JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU
Kanaky
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Writings translated by
Helen Fraser and John Trotter

From the original French
La Présence Kanak
Jean-Marie Tjibaou
Edited by Alban Bensa and Éric Wittersheim
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Cover: Jean-Marie Tjibaou salutes the Kanaky flag the first time it was flown for
the provisional government, 1 December 1984. Photograph: Helen Fraser.

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New Caledonia
South West Pacific Ocean
Gathered together here, as I wished it, are what Jean-Marie Tjibaou has written and what he has said in interviews. This publication is the fruit of meticulous work by Alban Bensa and Eric Wittmersheim. I thank them and with them all those who have helped and supported them in this undertaking.

My desire was to make this testimony to the respect and constancy of Jean-Marie Tjibaou available to all of us who must pursue the struggle. May this book help the others, with whom we have decided to continue the journey we have begun, to understand why we are so resolved.

Here then is the story of that man who, in his earliest childhood, left his tribal home Tiendanite to learn, to apprehend and comprehend the reality of injustice. After a short time in holy orders and studying in metropolitan France, his commitment became more urgent. He asked to be released from his vows, the better to serve his brothers. Kanak confidence had to be restored. In 1975, he succeeded in organising the Mélanesia 2000 festival, a cultural manifestation which was to be the point of departure of a whole life devoted to the political future of the country.

The Kanak had to be able to live proudly in the land of his ancestors. The world had to know that Kanaky is the homeland of the Kanaks. So he travelled, he met the media, in France and throughout the world, and focussed media attention on this remaining scrap of French empire at the end of the earth. As President of the FLNKS¹, Jean-Marie Tjibaou spoke with conviction
about what it was really like to be Kanak. He was faced with a wall of incomprehension.

Then, since words were no longer enough, the Kanak people rose up in revolt, and it was the time of the ‘events’\(^2\). The whole country was in flames. The army occupied our tribal homes and blood flowed.

The man of peace had made a promise. He kept his word. In a Kanaky in flames and awash with tears there came the mission seeking dialogue. Jean-Marie Tjibaou was throughout its main partner and he fought point by point to advance the demands of his people. The State came to acknowledge the incredible disequilibrium which existed between Nouméa the European metropolis and the bush of the country folk and the Kanaks. The status of the country had to be reviewed.

The year 1988 saw the crisis finally come to an end, with the signing of the Matignon Accords by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Jacques Lafleur and the French State.

A page was turned. A new era began. Two of the three Provinces are in the hands of the independentists. It is the step before independence.

So this volume does not seek to revive the pain we have every one of us felt. It does include some very harsh words about certain people: made in a quite specific context, they reflect the bitterness of the struggle. It is my single hope that reading this life so entirely devoted to the Kanak people and the recognition of its rights will lead us to appreciate how far we have all come and to make together the effort necessary to achieve what we have set out to build: a new, more just and more open society.

Marie-Claude Tjibaou
February 1996

1 Translators' note: usual (French) acronym for the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front. See Glossary.
2 Translators' note: the term usually used to describe the state of intermittent hostilities in New Caledonia between FLNKS supporters on the one hand and French security forces and some local opponents of the FLNKS on the other, between 1984 and 1988.
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION
Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a mind open to the universal

But politics have to do with the nature of human association, the contract of men with men. The politics of a country can only be an extension of its idea of human relationships.

VS Naipaul

Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–1989) sped like a meteor through the close of the century. Still unknown to the French five years before his death, he burst onto the international political scene and too quickly left it. His singular role in history has yet to be truly appreciated, for lack of a proper understanding of the way the situation in New Caledonia developed; for lack also of being able to go directly to the words that this representative of a small Melanesian people chose to use in addressing his contemporaries.

‘He is a man I respect, for whom words mean more than words,’ wrote François Mitterrand about the man who, in the name of the Kanak people, went head to head with the French Government. The whole world remembers this always smiling and good-natured man as a fair and capable David who emerged from his little valley of Hienghène to take on, tenaciously but with great humility, the many different Goliaths the Kanaks found blocking their path to emancipation.
Tjibaou’s voice carried all the way to France because the Kanaks took the risk of physically opposing French colonial power. Rising above the noise and turmoil of the ‘events’ that swept through New Caledonia from 1984 to 1988, his message went beyond the immediate circumstances. Among the figures of anti-colonialism, Jean-Marie Tjibaou occupies a special place, no doubt because New Caledonia came so late to the list of countries to be decolonised. Kanak independence found in him an entirely new kind of spokesman, one who sought to show the quality and wealth of Melanesian civilisation at the same time as deploiring the lot of his people.

The thinking of the man who was to become the principal representative of the Kanak people stems in part from a life story that was quite typical of the education of the elites in Oceania. Like most Melanesian, Polynesian or Papuan leaders, Jean-Marie Tjibaou moved from a Kanak childhood to contemporary political life through the churches. He was born on 30 January 1936 in Tiendanite, a small reserve in the high valley of the Hienghène River on the east coast of La Grande Terre. His first nine years passed in the state of relegation suffered by all Kanaks from the implementation of the Native Code in 1887 until its abolition in 1946. In this region of New Caledonia, which from 1840 was under the sway of the Catholic missionaries, the parish priest was for a long time the only representative of the European population with whom Kanaks could establish any relations of a positive kind. A Marist missionary, Alphonse Rouel, was thus to play a large role in Tjibaou family history: parish priest in Hienghène for fifty years, it was through him that Tjibaou’s father became one of the first Kanak school teachers. Wenceslas Tjibaou later placed the fate of his son in the hands of Alphonse Rouel, who sent him to the little seminary at Canala in 1945. There followed a long series of moves from one educational institution to another, which culminated in Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s ordination as a priest and thereafter exercising his ministry as assistant curate at the Nouméa Cathedral from 1966. He was to hold this position for less than two years, as at the end of 1967 he asked for leave of absence and was finally permitted to leave the priesthood in 1971.

For all of this period, Jean-Marie Tjibaou lived far from the Hienghène Valley, and was able to return to Tiendanite for the first
time only after ten years, by which time he had lost his native tongue. Being kept away from Kanak society for such a long time no doubt encouraged Tjibaou to return to it through ethnology, and more broadly by thinking about the future of indigenous identity in New Caledonia. On leaving the priesthood, he was all the more seized by these questions because of his shock at seeing the living conditions of the Kanaks. Parked in mostly cramped reserves, driven to the far reaches of the colony, the Melanesians then suffered all the agonies of marginalisation: poverty, alcoholism, failure at school and the deterioration of social relationships. In the years 1969 to 1972, the nickel boom, the growth of towns and work for wages and the maintenance of a policy of segregation destabilised traditional life, which had been more or less re-established in the reserves following the first shock of conquest and colonialism in the nineteenth century⁴.

Nouméa’s archbishop had turned a deaf ear to the concerns of the young priest Tjibaou so, disconcerted, he turned to the social sciences to identify the questions which needed to be asked and to find solutions. Supported by a bursary, Jean-Marie Tjibaou left for France, first to the Institut catholique de Lyon (Catholic Institute of Lyon) and then to the Ecole des hautes études (School of Higher Technical Studies) in Paris. He attended the ethnology courses run by the Oceania specialist Jean Guiart and, under the supervision of Roger Bastide, began a thesis on the problems engendered by the disintegration of the Kanak world. As a student, Tjibaou immediately opted for applied anthropology⁵: having observed the ‘alienation and resignation’ of his people, he was convinced of the need to ‘embark on a program that would allow the group to rebuild a rewarding self-image’⁶. But his research work was interrupted in 1970 by the death of his father. Back in New Caledonia, Jean-Marie Tjibaou immediately put into action what he had been thinking about by participating in various community activities. Melanesians associated with the Churches were very concerned at the time by the depressed condition of the Kanak people, and were trying to remedy it with educational and cultural initiatives. Jean-Marie Tjibaou gave an unprecedented boost to this sort of approach by organising the 1975 Mélanésia festival — a masterly first official presentation of the Kanak world.
As we shall see throughout this book, this event occupied a central place in his thinking. Mélanésia 2000 also marked the real beginning of his political career: indeed, less than two years after the festival he became mayor of Hienghène and vice-president of the Union Calédonienne — at the time when the latter opted for Kanak independence. From 1977, the pace of New Caledonia’s political history quickened and Jean-Marie Tjibaou played an increasingly important role in it. His political career was as remarkable as it was short. It ended tragically at Ouvéa on 4 May 1989. In some 15 years, what he said and did completely overturned the world’s image of Kanaks and of New Caledonia.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou wrote very little. Most of the texts brought together for this work stem from recordings of lectures or interviews given as required by the events of the time. He was in no way concerned systematically in building up a body of writing, and never, or hardly ever, bothered to go back over what he had said at the UN, in Larzac or at a FLNKS congress. Tjibaou’s constantly evolving thinking grew on the basis of his experience as a Kanak in the tribe, as a seminarian, as a student and as a militant at the head of a continually broadening movement.

Presented here in chronological order, the writings, speeches and responses of Jean-Marie Tjibaou recreate New Caledonia’s recent history for us as seen by one of its principal actors. As we read through these texts, a coherent body of thought is progressively revealed to us, one deeply imbued with the conviction that overcoming New Caledonia’s colonial situation relies as much on the transformation of Kanak society as it does on their political struggle. Having begun with ethical considerations, Jean-Marie Tjibaou comes to the conclusion that Kanak independence is a necessity, though not for all that an end in itself. ‘The most important day,’ he would say, ‘is not that of the referendum but the day after.’ It is the effort to surmount this difficulty which lends his work its internal dynamism and singular nature.

This undogmatic way of looking at present and future reality played a key role in the Caledonian ‘events’. While the Territory did indeed experience violence and clashes, they were contained within the confines of what Jean-Marie Tjibaou judged, step by step, to be
possible or not. Very harsh words denouncing colonialism coexist with a human and social ideal bridging in some way the gaps between communities.

So this book brings us the means to understand New Caledonia's journey from the barricades of 1984 to the signature four years later of the Matignon Accords. It also raises implicitly the question of whether Jean-Marie Tjibaou, despite his premature death, was able to establish the foundations of the new society he so much wished to see. In other words, is Tjibaou's thinking the record of a time that has passed or the beginning of a political and social era that is still with us?

Underlying his thinking on history, we find a philosophical meditation of a more universal kind. Rejection of the other, although at the heart of every colonial situation, never ceased to astonish Jean-Marie Tjibaou. When he came up against the everyday racism of certain priests towards Kanaks, from his first years at the seminary, he would always think about it and then condemn it as an attack on human dignity, following the path of another Melanesian priest, Apollinaire Ataba. 'The Europeans prevented us from existing,' he noted. Remaining a practising Christian throughout his life, Tjibaou was nonetheless deeply disappointed by the failure of the Catholic Church to condemn clearly the injustice suffered by Kanaks since the advent of colonisation. 'I don't regret experiencing it from the inside, but I felt that what I could do served no purpose.'

At the time, the single positive image of Kanak civilisation had been developed by Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954). Jean-Marie Tjibaou drew from the work of this Protestant missionary turned ethnologist the elements of a syncretic concept of Melanesian personality and society. For the budding militant, it was not a matter of studying the Kanak traditional world as such, but rather of finding 'analytical tools' that would help understand and overcome the despair of his people. Jean-Marie Tjibaou started from the somewhat detached view that the Kanaks 'come from elsewhere'. He measured the gap separating them from Westerners: their concepts of the world attest to an otherness he was rightly reluctant to consider immeasurable. At times, he pays tribute to the 'distinctive carapace'
formed by Melanesian points of reference; at others, he compares it
to the basic structure of the old rural societies of the West. The
connection with the land, the ‘creating word’ and genealogical
memory seemed to Tjibaou to constitute a cultural base common to
the Kanaks and the descendants of Abraham. By drawing out what
the two had in common, he intended to build an accessible image of
the Kanak person and of his universe.

In taking further the Leenhardt and Bastide investigation of the
notion of the person, he sought to penetrate the key elements of
Kanak individuality. He argued in terms of ‘identification patterns’
and self-awareness to describe the way Kanaks live in the world. He
attributes less significance to social structures than to the experience
of ancestors, custom ceremonies, space and time available to each
individual. He proceeds as much by introspection as by close obser­
vation of Kanak practices; whether they reflect traditional institutions
or colonial domination, he always considers them in their historical
dimension in order to understand the new situations brought about
by social changes both ancient and contemporary.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou's goal is more practical than theoretical. For
him, it was above all a matter of restoring pride to the colonised;
their renaissance would come through a new appreciation of their
original civilisation, both in their own eyes and in those of the
Whites. His analysis of the effects of ‘cultural alienation’ was bitter;
shame, disorientation and difficulty imagining the future brought
about a real crisis of identity. Colonialism, he emphasised, renders
the colonised strangers to themselves, and reduces Kanaks to
anonymity. How were they to find the way back to dignity? Very
close on this point to the thinking of Albert Memmi, although he
probably did not know Memmi's work, Jean-Marie Tjibaou was not
satisfied with a formal denunciation of colonialism. Faithful to a
realism he never abandoned, he tried to assess the consequences of
the fait colonial, as if the better to lay the foundations of an effect­
tive and credible Kanak renewal.

His ethnology, influenced by the circumstances in which it was
developed, was supported by a moral plan which Jean-Marie Tjibaou
was to put into effect through resolute political action. The future
president of the FLNKS, convinced that the way to independence was
through an overhaul of tradition and its image\textsuperscript{13}, was to give a cultural dimension to its struggle. At the core of his thinking is the project of man solidly rooted in his heritage and at the same time looking to the future. But for Tjibaou principle was not enough; his political ideas were developing, always expressed with reference to particular circumstances. A skilful and pragmatic politician, he would use the least circumstance to draw out a deeper meaning, displaying a singular skill in pointing out the repercussions of the least event. Cleaving thereby to a very Kanak way of expressing himself, he would rely on specific cases to produce the right image in a humorous way, and brought an exceptional freshness of tone into the political debate.

His writings and statements as events occurred attest to his capacity to adapt to different interlocutors. As if he wanted to make the most of any situation, even one which seemed to be very unfavourable, Tjibaou would get inside what his interlocutor was saying and suddenly, sometimes through a simple quip, bring out the underlying intention. We see him thus taking several different approaches at the same time, from the most conciliatory to the most determined, with the ultimate aim of doing whatever was necessary to defend Kanak dignity and legitimacy. He took note of the balance of forces and used the weapon which allows you never to admit defeat — time. Tjibaou conceded from time to time, but he never conceded defeat. In his eyes, recognition of the rights of his people was always the absolute priority. In his view, a proclamation of sovereignty, as a pledge of accession to independence, was necessary if the newly rediscovered pride in being Kanak was to be effective.

In keeping with the very relational Kanak concept of power, Tjibaou saw the independence of the South Pacific micro-states as being more about ‘managing interdependence’ than about brash assertion of pure nationalism\textsuperscript{14}. When he was called to run New Caledonian affairs (1982–1984) and then one of the independentist Regions (1985–1986), there was no sign of the doctrinaire in Jean-Marie Tjibaou. He would feel his way among economic projects of very different kinds; here favouring small farming and ‘Made in Kanaky’ craft industry, there large-scale capitalist operations like the creation of a free port or taking over the mining industry. Seeking a social and economic solution appropriate for New Caledonia’s very
particular situation, Tjibaou sought out contacts everywhere — from the CNPF to the CGT and Swiss bankers to boot — without excluding anyone. He took the same approach to possible political supporters, accepting tributes from countries not aligned to the struggle of the Kanak people at the same time as discreetly seeking the support of the Pope. Tjibaou worked in this way to broaden as much as he could the number of connections that could help achieve his political goals.

The texts brought together in this volume demonstrate how much the Church, the social sciences and above all the contemporary history of New Caledonia influenced the thinking of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. As well, his thought is rooted in reflection on the Kanak experience of the West and of colonialism.

By trying to export their technological and political models, the Europeans revealed their strengths and also their weaknesses. The colonised, at one and the same time marginalised by and sucked into modernisation, are in the best position, willy-nilly, to criticise the perverse effects of progress. Jean-Marie Tjibaou used this situation to aim some sharp critiques at the West. Does the European way of life stem from a true art of living? Don't Kanaks have something to say and to contribute on this subject? Coming from a micro-society founded on closely woven personal inter-relationships, he wondered how to construct psychologically satisfying social environments in the framework of a world civilisation. Can the small not usefully address the large, the islander the continental, the local the universal? Tjibaou possessed a sharp awareness of the primary contradiction between the specific and the general: how can the Kanaks, the product of a very specific history, contribute to the cultural enrichment of humanity? 'While,' he says, 'I can today share what I possess of French culture with a non-Kanak from this country, it is impossible for him to share with me what is universal in my culture.'

The malaise of the time did not lead Tjibaou to advocate withdrawal. He was indeed very categorical on this point when, in seeking a new, positive image for the Kanak, he asserted: 'Our identity is before us.' The experience of colonialism became for him the crucible of greater lucidity. Jean-Marie Tjibaou transcends the
situation of Kanaks in broader, but also more disquieted, thinking about the future of all his contemporaries. His work attests to the particularly acute perspective which is often the privilege of the colonised and the exiled. Colonialism constrains its victims to reflect on what freedom means, to reflect on the meaning of freedom with difference.

_{Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim}^{15}
3 Translators’ note: the main island of New Caledonia.
12 Translators’ note: terms left in French and terms in Kanak languages not explained within the text are explained in the Glossary.
15 Editors of *La Présence Kanak*, the original French edition of interviews with and speeches by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim are French ethnographers and anthropologists with long-standing interests in New Caledonia and Kanak independence.
TRANSLATORS’ INTRODUCTION

The decolonisation process that swept through the South Pacific in the 1960s and 1970s left New Caledonia behind. Granted the right to vote only in 1952, Kanak leaders four years later opted to stay within the French system, lured by the promise that ‘autonomy was the ante-chamber to independence’, rather than vote for an independence that they had been warned would be without adequate backing from France. By the time independence was firmly on the agenda, the Kanak people had been outnumbered in their own country by large-scale immigration, deliberately encouraged by France as a matter of policy to swamp the growing nationalist movement.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s preoccupation had always been the welfare of his people. He moved from the priesthood to public service, entering full-time political life in 1977. He quickly rose to become leader of Union Calédonienne (UC), which had moved from moderate demands to a platform of Kanak independence by 1979, and which was the largest party in the five-member Front indépendantiste.

Tjibaou’s political skills were such that he was unequalled as a negotiator with successive French Governments, and unequalled too in his ability to unite the Kanak people. After the French Socialist Government failed to fulfil its independence commitment, Tjibaou led Kanaks in a violent campaign of disruption and militancy, eventually securing the division of New Caledonia into largely...
autonomous regions. When this was overturned by a new conservative government in France and the regions discarded, Tjibaou again led a militant campaign in 1988 that, after traumatic loss of life, resulted in the Matignon Accords.

On the eve of the close of the mourning period for the 19 Kanak militants killed by France in the 1988 conflict, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and his deputy Yeiwéné Yeiwéné were assassinated by Djubelly Wéa, a former pastor disturbed by what he saw as an unacceptable peace accord.

Tjibaou's legacy is not just unrivalled leadership of the Kanak people. As an intellectual with degrees in sociology, he leaves us a body of work that covers ethnology, development, Kanak culture and spirituality, as well as political analysis.

What I would like to be able to give you our readers is a portrait of the Tjibaou I came to know well, both professionally and as a friend, during my years in New Caledonia and later after my return to Australia, to try to help you hear the voice that is in these pages, the optimism, the frustration, the despair, the pride — so that the texts which follow might convey more than text.

Charismatic, engaging, warm, charming, humorous — these are the adjectives most commonly used to describe Tjibaou. Inspiring is also a word I would use, since throughout New Caledonia, France and the Pacific region his impact remains strong.

Charisma and strength of character were much in evidence on the day the largest Kanak demonstration ever seen in Nouméa came to the brink of conflict with an unscheduled demonstration of over 25,000 Caldoches. As many Caldoches tried to provoke conflict with racist insults and as riot police struggled to keep the two groups apart, it was the force of Tjibaou’s leadership that averted bloodshed.

‘Turn your backs on them, turn your backs on them,’ he shouted, with an anger I had never heard before, so white-hot that it made his voice tremble. What doesn’t come out in the text of the speech he went on to make is the scale of the task before him. Amid the chaos, the noise of helicopters, the threats and insults being hurled across the short no-man’s-land, with cordons of riot police and their armoured personnel carriers nervously trying to keep the groups apart, Tjibaou’s words were not only heard but heeded, and words
can’t adequately describe the drama, as the Kanak crowd — many of whom were very keen to fight — slowly, and noiselessly, turned their backs on the provocateurs and listened.

What he tells them is that this scenario has been played out many times before, in Algeria, Vietnam, Vanuatu, that millions of Whites could be demonstrating opposite, the French could send as many troops, tanks and helicopters as they liked, and they would not stop independence, because Kanaks are the legitimate people of New Caledonia.

This strength of Tjibaou’s character was in evidence again after the massacre of ten Kanak men — including two of Tjibaou’s brothers — a massacre by settlers that was aimed at destroying the agreement made that day, 4 December 1984, between Tjibaou and the new French envoy, Edgard Pisani. Tjibaou had secured the release of 17 Kanak prisoners and in return had agreed to dismantle the many roadblocks manned by militants throughout the countryside, and to release hostages that had been taken on Lifou Island.

For three weeks since the FLNKS had violently disrupted the 18 November elections that France scheduled to usher in an autonomy plan, New Caledonia had been traumatised by conflict. The Pisani/Tjibaou agreement, once implemented, would allow a climate for negotiations. The massacred men were returning home from a meeting in Hienghène on whether to accede to the terms of the agreement. It had been extremely difficult for Tjibaou to convince militants to halt the roadblocks, and the massacre was specifically aimed at provoking the FLNKS into full-on violent retaliation. It was a tribute to his extraordinary integrity and statesmanship that he was able to prevail within the movement and to keep to the terms of the truce, a gesture that won Tjibaou international acclaim.

Tjibaou, a father of five, loved children. I have never seen him in a situation where children were present that he did not seek out the children, if only briefly, but always before attending to the adults present. Over my time in New Caledonia, or at least the quieter times, Tjibaou played a game of giving a titbit of news about his political movements during chance encounters in Nouméa with my son Christopher, knowing that I would ring for the story once Christopher had passed on the bait.
Over the years I had the privilege of interpreting for Tjibaou, a task that was to teach me a lot about his warmth, his patterns of thought and ways of relating to people, and also about his sense of humour. The immediate world of the Kanak village features strongly in his speech, the land and its features such as mountains, rocks and rivers, the sea, birds, the sky and its weather, all of which would often be used to give very poetic answers to what were often straightforward questions. As I started translating, I would frequently wonder where this was taking us, for it seemed Tjibaou had set off on a leisurely promenade through a forest, along a beach or up over a mountain. But always he would bring his interlocutor back to the starting point, presenting the actual reply almost as a gift at the end of the shared walk.

Silence was important too. Once during a discussion about different cultures, Tjibaou told me that Westerners ‘were always rushing to fill silences’. He needed silence at times of tension and I learned from a mutual friend that at some of the tensest times Tjibaou would ask to be driven out into the bush near his Nouméa home, where he would just sit in the car, with the windows wound down.

Tjibaou was at first hesitant and embarrassed when I wanted to write a feature article about his life. As I began with questions about his childhood, he stopped, asking was this a psychological examination? I had the impression he was not used to talking about himself, for it was only after an hour or so that he started to enjoy the discussion, almost as though these were areas on which he had not much reflected. One discovery I made attending Mass during a visit chez Tjibaou at Hienghène was that he had the most beautiful singing voice that I had heard in New Caledonia.

When he was at home in Hienghène he liked to write music and play the piano until well into the night. ‘It’s my little pleasure,’ he told me, adding that he also enjoyed fishing and found relaxation in feeding his ducks and pigeons. ‘And one dreams when one looks at the sea. I really like diving for fish, because I feel at peace, or when I work in the fields.’

The Caldoches were a people that Tjibaou felt sorry for. He saw them as people lacking a cultural identity — that they were rejected by France and could never be at home there and were seeking to
forge an identity in New Caledonia, yet spurning the identity New Caledonia already had; and in rejecting the Kanaks, as they reject the metropolitan French, they end up, in his words, an impoverished people without a culture. Nature, and the way that Kanak life was so immersed in it, was crucial in Tjibaou’s life. His village of Tiendanite lies deep in the Tiendanite Valley near Hienghène. The surrounding mountainsides enfold the small tribe of only 120 people, which was not reached by road until the 1950s. Now the road follows the river down to the coast. Tjibaou told me his strongest influence to take up the fight against colonialism was not so much the traumas of the many Tiendanite people killed in uprisings against the French — including his grandmother, shot by French troops as she tried to flee with his father, then a baby, on her back — but more the stories of hardship caused by the Native Code, enforced until 1946, which banned free movement by Kanaks and extracted a head tax to be paid by the chief even when there was no money. Tribes began to die as there was nothing left to eat, since villagers were too busy working for the Administration, so that yam fields and food gardens turned to weeds.

The impact of colonialism on Kanak culture and its fracturing effects on Kanak identity became a principal concern for the young Tjibaou, leading him to train as a Catholic priest and to complete sociology degrees in France. A formative influence was French ethnologist Roger Bastide, whose work examined societal illnesses caused by domination of one society by another. It was with a view to best serving his people that Tjibaou left the priesthood. Taking a stand for Kanak emancipation did not sit well with a Church whose hierarchy was then outspoken in its anti-independence stand.

As I came to know Tjibaou in early 1982, his mood of optimism and excitement was striking; optimism that the 1981 French Socialist victory would put Kanaks on a clear path to independence, and excitement at the economic and social development that his leadership of the New Caledonian executive would bring.

Support for Kanak independence was a part of the French Socialist Party election platform, and conditions in New Caledonia were never better than in 1982 for decisive action to put independence on the map. Welcome or not, New Caledonians expected action on the issue.
Optimism was behind Tjibaou’s decision to depart from treating 24 September, the anniversary of French possession, as a day of mourning for Kanaks, and replace it with a festival to celebrate Kanak culture. The day of festivities, in the heart of the White city of Nouméa, was an attempt to reassure non-Kanaks, to draw them into understanding Kanak identity as the heart of New Caledonia. Tjibaou was animated, excited, supervising the construction of a full size Kanak case in Nouméa’s Place des Cocotiers.

I imagine this was some of the excitement and enthusiasm he would have felt when he staged the highly acclaimed Mélanésia 2000 festival in 1975, which had the twin goals of demonstrating the strength and wealth of Kanak culture to Kanaks themselves and introducing it to Europeans. Although 12,000 people attended the 1982 festivities, few were White, leaders of the Right going so far as to warn their supporters against attending.

Tjibaou set to work, patiently explaining in lengthy television programs that Kanak independence did not mean excluding others, rather that Kanaks had to be sovereign before they could welcome other races to belong to an independent nation. He reached out in other media too, displaying his excitement at the prospective economic development of the Territory, trying to enlist the support of farmers, businessmen, of all who had an interest in seeing a stable, secure New Caledonia.

But within a year, I could see the optimism was almost gone. While right from his first visit to Paris Tjibaou had received private guarantees of support from French leaders such as François Mitterrand, by 1983 he was saying that he was sick of double-talk from these same leaders, sick of not receiving a clear response to appeals for France to say what the political future was going to be for the Territory.

For the first time, I saw Tjibaou tired and full of despair. This was in 1983, after he had visited Algeria on his return from the Socialist International meeting in Lisbon. The Algerian visit made a deep impression. He told me what affected him most was seeing not only all the places where people had been killed but also grasping the strength that Algerians had found to fight oppression. He had returned to Nouméa troubled by the advice of the mujahidin, to the
effect that the French could never be trusted, that their word was never kept, that they respected only violence.

It was not only Tjibaou and the Kanaks who had lost patience with the French Government over its failure to announce a political future for New Caledonia. Jacques Roynette, France’s High Commissioner to Nouméa, flew back to Paris in 1983 to try to ascertain the intentions of his Government. On the ground, the independence movement announced it was giving up its policy of working for change within the institutions, and would resume demonstrations and other militant activity.

The institutional path, in particular the experience of running the Governing Council, had failed. Indeed, while French High Commissioners acknowledged to me privately that New Caledonia had never before had such competent economic management as under Tjibaou’s Council, the reality was that the experiment of cooperating with the Centrists had failed. Popular support for the Centrists was almost non-existent, and now the country appeared badly polarised.

The advent to power of the Socialist Party in Paris had not brought the promised progress towards independence, but instead a series of economic, social, cultural and judicial reforms. While intrinsically worthy, the reforms were too little, too late. As Tjibaou told me, ‘the trouble was they gave us reforms when we were no longer waiting for them.’

Looking back, you could say that communication between the French Government and Kanak leaders must have been flimsy, at best, for when the Socialists were elected in 1981, Tjibaou’s Union Calédonienne party had ‘Top 82’ as its principal slogan — this meant their aim was independence, or a clear path to it, by 1982. By the end of 1982, the slogan had become ‘Top 84’.

By 1983, France had appointed not only a new High Commissioner but also a new Minister for Overseas Territories. Whereas Henri Emmannuelli, the outgoing Minister, had built a rapport with independence leaders and had insisted the political future could not be determined until the reforms were in place, the approach of Georges Lemoine appeared to be one of ‘back to the drawing board’. In July 1983, he gathered leaders of the
independence movement and the anti-independence RPCR party at Nainville-les-Roches in France for negotiations.

The outcome of this round table meeting was that France, in what was billed as a historic gesture, recognised ‘the innate and active right to independence of the Kanak people’, while the Kanak leaders acknowledged New Caledonia’s long-standing settler communities as ‘victims of history’, with the right to participate in a vote of self-determination not accorded to more recent arrivals.

When Tjibaou and the other independence leaders returned to Nouméa, I was saddened to hear their behind the scenes stories of the meeting. They told of the few Kanak members of the RPCR being isolated by their European colleagues when the work sessions were over for the day, and of their subsequent adoption by the Independence Front, with the remaining evenings spent together. And in a perhaps not unrelated development, RPCR leader Jacques Lafleur refused to sign the final communiqué, fearing the electoral consequences.

But the months that followed revealed that whereas France was prepared to recognise the innate right to independence of Kanaks, it was not prepared to provide them with the means to exercise this right. France kept New Caledonia waiting for a further 12 months, when Lemoine unveiled his much awaited plan, for a statute of autonomy that was to last five years before an act of self-determination. It was rejected by the independence movement, which vowed to boycott and disrupt the elections that were to usher in the statute, and which now reconstituted itself as a Liberation Front. Tactics used against the French in Vietnam, Algeria and Vanuatu were studied by the new FLNKS, and it was in this context that I observed a side of Tjibaou that was new to me.

Addressing a meeting of his party, Tjibaou was furious. He explained to the 100 or so present that the French Parliament had passed the bill for the statute, ignoring the amendments put by Roch Pidjot, the grandfather of the independence movement and a long-serving member for New Caledonia in the French National Assembly. The elections had to be prevented from taking place, Tjibaou said: the Government had to accept that the days of discussing autonomy were well in the past. As he recounted these recent political devel-
opments and explained that sacrifices from rank and file supporters would be called for, Tjibaou grew angrier.

‘Are you ready for this militant disruption?’ he shouted to the crowd, which roared back its assent.

‘Are you ready to take to the maquis?’ The returning roar was louder.

‘Are you ready to cut the ears off traitors?’ Again the crowd roared approval.

I had been invited to this meeting by Eloi Machoro, the UC Secretary General who was seen as the hard-line firebrand, while Tjibaou was seen as the moderate. Now it was apparent to me that both men were at the same point on the political spectrum, but so skilled an operator was Tjibaou that he had managed to hide this from the French, and Lemoine in particular. Believing that Tjibaou’s moderation would prevail, French preparation for the disruption of the elections would prove to be inadequate.

Anger had pushed Tjibaou to this point, anger that France was offering Kanaks something they had long moved on from. After all, it was the old man, Roch Pidjot, who had founded the autonomist predecessor of UC, back in the 1950s.

‘To accept autonomy is to walk on the graves of our ancestors,’ Tjibaou was to say on several occasions, but clearly France was not listening. Tjibaou’s anger was also founded on the fact that the day the French Parliament voted on the statute, only a handful of deputies were in the chamber. And he was clearly disgusted by the fact that Pidjot’s amendments had been tossed aside with barely a glance. Tjibaou felt this insult to the elder more keenly than if he had suffered it himself.

For the next three months, Tjibaou allowed Lemoine and his Cabinet colleagues to go on believing he had not wavered from his position as a moderate who, with his many followers, would reject the radical tactics of Eloi Machoro.

(The only possible fracture of this subterfuge was the feature article I wrote after hearing Tjibaou’s angry speech to the party meeting. Astonished at the hardening of Tjibaou’s position, I had asked his permission to report the meeting. It was only later that I realised he had been distracted when he gave it. My story warned of
the changed circumstances and received a lot of coverage in New Caledonia, where the Nouméa media concluded that it was baseless; Tjibaou phoned to tell me apologetically that I would have to wait several months for vindication, for he was not going to confirm the veracity of my article publicly.)

The French Government went on to underestimate the strength of the Kanak protest against the Lemoine statute woefully. In the months before the November 18 elections Minister Lemoine was snubbed completely by FLNKS leaders on his visits to New Caledonia, yet he persisted in the line that Kanaks had fought so hard for the right to vote they would not throw it away for a boycott. Kanaks were Christians, he insisted, opposed to violence.

Tjibaou and the FLNKS were very successful in taking the French Government by surprise and disrupting the elections. The militancy was kept to what was termed the ‘second phase’, the first having been the phase of working within the institutions, which had been tried and found wanting. Second was militancy and violence, but without the use of firepower — tactics such as roadblocks, hostage taking, disruption.

The responsibility and loneliness of leadership weighed heavily on Tjibaou. The trauma and conflict that prevailed in late 1984 and early 1985, would, if it had continued, have no doubt led to a dramatic decrease in the non-Kanak population. This would have solved the need for electoral reform before any act of self-determination. Tjibaou was under huge pressure to retaliate after the Hienghène massacre, and again after the assassination of Eloi Machoro by French troops on 12 January, 1985. Indeed, both occasions took all his strength as leader to convince the more hardline sections of the FLNKS that the path was not violence, but a return to the negotiating table.

Three years later, I broached this subject with Tjibaou — there were questions I had wanted to ask all that time, but had not through fear of causing pain. Finally, I did put it to him that if the conflict had been allowed to last the gains might have been greater for Kanaks.

He was silent for a time before replying: ‘We could have won more, just as we could have suffered more massacres. We’ll never know. We cannot judge the hypothetical. The choice has always
been to avoid massacres,’ he replied. For ‘the choice’, what he meant was ‘my choice’. Early on in the conflict of 84–85, a young Kanak, Michael Douilo, was killed. It was clear when I met Tjibaou the following day that this, the first death under his leadership, troubled him greatly. Perhaps he was reminded of the huge numbers of dead suffered by the Algerians which had so affected him when he visited Algeria.

The first period of conflict had resulted in the Fabius/Pisani plan, a division of the Territory into largely autonomous regions as a transition towards independence. The FLNKS won three of the four regions and Tjibaou’s optimism returned. Here, he said, he was leading the green revolution, building economic independence at the grass roots first.

Another testimony to his skills in leadership was the way Tjibaou drew the Palika party into working with him in the Kanak regions. Palika had until the conflict of 1984 remained outside the mainstream independence movement, refusing to take part in the institutions. Once the boycott and disruption of the Lemoine statute was adopted, Palika joined forces, and became a full member of the FLNKS. It was a party whose membership comprised a large number of talented university graduates, and Tjibaou’s leadership extended beyond the habitual parochialism of UC, with one of Palika’s leaders, Paul Néaoutyne, recruited as his chief of staff in the Northern region.

The election of the French Right in 1986 under Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister and the appointment of Bernard Pons as Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOM) brought a political reversal for Kanaks. Not only was the regional division to be scrapped, it was to be replaced with a statute of autonomy and a gerrymander that favoured the Caldoches. The Pons plan gave Kanaks control of the underdeveloped, poorer areas, while the great bulk of the Territory’s resources and wealth would be controlled by Europeans. Again Tjibaou had to make the decision that the ancestors’ graves would not be walked over, but this time he knew there would be much greater trauma than four years previously. Even before FLNKS local committees took action to disrupt the 1988 election, the Chirac Government had over-run New Caledonia with troops in a bid to intimidate and contain the Kanaks.
During the election boycott, four gendarmes were killed by Ouvéa militants during an attempt to capture the gendarme station on the island of Ouvéa; the militants then took 26 gendarmes hostage and retreated to deep caves. The crisis was brought to an end by the storming of the cave by French troops, under orders from Chirac not to negotiate. The ‘resolution’ was widely seen as a cynical, but unsuccessful, ploy by Chirac to win voter support for his bid for the French presidency. Nineteen Kanaks were killed, three of them executed in cold blood by the French troops.

Negotiated by Michel Rocard, the new French Prime Minister, the Matignon Accords gave New Caledonia a ten-year peace plan during which extraordinary measures would be taken to ‘rebalance’ the Territory, to reduce the disparity in economic well-being of the two communities, to provide intensive education and training programs for Kanaks.

At first, I was shocked that Tjibaou signed the Accord, but conversations with him — both while he was still in Paris and then in Nouméa — revealed the devastating sense of responsibility he felt as leader for the Kanak deaths. He saw the choice before him as a stark one — either war with France, for which Kanaks were extremely ill-equipped, or signature of an agreement. Another major incentive was to gain the release of the 90 odd Kanak prisoners in France. While ten years was a long time to postpone a goal that had at times seemed very close, Tjibaou felt it was worth it, with France’s commitment to electoral reform and to a genuine effort to bring the underdeveloped, mostly Kanak populated interior and islands, closer to the wealthy, resource rich, European south.

But when I saw him two weeks before he died, Tjibaou was again beaming with optimism and I understood the appeal of the Matignon Accords for him. The ten-year period was described as a challenge for the FLNKS and Jacques Lafleur’s RPCR to use to win support before the vote on independence. Tjibaou was confident it was a challenge he would win. With ten years, it was not hard to imagine that many opponents, especially those in rural areas, would be enticed by the development ideas of the FLNKS. Lafleur’s tactics of fear and platform of rigid adherence to the status quo would not be enough for the RPCR. Tjibaou was very excited and impatient to
get on with the task of governing (in his case it was going to be the Northern Province), to meet the technicians, farmers, entrepreneurs. It was easy to understand his confidence. During this last meeting, he introduced me to his previous appointment, a Caldoche keen to establish a venison meatworks in the province.

The classes of people in the Territory were changing, Tjibaou told me: there were those for independence, those against, and those saying ‘why not?’ and it was this last group that was growing. Tjibaou was a leader with ideas, with visions that were contagious, and confidence that he could win enough support from other communities to carry them through.

_**Helen Fraser**_

An award-winning foreign correspondent in New Caledonia in the turbulent 1980s, Helen Fraser was also a friend of and interpreter for Jean-Marie Tjibaou. A former editor of *Pacific Report* and *Pacific Islands Monthly*, she continues her scholarly involvement in Pacific affairs. She is the author of *Your Flag is Blocking Our Sun* (ABC Books 1990).
The Tjibaou papers translated in this volume are of many different kinds: formal, informal (even casual), academic, poetic. As the original editors said in their Avertissement, the texts brought together in this volume are drawn from already published writings and statements (often difficult to access) as well as recordings and public and private archives, and from among the innumerable interviews given by Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Thus, while they demonstrate ‘a very great coherence of thought, to the point that many texts take up the same themes’, they differ widely in language and tone, according to the circumstance and emotion of the moment. That context is briefly provided in the short introduction to each chapter, which we have translated as written, without modification.

Each text has a different sound. We have sought to preserve that sound, as well, of course, as the closest possible verbal accuracy, and thereby to recreate in English the way Jean-Marie Tjibaou presented himself in French to the widely varying audiences he had to address or which, occasionally, sought him out.

Our collaboration was of an uncomplicated kind. We are not professional academics: one a journalist, the other a retired diplomat; we make no pretence of academic rigour, because we don’t know how to do it. What we have is goodwill and a desire to make this man better known in the broader Oceanian world. We divided the book into two roughly equal halves, which had the incidental effect of putting most of the culturally oriented material in my hands, and the more directly political into Helen’s. In the process of examining and discussing each other’s drafts, we had the great advantage of Helen’s feel for how Jean-Marie Tjibaou intended to be heard, especially in the interviews and other ‘live’ pieces, flowing from her having known the man and his family and associates on the ground and over several years. My own more distant, policy-oriented involvement in the history of New Caledonia over this period permitted a flintier approach, taking the lead from the texts themselves and historical rather personal familiarity with the background from which they emerged.

We have translated everything bearing Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s imprint, with the exception of the interview with Sarah Walls in Chapter 32, where we have substituted the original English text.
rather than translate back the rather free text used in the Bensa/Wittersheim edition. We have included Marie-Claude Tjibaou's preface, but have taken advantage of the leave to vary the content generously granted us by Alban Bensa to omit the Avertissement and to supplement the Bensa/Wittersheim introduction with the present translators' introduction. We have used that same leave to omit the Aimé Césaire text. Square brackets in the text indicate material interpolated by the original editors.

We have expanded the Chronology as well as translating it, for the benefit of English speaking readers who might be unfamiliar with some aspects of the history of New Caledonia, and, in the background and influencing when not determining events in New Caledonia, the history of France over the same period. We have not extended the Chronology beyond the period covered by the original editors, other than to include reference to the Nouméa Accord of 1998. For more obvious reasons, we have introduced a Glossary, intended to explain French and Kanak terms which are not specifically explained in the text, or in a few cases, to provide further explanation.

Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim concluded their Avertissement with a plea for the work of gathering together the documents recording the thinking of Jean-Marie Tjibaou to continue, and we renew that plea to the wider audience to which we hope our labours in producing this translation will bring this remarkable South Pacific leader closer.

*John Trotter*

*A former Principal Adviser on the South Pacific in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and diplomatic representative in the South Pacific, John Trotter is now a translator from French and other European languages.*
Dear reader, dear friend

Kanaky welcomes you and thanks you for coming and looking upon the landscape this book offers to your gaze: a sacred landscape, like a cemetery at Verdun or elsewhere with the thousands of crosses, so many epitaphs which truly live only for the people for whom such traces are memory and history and a step on the way to their future.

For you, the passer-by, perhaps these texts will be inspiring, but they could equally be totally flat. Bear in mind nonetheless that they are the indelible tracks of our people’s groping but irreversible march towards independence.

For you, the sympathiser: read these pages carefully; they will at times provide some keys to sharing the way we Kanaks think about our demand for freedom.

For you, the militant, these unpretentious pages are precious. They are dried marrow, like the sacred relics of our ancestors. Reading them, remember our endless debates, our failures of understanding, our suspicion of each other … Remember our brothers in the struggle who abandoned us during this trek for less arid fields … Remember the clashes and the looks of hatred these texts have provoked among your kin … Remember the comrades who have fallen and who have sealed with their blood what the FLNKS has committed itself to in word and deed.

Re-read these pages and think about the distance we have come.

Re-read them because, whereas the colonial endeavour has been to make our people lose their identity by alienating them from their history and expunging the evidence of it, this little book will have its place in the creation of the written memory which will allow the new people of Kanaky to know about themselves and to create for themselves a self-image which is deeply rooted but new, satisfying and heroic.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou

1 Editors’ note: this text was written by Jean-Marie Tjibaou as a preface for a compilation of the charter and the resolutions of the congresses of the FLNKS (Nouméa, Edipop, 1987).
JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU’S main concern when he first appeared on the public scene was to make Kanak culture known and recognised by a White world more or less ignorant of what it means to be Melanesian. It needs to be borne in mind that these initiatives, of which the Mélanésia 2000 festival was to be the high point, were developed in an increasingly tense political context. The recession which followed the nickel boom (1969–1972), the repercussions of the events of May 1968 and more generally the decolonisation process completed or under way around the world highlighted the contradictions, paradoxes and delays which marked the situation of the Kanaks in New Caledonia. The first Kanak students, on their return from metropolitan France, openly demanded independence. The years 1974–1976 were marked by increasing protests against the French presence and consequently by heavier repression: arrests of numerous militants, police violence (the death of Richard Kamouda on 27 December 1975), the first congress of Palika (Kanak Liberation Party) in May 1976, etc., while Papua New Guinea acceded to independence on 16 September 1975.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s strictly ‘cultural’ approach, which attracted little support, and was indeed condemned by the Kanak leaders, contrasted sharply with the growing political agitation of this period.
This way of responding to political crises by thinking more deeply about how Kanak identity was to develop was to remain one of the most original aspects of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s work and thought. The interview and the two texts of this first part give a central place to the Kanak heritage and to its destiny in the modern world. As a cultural worker, as an ethnologist and as a politician putting his first arguments together, Jean-Marie Tjibaou here examines the conditions under which Kanak dignity, faced with colonial scorn and the demands of modern life, might be reaffirmed and find new points of reference.
CHAPTER 1
Why a Melanesian Festival?

To prepare for the Mélanésia 2000 festival, a dossier entitled ‘Mélanésia 2000, a festival of Melanesian life’ had been put together in the spring of 1974. In a foreword, Jean-Marie Tjibaou sets out his view of the meaning of the project and the end purpose which it should serve. As well as anxiety about the future of Kanak culture, he expresses alarm about New Caledonia’s political destiny: ‘Denigration by indifference and the absence of cultural dialogue can lead only to suicide or revolt.’

THIS FESTIVAL IS profoundly motivated by faith in the possibility of establishing a deeper and more sustained dialogue between European culture and indigenous culture.

Indeed, le Caillou has colour and flavour only to the extent that the original culture of the country is accepted and assimilated. And I allow myself the dream that in the year 2000, the cultural profile of the New Caledonian will include elements of European as well as Melanesian culture. But for this symbiosis to come about, the pre-condition is recognition by each culture of what is specific to each. Without this basis, standing back to back, we shall continue our dialogue of the deaf.

Objectives of a Festival of Melanesian Life
Towards a new dialogue
Beyond the Melanesian festival, we look ahead to a great manifestation of New Caledonian cultural life in 1980. I see it as an
immense celebration of culture, a festival where all the communities of this Territory would put their heritage before the New Caledonian public, a unique endowment, to be recognised and accepted with pride. It is indeed from this encounter that a new Caledonian culture could be born.

But to achieve these aims, we must prepare. The Melanesians, above all, must rediscover their pride in a cultural personality which the historical circumstances of settlement have led them to deny in favour of a set of new values which today they find wanting.

**Kanak culture today**

The second purpose of the festival is on the one hand to make an inventory of the ‘cultural material’ which the Melanesians of New Caledonia currently possess, and on the other to define the philosophy of the indigenous way of life. In other words, this inventory should answer the following questions:

- What is the situation of Kanak culture today?
- What message does this contain?

**Rediscovering identity: precondition for the future**

The third objective of the festival is to permit Kanaks to portray themselves to themselves in such a way as to rediscover what their identity is in 1975. As well, the festival can help Kanaks to recover confidence in themselves and greater dignity and pride in a cultural heritage which is part of the experience and the wealth of humanity.

This reawakening is important for disconnecting Melanesians psychologically from their inferiority complex, which arises in large part from the cultural insignificance to which they have found themselves reduced (the traditional slogans were ‘Kanaks, convert! Become civilised!’).

One of the consequences has been personal feelings of shame and self-contempt, which they drown in alcohol.

In the name of Faith and ‘Civilisation’, Kanaks have had to deny their own personality. Today, because circumstances have changed, they must declare their right to be and to exist culturally in New Caledonia.
Why a Melanesian Festival?

I venture to write that down, because I am convinced that we have taken the wrong path, and that the glory of Faith and the honour of ‘Civilisation’ would be to invite the Kanaks to come to the banquet of civilisations, not as deculturated beggars but as a free people. And Kanak participation can take only one form: affirmation of their personality through rediscovering that it is possible to express themselves in their own cultural terms.

Towards a cultural dialogue

Finally, the festival should permit the Europeans as well as the ethnic minorities in the Territory to see, to know and perhaps to acknowledge the culture of the indigenous people. It is this, in fact, because it is indigenous, which can give the country’s culture a truly New Caledonian ‘colour’ and flavour. But to exist fully, Kanak culture, like the whole Kanak world, fundamentally needs this recognition by the world around it. It is vital. Denigration by indifference and the absence of cultural dialogue can lead only to suicide or revolt.

I have faith that this festival will take place. I note, in fact, that among New Caledonian and metropolitan French there is a line of thought which sincerely acknowledges that the promotion of indigenous culture is an essential element of harmonious development of the Territory.

This project, intended to be a bearer of Kanak hope, is part of a real search for dialogue. I write that all the more comfortably because I am already engaged in the work of cultural co-operation.

The hope which underlies this project is great. We must bring it about, together, for the cultural future of our youth and the well-being of our country.

1 Translators’ note: the term le Caillou (the rock or pebble) is the familiar name by which New Caledonia is known to its European inhabitants in particular.

2 Translators’ note: Tjibaou here puts in brackets the words renaitre avec, meaning, literally, ‘be reborn with’, which is an untranslatable play on the French word for ‘recognition’. What Tjibaou seems to be suggesting is that true reciprocal recognition between the two cultures will amount to cultural rebirth for each as well as the birth of a new ‘New Caledonian’ culture.
CHAPTER 2
Mélanésia 2000: A Political and Cultural Event

Financed by the French State and organised by Jean-Marie Tjibaou — shortly to go into politics — the Mélanésia 2000 festival took place in Nouméa in September 1975. On a broad esplanade overlooking ‘White Nouméa’, some 2,000 Kanaks from all regions of the archipelago, taking great care with the aesthetics, presented examples of Melanesian architecture, handmade objects, dances, etc., as well as high points of Kanak life: ceremonial exchanges between clans, speeches declaimed by specialists in the art of oratory, welcome songs ... all revealing a subtle art of social intercourse. In counterpoint, a theatrical presentation of the history of the Kanak people, recalled discreetly but firmly the social and political problems raised by colonisation: crying inequality and exclusion of the indigenous people from the dominant society.

In this interview with Michel Degorce-Dumas, at the time a student preparing a dissertation on Mélanésia 2000, Jean-Marie Tjibaou recalls the stages of preparation of the festival, which was immensely successful in Nouméa. In his assessments and his thinking about the festival, the independentist leader touches here on many issues (cultural dignity, the weight of modernity, relations with the French State, etc.) which he was later to take up and expand upon regularly. Although it took place in Nouméa in April 1977, we have placed this interview at the beginning of the book, because it provides a good introduction to understanding the way Jean-Marie Tjibaou was thinking at the time of Mélanésia 2000.
JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — The first idea was to make an inventory of what existed; thereby to create consciousness of the cultural heritage of the Melanesian people and thus try to restore people’s confidence, in the face of the state of alienation colonisation had brought upon them. For the grip of colonisation was even stronger than that of the Christian missions. The two are tied up together, because the work done by the missions emerged from the culture that people were taught: they were made to believe that what they had — such as dances, songs, their manner of dress and their housing — all that was savagery, customs belonging to a past world delivered to Satan, to the devil, thus to hell and all the rest of it! All this talk by the colonists, the missions and the Administration induces a sort of shame in the traditional mentality; that is what the feeling of alienation is. You have to be something else to be a good man, an acceptable man, a civilised man, a technical man, a man of strength, a smart man. In a word, to become a man, you have to deny your own culture. We did not do what we did because of those ideas directly (those ideas have been around for a century and have taken root), but rather because of the state of alienation which remains, the inferiority complex, the marginalisation of the Melanesian world within the economic system. This devaluation is tied to the cultural alienation which makes people have a sense of shame about themselves, and they cannot escape, cannot become real men, in relation to their own culture and in relation to the new world. They are always ‘savages’; they are always outsiders, to themselves as well as and above all in relation to the new civilisation, which they find hard to penetrate. They are always, in a way, outside their own selves.

