigned to Kanak women (Bouard and Demmer 2023). Under these conditions, after several years working in mining, some of the men and women employed choose to return to the domestic economy. But given the pressures to increase nickel output to feed the global demand in recent years, it is unclear whether small-scale family farming can be sustained, given its labour intensity and the attraction of paid employment.

Political independence and decolonisation are central to the economic and social needs of Caledonian and particularly, Kanak society. They will enable the continued evolution and maintenance of territorial heritage (including resilient social and cultural practices, mobility, and non-market exchanges). There are important aspects of culture and heritage that must be part of Kanaky-New Caledonia's future.

***Christine Demmer*** At a time when a new coalition of anti-independence parties (the "Loyalist Union") has announced, without reference to the colonised people, that the decolonisation process must be considered completed, the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front) has declared that it wants to negotiate with the State. Their part of the independence movement is still requesting full sovereignty. The political path towards "decolonisation within the Republic", introduced by former Prime Minister Michel Rocard in 1988, never extinguished the struggle for independence. In this small Pacific archipelago, where Kanak as a

group forms the largest percentage of the total population, the idea of a "federal solution" or a "differentiated solution" has been rejected. The State continues to remain deaf to the Kanak desire to create a multicultural nation (with a common civil and customary status), as a partner with France. Accepting this demand would show that the definition of colonisation as a "crime against humanity", as Emmanuel Macron asserted in Algeria in 2017, was not just his electoral slogan, but a commitment to truly come to terms with the colonial past. How can we move forward to another political solution now, 7 years later, given Kanak's determination to achieve full political independence?

***Denise Fisher*** The compromise political framework under which New Caledonia has operated peacefully for 30 years has expired, reopening uncertainty about the territory's future governance and relationship with France. Sadly, the final independence vote guaranteed by that framework was politically nullified by an effective boycott by Indigenous independence supporters, after France declined their request to postpone the vote to enable their cultural grieving practices after the devastating impact of COVID-19. Early discussion between France and loyalist and independence groups is essential. But these groups are more polarised than ever, and talks must necessarily focus on areas of deepest difference. These include whether or not to hold yet another independence referendum, special citizenship rights of employment and voting eligibility for longstanding residents, governance institutions themselves, key powers including foreign affairs and defence, distribution of nickel revenues and genuine engagement of all young people in social, economic and civil life. Talks will inevitably redefine the territory's relationship with France, with implications for the fragile immediate geographical neighbourhood, and the wider South Pacific region where Western interests, including major French national interests, are undergoing strategic challenges.

***Matthias Kowasch*** Macron's second presidency has to deal with the deep distrust of Kanak communities in New Caledonia-Kanaky. In 2022, Macron was re-elected as French president (winning in New Caledonia-Kanaky with 61% of support against 39% for Le Pen). Since then, the decolonisation process in the French overseas territory has been on an unofficial "stand-by". From 1 to 4 June 2023, France's Interior and Overseas Minister Gérald Darmanin visited Nouméa. To revive the dialogue and to cajole some cooperation, he made three proposals: (a) a promise of self-determination within one or two generations, a timeline which was immediately rejected by pro-independence leaders; (b) France did not rule out the transfer of further political competences including sovereign powers (defence, currency, law and order, foreign politics); c) the restriction of voter eligibility in local provincial elections will – at present – not be changed (essentially confined to those already resident in 1988 and their descendants) (Fisher 2023). As of late 2023, there was little sign of a way forward for the political status of the archipelago, following the historic visit by President Macron in July 2023 and draft legislation on constitutional reform.

Mining is intimately linked to the colonial history of the country and the marginalisation of Indigenous Kanak people on Grande Terre. The dominant nickel sector may contribute economically to the wealth of the country, but it also makes New Caledonia-Kanaky one of the world's largest $CO_2$ emitters per capita. The nickel and transport sector are emitting 84% of all greenhouse gases (Energy Observer 2023). There is now some action to reduce $CO_2$ emissions: Mining companies are required to cut emissions by 50% by 2035 and be zero neutral before 2050.