My thinking developed from those ideas and from the problems arising from alcoholism. This is down a bit at present, but during the years of the boom¹ we saw people getting drunk, staggering about all over the place, and then there was something new: people were saying things they had never said until then, criticising the chief, criticising society, the custom authorities, etc. We even saw people whose traditional authority was recognised themselves become layabouts, losers; they had kept their traditional aura, but drink pulled them down from their pedestal and revealed them for what they were: men with a certain authority at the custom level, with
things of value to say in traditional society, but completely peripheral to the modern world. Modern society (the missionary, the Administration, etc.) had brought this about by removing political power from traditional society, even its policing power, power in the strong sense of the term. In this way, people have been left with a structure emptied of its content, since those who give the orders are, now, somewhere else. There is no longer the homogeneity there was in the traditional groups; people now have points of reference other than traditional society, other chiefs, other people who have authority over them, and this brings about a crisis of identity.

For all these reasons, I told myself I had to do something! I tried to work with the women on keeping the villages clean, because it is all tied up together, people had let themselves go. Today, things are a bit better, better than during the boom and just after the boom, in the years 1965 to 1970. These were years I lived like years of misfortune, when it was clear that we had a really deep crisis; chefferies and tribes abandoned, along with most of custom. There are some people who opted to become ‘naturalised’ French citizens in the 50s in order to be able to buy alcohol; this had become the symbol of accession to full humanity. You know, in the past, only the French and those who had full citizenship rights could buy what they liked in the shops, while the others, the Melanesians, were considered second-class citizens. In fact, people abandoned a lot of things.

In 1947–1950, when Melanesians began voting, there was real hope, but later they became divided. Dissension within the Union Calédonienne also caused confusion in tribal society. When people went into politics, they appointed those who had authority in traditional society, and then it turned out that in the world of the Whites those they had chosen had real power, that of voting for people. But the Whites used the power obtained by the vote of the Blacks. That contributed to the demolition of the authority of the chiefs. The split in the Union Calédonienne was not very well understood and gave people one more thing to worry about.

All these reasons led to the definite abandonment of the organisation of traditional life; there has been some attempt to revive it, but these are individual cases. In general terms, society as a whole
has not realised how rich traditional life is and especially how valuable it is for society.

Because of the disintegration of the tribes, Mme Scholastique Pidjot had in 1971 already set up a little group which was trying to do something about alcohol. At the time, it was still an informal effort, at the family level; registration had never been sought. This anti-alcohol committee was trying to think what it was about drink, or rather the bar, that place where the husband stopped to natter with the neighbours, that led him to stop there rather than going home. They tried to work out what might persuade the husband to come home more quickly rather than hang about in bars. First, they aimed to get the house looking better, the kids cleaned up, make the family home a place that was good to live in: that was the aim of the ‘Smiling Melanesian Villages’ association. And the women worked on it, too, to bring themselves up to scratch. As one man remarked: ‘I don’t want to go home. It’s disgusting. Kids with their noses running, my wife a slattern, and so on. So I’d rather stay at the bar with my mates.’ This made quite a few women start thinking, and from that, they tried to get some projects going (village cleaning etc.), and people got to like the idea. The work was based on where people lived, with facilitators and site visits. Trips were important, visits to other groups. After the first year, I saw clear progress. People made great efforts, improving their living places. To encourage it all, social gatherings, parties, afternoon teas, dances etc. began to be organised — and that is where the idea for the festival came from: I thought we could try to organise something to tie the groups together. That was the first stage of the project.

MICHEL DEGORCE-DUMAS — This ‘Smiling Melanesian Villages’ movement was well established and decentralised. In each village, the association had a correspondent. Organising visits permitted a mingling which was not usual in the Melanesian mentality. The tribes were not in the habit of meeting, and I think that did a lot to establish the idea of the festival and to give people the idea that they could all meet each other one day.

J.-M. T. — Yes, the movement had set up 18 little committees which declared themselves ready to do things for the festival: they made
Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanaky

handicrafts and Kanak war clubs, and they sought and got dances\textsuperscript{5}, etc. We could have done a little festival just with these committees. This project was submitted to the Territorial Youth and Sports Directorate, and I am the one who showed it to Missotte\textsuperscript{6} and Barillon, asking for their support. But Missotte said: ‘Instead of doing your little thing, you could do something much bigger.’ From then on, we began to envisage a big project. Then came the discussions on the Seventh Plan. I was in the Cultural Commission, and took advantage of it to slip this project in, and in the end, it was included in a ‘Festival’ file, to be considered the following year. So then we picked up the project again to put it to the Development Committee.

This committee was managing several projects, but took on the festival one. As it developed, the festival finished up overwhelming the committee, and people who were attached to other projects came to work in the festival sub-committees. These committees were where we discussed how the festival was to be brought about. We had the idea of organising three mini-festivals (one for the Islands, one for the North and South, and one for the Centre) and a festival committee comprising several sub-committees (infrastructure, content, electricity, etc.). The infrastructure sub-committee worked on the spot for all construction work, snack bars, food, child-care, setting up the stalls, public relations, police, etc. The content sub-committee, for its part, travelled to organise the performances.

Every evening there were meetings; it was very lively, the more so since the Groupe 1878\textsuperscript{7} had distributed tracts against the festival. It was supported by certain political parties, which were sometimes working for us and sometimes against, and which thought it was going to be a disaster. They were at first hostile, and when they saw that it was working, they tried to take over …

That’s not over, by the way: they are still playing that game … The Groupe 1878 is a group of young people who are anti, and that can mobilise quite a few people. For this year’s territorial elections, I think there are new elements in play which suggest that they are not right, and the recent municipal elections have shown that sometimes my assessments are not bad.

Concerning the mini-festivals, we wanted the locals to have their festivals and thereby to be sensitised. Our point of departure was that
not everyone would be able to go, and that something really had to be done for the locals. At that level we achieved our aim. To the satisfaction of all, the mini-festivals revealed things that we thought had disappeared.

M. D.-D. — *In the reports on the mini-festivals, there is criticism about the ‘traditional’ costumes (rubber thongs, T-shirts, watches and other anachronisms). And then there was that beauty queen business at Lifou, which Naisseline criticised.* How did this come about? It is a small point, but one which seems to contradict the rest.

J.-M. T. — The beauty queen event was organised by the Lifou tourist office as part of their annual festival: we had to go along with it. We talked about it afterwards, after it was over. This beauty queen thing gave our external critics a good opening. Our plans never included any beauty contest.

M. D.-D. — *This minor setback shows that the decentralisation of activity was effective.*

J.-M. T. — We had decided that where no arrangements for organising a festival existed, we would have to ask the organisations already in place (like the tourist office in Lifou) to take on the organisation of the festival. I want to emphasise that the structure of the project was short term, with *nothing post-festival*. The project was ending in September 1975 with the holding of the festival, but nothing was planned beyond that concerning the cases, the sites or any post-festival projects.

The aim of Mélanesia 2000 was to do a ‘commercial’ on our culture for the White world, and to get the Melanesians involved in a great people’s celebration where they would learn about themselves and awaken to their own heritage.

We gambled this commercial would lead people to create more. We wanted to help restore their self-confidence and their sense of dignity, and afterwards, to try to motivate some people in the economy, those whose self-affirmation was firm, to seek positions of responsibility. All this has to happen through training, and for that
you have to do better than tenth grade, where there is a blockage. Our difficulties are tied up with this crisis of identity. People are held back: they are 19 when they get to tenth grade. A high school dropout rate is part of the crisis of identity. Later, they regret it; they want to go on, to do things ...

M. D.-D. — *We could talk now about how the content of the festival was chosen. It provided lots of photos in the press, but not many articles ...*

J.-M. T. — That too tells us something. For the festival itself, *Les Nouvelles calédoniennes* had pages of photos, but there were no articles.

M. D.-D. — *I saw La France australe*. *There too there was a whole page, with just a little article ... For the festival, then, who were the people involved? There were European tradesmen there, and some people criticised their involvement. What should we think about that?*

J.-M. T. — It was our choice as organisers to ask for European tradesmen. Those who criticised their presence also criticised the festival. There were discussions on the subject in the committee. Why not get some Black tradesmen? There are plenty of people about, but no-one competent. Once you have chosen what sort of show you want, you have to choose the means and the staff to allow you to achieve your aims. It follows from the initial choice: we wanted to put on a big show, a really grand, significant spectacle. We have thought about the criticisms about the presence of Europeans, the criticisms of Nidoïsh Naisseline, for example, the only one to have made them openly. We discussed the principle of the presence of Whites in the organisation of a Black festival. But the question was not so much the presence of the Whites as knowing what it was we wanted to do. The festival as we conceived it has no precedent anywhere in custom: a gathering like this, over a specified, very short time.

If you query that, why stop there? You should also query everything foreign to the Melanesian world: clothes, the houses we live in, electricity, etc. If you are going to be logical, everything brought in by the Western world should be discussed, even the way you talk about it, and the language you use to talk about it, and so on *ad
infinitum. When you criticise the presence of White tradesmen, you query the use of the Western techniques we have chosen to use for the precise purpose of manifesting what has been destroyed by the West through colonisation.

My position is this: from the moment you query something, you should take it all the way. There is no reason to stop, to criticise the details, when the issue remains an overall one. The criticism was beneficial, for little things like watches and so on, but the people who were really concerned by this question were those on the committee. The others, the ones who were dancing, did not give a damn about all that. There is another response, too: the way people dance today, the material they use, it's what they live culturally, and we do not have the right, in the name of 100- or 150-year-old authenticity, to criticise what they are today. They dance in manous, with whistles, wearing watches and rings and so on — it's their current way of expressing themselves, it is part of their current authenticity. Authenticity is linked with time, and always with history, with a certain way of being at the time. We could talk about this forever.

Our opinion concerning the presence of the Whites is this: we tried to give as many ideas as possible to the European specialists so that they could use their technical skills to build what we wanted. That was the case, for example, with the historical pageant.

M. D.-D. — On this very subject of the pageant, I have read several letters on the subject of the masks used to portray the Europeans as they were when they arrived in New Caledonia. The committee asked that the masks, especially that of the missionary, should not be grimacing or ridiculous, and went on about the ‘benefits’ brought by religion.

J.-M. T. — It was the wish of certain members of the committee ...

M. D.-D. — In the documents, there is the following sentence: ‘It would be desirable to show the missionary bringing benefits. Taken literally, this could be dreadful, but it is the wish of the committee.’

J.-M. T. — We had to talk about it because some of the older people, both Catholic and Protestant, might have been shocked if the
missionaries had been played for laughs. It was the wish of the committee, but we also said that the symbolism, the staging, the dress was all technical theatre stuff, and we placed our trust in the theatre people to do it in a way that respected that wish. But at the same time, the missionary, the businessman, the soldier, all had to be shown as symbols of 'civilisation'.

M. D.-D. — I realised when talking to people that the festival had two high points: the welcome of the tribes by the delegation of the South and the historical pageant. It didn’t work — it was hard to understand. In metropolitan France, when the organiser wants to do a mediaeval show, the Middle Ages are reconstructed, but here, at the festival, this event was profoundly lived by the people. They were not actors; they were real chiefs receiving the delegations. That could not be done more than once, and it was very important. The second high point was the pageant, where people who were not used to it had to be taught how to express their culture to others.

J.-M. T. — Yes, these moments were important ones, especially when they are presented as you have just done. On the one side, people offer ritual welcome, required by the fact that people are meeting — it is not theatre, rather a customary ritual done and felt, simply, as a deep and meaningful act in itself, not thinking about what others might think of it, instinctive. They did what had to be done — no-one told them they had to do it, because it is all there in custom. They made the necessary preparations, and all they were told was the time they should start.

These were high points, and still are. But at the time, during the festival, there was no distinction between the performances: since they all took place at fixed points, it was just as important for participants to eat together, to make the bougna, to play together, as it was to stroll about. An atmosphere had been created, helped by the location, so that people enjoyed the festival as an overall experience.

It’s really only when you look through the snapshots, so to speak, that you notice particular points such as those you mention. The pageant itself was no more than scene-setting, a bit of theatre. There was nothing extraordinary about it in the context of the dances that
were done: it was a mime show based on what people had been through in the past, on stories, on legends, and also on the arrival of the missionaries. The pageant pulled together all the things which had been presented in mime, in dance and in song, which were part of what makes up the history of this people.

M. D.-D. — Something else seemed to me to be important: the festival was a meeting where people spoke the same language for once — and that language was their shared culture. There are about 30 Melanesian languages, and the lingua franca is French. But at that time, another language was spoken — that of gesture, gift-giving, custom in sum, and those people realised, I think, that they had the same custom and that they belonged, let’s say, to the same people.

J.-M. T. — I think that for people who usually live according to custom, there was nothing new. For others, and perhaps the youth, yes, but for people like me, 40 years old or more, it is a reality of life. You know that there are differences in the detail of the ritual, but the sense is the same. What is important is the gathering that took place, because it is unique, because it had never been achieved in the past, because there had never been either the opportunity or the means to gather together people from such different backgrounds in so short a time through custom. Without this festival, there was no way that the people of Bélep, those of the Île des Pins, the people of Ouvéa, Lifou, Hienghène, Bondé, and so on, from the 400 kilometre length and 200 width, counting the islands, could have met together: that was the great event. People came mostly for that, for that great gathering. The speeches called for quite a few translations, because the elders have always presented the custom gifts in their own language. That’s what we do: the one who arrives speaks in his language, even if it is not understood. Anyway, you know roughly what he is saying (laughter) — you know the routine, and what it all means. If you went to his area, you would say the same things. But during the festival, you could see young people translating what was being said exactly.

M. D.-D. — One could understand from the political point of view if the success of Mélanésia 2000 as a gathering and an awakening might have
bothered people a bit, especially given government involvement in the undertaking.

I read in a circular that ‘the participation of the armed forces in Mélanésia 2000 is to be massive and is to take priority over all other activities’. That shows that they did not hesitate, although there was an article in Le Monde, I think by Colombani, about the difficulty of getting government money. The State did participate. What do you think of the government’s involvement, not as an official, but as a Melanesian?

J.-M. T. — For us, government involvement in the organisation of Mélanésia 2000 is no different to the use of bulldozers, lighting, a theatre technician, or a Philippe Missotte. Objectives are set, and ways and means of achieving them, and the involvement of the government in providing funds, personnel and technical support fits in there. We asked for logistical support, and that is what we received.

M. D.-D. — Yes, but can’t that be interpreted as a sort of cover, with the army involved in the festival and the government providing funds? In a wider political context, wasn’t that involvement motivated by something else? Didn’t the French Government have an interest in Mélanésia 2000 taking place? The government does not just hand out money. I put the question to Mr Erignac\textsuperscript{12}. He said that it was not a good topic, that I should have chosen Caledonia 2000, which he had in mind to do. He did not reply.

J.-M. T. — For my part, I can respond in relation to our aim. I do not know what the government’s aims were. They are part of a well-defined policy, and I am not so naive as to think that they were the same as ours. But, like all the people who were involved in Mélanésia 2000, the tradesmen, the people who sold us wood, they are people who wanted to work on this project to earn cash. I suppose that the government, at a higher level, also had objectives, like the wood merchant, but what counts for us as organisers of Mélanésia 2000 is attaining our objectives. I don’t want to go over again what the government’s aims were in getting involved. The authorities did not seem to be using the festival for any purpose
other than our own, while we used everything provided to us as we would have done if the funds had come from private sources.

1 Between 1969 and 1972, world nickel prices soared in an unprecedented way. Mining concerns in New Caledonia took on many Melanesians at the time, thus brutally accelerating the entry of the Kanak world into the market economy. This influx of money partly destabilised traditional practices (Editors’ note).

2 Translators’ note: the Editor of the French text had a footnote which described the legal status of the indigenous population of New Caledonia at the time of publication. Article 75 of the French Constitution provided for a ‘particular legal status’ permitting recourse to ‘customary rules’ in relation to matrimonial and land matters. The Editor noted Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s recollection that in the 1950s, one of the effects of indigénat (indigenous status) was that indigenous persons were not permitted to purchase alcohol, leading some Melanesians to seek to be divested of it.

3 The Union Caledonienne (UC), founded in 1953, is the oldest party in the Territory. It was supported up to 1977 by most of the ‘petits Blancs’ (ordinary Whites) from the bush and Melanesians favouring wider autonomy for the Territory. It came from the union of two associations set up by the Catholic and Protestant Churches to avoid the possibility of radicalisation. The dissension to which allusion is made here appeared when some Kanak leaders, under pressure from the Administration, were incited to leave the UC. See M. Dornoy, Politics in New Caledonia (1945–1977), Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1984 (Editors’ note).

4 The wife of the Melanesian MP Roch Pidjot was to play a large role in the organisation of the festival Mélanésia 2000 (Editors’ note).

5 In Melanesian society, each dance is the property of a clan and cannot be performed without the permission of the clan which owns it (Editors’ note).

6 Philippe Missotte, born in 1935, from 1972 created and ran the Training Centre for Youth Leaders and Development in New Caledonia, with Gilbert Barillon and Jean-Marie Tjibaou. He also helped organise Mélanésia 2000 and was co-author with Jean-Marie Tjibaou of the work Kanaké, Mélanésien de Nouvelle-Calédonie [Kanaké, Melanesian of New Caledonia] (1976) (Editors’ note).

7 The 1878 Group, the name of which recalls the year of the first great Kanak rebellion, grouped together the first Kanak students to have returned from metropolitan France who devoted themselves to a radical critique of French colonialism. The 1878 Group, founded in 1974, had criticised the Mélanésia 2000 project sharply, condemning any form of ‘prostitution of Kanak culture’ (Editors’ note).

8 Nidoish Naisseline, custom chief of the island of Maré, at the time a member of the Marxist-inspired Foulards rouges (Red Scarves), the first Kanak independentist movement, which was founded by students returning from metropolitan France. With the 1878 Group, they founded Palika (Kanak Liberation Party) in 1976 (Editors’ note).

9 Nouméa daily, which ceased publication in 1978 (Editors’ note).
10 Manau: a word of Tahitian origin describing the lengths of coloured cloth brought by the colonisers to the indigenous peoples of the Pacific, which gradually replaced traditional clothing. This new style of dress has been adopted throughout the Pacific, to the point that it is seen as the typical garment of Oceania (Editors' note).

11 Bougna: a word of North New Caledonian origin (Koumac region). Fish or meat served with vegetables and coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked under a pile of hot stones ('Polynesian oven' or hangi). The bougna is now served at all Kanak festive meals (Editors' note).

12 Then Secretary General in the New Caledonia Government (Editors' note).
The Mélanésia 2000 festival gave rise to the publication of a memorable work, Kanaké, Mélanésien de Nouvelle-Calédonie, edited by Jean-Marie Tjibaou with Philippe Missotte. As well as providing a record of the festival in words and many photographs, the work was intended to present an accessible synthesis of the main features of Kanak culture. Jean-Marie Tjibaou draws on a diversity of sources for this, and the work of the ethnologists, his personal experience and, implicitly, his Christian culture permit him to develop an image of the Kanak world which falls between the views of Pastor Maurice Leenhardt (in Do Kama especially) and contemporary Kanak reality. Drawing on his experience as a cultural organiser, he paints a picture of the economic and social situation of the Melanesians of New Caledonia which is, to say the least, worrying. Beyond the educational thrust, this text has, in retrospect, a premonitory character: Kanaké, the national mythological hero in 1975, points to ‘Kanaky’, the name that the independentists were in December 1984 to give officially to their future, decolonised country. We include from the work only an extract, showing how deeply concerned Jean-Marie Tjibaou was to see Kanaks become actors in the modern world rather than its victims.

KANAKÉ IS ONE of the most powerful archetypes of the Melanesian world. He is the ancestor, the first-born. He is the flèche faïtière, the central pole, the sanctuary of the great house. He is the word by virtue of which mankind exists. He is the same word which
established the system regulating people’s relationships with each other and with the geographic and mythological environment.

The aim of this book is to inform. By taking an aesthetic approach, we intend to put before the public a few pictures and ideas which are snapshots of Kanaké and his universe. We give pride of place to myths, space and time, because it is the Kanak experience of these three dimensions which reveals Kanaké’s specific nature.

The occasion of this book is Mélanésia 2000, the first festival of Melanesian arts.

Mélanésia 2000 was the gathering of 2,000 Kanaks for a great celebration, and 50,000 spectators.

Mélanésia 2000 is a step in the search for Melanesian identity. It remains, for many Europeans, the event which made them aware that an indigenous culture exists.

With this book, we want to revive the dialogue on the construction of our country. We want to proclaim our cultural existence. We want to tell the world that we are not refugees from prehistory, any more than we are archaeological remnants, but men of flesh and blood.

Today, Kanaké comes to you, heavy with years and history, rich with unique cultural experience. He is claiming his place in the sun.

[...]

We were near Nouméa on 6 September 1975, a few hundred metres from the sealed roads, the concrete towers of the new suburbs and the street lights, on the main ground of the first festival of Kanak arts in New Caledonia, ‘Mélanésia 2000’, so called to evoke the key question for the future: what will the Kanaks be in the year 2000?

The orator’s name is Emmanuel Naouna, a farmer from the Wate tribe deep in the Népoui valley, at the end of the longest conveyor belt in the world, which each year loads 1.5 million tonnes of red earth into the bellies of ships. Thirty kilometres away, the ore is torn from the sides of le Caillou. Refined and purified, it becomes nickel, which is the country’s main resource.

Emmanuel Naouna is not an amateur actor playing his role well in a piece of revived folklore. He is heir to a clan whose precise function in paicî society is to maintain forever the genealogies of the paicî-language clans which live in the area from Ponerihouen to
Touho and as far as Koné on the other side of the mountains, and to proclaim them on great occasions, such as the death of a high chief or the installation of a new one.

He learned genealogy from one of his fathers. It lasts more than an hour, and without the rhythm of the dance, memory can fail.

The Word is sacred, and the orator must prepare himself for the proclamation by avoiding all liquor and abstaining from food and sex. This morning, before stepping onto the stand, Emmanuel took sacred medicines: he drank a brew of herbs while calling on his ancestors so that his tongue should be as loosed as a snake and his words fly like stones from a sling. This speech is not just any tale. It is the Word in the same sense as in the prologue to St John’s gospel: ‘And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.’ In the same way, this Word is incarnated in the Kanaks, recounting their creation and organising their clans and their living space.

Some hours beforehand, the people from the Canala region who speak xhârâcûû recited the mythical origin of their clan in the same way. They proclaimed it without hesitation while offering to the people of the South, the custom owners of the land, the traditional house they had insisted on building for the festival.

We shall return to these mythological stories, the veritable genesis of each significant group of Melanesians in New Caledonia. It was important for us to place these 1975 proclamations at the beginning of this book, after so many years of scepticism and persuasive denials from people convinced that there existed no real culture in the Melanesian world. It is astonishing to see rituals which are still practised emerge from obscurity. They were hiding them from the Europeans, for whom they could be nothing but savage practices, and also from the missionaries, who had banned them as idolatrous. The Kanaks could not contradict the missionaries for fear that they would no longer defend them from harassment by the Colonial Administration.

The Kanaks are still here, 74 years after a prominent European greeted Pastor Maurice Leenhardt when he arrived in New Caledonia at the request of Protestant converts with the words: ‘What are you here for? You have come for the Kanaks? In ten years, there will not be a Kanak left.’
The Hazards of Modernity

If you met Emmanuel Naouna in the streets of Nouméa, you would not recognise him among the other passers-by. He must work in the nickel industry or in a shop. He is a catechist in the Catholic Church.

He is one of the 53,725 Kanaks who live in New Caledonia (some 40.8 per cent of the population). Of this figure 12,269 live in Nouméa and its environs, 13,000 in the Loyalty Islands (Lifou, Maré, Ouvéa). The Europeans too are numerous: 51,582 (39.17 per cent), of whom the largest number live in the capital. The population of New Caledonia includes also 9,920 Wallisians (7.53 per cent), 6,823 Tahitians (4.72 per cent), 1,751 Vietnamese (1.33 per cent), 4,827 Indonesians (3.6 per cent) and 3,600 others (2.7 per cent).

In this multiracial microcosm, the Melanesian population occupies a distinct position. While the news media spread and reflect an image of the Europeans to some extent, this is not the case for the Kanak world, which still lies outside their field of vision.

The Melanesian world is secret, reserved. To shape its image for the public, it has only public opinion, and public opinion is harsh. ‘Melanesians have no idea of time’ — absenteeism and tardiness make relations between employers and employees difficult. ‘When there is an occasion in the tribe, you know when they leave, but not when they’ll return.’ You can’t rely on them. They have no idea about business. On the other hand, people say often: ‘They are welcoming and hospitable’, but also: ‘They are just big kids’ and ‘When they have had a few drinks, they turn nasty’.

All these ideas have spread to become generalisations, with roots in a multitude of specifics which are real enough but for various reasons unexplained. On the one hand, studies of the Melanesians are, because of their academic nature, confined to specialists and little known to the general public. On the other, for reasons we explained above, Melanesians do not open themselves up but try to keep their secrets impenetrable, because they know how fragile they are when exposed to sceptical and scientific minds. Finally, if people who talk about the Melanesians are really pressed (and they are fairly few, because everything that touches on the things which have been inherited from the colonial era is more or less taboo, and it is considered somehow unseemly to talk about them), the following
facts emerge: very few such people have really known the Melanesians, many have met them through boss/employee contacts, or lady of the house to servant; or even through exchanges of cheerful tatas\textsuperscript{5} amidst the roar of engines and dust of the roads as people head for holidays on the East Coast. Even in the interior of the Territory, there are few who have completely shared in the life of a tribe for more than a week.

**Between Factory and Tribe**

Despite their isolation, Melanesians cannot ignore the Europeans’ way of life. Pulled in by the appeal of consumer goods, as if by a gigantic vacuum cleaner, Melanesians find themselves more or less involved in the economic system.

This is not a question of sentiment. The Melanesians are moving towards what they see as a better way of life, whatever speeches might be made about choice of society or philosophical options.

The modern industrial and socio-economic environment has increasingly enveloped the world, including the rural world. Melanesians have to find their place in it.

This leads immediately to the underlying but never explicitly put question touching the very essence of life: ‘How to be a Kanak in the modern world? How can we find a place in the industrial world without losing our souls there?’

This issue manifests itself in a permanent state of unease about Melanesians and their involvement in the world of work.

They are 40 per cent of the population but only 24 per cent of wage earners. When you ask a Melanesian what his aspirations are, he replies ‘to have a job’ not ‘to have such and such a trade or profession’. The reply always has something to do with a desire to be in a position which brings recognition that he is someone. To date, there are no Melanesian businesses of any size. The handful of small and medium enterprises which are operating are too few to be representative.

Relatively few Melanesians currently stay in a job long-term. However, some have been working for 20 years with the same employer. Considered to be slow but conscientious and dependable, they have in fact found their place in a little circle of workers where
they are recognised, and this social fabric has a certain similarity with that of the tribe. The biggest firm in the Territory, SLN, has only 16 per cent Melanesian staff. In the mining centres, the proportion is a little higher, 33 per cent to 50 per cent of employees, compared to 10 per cent at the plant in Doniambo. There, people have to adapt not only to the demands of productivity, the dust and the noise, but also to modern housing and urban life. At the mine, the work is in the open air, and generally people can continue to live in the tribe, or at least return to the tribe often.

A large part of the vicissitudes of Kanaks dealing with industrial work can be explained by the fact that they live with and feel these limitations, in the background, the always open possibility of returning to the tribe.

The Wallisians, 1,800 kilometres from their village, the Tahitians 4,800 kilometres from the aia-here (beloved country) cannot react in the same way. As for the metropolitan French and the French born in New Caledonia, they left the family farm ages ago. On one hand, they often lament it; while on the other, the land is not a religion for them, and ‘they are used to it’, for, as one old Kanak used to say: ‘Work and speed are worth nothing. They are the ones who invented them.’

You could not say that the economic situation of the Melanesian world is flourishing. Of the 24 per cent of Kanaks among the working population of New Caledonia, 65 per cent are manual labourers or house servants not requiring the Labour Office’s trade examination. Two of the 860 managerial staff in the Territory are Kanaks, and seven of the 650 foremen.

In the public service, three Melanesians have studied at tertiary level, nine were recruited after qualifying for university, 55 out of 400 at the school leaving certificate level and 300 out of 600 at the level of primary school certificate or less.

A considerable effort has been made to train workers quickly to a proper level of qualification, by creating fast-track professional training centres. Unfortunately, even those who have learned a trade tend not to practise it. Thus, when recruiting in New Caledonia for any sort of work, people select straight out of the tribe young Melanesians who have a vocational training certificate but have never worked.
This situation and this lack of interest in professional training are due not solely to unemployment and a taste for rural life, but also to a widespread expectation on the part of small employers in whose frame of reference Melanesians are a priori fit only for manual labour. Casual work is their field. For 30 years, groups of men and youths have been periodically leaving the tribe to go to Nouméa to unload the boats which supply the island with all sorts of products. Certain tribes have become specialists in the loading of minerals. Conditions of work and accommodation are far from ideal. For many young men, these periods have been a time to learn to drink and to get an idea of what work is like in the modern world. These periodic expeditions were nonetheless an opportunity to get together a few savings which could provide money for the tribe.

The problem of the economy of the Melanesian world is going to grow further with the reduction of manual labour which will flow from the new methods now being put in place.

The European approach to work is the fruit of an ethical choice made in the course of history which has made it the essential tenet of Western society: work completes creation for the service of mankind. Melanesians, on the other hand, got to know work as something done away from their land, for the benefit of others, through compulsory labour levies which were called volunteer work. The gendarme, as agent for indigenous affairs, and all-powerful representative of the colonial administration, required the chief to provide a given number of men to go and work on the settler’s coffee plantation. If he did not assemble them, the penalty was prison. Later, he was given a per capita fee for the number of workers provided. The laws on indigenous status which permitted these practices were repealed only in 1946, after two wars had seen Melanesians serving voluntarily in the expeditionary corps.

What motivates Melanesians to work? The wish to be part of the modern world? The pull of material possessions? What do they know about European society? For the most part, what a foreigner working there would know.

Kanaks feel only the most constraining aspects: work, schedule, production, the constant acceleration of the rhythm which flows from the very nature of a society in expansion, and finally, as a direct
consequence, the pain of anonymity which the Melanesian world is not alone in feeling ... They know the other aspects of that society — family, how people rest, talk, play, cook, how they live all the instants of life which together make the daily life of the individual into the way of life of a people — only through school, cinema, television. They have not lived those moments. Rare are those who have sat at a European table.

The women, on the other hand, having often been house servants, have been able to learn how to use household equipment.

In the face of a society which presents such a rough surface to the hand which would grasp it, the tribe remains the magic solution. In the tribe, Melanesians have a place and a name; they know where they are in time and space. In European society, they are labour, and when the choice is available, they will not hesitate.

In the current situation, Melanesians have no model, no beacon, no elder brother who has fully succeeded in European society. Each is a pioneer cutting a path which his vigorous roots in traditional society make all the more difficult.

For the great mass of them, a pattern of coming and going develops. To help the clan play its part in the preparation of a marriage, you go and work for two or three months in Nouméa. To buy a vehicle requires a longer time away, working for a settler or at the mine. Once the celebration is over, you stay in the tribe. Growing numbers of houses in the tribes are being built of modern materials. These ‘solid’ houses show that a fair number of Melanesians are prepared to save money and to devote a great part of what they earn to improve living conditions in the tribe. Isn’t that further confirmation that return to the peaceful haven is a major aspect of Melanesian life?

Problems at School

Nonetheless, the proportion of Melanesian children at school (42 per cent) is slightly above that of the general population (40 per cent).

There are demographic reasons for this, since there are more children of school age in this ethnic group. Despite the dedication of all involved, the teaching methods in use at school are not such as to help Melanesians overcome the handicaps we are about to examine.
In 1974, the proportion of children sitting for and passing the primary school certificate was the same for both the Melanesian and the European groups (a little more than 5 per cent of the total school population and 31 per cent of those passing in each case). In contrast, of the 956 children entering secondary school, 200 were Melanesians and 584 European. However, there has been clear progress at this level, Melanesian numbers rising from 35 in 1966 to 59 in 1970, to 147 in 1971 and 161 in 1972. Progress is evident every year at the end of the fourth secondary year: 31 Melanesians passing in 1966, 59 in 1970, 63 in 1971, 104 of 146 Melanesians sitting the examination in 1974 of the 147 who entered at the beginning of the 1971 school year, an encouraging result. Difficulties increase after the fourth year. The reasons are not always obvious. Some are channelled into vocational education. Others, girls in particular, leave school at this point, which is far enough to satisfy the ambitions of their families. From this grade onwards, Melanesian students seem to have more difficulties. They are reared in their mother-tongue, which they have spoken until they enter school at the age of six. Often, it remains the language normally used everywhere except at school.

But at school, and in the modern world, French is the means to learn about the universe and to build the capacity to think. Beyond a certain level of thought, gaps appear, which though invisible in daily conversation, prevent the student from advancing further in the system of Western thought. The Baccalauréat is of course the main key to the higher studies which in general terms are the only means of reaching management positions. Melanesian results have progressed little since 1966 (secondary school having been open to Melanesians only since 1958). The figure for Melanesians obtaining the Baccalauréat varies between one and seven from 1963 to 1974, with a peak of nine in 1970, from a total of 120 to 180 candidates. In 1974, two were successful in the secondary Baccalauréat and one in the technical Baccalauréat.11

Now for the first time, nearly 100 students of Melanesian origin are in fifth year classes in secondary and vocational institutions in New Caledonia. This result, due to the efforts of all, both students and teachers, promises an appreciable increase in the coming years.
in the number of young people from this ethnic group going on to higher studies.

Currently, one of the greatest problems facing Melanesian youth is finding a job. While all young people find it difficult on leaving school (after primary certificate for most, secondary leaving certificate for some) to surmount the barrier between school and working life, it seems it is even more so for Melanesians. Many, after attempting a few times to settle into working life which they find unsatisfying, go back to live in the tribe. Later, under the pressure of family obligations, they make another attempt and start again at the lowest level of employment.

The Women’s Project — Renaissance
This quick overview of the world of work has highlighted the fact that young men move constantly between the tribe and the workplace. Melanesian girls leave the tribe much later than the boys, but those who go make a much more deliberate break with the traditional milieu. Generally, they go to Nouméa. Many others are there already because they were born there or because they have joined their husbands who were living there for their work. Thus they have direct experience of the conveniences of the modern world. In domestic science courses, they had already learned ironing with a modern iron, sewing and recipes which are difficult to use when living in the tribe. They have learned to appreciate the ease of cooking on a gas stove instead of travelling further and further to find firewood, not to speak of running water and washing machines and dishwashers. They have seen the advantages of electricity and of houses with cement floors.

But more perhaps than this desire for convenience, it is the traditional role of Melanesian women which explains what they are doing in the renaissance which is under way. 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, and particularly to her brothers, known as maternal uncles: they are the owners of life, the guardians of the blood.

So the women of Caledonia, like all the mothers of the world, give life at birth and again every moment of the daily round. Perhaps that
is why, striving for happiness as they must, they felt how deeply into their being the problems of their people went. First, the ravages of alcoholism alerted them. It was not only that for years they had had to suffer its consequences and repair the damage it caused — this curse denying them the money which would have allowed them to improve life for the family — but in recent years they realised that it was dissolving the social fabric, to the detriment of the children especially.

Several associations were formed. Doing so, the women imitated the creation of men’s associations after the war to help restructure the Kanak group following the new laws modifying its legal status. These were Father Luneau’s UICALO (*Union des indigènes calédoniens amis de la liberté dans l’ordre*); the AICL (*Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens*) and the AICLF (*Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens français*), both created within the Protestant Churches; and in the Catholic Church Christian Agricultural Youth, from which emerged the *Mouvement familial chrétien* in 1968. Thus, encouraged by Mrs Pidjot, the women’s association ‘Smiling Melanesian Village’ was founded. Its goal was to attack alcoholism at its deepest sociological roots: to restore to the tribe its virtue as an environment in which people cannot help but live in a degree of harmony with the physical and human world. Standards of housing, standards of gardens, preventing idleness: the project would put both husband and wife to work, sharing major undertakings and daily tasks as well as saving the funds needed for building and for better equipment. Starting with 20 or so women at La Conception and Saint-Louis in 1971, they were more than 200 at their last general assembly; they meet regularly at the regional level and once a year all the groups in the Territory hold their general meetings. They conduct exchanges which allow them to get to know each other better. During this time, the fathers look after the babies and the other children.

While the men’s associations a few decades earlier had turned into political bodies, the women’s groups in the ‘Smiling Melanesian Village’ movement were to give birth to something else altogether: the Kanak of 1975.

They quickly realised the malaise affecting the Melanesians, arising from the constant disconnection they experienced as they
moved between the collective world of the tribe and the individualistic world of the Europeans, torn between two value systems rooted on two different planets. It was they who in 1973 had the idea of mounting the first festival of Melanesian art. The idea was taken up. Following the drafting of the Seventh Plan, in which 100 or so leading Melanesians had been consulted, they and a few Europeans set up the Development Committee. Members of the Melanesian Cultural Association, they were together to make of the Melanesian festival a demonstration of the vitality and the dignity of the Melanesian world, as well as of that reawakening that we are trying to share with you today.

[...]

*Kanaké and the Future*

Kanaké goes to mass or to service to pray to the God of Jesus Christ, but has not broken completely with ancestral beliefs. He seems to maintain in the depths of his being an escape hatch which links him to the ancestors. He continues the yam rituals. If he is sick and official medicine does not work, he resorts unhesitatingly to traditional medical practices directly derived from the ancestral faith.

Concerning the institution of chiefcy, Kanaké sometimes contests the exercise of authority within the tribe, but never its mythological origin. This belief remains profoundly rooted in the collective consciousness.

Customary ceremonies are still performed, especially for bereavement and marriages. Mythological references are constant: the mother's family is the holder of the principle of life, the blood, and the father's family has authority over the social status conferred by name and rank. Speeches are still made. Like the ceremonies, they have undergone transformation in form, but the substance remains the same.

The sense of custom and the traditional spirit of the Kanak people remain, but Kanaké, if he is to preserve its authenticity, needs to make a constant effort to ensure that the material and symbolic expression of his way of life is meaningful.

If he does not, he runs the risk of finding himself the depository of rituals and formulas emptied of meaning.
What Can Survive in Kanak Culture?
Our blunt reply is Kanaké. There is a certain stability in the way Kanaké goes about meeting his basic needs within his environment.

The yam and the river taro are still planted, harvested and eaten. Kanaké feels more and more that he must go back to basics to meet his need for security and human warmth.

Kanaké keeps alive in his heart the faith in life and the presence of the spirits which sustain him as he faces the fear and anguish of death.

Kanaké still approaches the need to perpetuate the race with his respect for the traditional marriage system and the community obligations it entails.

If Kanaké’s ancestors returned in the year 2000, they would recognise the man by his name. They would recognise his system of ritual, his genealogies, the structure of his customs, his language, even though impoverished, his humour, in a word the way he lives his life, as he has through history.

The actual experience of this oneness of mind will vary with historical circumstances. But it should never be totally identified with the written institutions, the rituals or the symbolic material used in any one era. In fact, what is essential and what persists beyond the centuries is not that experience, but the inspiration or the ethic which gives rise to that experience in history. Of course, that ethic is refined over the years and becomes coloured by the life of the people who pass it on, but it is above all the inspiration which maintains it. As to Kanaké and what he will become, it is clear that it is the ethic which inspires the life of his race which must survive. Indeed, that is what ensures that Kanaké will always be Kanaké.

Living this ethic is what enables Kanaké to make choices, in the traditional world as well as amidst the immense possibilities of the modern world. Only a clear view of this ethic will permit Kanaké to create for himself a culture or to renew the way he identifies himself. For this ethic at the heart of Kanak culture is at one with the cultural inspiration of all human groups. It is the reply that every community gives to the questions which have always eaten at the guts of humanity: who are we? where do we come from? where are we going?
Faced with these questions, there is no hierarchy of response and thus no more or less developed levels of humanity, only the different ways of responding which engender diversity among cultures.

The awakening is slow, but it is progressing and there is no turning back. The indigenous way of life, with its roots deep in the hearts of our ancestors, is moving quietly into the light of day. It is at the ethical level that the indigenous culture will survive and it is at that level that Kanaké is now and will remain Kanaké, a Melanesian of New Caledonia.


2 The biological father and his brothers are all called father, but especially the one who bestowed the name.

3 Maurice Leenhardt, De la mort à la vie [From Death to Life], New Caledonia Evangelical Mission Society. Written in 1922, republished in 1953 for the centenary of the French presence in New Caledonia, 45p (p. 5).

4 New Caledonia Statistical Service, census 23.4.74. In the 1989 census, the population of the Territory was 164,173 – 73,589 Kanaks (44.8 per cent). In 1956, the population was 68,480 – 34,969 Kanaks (51.1 per cent). The Kanak population at the time the French took possession of the archipelago in 1853 has been estimated at 40,000. In 1921, this number had fallen to 27,100 persons (source: J. Freyss, Economie assistée et changement social en Nouvelle-Calédonie, Paris, PUF, 1995) (Editors’ note).

5 Typically New Caledonian term for ‘au revoir’ (Editors’ note).

6 Société Le Nickel (Editors’ note).

7 5,625 workers out of the 8,181 Melanesian wage earners counted by the CAFAT (Caisse de Compensation des Prestations Familiales des Accidents du Travail et Prévoyance des Travaillleurs de Nouvelle-Calédonie — workers’ social security and accident compensation fund) on 31.8.71 were included in this category (out of a total of 430 wage earners, including 14,600 Europeans.)

8 A survey conducted in 1975 among 941 employers, totalling 22,692 wage earners (75–80 per cent of the total), extended the categories of ‘manager’ and ‘foreman’ to equivalent functions in the tertiary sector and especially teaching. It identified, of the 5,389 Melanesian wage earners of both sexes (23.74 per cent of the total), 3,071 labourers and staff (but 240 staff is a number which appears not to take into account the house servants), 337 Melanesian foremen of 2,376 (9 in heavy industry, 250 in private education and 59 in public service), and 26 management staff of 1,148 (of which 17 are in private education).
For more recent analysis of the economic situation in New Caledonia, see A. Christnacht, *La Nouvelle Calédonie*, Paris, *La Documentation française* (notes and documentary studies) and J. Freyss, *Économie assistée et changement social en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, op. cit. (Editors’ note).

9 Since 1900.

10 The laws on indigenous status were put into effect by the decree of 18 July 1887, extended by the decrees of 12 March 1897, 23 March 1907 and 27 May 1917.

11 The first Melanesian to pass the Baccalauréat was Ounu Boniface of Ouvéa, in 1962.
CHAPTER 4

Traditional Society and the Search for Melanesian Identity

This article, the only one by Jean-Marie Tjibaou to have appeared in a learned journal, was written well before the Mélanésia 2000 festival took place. Tying the general characteristics of Kanak culture into a detailed presentation of ethnographic material concerning his region of origin, the article reflects Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s study of ethnology in Lyon and then in Paris from 1968 to 1971. The article appears to be based on an actual field study he seems to have undertaken in the Hienghène Valley, putting his ethnological studies to good use. It provided much of the inspiration for the writing, with Philippe Missotte, of the work *Kanaké, Mélanésien de Nouvelle-Calédonie*.

At the time this study appeared, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, leading the Maxha! (‘Raise your head’) movement, was campaigning for election as mayor of Hienghène in the March 1977 municipal elections. This period was marked by land claims which gave rise to many demonstrations and to some intense political thinking within the Union Calédonienne. The lapse of time between the writing of the article and its publication perhaps explains why no explicit trace of these events is to be found in it.

NEW CALEDONIAN MELANESIANS are today seeking their identity, which leads them to ask themselves the following questions:
1. How do they identify themselves and how authentically? What are their points of reference in traditional sociology? What are the motivating factors in this society, the elements which constitute the Kanak personality at the end of the 20th century?

2. Is the system still coherent today, as it was originally — or in other words, is this system the vector of an authentically Kanak dynamic? What is the present-day situation of Melanesian society?

3. What are the new cultural elements in the present system? Can they be quantified? Can the rate at which they are being integrated be measured? Towards what new society are the Kanaks moving? What will a Melanesian be like in the year 2000?

These questions require an approach drawn from Melanesian experience. I am not seeking to know whether Melanesians are or are not adapting to the industrial world, but whether they are assimilating cultural models which are foreign to them and what new society is to be seen emerging as they feel their way towards a new dynamic and a new coherence.

The Melanesian cultural identity has a representational aspect and a descriptive aspect. What appears to be fundamental in Kanak society is the myth. The myth is a story of a legendary kind about the origin of a clan. It has to be borne in mind that each clan considers itself to be at the centre of the relationships which exist between the members of the same tribe, and that in consequence the origin of the clan is perceived as the origin of the world around it. In fact, the whole network is perceived from the exact same point as the mound\(^2\) in physical terms, and the subject’s social position in terms of the tribe’s system of hierarchy.

The myth is the creating word of the Kanak universe (in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God ... God said: ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light. ‘God said ... God said ...’). This word brings life into being through the coming of the ancestor of the clan.

The myth which engenders life is also the creator of the Kanak universe, which it orders by determining:
1. A system of relationships among men
2. A network of relationships among the clans
3. A series of relationships with God and the cosmos.
1. Relationships Between Men and Symbols
The relationship code, that is, the behaviour and the attitudes expected of the individual towards his brothers in the tribe, is imposed by the ‘word’ which engendered the clan. If the eldest brother is always in a privileged position, it is because, according to the myth, he is the first-born of brotherhood. It is he who ‘takes the lead’. It is he who is the light of the clan because he is the first-born to the light. He is the revered son of the elders of the tribe. He is the word of the clan. He is the central pole of the great dwelling with which he is identified. That is why this dwelling, considered as the symbol of the ancestor, has the sacred all about it. In fact, this dwelling is the place where there lives the word of the clan, incarnated in the chief, who is the eldest of the brothers.

This bundle of symbols leads the group to give the chief and his dwelling place a certain pre-eminence. The junior clans will because of this be kept at a certain distance from the eldest and where he lives. This will be seen in spatial terms in a wooden palisade or a stone fence, or quite simply the choice of a location higher than those of the dwellings of the other clans.

Where the wooden palisade or fence does not indicate the dwelling place of the chief in an obvious manner, there is nonetheless a reserved space in the form of a lawn more or less marked out by pines, coconut palms, column pines or Kanak poplars (*Erythrina*). By whatever means the courtyard of the chief’s house is marked, the group is at one in acknowledging the space reserved to it and the sacred element of that area. This sacred character of the chief’s house, identified on the ground, is marked at the institutional level by a series of rules and bans which require juniors and subjects to comport themselves in manner which, in its essence, gives pride of place to the dwelling place of the ‘word’ of the clan.

Melanesians seem to have made great effort to build not only physical barriers but also psychological and moral barriers between themselves and the chieftaincy.

The aim always is to put the generative and life-giving word of the clan at a respectful distance. This word of the clan is generative in the sense that the structure of Melanesian society is that which appears schematically in the myth. This social structure constitutes
not only the framework of Melanesian society but at the same time a mechanism, or a system for communicating the word, which is an integral part of Melanesian life. The cohesion and the vigour of the group are a function of the life and intensity of this word.

The more deeply the word imbues the communication system, and thus the group itself, the more dynamic the community.

In this universe, it is difficult to talk of advancement in terms of moving upwards within a hierarchy of status. It is just as difficult to talk of progress in linear terms.

2. Networks of Relationships Among the Clans

If the system by which the word is communicated has its origin in the myth, that means that the direction in which the word circulates within the social hierarchy should follow the order of priority found in the chronicle of the fathers or the elders of the clan fraternity. In hierarchical terms that will manifest itself in deference to the first-born. So he will be the chief, or the big brother in Melanesian terms of clan fraternity. He will therefore be considered as the incarnation of the word and the receptacle or 'basket of words'. He is the root, the source, the bones, the hill crests (tceen duat). He is entitled to precedence in custom matters, to the first fruits of the crop. Any communication which affects the tribe should be conveyed through this leader, to be spread thereafter throughout the network. It is a necessary condition for successful transmission of the message.

The next level in the structure of the tribe is the chief's spokesman. This is normally the younger brother, for Melanesian society gives this position to the second person to appear in the mythological story.

Area of study: Hienghène

I. the Territory: Bouarate and Goa chefferie districts at Hienghène

II. overall organisation or division of responsibilities: in the chefferie there are in general terms dâma and yabwech (chiefs and subjects in the traditional sense). Functions are distributed as follows:

1. the Ka po dabila⁴, those who produce food;
2. the Ka po dò-ýé, responsible for the rituals (hyarik) necessary for production in general;
3. the *Kaok le wan tok* who perform the rituals peculiar to the growing of yams. They are the first to dig the yams, and eat them first in seclusion as part of a ritual ceremony before the general festival of the yams;

4. the *Kaok le kawenia*, attached directly to the chief’s household for domestic work: collecting wood, cooking, drawing water, etc. No woman is permitted to do these duties and no man other than those designated by custom. They are ‘the chief’s mouth’, intermediaries between him and the others. As private advisers, they can when necessary exercise over him a power of correction in private matters;

5. the *Ka pohiri*, who perform the rituals giving strength and power to the chief and make him sacred. They are also the ones who place taboos in the *chefferie*. In a general way, it is they who do ‘sacred’ things;

6. the *Ka po maendan*, who are the rainmakers and are considered to be responsible for atmospheric forces in general, stopping cyclones, regulating the weather, according to agricultural needs or those of the festival calendar, etc.;

7. the *Ka po hyarik* are responsible for sacred matters as they affect people outside the *chefferie*; it should be explained that these people do not belong to an hierarchical level, but have varied and limited responsibilities which make them autonomous in relation to the other categories. The *Ka pohiri* are part of this group, but dedicated to the *chefferie*;

8. the *Ka kāi nuk*, responsible for providing fish for the big gatherings;

9. the *Ka hoa (kdjilingan)*, who have police functions within the *chefferie* limits;

10. the *Ka peghach*, who are the warriors;

11. the *Ka po djila*, who make the traditional money (*aman o thont = théwé man dila*).

In most clans the levels which are most in evidence are those of elder and younger brother, the latter being able to fill several functions. It is only in the framework of the *chefferie* that functions diversify and are shared among several individuals.
This series of functions in the structure of the tribe shows the chief and his spokesman to be endowed with a certain pre-eminence. All the other levels are placed at equal distance from and in a special and autonomous relationship with the chieftaincy. In fact, each of these functions is a microcosm with its own hierarchy, with broad similarities with the organisation of society as a whole. It can thus be said that each clan takes for itself the system of communication and relationships of the great clan fraternity.

It should be explained once again that each clan has its own generative myth. It should also be noted here that if the clan, in the frame of reference of its own myth, places itself as ‘the navel of the world’, this is language not to be understood in the sense of succeeding generations where one clan is at the origin of all the others.

It is much more a way of expressing the autonomy of the clan in a system of relationships. The mythological story does not provide a panoramic vision of society as a whole, but only a glimpse of that society through a given clan. It is the vision of the clan which interests the narrator and the whole society. In other words, the narrator focusses on showing the place of his clan and gives such emphasis to this clan that the rest of society is no longer seen. But the general view is missed only by the external observer, while for the people of the tribe, the overall vision of society does not need to be made explicit, because it is constantly present as the background against which each clan’s particular character emerges.

3. Relationship with the Cosmos

The organising word of the clan extends its hegemony beyond the limits of the hierarchical system which governs the people. Its power covers things and the cosmos in general. In fact, everything which is immediately or more distantly in its environment is more or less imbued with its influence and consequently a participant in the state of being engendered by that word — which entails a situation of interdependence between the beings present at the moment of generation of the clan. Thus the shark (animal), the rock (mineral), the kaori\textsuperscript{5} (vegetable), thunder (atmospheric phenomenon), which are the elements of nature that mediated the mystic word and the
appearance of the ancestor of the clan, will be considered to be sacred elements of the cosmos. They are the symbol (totem) called spirit or ancestor\(^6\) (grandfather, big brother) or quite simply the ‘elder’ of the clan. Each of its elements in its specific form, but also in its general character, is an integral part of the clan and is entitled to a series of relationships. In effect, the thunder, the shark, the tree or the rock no longer appear in their objective reality. They are placed on the same plane as the other constituent parts of the personality of the group.

What according to the myth is the genesis of these relationships between man and the different elements of the cosmos?

In the myth, we first see the symbol, the spirit of the clan, through the intermediary of a fish, for example: the shark, perhaps, whose contact with the rock in such and such a spot will give birth to the eldest of the clan as well as to his brothers. The shark will then be considered to be the element of nature which perpetuates the real and protective presence of the ancestor, and the shark will, in fact, help his children or get them out of trouble. The shark as ancestor of the clan is entitled to special treatment. Thus those under its protection are forbidden to eat shark meat. If a shark is caught in their net, they must remove it respectfully and release it. If they find a shark stranded, they must put it back in the sea — and so on. For its part, the shark should watch over one of its children who are at sea. If he is drowning, the shark should come alongside him and offer him his back to hold on to and take him back to shore. If a shipwrecked man is attacked in the sea by other fish, the shark takes responsibility for defending him. If the same person is fishing for an important occasion, the shark should chase fish into the nets or traps held by the man. If the man is at sea and threatened by bad weather, the shark appears in front of the canoe or boat and the man who understands the message should follow to avoid the danger.

It is forbidden to clan members, and above all to the women, to say its name.

The element which appears next in the myth is the rock. This rock is in a precise point in space, which is considered to be the first location of the clan, and the rock is the sign which indicates the
precise place where the clan burst into existence. This place and the rock itself are considered to be taboo. In certain cases, it can serve as the place of sacrifice. In any case, it will be considered taboo by the clan, with the exception of the person who is responsible for protecting the place and safeguarding the clan’s medical secrets (hyarik). The clan’s house mound can be the same spot or in its immediate area.

The level which comes next is that of the money (thawe)⁷ bearing a figurine of wood or stone representing the ancestor of the clan. This is the family treasure.

Next come the hyarik (medical secrets) which are the prerogative of the clan. They draw their power from the ancestor who is invoked through the figurine or on the clan altar.

The old men say that the plants have no power in themselves: they are no more than the symbolic material over which the celebrant pronounces the sacred words which enable them to transmit the power of the ancestor.

Land

Myth, country and hierarchy inhabit the same space. Land, in the Melanesian world, is the country over which the universe of the myth extends. ‘The social landscape and the natural landscape overlap. The limits of the group’s country are not the palisades around the dwelling or obvious borders on the ground. It includes the whole domain over which the influence of the ancestors, gods or totems is exercised.’ (Maurice Leenhardt, Do Kamo, p. 166).

Landscape, village layout, society, the dead and mythical beings form a whole which is not only indivisible but also in practical terms undifferentiated. Which here means that it is not the objective reality of land which is of interest. One cannot, therefore, mortgage it, sell it or violate it with works which change its appearance, for that would be to damage various aspects of the incarnation of the myth.

The land is in fact known by each and recognised by all members of the tribe. Each parcel of land is identified by all, for it has a name and everyone calls it by its name, which is known as part of the areas attached to another name, that of such-and-such a clan. There is no
empty space or virgin land in this universe. And these names are constantly recalled in conversations, accounts of what had taken place in the tribe, legends, lullabies, working songs and the custom speeches which recur frequently through the year. The tribe's land thus appears as the immense stage on which perpetual theatre plays out, everyone in his assigned role.

Some division of the ground is necessary to try to take account of the social hierarchy as it has been determined by the original myth. Thus, the clan Word will always be in front or above in relation to the other inhabitants of the tribe, and the chief should never be placed in the shadow of his subjects. Land is part of the man-earth-myth-god network of relationships. It contains special places where encounters between man and divinity have been experienced in varying degrees of intensity. It is this sacred mythic experience which itself makes such a place taboo. On the other hand, it will be considered the place which recalls the presence of divinity and also the altar where fresh encounters between man and his god should take place. It is the place where the generative word of the clan and its living members are present to each other. It is there that at every sacrifice the primordial event which saw the birth of the clan and which supports it throughout its existence takes form.

We cannot over-emphasise the importance of the precise territory for each tribe. Indeed, as we have said above, land for the Melanesian world is not just the earth as nourisher or the earth as bearer of the history of the clan. It is one of the constituent elements of the society as a whole.

The alienation of land and the changes in land regulation have not only displaced the tribes, they have brought about their fundamental disintegration. A clan which loses its territory is a clan which loses its personality. It loses its mound, its sacred sites, its geographic points of reference and its sociological points of reference as well. Its whole universe is upset, along with its network of relationships with its brother clans, and the relevant protocol is thrown into general confusion.

It is to be noted also that the parcels of land exist in a network of relationships, linking and linked by the mounds in an organised structure; just as the clans have a network of alliances which follows
streams and valleys and crosses chains of mountains in accordance with precise itineraries.

Land, therefore, is not perceived as land but as a tissue impregnated with the network of human relationships. It serves as a living archive for the group and as such constitutes one of the bases of the Melanesian world, and by that very fact, stands as one of the fundamental elements of the Kanak personality.

That is in fact to say that it is not only an element of the cosmos but one of the essential aspects of the myth. For the individual, it appears not as material support only but as one of his own characteristics. *The man of the tribe accedes to personality through his relationship with the myth and with land*.9

**Time**

How is time experienced in traditional society? It seems that we cannot speak of a notion of time which is intellectual and objective and which can therefore on the one hand be rendered to some extent as a total concept and on the other cut up as a calendar. That has no interest at all for the Kanak. We shall see that Kanak time is above all a living experience of the rhythm of nature, of heat and cold, of the yams, of old age and youth, and the event which forges marriages warms the community and makes it grow.

**Time and cultivating the yam**

For Melanesians, the rhythm of the year is set by the cultivation of the yam, the principal nourishment, which is offered to chiefs, to the elders and to all guests of honour. It is the noble offering, the symbol of man, of the phallus, of honour. It is the yam which is offered on the altar where it symbolises the *kaamo*, the country with the chiefs, the old men, the children and everything which makes the country live. The yam with the *thawé* (the string of traditional money) and the *mada* are the main items in the exchange of traditional wealth that is effected for a marriage or a bereavement. The yam is carried with as much delicacy as a child. It is cultivated with quite particular methods, an activity that keeps people of the tribe occupied for a good part of the year.

The *cini kuuk* (grill the yam) ceremony takes place at the end of July. It is a ceremony where the celebrant (the priest of the clan) is
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charged with watching over the cultivation of the yam and interceding with the ancestors that they might make it fruitful. The *cini kuuk* taking place at the end of the cold season, it is then in August that *hyagné* (clearing) begins. The next actions are in succession *cini, humi* and *tami* (burn, plough, plant). Which brings us to the end of October. Thereafter, the fields and their surroundings are tidied. For the completed field should offer a certain charm and a kind of beauty. Then the *yho* (true taro) are planted as well as the ordinary yams. During this time, the yams germinate (*cim kuuk*) and appear on the mounds. This is the time when you hear the kingfisher calling ‘*cim, cim, cim, cim, cim, cim!*’ (grow, grow, grow, grow, grow, grow!) Then you *po havit* and *thii havit* (cut the stakes) and dig them in to hold the yam shoots. The operations which follow are *nhei kuuk*, which consists of placing a little reed support beside the young stem to allow it to reach the big stake. Then the stem is attached along the stake with bark cords prepared for that purpose. It is delicate work which demands much care, almost tenderness, truly expert work. The old men spend days at it, in a sort of constant daze. At this stage of its growth, the yam brings us to the end of November. When the stem reaches the top of the stake, it is called *thé yuu kuuk* (cut back the stem), which is done by making a tuft three-quarters of the way up the stake. Towards the end of December, the stems are loaded with branching shoots going in all directions. At that time, they are brought back (*gadaai*) along the curve established at the time of the *yuu kuuk*. In January, we come to *pawe kuuk*, that is, we let the yam run. And we await the *osian kuuk*, which is the appearance of the last shoot, pushing through the soil and showing that the tuber is there. Thus the yam brings us to the end of January. After the *osian kuuk*, Kanaks are free to build their houses, to get the canoes and nets ready and above all to go fishing, for it is the hot season when the fish come close to the river bank or the sea shore. This is welcome, because heavy work would be very uncomfortable at that time of year.

Three months later, that is, at the end of April and beginning of May, the chief announces that the first fruits will be drawn. He will already have made contact with the crop master (*kaapue poxa*) who draws the first fruits from the sacred field (*hua hitéi* or *wadaan tok*), grills them at the altar and eats them with the men of his clan while invoking the ancestors.
The next day or the days after that, everyone digs out the new yams. And the whole tribe gathers for the festival. Before the feast is prepared, the chief offers a yam to the kaapue poxa, speaking along the lines that they stand there before ‘you both’, the old men and the chiefs, the women and the children; they have called on you to tell you: ‘Here is the yam they have planted. Look upon it. You will grill it one day and you will intercede (gaanagoon) for us, so that bad spirits will lose their way and the country will be reborn …’ The kaapue poxa expresses thanks, takes the yam, and, on the eve of the next yam planting, will invite the men of the tribe to the sacrifice (cini kuuk) to open the new season. There remain June and July to harvest the yams and we have gone right around the calendar. The year is moreover divided into four periods which correspond to the cultivation stages of the yam:

- first period: clear — burn — plough
- second period: plant — stake
- third period: attach the stem and release the yam
- fourth period: the harvest.

This rather dull enumeration makes it clear that the tribe lives by the rhythm of nature in general, but especially the rhythm of the yam, which provides, so to speak, the vernacular calendar of the Melanesian people. This rhythm is so ingrained that it is lived biologically, with the consequence that, having no particular reason to acquire another rhythm, the tribal man is born, lives and dies to the beat of a natural heart.

While the cultivation of the yam provides the rhythm of life in the tribe, that activity itself proceeds according to the appearance of other natural phenomena, such as the position of the sun in relation to a given peak or islet, the appearance of a given star or the Southern Cross, the position of the Milky Way, warm or cool weather, the Westerlies, the spring tides, the rainy season, the appearance of the new leaves, flowers or fruits of this or that tree, and also the calls and behaviour of the birds, the arrival of shoals of this or that kind of fish, and so on.

To place an event in time, Melanesians use more precise points of reference, such as the different phases of the moon, the fingers of the hand, knots on a cord, or notches in a piece of wood.
These then are the reference points by which Kanaks can use a common language to situate themselves in time. But that does not automatically imply conceptualisation of time, something which the facts of tribal life do not actually require.

The essential point here is not the mastery of existence but simply being. And being fully is necessarily being in the rhythm of nature and it is wise to live in harmony with nature.

In these circumstances, no-one sees the use of removing time from the rhythm of nature and giving it some sort of autonomy, to be used thereafter to impress a new rhythm on people and things. In the harmony of the tribal universe, such talk is sacrilegious, and the action proposed looks useless...

**Time and the ‘history’ of clans**

If the term ‘history’ implies the notion of time conceptualised and thus made objective, we should have to speak here of the past of this or that clan. This past obviously does not translate into linear terms, and cannot be arranged into a series of boxes in a table marked 1 to 1975, in which events can be fitted; this past rather translates into successive layers of events and landscapes.

This past presents itself rather like a geological section showing the mounting layers of different materials. These layers of varying widths and the lines that divide them are not all equally precise: the essential point is that all are on view together. The same glance can take them all in. These various layers take the appearance of successive landscapes. These landscapes can appear either with the same physical structure, but with features and scenes which vary with events, or with totally different landscapes.

There is of course a more elaborate form of the clan’s past in the genealogy. And that is interesting, but it impresses only the outsider. In fact, when he proclaims his list of names, the herald never disconnects from the name of the mound. It is enough to ask him to replace the names in the context of the clan country for him to do it immediately.

Among the series of landscapes or tableaux available for viewing, some are clearer than others. This difference in clarity is not to do with how old or how recent they are, but with the imprint left by the
memories, as well as with the precision or imprecision of the oral traditions which are transmitted. It should be noted also that in dealing with the past of a given clan, the images, as in a film, will appear in close-up or in long shots according to what the narrator wants to say.

Thus, the outsider will completely drop his true origins, sometimes change his name and establish his origin and his myth on a mound in the area of where he now lives.

Talking about the origin of his clan, a grandfather might sketch the following tableaux:

1. the mound, the kaori\(^{10}\), the ‘pines’\(^{11}\): that is where the ancestor appeared. He begets three sons.
2. the eldest, called X, settles at the spring called Y. He plants a tamanou tree which is still to be seen today.
3. the next son inherits the digging stone. It is his. The furrows can be seen in the Z plain.
4. the third son called K begets a male child P, who is carried away by the flood which shifted the clump of bamboo at Z.
5. … all that happened long ago; the river still flowed in its old bed, there where nowadays the casuarinas\(^{12}\) grow.

And I could continue the series of tableaux. Starting with the ancestor and his sons, it is the grandfather who is of most interest to the grandson, the generation of the great-grandfather merging into the generation of its brothers. In the organisation chart of the tribe, he actually takes the place of the ancestor, with his name and his social position. Should the namesake still be alive, the grandson calls him big brother. For the cycle of the clan starts again at each fourth generation.

On the subject of the genealogies, it is essential to understand that they are a political listing, the purpose of which is to secure the position of the clan among other clans socially and in relation to land. In addition, reciting the genealogy is a sacred act justifying the existing structure of the clan. It is this recitation, with the hierarchy it presents, which fixes custom precedence. Further, the succession of names in a genealogy is not to be interpreted in historical terms but in hierarchical terms. This succession has the effect of showing what order of protocol should exist among the leaders of the clan.
Also to be noted in relation to the clan’s past is that the grandfather describes the first five tableaux with a degree of precision, then leaps forward to the last three or four generations; and between the two blocks of story, three or four names that stand out in the empty space into which several generations have vanished. Among these, there are generations which have made no particular mark on the clan’s past, but also those which have dishonoured it.

In short, the past of the clan is not inscribed in a linear succession of eras but appears as a series of tableaux, set on a single level in an hierarchical and spatial order required by a policy aimed at security, cohesion and the survival of the group.

**Time and myth**

To talk of time in the domain of myth is to talk without sense. For by definition the myth is placed out of time. But this is not the point of the discussion. It is in the relationship of the myth to the Kanak. In other words, where in time does the Kanak place himself when he enters into contact with the myth, the totem, the ancestor, the gods? And when this meeting takes place, which of the two interlocutors crosses the limits of time?

Take the example of the *kaapué poxa* (cultivation master) at the time he celebrates the *cini kuuk* (grill the yam) and watch him. To open the new season, the priest takes some nice little yams. He goes to the sacred spot which is reserved for him. On a stone which is his altar, he grills the yams. When they are cooked, he scrapes charcoal from the blackened crust into a little hollow. He places over it the flat stone on which he will stand. There, he will remove the crust which has hardened around the yam in the heat of the fire. And at this moment, as a wisp of steam and a delicate odour rise from the yam, the celebrant (*gaanagoon*) prays (asks for blessings and plenty): ‘You who look upon the country, bless you for the good things which have come upon us. Grant that the word might be vigorous among us, that bad luck might not come upon the country, that the crops be abundant, and that the country ring to the cries of children ...’ At this moment, the celebrant solemnly eats the yam. And the mere men present with him commune with him by sharing his sacred meal.
Next, the celebrant gives people the *yati on gangue*, which is the medicine for the abundance of crops, for the vigour of the word and the vitality of the country. And he ends his prayer by sticking into the ground the core of a casuarina to seal the alliance with the ancestors. By this gesture, the country as it is now is connected to the ancestors.

If in a time of scarcity there is discord among the people or they are bearing grudges, the situation will get worse. But if they have made the effort to get back into harmony with the sacred word, the country will bloom again in an abundance of life.

The first thing one notices about the ceremony is the confidence with which it is approached. The man prepares the sacrifice in the natural manner of a mother preparing a meal for her children. Then the meal is eaten and conversation begins. Man speaks to his god as a child to his mother. And there develops an indescribable sense of communion. The relationship which is established between the celebrant, the congregation and the Other is something quite impenetrable, so perhaps it would be more discreet not to talk about it. The people present and the celebrant are going through a mythic experience.

By assisting at the celebration, listening to the prayers, and eating the yam, the group renews its union with its god and participates in the power of the ancestors.

That leads to another observation, namely that in celebrating his god, the Kanak projects himself into the god. He plunges into him, and the god leads him into the universe of the ancestors. In no way abashed by this, the Kanak shows his god around his country, which is that of his ancestors, who remain present like the air one breathe. Yet another observation concerns the faith of the group in the effectiveness of what it is doing — and not just the group participating in the sacrifice, but the whole tribe. There is in fact a sort of general understanding, or sociological pressure, which holds the Kanaks from going beyond the requirements of the *kaapué poxa*. And the men who participate in the sacrifice are conscious of the importance of their acts. For them, the grandeur and the generosity of nature are bound up with the medicines they drink, the yam they eat, the casuarina core thrust into the ground by the celebrant, as well with
as the prayers and thus the whole celebration which puts them all in
communion with those who are at the source of life.

After having taken part in this celebration, the men of the tribe
can work in peace, because they are sure that the tribe will have a
happy year.

Which of the man and his god has stepped beyond the edge of
time? Clearly the man, who by his sacrificial act steps into eternity.
His communion brings him into the fraternity of the ancestors. And
that is something normal for the Kanak, something natural. It is not
doing so which is anomalous, which is mad, for that is to fall into
insignificance, into nothingness.

Maurice Leenhardt had it right when he said that the Kanak ‘is
his god’s man, his totem’s man, or the man of some other power. But
through these powers or these aberrant beings, he is powerful, he is’.

The mythic experience of time is a normal part of Kanak life, and
it is so deep-rooted that it is difficult to imagine how a Melanesian
group could live in its traditional cohesion without this experience
of mythic time.

A blessed time
In the life of any human group, there are special times when
relationships within the community take on particularly intense life.
It is the block of time which encompasses an event of this kind and
the preparations for its celebration which I call a ‘blessed time’.

In the life of the traditional society at Hienghène, the events
which come around the most often to revive fraternal warmth in the
community are the feast of the new yams, important arrivals and
departures, the commencement of ploughing the yam fields, the
erection of a big house, the enthronement of a chief, community
work and above all births, marriages and bereavements. It is the gen
aman organisation whose function it is to bring to life the special
time offered by the event. The gen aman brings the maternal and
paternal sides together and in a way constrains them to reinvigorate
the networks of connections which unite them.

Let us observe the structure of the gen aman in the following illus-
trative events: birth, bereavement, marriage.
Birth: When a child is born, his father gives notice to his clan brothers that in four or five days, a name will be given to his son. On the day, or the day before, the brothers come, bringing their contribution to the gen aman. When the day is fixed, the father shows his brothers their whole contribution, composed of thawé (cords of traditional money), woven mats, and foodstuffs. When everyone has seen them, the elders of the clan prepare three parcels of ‘custom’ for presentation to the child’s mother and to his maternal uncles.

These parcels each contain one, two or three thawé. Obviously, other gifts are offered with the thawé.

When the mother and her brothers have arrived at the place of the gen aman, the father and his brothers spread out the three parcels of ‘custom’ in front of them. Next, an elder stands in front of the ‘custom’ and makes a speech. He tells the maternal uncles of his great joy at welcoming a fruit of their blood into his clan. When he has finished, he offers the three thawé by pointing to them: the first is the ba nayalan or ba tho pei yalan. That is the thawé to baptise the child or to give the child a name. This is the money which permits the child to bear one of the names of his clan and thus to be registered in the hierarchy of the tribe.

The second thawé is the ba ngayu, also called the ba thii we het wan. Literally, ‘To strengthen the child, to make it hard and strong’ and enable it to drink and to eat hot food.

The third thawé is the ba pecave sang. This money indicates that precautions have been taken so that the child can be taken everywhere without risk.

In all, these three thawé say to the maternal uncles: ‘The child who has come from your blood is in good hands. He has received one of the names of our clan. His social position is registered in our hierarchy. Furthermore, his upkeep is assured. And he can move about among us and all our clan brothers in complete safety.’

Before taking the gen aman, the uncle makes a speech of thanks, and then he gives a thawé called ba ve thont. This is the money he offers to be permitted to take everything away.

Later, when the child has ceased suckling, the father will again give a thawé called ba yuu dit wan, which signifies the cessation of
breast-feeding and more precisely the involvement of the paternal uncles in the weaning of the child.

Last, there remains a final ceremony, with a thawé to be given to the maternal uncles. For a boy, it is the toumi sang (he is painted in ochre) and for a girl it is the tuuwi djeenan (the earlobe is pierced with a slender stem of fern or coconut frond). It is by this last thawé that the mother and the maternal uncles are relieved of all responsibility regarding the person who has come and increased their clan. It is only after this ceremony that the child is a full member of its father’s clan.

Bereavement: Bereavement is an event which occasions a large gathering of the tribe. It is the most demanding event, because its timing cannot be fixed. And everyone is obliged to interrupt what he is doing to go to the bereaved family.

As soon as news of someone’s death is received, a thawé is sent to the mother’s clan, because that is where his blood has come from. The traditional money circulates around the clan with the message, while on the paternal side, the clans arrive one after the other. First, each pays a visit to the deceased. Linen is left near the body. Next, the head of the house is called, and, in the yard, the custom contribution is given. Speeches are of course always made.

When all the father’s people are present, a ‘custom’ is prepared, the ba tadi hin ngan, which is kept for the arrival of the maternal relatives of the deceased. As soon as they arrive, the ba tadi ngan is placed on the coffin or at the feet of the dead person, to tell the person who is closest to the deceased by blood: ‘There is the thawé for taking your brother out of the house into your keeping so that you can put him in his place of rest.’ The orator for the mother’s people replies, then he takes the thawé with the ‘custom’ as well as the coffin. Then the burial takes place.

When everyone has returned to the house, the master of ceremonies announces that in four or five days everyone is invited for the hauwa, which is the mourning ceremony.

Three points before we talk about the ceremony itself. First, concerning the four or five days: why this delay, which is moreover found also at the time of the naming ceremony after the birth? This
delay is required by the belief of the elders. They say in fact that it is on the fourth day that the male child awakens and therefore can be considered to be one of the living.

For a girl, they wait five days to declare her ready to enter the world of the living. It is only then that the child can be named and thus become part of the tribe.

Why the same delay for the dead? The elders say it is because after the fourth day for men and the fifth day for women, the body of the deceased relaxes and the limbs dislocate. The man or the woman can then be considered to have truly left his or her body. The tribe can prepare the *hauwa*. There are other reasons for this delay. They will be explained in another context.

The second point concerns the *ba tadi hin ngan*, which is the ‘custom’ which returns the deceased to his uncles. This offering is also to the ancestral masters of the blood, that they might free the house and everything in it of their grasp. If the offering is not made, the house and the things in it at the moment of the death become taboo. Furthermore, the people who nursed the deceased may not leave the house to eat outside, lest the gods strike them.

The third point should already have been covered, namely, that in every custom celebration of life and death there are always two groups present, and no-one who is not a part of one or the other group has a role. It is the person at the centre of the event who determines the groupings. On one side, he has his maternal uncles, the *wan hitéi*, the masters of the blood, those who are at the source of life. On the other, the paternal people, the *kaapué aman*, the masters of the ordering of society in the ceremony.

Back to the bereavement ceremony. On the day set for the *hauwa*, the *wan hitéi* arrive at the house of the deceased. They are welcomed by the *kaapué aman*, who have everything ready for their welcome. As soon as they arrive, the *wan hitéi* offer the assembled *kaapué aman* a single package of ‘custom’, which is the *ba the thili gen aman*. That means: to cancel out the custom offering which is going to be made to them. But the real sense of it is saying to the *wan hitéi* on the one hand: ‘Don’t go to any trouble for us, don’t spend too much, we are all brothers, don’t shower us with gifts’, and on the other letting it be understood that if they honour the dead man by giving ‘generously’,
the *ba the thili gen aman* will exorcise all the bad luck they are at risk of attracting. This meaning does not have to be made explicit in the speeches, which are all about alliances between clans. But if for one reason or another the *wan hitéi* want to get a large profit out of the *gen aman*, they will load the *ba the thili gen aman* down with wealth to oblige the *kaapué aman* to give a lot. This is done if the *wan hitéi* want to humiliate the masters of ceremonies or punish them in return for some bit of treachery they are held to have committed in the past. But that will be barely perceptible in the speech. Kanaks are capable of keeping the memory of a humiliation done to them for a very, very long time, with no sign of it whatsoever. It should be noted, incidentally, that the sometimes apparently anodyne customary gestures are full of social, religious and political meanings.

When the speech on the *ba the thili gen aman* is finished, everyone replies with a single voice 'hoolé!' Then the *kaapué aman* pick up the *gen aman* and go off into the *ngan djila*, which is the house in which have been placed all the customary wealth which has been gathered for the occasion by the *kaapué aman*. There, the elders of the group will do a detailed inventory of the *ba the thili gen aman*. The result gives them a point of reference which they absolutely must exceed, especially in numbers of *thawe*. The people in charge have a quick look at the contents of the 'customs' prepared by the *kaapué aman*. They add or subtract a *thawe* according to the size of the *ba the thili gen aman*. When everything is ready, the *kaapué aman* are all called in and the master of ceremonies, making his short speech in a fairly confidential tone of voice, presents to his brothers the wealth that they are about to have the honour of offering to the *wan hitéi*.

Now that everything is ready, the men carry the packages into the courtyard. They religiously set out the three packages in a row, pointing towards the entrance to the house. All the *kaapué aman* are assembled on the same side. It is at this point that the *wan hitéi* are invited to present themselves to the *gen aman*.

The master of ceremonies steps from the group of *kaapué aman* and makes a stirring speech to his guests. The whole group takes part by marking each cadence of phrasing by sounding its approval with a rhythmic 'oon!' which urges the speaker to greater and greater heights of dynamism, lyricism and warmth. Once this speech is over,
the custom brother of the deceased or one of his kin on the kaapué aman side takes a thawé from the first package (called ian hauwa) and holds it out at eye level. The master of ceremonies speaks again to say that this thawé ‘opens’ the gen aman, and then the thawé is put back in its original place.

Then they go to the second package, and through the same ceremony. The orator says that this is the hmauc nyang, also called nyamin ne nyang. This is the high point of the hauwa. In this package are found the most valuable thawe. Furthermore, it is also in this package that the most gifts are found, because hmauc nyang means ‘the most precious gift for him’. The sense of the custom is on the one hand to farewell the deceased and on the other for people to offer their most precious possessions to express their sorrow; the greater the impact the deceased has had on the people around him during his lifetime, the greater the void, and the greater the effort the kaapué aman will put into this custom. To some extent, it is a way of honouring his memory before the wan hitéi, but it is also a way of honouring the maternal side for the fruit of their blood who has been someone great in the family he has just left.

We have the same ceremony for the third package, the ba koin nen gen aman, that is, ‘ending the custom’, but the real meaning of this last gen aman is in the money called tami kundi and another called tahindu. The tami kundi is money attached to a kundi stem or leaf from a cordyline. Money is presented in this way when a maternal uncle is asked for pardon when a nephew has hurt himself or at any time that he loses blood. Here the meaning is the same. It is a request to make amends made by the kaapué aman to the uncles as masters of the blood and masters of the life of the deceased.

In this context, the tami kundi has a mythic sense as well, that of exorcising the wany. Tahindu means ‘bury the bones’. The true significance is a message to the wan hitéi to keep the bones of the deceased safe from being profaned in any way. There is also an idea of definitive separation from everything connected with the deceased. The kaapué aman in a way free themselves from it by inviting the wan hitéi to take the bones of the deceased to their own resting place. On the mythic plane, it is also a way to tell the spirit of the dead man to leave its former dwelling place.
These are the three main customs for the hauwa. But very often a fourth is added and sometimes a fifth or sixth called sam.

It is a gesture of thanks to the people who devoted themselves day and night to nurse the deceased in his last illness.

But the hauwa rite really ends with the vhai ciino. It is pretty simple.

The kaapué aman invite the wan hitéi to eat. The instant the food is cooked, the chief of the wan hitéi is invited to ganagoon, that is, to pray and to make wishes that the bad fortune which has just afflicted them depart forever. It is from this moment only that the kaapué aman feel themselves to be released from their obligations, to themselves, to the wan hitéi, to the ancestors. For the harmony which death has broken is re-established. They can dance the pilou. The event is over. It has been enclosed in a block of time where nothing has counted except the cohesion and the fervour of the group.

Marriage: The most anticipated event in the tribe is the kind of marriage called pecimui lu or pe haloon. It is the occasion for celebrating par excellence. It has three main phases:

- the proposal and the girl's reply
- the offering of the girl by the wan hitéi
- the receiving of the girl by the kaapué aman.

To take a wife, the boy goes around the clans which are made known to him as traditional for this. He can do the rounds himself, but the more often it is an elder of the family who undertakes the search. The boy makes his choice from among the girls who are selected for him. Once the choice is made, the closest relatives with rights to the word settle among themselves who is to speak. They prepare a 'custom' with a thawé called ba peian valik, which means 'to say, to announce, or to make a proposal'. When everything is ready, they agree on a day when some representatives of the clan can leave with the message.

The relatives of the girl, alerted to the date, await the visit. When the messengers arrive, they give the 'custom' ba peian valik (also called ba cile nook), that is, 'to ask for a wife'. The relatives of the girl take the 'custom'. They consult among themselves, ask the
girl’s opinion and (depending on how the discussions go) they decide either to give a reply at once or to put it off until a later date. If the reply is affirmative, they give a ‘custom’ called *ba tahuon valik*, that is, ‘to take up the proposal’, to make it public. This is the way the clan and the girl say ‘yes’. At this time the boy’s relatives make a little gesture of thanks.

Thereafter, the brother clans are assembled on each side to show them the *ba peian valik* and the *ba tahuon valik*. The word gets around and the relatives of the boy will set a date, of which they inform the clans of the girl, while the clans on the boy’s side, called *kaapué aman*, are already getting on with the preparations for the celebration. As soon as they are ready, the *wan hitéi* place out in the courtyard three packages of ‘custom’: the *ba na sang*, the *keen ngap* and the *thont tain*.

The *ba na sang* is the most important part of the *gen aman*. It is by this custom that the girl is offered to the *kaapué aman*. Literally, the *ba na sang* means ‘giving the woman’. This package is the most heavily packed with *thawe*, because the girl bears with her and with the money symbolising her offering, the honour of all the clans which accompany her. She does keep her totem and its *yarik* (medicines). In her new tribe, she keeps her identity as a member of her clan of origin. The importance accorded the *ba na sang* is intended to show her place in the hierarchy of the *wan hitéi*. That will allow the *kaapué aman* to identify her socially and thus to place her appropriately to her rank in her new tribe.

The *keen ngap* is the basket of provisions, her request for the right to eat with her husband and her new family. All taboos have to be lifted so that she has the right to move around in her husband’s house, the right to use the cooking pots, to make a home with her husband.

It is also a request for the right to plant her taro stems and yam heads, or in other words to ask the *kaapué aman* to give her a plot for cultivation and at the same time to let her work in the fields without risking an encounter with the *wany*.

The last package of ‘custom’ is the *thont tain*. This is the wealth that she brings with her. It is a way of saying to the *kaapué aman*: be careful, this is not just anyone, this woman is loaded with wealth. So
offer her a place in your houses. And in accepting her, make sure that she has the right to her own being in the eyes of the chiefs and the elders.

Furthermore, may the gods of her new tribe not punish her if by mistake she breaks taboos attached to people, places or things.

In short, the wan hitéi feel very honoured to offer a member of their clan in marriage. But they seek to ensure that she is properly accepted and treated with proper consideration by the chiefs and the elders and the gods.

Can you imagine a more perfect welcome?

When the orator who presented the gen aman has finished, the chief of the kaapué aman comes forward with a thawé which he presents to the wan hitéi after briefly expressing thanks. This thawé indicates that the kaapué aman are going to take everything away.

The three ‘customs’ are taken away into the ngan djila. The elders do a quick inventory. They compare it with what they have prepared and make some adjustments to ensure that their gift is two or three times greater. Then, in their turn, they come in.

The men carry the gen aman into the courtyard. They set out three packages: the ba tho nan gnyang, the ba whii ngap and the thue we man yaak.

The kaapué aman stand at the top end of the gen aman. The wan hitéi are invited to approach and the orator begins a long speech, punctuated by the repeated and increasingly enthusiastic ‘yes’ of the crowd. Then, the presentation of each packet is attended by the same ceremonial as for the wan hitéi.

First, the orator gives the ba tho nan gnyang, which means ‘calling the woman’. It is the husband’s welcoming gesture. This package is the heaviest in thawé and other riches. The kaapué aman make it a point of honour to give importance to this symbol of welcome, because the alliance which is being made includes the woman and all her clan. In addition, the ba tho nan gnyang constitutes the agreement of the kaapué aman to the various requests contained in the ba na sang offered by the wan hitéi.

Second, the ba whii ngap is given. It signifies the agreement of the kaapué aman to welcome the girl and grant her the right to sleep by the same fire, to eat from the same dish, to cultivate the same field
with the husband. It signifies also the right to live in fraternity with the members of her husband’s clan and constitutes for the *wan hitéi* the affirmation that they are from now on among the guests of honour of the tribe.

The third and last custom is the *thué we wan yaak*, the ‘payment for water and fire’. This symbolises the thanks of the *kaapué aman* to the woman for the new hearth to which she will give birth with water and fire. For the tribe, that means increasing life. But the thanks go to all the *wan hitéi*, for one of their blood is coming to enrich the tribe with a new source of life.

In general terms, the *ba tho nan gnyang*, the *ba whii ngap* and the *thué we man yaak* presented by the *kaapué aman* make up the element which seals the alliance offered by the *wan hitéi* by means of the *ba na sang*, the *keen ngap* and the *thont tain*.

The meeting of these two elements reformulates the tribal group’s relationships. It creates an alliance, the source of a new dynamic which reflects on the whole social fabric here set in movement by the *kaapué aman* and the *wan hitéi*. Both groups have lived a segment of time brimming with life and human presence. This segment is not delimited in time: the event has its own time, in which the community and the event are profoundly associated. Unlike the sort of time which frees people by freeing their time, this event-time puts the group into symbiosis with its time and space within an event which draws into its warmth and influence the human groups which fall under its spell.

The three events which have been described are then the ‘high points of social time’. At the beginning and at the end, they are in time, but within the event, it is warmth, fervour, comfort and fraternity and the sense of experiencing it. Living these segments of time opens for the Kanak the whole universe which gives him life and fullness of being ...

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1 This article is taken from *Journal de la Société des océanistes* (no. 53, vol. 32, December 1976, pp. 281–292) (Editors’ note).

2 An artificial mound, round in shape, which is open at door level, and remains in existence after the house is abandoned. (J.G.)
3 See the notion of the word being identical with the action, according to Maurice Leenhardt.

4 *Fwāi* language: author's transcription. *Fwāi* is one of the languages spoken in the Hienghène region (Editors' note).

5 Kaori: *Araucaria* (hoop pine), tall forest tree, often planted near dwellings.

6 Terms from the *pinje* language: *nawèn* (spirit), *naweï* (our spirit), *pue kahyuk* (root man), *tyènkahyuk* (wood man — for tree).

7 All the other vernacular terms in this article are in the *pinje* language.

8 See the Jopaipi myth in Maurice Leenhardt, *Documents néo-calédoniens* (Paris, Institut d'ethnologie, 1932), clarified in Do Kamo, op. cit. (J.G.)

9 Our emphasis. (J.G.)

10 *Araucaria*, a large forest tree, often planted near dwellings (Editors' note).

11 This is the column pine, *Araucaria cooki*, a conifer native to New Caledonia, which Kanaks often plant near their dwellings (Editors' note).

12 *Casuarina*, hardwood tree with needles, the symbol of permanence (Editors' note).

13 The cordyline (*Taetsia liliacea*) is a sacred plant for the Kanaks.

Translator's note: JG is Jean Guiarr, the eminent ethnologist under whom Tjibaou studied in Paris.
PART TWO

Thinking Independence
(March 1977–March 1984)

IN 1977, TWO years after the Mélanésia 2000 festival, Jean-Marie Tjibaou commits himself fully to the political path. He wins the municipal elections at Hienghène and joins the Union Calédonienne. A member of the Executive Committee with Eloi Machoro, Yeiwéné Yeiwéné, Pierre Declercq and François Burck, he becomes vice-president of the party at the same time as the party, influenced by the growing strength of a new generation of militants, opts resolutely for Kanak independence. This radicalisation is a response to the refusal of the French Government to enter into dialogue with the autonomists and reflects a steady increase in tension on the ground. At the end of the 70s, Kanak claims are focussed on the land question. The reserves, comprising at that time less than ten per cent of the Territory’s cultivable land, are overpopulated and cry out to be extended; colonists’ rights to their properties are more and more disputed, and sometimes properties are briefly occupied. The Union Calédonienne supports this movement to reoccupy ancestral land, and on several occasions it is Jean-Marie Tjibaou who condemns the expropriation suffered by the Kanaks since the 19th century.

Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories Paul Dijoud becomes alarmed by this potentially explosive situation and persuades President Giscard d’Estaing to undertake significant
reforms. A land office is created, and a cultural office, and an operation for what is called ‘Melanesian advancement’ is put in train, all in an effort to stem the Melanesian discontent which the Socialists, then still in opposition, exploit by affirming their attachment to the principle of self-determination for indigenous peoples. And the victory of François Mitterrand in 1981 will give rise to great hope among the Kanak nationalists, organised since 1979 in a Front indépendantiste (FI). Without giving a clear response to the aspirations of most Melanesians, the first Socialist government will nonetheless help the FI hold power in New Caledonia for two years (1982–84).

Thus, in June 1982, Jean-Marie Tjibaou becomes Vice-President of the Territory Council of Government and thereby gains decisive experience in managing the Territory. Strengthened by it, he develops a train of economic and diplomatic thinking which raises questions about the heedless push for profits characteristic of local business and, eventually, invites people to rethink New Caledonia’s political future. Taking advantage of the recent independence of the New Hebrides (which became Vanuatu in 1980) and putting to good use the political support of the countries of the Pacific and the Algerian Government, Jean-Marie Tjibaou progressively develops international standing. He draws on these new contacts to enrich his thinking on Kanak civilisation in relation to the technical and cultural evolution of the world. Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s thought continues to consolidate both philosophically and politically. As the texts in this second part show, the future president of the FLNKS is fully mature intellectually as he tackles the fundamental changes that New Caledonia will experience from the end of 1984 onwards.


2 The High Commissioner of the Republic is ex officio the President of the Council of Government.
CHAPTER 5
‘A People Between Two Worlds’¹

In this extract, a year after the turning point represented by the decision of the Union Calédonienne to seek independence, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Vice-President of the UC and mayor of Hienghène since 1977, considers some of the implications of this change of direction. After a technical study of the two statutes governing the rights of persons and property in New Caledonia (not repeated here), he looks towards the arrangements which will be needed for the management of the wealth of the Territory and the adaptation of the school system to the specific needs of Kanak children.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, the slogan ‘Two colours, one people’² matched the ethnic reality, as the majority Black and White groups constituted the essential elements of local politics. Neither the Antillese, nor the Wallisians, nor the Tahitians, nor the metropolitan, nor the métis occupied as large a place as they do today.

These new aspects of local political geography require us to reconsider the meaning of our slogan, since it no longer entirely covers the Territory’s ethnic realities. From now on, we need to look at it as the symbol of our reciprocal will for dialogue, the beacon which should guide our daily struggle, and the expression of our desire to come to terms with our history by putting in place a political program for real decolonisation. This entails an obligation to rethink the legal status of people and their property (in New Caledonia), the status of the culture within which each group lives,
and the group’s right to promote it, and finally laws for the exploitation of the Territory’s natural endowment and the means to do so.

Acceptance that the groups are unequal is fundamental for real dialogue, and this means taking into consideration everything that affects status. Thus both sides need to make an effort to recognise that people organise their way of life in different ways and enjoy their quality of life differently; political will is needed to promote them; and the decisions which incorporate that political will into the life of the country need to be implemented.

In that respect, the Kanaks demand that their culture be taken into account in the social and educational system which forges the spirit of our children. Recognition that our cultures are different requires that teaching, and radio and television as well, play their part unambiguously in promoting our cultural models. In sociological terms, this approach is of utmost importance for Caledonia. At present, no encounter of this kind is possible between our peoples.

For it is only the Western model of civilisation and culture which is on offer in Caledonia. The Kanaks are in fact condemned more and more to become strangers to their own society, so that the organisation of the tribe, of chiefly matters, of customary life, no longer seem to its members to be worth doing.

This situation is a function of the colonial way of looking at our status and that of our society. We are a people between two worlds.

Today, we reclaim our right to exist with our cultural heritage recognised in our own country.

Exercising our right to be different, we demand the establishment of a cultural charter to be signed by the representatives of the government, the education service, State television and Melanesian cultural groups.

Our country should more and more be seen as a heritage, not a wreck to be looted.

This is why the wealth beneath our soil, in our forests, in the sea which surrounds us, in our reefs, as well as our tourist potential, our strategic situation, our population and our cultural heritage should be protected by statutes which rigorously apply that principle.

The exploitation of this heritage should be agreed in a contract of solidarity between the Territory and individuals on the one hand,
and between the Territory and its political, economic and cultural partners on the other.

I shall end by saying that we are a part of the peoples of the Pacific and not of those of the Mediterranean, which calls for review of what links we need with Europe, in order to put in place a wider policy with at its heart a more open approach to the world of the Pacific.

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1 This text appeared in L'Avenir calédonien (the organ of the Union Calédonienne), no. 767, 18 July 1978, under the heading 'Our slogan as a program'.

2 First slogan of the Union Calédonienne. From 1985, the UC's slogan was: 'Acknowledge the Kanak people that it might in turn acknowledge you' (Editors' note).
CHAPTER 6
The Right of the Kanak People

From 1977, Kanak claims keep growing. There are more and more demonstrations for the return of land and against repression. In January 1977, Jean-Marie Tjibaou announces in l’Avenir calédonien: ‘Independence in 1980’. In June, the various independentist parties join together in a single front, with Tjibaou as President of the Front Indépendantiste. He writes this text on 11 September, just after a demonstration has been harshly repressed. One year before the neighbouring New Hebrides becomes independent as Vanuatu, he presents the balance of forces in the Territory, underlining the unity and legitimacy of the Kanak movement. Addressing himself to Gabriel Marc, an official of Justice and Peace (a Catholic inspired movement), he uses the occasion to query the Church and to take satisfaction from the decision of the Evangelical (Protestant) Church in August 1979 to come out in favour of Kanak independence.

WE HAVE READ in the newspaper that France has been trying to negotiate the establishment of a joint nuclear force with Bonn in Germany. Bonn wanted nothing of it. It is nonetheless a reminder that all countries in the world, to safeguard their independence, seek to establish relationship systems which make them dependent on other countries but place them in a system which safeguards their national independence.

This right to choose with whom we shall be interdependent, politically and economically, is one of our fundamental demands.
In the economic sector, the greatest scandal facing us is the exploitation of our heritage, the exploitation of our mines by the SLN, by the so-called ‘petits mineurs’ who export thousands, millions of tonnes of nickel to Japan each year; and this heritage goes into the pockets of private individuals who invest elsewhere, in Australia, in Sahara oil, etc. The claim is a natural one: the indigenous people cannot benefit from this wealth and they ask that this heritage be returned to them, used for the benefit of the country; and if one day, after independence, the State takes charge of exploiting it, foreign capital would obviously be involved. All that would change would be the distribution of the dividends: if the country holds the heritage, it has the power to decide what use is made of it, something now under the authority of the French State. An independent State could, for example, take a share of the income from the sale of the ore and use it for development purposes.

It might be noted that currently, with preparations for the Conference on the Law of the Sea under way, the sorts of treaties which have already been signed with the Koreans and the Japanese place us in an identical position in regard to the exploitation of our heritage by foreigners. Thus, it is still a French minister who deals with foreign countries on mining and maritime resources (not just fish, but also oil and polymetallic nodules). Which makes our country a bit like a mine they are digging without regard for the people on top of it.

That is why, in economic terms, we demand control of currency movements and the inflow and outflow of capital in our country, matters today still the domain of the French State and over which we have no power at all. Policy is made in our country by an appointed governor and the ‘wider powers’ given to the Territorial Assembly, and the local government has no power other than to say ‘yes’ to the decisions taken by the governor. We cannot continue to accept this, the more so since the policy thus made tends to bring more and more people to New Caledonia and make us a smaller and smaller minority.

On the question of whether, since the preparatory mission for the Plan was last here, people’s thinking has developed, I would answer that yes, I am sure that a very great and rapid change has taken
place, but I believe not so far so great as to make the Kanak people as a whole ready to die for their country. The majority of militants, in the local sections and the regional committees of the Front indépendantiste — which won the last elections by 13,000 votes — are now ready to confront the anniversary. The problem is one of strategy, tactics and means: not armed means, I should say, because experience and history have taught us that, ill-armed as we were in 1878, we got ourselves crushed. In 1917, the Northern revolt (and I am well placed to speak of it, because my paternal grandmother was killed by the soldiers who suppressed it) was also crushed.

From the moment that right is on our side, we try to defend that right, to express it in demonstrations and in writing. Nonetheless, we are very, very limited where writing is concerned, because the bourgeois press here in the Territory makes no space for us; its own security is involved. From time to time, when we write something nice, they will accept it for publication, but then cut it and publish it with syrupy comments which dilute our ideas, so much so that it is not worth writing. Using leaflets, public meetings, private meetings, we are trying to get ourselves a bit more organised for independence; the fact that they have worked together to promote the Front indépendantiste has made people more conscious of the struggle for liberty, for liberation. A sense of pride has appeared with this struggle, a new identity compared with the colonial sense of alienation. We all learned to sing the Marseillaise at school. Today, I think people are aware that the Marseillaise is the national anthem of the French, not the national anthem of the Kanaks: the anthem which salutes the French flag, salutes the flag which colonises our country, salutes the annexation of our country, the alienation of our land, the alienation of our fatherland, the alienation of our heritage. And I think people are more and more aware of all that.

On 24 September, there will be meetings pretty well all over the country. We have been thinking of a sort of 'national mourning of the Kanak people': we shall try to do it in a calm manner, but it will be said, it will be thought, it will be expressed. The Kanak people are building up their unity. We have participated in the South Pacific Forum as observers; we worked the corridors to discuss our case, to convince people of our cause. I think that the countries of the
Pacific have unanimously decided to support independence for our country.

Now, strengthened by this unanimous position of the Pacific countries, we are going to take our case to the highest level: we are going to take it to the United Nations, in September or October. After the summer break, we are also going to try to send someone to France with our Member of Parliament Roch Pidjot, to sensitise metropolitan opinion to our claim.

In recent days, there have been organised demonstrations, especially by young people, secondary school students, supporting certain teachers who have expressed their opinion on Kanak independence, in defiance of the deputy head of education and the primary school inspectors, and have been dismissed for it. These demonstrations have all been orderly. But a fortnight ago the High Commissioner decided to suspend all demonstrations, just when the RPCR [Rally for Caledonia in the Republic] itself was organising a demonstration (in a way, a counter-demonstration). We consider this to be an abuse of power, given that the people of France themselves can march, can demonstrate, as an established fundamental right. Here, it is prohibited. And at the last of our meetings, three days ago, people were beaten savagely. Obviously, the forces of order have the law on their side because demonstrations are forbidden, but they acted not just to disperse people but to hit the independentist leaders. Some have even been harassed at home by phone calls and so on. Repression is truly the order of the day today, but the Kanak people were expecting it: this very morning, in the Territorial Assembly, people on the Right made speeches giving warnings which were nothing but disguised threats, saying that the Kanak people had to stop demonstrating, otherwise they would have them to deal with, and so on. These are people who are armed, who have the means to intervene, who have rifles on their side, strength on their side, the Administration on their side, and, unfortunately, the complicity of the Government on their side.

I am not whingeing about this, because on our side, we have no need to weep, we are tired of shedding tears, our eyes are dry from weeping over our fate. Today we are trying to fight and we shall fight until the end. I believe that the Kanak people’s awareness is
constantly growing. Tension is mounting. People are arming themselves. The Kanaks are still not arming themselves: first because it is difficult to do so, and second because it is not our way to go into the streets with rifles to claim our rights. But if the pressures continue, if the tensions cannot be expressed in demonstrations, which is the normal way, which are outlets for the people, there is no telling what will happen to us or the country in the future. The fact is that people are more and more mobilised and many today are unfortunately prepared — I say unfortunately in relation to colonial pressure — to die for their country.

We are also organising a sort of funds drive to assist the despatch of a mission to the United Nations to make our rights known there, perhaps also to help the person who might go with Roch Pidjot to present our positions and our cause to the French people, to the press, to public opinion.

I can give some news. The day before yesterday, there were about 20 arrests. Elie Poigoune, one of the Palika independentist leaders, had his nose broken, was hit several times and is now in hospital. A deacon had his hand broken, a young girl and Territorial Councillor Jacques Violette were hit hard, as was André Gopéa, Territorial Councillor from the East Coast; New Caledonian police stopped him on the road, took the key of his vehicle and said things like: ‘You independentists had better watch your step, you'll get your head bashed in!’ Well, that is the sort of thing that is going on in Nouméa at the moment. There is also the Morini group, who put up posters, RPCR thugs who were there behind the police and the security force when they charged, there with their cashes to try to provoke trouble, to beat up the leaders of that gathering three days ago. I must stress also that there are more and more security police, whether for the Dijoud⁴ visit or because of the demonstrations for 24 September, I do not know. Another 100 or so arrived about 10 days ago, and there are more to come — so many that soon there will be one policeman for each inhabitant. However, from now on there can be no security while there is no security for Kanaks.

The last time he was here, the President of the Republic, Mr Giscard d’Estaing — the independentists were not there to welcome him — speaking in the new Territorial Assembly, urged upon the
anti-independentists not that they should crush the Kanaks, but that they should seek unity. This stuck in their throats, because they were expecting Giscard to congratulate them for their victory and to urge them to crush the Front indépendantiste a bit more. Well, what we say is that unity is up to us, not the foreigners, and there will be no unity if the initiative does not come from us.

That gives some idea of what the climate is like today, 11 September. The newspapers are satisfied because the police went in in a fairly energetic way and calmed down the demonstrating Blacks, knocked them about, and some were sent to hospital. A degree of satisfaction can be read between the lines. Mgr Klein, the Archbishop of Nouméa, also made a statement which was no great shakes. As a Catholic, I am a bit embarrassed because the Protestants have taken a position which points to the liberation of man, not man in the spiritual sense — it is not spirit men you find in the streets but men of flesh and bone caught in constraints which are material, physical, economic and political.

The Evangelical Church, then, has taken a position in favour of Kanak independence. Archbishop Klein wanders around in a fog, and obviously the Kanaks say: ‘He is a foreigner, he can’t be in favour of us!’ And it is a pity, because the Church is seen as divided, the Catholic Church offering no salvation for the Kanaks, while the Protestant Church is more deeply rooted in the people of Caledonia. So people settle down a bit. This morning, some people in the Assembly made some statements to square their conscience, uttered some warnings for the sake of what their constituents think, but I think the movement for independence is well on its way.

But we independentists are not safe here. People who are independentists are dismissed; today, for example, certain students were expelled from the secondary schools, and yesterday others were expelled from Blaise-Pascal, a Catholic institute, and from Sainte-Marie, a Catholic school in Paita. The insecurity thus experienced by the independentists is part of the fight for freedom, the fight for the nation, for Kanak nationality; it flows above all from the feeling of insecurity of people who are afraid of the rise of this Kanak awareness, and who are perhaps afraid for their property ... The fiercest, the most frightened people are those who have capital, who have
mines, banks, large capital investments in the country. They transmit their fear to others, but it is they who are under threat, and I think that for them, there will be no more security: it will depend on the French Army, the French Gendarmerie, and then on their own rifles, because they are armed, equipped; they have guard dogs and so on which afford them security. Unhappily, they communicate their feeling of insecurity about their property to the general population, who are not involved in this fight. It is the exploiters who should be made to feel insecure. They should keep their insecurity to themselves, but they make the little people share it, so that they will support them in their shameless exploitation of our heritage, of our country.

So there you are, Mr Gabriel Marc, greetings from Caledonia. On this sunny day, you know, with Philippe Missotte, we are thinking some really dark thoughts while people stroll enjoying the sun, the beach, the sea. But the Kanak people’s fight for freedom is a hard fight despite the sunshine. I would say that it is David against Goliath, and David has to find a way through the bush to defeat a Goliath who has the means, who has helicopters, who has rifles, who has everything. What we have is right on our side. I hope you can put these ideas around you in France, so that right might triumph, the right of the Kanak people, of course, but triumph simply because it is right.