While the Koniambo project in the North Province has a clear geopolitical objective dating back decades, having been initiated by supporters of economic emancipation from France (Batterbury et al. 2020), as of 2023, Goro Nickel is preparing to supply Tesla with nickel for battery manufacturing. Tesla wants to secure and control its supply chain but is also insisting on tighter environmental standards and social responsibility. The critique is that some "greenwashing" is taking place –Tesla's electric cars are mostly bought by environmentally conscious affluent consumers, who sometimes overlook the conditions of production and the $CO_2$ embedded in the supply chain. In addition, the Goro Nickel smelter has a long history of accidents including heavy environmental damage. Therefore, the future will reveal if Goro Nickel serves as a cautionary example of how difficult it is to achieve true sustainability – sustainability that is an important approach (but also a buzzword) to deal with global environmental changes and to preserve the outstanding marine and terrestrial biodiversity of the archipelago. In the beginning of 2024, all three nickel smelters in the country (Koniambo, Goro Nickel and the over 100 years old Doniambo) are in financial difficulties, they have a combined deficit of €1.4 billion (NC la 1ère, 2024) which emphasises the social-economic risks of dependence on the commodities sector. The activities at Koniambo are currently even suspended.

***Isabelle Leblic*** It is not fair to reduce the independence vote to a vote along ethnic lines. The independentists have taken up the "bet on intelligence" made by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in the 1980s. Since the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, or even since the round table of Nainvilles-les-Roches in 1983, the hands extended by the Kanak towards the non-Kanak for the construction of an independent country are innumerable. On the other hand, the non-independence positions are becoming increasingly clear-cut, close to racism, and political leaders do everything to thwart a positive evolution of the

country. They even brought forward the third and final referendum to ensure a "no" vote in 2021, against all decency in the face of Kanak mourning, refusing to postpone it (Leblic 2021a, b). All this happened with the help of the French State, moving away from its declared position of impartiality. Today, the pro-independence activists are still trying to break the deadlock, but they no longer believe in promises that are never kept. They demand strong action. There is no indication that this will come. However, the future of a democratic Kanaky-New Caledonia, concerned with balanced development respecting the environment and with social and economic justice that allows well-being for all, whatever their origin, means this is a small price to pay.

***Pierre-Christophe Pantz*** Electoral ethnicization, reinforced during the first and second referendums on independence from France, was confirmed during the third consultation in 2021, and this has proven to be a dead end. The cold reality of 30 years of elections, then referendums, has left the broad contours of the vote unchanged: Kanak people continue to vote essentially for independence while the bulk of non-Kanak people continue to reject it massively. The ethnic border has largely remained unchanged despite appeals on all sides for an intelligent vote. Since the electorate is frozen, the quest for a majority (for or against independence) is dependent on relatively marginal demographic movements. And it is clear that the evolution of the balance of power seems to be deeply crystallised and stabilised, unchanged by the 2021 consultation. Overall, given the impermeability of the political allegiance of the Kanak and non-Kanak blocs of the New Caledonian population, the majority vote of one camp over the other solves nothing and looks more like a Pyrrhic victory.

***Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane*** In 2006, Carole Reynaud Paligot wrote in her book *La République raciale (1860–1930)*: "…the racial mixing of settlers and Indigenous people should create a 'tropical race', adapted to the tropical climate, and which will compensate for the inability of White people to acclimatise. [...]" (p. 57). If physically people were "colored" following such miscegenation, this was symbolic since their heads remained European. The results of the various referendums in the contemporary period have sufficiently shown resistance to changing this state of mind to create an emancipated and sovereign country.

Schooling continues to build and shape minds, giving new generations a sovereign and emancipated spirit. Knowledge gained at school should promote an emancipatory cognitive challenge for students, and not their ideological enslavement. Back in 2001, at the presentation of the new curricula for primary school education in New Caledonia, Marie-Noëlle Themereau, former New Caledonian President, declared: "In the city, the village or the community, schools should take the first step towards families. This is the indispensable mark of respect for our public service".

Almost 16 years later, the New Caledonian Educational Project voted by the parliament in January 2016 was a major institutional advance, because fundamental elements of Kanak culture were included in the curriculum. This inclusion offers a bridge of intercultural understanding and could contribute to overcoming social inequalities. However, fundamental elements of Kanak culture introduced into schooling need strengthening in the social world as well, in order to promote a change of mentalities.

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