2 Expression used in New Caledonia to describe mine-owners (Editors’ note). Meaning ‘small miners’, it refers to miners other than SLN, not all of whom were in fact small in other than a comparative sense (Translators’ note).

3 Each year in New Caledonia, France celebrates the anniversary of its annexation of the Territory on 24 September 1853. The independentists have for their part made it a day of mourning for the Kanak people, marking it regularly with various demonstrations (Editors’ note).

4 Paul Dijoud, Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories 1978–1981 (Editors’ note).
CHAPTER 7

Being Melanesian Today

In this address, Jean-Marie Tjibaou underlines the extent to which the general population of Kanaks are, to this day, possessed by their culture despite 150 years of French presence in New Caledonia. He wonders about the difficulties that Melanesians have with the demands of Western life, and more broadly about the very uncertain future of the modern world. The address is remarkable for the freedom with which he expresses himself, going beyond the dominant political confrontations of the day (between Right and Left, East and West and so on) to reflect on his direct experience of modernity, at the moment when the independentist movement is approaching a new juncture.

The possibility of a win by the Left in the May 1981 presidential elections leads the Kanak leaders to make their people and their basic claims better known. This address, given at the ‘Geneva Conversations’ and published a few months after the election of François Mitterrand, is part of this new political dynamic, although in form and in tone, Jean-Marie Tjibaou still sees it as a matter of introducing his audience to a subtle understanding of Kanak culture. In 1975, he had already been organising seminars for the staff of New Caledonian enterprises aimed at explaining the main characteristics of the Melanesian world. He takes the same approach here, with no reference to the political context of the time, as if he were still drawing on ethnological discourse to inform his political argumentation. But the course of events will oblige him to take a harder line (see below ‘The Melanesian Cultural Renaissance in New Caledonia’).
IN MY COUNTRY, you begin an address by saying: ‘Elders, chiefs, leaders, people of this place, greetings.’ I have been asked to say a few words today about the ‘Melanesians’, and the title of the address was announced as ‘Melanesians of Yesterday and Today’.

I don’t know how far forward yesterday goes. From when? For me, it finishes today, and tomorrow, well, that’s tomorrow .... So I am going to say something about ‘Melanesians of yesterday’: those Melanesians of yesterday, as I have said, are of today. By that I mean that there are human models and that at each moment of history people are living. There is a certain timelessness which runs on within the group, and then some things which change. What then is from yesterday and what from today? There are some things which are impermanent, some elements of culture which are no more, but which are no more in the sense that they can no longer be seen as belonging to a precise period of time. In the museum, a moment ago, we saw some bamboo; I saw as well some clubs, and there was also a ceremonial axe. These are objects which, culturally, are no longer used today but which still form part of the group’s continuing frame of reference.

To make that a little clearer, we are going to try to see how the Melanesian is perhaps another way in which humanity manifests itself, but it is a manifestation of the same thing, the same reality. And the way that reality is manifested is conditioned by environment and by history. That is a way of making the banal point that people produce society and that society in its turn manufactures people. So that, thrown into the world of the living, our little person is a bundle of needs and aspirations: need for food, shelter, safety, clothing, the need to talk, to exchange, to perpetuate himself by creation and procreation; and the society which welcomes him offers a bundle of responses linked to the ecological, geographical, climatic and historical environment.

I cannot help but think of the reality of that today. I was at Glion this morning, and I saw snow falling. Through the window, all the time, the snow was falling, and I assure you that it makes me nervous. Because that is not part of my environment. And I don’t know how to behave, I haven’t learned it, I haven’t got the reflexes. The group which welcomed me at my birth did not give me the
reflexes, the habits, the culture which relates to that phenomenon. This jumper I am wearing was given to me by someone in Paris when I arrived. Same thing for the muffler. I arrived in shirt-sleeves, so people said: ‘Where does he come from?’ I am not used to it.

It seems essential to me that we grasp what a huge cultural investment each group makes to cope with its need for present and future security. You have to anticipate. I emphasise: anticipate. When the environment is threatening to the point that you can die if you have not provided sufficiently for the future, you have to have a very large sense of anticipation. At home, you can live all year round without clothing. I suppose that in Glion, if you have no clothing, if you have a house which you cannot close tightly, if you have no stove to warm yourself, you risk your life. And these things are all basic in the establishment of cultural structures for ‘making’ people.

To sum up, I shall talk a little about the concept we have of man in the Melanesian world, beginning with his environment, the perception we have of what it is that we value in him, what it is that makes him succeed. And all that in relation to today’s man, the man we are in the process of making in Caledonia, the Melanesian man the teachers are going to make for us. A new Melanesian. We’ll say that this man is a success, that he has some prestige because — perhaps he will be a university graduate — perhaps he will have money, a Mercedes — perhaps he will be a doctor, smoking cigars! There is a certain type of man who is made by the university, made by the modern school, and the Melanesian can’t escape this ‘factory’. Traditionally — when I say traditionally, the definition escapes me, especially here, at the university. What does ‘traditionally’ mean? I suppose it means ‘yesterday’, and, as I said before, for me yesterday lasts until now.

What is our concept of man in the Melanesian world? What is our concept of the universe he is in? What are the models of man, the models of successful man, what are the relationships this man has with the universe of the living, with living beings, with his native soil? I think that people who are still of the soil, rural people, can easily comprehend what I mean. How does he relate to the sun, the moon, the thunder, the seasons? And to those who live, as I put
it, ‘beyond the mirror’. I say all that to sketch a bit of a profile of the traditional man: he is the one who emerges from the land, the soil, the tribe, who is a product of the land, a product of the tribe.

What is our concept of life and therefore of the origin of man? I would say that the Melanesian world, like every human group, has tried to provide responses to the questions which seethe inside every human group: where do we come from? who are we? where are we going? And the reply to the question ‘where do we come from?’ on New Caledonian soil has been translated by the people into genealogies. They say, ‘the people of such and such a clan’ — ‘the Aramoto clan’. Well, the Aramoto come from straw, a certain kind of straw, grown on a certain mountain, and from this straw came the clan. Those of you who know the Bible, recall to mind the genealogy of Jesus, ‘son of David, son of Abraham’. You find the same pattern. But we find, at the end, a tree or an animal or a stone or the thunder. The relationship is with the earth, with the environment, with the country, with the soil. We do not come from elsewhere. We are people of and from this land. The ethnologists, the psychologists, the psychiatrists can talk at length on the psychoanalytic significance of this means of anchoring our origins, but that is not what I am talking about. I just want to say: this is the way it is. ‘Son of, son of, son of …’, and the names too have their importance. I make reference to the Bible because that is a literature which has its origins in the rural world, and you find the same patterns: people have come from such and such a place, their son is So and so, and, as in any traditional society, the first-born, those who first saw the sun, they are the ones who have the right to speak, because they are the eldest, they are the people who, in principle, should possess wisdom.

The man comes from a tree, a rock, a tortoise, an octopus, a stone; he comes from the thunder, and the thunder is his totem. It is important to emphasise that the relationship with the totem is always something sacred. If you are descended from the shark, the shark protects you. I don’t know if you have sharks here, but in Caledonia we have the sea, and it is important to have the shark as a protector. If you come from the column pine, you have no right to cut that tree down. Because the totems are your spirits. They are part of you. You owe them respect and veneration.
Well, all that is yesterday for the Melanesian world, but today according to whether you are close to the tribe or distant from it, the consensus of the tribe; we are always more or less close to those things. There are some who no longer show respect. There are also many who do. And I observe that today there is, perhaps, something of an identity crisis — or is it that, by dint of going to school, by dint of trying to become the model set by the school, the model set up by Europe, and not being able to achieve the model, people end up asking themselves the question: whoever are we? where do we come from? Then we can go back to the source to try to reimmerse ourselves, to find ourselves again in something else.

In many places still, this relationship with the totem remains a relationship which, traditionally, was unique: the channel to the divine. Through this relationship, the religious dimension of life is lived, including, as I said a moment ago, with the people who are ‘behind the mirror’. To give an example: in March and the three months which follow, we dig up the new yams. And it is forbidden to eat them before then. Last Friday, when I went to see my uncle, he gave me something which I have called medicine. This was not Astérix’s magic potion, but a drink made with herbs, leaves and so on. He said to me: ‘Right, you drink this, so that when you go off travelling in the world, if you eat yams, the ancestors will not hold it against you, because you will have made the custom beforehand.’ It was not that we were asking for pardon, but rather letting them know that there was a risk I would break the law. It is something sacred. Last year, at the moment when the first yams were to be dug, he called us together. At the time, we were working for the independence of our country. Well, he cooked the yams, opened the pot, and then he spoke to the ancestors to give us strength in our struggle, so that we would be strong in our convictions and in our speaking. So that what we said would be heard. Because sometimes, true things are said but ears are closed. The Bible says that there are hearts which are closed to the truth, hearts in which the spirit is not open to the light. That’s the way I mean it. Then he gave some to us to eat. We drank various medicines for this and that exact purpose. The word ‘medicine’ you can put in quotes. There are leaves which are prepared according to certain recipes. A little while ago, the
gentleman who showed us around the museum and showed us the engraved bamboos said that he had managed to find a drawing of a ‘magic package’ which contained all the leaves representing this plant, that plant, and so on, which were put there as an offering to the divinity to obtain a blessing. That is ‘medicine’. Next, we ate the new yams, but only after we had been authorised to dig the new yams and eat them. Before that, you can’t. There are things like that in all rural societies. But I think that what it is important to say is that this is here and now. How far from the year 2000? Twenty-five years? Fifteen? I did my studies at Lyon, at the Catholic faculty. When I returned home, ’68 had not ‘liberated’ me! And I am well pleased not to have been ‘liberated’!

At the beginning, there is the tree, the thunder and so on. Then there is the series of ancestors. Then there is us. And life passes through this genealogy, and this genealogy is that of my fathers, but it is also that of the clan which gave my mother and which, by giving my mother, gives me life. We say that the principle of life is that it is the mother who gives life. The father gives personality, social status, land. Look at Leenhardt\(^6\) — I don’t know whether you have read him. I think he understood many things. It was fortunate for us that he wrote. Life is given by blood. It is the mother who gives the blood. And she, with her brothers and her fathers, is the owner of the blood. So I am always dual. I am never a single individual. \textit{I cannot be a single individual}. The body is not a principle of individuation. The body is always a relationship. The body is the blood, and the blood is the mother. And it is my maternal uncles who own that part of me. That is why when a child comes into the world we give gifts to the mother, to pay her homage, to bless her because she is fecund, because she gives life and makes our clan grow. My children have my name. In the clans we have four or five names. They are like registration numbers corresponding to social categories. They are not names for general use. There are no public names. Names are clan property. If you take the names that are in my gift, it’s war! Or you will be cursed by the ancestors; you’ll get sick and die. Right. The children, then, receive name and status from the paternal side. Unless they are taken back by the mother as compensation. If my mother is from your side, she can take back one of her sons for
herself. Because she keeps her status and her rank in her family, and she keeps her name. My name is Tjibaou. In modern society, my wife is called Tjibaou, but in our custom, she is part of her group. She is not of my group. She can take back one of the children and name it, in compensation. Or indeed, her clan will later come looking for a girl in my clan to re-establish harmony in both.

That is the principle of life, and I think it is fundamental to understanding the difference and indeed the difficulties Melanesians have in adapting to the modern world. We are never ... I am never I. I is linked to the individual. I am always someone by reference to. By reference to my fathers, by reference to my uncles. That is a real problem in modern society, when decisions have to be made, especially quick decisions. We are always in consultation, giving and taking advice, palaver. We have problems because we are not quick enough. That is important. It is important because the relationship which exists at the level of the individual person exists also in society. People exist only by reference to. Always. In that context, I would say that the successful man is the one who tends the connections on each side well. With the fathers and with the uncles. The maternal uncles and the mothers. A little detail: my mother, with all her sisters, are the ‘Mums’, and my father with his brothers and cousins are the ‘Dads’. That causes you no problem here because there are no Melanesians in your businesses. But European businesses in Caledonia sometimes have problems when an employee goes to bury his grandfather. And then another grandfather and then another! Next, it is his mother, and there are a lot of mothers. Because all his mother’s sisters, all her first cousins are his ‘Mums’. As for his mother’s brothers, they are uncles. This does not translate into French. In Melanesian languages, we have different terms. In French, uncles are uncles, whether they are paternal or maternal. For us, the sense of uncle is maternal. The others are not uncles because they are fathers. Aunts, too — they are the father’s sisters — women who speak loudly ...

The man who attains sanctity, harmony, perfection, is the one who maintains these two relationships. There is another dimension as well, the relationship with the ancestors. If I hurt myself, for example, in front of one of my uncles and make no effort to make
amends, I am going to be punished: I get sick, go to the hospital perhaps, have X-rays, nothing found, I lose weight, I am going to die before long. I'll have to go and see a seer. The seer will say: 'Well, here's one who forgot to make custom to his uncle.' I have to get pieces of cloth, shirts, clothes, sugar, rice, tobacco, money, to go and ask pardon of the maternal uncle. Because the vital flow has been damaged, and it does not belong to me. It is blood, it is life, but it is the life which comes to me from the totem of my mother, from the maternal clan which flows in me. And I do not have the right to damage it. I should bless it and honour it because it is mine, yet it does not belong to me. I am in a way the tenant. We have the use of many things, without being the owner. If I have behaved badly, if I have not respected the law, the right way to do things, I am punished and my punishment comes from the watching ancestors.

I am not going to go into all that, because that is too long a tale. There are also illnesses which are given by spells. But here I am talking only of illnesses which come from failing to do things properly. If you forget to put water in the radiator of your car, the motor will run badly, overheat. That is just the same thing, but this is something which is not working with the ancestors, and you have to find the 'medicine' which suits the case. You have to make custom and seek out the person who is in a position to give you the drink that can cure you. That is yesterday's Melanesian — but he is very much with us, and that is why I am talking to you about it.

So we have our concept of life, our concept of man, but there is also our concept of success in life: prestige — where does it come from? It's very obvious. In the Melanesian system, to be a man of prestige, you have to 'possess', of course, as everywhere. So you have to work or have a big family which allows you to 'possess' a lot. Prestige is giving away, giving a lot away and giving it to everyone. It is the reverse of the capitalist world! Here, I am told, children are taught to save, to accumulate, then when they have some savings, systems have to be found to turn those savings to profit. Then they say that you've got some briques if you have a million. The French say that you get some briques and with the briques you build your castle, you build your own stature as a man and you become someone. The more briques you have, the higher you climb, the
greater you are, even if there is nothing inside! It is very important. And what do you do with the briques you have under your feet? You have to gather them together, put them to work for profit. In our system, if you do that, you dwindle, because you have no relationships. You are obliged to cut yourself off from the community. You cannot honour your uncles if you have a lot and don’t give. The more you have, the more you are expected to give. And since these are small communities, people know what you have! There is not the anonymity of the city, so there is no escape. If there is a custom occasion, that is, a gathering where people bring their gifts, people watch: ‘That’s all he brought!’ And people notice straight away. Because, through the year, there are many such occasions. Last time, one of my uncles, a bachelor, was missing from the gathering. And my old uncle, who does the yams, said to us: ‘Who is missing?’

“So and so.’

‘Oh, don’t bother about him: he always brings 100 francs and a kilo of sugar. So it’s not worth waiting for him, we know in advance what he will bring!’

People know. Only it is not knowledge which adds up and stops at the bottom of the bill, rather something which is inherent. If you never give anything, then when the day comes that you have to mount a celebration, you will get nothing. I know a gentleman who does not join in preparing the fields for the yams. I noticed, one year, three years ago, that he was working his field beside the road. To get to my tribe, there is only one road. He was working alongside the road. When someone has heavy work to do for the yams, especially when it is a middle-aged gentleman, you should help them. Well, in order not to help him, people pass by early in the morning, when there is still no-one in the field. They get up early to pass by, and come back late, not to be reminded that they are not helping him. But they will not help. And I have seen a marriage where people have not budged! When people say in the tribes say: ‘A marriage at your place?’ and everyone comes — it’s a festival in the village. People bring custom first, things, cloth and all that, cash, traditional money, then meat, fish and so on. But if you never get involved, then on the day of your marriage, people will not come out; they will stay at home or disappear. But you don’t hear them. There is no
spoken dispute: the dispute happens because they disappear. For example: — I do not agree with you, and you call me. I say yes, but you will not see me. I will not come and insult you, but you will not see me. That's the rule. There are days set aside for that.

So I was saying that a man's prestige comes from his giving. And that raises problems for participation in the industrial world. You get prestige also from the relationships you make, which you create. The more relationships you have, the more prestige. Recently, I took part in a session of the committee of the Churches' Ecumenical Council on human rights infringements. Right to freedom, right to expression ... Rights to land are being violated too, and I was saying that it is written in Genesis; the Judeo-Christian philosophy speaks of God who created the world, saw that it was good, etc., and then showed the earth to the man and said: 'Go out and multiply' and then: 'Fill the earth and subdue it.' Subdue the earth? Man is the master. In our system, man is not the master. He is one element in the world. He is one among the plants. There is one plant which is his totem. Among the animals, there is an animal which is his totem, which is the totem of another clan. And it is quite a different philosophy which flows from that. We are part of the world, the world of the living, the world of nature, the world of trees, plants, stones, and they must be respected. When the Europeans arrived, there were fishing and hunting places everywhere. There are laws to be observed, to protect their breeding because these things are food, but also because the fish, the birds, nature overall are part ... rather, man is part of the universe just as they are. And he is not the boss. He is the head of the clan. He may eat other animals, but he is an element of nature. And this is fundamentally important for him, because there are plants and animals which form part of his genealogy.

This brings us to the relationship between man and his country. In modern society, there is heritage and country; you need to think in terms of heritage to begin to understand that concept of land. Land is not capital, with an objective existence separate from the human group, from people. In the modern world, I can take a parcel of land and give it or sell it to you; you take it and give it to another; I come along and rent the land from that one and develop it. Over there, it is a matter rather of the traditional idea of land as patri-
mony: the land is where the ancestors are. Genealogy is rooted in the land. Genealogies which have no spatial dimension, which are not fixed to a precise spot, are meaningless. ‘Jesus, son of David’ refers to people from a particular place. Take that genealogy from that country and it loses meaning. All genealogies have a meaning by reference to a country, to a precise area. And it is in that sense that the land is in a way a part of the group, because it is the only element ... A moment ago we were talking about a museum, but one which shuts you in. Today I have a notebook in which I have written the things I want to say. Later on, my children will be able to look at this piece of paper and see that I said this and that in Geneva. About my country and its land, about my tribe, genealogy and so on. The land is like that notebook; that rock with that spring is a notation upon it. And at that spot with that name, that is where the story begins. You walk along here, along here, as far as the water, and you have the roots of your history, its spatial dimension, the space which makes it your history. Without it, you have no history, and you are a citizen of the world and a citizen of nowhere.

Country is very important because it constitutes archives. It is the country which holds the group’s archives. And in the group, when you make custom, exchange gifts, exchange speeches, you do so by reference to connections by marriage. In the past, you gave a girl from your side to ours. Two generations later, you took a girl from my side. And it happens between such houses: houses in the old European feudal sense, the ‘house of France’, ‘the house of whatever’. Between those two houses, those two mounds, those two clans, we have made a connection. But those connections interweave, fuse together, between those two names there. Bouarate, Goa, Bouarate⁹, it is there, in a certain stream, on a certain mound, it is in a certain place that relationships are made. And to go from Goa to Bouarate, there are itineraries. I go first by a particular spot. And at a certain spot, I meet a certain clan, and I do not have the right to go directly. I go by a certain clan, the one which is the ambassador, which has to lead me and introduce me. It is all that is points in space, names of clans, but names of clans inscribed in space, on the country. And it is enough to say the names to me, the named points in space: that tells the relationships between the clans. There is another system as well,
which is the names of trees, or the names of birds, or names, names, names. Or again, the names of places are used. At home, we usually call people by the place they come from. We say: the one who lives at such and such a spot. At home, I am Kamo Pakaawat. Pakawaat is where I have my house. So, to avoid saying my name, people who respect me will call me Kamo Pakaawat, the one who lives at Pakaawat, then the one who lives at such and such a spot. That makes life complicated for people doing research in the field, because people always have several names. They are called by the name of the spot where they live, and there is also the given name; sometimes they have several given names. And then, when you ask at the town hall, they give you the official names.

The relationship of man with society, with his group, with the country, and his relationship with the seasons, or with the yam season. I shall end there: the way time is perceived and lived. And I would say that, for people in that society, in the tribes, that is not a topic ... People do not talk about time.

They do talk about seasons. But not about the time ... There is dawn, when the sun rises; early morning, before sunrise; the morning; and then midday; and then afternoon; and then the evening. Going by the clock is a modern phenomenon, and it is because of the clock that we have to talk about the way people experience time. Time in traditional society, in Melanesian society I think is much the same as it must be for the peasants who grow vines or wheat. Time is the rhythm of nature. The rhythm of the seasons. There is cold weather and hot weather and the weather in between. But cold and heat are sensations — as with snow and so on; the hand of the watch is provided by the plants. The sun is of interest, but it is not the sun which tells us, it is the plants, growing and dying.

I was looking at the vines a little while ago. There were little bits of wood, the vinestock. For someone who has a drink, the grapes and the bits of wood that they see don’t have much in common, but for the peasant, it is a sign. That’s what the times of the year are, measured by the different moments in the growth and death of the plant. For us, the yam dictates the annual calendar. I was telling you that at that time, you do the first harvest. There is food to eat. March, April, May and then June, July, August, it is high season.
The yams have been dug and we start clearing the fields. September, October, November, we prepare the crop. We have cleared the debris and burned it, and put in the yams. I am dividing it all into quarters, but it depends whether you are close to the sea, or in the South, more towards the North or the interior, which calendar you follow for the plants. They are quicker where it is warm, and the more you move towards the cold, the later they push above the ground, so that the harvest is later — at least for the yam.

And we have that season, this yam culture by the rhythm of which the whole year runs. I have told you that June, July, August is the season when there are plenty of yams, the full harvest. That is the time when there is no more work, the time when there is plenty to eat, because there are yams, taro, all the crops are in. That is the time of year when we mount our celebrations: marriages take place, enthronement of chiefs, deep mourning. I am not sure that 'deep mourning' is the right word here: funerals, perhaps, the great ceremony to end the period of mourning. And that is a ceremony to end all ceremonies. And that too is important. And we do it all at that time, when there is traditionally plenty of food. It is also the season when the fish are big, the animals fat. At the time we dig the new yams there are pigeons, good game. We have a big pigeon called the notou, and there is the flying fox. I don’t know if you can imagine what that is. It’s a sort of big bat. Some shudder to see it in the pot, but others think it very good.

The flying foxes are at a certain time, and at that time there is a certain flower, a certain shoot which appears. I talked about flowers — well, there is a sort of reed which flowers at that time; the mountain reeds are full of flowers. So if you like, that is people's calendar. The reeds mark it, the yams. There is a set of plants which behave in a certain way at a certain time, and which behave differently at another time, and so on. You have seen plants with red leaves recently, before they fell. That means it is a certain season.

For people in traditional Melanesian society, yams control the whole calendar, running right through the year. The year is counted in moons. And that is the basis for all the celebrations and festivals scheduled. The time to enthrone a chief, at the moment of the new yams, or afterwards, when there is plenty to eat, and so on. The time
to build houses is set for the end of the year, before the cyclones, when it is dry, when the straw is ripe, so that it is not gathered too early, lest it rot. That's the way everyone does it. I think it important to note that it is the rhythm of nature which provides the rhythm of society and, thus, in the end, the rhythm of man himself.

And that, I think, is the fundamental difference between the rural people who live by that rhythm, and those who live in the city, who live by the rhythm of business, with plans, with investments that have to bring a return. You have to plan and invest and calculate and so on. And when you talk about plans, you have to prepare schedules; and when you talk about schedules, you have to say: ‘Well, on the 15th, I have to have reached this stage of the project.’ And if I haven’t reached that point, I have to … rush about! I have to find another rhythm, to be ‘in step with the time’. That was imperative for the old people, too: there are plants which must be planted at the time of the new moon, or at the time of the full moon. But the profit imperative is not as large as in the industrial world. And that is something new. It is a new phenomenon in the rhythm of work, but also in the rhythm of life, in the rhythm of thought. It obliges us to think the world anew. We make plans, and it seems as if we are going to bend the world to our rhythm. Of course, we cannot yet turn day into night, but there is electric light. It is night and we are as if in full daylight. Ways of doing things differently. We make every effort to ensure that the rhythm man has decided on will be respected. Compared to the traditional world, it is day and night.

When I am in the tribe, at night, there is no cinema, no television. I see my mother listening to the radio to find out who is dead, because they do death notices. Apart from that, the news, the election campaign of Giscard d’Estaing or Mitterrand, she does not know what it means. People know that they are going to have to vote for this one or that, but they go on and on: what one says, the other contradicts perhaps, but you do not know whether he is contradicting or saying the same thing (for the people on the spot). So, from seven or eight o’clock until one or two o’clock in the morning, they sit and tell stories.

This way of dividing time is something very important which refashions people. It is also a source of conflict for men who go from
the tribe into industry. At one time, people noticed that that caused a lot of absenteeism. But it was because the system of values is not the same. People go home for the death of their auntie (the father's sister) or grandmother. Your rules give a day off for burials. Just one day, that means, you are entitled to just that day — but the next day you are back at work. In our system, you go to the burial, you come out, the custom chief says: ‘We’ll gather tomorrow.’ And then you all get together to do the grieving ceremony, to pile up the gifts to give to the maternal uncles, because as I told you, when the child is born, you give the custom to the mother. And when that person goes and dies, you return the ‘remains’: they belong to the maternal uncles; you give them back. You have to do ceremonies for that. Sometimes many times. Labour regulations give you a day; we take a week to do the custom. They just can’t go together. There are many conflicts about that.

That is perhaps what makes it seem that the profile presented to the world by the man made — I say ‘made’ deliberately — by traditional society is different. And, in the modern world, what is today's Melanesian? Well, we are the ones who are trying to adapt. I would say that we are a lot more relaxed when we are cut off from our group. When you are no longer in Caledonia — if you are in Nouméa, it's already better — and in Paris, you are relaxed. I'd say ‘relaxed’ not in the moral sense but in the sociological sense. You can easily live by the same rhythm as the people who live in the city and are culturally accustomed to city life. But when we are close to our group, the group takes over. When we live in town, we have a sort of rubber band, and every time there is an event, the rubber band takes us back to the tribe, and it is hard. You are there, but always under tension, and it is the tribe which pulls on you. But not if you are in Paris. You’ve left the rubber band at the airport, and you do the same as everyone else.

I am joking a bit there, but these are the problems which face Melanesians entering the industrial world today. I have to say that we have moved from the Stone Age to moon rockets in the space of 100 years. While Europe took its time. How long ago did you leave the Stone Age? And since the industrial world came, things are going faster and faster. Everyone has to try a bit to keep up these
days. But there are, as I said at the beginning, a material environment, habits, reflexes, a culture which have been shaping you for a good time. We are just starting out, and we find it hard to keep up. Now we are asking ourselves, and I will end with this: should we follow you? Because things are going faster and faster, and where before we could guess where you were headed, now we see that you have been to the moon and that you are not satisfied, still searching ... So, since it is difficult to follow someone who is seeking his way, there is a sort of movement back to the roots.

Perhaps it is a false problem, I don't know. We will know in 10 or 15 years, but there is a real movement back to look for something to hang on to. And I think that this is not a solely a Melanesian phenomenon. It's world wide. The Occitan people are looking for their roots, the Bretons want Brittany to be independent — and in all that talk, they are perhaps looking for a regional identity. Because today, with the mass media, you have the impression of being a part of the world a bit. Last week, I listened to the radio and watched television in Nouméa. And when I arrived in Paris on Sunday, people were talking in Champigny-sur-Marne about what had happened; people were talking about Mitterrand and Giscard and what happened. And I knew. These are things you know about. But you don't know where that world is. You don't know where its roots are, and you can't identify with it. So you are lost. As a result, you ask yourself: what is there to hang on to in it? When the current is carrying you away, you look for stones to hold on to. This fact is, I think, a global phenomenon. Perhaps it is simple. I don't know. But for us, there is a movement back, not a return to something we had not known, you can't do that ... You can't look for something you do not know, but a return to a kind of environment, a kind of universe, where, culturally, in groups, in associations, you can meet together and feel 'among people', in a human dimension.

The television factor? When I am two roundabouts from Nouméa, and I know what is happening at the same time as the folk in Champigny-sur-Marne, I am not in a world I can identify with. Perhaps if they had managed to find people on the moon ... I hoped for it. I was in Belgium the day they landed on the moon ... I hoped for it. I was in Belgium the day they landed on the moon. We were on our way back to Avignon with some friends who were going to set
up a holiday camp, and we hoped they would find people on the moon, because we were thinking that if they found people up there, with the mass media talking about our planet, we should all identify with the earth. We are the men of the planet Earth, distinct from them ... But since there is no-one there, we are left with ourselves. And that is more terrible. It's dreadful!

So these are some thoughts I wanted to pass on to you. What I say is what I think. It represents what we are now, what we have been, and what we are as we go searching.

2 Large disk of polished stone mounted on a handle, formerly used as a prestige object in ceremonies (Editors' note).
3 Jean-Marie Tjibaou often used this expression for the deceased (Editors' note).
4 For Kanaks, the totem is the visible form of the spirits of the ancestors (Editors' note).
5 The first yams to ripen cannot be consumed until the tribe's garden magician has given the signal: he eats a portion himself and then presents the first fruits to the chief. When the latter has eaten them, all the people of that country are allowed to do the same (Editors' note).
6 Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954), a Protestant missionary in New Caledonia in the first half of the 20th century, then professor of ethnology at the École pratique des hautes études, wrote numerous reference works on Kanak culture: as well as the works already cited, particularly notable works are Notes d'ethnologie néo-calédonienne [Notes on New Caledonian Ethnology], Paris, Institut d'ethnologie, 1930, and Gens de la Grande Terre [People of Grande Terre], Paris, Gallimard, 1937 (Editors' note).
7 French slang: brique (= brick) meaning 10,000 francs (Translators' note).
8 Strings of polished and pierced shells, decorated at one end with a piece of carved wood or fine basketweave: these precious goods are a memento of the contract between the groups and are exchanged when ceremonies are held or even for more ordinary dealings. These objects are commonly called 'native money' in New Caledonia (Editors' note).
9 Names of chefferies in the Hienghène Valley (Editors' note).
10 The family names Kanaks give to the French Administration when registering are often very different from the names in daily use (Editors' note).
‘Passing through Nouméa in May 1981 — it was my first visit to le Caillou — I was keen to meet a leader of the Kanak independentist movement. The presidential elections had just seen the election of the Socialist Party candidate, and a great procession had gone through Nouméa with people shouting ‘Mitterrand President, Kanak independence’. The independentists, then organised in the FI (Front indépendantiste), obviously felt that their time was coming, and some European friends in the Union Calédonienne had put me in touch with Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Although he was one of the main Melanesian figures in the party, he was then little known on the New Caledonian political scene. It was at Poindimie that I had the privilege — without the least notion at the time of its significance — of spending some six hours with ‘Jean-Marie’. He was returning from Nouméa with his wife Marie-Claude and his three sons, travelling in his private vehicle to Hienghène, where he had been mayor since 1977. Jean-Marie Tjibaou already had the maturity of a leader who had seen and thought a great deal. But I was struck also by the ease and simplicity of this plump and well-muscled Melanesian peasant, his frank manner of speaking, the fact that he was so obviously comfortable among all these White Union Calédonienne veterans.’

Jean Chesneaux

JEAN CHESNEAUX — How do you define Kanak independence, which is the core of the Front indépendantiste program?
JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — We have to question our colonial inheritance, the idea that enlightenment and civilisation comes from the West. It would be unthinkable, ‘racist’, for the Kanak people to be able to absorb other peoples, people of another culture. The more so since the New Caledonians have no time for us. They do not accept Kanak independence, but New Caledonian independence makes no sense. Other peoples with another way of life will be able to stay if they accept that we run the country — as long as they do not put independence at risk. The people who pose a threat are a different category. The others, if they accept the country and the way it is organised, can stay. It’s up to them. So we shall have to reorganise the school curriculums to ensure that they provide for the Kanak way of life.

J. C. — *The Kanak way of life is a basic point then?*

J.-M. T. — We heard what Brice Lalonde had to say during the presidential election campaign, but how we survive isn’t going to be invented in Paris. We are well placed in Melanesia to understand that the world is headed for the rocks. We are well placed to give a soul to our social life. We have only modest financial means, but for us, being counts more than having. But we have to find a way of giving institutional form to the Kanak way of doing things. We don’t want to go backwards, we want to improve what we have.

Our way of life involves the production of yams for ceremonial use as well as for subsistence, but the first aim counts as much as the second. We have to produce therefore in order to feed the people in accordance with what they are used to. The interesting thing about the situation in which our society finds itself is that we are in little groups. We do not have to manage life for tens of millions of people. We emphasise the basic economy, group co-operation. That is what socialism means for us. Enercal is a good example of the public sector co-existing with the private sector!

When people who have been to the French school come to the tribe, they can’t do anything. They are sort of loafers. School teaches them nothing more than how to be workers for the Common Market; its aim is only to make people all the same. But they return
to the tribe where the survival of the group is tied to a different system, and it is as if they were handicapped. The unemployment here is an effect of the way the world is organised now. Potential is smothered by the race for wealth, production, weapons. School teaches that you have to go to Nouméa. It does not teach you how to live in the tribe. But in Nouméa, people have no idea of how to live. School should be providing an apprenticeship in another model of living (whence our rural family housing program). Not dirtying the river; planting coconuts; growing yams. School should teach the Kanak way of life: beginning with giving sense to community life.

Around the town, around Nouméa, people go wild, and nature is dirty and dead there. Once again, it is not that we are at a point where we have to turn around and go back; rather that we are at a point where we must find our direction. Our great problem is that the European world of Nouméa has discredited our society. How can we succeed in promoting our social model? How can we organise things so that we can live life by our rhythm?

J. C. — But New Caledonia is dependent on the world market!

J.-M. T. — We have the good fortune to be an island. We shall give priority to organising our free time. If there have to be tourist ghettos to obtain foreign exchange, we shall run them ourselves. But our people are afraid of mass tourism. The only alternative offered us by the West is industrialisation, and we are walking a tightrope. But the SOS is coming from the West itself, with fear of war and fear of the nuclear. The West is like a machine out of control; people are trying to brake it with their bare feet. It has not yet invented other forms of social organisation. This is why we should reconsider the very way we organise our lives.

To deal with the world market, we need to know what we shall choose to export, at what favourable levels. For example, competing in luxury products, from our seas and our forests: perfumes, essences, lychees. And developing federations of Melanesian countries can help us to be stronger on the world market, by developing exchanges among ourselves first of all.
J. C. — You intend then to develop closer relations with the other peoples and nations of the Pacific?

J.-M. T. — We are concerned especially with the Melanesian countries: Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji. We shall develop cultural contacts with them, for we have many things to share. We have to re-establish, revive the traditional routes: until the 19th century there was active island to island trade by boat. And we can develop trade in complementary products.

The South Pacific Forum will meet in July next in Vanuatu, and Vanuatu will chair the meeting and prepare the agenda. We have some hopes in regard to the United Nations. Papua New Guinea is another opening, with the Irian Jaya struggle; our young people support their South Pacific anti-nuclear movement, the struggle of former Portuguese Timor. But Olivier Stirm is putting pressure on Fiji; France is threatening to no longer buy their sugar. We also have affinities with Samoa the only country which supports us openly and in a practical way, by allowing us to set up an office there. It is a unique experiment, using the traditional chiefly system in the hierarchy of the present government, up to and including the prime minister. It is in this modernisation of traditional functions that they find the strength to support us.

So we attach a lot of importance to the experience of the Pacific countries. But as a French colony, we are out of the circuit. Yet their experience counts — Niue, for example, with its passion fruit co-operatives. Or the copra co-operatives in Vanuatu, sugar and copra co-operatives in Fiji, village stays in Fiji, palm oil refineries in Solomon Islands, forestry production in New Zealand. We will have to get back to the issue of rice, for which our people have developed the taste. They cultivate it well in South East Asia. The important thing is to organise local markets, because here, in Poindimie or Hienghène, we are obliged to pay the same as in Nouméa, and it is too dear.

J. C. — What about the political struggle, apart from elections?

J.-M. T. — Each year at Hienghène we celebrate the municipal festival with singing, feasting and dancing. A traditional pilou-pilou
lasts the whole night. For Hienghène, we planned a cultural activities centre, but the Administration refused to approve it. We want also to rebuild the structures of social life, to rediscover the genealogies.

But the French Administration rejects the normal manifestations of Kanak life.

We launched land occupation movements. For example, at Tibarama in 1979, on the farm of the settler Dubois. The local tribe moved in and is working the land. The mobile police found themselves confronting families, old people, children. After some talks, the tribe decided to stay put, and the Administration gave in. The settler was not working the land. Thereafter, the situation was regularised through the land reform program, and the land in dispute was bought back. Other land occupations are in progress: at Hienghène, on government land; at Païta, on uncultivated land belonging to a settler, at Bondé. And the Administration can give in, accept restitution to the tribe, as at Tibarama, Houailou and Thio. These occupations are supported by the whole independentist movement, led by this or that member party of the Front, according to the local situation, the UPM, FULK, the UC, LKS and so on. The whole movement has been very active since 1979. It is a response to Paul Dijoud’s ‘land reform’. We know how to avoid upsetting people and we have already achieved 10 or so occupations.

There are also the independence building sites. It is the position of the Union Calédonienne that every man should have a house and a food garden … The UC municipalities are building dams, organising festivals, developing markets, installing electricity, establishing platforms for local independence. That’s the infrastructure of independence being put in place!

At Hienghène, we have a town plan which forbids any activity that produces waste which the producer cannot get rid of. The service station, for example, may not dump its oil in the river. We are going to draw up in Hienghène a list of charges which we shall then put to the town planning department. At Canala, the UC municipality is working with the Council of Elders. The municipality refuses to use machines to dig trenches for the water supply. They prefer to contract a tribe, which consults the elders: you can’t just dig anywhere … We are pushing for diversified technology, to
offer more work. Tradition is being revived in the young men’s work groups, in that they get the roughest work. Building houses is group work, doesn’t cost much, well suited to our needs, decentralised.

J. C. — *Can we speak of a Kanak people?*

J.-M. T. — That is an idea which was born of the struggle against colonisation, born of adversity. It is a collective reaction, a developing reality.

The *Union Calédonienne* is trying to get it moving through the regions, among people who speak more or less the same language, who can understand each other, who do custom in the same way, who have the same marriage and funeral rites. But the concept of exchange is the same from the North to the South of the country. Once again, we are not trying to reverse the current which takes people to Nouméa, but to create a counter-current in the reverse direction.

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2 Tjibaou sometimes uses the term ‘New Caledonian’ or ‘Caledonian’ simply to refer to the people, of whatever ethnicity, who share the Territory with him, but sometimes (as here), he uses it to refer to the European population as a group intolerant of Kanak aspirations. We have to depend on the context to gauge the emotional thrust he intends (*Translators’ note*).

3 Brice Lalonde was the ecologist candidate in the 1981 presidential election. J.-M. Tjibaou had seen him on television.

4 New Caledonian electricity distributor.

5 1981 saw the run-up to the Euromissile crisis.

6 Which would bring together Vanuatu, the Kanak country, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

7 Body of which the independent states of the region (11 at this time) are members, but not France.

8 Western region of New Guinea, occupied by Indonesia.

9 Minister of Overseas Departments and Territories in the last government of Raymond Barre.

10 Polynesian archipelago, former German colony under New Zealand administration, the Western part independent since 1962. [Chesneauaux seems to overlook the existence of American Samoa — *Translators’ note.*]
11 Small archipelago, independent in association with New Zealand. [Niue is in fact a single island — Translators’ note.]

12 Communal dancing (Translators’ note).

13 This project finally saw the light of day in September 1984 (Editors’ note).

14 Promulgated in 1978 DOM-TOM Minister Paul Dijoud.
In their traditional oral literature, the Kanaks give poetry a high place. Jean-Marie Tjibaou revives this genre so dear to the old Melanesians: he adopts its nostalgic tone to evoke the seizure of land and its terrible consequences for social and religious life. As he notes in the poem (beginning of the fourth stanza), at the time he was writing these verses, the Administration, attempting to respond to land claims, had begun a wide-ranging operation to identify and register ‘clan lands’. Every Kanak is asked to recall the sites occupied by his ancestors. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, like the Kanak poets of yesterday and today, seems to have drawn his inspiration from this particular set of circumstances.

The land of our fathers is no longer in our hands,
A foreign flag flies over our country,
Yet … yet …
Our lands are not for sale,
Our lands that were stolen, sold,
Sold and sold again, over and over,
Are yet not for sale.
They are the oneness of our people,
They are the universe we share with our gods,
They are the space in which we are linked to our brother clans,
They are part of our existence.
Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanaky

The breath which comes to us from our ancestors
Takes root in our lands.
The names we bear
Issue from the mounds of our fathers,
The blood in our veins from the breast of our mothers
Who wander in search of their mounds
Trampled and profaned by cattle
Imprisoned somewhere
Behind barbed wire.

Where are our altars? Where our ancestors?
Blessed the day which will see our return
To places you chose as eternal home
For an annual celebration
Of our fraternal ties.
At this time when we call up your memory
To find our clan lands,
Your skulls and your bones
Scattered by the settlers and their horned beasts
Little by little return to life, slowly but surely ...
And part skeletons, you make your way quietly
Through the ‘peaceful haven’ you passed on to us long ago.
In the night I hear their hesitant steps,
They have returned to their country and have found no-one,
And I hear from the depths of the ages
The soft, enchanting harmony of their melancholy chant,
Sung in two parts
For whomever might be dozing under the stars.

Aé Aé! Aé-Aé ... Aé-Aé! Aé-Aé ... Where have our sons gone?
Aï-oï! Aï-oa ... Where have they gone, the sons we loved?
Why this silence? What has become of them?
Can they have returned to their mothers’ country?
Have their uncles taken them back?
Taken them whom we had already named?
The lawns are still neat,
The pines and the coconut palms are still there,
Silent witnesses of our history.
Their tops are now lost in the sky,
Some have forever lost all their leaves,
Skeletons reaching for the sky,
Crowned by gaping holes
Like empty sockets,
Seeking their stolen heritage.
Among the beings who have lived
The mounds remain, impassive,
Ready to receive a new house, a great house,
Raising its finial arrow\(^3\) to reconquer the sky.

The furrows are still there,
Laid gracefully outside by side,
Awaiting serenely the grace of penetration again
By the proud and virile yam
Which will bring life and fruitfulness back to them.
On the green sides of the hills
The dried out taro patches snake along.
The spring that irrigated them has returned to its bed
And the taros have perished, hope dried up.

Why is there no more fire,
No more smoke in the country?
They must be cold, our sons.
Cold feet, cold hands and faces,
Cold at heart and in the gut.
Perhaps they hear our weeping?
Perhaps they are near?
Aou! Why do they not speak?
Have they their voices, the power of speech?
Have they lost the inheritance we left them?
Are they dead? But if so,  
Why have they not come  
And joined us in our eternal pilou⁴?  
Are they prisoners, locked away and speechless?  
Has the word been taken from them?

Perhaps they are wandering in the forest  
Looking for that rare plant  
Which restores speech to the dumb.  
But that plant gives strength and power  
Only to those who take it  
With ritual recitation of the sacred words.  
But do they still know the sacred words  
That bring grace and blessing to believers?

Perhaps they cower in the depths of the valleys,  
Deep in the forests where the mwakhegny⁵ live.  
The new pwérétwat⁶ might have told them:  
‘The flat and fertile ground is bad for you.  
It is too dangerous to live on the land of your ancestors.  
You will no doubt catch incurable diseases.  
The wagny⁷ of your ancestors have smitten you.’  
And with many horned beasts  
Our sons have been pushed back and back into the land  
of the mwakhegny  
And the mwakhegny possess them!  
Aou, Aou, bwalangaa!

1 Unpublished. 10 July 1981.  
2 See Dewé Gorodé, Sous la cendre des conques [Under the Ashes of the Conch Shells], Nouméa, Edipop, 1985 (Editors’ note).  
3 Translators’ note: fleche-faïtière, translated in this case to preserve rhythm: see Glossary.  
4 Dance of the dead.  
5 Imps, sprites.  
6 Totem spirit which manifests itself in human form, with the peculiarity that its kneecaps are placed behind the knee. This is indeed characteristic, because it often announces the contrary of what is to happen.  
7 Curses connected with failings in ancestor worship.
CHAPTER 10
On the Threshold of Power

On 22 July 1982, the New Caledonian right wing, hostile to the recent regulations and to the exercise of power by the independentists, demonstrates in the streets of Nouméa and finally invades the Territorial Assembly in an attempt, as in 1958, to obstruct the democratic process under way there.

In this text, Jean-Marie Tjibaou analyses the conditions which allowed the Front indépendantiste to take the leading elected role in the Council of Government on 18 June 1982. This assumption of responsibility at the highest level was made possible by a reversal of political alliances, the centrist FNSC (Federation for a New Caledonian Society) having broken with Jacques Lafleur's RPCR and transferred its support to the Front indépendantiste. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, appointed Vice-President of the new Council of Government, takes note of this new situation and assesses the consequences for the future of his movement.

THE FRONT INDÉPENDANTISTE and the Union Calédonienne note at the outset that every significant advance concerning the demand for independence has come from the struggle on the ground: none has been the result of debate in the Territorial Assembly. The Assembly enables us to sensitise opinion to our demands, but not to move them forward.

Now that we face the prospect of taking on executive responsibilities, it should be remembered that the aim of the Front indépendantiste is still to take power. It is because we think that we can attain a
measure of power by constitutional means that we are taking on this responsibility.

In addition, for the Union Calédonienne, ‘Top 82’ means organising in the regions, taking part in all civil society in all its aspects and making a point of being involved in everything where a measure of power is to be exercised. If this opening for us to go into the Council of Government is confirmed, we shall do it. If not, we shall remain on the ground, in opposition, which is where we have done best so far.

We have always said that the security of this country is tied to our claim for Kanak independence being taken seriously. We accept a role in the institutions, but if that should lead to the negation of our fundamental political demand, we would know what we had to do. Participating in the institutions is a safeguard, but a rather dangerous one: there is always the risk of getting stuck, while staying in opposition moves things forward.

What is happening today is solely due to the fact that the FNSC broke off with the RPCR. It is only for that reason that we are able to be in the Council of Government, not because the FNSC is throwing itself into our arms. Besides, the agreement negotiated with the FNSC for its support is not one which gives priority to the recognition of Kanak independence; it is rather a technical agreement entered into with mutual respect, each knowing that the other retains its political line. I do not know what the FNSC calculation is; but as an independentist, I think that it is the intelligent Caldoche putting money on the future. Is it a Trojan horse strategy via-vis the Front indépendantiste, or is it really a step towards acknowledgement of our claim? Simultaneously, we consider the metropolitan Socialist Party to be a partner, even if we are not on the same wavelength as the government we have supported. It has a sort of moral contract with us: if it does not move our basic claim forward, it owes it to itself not to cause it to lose ground. It is in this sort of ‘clear flux’ or ‘fluid clarity’ that we make our commitment. But we would not have made the same commitment before 1981.

The Kanak people have never had executive responsibility. Its representatives have always been in the opposition, even in Maurice Lenormand’s time. It is not very comfortable to find you are no
longer in systematic opposition to whoever is in government. This situation, due in part to the work of Christian Nucci, is an event in Kanak political history.

Everything is happening at once: the FNSC’s break with its partner opens up for us the prospect of going into government. However, the reluctance of Kanaks to participate in the institutions is long-standing. A time comes when that has to be put aside, not obvious to everyone, a gut thing. For the FNSC, it must have been the same sort of thing. But I repeat that for us independentists, the danger is that we lose ground, get bogged down.

If we had had the numbers without needing the FNSC to go into government, we would have put up our own program. Given that it is a combination of circumstances which puts us together with our old adversaries and the present opponents of our political program, all we can do is organise ourselves technically to manage current business. But if we go for more than a year, we do intend, with the support of the French Government, to move in directions consistent with planning and equality of opportunity. That is why we speak of socialism.

As for Kanak independence: for us, there is an indigenous people, and it is the Kanak people. We want recognition of this people first, and of its right to claim the independence of its country. This is no more racist than to speak of French citizenship. Within the notion of independence, such adjustments can be made as seem desirable. It’s a concept which is nationalist but not exclusive. It is not that we say ‘Whites out!’ It is our opponents who take it that way. To be nationalist is not to be racist. The problem with the idea of ‘multi-ethnic’ independence is that it makes no reference to nationalism.

2 To accelerate the reform process in New Caledonia, the Socialist Government promulgated a series of regulations in 1982 and 1983 (Editors’ note).
3 Maurice Lenormand, a pharmacist of metropolitan origin, former MP, was the founder of the *Union Calédonienne* in 1953 (Editors’ note).
4 High Commissioner in New Caledonia 1981 to 1982 (Editors’ note).
CHAPTER 11
The Dangers of Development

Jean-Marie Tjibaou here speaks briefly of the quality of life in which the peoples of Oceania can take pride. But, he suggests, there hovers over the ‘Pacific way of life’ the formidable shadow of uncontrolled development which threatens both pollution and the cultural heritage of the peoples.

THE PACIFIC, WITH its ocean and its islands, is a gift of the gods to the peoples of Oceania, past and present. The ocean, the islands, the air and the light, the fish, the birds, the plants and mankind together comprise the Life which is our supreme heritage as Pacific people.

Everyone is responsible for his own fulfilment. This responsibility is becoming more and more difficult to exercise as the dangers assume ever greater dimensions:

• the danger of denial of the indigenous peoples and their heritage
• the danger of denial of the greatest dignity of all: control of one’s life and destiny
• the danger of blind industrialisation smothering the earth with tar and concrete
• the danger of tentacular multinationals which suck the substance of our countries to nourish other bellies and other minds
• the danger of sociological distortion arising from the speed with which modern technology is developing and the inability of our peoples to absorb it quickly
• the danger of nuclear weapons
The Dangers of Development

- the danger of biological weapons
- the danger of genetic manipulation
- the danger of rivalry for political hegemony over the region.

These few points among many challenge us in our responsibility to protect Life and its fulfilment in the Pacific.

The masses of water which separate us, ceaselessly moving, bear the seeds of life; we have the heavy responsibility of ensuring that they do not become bearers of the seeds of death.

We are condemned to solidarity with each other, to build that solidarity in such a way that the Pacific remains a paradise for life on our planet.

1 Published in L'Événement, an irregular supplement to L'Avenir calédonien, October 1982.
CHAPTER 12

Independence and Responsibility

In this press conference given in Nouméa at the beginning of May 1983 on his return from a tour of Europe and Algeria, Jean-Marie Tjibaou reports on his contacts with the French Government and Socialist Party, as well as with members of the Algerian FLN. Adopting a very political tone, he sets out the preconditions for any substantive debate on independence, whereas the draft statute put forward by the Socialist Government a few weeks previously makes no mention of that question. This is the line of argument that the independentists focussed on several months later (July 1983) in their discussions at Nainville-les-Roches with the RPCR and the Government. There for the first time were recognised officially ‘the Kanak people, first occupants of the Territory, and their innate and active right to independence’.

JEAN-MARIE TJI BAOU — The question put to me by most DOM-TOM and Ministry of Co-operation officials, as well as the people I met privately at the Quai d’Orsay, was obviously independence. Nothing new there, and you always say the same thing.

Finally, at the last meeting we had with Mr Mitterrand — attended by Messrs Aïfa, Naisseline, Morlet, Paita, Pidjot and myself — the President of the Republic concluded with these words: ‘So I must recognise your independence? Over to you [addressing the Melanesians there] to accommodate these gentlemen [the Europeans taking part in the meeting].’ In my opinion, the problem was under-
stood, and I believe it still is, but there is no movement politically, because, as I have had occasion to say before, as long as the discussion remains at the private level, it does not allow the population, the collective consciousness, to make up its mind about its own future.

The key priority question for the Government seems to be the position of the communities which are in the Territory. Our reply, as I put it to Mr Lemoine and before that to Mr Mitterrand, is that, in any country, the question of immigrants is a matter of State sovereignty. Consequently, the Front indépendantiste would not be in a position to discuss this question seriously until its relationship with the French State was one of partnership. But at the present time the FI is one party among others, which can perhaps discuss the matter with the Socialist Party, but not on a basis of equality with the Government.

There is also the question of ‘double legitimacy’. I was the one who used this expression at the time of the assassination of Pierre Declercq: it is not that there are two forms of legitimacy, only the legitimacy established in law by the French flag. But there is legitimacy outside the law, that inherent in aboriginality, in the Kanaks as the indigenous people: Melanesian legitimacy. That has several consequences. First, on the subject of the referendum: to be effective, it would have to address the people who by their nature had the right to independence in their country, that is, the indigenous people. It’s right to claim independence is an innate right which cannot be brought into question by the negative result of any referendum. Losing the referendum does not destroy the Kanaks’ right to independence, because this right is inherent in their status as the indigenous people.

At the last elections, a political leader congratulated the people of Nouméa for having voted en masse to remain French. I endorse this statement, because it answers itself: the French are asked if they want to stay French. It is almost absurd. For our part, we recognise that this right is legitimate for the people of France, and also for the sons of France who left France but remain French. The legitimate right of the French, as of the Wallisians, as of the Tahitians, as of the Antillese, to be masters of their own destiny belongs to them as
patriots in their country. But what we ask as the representatives of the Kanak people is that the right of the Kanak people to the mastery of their own destiny be recognised. For us, that is the fundamental question, the colonial question. It is a matter of recognising the legitimacy of the indigenous people in their own country, their whole sovereign identity. Once their sovereignty is recovered, they can exercise their right to admit others, and they can discuss matters as partners with governments of goodwill.

It is very important to make this clear, because sometimes words with their emotional overtones introduce ill-feeling into the debate which need not be there. Concerning the idea of a provisional government, as I have already said, and my comrade Yann Céléné Urégei will have more to say on it shortly, we have had some interesting contacts. The idea of independence — as we have realised once again following Mr Henri Emmanuelli’s statement — will develop only if the people take it up, for it is their battle and no-one else’s: they will have to mobilise to obtain it.

HELEN FRASER — Jean-Marie Tjibaou, what you have just been saying, following the statements you were able to make in metropolitan France, prompts the question whether your functions as Vice-President of the Council of Government and as independentist leader are not incompatible. Are you thinking of leaving government, as you seem to be hinting?

J.-M. T. — I think the preceding statement of Front indépendantiste intentions was clear. The Government stated its intentions, the Front stated its intentions: now we wait.

H. F. — You know that a lot of people were shocked by what you said before your departure, when you said that you had got nothing out of taking part in official institutions, that power came from the streets — well, are you now comfortable as Vice-President of the Council of Government?

J.-M. T. — I was very clear in what I said. In its assessment of progress so far, the Front has noted that where we have moved
ahead, it has been from the street: demonstrations, land occupation and so on.

H. F. — Mr Vice-President — I address this to you as Vice-President — nearly a year ago, in June, you signed an agreement with the Government and with your partner from the FNSC, Mr Henri Wetta, and in this agreement, this contract of government, the Government’s advisers undertook not to make political statements in their capacity as members of the Executive. Well, you went on an official visit to Paris as Vice-President and you spoke in terms that we might call political, committing the UC, your party.

J.-M. T. — I think that independence is today the Territory’s number one problem. I was very clear in what I said: what are the Government’s intentions for the future of the Territory? For its part, the Front indépendantiste has its line as a political party. I do not know what the Government’s line is. Anyway, it has never stated it publicly.

H. F. — And you think that it is going to do so on 13 May?

J.-M. T. — I hope for New Caledonia’s sake that there will be a clear response, but that’s not my job.

H. F. — Quite, since you are talking about supporters and partners, independence, Kanak sovereignty, the future of New Caledonia, that’s the business of the Kanaks and the New Caledonians, isn’t it? How do you justify going off to seek support from the Algerians, for example?

J.-M. T. — The question of independence is being discussed also at the United Nations, among governments. From the geopolitical point of view, our little country is a strategic point in the Pacific and in regard to Asia. If we went to see the FLN people, it is because we were invited to Portugal to the Congress of the Socialist International, where the FLN, as the Algerian socialist party, was present on the same basis as Mr Jospin for the French Socialist Party, the German Social Democrats or the Italian Socialist Party. We were
there in that capacity. Mobilisation for the cause is as important externally as it is internally, but internally it requires discussions and negotiations as well ... 

H. F. — In that regard, how are the Front indépendantiste’s relations with the Wallisian community?

J.-M. T. — I have already met the leaders of the Assembly of Wallis. The future of the Wallisian community is bound up with the future of Wallis, but also with the future of the community which exists here. These Wallisian leaders told us that we should go and talk to the Wallisians in New Caledonia so that they would vote with us, the independentists. But I replied to them: ‘The Kanaks will never ask anyone to vote for them!’ For it is the Wallisians who need the Kanaks’ country, not the Kanaks who need them. And that goes for all the non-Kanak communities in the Territory. That will always be our approach, because we do not claim something which is the property of the Wallisians or the French. We claim something which belongs to us. It is for the people who are beside us, who are with us, to support us, and if not, to deny us. It is through that commitment that we are working to assure our future.

The Government must define its position clearly ... For our part, we say: independence is on the horizon and we have a timetable for it. Because we are not talking about independence in 130 years, we have talked about 1984 ... That is not impossible, and I have talked to Mr Nucci and to Mr Emmanuelli about it. We have budget agreements in the framework of which we can discuss the transfer of budgetary autonomy. From that point, we can see, in organising the development of the Territory, what needs to be done for the country to become independent economically. But that means we have to have responsibilities. I told Mr Lemoine. He said: ‘But you have no trained personnel!’ I replied to him: ‘But 130 years ago we had no trained personnel and in 130 years’ time we still won’t!’ It’s a matter of instinct — problems of responsibility cannot be resolved ...
Independence and Responsibility

1 Recorded by Australian journalist Helen Fraser, author of *Your flag's blocking our sun*, Sydney, ABC Books, 1990, and later editor of *Pacific Report*.

2 Jean-Pierre Aïfa and Gaston Morlet, European members of the centrist FNSC, were at that time allies of the independentists Nidoîsh Naisseline and Gabriel Païta in the Territorial Assembly. The independentist MP R. Pidjot was attached to the delegation.

3 DOM-TOM Secretary of State (1982–1984) (*Editors' note*).

4 Secretary General of the Caledonian Union and Chairman of the Independentist Group in the Territorial Assembly, assassinated in Nouméa on 19 September 1981. He was succeeded as Secretary General by Eloi Machoro (*Editors' note*).

5 The draft statute proposed by Georges Lemoine provided for a referendum in which all residents of New Caledonia would be entitled to take part (*Editors' note*).

6 Member of the Independentist Front for FULK (*Editors' note*).

7 Secretary of State for Overseas Departments and Territories 1981–1982 (*Editors' note*).

8 From the '60s on, the Overseas Territory of Wallis and Futuna has been an important source of unskilled labour for New Caledonia. The Wallisian community today, 1996, represents nearly 10 per cent of the total population of the Territory; it has provided significant support to the anti-independentists and to New Caledonian employers (*Editors' note*).
This speech was made in Nouméa on 18 May 1983 during a demonstration by the Front indépendantiste which was organised at the time of a visit by the DOM-TOM Secretary of State, Georges Lemoine. During the preceding weeks, the independentists had undertaken several actions against the European colonists, and had increased their protests after the murder on 11 May of Louis Poitchily, a young independentist militant. On 18 May, the anti-independentists too had gone into the streets of Nouméa in large numbers, intending to oppose any Government initiative which took into consideration the Kanak claim for independence. The two processions almost confronted each other: it is then that Jean-Marie Tjibaou spoke in the Place des Cocotiers and forcefully reaffirmed the historic and political links between the Kanaks and their land.

THERE ARE MANY Nouméa people here, many people who have shut their shops to be here. They are 40,000 in Nouméa, and they think that they are 40,000 over on the other side. You are perhaps only 2,000, but you are the people! Our genealogies sing the stones, sing the trees, the pines, the coconut palms which are deeply rooted in this country. There have been other processions like the one over there. In Papua New Guinea, before 1975, before independence, they said: ‘You will have no more sugar, you will have no more rice,’ and this sort of nonsense was repeated in the Solomons and then in Vanuatu. They did the same sort of thing with processions in
Vietnam. And also in Algeria. Today, those countries are independent, because the people who paraded in front of the indigenous peoples saying that independence was not possible have gone. Because they fight for a newly established legitimacy, one defended by all those flags which are being paraded, a legitimacy which was established by Febvrier-Despointes. Those people parading are seeking to perpetuate that legitimacy, which crushes and denies indigenous legitimacy. But indigenous legitimacy is in us, it is in you. No-one established it! It is in the belly of Kanak land! It will not leave Kanak land! It will take form, it will emerge in independence. And independence is the people —it’s you who assert this today. They could be millions against us, they can send all the riot police they like, the atomic bomb, helicopters and the rest ... all that won’t wipe out the claim for Kanak independence.

Many say that Kanak independence is racist. We demand Kanak independence because we demand to be what we are! We claim our place in the sun, like any other independent people in the world. We demand that true custom, which Mr Naisseline explained a moment ago, might at last emerge and that the chiefs who represent the Kanak people emerge to speak the word which is in the belly of the Kanak people. This right ... cannons could roll over it, rifles could shoot at it — but it will remain as long as one Kanak is there to breathe the breath of the land of New Caledonia.

It has been said that New Caledonia should be ‘made White’ to get rid of the Kanak claim. The Australians succeeded in Tasmania: there are no more claims, because the Tasmanian people have been definitively destroyed! Here, as long as there is one Kanak, the claim will remain. And the claim is not the property of Mitterrand, Lemoine or some other president, it belongs to the Kanak people. It is for that reason that the affirmation of unity by the comrades a moment ago is important.

I would like to reply to another argument, which is: ‘What will you do with the other ethnic groups?’ The claim for independence belongs to the Kanak people, to the legitimate, indigenous people. We are here to demand it. We are not responsible for the independence of France. The French are independent, aren’t they? We are not responsible for the independence or the destiny of the Antilles, for
the destiny of Wallis and Futuna, for the destiny of Tahiti! The destiny of those peoples belongs to them. It belongs to their country.

1 Helen Fraser papers.

2 Admiral Febvrier-Despointes took possession of the New Caledonian archipelago in the name of France on 24 September 1853 at Balade (Editors’ note).

3 In 1972, Prime Minister Pierre Messmer stated: ‘New Caledonia, a colony of settlement, although it is destined to be a motley multi-racial society, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory in the world where a developed country can send its nationals as migrants ... In the long term, nationalist claims by the natives will be avoided only if the communities of non-Pacific origin constitute a demographic majority’ (quoted in Les Temps modernes, March 1985, p. 1608) (Editors’ note).

4 Translators’ note: this reference to the dispossession and almost total elimination of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania in the 19th century reflects the then widespread belief that Tasmanian Aborigines were in fact driven to extinction.
CHAPTER 14
‘My Idea of Development’

The Nainville-les-Roches meeting saw the authority of the Kanak nationalists solidly established. Strengthened by this victory, the Front indépendantiste set about good administration of the affairs of the Territory. As Vice-President of the Council of Government, Jean-Marie Tjibaou replies here to questions from a French language monthly devoted to the Pacific region and published in Nouméa.

For several years, the nickel mining industry had been going through an acute crisis which had forced leaders to rethink the economy of New Caledonia, in terms of diversification rather than a single industry. In this context, Jean-Marie Tjibaou focuses on the possibility of developing other aspects of the Territory’s wealth such as tourism, emphasising the need to decentralise the archipelago’s economic activities.

30 JOURS — Mr Vice-President, might we examine some aspects of New Caledonia’s economic situation: between 1980 and 1982, the volume of imports dropped from 889,000 tonnes to 518,000 tonnes, or 38 per cent. If we consider money supply between January and May 1983, we are looking at a drop of 150 million francs CFP; from April 1982 to April 1983, the CPI increase is 13.3 per cent. This is not a very good result. What do you attribute it to?

J.-M. TJIBAOU — First of all, let’s not lose sight of the fact that the base of the Territory’s economy has always been nickel. Today,
economic difficulties, coming on top of the constant fall in Japanese orders, have meant losses of nearly 60 per cent for the exporters. There are two consequences: foreign exchange earnings have plummeted and the miners have had to make massive retrenchments, keeping on only the minimum number of employees essential for the maintenance of the plant. For a single industry economy like that of the Territory, this is catastrophic. The country is at a standstill, and will remain so for a long time.

30 J — But you seem to have been trying to set it in a new direction.

J.-M. T. — Yes, but despite that we have still not finished feeling the effects of this nickel slump. The Territory budget has suffered from it since 1975; and today we are at the trough of the wave. The Territory has not planned for substitute industries to employ those retrenched from the nickel industry. On this question of nickel policy, I have asked the relevant department to provide me with proposals to get us away from what I see as a policy of simply picking the nickel up. The Territory has never really had a policy for managing its mining resources. Moreover, these resources should add to the wealth of the whole community, whether in a liberal capitalist economy or a socialist one. That said, it is normal to have a return on invested capital. On the other hand, the revenue from the exploitation of these resources should help to create substitute industries or activities. The time has come for fast action, which is perhaps easier in a time of crisis.

Now it is up to the Territory to draw up a development plan in which it will be clearly stipulated that the Territory should organise its mining resources in a viable manner so that they can truly serve the development of New Caledonia. Of the total mining titles handed in, the Territory should retain, say, 25 per cent. With that amount, it should begin a policy of diversification. So far, all that has been done is to prepare a mining inventory. Only the BRGM [Geological and Mining Research Bureau] has gone further: I think we should set up a local BRGM for ourselves. Why? Because then we could move to the next stage: prospecting. In fact, it is from the time that the inventory of deposits is fully done and they have been
classified according to their nature and size, and from that time only, that mining titles can be issued. I am convinced that the end of the first plan, scheduled for 1986, should see the setting up of this local bureau, which will do the prospecting on the basis of which the Territory will be able proceed to issue mining titles and to make proposals to possible investors.

For the second plan, the Territory, through the local BRGM, would have to decide on setting up a territorial operator which could serve as the direct interlocutor of New Caledonian investors and miners in the establishment of a real resources management policy. In a note on prospects for the industry, a local mining firm assesses that at the end of 1986, no further New Caledonian nickel will be sold because of the costs of extraction and also of transport, given the moisture content of the New Caledonian ore — two aspects which will lead people to think of other arrangements for profiting from our resources. In addition, in the second plan, we are providing for small processing plants.

30 J — What you are looking for, then, is a structure for the Territory comparable to that of the [French] State: a New Caledonian BRGM and an operator, a New Caledonian COFREMMI (French Metallurgical and Mining Holdings) which would work with local or international investors. But what becomes of SLN in all this?

J.-M. T. — SLN would continue its business. We simply lack the information necessary to assess the management of SLN. Thus we need other arrangements to determine clearly whether or not nickel is finished. Finally, on a different level of thinking, we need to be in a position in the near future to determine our needs in grey matter, so that we can offer students openings leading to interesting jobs in the mining sector.

30 J — In your view, then, nickel remains the key to development?

J.-M. T. — I would nonetheless like to make it clear that at the end of the second plan, that is, in 1989, New Caledonia should no longer be exporting nickel in the form of ore.
We have, therefore, a little more than six years ahead of us to get ready for this change. This period of time will have to be used to get ready for the future from the point of view of development, management, profiting from the exploitation of our resources, but let me stress, the days of just picking it up off the ground are over. And there is no longer any question of reinvesting the money earned from this God-given gift of heaven anyhow and anywhere: it has to be processed locally, its tax treatment has to be revised so that it acts more as an incentive for the creation of substitute industries.

30 J — The operator appointed by this local office to work in the nickel industry would make a profit. But what would happen to it? Would it go into a fund and be available for loans to other businesses?

J.-M. T. — We have asked the SICNC (New Caledonia Investment and Credit Company) and the Central Bank to prepare for the end of this year a plan to split the property business and the credit business: the latter would become a development bank to facilitate investment in other sectors of activity.

30 J — Which sectors would they be? Processing industry or tourism?

J.-M. T. — For me, tourism is of interest only because it creates jobs. The problem is that we are in a fragile little country which lacks consensus at the sociological level. To begin with, we have to persuade New Caledonians to stay in New Caledonia during the holidays. The way I think, 60 per cent of the tourism budget should be devoted to stemming this haemorrhage. That of course means that the environment will have to be developed — taking serious account of the human environment, for despite the problems at the Fayaoue tourist facility, there is a desire to get involved in the economy, and when they say that we Melanesians are socialists, it is in terms of traditional ideas about ownership. If you have things, you have to give some away. That said, we are not against businesses making profits, provided that society as a whole benefits.
30 J — On the subject of Fayaoue, the community, the Territory, the SICNC and other private firms were involved. It seemed to be something which would work …

J.-M. T. — The set-up was interesting, yes …

30 J — But didn’t go far enough?

J.-M. T. — Perhaps. The problems are linked above all to the lack of consensus I mentioned just now, without which there is no sharing of responsibilities. What seemed doable in theory turned out to be impossible in the Fayaoue case. Here and now, people are not ready for this sharing of responsibility. It is too new a concept for the people here. The trouble is, there are commercial imperatives, and these have to go ahead: the hotel has to open, things have to be done. Suddenly, there is a break, and the Ouvea people inevitably feel left out. The result is that they think that money is being made right in front of them, with no benefit to them, and they feel frustrated. I think that that is the core of the problem. In future, well before operations begin, we shall have to put in place a proper schedule which will define everyone’s responsibilities. This is a lesson the Ouvea experience has taught us. We currently lack economic models in all sectors. The existing ones are perceived by Melanesians to be foreign. Nonetheless, people can see that things are changing: a Melanesian is Secretary General in New Caledonia, and the fact that not everyone accepts it does not diminish its value for the dignity of the Kanak people. It is a benchmark for the organisation of the Administration. It shows that things can change. On the other hand, there is no example of a working Melanesian enterprise; if you find one, you will have to let me know and publicise it. The Koumac marble works will be a success perhaps; personally, I have a lot of faith in it, perhaps because rocks cannot be burned down …

The sectors in which an effort should be made are agriculture and tourism. These two sectors cannot be separated. In agriculture, there is already a small local market; in a way, people will have to be ‘imported’ into it in order to justify the development of agricultural policy on a larger scale. This cannot fail to make costs fall and thus
to encourage the development of tourism. It's an upward spiral. Our idea is that the West Coast could be devoted to agriculture and agribusiness, and the East Coast and the Islands to tourism⁴.

30 J — But there is also the question of wage levels, which you have not mentioned. If you take Vanuatu, for example, with the wage scales there, you can see how they are able to offer cheap tourism …

J.-M. T. — Here in New Caledonia, the lifestyle is artificial. Local officials claim remuneration aligned with that of their metropolitan colleagues, which, given our economic infrastructure, is truly nonsensical. That hurts me all the more because, once again, the Territory does not have the political institutions which allow it to set economic development objectives. At present, and this is a real worry, the standard is set by the public service. When they leave high school, the young people all more or less dream of a job in the public service, because that has the greatest security.

30 J — But which does not produce wealth …

J.-M. T. — Quite the opposite. Broadly speaking, it increases the group of those who consume, and that reduces the number of those who produce. It follows that the producing group needs to be given its due, and the public service returned to its proper place. At present, there is no means of mobilising people to do this: there is no plan, no goal, no procedures.

Take animal production, for example. We should be saying to the producers: the Territory goal is 130,000 head in 1986; and to private investors, go for it: the Territory will assist you through the local investment code if you get involved in achieving the plan's goals. As for the public servants, we should be saying to them: your role is to help these people without over-managing them. At the present time, of course, it is the public service which gives the orders, the public service which has the power. Therefore, our goal for the next year is to have in place by June, in each sector, the procedures which are to be followed, with well-defined objectives. Taking animal production again, we shall say, therefore: to reach the objective of 130,000 per
year, we shall need such and such a number of public servants, and not one more.

30 J — *The central pillar, then, is a plan which not only sets out the objectives, but which provides the incentives to reach them. But to go back to tourism, doesn’t a formula have to be found for resolving the problems which come up in a business, without bringing it to a halt, a sort of conciliation agency?*

J.-M. T. — For me, the nub of the problem is the gap between the European idea of tourism and the Melanesian idea. That is why we have to be sure that we work out carefully who can do what. To rule on custom disputes, we can go to the Clan Council, the role of which is to determine property boundaries and the rights of each party. Let me tell that you that in my case, when dealing with investors, I spend most of my time trying to find the way to proceed before giving any sort of green light ... I hope that things will improve with the new statute. Anyway, I firmly believe that a custom authority is needed to ensure consultation.

30 J — *Good. Could we perhaps talk now about your trip to Hong Kong and especially this Népoui project they talk about?*

J.-M. T. — In the Territory meeting on development, the need to decentralise to create economic and administrative decision-making points other than Nouméa was emphasised by most people. That is the first point of departure for launching the idea of the Népoui free port. For true decentralisation can operate only around centres of economic interest which attract population. The second is the question mark placed over the status of Hong Kong in 1995. Investors are travelling all over the world looking for new ‘shelters’ for their investments. For the time being, capital is staying in Hong Kong, but it could be transferred fairly rapidly if the lease were not renewed. They are therefore looking for significant investment projects, because they fear that eventually China will grab their capital, and for that reason, they are interested in the possibilities in New Caledonia.
This project, then, is to establish Népoui as a free port, a small finance centre, an international port with an industrial and commercial town within a duty free zone. Our interest in it is the development of the Territory. Investors will surely be keen to build production centres, such as factories for watch or vehicle assembly, or indeed agribusiness complexes within the zone. And still in terms of this project, there are even some French who are interested in our situation and in the relations that we shall have to develop with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. It is therefore an idea with a lot going for it.

Népoui will constitute a financial centre which will create jobs. That is how I see it. The Népoui project should kick-start the whole Territory economy.

30 J — How many people will live in Népoui? 5,000? 20,000?

J.-M. T. — We are beginning on the basis of the original plan, which provided for 20,000 people, but that will depend on how attractive this town will be for our compatriots.

30 J — What chance do you give this project of succeeding?

J.-M. T. — I'll tell you on 31 October. It is not until then that those involved will indicate what their response will be ... Personally, I have told them that I would be happy to include the idea of Népoui free port in the three-year plan ... I have asked them to let me have proposals on 31 October, so that during the budget session I can put proposals forward to the Territorial Assembly as part and parcel of the objectives of the three-year plan.

30 J — And you are ready to give every guarantee provided there is this 'run-off' for the Territory?

J.-M. T. — The financial risks are for the investors to take. There are 14,000 hectares belonging to the Territory which are reserved for Népoui. I have begun discussions with the people of Poya and thereabouts. I have good reason to think that it will happen ...
This interview was given by Jean-Marie Tjibaou to the monthly *30 Jours* in October 1983.

100 francs CFP = FFR5.50 (Editors’ note) = EUR0.84/AUD 1.55 (Translators’ note, 2005 values).

The Fayaoue tourist centre on the island of Ouvéa was burned down by independentists on 14 June 1984 (Editors’ note).

In an interview which is essential for understanding his thought, Jean-Marie Tjibaou assesses the progress made with the Kanak claim to cultural identity, of which he had been one of the main drivers for more than ten years. The architect of Mélanésia 2000 (1975) gives us here one of his most profound reflections on the clash between Kanak civilisation and the West, the face of which, he reminds us, has for New Caledonia always been colonialism. A few months before the creation of the FLNKS and the ‘active boycott’ of the 1984 territorial elections, Jean-Marie Tjibaou gauges the limits of recognition of a purely cultural kind: the claim to identity is but a step on the path to a liberation which he now shows himself convinced must be political first and foremost.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS DUPON — Some years ago, you were the prime mover in the first great public manifestation of the renaissance of Melanesian culture in New Caledonia, and now you are one of the main political leaders in this country. Has your political struggle run in parallel with your struggle for recognition of Kanak cultural identity?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Mélanésia 2000, the event to which you refer, was the culmination of a reawakening, a crisis of identity. In the face of a system — educational, economic and social — which denied their humanity, their hierarchy and even their living space,
the Kanaks conceived it as a claim for recognition, rejecting both subordination and the White mask of assimilation. The central government perhaps thought it was taking it over. The conservative local authorities accepted the project, not without suspicion, because it was an official project. Mental blocks — more historical and psychological than cultural — made the petite bourgeoisie more hostile to the event. Among Melanesians, opinion was divided. My party was against what it considered to be a project of the colonial administration. The other groups in what is now the Front were hesitant, but they participated. In the political context of a break in the discussions in Paris on the status of the Territory, in the social context in which there was no Melanesian in any position of responsibility and very few with any schooling, the exercise, which was well covered, had a significant impact. For the first time, two thousand Melanesians came to Nouméa and openly demanded recognition of their identity.

J.-F. D. — What were the decisive points in your campaign and what series of steps do you envisage to ensure movement from recognition to a real renaissance of Melanesian culture?

J.-M. T. — The beginnings of the recovery of pride and personality can be dated to the ‘Smiling Melanesian Villages Movement’ founded in the second half of the sixties by women in the Nouméa suburbs, led by Mrs Pidjot, the recently deceased wife of the member of parliament for Constituency One. Its initial purpose was to fight alcoholism. Women were to rehabilitate their husbands by improving the home and its surroundings. Rediscovery of self-respect and of the sense of belonging to a group seemed to us something which required that approach, even though it seems naive. From there, we went further and set up the second stage: from recovery of pride to recovery of culture. That is where the idea of Mélanésia 2000 came from, with the strong support of the Youth and Sports Department of the time.

But in all fairness, I have to say that the ground for this important step had been prepared by the student action after 1968. Even though the little newspapers and the group demonstrations, such as
those of the Foulards rouges, echoed demands being voiced throughout the world, their action here was directed at problems which were sufficiently specific both to upset the calm colonial order of things and to prepare people's minds to accept Mélanésia 2000.

Since then, successive political positions in favour of independence have strengthened the search for the identity we have claimed at the human level, in terms of land and institutions. And then, more recently, there has been the recognition by the Socialist Party of the right of the Kanak people to independence, and the positions stated in the most recent meetings of the South Pacific Forum. Finally, there are the decrees under which the government has acknowledged the existence of indigenous society and the injustices the indigenous people have suffered. This acknowledgement, which has taken concrete form in the Office culture, scientifique et technique kanak and the Office foncier, opens the door to the cultural rebirth of the Melanesians of New Caledonia.

J.-F. D. — There is much talk of custom in New Caledonia these days. Can you explain to me what is meant by it? Apart from the political use that is made of it, does this retain deep meaning for the general population of Kanaks, despite colonisation and the changes in the way people live? How do you intend to make this concept work for the reconstruction of your people's heritage?

J.-M. T. — As things now stand, the term 'custom', which is general, derogatory and ambiguous, is used for convenience, but always to express difference. I would remind you that it was created by Europeans to designate what in general terms was part of the Melanesian world, something Kanak, and did not concern them. The Kanaks responded to this by giving another interpretation to the term 'custom': that which distinguishes us from the Whites and from the technical, economic and commercial world which belongs to them and to which they deny us access, a world which is foreign to us. Whence custom as refuge. Whence also the comment of one Kanak: 'In custom, I am someone; in town, I am no-one', which tells us also that custom, apart from its distinctive material aspects, is also the whole set of institutions specific to Melanesians, which are their
own, which define them and give them value as men, which give them authenticity in their own eyes more than all the administrative rules and regulations imposed by the Whites could ever do. It happens that what confers value and importance to Europeans in their societies is not what makes the individual in ours. For us, in the eyes of others as in your own eyes, ‘the more you have, the more you must give’ in order to be a man.

It follows that it is impossible for us to accept as our own the values which form the basis of your societies, because these ideas are destructive for ours. We are obliged, in order to adapt to the world, to consider the economy not as an end in itself but as a technique. Accumulation, saving, capitalisation, investment, expansion, growth and their corollaries, capacity and profitability, we cannot use as techniques. We are conscious of coming from somewhere else and of being pursued by that somewhere else which is our whole frame of reference. Well, the colonial system has made the Kanaks not only scorned and despoiled strangers in their own country, but also people who are to be identified only by economic criteria, by consumer goods. A very primitive system! — to which we prefer the personality which custom confers on us.

It will be argued perhaps that other Pacific countries which have been colonised have kept aspects of their material culture to a greater extent than we have. In fact, what you have in these cases is often isolated bits and pieces of protocol divorced from their context, which seem to us to remain within the colonial context, because they are no more than folklore, or are still regarded as such, while we Kanaks remain attached also, for example, to introduced practices marking life events. It is custom as a whole which gives sense to the Melanesian.

J.-F. D. — Decolonisation has given rise to a strong sense of regional solidarity in the South Pacific which finds expression in multiple ways. What, in this context, is the meaning of an event like the Pacific Festival of Arts? And if we could try to go a little further: the identity of a culture in the world is manifested not only by what it has which is original but also by what is universal about it; how do you envisage reconciling the cultural responsibilities of Kanak custom with its obligations to the world as a whole?
J.-M. T. — Events like the Pacific Festival of Arts can in fact help make Kanak culture play the role every culture plays in the universal heritage of mankind. But for now, the challenge we have to deal with is a concrete situation beyond the reconstruction of our culture.

It is unemployment, for example, which prevents our young people from learning about the world of work which makes them adults. In the present system, schools are the only path to adulthood. The schooling process has a single aim: access to wage employment, to monetary income, which has been made a goal and in the absence of which people are unusable, unused, useless; they do not exist.

The very concept of the person is tied to the way in which the individual is initiated into knowledge and into life; and beyond that, to the concept of development. It follows that one of our immediate problems is this: beginning with a redefinition of schooling programs and objectives, how are we to feed into a form of development which is human, which forms the whole person and not just *homo economicus*, the wage earner?

J.-F. D. — *How do you see Melanesian culture taking in new forms of artistic expression? Encouraging the development of a Kanak literature in French, for example: does that seem possible and desirable?*

J.-M. T. — The present situation that Melanesians in New Caledonia are living through is one of transition, characterised by much hesitation. The elements of modernity are there, but we lack models combining the traditional and the modern. So it is a time of debate between opting for modernity and the fear of losing one’s identity. This debate will be a long one, and we shall have to overcome this contradiction. The symbiosis between the traditional and the modern comes about in fact by the force of things. The new forms of expression do it by incorporating material: sounds come out of the guitar, for example, but accompanying specifically Melanesian poetic or contemporary themes. In the same way, the *manous* (traditional skirts), the rhythmic whistles, paint and decorative powders, the harmonica and the drums used to today in our dances, our *pilous*, all these draw modernity into our traditional activities. Less obviously perhaps, we are incorporating elements of the cultures around us into our choreography.
Finally, there is use of linguistic material — French and for that matter, English — in poems and songs, alongside borrowings from other Oceanian cultures. You could say that there is movement by Melanesian society, on an historic scale, to win for itself a new identity, based on its tradition, but mobilising borrowed material elements and using standard elements from the universal culture on offer everywhere but especially in the media.

That people continue to hesitate is essentially the result of the fact that we still lack champions of Melanesian culture to suggest new models, large-scale artistic creations which will make people think, make them aware of themselves and unleash creative activity.

There are however some admittedly timid attempts, especially songs, but also in the fields of painting, sculpture, dance, theatrical work.

We should doubtless be looking to a new flowering of poetic and literary creation, which will set new models with their roots in Kanak tradition but adapted to the contemporary environment of Melanesians, which is that of the town. Along with regular pay, acculturation to this new frame of reference is vital. But what is also vital is the need to create for ourselves an environment in which the modern is incorporated into the life breathed into us by the ancestors, without which we cannot reconnect with our roots.

J.-F. D. — What will be the role of cultural and scientific bodies which already existed or have recently been established (Institut culturel Mélanesien, Office culturel, scientifique et technique Kanak)?

J.-M. T. — Among the offices which have been created, the Institut culturel Mélanesien, whose job it is, can no doubt contribute to the achievement of the goals which have just been defined. But in that regard, we should not overlook the significance of the role of the Office foncier. That office should function to allow our clans to resume ownership of our land, of their traditional territories, their cultural places and sacred places. You will realise the importance of this if you bear in mind that the hierarchical system can function only if the physical framework corresponds to what tradition says it is. The disputes between clans which arise today during the restitu-
tion process in the Territory do so principally because the alienation of our lands which accompanied colonisation impaired the fundamental organic link which tradition had established between our societies and their physical environment.

The restoration of our land rights appears then to be a prerequisite for the restoration of our culture. That said, what will the role of the Institut culturel Mélanésien be? First, it will push on with the heritage survey, which is the most important work it has undertaken to date. UNESCO, CRNS and ORSTOM will be asked to participate in this heritage survey in the field, because it is urgently needed. It is about material culture as well as the oral tradition, custom practices, magic practices, none of which register very much in an urban environment, but which are part of the very fabric of our personality.

To survey all the dispersed elements of the Melanesian personality before they are forgotten, political will in the widest sense is needed, and clear objectives. The system of identification in relation to tradition has to be clear enough to let Melanesians (re)build a personality which is their own, but within the framework of their present environment.

The second responsibility of the Institut culturel Mélanésien is carriage of the Pacific Festival of Arts. I am trying, for my part, to stimulate people to think of this event as having two aspects: the spotlight on traditional culture, of course, but, at the same time, another facet, showing clearly how Oceanians express themselves culturally in the contemporary context. That supposes artistic creation of a kind that will illustrate the life they live now, that is, their cultural, political and economic demands, their fears at all levels as they face both life and death. By that I mean that Oceanians, once they are reassured about the classic forms of response in their traditional cultures, and thus confirmed in their continuity, their permanence, need new responses, adapted to the conditions in which they now live, mobilising the new techniques to spread them. More concretely, what Oceanians have to say and what they have to say about each other, including what our people say and what is said about them, today should be projected quite naturally into the media, so that we can continue to find ourselves, and thus
to be at ease with ourselves, to be able finally to use our creativity to promote our identity.

The main goal of the Institut culturel Mélanésien for 1985 is to continue to draw benefit from the Festival. It will endeavour to turn to the greatest advantage the heritage assembled for that occasion. The many groups which were formed will maintain and improve what will have been achieved by that event. The new cultural centres in Nouméa and in Hienghène will provide the locale for these activities.

J.-F. D. — Continuing in the same vein, we would like to put a practical question to you: how do you envisage that the concrete problems entailed in reconstructing and spreading Kanak culture will be resolved?

J.-M. T. — Cultural reconstruction is a whole. The job of the various departments with responsibilities in the cultural field should be to think about what is needed and to help others think about what has to be done to integrate culture and life, and in particular to put in place the framework, the space within which the people of the Territory can develop harmoniously, with the highest possible quality of life. There are however material imperatives in regional development. New Caledonia today is really two countries. We need to bend our minds to finding a way to overcome the unbridgeable gap between them.

While you can’t organise the city to fit in the tribe, you can try to organise the country to fit in both the one and the other. The idea is this: the towns get subsidies for the things which contribute to the quality of life: sports grounds, playgrounds, swimming pools, parks and so on. Why not accept that those who work in the rural areas producing mats and baskets, preparing traditional money, working up and delivering speeches, composing and performing songs and dances do so in part to be able to obtain things which improve their quality of life?

By doing this, they participate in this concept of development which goes beyond the well-being which comes from material things obtained from wages. Modern money should help in the production of traditional money. These activities, as well as the upkeep of tradi-
tional housing, the improvement of skills in the tribes, could be paid for in non-money terms and exemptions (such as on transport, to facilitate mobility and exchanges). These are questions we are thinking about in shaping the budget and the plan.

So, yes, we can reconstruct the culture, but culture which is part of an overall framework for living and which sets a style from which everyone benefits.

J.-F. D. — *Living in town is the lot of an increasing number of Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians, and it conflicts with many of the traditional values of Pacific societies (living close to nature, sharing, exchanges, conviviality, sense of community) which set the quality of life there. How do you reconcile the inevitable existence of the town and what for you here is its opposite, what you call ‘the bush’ or ‘the interior and the islands’?*

J.-M. T. — With its advantages, but also its constraints, the urban setting is certainly foreign to traditional Melanesian society. Anonymity, the daily struggle for recognition, for a job, to perform, indeed to survive, these are unknown in our rural societies. Coming to town, Melanesians know that they have to deal with a new frame of reference, that of industrial society: efficiency, profitability, rigorous scheduling of activities, and also the individualism and solitude which are the other side of the illusory ease of communication and contact.

These constraints appear in the tribe, in the rural setting, as soon as there are wage earners there, and the tribe too is dragged along, dragged into involvement in another system of ‘values’. How to compromise with this upset, how to stay ourselves and at the same time feel at ease in this new framework, that is our problem.

And to understand our malaise and our aspirations, you have to remember that we have not yet been decolonised. We are constantly conscious of the non-Kanak environment into which we are asked to fit, not only through the alienation of land, but also through the hurdle of examinations, the rigours of management and the cold rules of the economy. This ‘modern’ world, which we have not yet exorcised, still has the colour of the colonisation which diminishes
and emasculates us. You see that in the way organised ignorance of Kanak reality persists, the refusal to acknowledge métissage, the rejection of relics. The colonial system has made Kanaks anonymous. We have not become marginalised by chance or by passive refusal. While I can share with a non-Kanak what I have of French culture, it is impossible for him to share with me what is universal within my culture. Reconciliation of town and bush will come about through recognition of the Melanesian personality and the complete restoration of our values.

J.-F. D. — Recent history has brought together in New Caledonia, on Melanesian territory, several foreign cultures. How do you see these cultures and the original culture co-existing? Do you think that we should cultivate differences because of the past, seek to meld them, or, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has written, try ‘to preserve the diversity of cultures without reference to the historical content which each era has given it’?

J.-M. T. — Melanesians find the foreign cultures, in their most diversified form, in town. But they are part of the cultural transformation which our country has experienced: the French language, the system of French logic taught in the schools — and all school children are imbued with that system.

To be capable of being integrated, a foreign system needs to be dealing with a well ‘positioned’ personality that is sure of itself and its frame of reference. As soon as the Melanesians of this country are in that position, and able undertake the necessary reorientation in relation to the different system, they will be able to face up to it and adopt the best of it. Mastery of French, as a language of international communication, is no doubt an advantage. But Melanesians do not have to become black Frenchmen to use it. They should, unlike the rest of the world, be people who are faithful to their inspiration and their way of life, but capable of using the contemporary tools of the school and the media and of drawing on what other cultures have to offer to assert their own personality.

Between the search for identity and the acquisition of those bits of the foreign culture which are part of daily life, which set the position of the individual in the new environment, there is a
constant to and fro, a constant dialectic. But another constant should be the fear of losing oneself, of giving up one’s identity. This provides protection, a point of reference, a handy barrier for Melanesians aiming to absorb what the foreign culture has to offer, as indeed for those in the same situation, facing the same choice. Having observed what happens in my country, I have in fact become convinced that cultural osmosis implies a certain steadiness, prolonged contact not only between systems but between the individuals experiencing it, living together. But before you get to the points of affinity from which cultural sharing is built, there must first be explicit recognition of the personality of each party. The dominance of the language of the colonisers is a lesser evil only in that it is used by the colonised to assert themselves and achieve recognition. Well, here in New Caledonia, the media and the education system show how necessary it is to make our claim to cultural identity a claim to nationality. The special place of every language is the national home with which its speakers identify. We have to accept that the Melanesian cultural personality will not be able to reach its full dimensions unless Melanesian society has the capacity to control its own destiny. Being in government is useful, a handy tool, but do you build a personality with tools?

1 This interview, conducted in March 1984 by Jean-François Dupon, a researcher at ORSTOM in Nouméa, was published in a special number of the review Ethnies (nos 8–9–10, ‘Renaissance du Pacifique’, pp. 76–80), published by the association Survival International in Paris in 1989.
2 Jean-Marie Tjibaou is alluding here to the traditional Kanak political system, which defines the identity of each lineage by reference to a specific dwelling place, the prestige of which is proportionate to its antiquity.
3 This festival, which was to have been held in Nouméa in late 1984, was cancelled because of the ‘events’, and took place in 1985 in Papeete (Tahiti) (Editors’ note).
4 Jean-Marie Tjibaou is referring here to the gap between the urban agglomeration of Nouméa, where the White population predominates, and ‘the bush’ (the interior of Grande Terre and the Loyalty Islands), rural areas where the Kanaks are in the majority (Editors’ note).
AFTER 18 NOVEMBER 1984, nothing would ever be the same again in New Caledonia. The magnitude of the rejection of French institutions by the Kanaks established a new balance of forces, at one stroke making the FLNKS the essential interlocutor. Roadblocks, attacks on gendarmes, harassment of colons, and, in return, the massacre of independentists at Hienghène, the definitive ‘neutralisation’ of Eloi Machoro and Marcel Nonnarо by the GIGN and so on; many deaths on both sides brought tensions to a head in the archipelago. In this climate of violence, negotiations on the Territory’s future were begun by Edgard Pisani, and less than a year later, a new statute was adopted. The independentists gained significant powers in the regions, but the birth of Kanaky, which in January 1985 seemed very close, was put off. The Socialist government would pass this still burning issue to its successors in March 1986.

When the Kanak independentists burst onto the international scene like this, Jean-Marie Tjibaou as their leader gained broad access to the global media. His innumerable statements throughout this decisive year each refer to a political action or event. But independently of the events of the day, Jean-Marie Tjibaou was developing his thinking on national identity, with a view to the emergence of an independent Kanak State.
CHAPTER 16
On Watch

Two weeks before the territorial elections of 18 November, Jean-Marie Tjibaou reiterates the FLNKS's directions to its supporters. These are that the smooth running of the electoral process is to be opposed by force and thus frustrate the new statute for New Caledonia which the DOM-TOM Secretary of State, Georges Lemoine, has just had adopted by the National Assembly. At this last congress of the Union Calédonienne before the unleashing of the Kanak revolt, Jean-Marie Tjibaou resorts to anti-colonialist rhetoric as resolute as it is classic. To get his party to close ranks and to mobilise the militants, he sets down as a pre-requisite for any discussion with the French Government the accession of the Kanak people to independence.

COMRADES!

Thank you for being here.

I say that with some feeling. I said a little while ago: we have the elders here — old Pidjot, old Lenormand, the grand chef.

Hilarion was here a little while ago to make the speeches to us, to welcome the delegations in front of the case. He too is one of those elders. Thank you for being here, to tell them that the fight they fight is not a lost one.

You could have not come. And your absence would have told all those people who have been fighting from the very beginning that they were on the wrong track. Because what they are really telling us now is that the Union Calédonienne is getting onto the wrong track.
A boatload came from Bélep\(^2\). Thank you to the Bélep people. Thank you to the people of the islands, because Touho is distant, when you have to come from the islands to Nouméa then travel kilometres to get here ... I think that the place you see the mason is at the foot of the wall. The people who say: ‘This is the way you should pour the footings, this is how you have to use the plumb line, this is how you have to use the trowel.’ He does not know how you hold a trowel and he clears off when the time comes to put into practice the speeches people have been making for years. We are fighting for what? We are fighting for independence. That is our name, independence: it is the Kanaks' name. And that is what makes people afraid, that is why there is hatred towards Kanaks. There is even greater hatred towards Europeans who fight for this cause. It is our name, independence. And when they besmirch independence, they besmirch our name, they besmirch our face. And you are here to say that this besmirching of us has to stop. We want independence today. I say that to introduce the thing that causes fear today: boycotting the elections.

That's what being at the foot of the wall is. That's what it is, saying, doing, putting into practice what independence is. Independence makes people afraid. Some Kanaks are afraid, even though they have no weapons, they have no guns. It is for that reason too that we are scorned, that we are threatened, because independence means: ‘This is Kanak country.’ Kanak sovereignty, the sovereignty of this country, belongs to the Kanaks and to no-one else. It is not for Lemoine to dictate to us with whom we make independence, for independence is our heritage. It's like your face. You can grow a beard or a moustache, shave or paint it. It's your problem. It belongs to you. Independence is the sovereignty which belongs to us, which we claim. But it is for us to say what the calendar is for independence, because it is our heritage.

I say again, thank you for being here to support the fight, to support those who have always fought the fight.

Just one thing: why, after saying ‘you must vote’, are we now saying ‘no more voting’? I think I have to go over it again, because yesterday there were Chamber of Agriculture elections. We didn’t explain it enough. But for the elections, we will say: ‘Vote for the
Kanak National Assembly. The next Assembly is still the Territorial Assembly. We will be voting for the Kanak Territorial Assembly, the Kanak National Assembly.

We are also going to elect our representatives to the National Convention, as was said at the FLNKS Convention. We are also going to convene the FLNKS Congress on 1 December to appoint our independentist movement Management or Steering or Organising Committee which we call the provisional government. But we insist that from now on any vote organised by the French Government, without our agreement, is a vote that won’t have us in it. Is that clear? Because yesterday I was still meeting plenty of people who were asking ‘who should we vote for?’ The Union Calédonienne has already said that it is not taking part in the elections, which means that it is not doing a list. The FLNKS has no list, and none of the militants will be voting any more. They will vote the day that the UC or the FLNKS calls people to vote on the act of self-determination, the Lemoine referendum. Do you know what questions he is thinking of putting in ’89? You might have heard it on the radio or perhaps the TV.

First: ‘Are you satisfied with the current statute?’ The UC says: ‘Obsolete question.’ Autonomy is out of date: we are independentists. Are you satisfied with the autonomy statute? For us, this is a question which is already out of date.

The second question he is thinking of for ’89, this is what he said to the French National Assembly: ‘Do you want a more evolving statute, more so than autonomy status?’ Again, for us it is an obsolete question. Obsolete, everyone knows what that means. An old manou, old and dirty. An obsolete question.

The third question: ‘Would you like the country to become independent?’ Well, that is a question that we have already rejected. We demand Kanak independence, Kanak socialist independence. But Kanak independence first off. We say that independence is our heritage; this is the Kanak country, and there are still men living in the Kanak country. You are here to remind people of this, because there are some who have run away, who are already saying with Lemoine in ’89 ‘independence for everyone’. That means perpetuating the present system. We reject that and in ’89 if these questions
are put: ‘Do you want the country to become independent for everyone?’ that means that the Kanaks are a group on the same footing as the Wallisians, as the Martiniquese, or any group.

We demand primacy in this country because it is our country; we do not demand independence for France, for Martinique, for Tahiti, for Wallis or any other country; we demand independence for the Kanak country; we are the Kanaks. We demand primacy in this Kanak country, and we ask for the support of all who are against colonialism, all who are against the colonial system.

During these two days, we are going to decree, so that it is very clear, that on the 18th, first, there will be no lists with the UC on. The UC people who are on the lists, as we have told the Touho steering committee, exclude themselves by that act: they are no longer part of the UC. That is very clear. […]

There is no UC on any list. We are not voting any more and we will vote the day that we have to pronounce on the act of self-determination. We’ll have a chance to come back to this point in the next few days, to talk it over again. But I would like it to be very clear, rather as the Secretary General [Eloi Machoro] asked me to do, that what comes out of this congress will be our determination to prevent the new assembly happening on the 18th. At these elections, the result on our side must be zero. The Bélep people can’t mobilise to close the town hall in Nouméa. Mobilise in your own areas for a zero result. Why? So that the Government is faced with the choice of either going ahead with the new assembly anyway or annulling the outcome of the elections. We are fighting for no more elections, no assembly other than the Kanak National Assembly. We are fighting for the Kanak National Assembly. We will boycott the next assembly too. The same goes for the local assemblies.

We Hoot ma Waap³ people have to block this ‘local council’, because in this local council there are representatives of the municipalities; if we are not there, there will be no local council. There will be socio-professionals, co-operatives, social organisations, shops … We will be able to oppose those three levels and prevent any Hoot ma Waap local council. I give this example which goes for all the rest, but will be more difficult for the Southern Region with Nouméa, but that is the aim: frustrate the elections, block the implementation of the
statute. It should not be forgotten that the first task of a new assembly is to pass the budget. For the budget to be passable, it must have the opinion of the local district or the assembly of districts. The assembly of districts is composed of the representatives who come from the six assemblies, one in each district. Well, if we can block that, we shall be able also to frustrate the approval of the budget, and if there is no budget, the governor will be obliged to bring the budget down by decree or by order, by ministerial decree, and that means that the Assembly is inoperative, and we are fighting for that too. Block the elections and then block the implementation of the statute and frustrate the establishment of the institutions; people will have to work, the Assembly people, the Council of Ministers people. They will have to go on the road, they will have to move about. We'll boycott that too and give them six months; by 30 June, there won’t be any more Lemoine statute.

Do you feel strong or are you afraid? On 30 June, the Lemoine statute must be no more; the new assembly must be prevented from working on the ground. We are on the ground, we’ll be everywhere, not in the assembly any more, we’ll be on the roads, in the fields, in the sea (I’m saying that for the Bélep people). We will obstruct the work of the new Council of Ministers. Understood? Block them on the ground, block the implementation of the statute, block the elections. Over these days, the FLNKS, the other comrades will all be here to talk with us about how we do it. It’s not enough to say: ‘We are going to …’ — it’s how we do it and when we start. We are starting now, we are thinking about how we do it. That is very important, that we leave here, we leave this congress knowing what we have to organise: the result on the 18th has to be null and void or, if there is a result, one which can’t be ratified, and if the government ratifies it, that means that once again it will be understood that for them, independence is them. Lemoine clearly said: ‘Independence with France: you have to choose between independence with France or with Libya.’ What does that mean? It does not mean Libya! It means: ‘You will have independence if you do it with France; it is only with France that it is possible.’ That is not independence! Independence, for us, is the right to choose the partners with whom we want to work; but if, in principle, if beforehand, as all those no-hopers who have run off from the FLNKS
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or the UC are saying, we have already chosen, we choose independence with France. You have to take away the veil — that means that we choose nothing. We accept colonial France saying: ‘OK, my boy, now you are no longer a colony, you are independent now — I am in charge.’ Well, the 18th: we leave here firmly determined to block the 18th. To do what? To achieve Kanak independence.

Acknowledge the innate and active right to independence? It is not enough to say it, it has to be recognised by giving the Kanak country back.

How can you talk about how Mr Lenormand and other non-Kanaks are to be treated if you don’t have the power to do it? Who is it in this group who stamps the papers? And under whose signature is the right to enter the country given to people outside? Not us. First of all we claim that right, the right to control immigration, the right to decide whom we shall welcome, which is linked with sovereignty, with the restoration of the Kanak country. From then on, OK, we can discuss it, but not before. So we boycott the elections to obtain talks on a new basis, and as quickly as possible. We boycott, we destroy, we prevent the government from itself decolonising, because it is incapable of doing it, it is not its job, it’s ours — to obtain immediately, as quickly as possible, discussion of restitution of Kanak country to the Kanaks, and the right for them to have a flag, to be independent, and from that moment on, to exercise the sovereign right to decide which others might stay. But it is not for France to say: ‘Take this one, don’t take that one, you will take that one.’ No — the Kanak country is our property, it’s our home, and it’s up to us to say who comes into it. It is not Mitterrand’s, it is not Lemoine’s, not anyone else’s, it is ours. So we have to succeed, if we are to get this discussion going straight away. Is that clear? We shall have to be firm.

1 Speech by Jean-Marie Tjibaou at the XV Congress of the Union Calédonienne (Touho, 1–4 November 1984), recorded by Helen Fraser.
2 An island at the extreme north of New Caledonia (Editors’ note).
3 One of the six ‘local’ assemblies defined by the Lemoine statute. Each locality was to correspond to a region with a certain homogeneity in custom terms and was to have elected representatives sitting on a council in a consultative capacity (Editors’ note).
The Kanak uprising of 18 November 1984 achieved its aim. The electoral process was impeded by a strong independentist mobilisation. The revolutionary nature of the situation thus created made the political future of the Territory very uncertain. The FLNKS undertook several symbolic acts: after the establishment of a ‘Provisional Government of Kanaky’, the independentist flag was raised for the first time on 1 December at La Conception, the tribal village of the Kanak member of parliament Roch Pidjot. On this occasion, Jean-Marie Tjibaou recalls the history of the Kanak revolts which broke out repeatedly from the first days of colonisation. He holds that the logic of confrontation which is shaking New Caledonia and putting many human lives at risk, however distressing it is, is the result of a situation which the Kanaks no longer accept.

IN 1853, OUR country saw the French tricolour flag raised at Balade, robbing Kanaky of its sovereignty.

Today, we take up the challenge and hoist this flag. Green is the symbol of Kanaky, Kanak country green. Red, symbol of the struggle of the Kanak people, of our unity, the unity of the FLNKS, the unity that encompasses all those who will support the Republic of Kanaky. The blue of sovereignty. The sun is shining today, though in the history of the Kanak people it hasn't always done so for us. Thanks to the sun.

Thanks to our ancestors for being with us; they who walked along the painful road of humiliation, kicked in the backside, they who
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walked with eyes downcast, because every time they raised their heads, they brought humiliation on themselves. Our fathers’ claims were always met with a colonial administration and gendarmes saying that they were wrong because they were Kanak, whatever their rights might be. What we say today is that our rights will die when we die, but while we are still alive, this flag will flutter in the sky! — still flutter before countries which have their sovereignty, asserting our claim to be a permanent member of the concert of nations.

I would like to salute our militants, our founding militants. To salute the last 10 elders, shot together in front of the grave dug beneath the monument now there at Pouébo. To salute all those gaoled for refusing to submit to the colonial government: many chiefs, many elders died at Nouville, on the Isle of Pines, in Tahiti and Australia. If you know the history of our fathers, you know that today many of our leaders are in cemeteries far from their lands. To salute those who in 1878 rose up in protest, in the region which is now teeming with fascists. Atai’s death symbolises the deaths of these heroes. He didn’t have our opportunities: the ability to get around easily, the latest communications systems and maybe too, the change in the adversary’s thinking. Noé and all the elders who died in 1917. They were many who were forced from their lands.

In my view, dying is perhaps not the hardest; the hardest is to stay alive and feel a stranger in your own land, feel that your country is dying, feel powerless to take up the challenge and to unfurl once more our claim for the return of our sovereignty.

I would like to salute the militants who have suffered in the struggle. Those of 1969 and earlier: there are many of them among you, many who have done time in prison. There are those who have died. One was killed yesterday by a bullet in the brow; the brow of freedom. I would like our struggle to move quickly towards the light, towards freedom. And allow me to call for us to forgive together those we cause to hate us for what we must do, the restoration of our people’s sovereignty in Kanaky.

Let our flag now ever remind us that our struggle is a political struggle, that the purpose of our demands is not death, but remind us too that death is an inevitable part of the confrontation between our
people's legitimacy and the colonial legitimacy established by the French Government. The implicit opposition between the one and the other form of legitimacy is the basis of the war, the basis of the hatred, the basis of what we want no more of in our country.

So we are keen to get talks moving on the restoration of Kanaky's sovereignty.

To conclude, I would like to read you a little poem that I dreamed in the night. We tried to write a tune, but with all the telephone calls we didn't get it done.

O Kanaky, my country, my country!
Hail to you, my country!
Your sovereign people are proud
Your people born of the lands, of the sacred mounds.
Always at one with the ancestors, gathered by the same destiny.
Face turned to the future.
To declare to the world, to history, your sovereign freedom.
O Kanaky, my country! Long live Kanaky!

In the name of the Kanak people, I salute the national emblem of Kanaky and declare constituted the Provisional Government of the Republic of Kanaky. Long live Kanaky!

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1 Transcription of the tape of a speech by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, 1 December 1984.
2 Ten Kanaks were executed by the French army in 1867 at Pouébo in the northeast of La Grande Terre, after a revolt (Editors' note).
3 Places of deportation, one at Nouméa and the other at the far south of La Grande Terre (Editors' note).
4 Ataï was the leader of the Kanak insurrection of 1878. For more on this, see R Dousset-Leenhardt, Colonialisme et contradictions, Paris, Mouton-EPHE, 1970 (republished. L'Harmattan, 1978) (Editors' note).
5 Noël Nea, of the Goyeta clan, was one of the principals of the second big Kanak insurrection, in 1917 (Editors' note).
6 Year of the first demonstrations by Kanak independentists which were brutally put down.
CHAPTER 18

Facing our Identity

The Hienghène massacre on 4 December 1984 (in which 10 Kanaks from Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s tribe were killed — including two of his brothers), the assassinations of Eloi Machoro and Marcel Nonnaro on 12 January 1984 and the proclamation of a state of emergency in the Territory kept New Caledonia at the forefront of the French Government’s concerns.

This could have led the independence movement to believe its fundamental demands were on the way to realisation. In February 1985, the FLNKS has before it the proposals of Edgard Pisani, whom President Mitterrand has put in charge of New Caledonia. Interviewed by *Les Temps modernes* for a special issue on New Caledonia entitled ‘For Independence’, Jean-Marie Tjibaou explains the position of the FLNKS on the Pisani plan. Hoping to rally a majority of Caledonians around the option of ‘independence in association with France’, Edgard Pisani has put forward the idea of a vote on self-determination to be held at the end of 1985. Tjibaou notes this political step forward but is suspicious of the proposed solution.

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — The main aim of this trip is to get the French public to see that decolonisation is the responsibility of the French Government. We must convince French public opinion that to ignore colonialisation is to ensure it continues. If public opinion reacts against colonialism, this will be reflected in the policy decisions that are made. So for us, French public awareness is crucial to the problem of decolonisation which concerns us. The problem
lies between the Kanak people and the French people. It’s not the Kanak people occupying France, it’s France that invaded us. In appealing for the restitution of our people’s sovereignty and for the right to choose our own destiny, we are appealing to the French people to be pro-active. So we must set up a network through the whole gamut of French organisations; government representatives, political parties and various pressure groups, unions, associations, etc. — all those that can get our message through to the French people. That is why we wanted meetings with political leaders first, then union leaders and now leaders of associations. Although we’ve been rebuffed by the Opposition, we are meeting Opposition members individually. The sessions we’ve had with the Socialist and Communist parties have been very good, the unions too. But I must say what’s given us the most hope, and especially encouragement for the immediate future, has been the movement that stemmed from the recent events in New Caledonia ... we have the support of some 30 committees throughout France now, which bodes well.3

What did surprise me was the level of verbal aggression at the National Assembly —as if I were somebody.4 This just reveals their disarray, more than anything else. We’re being used as part of the Opposition campaign against the government; they don’t want any sheep wandering out of the pen before the next elections. In the same light, it is clear that it was the party machine that was reacting, through people who call themselves Gaullists (who, sadly, have lost sight of de Gaulle and the soul of Gaulle) behaving in a completely petty way.

LES TEMPS MODERNES — At one point, there was the idea, in certain quarters, of having a referendum in France on the New Caledonia problem. Do you think that will ever happen? Would you expect to get something out of appealing to the French people, if they were asked to decide the New Caledonian question, as they were for Algeria after the Evian Accords?

J.-M. T. — Intellectually, so that people understand (and also in educational terms) point of view, it would be clearer if the French people be polled and the Kanak people left out of it, as in the Algerian
case. We wouldn’t be against that possibility. It is exactly what we have been arguing for. If the French Government wants to decolonise, it could ask its people — do you want to return to our people the exercise of a power that belongs to them or not? A negative result — in relation to the next referendum — would not remove our right to independence. But the referendum result gives the French who are polled the right to secede, which is not the same for us.

T. M. — You seem extremely reserved about a number of points in the Pisani plan — especially the whole concept of association. You have said that for association to be envisaged there have to exist two distinct entities; yet there is only one, the French Government, since for the moment you don’t exist, you have no official recognition. So that is a major problem. On the other hand, we could predict that the referendum won’t necessarily endorse the Pisani plan. Given this, what is your position on the referendum, and more generally, on the Pisani plan? Do you still accept this poll as pivotal?

J.-M. T. — We shall announce our final position after we study what is finally adopted by Parliament. At the moment it’s all up in the air. Mr Pisani has put forward some proposals; the Front will put forward its own, relating to particular aspects of the plan. However, we will only reveal the Front’s position after the plan is put into law, when it is passed by the National Assembly and the Senate. We will know what the plan entails at the end of March, that means essentially the referendum, the electoral law and, if the referendum is successful, granting the Government delegate the power to enact co-operation agreements. I can’t say what our position is on this for the moment; we’ve said we’ll consider the proposals. It’s the first opening for us since the Deferre framework law [in 1956] … since then there hasn’t been a plan that actually takes the Kanak claim for independence seriously in an explicit way, and we believe there will be no lasting peace between the two communities without an agreement that deals with the Kanak claim for independence — we’ve always said that in Caledonia, peace goes by the name Kanak independence. That claim will continue to exist for as long as it remains unresolved. By providing an opening, the Pisani plan allows us to talk about it.
There are problems, which you have raised, with the concept of association, such as the electoral college issue, on which we shall put forward some suggestions. On the face of it, we see it as positive that the government has explicitly indicated, and I believe Mr Pisani has had a lot to do with this, that this plan anticipates independence, also that the principle of recognition of our sovereignty is now not only part of a plan but also included in a timetable. At the grass roots level, the current idea of independence for 1 January 1986 forces people to take a stand. For our part, we expect, and I think it has already begun, that there will be realignments between now and July, different to those pertaining to *Living in Caledonia*.\(^5\)

T. M. — *What do you mean by ‘realignments’?*

J.-M. T. — These days, there are two big groups: the RPCR and the FLNKS, and then those who navigate between these two. The majority of Europeans are in the RPCR, and we know that the majority of Melanesians support us. But we also have European and Asian militants, just as there are Melanesians in the RPCR. The mobilisation occurs between two groups, or two clans, RPCR for France and against independence and the *Front* for independence (we say for independence but for or against France doesn’t concern us). We are not interested in other countries, only France. That is why we are appealing to the French people and government. The new option is *Living in Caledonia*. There are people who are attracted by that because they can’t imagine living in a different country; it is their country, while others are attracted for business reasons. There are some in the Territory because they like the climate, they are happy to be there, but they are French with family and friends here. There are some who’ve got businesses both in New Caledonia and here, and for whom the most important thing is to be able to work there. This fringe group keen to live and work in New Caledonia will no longer take a position *for* or *against* independence, but rather in terms of *Living in Caledonia*. I don’t think this option has surfaced yet but Mr Pisani is trying to get it up. And I think people are starting to change and be more open about it. That said, very few will come over to us — I don’t think we’ll come across many of them
prepared to be more open with us. I think they would be more at home with the local Socialist Party than with us.

T. M. — Then for you the Pisani plan is a sign of real progress?

J.-M. T. — It's certainly progress compared with what's taken place since the framework law.

T. M. — Coming back to this theme Living in Caledonia. You are being asked to give guarantees for non-Melanesians …

J.-M. T. — You give guarantees when you have the power to give them. But we do not: since we are not sovereign in our country, we can give you only moral guarantees. Something more significant is that we are looking at ways to publish a daily newspaper (and through your review we are launching an appeal for funds). A daily where Europeans work alongside us, non-Kanaks who work with us …

T. M. — Are they a significant number?

J.-M. T. — No, perhaps 7 per cent of our strength. Or 10 per cent, depending on the area.

T. M. — And Melanesians on the Whites' side?

J.-M. T. — Perhaps a bit more, 10 or 15 per cent. They claim 50 per cent! That is why we would like the Kanak people alone to be consulted [in any referendum on self-determination]. So through this paper we shall be appealing to people to have their say. Those who control the media — the owners of Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes⁶ and local news sources — show Kanak positions only in the negative, as part of their propaganda. Some journalists are RPCR militants, reporting only the negative side of our positions. Because these RPCR journalists are not publicly identified and because of the virulence of the extreme Right in the pro-France campaign, many people are afraid to voice their views. So much so that this group of people, needed by Mr Pisani to support Living in Caledonia and work
freely there, at present have no opportunity to speak out. To speak out freely! *Les Nouvelles* doesn’t give them the chance, and, especially, they are threatened. We are counting on the State of Emergency to disarm this extreme Right, so that people can free themselves and talk about it. I hope that by the end of April things will perhaps be becoming clearer.

T. M. — *Would things have been a lot easier if these events had occurred in late 1981 or early 1982*?

J.-M. T. — I think so. We had recommended that direct rule of New Caledonia be included in the regulations passed by the Government, to be followed by the restoration of sovereignty.

T. M. — *French elections completely distort the issue*!

J.-M. T. — When the opposition gets agitated here, the effects are felt there.

T. M. — ... *and vice versa*.

J.-M. T. — Yes, but vice versa means that Caledonia is being used. It is not the Caledonians who ... 

T. M. — *That is what Giscard has just said, that if New Caledonia becomes independent, the Socialists will bear the heavy responsibility of having created a Cuba in the Pacific*.

J.-M. T. — But that’s rubbish!

T. M. — *Doesn’t the opposition have an ulterior motive, of using the Caledonia question not for Caledonia but against the French Government? But would they really be unhappy if the issue were settled before 1986? Because they will inherit the problem if they should win in 1986. It is in their interest both to be able to accuse the government of dumping New Caledonia, and to have the issue settled.*
J.-M. T. — There are those who are happy with Pisani’s proposal. From what I hear, both the Left and the Right want to see France stay in the Pacific, so they will offer carrots to that end. We’re the spoilers! The Caldoches and the Kanaks are excess baggage. And we are the greater pain because if we are independent we can deal with whomever we like — Australia, the United States, Japan, who are in the same camp! And they are very afraid that our little country will become a military base for the other club. That it what is really all about.

T. M. — Can you spell out whom you mean by the other club?

J.-M. T. — Yes, it’s the USSR and its satellite countries. I don’t think there are 36 clubs. There are two basic ones and then the non-aligned countries.

T. M. — Was this a major focus of your talks with the Australian Prime Minister?

J.-M. T. — The Australians are scared stiff of Cuba and Libya.

T. M. — You use the words ‘sovereignty’ and ‘independence’ in your speeches What is the difference for you?

J.-M. T. — Sovereignty is the right to choose partners; independence is the power to manage all the needs that colonisation, the present system, has created. We have an ongoing need for the restitution of the Kanak people’s sovereignty over their land — sovereignty over men, over the land, what is under the ground, the airspace, the sea, etc. It won’t provide a living but it is an important principle.

T. M. — Is sovereignty more important than independence, from this viewpoint?

J.-M. T. — Sovereignty gives us the right and the power to negotiate interdependencies. For a small country like ours, independence is choosing our interdependencies skilfully.
T. M. — The FLNKS comes across as an extremely homogenous body, but we know there are many different views, not so much on strategies as on the kind of society to be sought and thus on the means of achieving that independence.

J.-M. T. — We are talking about this and I would say the Pisani plan has rather forced us to focus on what type of society we envisage. The issue came up at the last meeting of our executive, two weeks ago now. People have to meet to discuss Pisani’s proposals so they can come to a consensus — if not on the replies, then at least on what the problems are. We have to identify the problems, look at their nature and how they can be talked through. We in the Union Calédonienne feel that the type of society should be clear through the plan, while others want a more doctrinal preamble that is a vision of the society to be built. The two are not mutually exclusive. We have consulted each of the groups, Palika especially and they were due to talk to us about it in our congress the day Eloi Machoro was killed. I don’t know when they will meet — perhaps in the coming week. We have not got much time left now to finalise the proposals that we could put to Pisani to keep the work going.

T. M. — Does independence mean economic independence and the nationalisation of resources? Have you considered this?

J.-M. T. — That’s what we are discussing now. When we tie the idea of socialism to Kanak independence, it has to be said we are rejecting something. It’s not a positive slogan describing how society is to be organised, but rather a rejection of colonisation. We won’t accept continuing exploitation of our resources by a few individuals for their own profit — that goes without saying. On the other hand, the positive feature is that resources, including those below ground, belong to the State. We think that the State should participate in the exploitation of our resources. Investors must not be penalised, otherwise there won’t be any, but ‘locals’ who invest — Kanak nationals and those who live in the country or agree to invest in the country — must be aware that our priority is to have a country where people are happy to live because it’s organised, people have
enough to eat, people can move about freely, and [a country] which expresses our culture, as a right.

Moreover, we say that the country and its economy are going to be organised, and in the initial stages, development planning undertaken, in such a way that priority is given to making people feel at ease. That means that if you come here to invest, you can be paid for your investments, but you can also donate a percentage of your profits to continuing the development of infrastructure: communication systems, roads, water, electricity. That way, those with responsibilities or promoting the project can get started without having to pay for electricity and water and so on. Our idea, once sovereignty is restored, is to establish a body — like the present Office foncier which we’re looking at developing — that will deal with the management of our land resources. We recognise clan membership etc., but it will be the State, a State body, which will negotiate with Kanaks who have no land to exploit, as with any investor.

T. M. — Let’s come back to the various points of view within the FLNKS. This is generally presented in the French media as a sort of opposition between moderates and radicals. This puts you as spokesman for the moderates and Eloi Machoro, when he was alive, as spokesman for the radical faction. Is this a true picture of the independence movement?

J.-M. T. — You know, our practice is to work more by consensus than by vote, which means we try to look at problems together and find the minimum we agree on before taking a decision. That is how we live. Individual positions aren’t excluded, but people have a lot of respect for joint undertakings. And if someone takes a stand that differs from the collective one, the general guide, I feel, is not to be destructive. Eloi Machoro was part of Union Calédonienne, he was our general secretary ... and I don’t think our views differed all that much.

T. M. — What sets apart the FLNKS and the group which agreed to participate in the elections, the LKS?
J.-M. T. — There isn’t much difference. People either get involved or they don’t, it comes down to that. Some people are afraid.

T. M. — Do you feel you have what amounts to an ally in the Socialist Government here?

J.-M. T. — We’ll know after the elections.

T. M. — Two months ago, Mitterrand spoke about New Caledonia on television, he spoke of the ‘the unjust force of the law’.

J.-M. T. — That’s all very well but not very useful at the moment.

T. M. — Did Mitterrand’s New Caledonia visit signal he was pulling back, or distancing himself from Pisani’s proposals?

J.-M. T. — I think he came to tell us, despite the deaths of Eloi Machoro and others, that the government remained open to dialogue, that he personally is in a corner, without much room to move. If we don’t play ball there won’t be any more Pisani plan. We are the ones who initiated current talks, so we are committed.

T. M. — Despite all its shortcomings, you agree to play along and talk as laid down by the Pisani plan?

J.-M. T. — Currently we’re not playing along, we are talking. For once, the target of ‘independence’ is very explicitly on the timetable. Pisani himself says that for some there will be too much of France in this plan, for others too much independence. Obviously, we think there is too much France, but we are not going to be picky. Either we wage war — and we aren’t equipped to do so — or we talk. But there is a range of courses of action to look at between making war and talking. We are talking for the time being, but our sights are still on action.

T. M. — What would you do if it came down to a simple question of might — in the sense of civil war?
J.-M. T. — We are not equipped militarily to go to war against the 6,000 gardes mobiles. But we will ultimately win.

T. M. — Do you think events could get out of hand?

J.-M. T. — For the moment, we have disarmed, there are no more guns.

T. M. — And the Whites, the French, are they armed or disarmed? Did the state of emergency make you safer?

J.-M. T. — We would like the French to be disarmed, for the sake of security. There has been a raid on the home of a National Front leader, which was a good sign because he is very powerful and has a stock of guns. They brought the guns in on Japanese boats and they distributed them during the latest troubles. So, if there has been a first raid ... that's something! I think Pisani will continue to disarm them, at least I hope so!

T. M. — So the security of the Kanak people is in part in the hands of the French Government. And who defends your militants when they are arrested? Do you have Kanak lawyers? No? Who defends them, then?

J.-M. T. — The judicial system as a whole, the courts are against us, and always have been. We’ve got two lawyers, thanks to the Association de soutien au peuple kanak and the League of Human Rights — who have been in Nouméa for a week. There is also Me Tehio, a Tahitian who gets a lot of threats — there have already been several attempts to blow up his office. Thanks to the two Parisian lawyers, 20 prisoners have already been released out of the 87 in prison (currently there are about 100 Kanaks in prison). One lawyer alone can’t deal quickly with defending all these men. But obstruction from the court, the gendarmerie and the security forces is a factor too — they are all a party to the situation, along with the right wing elements! The arrival of the two Parisian lawyers has relieved things a bit, and two others are due to arrive. I would like to
thank the people who've made this help possible all the same. We don't have enough money to pay their fares.

T. M. — *What is the relationship between the independence movement and other Melanesian countries? Why hasn't Vanuatu recognised your provisional government?*

J.-M. T. — The Vanuatu Government gives us unconditional support. It was prepared to recognise the provisional government and risk a split with the French Government, but during my visit there with Yeiwéné, I said in the current climate we would prefer recognition at the party level. The Prime Minister telephoned us to express the support and the solidarity of the ni-Vanuatu people. The leaders of the South Pacific Forum are due to meet at the end of this month and we fear that recognition of the Provisional Government would push the French Government to close our access to Vanuatu, our nearest and most openly supportive country.

T. M. — *Do you feel special links with France? Historical, linguistic, cultural?*

J.-M. T. — Absolutely. That's not part of a political program, it's the way things are.

T. M. — *In the way you often present Kanak culture, there seems to be a meeting between your Christian experience and your membership of a specific culture, isn't there? Kanak culture is presented — you present it — in a universal way that appears to me to be inspired by Christianity.*

J.-M. T. — If you read the Old Testament, you will find similarities with Kanak culture, in the myths and the genealogies, etc. If you're talking of Greco-Latin Christianity, I don't know. We feel very close to the Bible, to the Old Testament and even to the New; we share a certain way of viewing the world with the Bible. There is something to be said for the Western Christian interpretation of the New Testament but it is not fundamental. What is fundamental is the
word — the word of our people follows the same pattern as the biblical word. And we are not embarrassed to use the Bible.

T. M. — But other militants, other political leaders, don’t have the same background at all, and even criticise the Churches quite strongly.

J.-M. T. — Yes. I am a Catholic but the official position of the Catholic Church in New Caledonia is negative towards our struggle. But then my old priest — the one who sent me to the seminary — was an anti-colonialist ... Monseigneur Calvet, current archbishop at Nouméa Cathedral, is a fascist. It would be better if you took him back for yourselves.

T. M. — Have you made contact with the Church in Paris, with the Catholic hierarchy?

J.-M. T. — Only with the Protestants and with Justice and Peace.

T. M. — Are you afraid that an OAS type of organisation will develop amongst the Caldoches?

J.-M. T. — It already exists but it’s a fringe group of hardliners who have been spurred on by the French National Front. However, I think the majority of Caldoches don’t want to fight anyone.

T. M. — In a recent interview in Le Monde you talked about part of the Caldoche community as ‘victims of history’. It was on the subject of counter-proposals to the Pisani plan you might put forward, on the composition of the electoral roll. You even established a cut-off point, between those who were there before 1951 and those who arrived after.

J.-M. T. — I was referring to the Nainville-les-Roches meeting of July 1983, which acknowledged the fait colonial and expressed the will to end it. It’s an ambit declaration. And acknowledgement of the right to independence. If you want to end the fait colonial you have to use the fait colonial. The people that colonialism applies to are the Kanaks and the descendents of the convicts and the settlers.
You mentioned the cut-off date: in 1951 Kanaks voted for the first time and they voted with the colonisers. The Native Code was abolished in 1946 and there was a state of emergency for the Kanak community for I don’t know how long. Next there was the framework law and its abolition in 1963. You arrived, you stole our land, you chased us away, you sent our chiefs to gaol, took the land, scattered the people here and there. But those who came later on were mostly workers, traders or entrepreneurs, or people who bought land, who took up concessions sold by the Europeans: they didn’t really dispossess the Kanaks. That’s why we argue that if the Government is logical and acknowledges the fait colonial then those who are affected by it are these two communities ... but not the Wallisians and not the Tahitians. The French Government rejected article 1514 of the United Nations Charter, under which the Kanak people can be considered as an indigenous people with the right to decolonisation. At that time, the Nainville-les-Roches speech might have made sense.

T. M. — **What are your relationships with international organisations?**

J.-M. T. — We have contacts with the United Nations, with the World Council of Churches, with Amnesty International, with Justice and Peace. The European Greens support us, which is significant in relation to the Pacific and the support from the peoples of the Pacific islands and the Australian unions. We also have the support of about 30 associations and groups here, in different towns of France.

T. M. — **What do you need most? Finance?**

J.-M. T. — Definitely. If we could spread the word through your monthly that we are opening an appeal in Paris for funds for a newspaper and for the movement — it would be a great help.

T. M. — **Where did you do your studies?**
J.-M. T. — I attended the Païta seminary and then I went to the Catholic faculty at Lyon, in 1968–69. So I was here in 1968. I am not a student. I am looking for analytical tools.

T. M. — Who had the most influence in your intellectual development?

J.-M. T. — I did! That is very pretentious! Along with the books of Maurice Leenhardt, and those of Roger Bastide. I also did the courses run by Jean Guiart. But the one who will always be my mentor is a Marist priest who taught us to think deeply.

T. M. — Some left wing intellectuals seem undecided about your movement, justifying their reticence with the argument that tradition is an obstacle to development.

J.-M. T. — The return to tradition is a myth — I keep saying this over and over again; it is a myth. No people has ever done it. I see the search for identity, for a model, as being ahead of us, never in the past — it’s a permanent process of renewal. I feel that what we’re striving for at the moment is to bring as much as we can of our past and our culture into constructing the personal and social models we want to guide the building of our polity. Some might view it differently, but that is the way I see it myself. Our identity is ahead of us. At the end, after we are dead, people will take our picture and put it on the wall, and it will help them fashion their own identity. Otherwise, you never move out of your father’s shadow, you’ve had it.

1 Interview with Les Temps modernes, no. 464, March 1985.
2 See E. Pisanì, Persiste et signe, Paris Odile Jacob, 1992 (Editors’ note).
3 A Kanak support movement was organised in France, Europe and the Pacific in late 1984 (Editors’ note).
4 Several days earlier Jean-Marie Tjibaou had attended the National Assembly as a visitor to hear the New Caledonia debate. He was aggressively attacked and insulted, and finally called on to leave, by Opposition deputies. The Quotidien de Paris columnist Dominique Jamet joined the bandwagon with the comment on 24 January that ‘in Clemenceau’s days just six bullets would have dealt with this priestling’ (Editors’ note).
5 An aspect of the Pisani plan, aimed at encouraging 'metropolitans' living in New Caledonia to continue to do so but without involving themselves in local politics. (Translators' note)

6 The only daily published in New Caledonia (Editors' note).

7 The Parti de libération kanak socialiste, under its leader Nidoish Naisseline, chose not to join the FLNKS 'militant boycott' of the 18 November 1984 elections (Editors' note).

8 The Vanua'aku Pati, the ruling party of Vanuatu, gave formal recognition to the provisional government, while the Vanuatu Government did not, although the Prime Minister was also head of the party (Translator's note).

9 Father Rouel.

10 In 1994 the Catholic Church of New Caledonia, speaking through Mgr Calvet, officially sought pardon from the Kanaks for the injustices suffered (Editors' note).

11 See supra the work 'The Rights of the Kanak People' (Editors' note).

12 Communities now over 15,000, 1996, whose members came from other French Pacific territories to settle in New Caledonia during the economic boom of the early 1970s (Editors' note).
By April 1985, the independence movement was forced to accept that its goals were a long way from being met, both through the final draft of the new statute and the fact that the Socialists were expected to be defeated at the March 1986 parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, Jean-Marie Tjibaou has faith that a viable independence can be built from the moment the FLNKS has control of two, and as many as three, of the four regions provided for by the Fabius/Pisani statute. This approach was reaffirmed with the signing of the Matignon Accords in 1988.

ALAIN ROLLAT — What is your overall assessment of the Government plan?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — There were already doubts about it among our rank and file because the Government did not announce its decisions on April 10 as scheduled. That the referendum has been postponed, and the timetable announced by Mr Pisani thus abandoned is certain to cause disappointment, when we have agreed overall on the initial timetable that would lead to the proclamation of independence, in principle, on January 1, 1986.

A. R. — Are you personally disappointed that the vote on self-determination wasn’t organised before the parliamentary elections?
J.-M. T. — I was talking about the rank and file. For them, that will be hard to take, because waiting has made them even more impatient ...

A. R. — You seem to be setting yourself apart from your rank and file. Why?

J.-M. T. — Because I do not know whether all the rank and file have understood, in the way in which most of the executive have, that if the referendum had taken place in July as scheduled, the result would have gone against independence.

A. R. — How much value do you put on the plan, given that it could be totally reconsidered if the government changes in 1986?

J.-M. T. — It is a huge disappointment for our leaders and militants to see that the process won’t be completed during the term of the Socialist government and that the solution will be left to some future government we know nothing about. Disappointing also that the Socialist government, which we have always supported at elections, won’t be able to carry through the organisation of the referendum and its outcome, independence. Overall, we are disappointed about having to wait, and disappointed that the Socialist Party hasn’t completed the job when we have been voting in the past not for Barre, Chirac or Giscard but for Mitterrand.

A. R. — Are you afraid that ultimately the Socialists could back off?

J.-M. T. — Given their record of about-faces, with the private school system for example, we’re within our rights to be sceptical. We’ve also learned from the framework law of 1956.

A. R. — What guarantees have you got that at the end of the day the referendum will go in favour of independence?

J.-M. T. — The proposed referendum is the Government’s idea. Our position has always been for an immediate referendum, but of the
Kanak people alone. It's up to the Government to hold a referendum differently, given the regional elections. At first glance, the electoral distribution doesn't go against us, since we could get a majority in the Loyalty Islands, in the North and 50% or just over in the Centre region. It will all depend on the number of seats we get but I think we should be able to start working on building independence.

A. R. — What if there's a change of government in 1986 and the Right overturns the new statute?

J.-M. T. — We won't just stand back and watch. But if we hold power in the regions, that's it, we build independence! We've come to see that if our proposed referendum for Kanaks alone is inconsistent with the French Constitution, and if the French Government cannot bring about Kanak socialist independence, it can nonetheless arrange to restore sovereignty to the Kanak people. Whatever, it's the determination of our people that is constant. I must underline that in practical terms only what is agreed by the Kanak people will go ahead; what doesn't have their consent will not happen.

We can't turn the clock back anymore. And, to the extent that we shall have the necessary power and finance in this regional system to build independence at the grassroots level ... We realise that all the economic levers are in other hands: the banks of course, but also the food industry, distribution, agriculture, etc. We must get a real foothold in these areas in order to achieve independence, using a Kanak socialist economy as a framework so that independence can be achieved by forging ahead rather than by rupture.

The Ukeiwé Government is running a scorched earth policy of getting as much as it can and then destroying the system. So implicitly Ukeiwé and his band of colonial business barons are well aware that nothing can get done in New Caledonia without the consent of Kanaks. That is a definite gain.

A. R. — Do you want to isolate Nouméa?

J.-M. T. — Nouméa is necessary but Nouméa doesn't just mean Ballande and Lavoix; there are other businesspeople we can deal
with and organise an economic counter-weight on the ground, in order to break open this tight financial network that requires some people to be silent on the independence issue on the one hand and on the other forces them to support the RPCR. I am hopeful that some of these people will be able to break away from the others.

A. R. — So you will take part in the August regional elections, even if there is no change to the electoral roll?

J.-M. T. — That question will probably come up but the circumstances are clearly different from last November, since a process of self-determination will clearly be getting under way.

A. R. — Do you think that one can have preparations for elections and a new statute at the same time as keeping the institutions that were set up after the November 18 poll?

J.-M. T. — Dissolution of the Territorial Assembly is for us essential. We want the Government to do this first, as we have been demanding since 18 November.

A. R. — The Government's plan is a 'gamble that reason will prevail' according to Mr Fabius. Do you share this feeling?

J.-M. T. — I noted that after his call for dialogue, Mr Fabius went on to talk about a military base: carrot and stick.

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1 Interview with Alain Rollat, published in Le Monde, 27 April 1985.
2 Instead of the previous division of New Caledonia into two electoral divisions, this new statute divided the country into four regions; North, Centre, South and Loyalty Islands, with each run by an elected assembly (Editors' note). The first three were all on La Grande Terre (with nearby islands), while the fourth comprised the island group of that name (Translators' note).
3 Originally scheduled for the end of 1985, it had just been postponed to late 1989.
Given the proposed electoral boundaries, these would give a result for independence in three of the four electorates.

Dick Ukeiwé, a member of Jacques Lafleur's RPCR, was at the time Vice-President of the Governing Council of New Caledonia (Editors' note).

Large commercial enterprises.

See J.-M. Kohler 'Colonie ou démocratie, éléments de sociologie politique sur la Nouvelle Calédonie', Nouméa, Edipop, 1987, for a study of economic and political collusion in New Caledonia (Editors' note).
In May 1985 the ‘Imaginary Museum of Oceanian Arts’, an exhibition of traditional Pacific art, was held at the Musée des arts africains et océaniens (Museum of African and Oceanian Art) in Paris. This long-awaited event had been scheduled for Nouméa, but political tensions in New Caledonia forced its relocation to Paris on security grounds.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou was interviewed during the exhibition by Alain Plagne, producer of the 1984 film about Kanak life, Djüdo. Here Tjibaou touches on the present relationship the Kanak people have with their culture and their claim for independence. His great serenity and the breadth of his vision stand out at this time of great political turbulence, and he explores areas that are less directly political. His remarks on the need for a renaissance of Kanak art are central to his dream — now realised — of a large Kanak cultural centre in Nouméa.

ALAIN PLAGNE — ‘Imaginary Museum of Oceanian Arts’: that’s a great title, very Malraux. But it’s ironic that it has become a victim of politics and we now see it presented to Parisians, when it was intended for Pacific Islanders. How much is left of your original idea?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — What matters is that the exhibition is being held — it’s only the context that has changed. But the Paris venue lends this undertaking great political significance. In regard to the Kanak people’s claim to independence, it is important that it is
presented here in the very heart of the capital of the people who colonise our country [and] have sovereignty there. Because they need to understand what we are campaigning for — dignity, independence based on Kanak identity. Our culture is not French culture. We are not Westerners, we are from the Pacific, from Asia a bit as well.

We need to spell out what is at the heart of the Kanak claim for independence. What is the basis of this claim? What is Kanak identity? Why a Kanak independence? These questions take us to the core of Kanak society — its culture. And it’s essential that the French, the other community living in New Caledonia, understand this too.

This exhibition is dead stuff: that’s how I see this collection of ethnological and archaeological artefacts. But they do work as a catalyst for exploring what is unique; Oceania isn’t just palm trees, the sea and islands, it is also a way of interpreting the world around you, of history, of space and the hereafter. It is also significant that this imaginary Museum should be staged at the site of the Colonial Museum4 — hoping it becomes the museum where colonies are laid to rest.

A. P. — We’ll come back to the general question of culture but first let’s talk about the objects on display. These things are almost completely new to us Westerners who have a Greco-Roman background. What do they mean to you Oceanians?

J.-M. T. — These objects relate to our religious beliefs, links with ancestors, with totems; they also relate to domestic life, altars, ceremonies for the enthronement of chiefs. They relate to life, to how we live our lives in our countries in Oceania.

A. P. — Just on this point, we generally divide Oceania into three zones — Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia, which we attach to the Australian continent; are we talking about different cultural spheres?

J.-M. T. — There are different ways of expressing things, I think, but I would say that here we find the particular answers to life’s central questions — where we come from, where we are going, who we are.
Where are we going? That is asking — is there an afterwards, a life after death? The answer given by each of the world’s peoples derives from their own geographic context. In the Kanak world you will always find mention of ancestors, totems, of what is produced by the earth and the sea. On the land these totems are rocks, animals, lizards, snakes, stones too, and thunder. In the sea the totems are sharks or other fish. You find this group of references right through Oceania. But again, in keeping with its identity, each island has developed a different experience of nature, the world and society. Relationships are affected by factors such as the population spread, whether the land is mountainous or flat, and so each group will have an individual way of answering these same questions. Nonetheless, there is something both constant and relevant emanating from these little islands dotted in the ocean, and that is a form of, not exactly fatalism, but a view that nothing is beyond repair. Because life is what is most important, it is what endures and what will always be present, whether members of the group are still living or have already gone to the ancestors.

A. P. — In Oceanian art, can [artefacts] be classified by function?

J.-M. T. — Of course. There are artefacts associated with cooking, for example. Cooking is a deeply cultural aspect of daily life but there are also religious offerings (in sacrificial cooking pots), which are characteristic of that society and which give cooking several dimensions and several practitioners, connected with social function. There is the person who prepares ‘potions’ for the new season’s yam harvest, the one who performs rituals to bring rain, for fishing, or for good weather, etc. There is also the social function, the nature of which varies with name and particular situation. Everyone knows his social responsibilities. Most of the time that role (or function) is hereditary. Preparation of the artefact is also one of these roles. There are artefacts which are everyday utensils, others which are specifically for sacrifices, for the altar and there are also artefacts used in rituals, ones we don’t see every day. There are also traditional monies, mats which are used for custom exchanges between clans; there are also ceremonial artefacts like ceremonial
axes, dancing costumes and masks used for festivals and celebrations. We could list them — the yam stone, the fishing stone, the stone for such and such a fish, etc.; and each clan owns the exact ritual and social function that is associated with these things.

A. P. — Without really classifying them, these objects portray daily activity — cooking, housing, making war, etc. This leads to a simple question; where does craft stop and art begin?

J.-M. T. — I don’t think we make that distinction. For us, either things are beautiful or they are commonplace things that are quickly made. If plates are needed then men or women will quickly weave them using coconut fronds. Other artefacts are produced with more ritual, with invoking of ancestors. Earlier I mentioned the yam stone, in connection with which some clans have a potion for growing yams, others for catching this or that fish, to help build a home, to make a flèche faiṭière. I think the line is drawn not between art and craft but rather between the sacred and the commonplace. An object destined for ritual or sacred use calls for more work on the part of the craftsman, who tries harder to make the artefact more beautiful. But in traditional life the distinction isn’t made between art and craft, it is between the commonplace object and the one that has been more or less consecrated.

A. P. — The ethnologist Jean Guiart has stressed a little-known aspect of Oceanian art, the importance of women in craft making. It is women who embellish daily life but who also, when they move to the husband’s clan on marriage, transfer knowledge and techniques. Guiart gives the example of the Lapita6 potters who were actually women.

J.-M. T. — It’s true that when women change clan they take with them their traditions and their knowhow; but especially the way of life, the fables and the legends; it is women who educate and mould the personality of children. Some traditional techniques are transferred by women, while others belong to their clan (the father’s) and can only be transferred with permission. We were talking earlier about pottery — that was a tradition belonging to the clan. A
woman could only take that with her if with the permission of the clan. And only one among all the women of a clan would be given that authority. But there are also some traditions which are transferred only by men, such as those associated with more ritual functions, offerings, the altar, or else skills such as housing and the building of outrigger canoes. On the other hand, women are responsible for passing on all cooking knowledge, utensils, mats for custom gifts and grass skirts.

A. P. — *By contrast, male Oceanian is prestige art, proclaiming competition between individuals and groups* ...

J.-M. T. — Yes, but we have to understand each other; I already said that ‘art’ for us must be seen as meaning the ‘art of living’, of a physical expression of Kanak life. For example, the sacred crafts seen in the honouring of ancestors through *flèches faîtières* and door mantels has a kind of artistic aspect in European terms. But the traditional Kanak sculptor is more concerned to make useful artefacts for daily life, or objects destined for sacred purposes.

A. P. — *Coming back to the case of the imaginary Museum, does the act of putting these artefacts in a museum spoil them, stripping them of their function and their symbolic power?*

J.-M. T. — Yes, in the sense that they are removed from their environment. This is the case, for example, with an altar, which has its representatives, its disciples who come to celebrate the relationship with the ancestors and therefore to use these artefacts in communications with the beyond. Otherwise, for the Melanesian, there is no respect no particular value is placed on these ancient artefacts. Cemeteries have *flèches faîtières* fixed in the grounds and door mantels especially, because they have been given to the mother's clan with the artefacts that belonged to the dead; there is a period in which they are revered and then these places are considered taboo. The taboo comes from the need to avoid sacrilege; going near a place where an ancestor is buried or where an ancestor's artefact has been placed near his grave could be a desecration, so it is
banned, it is taboo. There are lots of taboo places where artefacts are deteriorating.

According to tradition, the artefacts must stay in the cemetery in their original altars, especially if they are revered or used for celebrations. But if they are no longer used, if they don’t have an owner or anyone who knows the relationship (the rites, the formulas, the prayers) necessary for a celebration on that actual altar, then it’s better for them to be looked after in a museum where they can be studied by people who, today, need to relearn traditions.

Tradition is very evident in custom ceremonies, which nowadays are held when children are at school and young people are at university or training college, preventing them from personally taking part in these traditions. What they miss out on now is hearing the orator or leader of a customary procedure explain the meaning of their actions, such as why they go to one person rather than another, why you start with this clan before coming back to another clan, and then arriving back at the place where the celebration is being held. There aren’t rehearsals for these kinds of things, these events. You don’t rehearse a mass.

These traditions are lost to those who can’t attend. Therefore it is vital that these objects be brought together and that they lead to conferences both among Kanaks themselves and with specialists. Then we have to try to find a solution for the people who can’t be both at a custom ceremony and at work, university or school, so that they too can benefit from the Kanak school of their tradition, through modern means such as museums and films.

A. P. — Are you referring there to the twin aims of the Hienghène Museum?? Why have you pushed for this Museum for such a long time? Is it intended for Kanaks, or to imitate the Whites and Pokens who pass through three times a year in cruise ships?

J.-M. T. — It would be good for Pokens to see the artefacts too. They see it as a tourist visit but for us it’s a chance to gain their respect by explaining who we are, since they don’t know us. When you walk through a garden without being able to tell the lettuce from the weed, you’ll trample on the lettuce as well as the weed. If you’ve
been shown which is the lettuce, that this one is a leek and what its use is, then you will pay attention. And it's the same with artefacts — they reflect a people and its culture. Those who come and visit can develop more respect for the people they encounter in this country, they can see them as the guardians of this heritage. People won't be just a blur to them, they will understand what it is and what the sense of Kanak life is.

Where Kanak craftsmanship is concerned there are creative people who try to provide tangible signs of our culture in housing and the immediate environment. People who make sculptures and basketwork have to have authentic Kanak points of reference, which to my mind means reference points that are capable of evolving as well as grounded in history.

A. P. — Who are the current artists? Is growth solely based on crafts/tourism, or are we seeing new political programs emerging, about heritage, its conservation and contemporary art?

J.-M. T. — With the Mélanésia 2000 festival of 1975, we saw the advent of quality productions on the market but also all kinds of rubbish. This is what we are up against, people trying to sell bits of wood to tourists, poor quality crafts, just about any old thing. Then you have tourists leaving New Caledonia with these artefacts and using them to talk about Kanaky when essentially they are non-descript things without a history. Hence the need for a policy. We set up a crafts association as a meeting ground for those producers of significant traditional works. We are thinking of using this organisation to promote traditional methods, not only in craft making but also to add an artisanal touch to house construction, the immediate environment, the bedroom, the kitchen and the lounge room — so that in a way you'll be able to feel that you are in Kanaky even in a fairly anonymous Caledonian home. We are trying to make it policy that we systematically record our oral traditions and history and compile an inventory of art works. An initial study could use this to help create new art forms, whether they be crafts, architecture, choreography, music or literature.
A. P. — *Given the serious problem of the dispersal of Oceanian works of art, what are your feelings about restitution?* Roger Boulay explains for example that when he wanted to return artefacts belonging to Australian Aborigines they refused.

J.-M. T. — I think it is worthwhile to retrieve significant objects for the places where there are no significant objects left. But it's not part of our culture to go hunting around cemeteries for things. What is important are the references: artefacts are always references to something, so we are even interested in copies, since they can also provide a guide to how things must be done. We have given artefacts to the Hienghène Cultural Centre. People are interested, but not overly so: they are looking more for references to create artefacts and other things, for creating something useful for today.

A. P. — *How strong is culture in the search for an Oceanian identity? Putting it another way, is it wrong to talk about Oceanian ‘consensus’ on culture, and thus also in the political sense?*

J.-M. T. — I think that there is a consensus, on the face of it. I don’t know why but we Oceanians often find ourselves feeling a bit like-minded when there are Westerners or Asians there. We have a mutual understanding that is founded on sharing a basic culture and sharing concepts that explain the meaning of the world; concepts about relations between people in society, our relationship with the land, our relationship with gods and our view of the future. You don’t find the same camaraderie with Westerners — you always have to explain things.

A. P. — *The concept of the ‘New Pacific way of life’ was all the rage during the Festival in New Caledonia ... How do you define it?*

J.-M. T. — The Pacific way of life is our way. It’s about space, the sea, islands and rhythm — not the rhythm of Paris or of industrialised cities, nor the rhythm of populous countries where life means sticking to strict timetables ... where if you dawdle you miss the train. Here in Oceania, populations are small and except for
Australia and New Zealand, there isn't much industrialisation. The Pacific way of life is our way of being, our way of reaching agreement through consensus rather than by a vote. It is also about respecting one another. Respect, and gestures of respect, are fundamental throughout the Pacific. The pace of life is a very significant element too, because people have got time to live, something that is always appreciated by newcomers to the region. Given the introduction of industrialisation to the Pacific, it's possible that by the year 2000 we'll be like Westerners and living in a rat race, but at present people value their own way of life and want to preserve it. We try to inject our way of life, which lets the sun in, into social relationships and the world of work.

I had launched the concept of Pacific new home; this was a way of politicising the goals at the heart of the Territory's development a bit — to do with town planning, work, our Oceanian way of life, so that industrialisation doesn't too much spoil our chance of spending this time/space we have between birth and death quietly in the sun! (laughter).

A. P. — Does this concern strike a chord in Oceania?

J.-M. T. — Meetings have been held. The South Pacific Commission tried to incorporate this view in their integrated rural development programs, so that people could stay at home, be full members of their own communities and also live a modern life, not left behind by the modern world, using the benefits of industrialisation and consumer goods, without destroying their real wealth in the process, that is, their way of life.

A. P. — You have special relations with some of your near neighbours, especially Vanuatu. Are these cultural, political or emotional?

J.-M. T. — They're political, because Vanuatu is the country that has given us the most support. More specifically, they also respect our views and try to spread them. Economically, we have a lot of things to share but currently we're restricted by our status. Where culture is concerned we both have custom, different ways of expressing the
very same thing. One side makes custom speeches in Bichlamar\textsuperscript{11}, some in French, or in a Kanak language, but we understand each other, or near enough! We know what all that refers to.

A. P. — *What are the values of Kanak society, the relationship systems which are unique to it?*

J.-M. T. — What is basic to our culture, though you find this in other cultures too, is the notion of the man. The man is never an individual, he is the core of a group. He is the centre of relationships and has a role to play at the centre of the set of relationships in question. Say my son gets married. He is the focus of the celebrations, his maternal uncles come with his mother, while his fathers\textsuperscript{12} are the people of my family. The day he marries, he is the centre of this relationship network. He unites two previously distinct groups\textsuperscript{13} and in this way alliances are formed. And on the wedding day, these two once separate groups now sit on the same side, opposite the parents of the woman my son is to marry. My son is still the centre, but the group that forms is always different. You always find this movement of the centre. Having the man as the centre of relationships is fairly awkward in the modern world. For example, take savings — if people save it is to enable them to make a donation at a ceremony, or build a house so as to have people visit — it’s never just a means of accumulating wealth, of becoming the village millionaire who goes round dazzling people with his Mercedes, with his wealth ...

A. P. — *You don’t hoard money in Kanak culture?*

J.-M. T. — We hoard relationships. That means you have to build relationships, you have to put effort into the construction and smooth working of the system. There are maternal uncles and fathers and you have to constantly establish relationships, create happenings and ceremonies or play a part in ceremonies such as funerals. You have to smooth the relations between these two groups, paternal and maternal, so that the man becomes someone. Prestige doesn’t come from making money from what you own but rather from using
it to give: imparting wisdom, doing good, offering hospitality all the time. You can never be a millionaire, but the elders have a saying that in giving you are really depositing in the savings bank.

A. P. — It’s the return gift?

J.-M. T. — Yes, but the return gift is not always from the recipient. The return may not come till the day I die, or later, through my son or some member of my family. So much so that this system is not compatible with modern life — I cited savings as an example because it is striking, but our people find it hard to understand a system where you must save to increase your capital, whereas with us you must give endlessly.

A. P. — What stands out in Kanak culture, beyond artefacts and sculptures such as are produced in New Guinea or Vanuatu, is a significant literary and oral output, what Alban Bensa¹⁴ calls narratives; fables and legends which incorporate and even idealise artefacts, but which are concerned with far more than that. How important do you see these narratives being in Kanak culture?

J.-M. T. — It is connected above all to the fact there is no writing.

A. P. — There is a question that you are always asked, but which isn’t clear to us, and that is the real meaning of the word ‘kanak’, and apart from symbolic exchanges, what does ‘doing custom’ mean?

J.-M. T. — Kanak means man — it’s a Polynesian word. In the myth of Tēin Kanakē, the first of the ancestors’ sons, it is Kanakē, the man who is born. The term ‘Kanak’ as we have chosen to use it today is also a statement about colonisation. At the start of White contact we were acknowledged — Captain Cook made custom with the people he encountered, the Kanaks. Next, with colonisation we became ‘the dirty Kanaks’, with the missionaries we were ‘the Melanesians’. When Kanak claims started to be taken seriously, especially in 1951 when Kanaks voted and held the majority in the Assembly, we became ‘the natives’. ‘Melanesians’, ‘natives’; we are
tired of being christened different things by people who don't know us. So as part of our claim for independence, we decided we would be called 'Kanaks' and our country 'Kanaky'. Those who are prepared, as Cook was, to acknowledge us and make custom could eventually, if they want to take it that far, gain Kanak nationality. But above all, whether citizens or not, if they live in the Kanaks' country, they will be living in Kanaky. It's about history, the search for dignity and the acknowledgement of our people.

A. P. — And to get to the heart of the word 'custom', beyond the exchange of gifts, in both current and traditional relationships among people?

J.-M. T. — Custom is less a relationship between individuals than between groups and communities. As I explained earlier, the Kanak is not an individual — he is the core of a relationship; he is the blood running through its veins, and the flesh, both of which are given by his mother, but he isn't the owner of these substances. When he dies the mortal remains should be the focus of ceremonies to return them to the maternal clan. At the same time he is a personality, through the name he was given at baptism — which gives him a status, a role perhaps in the social structure, and also a space, a place on the earth to build his house and plant his yams. He is given roles and social functions as well. Custom for us is the act which at each moment, at each meeting, reminds us of the nature of the relationship; for example, if the son of my sister comes to my home and if it is a while since he has visited then he will make custom\textsuperscript{15} in order to greet me properly, to give me news from his place, to mark his visit. Then, if he were to fall and injure himself at my place, he must give me something in order to ask forgiveness for having spilt the vital heritage, the blood that belongs to his uncles and of which I am part owner. This is what making custom is; it's a generic term given by Europeans to cover a group of things which they don't understand that are manifestations of being Kanak. We give each custom its own name. We do such and such on such and such an occasion to impart such and such a message.
A. P. — Custom isn’t a ceremony though?

J.-M. T. — I don’t know what custom is. I know the special rituals which have special names. Custom, as I said, is the somewhat scornful name that non-Kanaks give to what Kanaks do. For them it’s a way of saying they understand nothing of all these things. The generic term ‘custom’ means for us more the law, our way of life and all the institutions which govern us.

A. P. — Unlike ours, your daily life contains acts and gestures that mark the relationships between people and without which they would not exist. In your culture, ordinary relationships have something which is perhaps not sacred but which seems an essential part of acknowledging the other and of exchange.

J.-M. T. — There is no problem of ‘the other’ in relation to me, because I am not me.

A. P. — I have recently re-read Kanaké; what do you think now of this ground-breaking and decisive politico-cultural initiative of 1975?

J.-M. T. — Some people are now beginning to appreciate that we should have done what we did even earlier. I can see that now almost nobody remembers the speech of Téin Kanaké, for example. The songs we recorded on cassette, the speech given by Emmanuel Naouna, etc., now these works and their authors are no longer with us. It’s terrible, it’s like the extinction of an animal species or a tree. If we had continued with what we were doing, I think we would have recorded much more. The problem was and remains a political one, that in dealing with the colonial administration you always have to declare yourself for or against what is being done for Kanaks. The issues are clearer now, because the political claim has to be supported somewhere. What is unique about being Kanak? It’s not the fact of being coloured, since there are other coloureds in the world and even in New Caledonia. This basis of this uniqueness must be cultural, philosophical and also how we look at development. What does it mean in Kanak terms when we use the word
socialism? We have to look at ourselves in the mirror, through tradition and cultural heritage, and this assumes an inventory, a stocktake we don't have. Well, it's a great shame, so to hell with those who didn't help us!

A. P. — Do you feel that Kanak society has produced political systems of an original kind? How would you define them?

J.-M. T. — That's a difficult matter. The nationalist claim is a political one, related to both colonisation and modern geopolitics. When the Romans invaded Gaul, I believe it was this that prompted Gaul as Gaul to emerge. Our story is somewhat similar. Every country had always been autonomous. Nationalism has never emerged without being preceded by the alienation of one people's sovereignty by another nation. Now nationalism is challenging colonisation.

As to our political systems, it is not democracy which determines who holds power here. We accept that and use it, but your system is based on individuals, and individuals eliminating one other so as to get ahead. We can be competitive too, but it is competition among groups. This comes from the basic notion of man that we have, and I think this is still the case in Oceanian societies: the need to seek consensus is a system, a way politics is played. Democracy as understood by Westerners is based on the principle of one man one vote; this means anonymity, except for pressure groups and political parties. With us, we have clans but they exist in a small area, so they have to come to agreement to avoid mutual destruction. Which is not the case in a big city where political parties win votes through destroying one another. The Socialists would be happy if they could win all the Communist and UDF votes, happy to have come out on top. That's democracy. It is not our way.

A. P. — How do you go about winning people over then, in New Caledonia?

J.-M. T. — We talk, as I said earlier, and we seek consensus. Consensus is harder, but it is a system. There is no one system fits all; you do what you can with it. And even in democracy as you under-
stand it, it seems to me that it is the ballot paper that counts as one vote. But what leads people to struggle for position and advantage is not democracy. The reality is that if so and so doesn’t vote RPR, he’ll lose his job; someone else will be looked at askance if he doesn’t vote Socialist; everyone is expected to fall in line. Our way is to try to understand. If someone doesn’t get the idea, then we have to explain it to him; we do custom with him and later he will get it. In your world, someone who doesn’t get the drift loses his job. There was recently a union protest in Nouméa because Mayor Laroque had sacked some people for demonstrating in support of prisoners. It's typical of what you see during elections in a democracy. We also come under this kind of pressure in reaching consensus, but in a different way. And once a consensus is reached, we don't go off on a Reagan-style Star Wars, trying to wipe out our opponent if we lost, or to eliminate him entirely if we won. We have no choice but to reconcile because we inhabit a small space. So socially and psychologically, we have to operate by consensus. Even if it takes months and years. No choice.

A. P. — How important is recognition of a people’s culture to the recognition of their identity?

J.-M. T. — We can’t put one before the other, they go together in this struggle of ours. Where culture is concerned, no-one is against us. Only fools disparage the claim of Kanak uniqueness. But we wouldn’t have this problem if we had the military might to be able to tell France where to go. The fact that we have to go through this debate about culture will do everyone good, in my view. There are people who impoverish themselves or who amount to nothing because they were always nothing, because they reject the Other, in the Western sense; they reject the idea of ‘otherness’ a priori. They can't accept that there are opinions, and truths other than those to which their own little group clings. I don’t think we are like that and we are all the richer for it, and everyone who lives in New Caledonia is.

A. P. — As a modern political leader, how do you explain that you have come here to France, to metropolitan France, to run a political campaign
quote/unquote? You don't fit the profile of a classic politician — is it to show you are not a traditional French politician, who is in fact your opponent, or is it in your nature?

J.-M. T. — I don't know what a politician is. I only know them through these spokesmen of the ruling system, who use the system to impose something. Our approach is to try to convince people, to convince them that Kanaky is our country. This is the fundamental truth. And that we are the heirs of this country, that our people have a heritage called independence. The French are already independent, have for their part their own national, cultural and territorial heritage. Mitterrand's platform of national independence tells me that if he believes that France must keep its independence, then he must also acknowledge that for us independence is neither a slogan, nor a political game, but rather a purely human goal. I don't class myself as a politician, there is no advantage for me in that. I am wasting time; I've been almost 20 days in Europe and during this time grass is growing in my crops, my children are missing the benefit of my presence as a brother, as a father, as a friend. This is how I serve the independence cause of my country, the way all we independentists are willing to go out to serve our demand for freedom. But this gives us no rights over our people, no rights to say what they should do, if they have to go to war.

A. P. — There is one basic problem with this effort to convince European, and Western cultures in general, of the uniqueness and existence of the Kanak people — isn't Kanak society built on an utterly different basis?

J.-M. T. — This is not specific to Kanaks: I recently heard American Indians reacting to what I say: 'It's the same here.' In one sense Westerners are victims; they were colonised by this Judaeo-Christian philosophy that inculcated them with the belief that man is a body and a soul and that he is an individual. This is just one myth among others, but it is a dangerous myth, dangerous for the planet. Calvinism's impact on capitalism has been studied; success on earth shows you have been saved, but as an individual. Thus being wealthy is valued, savings are valued and material success is valued. This
It has led to what we are seeing today in Reagan’s economic boycott of Nicaragua; this imperialism is based on the principle that to succeed you have to, if not eliminate someone in your way, then at least shove him into the shadows so that my star shines alone in the sky. This very dangerous world view flows from Judaeo-Christian philosophy. It wasn’t, I think, the original world view of the Gauls and druids. We have it differently, we have to think about the universe and above all the land as our mother, as a place that is spatial, sociological, psychological and eternal, where we exist through those who are dead, through those who are alive now and through those who will come.

A. P. — There is a huge divide, all the more difficult for Europeans to understand, since they have sought, from a certain point, not only to tame nature but to dominate it and enslave it.

J.-M. T. — In a way that is today’s dilemma. How should we view man? If we say ‘he is the head,’ as the Bible says, he has to dominate the world. That’s fine, but if you put him anywhere else, he has to set out to conquer the cosmos, and to do that he has to seize the means to do so. And we see the results of that; looting, destruction, individuals crushed, and for what? To go and do the same elsewhere! Fortunately there is no-one on the moon, nor beautiful lands to exploit and colonise; that leaves us just with ourselves. That idea can lead people, individuals, to think about the survival of the planet, to imagine how people could integrate with this universe, about what to do to make the Earth a mother for mankind, and this
dynamic relationship can always be there, because everything is living. But this other way of seeing things — which is arrogant towards the Earth and the universe — turns man into a superchief, technician, technocrat, ruthless go-getter, capitalist, stuffed with pride, who wants to reduce everything to subservience. And so we have the exploitation of the world and mankind, and perhaps at the end of the road, destruction. The current arms race, the Star Wars negotiations among the powerful, the risk of atomic conflagration — these come out of this concept of man struggling for absolute power.

In a way, it is Lucifer’s revolt. Look, there are no more fish in the Seine. I learned yesterday that in the Rhine last century, salmon were so plentiful that people with servants weren’t allowed to give them salmon more than five times a week! Now, no-one wants to swim in this river. But more worrying than the death of the waters of the Rhine and the Seine is the risk to life. A quarter of the trees in Germany are dying and in the United States the plane tree is almost extinct. I think this idea of achieving absolute power has to be reconsidered if we want to save the planet and mankind.

1 Interview with Alain Plagne, Paris, 6 May 1985.
2 The original editors wrote ‘now being realised’: see footnote 148 (Translators’ note).
3 Designed by architect Renzo Piano, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre of Nouméa was opened 5 May 1998 (Translators’ note).
4 The current Museum of African and Oceanian Art, built in Paris for the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, was previously called the Colonial Museum.
5 French term used by Kanaks to denote magical and protective qualities.
6 The oldest traces of Kanaks found in New Caledonia are decorative pottery of the Lapita style, of which vestiges are found through most of the islands of Oceania (Editors’ note).
7 The first Kanak cultural centre was opened in September 1984 in the municipality of which Tjibaou was mayor; it was endowed initially with objects collected by J.-M. Tjibaou himself (Editors’ note).
8 Contraction of the term ‘English spoken’, used to denote Anglophones of the South Pacific.
9 Curator of the Oceanists collection at the Museum of African and Oceanian Art (Editors’ note).
10 Regional organisation to assist the economic and health development of the South Pacific (Editors' note).

11 Lingua franca of Vanuatu, Bichlamar is a pidgin language of a strong English derivation, originating with contact in the 19th century (Editors’ note).

12 His father and the father’s brothers (Editors’ note).

13 Those of the maternal side and those of the paternal side (Editors’ note).


15 Present a gift while making a speech.


17 Mélanésia 2000 led to production of the first disk of Kanak music, songs and speeches (Editors’ note).

18 He is talking about imprisoned independentist militants (Editors’ note).
CHAPTER 21
Kanaky, France and Defence

In this chapter, Jean-Marie Tjibaou discusses the ideas of the FLNKS regarding defence after independence. It was a particularly topical issue in August 1985, because the French Government was considering establishing a military base in New Caledonia, at the same time as it was working on the establishment of regional governments run by independentists. The interview was conducted only a month after the attack on the Greenpeace ship, Rainbow Warrior, and in a world still dominated by East–West relations, Tjibaou makes his own observations on some of the political attitudes of South Pacific nations to France.

JOURNAL DES OBJECTEURS — Mr President, just a few questions on defence for the Journal des Objecteurs. What sort of defence policies would an independent and socialist Kanaky have? Against whom, with what resources, and with or without French assistance? Would Kanaky be party to a South Pacific regional pact?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Let’s start with the last question. We would like to consider defence as a separate issue, first with the other countries in the region and afterwards with others in the South Pacific Forum. We don’t have any enemies, nor do we have any plans to attack anyone. But neither do we want our geographic position to see us being used for strategic purposes by other countries against our will. Never in the course of our history has this problem been considered in national terms. With the division of the Territory into regions
with a measure of autonomy, each has tried to take on its region. ‘National’ is a new concept, coming into existence at the same time as Kanaky, so it’s a new responsibility we’ll have to deal with.

Protecting for our independence means putting a system in place, finding a balance in relationships, accords, alliances that you make with neighbouring countries as well as with the great powers. If we don’t have the means to protect our independence in military terms, then it’s up to us to find or invent balances of power we can use to ensure a degree of independence. The essential thing we have consistently maintained is that we don’t want to have military bases back on our territory [a reference to the American military presence during the Second World War]. While we’ll sign a mining assistance contract with one country, a fishing deal with another, the supply of cars with another and financial accords with some bank in the world etc., where defence is concerned, we’ll only call for assistance if we’re attacked.

J des O — What will be your position on nuclear weapons?

J.-M. T. — We are perfectly clear on this — there is no question of nuclear weapons in Kanaky. We see it as a threat that belongs to the superpowers which can afford this type of destructive weapon. We refuse to have anything in our country that is a threat to the planet or to human life. If they want an atomic bomb, we’d rather see it put in the Beauce or the Cevennes region.

J. des O. — With the exception of the Second World War there has never been an important strategic base in New Caledonia. Paradoxically, we’re now seeing this type of proposal coming from a government that has embarked on a process towards a degree of independence. How do you see this proposal and how would an independent State live with it in the future?

J.-M. T. — The fact that there are French Socialists in government doesn’t change French foreign policy in any way. France has its own view of itself as a country, and views the world through it. Given this, it is hard for France to accept the autonomy of others, that
other people can exercise the right to exist by themselves. Planning a strategic base for New Caledonia — which I think the Right agrees with — does not change foreign policy, which is unfortunate for a Socialist government. At the moment, I don’t know what the statement means, whether it’s a political statement made at a politically difficult time, or is a specific element in France’s global strategy, or is it a warning to the FLNKS and a guarantee to the anti-independents in the context of the 1986 elections that the Government is protecting you and will continue to do so? I don’t know which. It seems clumsy to me, given the Algerian experience, that this issue is being discussed on the eve of this self-determination vote, when we know what happened to the Evian Accords. We don’t know what the key objectives are and we can only wonder whether it will eventuate.

J. des O. — Over the past six months, the forces of order, especially military, have swollen to over 6,000. Nevertheless, the state of emergency has caused a few nasty incidents, the Thio picnic and the racist attacks on 8 May in particular. What is the French army actually doing in New Caledonia?

J.-M. T. — In my view it’s a way to spend French taxpayers’ money, and to give the gendarmes a holiday. We’ll never know how much it all costs but it will have cost more than funding the Region. If these funds had been invested in development, we’d be much further ahead with building independence. The proposed military base is the same sort of thing, to reassure one lot or another.

In any case, with all that we’ve been through we’re under no illusions, and we’ve asked them to lay off a bit. They reply that the separation of powers places the gendarmes under the judiciary, run by the State prosecutor. Then it’s the prosecutor who issues the arrest warrants to go into the tribes. We’ve called on him to stop issuing arrest warrants and to stop interfering in tribes before the elections. It’s a tactic used by the State prosecutor, with an eye to the opposition to the elections, to deprive us of voters.
J. des O. — *The last FLNKS congress reaffirmed its instructions to members to refuse to do French national service. What has become of those young Kanaks who were called up? Are there draft-dodgers and is the Administration repressing them?*

J.-M. T. — This instruction has been applied differently in different places. Many youths are trying to run away, refusing to do military service. Many young people now face arrest warrants for desertion. Their lives are unbearable: sometimes they are in Nouméa, other times in the tribe and at other times in the mountains. Many are virtual outlaws. As there are no photos on the wanted posters, many are travelling about under the very noses of the gendarmes. The difficulty is that their families are regularly visited by the gendarmes, in a bid to get them to turn in their children who haven't reported for military service. Another problem is that we are not sufficiently informed about the military's legal systems; the families end up giving in to the gendarmes' pressure, under threat of being visited day and night, of being subject to constant police intervention. There are families which pressure their children to give up, so that the gendarmes will stop coming into their homes and breaking crockery, smashing everything …

J. des O. — *Would you like to be supported by French anti-military groups?*

J.-M. T. — We don't know; we don't know the legal organisations that would enable us to organise people's defence. Not even their defence, but at least finding a way of looking after those who refuse military service. What should we do to prevent them being prosecuted?

J. des O. — *Are there conscientious objectors in New Caledonia?*

J.-M. T. — We don't really know what an objector is.

J. des O. — *Will there be compulsory national service in a future independent Kanaky? Who will be called up and in what way?*
J.-M. T. — We’ve started to talk about this, but a development service rather than a military service, with the obligation to give one or two years to development. It has links to our tribal system, where youths are enlisted to do the work requiring the greatest strength, such as in the fields, clearing, preparing yam fields and irrigation, etc. I think we need to look at the system anew in light of our own development goals — for example, having it so that the tools of production are collectively or family owned, so that people don’t go into debt setting up their own little infrastructure. This is where that sort of development ‘militia’ would be used. It will be compulsory, objection will not be permitted … (laughter).

J. des O. — Is the independence movement’s strategy of struggle a matter of a deliberate choice between violent and non-violent methods? How significant are the divisions within the FLNKS pushing in one direction or the other?

J.-M. T. — I couldn’t give percentages, but I think it’s more a function of age, a generational issue. There are elders who talk, who try to move dialogue forward. Then there are young people who are impatient because they have the impression — and sometimes not just the impression — that continuing dialogue has led some elders to be conned by some colons. They make some kind of custom to get on side with our people and then happily go on exploiting their land and their people.

Where violence is concerned, I don’t think we have a tradition of gratuitous violence, in the sense of violence intended to kill or destroy. It happens, but it’s directly linked to the fact that we are a really little country and a really small society. People live in a fairly autonomous way in the Regions, following well-worn paths. It’s when you deviate from these paths that you risk death.

After that, you’re in unknown territory, and the unknown is the danger, as much for the initiated as for the one who isn’t. There has been no deliberate choice to use violence. For us, violence came with the fait colonial, with the theft of lands, the theft of freedom, the theft of our word, our word in the sense of our ability to decide. That is the violence of our lives here, and that violence has become
institutionalised. We are endeavouring to free ourselves of this violence.

J. des O. — What are your plans for dealing, post-independence, with the excessive number of weapons in the Caldoche population?

J.-M. T. — I've already said to Mr Pisani, if you want people to talk, take away the guns, everybody's guns. But the problem is that the government has not managed to get on top of the problem of the stocks of weapons. We haven't discussed this yet, what should be done with these guns.

J. des O. — To round off the discussion, what do you think will come out of the support from the Larzac peasants? Do you think, as they do, that there are parallels between the struggle of the Kanak people and their 10-year struggle against the French army and central government?

J.-M. T. — Our common ground is a struggle for freedom based on land; like them, we are peasants and we well understand their struggle, as part of being on the land, of being there to survive, to live. Then, too, there's the fact that it's a struggle of a minority against a cultural majority. We are first of all peasants, we work the land. We feel the same thing when soldiers take our own lands, when we suffer the repression they exert. I think the people of Larzac feel about the struggle we pursue here as we do ourselves.

The Larzac support means a great deal to us, emotionally and politically. It's a good example for us, because their struggle has forged even stronger bonds among them and because in the end they won their case by awakening the conscience of the majority.

1 Interview given at Wagap (New Caledonia) to the Journal des Objecteurs [Objectors' Journal], 17 August 1985. It was published in issue no. 35, September 1985, of this organ of the Mouvement des Objecteurs de conscience [Conscientious Objectors' Movement].

2 A reference to provocations and attacks against Kanaks by opponents of independence during the most tense period, November 1984 to May 1985 (Editors' note).
Jean-Marie Tjibaou is referring here to the fact that in traditional Kanak society violence erupted when the well-worn customary paths, built and maintained by marriage and political alliances, were not followed.

The sheep farmers of Larzac in France for 10 years actively resisted the resumption of their land for the extension of a military camp, finally prevailing in 1981, when François Mitterrand, on his election as President, cancelled the extension plans. The farmers’ group had expressed their solidarity with the FLNKS shortly before this interview (Translators’ note).
IN THE LAST MONTHS of 1985 and until March 1986, a pacified New Caledonia went back to work in the new framework set by the Fabius/Pisani plan. The Kanak independentists threw themselves enthusiastically into managing, seeking to interest all Caledonians in their economic plans, to make the construction of independence credible. But this lull was to be short-lived, so vulnerable did New Caledonia remain to the vagaries of metropolitan politics. Jacques Chirac, the new Prime Minister supported by the RPR-UDF majority in Parliament which had emerged from the last parliamentary elections, decided to knock down the fragile edifice devised by his predecessors. Cleaving to the revanchist thinking of the most extreme of the Caledonian right, he set to work, with the assistance of his ministers (Bernard Pons, Minister of Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOM), and Charles Pasqua, Minister of the Interior), to exclude the FLNKS from the political life of New Caledonia. The army, its numbers in the Territory steadily increasing, was given the task of intimidating the Kanak populations by tactics of ‘nomadisation’¹, the budgets of the Regions administered by the FLNKS were cancelled and a new statute was prepared by Pons which denied the fait colonial. This deliberate push for a showdown with the independentists was the beginning for them of
a dark period which ended with the assault on the Gossanah cave in Ouvéa on 5 May 1988.

In adversity, Jean-Marie Tjibaou stood firm and called on international and French opinion to take heed of the grave dangers which were threatening his people. He spoke out in a manner which was both dignified and desperate, echoing the repression and injustice bearing down on his people (recolonisation of land, acquittal of the perpetrators of the Hienghène massacre, repeated police brutality, etc.), and forewarning of the tragic events this iniquitous situation presaged. Even in the deepest depths, the independentist leader continued to cherish the hope of dialogue with his adversaries.

1 Army units were stationed near tribes, ostensibly to assist with rural development, but actually to impede FLNKS contact with the grass roots, and to serve as military strongholds should the need arise (Translators’ note).
The discussion begins with a look at how people communicate. Like Marguerite Duras, Jean-Marie Tjibaou shows that he wants to go beyond appearances and argument to connect with his audience. New Caledonia’s immigrant and Kanak communities cannot reach mutual understanding unless historical and political obstacles are overcome, Tjibaou says. This need is emphasised here even more strongly because recent gains in the struggle for independence have been undermined by Bernard Pons, the new DOM-TOM Minister, who is refusing absolutely any kind of specific legitimacy for the indigenous people. Yet again, the political and cultural identity of Kanaks is denied. In this interview, Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s reaction is to recall the history of colonisation and to reflect more broadly on the difficulties non-Westerners have in winning respect for their intellectual autonomy.

MARGUERITE DURAS — Tell me … that’s a great suit you’ve got on, you’re very handsome, very chic …

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — You have to wear a disguise when you go to town.

M. D. — We don’t know each other.

J.-M. T. — We know each other.
M. D. — But we have never met.

J.-M. T. — That is true. Now, we have.

M. D. — Do you believe in people?

J.-M. T. — Because I come from a small community, I believe in people and I believe that things will always turn out all right. We are only 100 or so in my village, where there’s a road which runs along the river that you have to use to go to the food gardens or the village, so you meet each other on the way. People always greet each other with a smile, even if there has been a problem between us — the problems are put aside and we wait for an occasion such as a death, a birth or a marriage to sort things out. This is why I trust people. I believe that people can be sincere.

M. D. — In all cases?

J.-M. T. — Sometimes people’s sincerity can be overwhelmed by worries and what is on their mind at the time, but they can be sincere on other occasions. I see people in a bit of an animal way, like children who are afraid of some and not others. There are people I can trust and then there are those that I can’t get through to, who have very thick hides.

M. D. — It’s true that there are some you just can’t fathom.

J.-M. T. — There are some people who always elude you — just when you think you’re about to connect, they always slip away.

M. D. — With those people, do you manage to get through to them and talk to them about New Caledonia?

J.-M. T. — Fortunately for me, I don’t know how to speak — how should I put it? — in a way that is rehearsed, premeditated, scripted. I speak as ideas come to me. I think that you can have people with thick hides, with well-scripted speeches, who are also capable of
grasping your message ... and that they can be disarmed or affected, as they would be by a painting or a poem. But who then forget, they don’t know what it was that hit them. You don’t get far with people like that. In talks with Mr Pons ...

M. D. — What is Pons up to with New Caledonia?

J.-M. T. — Who knows?

M. D. — What is he? Minister of DOM-TOM?

J.-M. T. — Yes. He’s the one who is busy changing everything, messing everything up. But I don’t know if he is a free agent — he’s the type of person you can’t get to grips with. I look at his eyes but I don’t see them. In photos and on television, he looks good and I thought I would recognise him, but in the flesh ... perhaps it’s the shadow thrown by the job ... (laughter). He is in the shadows, he eludes me. I can also understand his dilemma — he has to consider those who promised a clean sweep after 16 March [date of the 1986 legislative elections] and then he still has to consider us as well. It’s pretty dramatic taking us out of the picture, trying to wipe us out and to send the army in against us. He’s changing everything, that’s what he said in Nouméa, including Pisani’s plans. In his press conference, he’ll say just how far he is planning to go, whether he will alter the Fabius statute and the distribution of powers. He had talked of keeping the Regions but with their powers invested in the High Commissioner.² I asked him whether he intended us to be left with nothing to do.

M. D. — He is very frightened.

J.-M. T. — I think he is afraid of himself. Before the elections this man had a bit to say in his own right but now I can’t tell who he’s speaking for. He goes into his shell and speaks from underneath it. He says one thing one day, something else another day. But as to his basic message, it’s really unfortunate, but he hasn’t broken out of the traditional mould, whereas we Kanaks have.
M. D. — You mean the capitalist mould?

J.-M. T. — Imperialist — we should consider ourselves happy to be French. We should be grateful to Mr Pons for not being taken in by our illusions, that is, for not listening to us and rejecting our demand for freedom. Wanting to be ourselves, for him, is our delusion and we betray him.

M. D. — Because in his view you don’t have any real ‘yourselves’ in you.

J.-M. T. — No. We had a good talk. But I don’t know if what he says are his own thoughts, from his own heart, his own guts, or if he is repeating slogans bandied about by Jacques Lafleur. Because the locals, the Mr Lafleurs and the other Whites over there, are really caught up in that sort of ideology, bound in that straightjacket. I said, ‘Mr Pons, if you threaten the status we have achieved, it’s not just about constitutional arrangements, you are also showing your contempt for us’. He said: ‘Things were all right between Kanaks and Whites. We always lived with Kanaks, we went into the tribes.’ Believing that Whites had lived with Kanaks is believing in fairies. (Silence.) According to Pons and his friends, ideologues, Marxists and communists had to come for people to get ideas in their heads and make them think ill of Whites ... ideas about revolution and freedom. To them, we don’t really exist, so we don’t have any claims of our own, all we’re doing is echoing what students and the French leftists say.

Then we had a discussion like this. We told Pons: ‘You call us ideologues, but it is your own ideology that makes you do that. Why would we be incapable of thinking? You grant the right to exist only to those who see the world from your perspective of technical superiority, of a Europe that went and conquered the world with guns and boats and all that; and from this position of power you say you are right, what you say is the truth that we must accept and see as something wonderful.

‘So when we claim our rights, we have to be excommunicated, since what we are saying is the opposite of what should be the truth. The truth is yours. We’ve got it back to front, maybe because we are
at the other end of the earth, in the antipodes’ (laughter). We had words ...

M. D. — *How did the colony come about? Convict settlements?*

J.-M. T. — Convict settlements, farming settlements, where the Feillet settlers\(^3\) came from, a very few *communard* families.\(^4\)

M. D. — *So you say the new Government’s plan isn’t to unravel the Pisani statute, but to keep the Regions and strip you of all power within them?*

J.-M. T. — This is what I want to expose — it’s happening right now. Here, people talk of a witch-hunt but in New Caledonia, it’s about mass dismissals. We have powers, we still have them, but Pons is busy emasculating them, here we go again, as with the Jacquinot law\(^5\) which undermined the Deferre law in 1963. The Deferre law, the framework law, was the only one that ever offered autonomy as preparing the way for possible independence for the colonies. It was under this law that the colonies became overseas territories. There was no talk of majorities in those days, whereas now it is used as a weapon against us, to argue that since we’re a minority we have no case.

M. D. — *In terms of numbers, is there such a majority?*

J.-M. T. — Yes. In terms of numbers, we are a minority, but as a result of deliberate policy. There are 60,000 Kanaks, 30,000 Caldoches and then there are the Polynesians, the Vietnamese, the Chinese, the people of mixed race who don’t comprise an ‘ethnic group’ despite what Mr Pons says; they are all immigrants who side with the Whites, because they are afraid of losing their jobs and because they are directly threatened. You know, the Right uses very direct pressure against the people who are with us … (silence)

M. D. — *What are you going to tell Mitterand? What will he say to you?*

J.-M. T. — First of all I will say how astonished I am by what Pons had to say in Nouméa. Maybe he was unaware that we would be
meeting Mitterrand, but it worries me that a Minister talks about reviewing the Fabius statute, saying Mitterrand agrees with him. This remark of Pons' is a real worry for us. We will also ask Mitterrand to use the weight of his office to ensure they don't destroy the instrument which has been set up and which we are using. It's a very important instrument for us, you know. It was pretty astute of Pisani to give a bit of responsibility to each side, so they would stop fighting and put the Fabius statute's management powers to work in the Regions. For our part, in the three largely Kanak Regions, we're in power and at work.

M. D. — Do you people have mines?

J.-M. T. — Yes, but the mines haven't been transferred; this was one of the powers which were resumed after the Jacquinot law in 1963 ... (silence). We have rallied our militants to build the country, once and for all, using this Fabius statute and setting up four Regions in New Caledonia. There are three rural Regions and the large Nouméa Region. Europeans are the majority in the latter, they are in control. But in the Regions of the interior, we hold power, we are working to get land. We're trying to get development going on the lands that we have recovered, to rally people around building Kanaky's economy.

M. D. — So you can present Whites with a fait accompli? To act already yours, because in your minds it is yours?

J.-M. T. — It is ours and what's more, there were never any plans to develop these remote parts of the country; the focus was always on the city, Nouméa. These lands do have real potential, though infrastructure is still lacking; no sealed roads, for example, not enough transport systems, very inadequate electrification and the distribution of water is insufficiently developed for either human use or agriculture. There is water but it needs to be stored. This is the work we're busy with — building port infrastructure to improve fisheries. We need to think about storage too, and packing in cold rooms.
M. D. — Do you have cattle?

J.-M. T. — Yes. We also have plans for a cannery. We’ve been given technical help to do feasibility studies of these schemes. This is a first, people feel involved. They’ve got the chance through these projects to have help drawing up documents and setting budgets. There is money available. Until now, the funds were hidden because financial matters formed part of an information loop that Whites kept to themselves — the Whites who hold power, I mean. Now, we’ve got savings offices and local bank branches. In our budget we have allocated funds to help those who want to do something new, those who want to expand, or set up poultry farms, or piggeries or buy a fishing boat. We’re advertising, explaining how to go about it. We are showing the Region’s people they have funds through such subsidies, that they can use them. We ask them who is in charge of the project, who will work on it, so that the market can be studied to see if the project could provide a living for a family. The Europeans don’t let people know when there are subsidies available. At the end of the day, people like the way we operate because it is transparent, we don’t have any interests of our own to protect. Even Europeans living amongst us are now showing interest in the Region. I think our opponents are, above all, afraid of just this danger, just what we are doing, because we are urging the building of the economy of Kanaky.

M. D. — But you don’t have the majority of the lands, they have been given to Whites?

J.-M. T. — We are scratching away at those lands (laughter). We are working on the lands that have been returned but which we don’t own. (Silence) To the extent that the Region brings together people [Kanaks and Caldoches] who don’t agree amongst themselves but who are united by work, it offers a chance for the future of our country. The people who are getting together are doing it with the aim of building something lasting in our country, making it more self-sufficient, richer, so that everyone is better off.

M. D. — Has this truly begun, what you are talking about?
J.-M. T. — Yes. Once we started looking at pretty well everyone’s projects in the budget, then even the Whites who were against us now agreed to join in this constructive effort. The passing of our budget in the North Region did not make Mr Lafleur happy. We have nine councillors, RPCR has three, and of these three, two voted for our budget and the third abstained. This is a very significant development. The danger for Lafleur is that the Region is breaking up the network he runs from Nouméa. There is a commitment to building the regional economy and its autonomy; I say emphatically that we must create a certain identity for the Region so that people can take pride in it.

M. D. — *This must be treachery of the worst kind for the Whites?* (laughter).

J.-M. T. — We’ll win the vote of self-determination if it continues like this. That’s not good for RPCR.

M. D. — *Do you recall the idea of a referendum in France?*

J.-M. T. — De Gaulle did that for Algeria. First of all he consulted the French in France, then the Algerians with the French of Algeria. If it comes to it, we would insist that the referendum ask the French ‘do you wish to become Kanaks?’ and the Kanaks ‘do you wish to become French?’ *(laughter)* … and then we’ll count the affirmative responses. *(Laughter)* Through the experience of regional government, the concept of independence has taken hold in the Regions — the idea that the Kanaks can run the country better than Nouméa, and build it jointly with the Whites.

M. D. — *I thought that you would not want any more to do with Whites, if they weren’t capable of accepting your view of the situation?*

J.-M. T. — Most of the Whites are not capable of it. They only respect force, like the *petits blancs* in Algeria. But you know there are some poor ones who are …
M. D. — Stupid (laughter)?

J.-M. T. — Yes. There are Caldoches who are venomous, stupid and nasty. I don't know what their values are. Many of them have never been to France. They label us terrorists, but they are the ones who practise terrorism. (Silence). We have a newspaper that started in February this year in an effort to offer unbiased news — Le Journal de Nouvelle-Calédonie.7 There is another newspaper, Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes which is like Le Figaro but worse, and which had all the advertising. Le Journal de Nouvelle-Calédonie is only starting to get advertising and should be supported since it provides sound information for everyone. Mr Lafleur phoned around to ensure that no-one would advertise in our paper, knowing that it's advertising a paper survives on. (Silence).

Now the fear they could stir up and spread is that the Kanaks will throw them out, that they will starve and go bankrupt. But experience in the region disproves this. They can't scare people anymore with that, so they use terrorist methods to create fear. Now they are afraid of the truth, namely, that we are demonstrating our ability to run our country on our own.

M. D. — The White maintains that he is French and that over there he is in France.

J.-M. T. — Yes, and Dr Pons repeats it. (Laughter)

M. D. — At the same time he opposes development in his country — preferring to lose it rather than see it do well in the hands of you independentists. How do you deal with that contradiction?

J.-M. T. — With facts. Slogans cannot defeat facts. The facts are there and at the grass roots what matters is if people eat a bit more and a bit better — that's what really talks. (Laughter).

M. D. — At the grass roots level people aren't suffering, though?
J.-M. T. — No, it’s okay, you don’t die of hunger in our country. No-one is destitute.

M. D. — Not really living, not really thinking. That’s a different kind of poverty.

J.-M. T. — Disruption, rather.

M. D. — It’s more than that (silence). They could flood New Caledonia with as much as they like in the way of benefits but these would never equal in meaning what you Kanaks could obtain for yourselves.

J.-M. T. — We told Mr Pons this. He is sending the paratroopers to New Caledonia again, with talk of 1,000 men by the end of the month.

M. D. — What is your advice for the French Left?

J.-M. T. — To keep supporting the Pisani plan, because we’re insisting on its full implementation.

M. D. — Which the Assembly passed …

J.-M. T. — Yes, on 29 September 1985. There is a year left, or at the most until December 1987 when the vote on self-determination is to take place. We are arguing that it is useless to rewrite the Fabius/Pisani statute while there is still a much bigger problem, in fact a basic one, the question of which electoral roll to use for this vote of self-determination. This is the important issue that the Kanaks and people in Caledonia must talk about. To alter the Fabius/Pisani statute now would be to strip the regions of their powers, bringing about just the kind of failures they would like to see and do nothing about (silence). We must remember the goal of Article 1 of the Fabius/Pisani statute is to ready the country for independence in association with France. This process entails setting up these four regions. After two years, a poll is held. But the problem is who is eligible? Is it the French people? The Kanaks
alone? Kanaks plus descendents of convicts and settlers? Kanaks plus everyone born over there? We haven’t discussed this issue because of the differences on it between ourselves and the Government; these differences are still there. But this is the fundamental debate that is needed right now. If Pons changes the law, he is avoiding our question. For us, as long as our question is unanswered, we’ll reject any self-determination granted with whatever conditions.

M. D. — How do you want to get to self-determination?

J.-M. T. — Through debate. Pons says that all those enrolled will vote. We say only the colonised people have the right to vote because they are claiming independence, because they have no homeland other than where they are. They alone have the right to a say in the act of self-determination.

M. D. — How do you see Whites in this?

J.-M. T. — Whites are those who are not Kanak. Descendents of settlers, born over there, are French, not Kanak. The Kanaks are the natives.

M. D. — You revert to race?

J.-M. T. — It’s not race.

M. D. — The convicts didn’t ask to go over there.

J.-M. T. — Neither is it my fault they were sent there.

M. D. — It’s neither their fault nor yours. So they just have to opt for Kanak citizenship.

J.-M. T. — It’s up to them.

M. D. — But they can do it?
J.-M. T. — Yes. But once again, that’s not our problem. That’s the principle on which the electoral roll for the act of self-determination must be established. But that debate is still to be had. The previous government was afraid to face it. The new government is establishing a new statute that will postpone the deadline but even if you postpone this deadline you still have to define electoral eligibility first, before it takes place ... (silence) Current law says three months residence in New Caledonia is sufficient to be able to vote. At the moment there are 1,000 paratroops. We could find ourselves with more than 10,000.

M. D. — Why the soldiers?

J.-M. T. — To bring Kanaks into line. It’s a provocation. It’s nomadisation. That doesn’t ring a bell with you? It was used in Vietnam, it was used in Algeria, widespread military occupation to intimidate the population ... (silence). Caledonia is an interesting case because you are forced to get to the heart of problems. This is what unnerves government people because they are not used to thinking deeply about things. We are obliged to deal with technicians, people who play with systems. A government gets in, they create a system. Another government comes along, creating another system. No-one pays attention to the indigenous people who are not prepared to tolerate imposed systems any longer, who want to control their own destiny, that is, to establish a system with the others, if the others agree.

M. D. — White Caledonian youth needs to be told that they have a lot to gain by leaving the country.

J.-M. T. — They want to leave the country, provided ...

M. D. — ... they can take the land with them (laughter).

J.-M. T. — No. On condition there are no more Kanaks. When they had to sell their lands, some poisoned the wells, so that no more crops could be grown on those lands.

Representative of the State in the overseas territories (Translators’ note).

At the end of the 19th century, Governor Feillet brought some 500 French families to settle in New Caledonia to develop coffee plantations.

For the history of European settlement of New Caledonia see the work of Isabelle Merle, Expériences coloniales. La Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1853–1920, Paris, Belin, 1995.

The Jacquinot law (1963) revised the provisions of the loi-cadre of 1956, at the time when France decided to increase nickel extraction and begin nuclear testing in the Pacific. The 1956 framework law had given New Caledonia wide autonomy.

Ordinary settlers.

In February 1986 Jean-Paul Besset, now one of Le Monde’s editors, launched a daily paper to break the news monopoly in New Caledonia. The initiative did not last long as the paper quickly saw Nouméa advertisers withdraw their support (Editors’ note).
CHAPTER 23

The Strategy of Non-Violence

The Chirac Government thought it necessary to hold a referendum in New Caledonia (13 September 1987) using the democratic ‘one man one vote’ to remind everyone that the majority of the people in the Territory were against independence. It hoped that by so doing it would at the same time marginalise the Kanak nationalist movement. The latter, confronted with an unprecedented military presence in the Territory, responded with a program of non-violent activity. The pacifist demonstrations were brutally put down, to the point of shocking French and international opinion. Questioned by the daily *Le Matin* about the FLNKS’s new strategy, Jean-Marie Tjibaou emphasised that the policy flowed from the balance of power at the time, and that no referendum could circumvent the demand for independence.

OLIVIER COUHÉ — The ‘Fortnight for Kanaky’ ended today. Are you satisfied with the mobilisation of your militants?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Personally, I think it was a positive result for all the leaders, with a turnout that was large and orderly. There were, for example, 187 hunger strikers. We managed to get everyone involved: women, children, the old and not just the adult men that you need for violent action. This is the start of something new and it is going to keep growing.

O. C. — What did this fortnight do for New Caledonia?
J.-M. T. — For Kanaky, it saw our people assume a more existential role in our liberation struggle. As for our opponents, I think it has thrown them off track and forced them to realise that the FLNKS has resources they were unaware of, and that unlike them, the FLNKS can show some imagination in pursuing its struggle.


J.-M. T. — Non-violence is not an ideology for us, it’s just a one-off tactic in response to current circumstances, and one that is working for us. For how long I don’t know. Since the beginning the Right has always been preparing for repression. It wants to provokes us so that we retaliate and that allows it to knock us out, to stifle the movement. We are more intelligent than that. We are doing things to raise the awareness of our people, but it’s also to get the message across, nationally and internationally, about the justice of our cause, and to win their support.

O. C. — Do you see pacifism getting you to independence?

J.-M. T. — I don’t like the term pacifism, it’s a bit spineless. The aim of the struggle is to acquire sovereignty. We’ve chosen this strategy of non-violence for the time being; it could work right up until independence, but is limited in time, on what circumstances we bring about.

O. C. — How do you reckon on managing this non-violence after the referendum?

J.-M. T. — I see the referendum as a significant step, but what comes after it is more significant, when those behind the referendum will be forced to accept that it resolved nothing. If the FLNKS calmly continues with its peaceful mobilisation, it destabilises the Government strategy and forces it to reckon with us. As long as our movement continues, there can be no durable solution which does not take our demand into account.
O. C. — How long do you expect to able to keep this policy going? Aren’t you afraid of being out-manoeuvred by a new, livelier generation?

J.-M. T. — I can’t say. Clearly it is a strategy that resonates with our culture, respecting life, as is our custom here. But it could be ended by the sheer volume of insults and provocations from the Right. Even though the elders suffered worse at the time of colonisation, the young aren’t prepared to go on accepting insults forever.

1 Interview in Nouméa with Olivier Couhé, published in Le Matin of 4 September 1987.
CHAPTER 24
The Regions, the Kanaks
and the Struggle

As funding for the three FLNKS-controlled Regions is about to be withdrawn, Northern Region President Tjibaou evaluates the two years’ experience of administration. He outlines in addition the economic program that he is confident will assure a successful independence. That cottage industries, agriculture and fisheries were booming in the country areas of the Territory gave cause for hope that the economic domination by Nouméa businesses might come to an end. The policies of Bernard Pons and the Chirac Government were to counter this attempt to bring the Kanak interior forward, but less than a year later, with the Matignon Accords, it was to be at the heart of the debate on New Caledonia’s future.

THE FLNKS FORMALLY took control of the regional institutions through the democratic process on the evening of 30 September 1985\(^2\), as part of the Fabius/Pisani plan.

Two years on, it is essential that we evaluate our work in the Regions, all the more so since the regions are being axed under the Pons statute. Along with the statistics there are important overall lessons to be learned from our experience in administration. Given the FLNKS goals of self-sufficiency and the irreversible establishment of Kanaky, our primary goal was to meet the many needs of the people.
From the general economic perspective, setting up a network of craft industries is vital. The three regions — the North, the Centre and the Islands — administer a huge area that lacks basic infrastructure and within this all development is considerably hampered by the absence of cottage industries existing alongside bigger businesses. A widespread road and electrical infrastructure for the bush is imperative if this obstacle is to be overcome. Without electricity and all-weather roads there can be no modern fisheries and no mechanic workshops! It won't do to have to use generators that often need several months' repair in Nouméa. Modernising communications is just as essential for education. We plan to make do with small radio stations for the moment, and these will clearly help develop our communications capacity. They should also assist in expanding cultural and educational activities.

In the education field, our first efforts should focus on children of kindergarten age. We must train teachers who can help children discover at an early age both the world and their own natural and human environment. This must help the Kanak child acquire the self-confidence it needs to deal with the industrial and technological world. Yet we mustn't think that the French language is the only key to modern Western knowhow. Basic mathematics such as set theory can be taught in the mother-tongue, a Kanak language. Then mastering French becomes just one way into the modern world; it becomes one tool among many, without entailing debasement of Kanak culture. The effects of colonisation still run very deep in this area and it is hard to shake them off. There is the possibility that our culture would come to have only emotional or sentimental value for us, rather than being the life-force, the source of vitality, for each individual. Schools and the Western media promote the view that you are not really living unless you have material wealth and own a house, a boat, a car. Possessions, possessions, possessions! Money, money! Admittedly, we all end up having to chase it. But couldn't we take part in this chase with our cultural heritage integrated as part of the activity, rather than having our true wealth, our culture, undervalued and seen as an impediment to being a fully modern man?

Let's turn to infrastructure and human development. For the first time we have been able to begin development of our country's
inland, thanks to the Regions and the powers handed over by the Pisani statute. At the moment, Kanaky has all the hallmarks of a developing country. It’s up to us to tackle the problems while at the same time assessing what this condition means. An underdeveloped country yet to be decolonised, as the United Nations Charter puts it. What it comes down to is how can we envisage taking charge of our economic future when, as a colony, we don’t have the power to make all the major decisions? And further, all the financial power resides in the small developed enclave of Nouméa. Administration of the Regions has brought us face to face with all the bad grace and delays of Nouméa. Decision-making was slow under the Socialist Administration but at least it eventually happened. Nowadays bureaucratic delays have given way purely and simply to withdrawal of funds.

Our militants must look at the results of this experience and think about the fundamental problem, which is how do we win over Nouméa? In my opinion, this can only happen if Nouméa plays according to the rules in a situation of calm, or through independence. Whichever way we look at it, the goal should be to use Nouméa as a means of developing the interior. Eventually, the interior could open up possibilities in infrastructure and investments and attract people to move there. Little by little the country’s economy will become balanced. Currently it is not and Nouméa remains aloof from — and even hostile to — development efforts for the interior. Our Regions could run out of steam in this environment because there are no markets. Clearly, therefore, we need to be in power for the problem to be solved once and for all.

The establishment of a real economic grid in the Regions needs to be underpinned by local economic or financial information agencies, operating as banks. These agencies would on the one hand facilitate investment and on the other provide basic economic education for the Kanak population, which is underqualified in this respect.

In our custom we know the exact meaning of every gesture so that we don’t commit faux pas. The same is not true in relation to financial institutions. Today, Kanaks obviously need to use bank notes and their value is understood, but often they are used more in
barter — ‘I give to you, you give to me’. To be an administrator is something else again, and implicit in the job is an understanding of how the market works. But for this the best school of all is still that of practice. Small businesses and co-operatives within the Regions have learned through experience about management, its legal requirements and also its risks. This experience leads us to the next step in regional administration — setting up professional associations. A craft industry association, a fishermen’s union, a chamber of commerce or a chamber of mines; these will provide their members with much-needed assistance in training, business advice, markets and problem solving. Only these types of bodies can guarantee that the benefits of production are retained in Kanak hands, to meet the needs of Kanaky. Otherwise how can we get people to kick the welfare habit, welfare that is given out paternalistically by the Administration as ‘benefits’ of colonisation?

Work in the Regions has shown us the need for these bodies to provide incentives and information. A fishermen’s union and a Kanak cattlemen’s union have thus been set up. Now we need to teach people how to organise, how to run these institutions so as to overcome, for example in the cattle industry, the harmful work by OCEF. This organisation controls everything in the Territory, buying carcasses according to its needs, rather than guaranteeing regular slaughtering for cattlemen. By combining in a union and controlling production themselves (number of head, cattle quality, etc.), the cattlemen can better control the market according to their own needs. Over and above these initiatives from the Regions, we have to acknowledge that we need advice and technical and financial help for each profession. In passing I call on all people, groups and associations that want to help us: for Kanaky to become a reality straight away we need their experience and expertise and their funds.

To opt for independence means being able to assume both economic control of Kanaky and mastery of the political institutions. At the moment the Kanak world is on the fringe of the economy. Notions of investment return, of savings, of economic growth have yet to be incorporated into the thinking of the majority of Kanaks. Now, to free ourselves of this straightjacket of political marginalisation we have to emerge from marginalisation.
Isolated experience of management, and a sort of sub-set of that, of managing roadblocks during our militant campaign, are nothing compared with running a co-operative for which you have to be present every day for months on end, and invest a lot of work for the sake of long-term growth. Failure to grasp this has led some Kanaks and non-Kanaks to be bitter critics of the Regions on occasions. But on the way to independence, we need to get the population to realise that there are a lot of things we don’t know how to do.

To build a roadblock, clearly anyone can cut down a coconut palm and carry it. Similarly, the building of a hut is reminiscent of birds who know innately how to build a nest without having to be taught. On the other hand, success within a large-scale economic system requires a technical and theoretical background and a lot of knowledge. It is a long-term commitment that involves a different relationship with time, a relationship that can’t be acquired automatically: arranging time in accordance with our overall plan and pursuing the same goal for months, for years, calls for an understanding that has now been gained by the Regions’ leaders, but which is yet to be shared by all Kanaks. Looked at from the outside, for those not involved, it looks like party-time for many. Our goal is to achieve greater Kanak involvement in the construction of Kanaky.

It has been pointed out to us from time to time that no colony has won its independence through economic expertise. But is the lack of examples a reason not to try this path? There are, alas, frequent cases of independent countries that are economically dependent. Recent votes at the UN show as clearly as you could wish how economically dependent ‘independent countries’ are.

From a militant’s point of view, it is clear that mobilisation today has taken on a new form. Certainly some — those who have not really been involved in the activities of the pressure groups and struggle committees — find it harder to understand the way this has evolved. But overall, the maturity of our people is linked to what we are doing in the Regions. The FLNKS organisation has benefited in a material sense too, not least in means of communication and travel. Today we have a more efficient, more modern organisation. Undoubtedly the lack of officials and organisers in the villages and municipalities remains a problem. But on the other hand the exten-
sion of telephone lines and the vehicle fleet of the Regions have helped the independence movement with co-ordination. As for the workings of the FLNKS — they have emerged from this all the more determined, more operational and better run.

The Regions have never been viewed as an end in themselves but rather as a step along the path to winning sovereignty. That is fundamental. The current French Government understands this well. To block our progress, the Government is trying to score political points by destabilising the FLNKS. Orchestrated by the Pons/Foccart team and people of such little intelligence such as some Caldoche leaders, this propaganda revolves around tired old slogans such as ‘the FLNKS has had it’, ‘the Kanak revolt is run by outsiders, or by support groups, or the LCR3 or else by the Socialists’. Those against Kanaks always paint them like this, as manipulated by others, rather than face the reality of whence the call for independence really comes.

And yet they would have to admit now that nomadisation, militarisation and unjust acts have not made Kanaks lose heart. We are not afraid. And whether the Socialists run the country or not, the idea of independence and the independence movement will remain. Repression makes us stronger. Some Kanaks are thrown in prison but they come out more contemptuous of the colonial power, harder, stronger and more resistant. The Government is contriving to show things in a way that it hopes will discredit the FLNKS, destroying its resolve and its following. But the RPCR and the National Front are only encouraged by this to be even more contemptuous of Kanaks, while the militancy and fierce hostility of the FLNKS towards colonisation can only grow in response. Our watchwords can’t be rubbed out by truncheons and gendarmes. The resistance grows stronger.

The 13 September 1987 referendum was not a success for Messrs Pons and Chirac. It is true that we’ve temporarily lost the support of a few significant countries such as those of Scandinavia; they wanted to respect the democratic façade of the referendum. But the UN has maintained New Caledonia on its list of countries yet to be decolonised while it waits to see how the situation evolves. Speech-making won’t change anything there.

The majority in the Assembly is not, however, comfortable as it portrays itself … The Government fears holding elections in New
Caledonia before the Presidential elections because then it would, finally, have to reckon with the strength of the FLNKS resistance. All this bodes well for us. Looked at overall, the government’s policy suggests two possibilities to me:

— Paris is misinterpreting the situation on the ground. We saw this already when the Socialists came to power. That the analyses by prime ministerial advisers were superficial and lacked understanding in depth. Today’s government thinks what its Caldoche masters tell it to think, either blindly or for electoral purposes.

— The second possibility is that the Government is in a Machiavellian way pushing its own Caledonian partners into a position where, in due course, they will face failure or no prospects. It would then be possible for it to act more directly to resolve the problem.

Whatever the Government’s rationale or ulterior motives, the Kanak people are still there, with or without the referendum. And the watchwords of the FLNKS are clear: resistance in the face of ever-growing militarisation; resistance in the face of the consequences of the Nouméa verdict in the Hienghène case; resistance in the face of the assassination of Léopold Dawano.4

Today we are in a position of self-defence. We have to plan for the length of the resistance, as well as for its eventual outcome, plan how to break out of this encirclement and open up the route to independence. Given the heavy military forces here, our militant organisation at the grass roots level has to be solid, mobile and omnipresent. Sooner or later the Government will be forced to deal with us, to reconsider its continued support for local partisan interests and to hold a true, definitive vote on self-determination.

The FLNKS won’t take part in the upcoming regional elections under the Pons statute. [...] In the final analysis these elections are a response to pressure brought by the FLNKS on the ground. At present, small clashes with the military are occurring daily. Little by little, we are mobilising. The protest against the Pacific Games proved it.5 Because of the referendum, the Caldoches are telling themselves everything has been resolved. In fact, all the Government has done is to encourage their desire for revenge, their anti-Kanak belligerence ... And the extremists are coming out into the open: they could marginalise a more moderate section of Caldoche opinion.
What are we to do faced with such adversity? The current situation is so violent and so tense that to respond with non-violence like last August would require solid moral and political preparation, almost mystical readiness and strong nationalism. To propose high profile activity at this time is to gamble with your own life for the sake of alerting national and international opinion. This means we would have had to have agreed to present ourselves as victims, resolved to win without violence, risking your life by continuing to advance no matter how many are killed. Personally, I am ready. But how many deaths before we change tactics? You must have a solid team amongst the militants that can hold in there at all costs. That requires an almost military, even religious discipline.

2 Election by universal suffrage for each of the four regional assemblies, under new electoral boundaries (Editors' note).
3 Ligue communiste révolutionnaire [Revolutionary Communist League], Trotskyist, led by Alain Krivine (Editors' note).
4 Léopold Dawano was a young Kanak killed by gendarmes on 6 November 1987, at St Louis (Editors' note).
5 This sporting competition of Pacific athletes, held every four years in a Pacific country, was cancelled in Nouméa that year due to deterioration of the political climate (Editors' note).
CHAPTER 25
Will We Be the Last of the Mohicans?¹

In this letter, written during the presidential elections of 1988, just days before the violent Ouvéa affair, Jean-Marie Tjibaou solemnly warns President François Mitterrand of the seriousness of the situation in New Caledonia.

WHAT FUTURE ARE you planning for us, Mr President? Are we to be the last of the Mohicans for the Pacific region, like the last Tasmanians? You know that the Kanak people have always refused to be thought of as an archaeological relic in world history. So much more will the Kanak people refuse to be a relic of French colonial history.

As your seven-year term draws to a close, Mr President, I would like to thank you for painting New Caledonia’s situation as it is, as a colonial situation and a situation of injustice for the Kanak people.

You are now on the eve of a new seven-year mandate. You will carry the destiny of France before the whole world. Will you allow twentieth century France to continue to be disfigured by the open wound of French colonialism?

Public opinion in France is sensitive to the massacres of Palestinians in Gaza. I call on you to remind the French public that in their own country, at the other side of the world in a country they say is part of France, the situation is the same as in the Occupied Territories and is a growing tragedy for our people.

Mr President, we listened to the long speech you made at Cancun at the beginning of your term in office. It gave us much
hope. But, as you are aware, the Socialist government has been no more successful than its predecessors in finding an institutional solution for the Caledonian situation, which, like all colonial situations, is unique. The Kanak people’s claim is for dignity and restoration of liberty in independence.

It is my wish that once again you will stand up for all those who believe in the rights of man and in a progressive and modern image of France. We are counting on you, if re-elected, to find a just solution. Because of what you are personally, because of the attitudes you have adopted, and your steadfast option for human dignity, we believe you should find just solutions. French and Kanaks are seen as adversaries. More and more they will become enemies, unless you join with us in mapping out the path to freedom for the Kanak people and for all inhabitants of New Caledonia. And for the honour of the people you represent.

Mr President, in New Caledonia as in France, we have people who personify a fossilised image of France. In our view, France is badly served by its representatives in the Pacific, unscrupulous wheeler-dealers who use the French flag and the name of France to serve their own interests. You have to know that the arrogant language used against Kanaks is taken by Pacific countries as a whole as demonstrating contempt for them too. And this can only get worse. What are we to make of the actions of Mr Pons, who orders in 29 extra squadrons of riot police for the elections of 24 April, to deal with an FLNKS that he said was nothing but a minor grouping? — bringing the military numbers up to 11,000, for 65,000 Kanak men, women and children. I assure you, Mr President, that the Pacific countries took this announcement as an act of aggression you can never justify. Does France need this kind of show of force to remind people that it is the home of human rights and the country of freedom?

Mr President, I want to see freedom restored. I want to see life return to normal in France as in New Caledonia. That is why I want to see you re-elected and form a new government that won’t systematically imprison Kanaks, as this one does now.

I would like you to order an inquiry into the Nouméa prison, Camp Est. Do you know that there is a Frenchman in prison there currently who is systematically insulted and threatened by the
guards? His food is even doctored with chilli pepper; all this is done to him because he is white and a supporter of Kanaks. He is a Kanak supporter because he has dignity and acknowledges the same dignity in others.

Mr President, I hope that you will heed my message. Increasingly our people are suffering threats to their physical safety. I appeal to you as a leader to make French public opinion accept its responsibilities, for you to lead France in searching its own heart and acknowledging that justice is being denied to others. How can France live with itself, when it condemns these human rights abuses in other countries, such as South Africa or the Occupied Territories?

What Mr Chirac’s government has put in place here produces the same results, establishing lasting dominion over the Other, without the Other and against the Other.

I hope to see you returned as Head of State with a strong majority, Mr President, so that you can offer our people and France, of course, a new era of freedom.

President Mitterrand’s ‘Letter to all the French’ was the platform for his 1988 campaign for re-election. François Mitterrand referred to Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s appeal in the following terms:

AS I WRITE these words, however, a message from Mr Tjibaou has been placed before me. It is both an appeal for help and a statement of the principles by which he lives. He fights for the independence of New Caledonia, and for him New Caledonia is above all the Canaque people. Perhaps I summarise his thinking too hastily. Mr Tjibaou and his party do not call for the exclusion of people of French origin and other races. They simply want, so to say, to decide this themselves, because they alone constitute universal suffrage.

I know this theory. For the seven years that I have been meeting him, Mr Tjibaou has not wavered. He is a man I respect, for whom speech goes beyond mere words. But I don’t believe that the historic
position of Kanaks as first occupants of this land is enough to put them in the right. One history against another: Caledonians of European background have also, through their labour, shaped that earth, been fed by it and put down roots. There is no chance of either community establishing lasting dominion over the Other, without the Other and against the Other — unless by violence, and even violence has its limits. Why is independence not possible? If the population had been homogenous, New Caledonia would already be independent, like its neighbours. But for two opposed communities of comparable size, independence would mean civil war, the most merciless kind of war, and thus the crushing of one of the two camps. You can guess which one. Internal peace is the only way to restore the downtrodden right of Canaques, and that peace and those rights can only be guaranteed by the French Republic. There is no other arbiter. I am not stating a principle here, I am stating a fact, and a fact which is salvation for all.

Caledonians of European origin don't put up any theories. They hold power. The strongest keep it. Just like that. Canaques used to have lands and these have been taken from them. Land reform has been used by French Government Ministers both before and since 1981 as a means to render them justice. These Ministers are long gone and so are the land reforms. The Canaques have a culture French Ministers, both before and since 1981, have wanted to protect, and they established a cultural office for the purpose. Those ministers are gone and the office too. No Canaque passed the Baccalauréat until 1962. There are few Canaque doctors or engineers, 36 primary teachers out of more than 800 and only six senior public servants out of almost a thousand. The three Regions with a Canaque majority received a half billion French Pacific francs, the Southern Region received six and half billion. What I am trying to say is that if peace for New Caledonia and a hearing for Canaques can only be ensured by the French Republic, the Republic has to act justly. It is not part of our tradition to exclude minorities.

But the parliamentary majority in Paris has passed a law and the population of New Caledonia a referendum. It is our republican principle to apply the law and my duty to promulgate it, and then respect it, like any citizen. On the other hand, there is nothing to
prevent using the same means to change the law. It would indeed be advisable! This is what I can reply to Mr Tjibaou, as to you, my dear fellow countrymen. New Caledonia is trying to find its way through the dark, bumps into things and hurts itself. All the elements of a colonial drama are here in miniature. It is time to move on. It is my hope that the coming weeks will not see the two communities falling into the trap of violence. Then I will use the power you entrust me with to ensure that the history of France — at the other side of the world — returns to its traditional path.

1 From L’Avenir calédonien, no. 985, 14 April 1988.
2 Paul Naud, a Poindimié teacher and a member of the UC (Editors’ note).
CHAPTER 26
Hope in Black and White

In this interview with film-maker André Waksmann just days after 19 FLNKS militants were killed in the French army attack on the Ouvéa caves on 5 May 1988, Jean-Marie Tjibaou gives a radical analysis of the colonial process in New Caledonia. Exasperated by the brutality and hypocrisy of the Chirac Government and the anti-independentist forces in New Caledonia, he gives free rein to the bitterness and weariness he feels after four years of struggle in the streets and of negotiation. Despite the harshness of his responses, it was from this time that Jean-Marie Tjibaou decided to enter into discussion on New Caledonia's future with envoys of Michel Rocard, the new Prime Minister.

Parts of the interview were used in Waksmann's film, *l'Espoir en noir et blanc* (Hope in Black and White).

ANDRÉ. WAKSMANN — Could you talk about the Caldoches and their attitude towards Kanaks?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — I can see that attitudes have not changed much since the days of the penal colony and convict guards. People here still have the same stereotypes of Kanaks in their minds. I am currently reading a book by Françoise d'Eaubonne called *Louise Michel, la Canaque*, about events in the period 1873 to 1880. It's always the same thing. For example, before Ataï's revolt in 1878, the Whites claimed to have got rid of the bad missionaries, who had
been using Christians in the tribes to take yams etc. from them. But then things went from bad to worse. New Whites came by the boatload, month after month, each lot more greedy, still more hungry and stubborn than the last, not wanting to hear or understand anything.

Even Whites punished by other Whites would be awarded a Kanak woman on their release from prison, along with some cloth as a general rule and the promise of a good life. If the woman was reluctant or already married, a gendarme would come and take her away by force. After having destroyed the crops and captured the women, they took the lands one after the other. Not one mound was left undisturbed. The land had been worked by the tribe, they had irrigated, sometimes digging right up the flanks of the mountains so water could run down. The people were chased off to other land, land that was already home to a different clan, but the clans were forced to live together; they were treated as if they were no longer humans but just the sort of animals the Whites call ‘stock’. Then these groups were forced to merge in with a third, and so on. What were these Whites seeking? What drove them here? All this was in 1874–1878 to 1880. There was a moment when they talked about attempting dialogue, just as today we are talking about trying dialogue with the occupier. But we always come up against the same lies — nothing has changed there, Whites are just as rapacious, still liars. So there are no grounds for hope, although we do have the support of the Whites in France, many Europeans in France, anyway. Yesterday’s poll results give 39 per cent for and 39 per cent against independence, which is significant nonetheless.

My thoughts turn to Atai’, before the 1878 revolt, when he said in his speech he was going on yet another attempt at negotiation, to see whether justice could be done.

One of the Canala chiefs, an elder called Gelima, remarked: ‘You’d think that this man from La Foa3 still believes that dialogue with Europeans is possible.’ Atai’s relationship with the occupier was such that he still believed in the possibility of dialogue. This was in 1877.

This book also mentions a European who ran a ‘model farm’ at La Foa — a colonial station really — and already then, this gentleman managed to get subsidies from the Colonies Minister. That says a lot
because the colons are still getting subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture. It’s really remarkable what some manage to do, since fraud is more difficult now, with roads and communications and now auditors in the Agricultural Service. But for a long time, it was always the same story — one that you see still happening today with the ADRAF scandal. Just recently, Harold Martin, current President of the new West Region had fraudulently invoiced ADRAF — and hence State/Territory funds — for work done at his and his cousin’s property. It always comes back to the same stereotypes and the same well-worn ways that those running the economy use to rip off the State. They use the State so as to be able to control the situation. Milliard is in on this too — though he is not as significant, not as seriously wealthy as Lafleur or Lavoix or the people who move in wealthy circles in Nouméa: they paralyse the country by imposing their laws and their system to corner the mines, the wealth, the banking system, the commercial system, and therefore the labour force and the Administration. That is why they are hostile to the Socialist government, because it comes along and interferes with their well-oiled colonial system, where even the sheriff has been bought. Hence the panic ... because they don’t want any change of sheriff. Those holding local power view the Socialist government as inherently sympathetic to Kanaks, as favouring in some way what they term ‘the Kanak minority’.

They are afraid their power will be undermined by the State and Kanaks, through the Kanak argument that New Caledonia is their home, their only home. Everyone else has their own country: metropolitan French, who are natives of France, Antillean and those from Martinique have their country, Wallisians and Tahitians have theirs. And then there are the Asians as well, the métis, the Vietnamese, all those who tend to keep in the background. They are beginning to have their own people elected, which is no doubt a good thing, even if it makes for problems at the beginning.

Whites have always considered Kanaks as part of the fauna, the local fauna, the primitive fauna. Much like rats, ants and mosquitoes ... make them inoffensive, keep them like monkeys in the zoo for amusement, for tourists and to have something exotic. But on no account should they have anything to do with the economy. Kanaks
taking positions threatening White decision-making power is to be avoided at all costs; they have to be broken, and everything to do with knowledge, the what and the how, schooling, is part of colonial power. Those who hold local power will not share knowledge or access to positions of authority, because that is a threat to them. Sharing power means sharing the economy. They hold real political power, sustained by economic leverage. Moreover, thanks to nickel exports and their control of customs and indeed all administration, the colonials have been able to buy plenty of weapons.

Charles Josselin, a Socialist MP who came here to campaign for Mitterrand, described New Caledonia as a shambles, but a shambles of fear! Even the Europeans are afraid. In this environment, it is impossible for Whites to consider that Kanak independence leaders could be anything other than terrorists or criminals. They can only be criminals, since they attack colonial officials in their fiefdoms, and each time a new administrator comes they try to get him on side. In any event, they always manage to get the administrator in their pocket, by using threats, guns and, as history shows, through invitations to their ranches for a spot of fishing etc. It’s a situation in which State resources and public monies are used to benefit this local ruling clique. In this situation, Kanak demand for independence is like a fly in the soup — incongruous, anomalous, an error — and a dreadful error that must be eliminated at all costs: hence the way they react.

I don’t know if you are aware of it, but the day that 19 militants were murdered on Ouvéa, there were people who celebrated, just as they celebrated the assassination of Eloi Machoro and his companion Marcel Nonnaro, the murder of the Hienghène and Ouégoa 10, and the deaths of the other Kanak militants. They celebrate each time a Kanak is killed, because for them, the fewer the Kanaks, the less the danger.

The crux of it all is that people have to understand we are in Kanaky. We are not in France. And all the foreigners who come, all the immigrants are thoroughly aware that the Kanak presence threatens their life in this beautiful country … so the danger has to be eliminated if it is a political or economic threat. The leaders and the committed militants have to be physically eliminated, in that
they show that the indigenous people are the original inhabitants, that they are specific to this country, which implies that the others come from elsewhere. As long as they do not accept this — well, you see what it has brought us to today.

The problem is that when we were in the majority, the democratic majority was discounted, and each time the statute was re-examined. We had the vote for the first time in 1951, again in 1952 or thereabouts; in 1956 the loi-cadre came into force at the same time as in the African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Senegal, etc.). The loi-cadre, also called the Deferre law, foreshadowed a progression to independence by New Caledonia, and government ministers acknowledged the need to train cadres. People began to be sent for training and some of them are in the independence movement today. However, the colonials saw this development as a threat: reaction was swift, with Paris following suit, and there was the 1958 putsch. Whites demonstrated and set up roadblocks, but gendarmes were not sent to arrest them. Yet this took place in a so-called democracy. It is only now that democracy is invoked, after Kanaks have been rendered a minority of the population, using immigration from France and its overseas territories to overturn the Kanak majority. The nickel boom allowed a massive influx of people to work the mines etc. and settle in the Territory.

We should not forget the privileges the government grants, to retirees for example. Some receive a 50 per cent increase on their pensions, and the military can get 50–70 per cent more for retiring here. They can settle and bring out their family etc. Some of them have bought a house in New Caledonia but remain in France. But the point is that they are on the electoral roll here and that they tip the balance — yet this is called democracy. We are against this colonial type of democracy, put in for the partisan purpose of opposing the claim for independence, which is first of all a claim for autonomy. The fact of Kanaks as the first inhabitants must be taken seriously. That most governments have refused to consider this has led to our current situation; I think it is only the Socialist government that has made a genuine attempt to deal with the issue, but the institutions are heavy things to handle. With our inexperience, we couldn't manage it. Inexperience, but also without any real political
will on the part of the Socialist government, and this at a time when for our part, we were most strongly mobilised.

So, where does that leave us today? Before the referendum he organised, we had told Mr Pons on several occasions that we are for a referendum — indeed we are the ones who called for one — but a referendum on self-determination. When New Caledonia was first listed with the United Nations Committee of 24 — along with countries I mentioned earlier such as Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, etc. — the French Government acknowledged a colonised people existed within our country. The Charter of the United Nations talks about colonised peoples, self-determination and the right to independence of colonised peoples. France had therefore acknowledged that in the UN charter, the right to self-determination is a matter for colonised peoples alone. On that basis, we approached the South Pacific Forum and it took our case to the Non-Aligned Movement, which in turn pressed it at the UN, so that our claim could be considered. Eventually our case was reviewed in 1986 and we have been listed by the UN committee as a non-self-governing country since then.

We have told Mr Pons that we want to discuss independence. Well, not exactly Mr Pons, since he refuses to listen to us on this, as the word independence is taboo for Lafleur and company. They only want to hear about their type of independence, which lets them take advantage of France. The FLNKS executive will again place independence on the agenda of the talks scheduled with the Government's envoy. We had already said before the referendum: 'We want to discuss self-determination.' We have to agree on what the act of self-determination means; it can't be something scheduled every four, five, even every 10 years. It is a once only thing and you really do have to agree on the terms. Everyone is talking about an act of self-determination and referendum, but it's not a matter of finding agreement or not on changing the university system or abortion law etc. We're calling for discussion first on the concept of self-determination; we can indicate who is covered by an act of self-determination in France because it is France. But who are the people in Kanaky or New Caledonia to whom the act of self-determination under the UN charter Article 114 applies? Who are the colonised people? We are! The definition we've given for those eligible to have a say in the
act of self-determination is that it should be all those affected by the *fait colonial*. So all those born in the country who are over 18 years old and who have at least one parent born in the Territory would be eligible to vote. This means those who voted in 1951, the first time Kanaks had the right to vote. Kanaks and all those who voted at that time are the ones to whom the *fait colonial* applies. It doesn’t cover those who have just arrived. They are perhaps affected by the *fait colonial* in Algeria or Vietnam, but that is not the *fait colonial* here.

The *fait colonial* and the colonial dispute (theft of land, theft of women, destruction, alienation, people killed in 1878 and 1917, etc.) involve Kanaks and those *colons* who made them suffer colonisation. They are the ones who must decide on independence through a free act of self-determination. We can move from those talks to preparing a timetable towards the act of self-determination and equally to set out the rights and duties of those not covered by this act.

The great fear of independence is above all fear of losing one’s house and land. The big bosses encourage this fear among the ordinary people because they have a lot at stake. Yet in all cases of independence, the big bosses have done well out of it. Look at Vanuatu where Nouméa wheeler-dealers still live, despite having been behind the Santo rebellion.9

Guarantees must be given to those who don’t come under the act of self-determination and to all French citizens wanting to live in the country without losing their citizenship. At the same time, a definite cut-off date must be given for those who would like to acquire the new nationality. Those who decline it will have a resident’s permit with certain privileges; a special status could be envisaged for French citizens in our country. All this should be determined along with the act of self-determination and the Constitution. We have to think about the country’s political and economic framework post-independence so that the act of self-determination won’t be seen as a break or as a leap into the unknown, but rather as a transition to something else — something that embodies people’s hopes and ambitions but also spells out their rights and duties.

We’ve been trying through the media to convey all this to Mr Pons, and we explained it in person to Mr Lemoine during the Nainville-les-Roches summit of 1983. We were given a good hearing
and our views taken seriously, but the statute they came up with didn’t reflect our aims, and that led to our boycott of the 18 November 1984 elections. But since 1986, Pons and the Chirac Government have bent over backwards to meet each of the demands of the anti-independentists, who wanted to see their contempt for Kanak nationalism enshrined in law, so the Pons statute as it stands is effectively our people’s tomb. It’s worth knowing that under the 1958 Constitution, natives kept their special legal status for as long as they had not renounced it\(^7\), yet we find that currently, of 75,000 Kanaks only about 2,000 have accepted common law status and therefore sought cancellation of their special legal status. The remainder haven’t gone through the process, which means they value their special status. It gives legal recognition to the tribe, the reserve and the associated expression of Melanesian cultural life and system of relations that White people call custom. Whites use custom as a generic word to define what is foreign to them, but for Melanesians it’s a description of family and clan relationships.

The Pons statute will set up a Custom Council, not a Council of Chiefs as in the Pisani statute; this means any Kanak, no matter what their place in custom, could become a custom councillor. When you see Pons in action, signing conventions on behalf of the State with tribes and individuals, you could think that he is setting up these tailor-made custom councils so they can propose reforms for consideration by the Executive Council. Reforms such as abolition of special status, reserves and all special treatment for Kanaks — all to fill in the blank sheet Pons got from his referendum. Then they would go on to portray the FLNKS as a movement advocating rebellion against the State, since by then all Kanaks would then be under common law like anyone else; and then French citizens who called for independence would be in a state of secession.

We have the right to independence and we are not rebels, as the French would be. We are Kanak nationalists. Every Kanak born is born with the right to independence, which is not the case for the French. We’ve explained at length and in detail, but the Government would never listen. Pons has always refused to hear us or meet us. Moreover, back when we were working within the institutions, he belittled us by lying, ignoring us, ignoring correspondence and
stopping funds. Nowhere on French territory has the government indulged in this kind of manipulation. It was only here; the absolute peak of this contempt was the Ouvéa affair and the bloodbath that followed. Ouvéa was a gratuitous bloodbath to win the votes of Le Pen’s supporters. Just prior to the second round of voting, Le Pen had insisted the Ouvéa crisis be fixed: ‘Surrender or extermination’. Now the survivors can talk and I hope we’ll get the truth about this carnage, this massacre that was organised by Chirac, Pons, Pasqua and Lafleur to get right wing votes.

What we claim is the right to be independent in our own land, for our people to be sovereign over their country — though we are ready to share it with those who accept the Constitution of Kanaky. First, with those who take part in the referendum — the colonials, descendents of convicts and colonists. We must not forget that convicts were people chased out of France and yet today they call themselves ‘loyalists’, making a mockery of History. We can open the doors so long as they accept our country’s constitution. But accession to sovereignty is our top priority, a matter of national identity, as Chirac put it so well when he was asked about immigrants during the election campaign. When your country is like a house with a revolving door, with people coming and going all the time, you can’t have a national identity; that is a key issue for us.

We don’t want to be the last of the Mohicans, or to be the junk room or rubbish dump for the French in the Pacific. But we are very open and we feel France has everything to gain from that. There are those who see us as a threat: ‘These Kanak terrorists are a threat to France …’ Be realistic! A handful of Kanaks is not going to threaten the French nation, one of the world’s great powers. On the other hand, for as long as France ignores our demands as Kanaks, they will continue to grow, getting more of the world’s attention, especially in the Pacific. The Pacific is becoming increasingly supportive of the Kanak cause and France will be less and less well regarded, indeed scorned by the region. Yet France has the financial and technical means to support independence for our country and to ensure it will be seen in a modern and rewarding light, both in the Pacific and globally, on the basis of a position on decolonisation which is fitting for France, for human rights and also in the light of the imminent bicentenary of the French Revolution.
A. W. — Do you think dialogue is possible now with the Caldoches?

J.-M. T. — I think there are some sincere Caldoches. Recently an association has even been formed by those who voted for Mitterrand and they are sure to make themselves heard some more. But there are racists here just like in any part of the world.

A. W. — When you consider that Chirac got more than 90 per cent of votes in New Caledonia, and then there is Lafleur ... do you think there are enough people genuine about dialogue?

J.-M. T. — Those figures don’t show that people reject dialogue but rather that they are afraid. It’s a vote of fear more than anything. New Caledonia is the only overseas Territory or department where Chirac has won a score like this ... Mitterrand won a majority in all the others except Guyana. Fear for the future is behind it, along with fear of the RPCR — because the RPCR has its militia go round; they provide transport for people to the polling booth; and they handed out a lot of money, did deals with tribes, with individuals and all this shows up in the ballot box, but is not to be taken as refusing dialogue.

A. W. — Do you think it’s possible to have independence without a bloodbath?

J.-M. T. — I don’t know — it is not up to us, it is up to the Europeans. This is our home. We have decided to move to independence; we are open about the future with those who are French nationals or those who would like to adopt Kanak nationality.

A. W. — Recent television images have shown incidents at Canala where people were harassed, probably by the FLNKS, which is very bad publicity for you ... What do you think about this sort of incident?

J.-M. T. — Anyway, this has to be seen in the context of our political demands and the struggle for independence. How have traitors and collaborators been dealt with in every country, even France? They shot them, they did not put them on television. So how, pray,
should we treat traitors and collaborators? I put this question to a Frenchman at our recent Yaté Congress and his response was straightforward: ‘They were shot’. So now people want to lecture us, about people we haven’t killed but who threaten our cause, who are dangerous because they inform on us to the gendarmes. And that mobilises the Caldoches and the enemy against us. Traitors have never been given medals in any liberation struggle.

A. W. — Do you think the State of Kanaky is going to be economically viable?

J.-M. T. — You know, if it is so difficult, it is because this country is rich in resources yet small. Of course, nickel are now being exported, with ups and downs. It is a significant national resource and some French officials are determined not to lose this pot of gold. France is perhaps the world’s third largest nickel producer … but there is no nickel in Paris, this is Caledonian nickel. Perhaps this resource needs to be exploited in a more rational way: a more modern smelter could be built to increase value-added and bring more money into the Territory.

Our policy is that this wealth should, in the first instance, be used for national development. Some countries have understood that this God-given wealth should be used for development and building infrastructure instead of lining the pockets of the rich. There is also tourism, which is up to us. The beauty of this country is extraordinary. Tourism development can go ahead in a way that respects the environment and without upsetting people’s lives, and could be as successful as nickel. At the moment, you see the hotels filled only with gendarmes and military, because if the FLNKS says ‘no’, no industry can go ahead. Other industries are jam, fisheries and chrome. These are resources the country has a lot of, and which have potential; since the country is small and the population low, we can envisage an economy which makes us independent.

A. W. — A final question, you have friends abroad, especially Australia in the Pacific; there is talk of your links with the FLNC in Corsica and with Libya. What can you tell us about these?
J.-M. T. — The official FLNKS position is that, as a liberation movement that seeks international support, we will accept help from wherever it is offered. Consequently, we have real diplomatic support. Last year at the UN, we lost the ‘vote’ of the European Economic Community because of this so-called referendum that France organised. A lot of countries have always supported us diplomatically, such as China, while we haven’t got Japan, though we used to. We have the vote of the countries of the East. Why, I don’t know. Our appeal is to all countries. European countries voted against; it was their choice to abandon us to the countries of the East. African countries, in particular those in the French camp, the former colonies, refuse to support us. And then everyone is scandalised because they say we have Libya’s support, and I don’t know who else, the Russians … it’s always the same visceral anti-communism — when you want to kill your dog, you say he’s got rabies. Our position has always been clear, that we want international support, but without strings. For the moment, we have this diplomatic support, but where material support is concerned, we have nothing.

A. W. — *We have read newspaper reports that militants have been trained in Libya* …

J.-M. T. — Ah … Trainees were sent, but they weren’t a group from the FLNKS, they were part of FULK (*Front Uni de Libération Kanak*), we don’t know much about it … Originally, it was an FLNKS initiative, but then we decided against continuing with it because of the wide diplomatic support that we were after. We said to ourselves that we must avoid getting in too thick with one country in particular if we want the support of others, and so last year we called in Yann Céléné Urégei and told him he had to explain how these trainees were being sent to Libya. The FLNKS executive and Congress had ordered a halt to it because we were planning the peaceful march at the time. But behind our back Yann Céléné sent the group, which incidentally was intercepted by the DST and put back on the plane. We’ve got a lot of questions about all this; we called on Yann to explain himself, but he didn’t do so. Suddenly, FULK cuts off contact. This is a problem for us …
We have other countries now, we have support especially from the Melanesian countries, which is natural and the most important, but also from Australia and New Zealand in particular, in the Pacific Forum context and also at the United Nations. I think we get a great deal of support from New Zealand, which went through a lot with the Rainbow Warrior affair and through it learned the hard way about what the contempt of the French Government means.

A. W. — Does the FLNKS have links with the Corsican independentists?

J.-M. T. — No, we don’t have any links ... Perhaps through solidarity committees in France. But there is no network.

A. W. — What role will France have in the Pacific? Will it have a role when you gain independence?

J.-M. T. — That will depend on the manner in which independence is achieved. But France doesn’t need us in order to play a role in the Pacific. It is a great power (ironically).

10 *Translators' note*: the Editor of the French text had a footnote which described the legal status of the indigenous population of New Caledonia at the time of publication. Article 75 of the French Constitution provided for a ‘particular legal status’ permitting recourse to ‘customary rules’ in relation to matrimonial and land matters. The Editor noted Jean-Marie Tjibaou's recollection that in the 1950s, one of the effects of indigénat (indigenous status) was that indigenous persons were not permitted to purchase alcohol, leading some Melanesians to seek to be divested of it.

11 FLNC: Corsican National Liberation Front (*Translators' note*).

12 See above ‘The Strategy of Non-violence’ (*Editors’ note*).
CHAPTER 27

Portrait of a Colonised Person

This account, written at the same time as the preceding interview, gives the actual experience of colonisation as lived by Jean-Marie Tjibaou from his infancy. Asked by Lionel Duroy about the terrible ambush at Tiendanite (4 December 1984), and under the influence of the psychological impact of the tragic deaths of militants at Ouvéa, he is inclined to recall the memory of the humiliations he suffered and what happened to him from the moment he decided to ‘raise his head’.

To set the framework of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s account, Lionel Duroy mentions the context of his inquiry at Hienghène: ‘My conversation with Jean-Marie Tjibaou took place in a room in the town hall in Hienghène in May 1988. At this time, it was very difficult to get to Hienghène, as it was not long after the events of Ouvéa. The only French remaining in Hienghène were the gendarmes, staying behind the metal barricades of the gendarme post opposite the town hall. The town hall itself was deserted. Tjibaou opened it so a room could be used. His wife stayed with us for a while. We spent the afternoon talking.’

DURING THE REPRESSION of 1917, the soldiers drove out the people of Tibatchi and Tiendanite. They chased them, firing at them, and when they got to Tiendanite, they burned everything. There were some women and girls there with my father’s mother — a Coulna woman — seeking to get back to Tiendanite with several wounded men. The Tendo people were afraid to take them in. Pastor
Leenhardt came one day, went into a case, saw weapons, saw what was happening and admonished them, so they did not take part in the uprising. The leader of Tipindjie was dead, and so were the women at Gavatch. They moved up along the river, fleeing from Tiendanite towards the north. The walls of the valley were very steep. They started the climb upwards early in the morning. In fact, the soldiers were following them — they must have had informants. At sunrise, as the women were climbing up the right bank of the river, they were fired upon by the soldiers from the left bank. My grandmother was killed instantly. My father was only a baby and was being carried by his mother. He rolled into the bracken and was picked up by his big sister. They continued the trek. My father was four years old. What happened after that, I do not know.

[...]  

What you studied at school was basically up to the missionary, in my case Father Rouel. He is the one who sent me to the junior seminary. Pascal Couilhat should have gone too but his father was against it. I left with Joseph Lévy, following others from the mission who had already left. My father was in charge of a school at Tiendanite. I learned to read, write and count with him. Father Rouel sent me to the junior seminary at Canala where I met up with all the others who had left ahead of me: Félix, François, Louis and Joseph Lévy (who was supposed to go to the monitor school at Saint Louis).

So I arrived as a nine year old at Canala in 1945, with Father Rouel. It was the only way for us to have any schooling. The missionaries chose children from the most active mission families. At Pentecost, a collection was taken up to provide for the seminary, but parents also had to send food; every fortnight we had yams and taros to eat.

My brothers went to school at the Warèi mission. They went by horse as the road to Tiendanite was only built in 1956. I came back on holidays for the first time in 10 years, and the bulldozer was still two days work away from the tribe; that 10-year absence explains how I lost my mother-tongue. It was early when I arrived up there. I didn’t even know of the existence of my other brothers: Vianney,
David, David Couilhat. I didn’t know they had been born, I had only
known Louis. When I got there I saw the little ones and my brother
introduced them to me. They stood there staring at me; they had
only heard about me. That first time, I travelled up in the truck
belonging to René Devaux, the manager of the Castex station.

After that I stayed at Canala. I remember being hungry there. For
lunch, we had a small piece of taro and that was all; at night we had
rice broth. The first thing that disturbed me was to see a European
boy come back with shoes and socks when everyone else went
barefoot, and that he had sheets; in other words, he had special
treatment. I was disturbed that a religious institution discriminated
like this. Later on, I went to the seminary at Paita, in 1949. Ernest,
the son of the chief of Warëi, went with me to Paita, and Honoré
Tiboïn too. In March, at the start of the new school year, I was called
in by the principal and told: ‘Now, we have a problem, someone has
dropped out. You are going to the seminary at the Isle of Pines.’ I was
very happy to go there as it was a big trip for me. Life there was very
hard. They were minor brothers, Javanese brought in by the Marists.
It was a monastic regime, rising at 5 am for meditation, Mass and
study. At 7:30, tea, good tea, then classes from eight till one. We
mimicked the whistle to say it was the end of class. I spent four years
at Isle of Pines. We grew crops there too — hectares of corn, we
planted and we built things. It was a farm at the same time. I have
good memories because at least we learned those things well, to grow
corn and to make cheese from the farm’s milk. But there wasn’t
much schoolwork. A boat took the crops away and through that they
financed the operation. I stayed there until 1953. There were State
subsidies available in 1953 and they insisted that I go and sit the
Certificate of Studies. We went to Nouméa to sit the exam. We were
already grown up but we had to pass it.

At St Louis [near Nouméa], Kanaks ate their meals in the corridor
that led to the toilet ... There was a Spanish brother there and he did
not eat with us, he was different and ate with the White Fathers.
I remember that is how it was, Whites not mixing with the Blacks. To
me, this was a bit peculiar. The White sisters wore shoes but not the
Blacks, only plastic slippers without socks. The Wallisian sisters also
wore shoes — in short, Kanaks were always treated like scum.
Then I went back to Isle of Pines, from 1954 to 1955, for the noviciate. There were three of us, one from Maré, one from Bondé and myself. We were going to become Brothers in order to help the missionaries. I returned to Tiendanite after this in 1956, then I went to Lifou and taught there for two years. We left Nouméa by boat in the middle of a cyclone, we felt the full force of it on the voyage, it lasted right until Lifou. There the boat broke up in the bay, during the night. There was someone waiting for me as I disembarked, a fellow student from Canalá seminary; we left in an old truck to go to the mission, all wet in the rain. At this place, however, we ate with the head of the mission. He drank coffee in the mornings, we drank tea. He listened to the radio so this meant that at the table we never spoke. I played a lot of sport at that time. I went to see the Mother Superior and she said to me: ‘We always make tea, there is enough to do without making coffee for everyone’. The next morning there was a single little coffee pot with a little jug of milk — the Father listened to the radio and we had nothing to eat. The Mother was not there and Father Cros kept his coffee all to himself. The bell rang and we left the table without having eaten. My friend went out and we asked for something to eat; all the kids brought us things to eat. That was the day we really connected with the kids. The next day the incident was over and done with.

I followed this pattern for a year and a half. Then I fell sick ... bronchitis, hospital. I didn’t return to Lifou, I went to Thio. There I met up again with Father Denis Cros, the one who drank his coffee all alone. I really saw what he was up to: he drank wine in his room with a Wallisian who was there; he had put some peppermint liqueur in the fridge and he tried to tell us it was medicine so that we wouldn’t drink it. We helped in the building of the Thio mission school. I read a lot at that time. I had a good class for grade 4. I asked Father Cros if I could continue my studies, if he could find me a course or a school. I met Father Martin, who suggested I return to the Païta seminary. So I returned to Païta in 1958–59 and there I completed the schoolwork for 3rd year, then I did part of 2nd. They didn’t teach languages there, only Latin. Then I did philosophy for two years, followed by four years of theology.

When I arrived, it struck me that I came across the same discrimination; in the refectory, there was a table for the European
seminarians and a table for the Kanaks and Wallisians. We didn’t sleep in the same dormitory either; the Europeans were fee paying, while we were recipients of different bursaries. Apart from that it was very good, very nice.

Having entered in 1959, I left the place in 1965 and I was ordained a priest here in August or September 1965 by Mgr Martin. It was Father Rouel’s day of glory. I was posted to Bourail at the end of the year. In 1966 I was the deputy curate at Nouméa’s cathedral. It was there that I began to see political problems, the difficulties in the way of the option for the poor. Sermons were very closely watched. The priest in charge had to be advised of what we were going to say, we had to show him the sermon in advance.

Father Jacob Kapeta was the curate. He was the UC chaplain and so was very politically aware. When the position of Cathedral priest in charge had to be filled, a concerted effort was made to block his appointment. He was very bright and was studying for a doctorate of theology in Rome. I was also a military chaplain — I looked after the young conscripts at the time. We organised a small newsletter, an association, hospitality for the families at Christmas etc.

Towards the middle of 1967, I encountered Professor Métais and his wife on the Cathedral forecourt; we talked and he said that he could get me a scholarship to study at the University of Bordeaux, in the ethnology department, but on condition that I pass the university entrance exam. I studied for it at the Jean XXIII hostel, having taken leave at the end of 1967. Then I did a short posting at Tiéon on the East Coast before leaving to sit the exam in France. It was supposed to be held in June 1968 but because of the May ’68 events it was postponed. In the meantime, I had received an offer from the Catholic University of Lyon, one that came with a guaranteed scholarship. It was a Croissance des jeunes nations [Growth of Young Nations] scholarship.

So I left for Lyon; I enjoyed the sociology lectures. I got to know Leenhardt. There was law, economics, politics, doctrine (Marxism) and religion; for me it was easy enough. It was a two-year scholarship, equivalent to a diploma or a degree, and you could go on to do a doctorate. As the scholarships were in great demand, I requested a third year; I surrendered the scholarship that I had which was for 800
francs a month so that it could be used for someone else, and I had another scholarship for the following year. After six months at Lyon, I went up to Paris to study ethnology at the Ecole pratique des hautes études [Practical School of Higher Studies]. When I was at the Nouméa Cathedral, I had cared for drunks — Kanaks — and something which struck me was the way they always talked about their land, about their tribal lands which had been alienated by the Whites. So with Professor Roger Bastide I worked in the fields of ethnology and psychiatry, on mental health issues.

Then I came back for the death of my father in 1970; I was involved in the custom ceremonies. I obtained an airline ticket as a study trip to New Caledonia. Then I stayed in the Territory and gave seminars on ‘Getting to know the Melanesian Milieu’ — aimed at liberal Europeans. Next, I worked for a period in the Administration, still concerned with the transition of a traditional society to a modern world, the connection with alcohol and the dream world in which alcoholics take refuge. I took a proposal to the people of Union Calédonienne, to Roch Pidjot, and funding was found for me, as I had asked. This budget was allocated for grassroots education. After a year, I presented a report but it was stifled by the Administration and the experiment ended there. Then there was an attempt to establish ‘tribal councils’ to help people. It was at this time that I met my wife Marie Claude. In 1972, we formed the Melanesian Group for Social and Cultural Development, but the UC people and the Administration were suspicious of it. It, too, came to a sudden end. I started to be followed. One Miss Duras, in charge of health education, called me in, and we had a row. Then I was transferred to Youth and Sports.

In connection with these activities, I threw myself into the festival project which I saw as one means of overcoming the insignificance we suffered then, when the whole environment was set up to alienate the Kanak, who existed only through his relationship with the White, and in which all the images he gets of himself are negative. So he has to be led to see his unique qualities, what makes him special, so that he will see his own value. The philosophy behind the festival could be summed up as getting the Kanaks to project their identity into this environment and demonstrate their
best qualities. Stirn was DOM-TOM Minister at the time. As an official in Youth and Sports Department, I was able to steer the design of the festival program. We had noticed that people's dancing was all over the place, they were unused to it; after personal hygiene and cutting out alcohol, now we would tackle the cultural aspect. I was hurt by the reaction to the festival of the Caldoches, who threw up their hands at 'yet another islander show', when it was such a fabulous event for the country — a gate of 50,000! But Caledonians weren't there; everyone but them ... Kanaks, metropolitan French but not the Caldoches. We had gambled that if people could feel better about themselves, they would be better equipped for the struggle, and we were vindicated.

The Union Calédonienne was against the idea of the festival. By then, I was already a member of UC, and we were insulted by our own people. However, we were supported by Roch Pidjot. What the people of UC found hard to live with was that it was funded by the Whites. They said: 'It's just bread and circuses for Kanaks so that they will forget their problems'. It was the first time in the country's history that there was a demand for such large funding (50,000,000 Pacific francs) for a Melanesian project. They sneered at us as Uncle Toms. It was 1975.

At the end of 1976, we started talking about the municipal elections for 1977 in Hienghène. At our feast to celebrate the successful yam harvest, a speech was made urging me to run for mayor. They didn't want UC, whose Hienghène branch was run by Bob Alquier, the grocer, who was a loser. Maurice Lenormand's circle were wealthy business people, and this didn't do anything for the tribes, only the Europeans. Whence the idea of setting up the Maxha movement, maxha meaning to raise your head, as in the revolutionary act of the slave. We ran a good campaign and won eight places to UC's five and the six of de Villelongue, the outgoing mayor. Hienghène was a catastrophe for them and they shared their misery. All the Whites came to the first Town Council meeting to see if we were capable of preparing a budget; this was March 1977. There were some calls for my expulsion from UC, but things calmed down.

I took part in the Bourail Congress in May 1977. That was where we came out in favour of independence. This led to a flood of resignations — one every day. All the Whites packed up and left. At the
close of the Congress, at night, I was going to get my car to leave and I put Pierre Declercq forward as Secretary General. I was called back urgently because they didn’t have enough people to form the political bureau. I was nominated as Vice-President with Roch Pidjot as President. We were now part of the machine, along with Eloi Machoro, Yeiwéné Yeiwéné and François Burck. That year, there were also elections for the Territorial Assembly, then fresh ones in 1979. In 1979, we decided on the creation of the Independentist Front and we also attended the South Pacific Forum — we hung around the corridors but without great success.

In our Hienghène municipality, we used the council trucks as a school bus. Previously there was only a school bus service for the public school, which meant only for the Whites. So we used the Council truck to take children to the church schools. We organised fetes. Then began the land claims. This was one of the strong points of UC. Still in 1979, we organised the Ouerap Congress, near Hienghène; the issue which upset the settlers was that of land claims, they felt more and more under siege. We had all agreed the whole country would be claimed but strategically, as a means of building popular support, we started with clan-based land claims.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou concludes his narrative by recalling the Hienghène massacre and previous conflicts with the settlers in the valley.

In November 1984, we had been threatened in Nouméa and two attempts were made to intimidate me: on the 18th, a grenade exploded under our house, in the garage; a stick of dynamite was thrown but it landed in a tree: if instead of hitting the trees, it had hit a window where the children were watching TV … I did not go to Hienghène on 4 December, the day of the ambush at Hienghène, because Edgard Pisani and Christian Blanc were arriving — but I had planned to go there with the children and I had stated this on the phone. The roadblocks had been lifted, as RFO had announced they would be.

[...]
After we had reclaimed the land at Hienghène, the settlers continued to let their horses loose on it. They would come and tie up their horses near my place but not very tightly, so that when the horses were thirsty they would pull up the stakes to which they were attached. That was the horses of Raoul Lapetite, of his sons, of Raymond Franceschini and Garnier as well, I believe. My brother Louis asked them to round up their horses and eventually he brought them back to the tribe. Loulou went down with the tribal police to warn the gendarmes that he had impounded the horses as strays that were causing damage; we didn’t want these people to continue behaving like this, as if they were still in the darkest days of colonisation. He told them they had to come and pay 200 CFP per horse to get them back. They came one after the other. To each, Loulou explained that we didn’t want things to be done as they were in the time of our fathers. This was before 1980, around 1978. Old Raymond Franceschini who had a bit of a heart problem had even asked for a chair to sit down because it was too hard for him to hear such things; after this episode Garnier began threatening people. He was looking after the Picard property, he had fired shots and put out bits of poisoned meat for our dogs. My brother took Garnier to court and it was from this point — at the same time as land claims — that everything went sour. It was the period when our people began to believe that we would get lands back in the valley, with the elders saying ‘that is so and so’s land, this belonged to such and such a clan’. They were threatened by Garnier and Mitride.

I say all this to so you can understand the circumstances which led to the slaughter and the death of my brothers.

1 This account was taken down in May 1988 by Lionel Duroy and transcribed by him. He undertook a long investigation in New Caledonia at that time in preparation for his work *Hienghène, le désespoir calédonien*, Paris, Barrault, 1989.

2 Jean-Marie Tjibaou returned to his tribe at the age of 20, after more than 10 years away.

3 Pierre Métais, a student of Maurice Leenhardt, became a professor of ethnology at Bordeaux (*Editors’ note*).
At Lyon, Jean-Marie Tjibaou was to encounter Gérard Leymang, among others, who was to become the last Prime Minister of the New Hebrides before independence in 1980 (Editors' note).
PART FIVE

Opening the Way
(June 1988–May 1989)

THE LAST YEAR in the life of Jean-Marie Tjibaou was completely dominated by the Matignon Accords, signed on 26 June 1988, and their consequences. While economic and institutional rebalancing in the Kanaks’ favour — a new version of the Fabius/Pisani plan of 1985 — was contested by no-one, the reduction in the numbers of residents of New Caledonia entitled to vote, with a view to the eventual emergence of a majority for independence, remained one of the stumbling blocks between the FLNKS and the French Government. On this strictly political point, of vital importance because its resolution would be the key to the self-determination referendum scheduled for 1998, he was by turns vigilant and acerbic. For him, it is true, it was essential that the Matignon Accords not be considered an end in themselves but as a stage, and that the French Government be constantly challenged to improve it’s often deficient capacities in the business of decolonisation.

Debate on the contradictions between the colonial situation and democracy notwithstanding, Jean-Marie Tjibaou was open to dialogue, as we shall see as we go through the texts that follow. Reviving the hopes for reciprocal recognition between his people and the other communities of New Caledonia, he set out on that Kanak humanist path which was so dear to him. In these pages, the
FLNKS President continues his search for a model of economic, social and cultural development that would withstand the most fragmenting forms of modernity. Always both generous and pragmatic, Jean-Marie Tjibaou saw his intellect and his action as being at the service not only of his own people but also of the whole country and indeed of the world beyond it.
The Matignon Accords were signed on 26 June 1988. In an interview with Libération several days later, Jean-Marie Tjibaou stressed that the Accords came through compromise and would need a lot of explaining. For the first time, one of the basic Kanak demands had been taken into account by the French State. The constitutional principle of ‘one man, one vote’ was stretched in the Accords to allow restriction of the electoral corps in the scheduled referendum on self-determination of 1998. This exceptional measure had to be approved by the French people in order to become irreversible.

LIBÉRATION — What is your analysis of the document signed yesterday?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Overall, I think it is balanced, but a difficult balance, because neither party gets entirely what it was seeking. The text itself in the form presented to the media satisfies neither us nor the RPCR. But it is of a sufficiently legal nature to fit the realities of the situation, take account of the positions of each side and commit the Government.

L. — Which aspects are you least happy with, and which will be the most difficult to get the FLNKS as a whole to accept?

J.-M. T. — In 1983, at Nainville-les-Roches, we fought for recognition of the fait colonial and for the ‘innate and active right to
independence’. We also allowed for the ‘victims of history’ to participate in decolonisation and hence in the act of self-determination. This means the right to vote for all those 18 years and older, with one parent or more born in the Territory. What is put forward today by the Government is not the same thing, and we will find it difficult to back. As yet, we haven’t done any calculations, but on the face of it we would not gain a majority, electorally. Technically, if there were to be a vote in 1992 as we had sought, then we would win a vote for independence with this electorate. This is a bit of a personal problem between me and the movement. But if you take demographic evolution into account, and if only those eligible to vote in the national referendum were to vote in 10 years’ time, then we know that Kanaks would comprise 50 per cent of the total.

L. — *In terms of population but not of voters?*

J.-M. T. — Effectively yes, but if the arrival of foreigners is brought to a halt then the problem is different. (Foreigners would only be stopped in terms of the electoral roll, because we will be needing specialists to provide the country with the necessary economic expertise.) Politically, the issue then is that all must agree that Melanesians would have an absolute majority — and with this in mind, it would then be up to each side to garner maximum support for their cause. The new element would be the support of everyone for this goal. The undertaking given by Jacques Lafleur is to bequeath to his children a future in their country, but also the country in which Kanaks have the majority. In other words, a future with us. This is not written anywhere in the text, but it is the most significant meaning of the documents that have been put before us. In front of the Prime Minister, Jacques Lafleur requested further meetings in New Caledonia to expand on it.

The anti-independence side accepts now that three-quarters of infrastructure funding will go to development of the interior; the fact that operating budgets are planned to be used for this type of rebalancing will make it possible for us to increase our support among Europeans. There is no future here anymore for Europeans who don’t want to be part of this process. Once and for all, people must commit
themselves to the construction of this country. That is the most positive thing I have gained from these talks.

L. — The document that you have signed says that the two sides undertake to win the support of their grassroots …

J.-M. T. — … for those proposals that have been put into law by the State. It is the State's responsibility to propose bills and institutions and to get them passed through Parliament, but for the two parties concerned [the RPCR and the FLNKS], it is better if there is at least a minimum of agreement. We can say at the moment that there is not a minimum of disagreement (laughter). We hope there won't be more disagreement, on either side, or outright rejection, but rather a desire to build a lasting future.

L. — Do you think the new provinces — Northern, Southern and Loyalty Islands — are starting with equal economic chances?

J.-M. T. — No, the three regions do not have the same opportunities. There is a desire to create the conditions so that all will have the same chances in the vote for self-determination, even with an advantage in principle for Melanesians. The stage has been set for us to give up making war. But I want to emphasise that all this has not been achieved without pain. There are those killed in 1984, in 1985 and in Ouvéa. What still exists, most importantly of all, is the risk of racial hatred …

L. — Does the national referendum provide the institutional guarantee that you wanted?

J.-M. T. — Yes, on condition that the parliamentary parties don't reject it, and also on condition that the whole nation commits itself by turning out to vote. People must realise that next year they will celebrate the bicentenary of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the people must support this process through voting, so that there will never be anyone fool enough to try to have this agreement overturned. The electorate set for the 1998 vote is not constitu-
tional, it has to become constitutional through a majority voting yes to it. Once the whole nation votes for it, it would take another referendum to change it. If the electors vote badly, they will have it on their conscience ... 

1 _Libération_, 28 June 1988 — interview by Frédéric Filloux and Marc Kravetz.
CHAPTER 29

Accords and Disaccords

One month after the signing of the Matignon Accords, Jean-Marie Tjibaou sketches the political situation for an Australian political scientist. While Tjibaou sees promising economic progress, the political gains for the demands of the FLNKS, which it has just reaffirmed, remain slender. To keep the focus on the goal of independence, the FLNKS needs to be firm in the negotiations for the accompanying measures on the reshaping of the Caledonian electorate. In this interview, the FLNKS President looks at the Matignon Accords as a process that should result in the decolonisation of New Caledonia.

STEPHEN HENNINGHAM — The situation is a bit uncertain at the moment …

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Yes, it is a bit uncertain, but we are trying to move in specific ways towards getting back to work. Today, we have reached agreement on the issue of direct administration, now that executive authority has been assumed by the High Commissioner. It is not good in theory, but in practice it is useful because we have been calling on the French State to be more involved. The concept of ‘the impartial State’ means that the French Republic, which is responsible for colonisation, commits itself to decolonise and put the State apparatus at the service of everyone; in other words, that there will be progress in terms of justice, the economy, of sharing the resources of the Territory. It is up
Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanaky

to the State to break the colonial mindset so that society can progress towards power sharing; this means an initial inequality in the distribution of funding for infrastructure and for training. This is essential if there is to be rebalancing and to provide the same opportunities for all the inhabitants of the Territory. But we are not economists, we are seekers of independence; if we’ve accepted this instrument, it is to help stabilise the situation, so that infrastructure can be built, cadres can be trained and we can reach a viable independence.

S. H. — This is the approach you had taken previously in relation to the Fabius/Pisani plan?

J.-M. T. — The parameters are not quite the same. As a precondition, we need a revision of the electoral roll, which in its current state gives our movement no chance of victory at the polls. As planned by Mr Rocard, the electoral roll leaves us 17,000 votes short and these 17,000 are Southern Province votes. Our position is that the right to vote in the referendum on self-determination should be restricted to those who are born in the Territory: this is our principal demand. As a member of USTKE put it yesterday, we are prepared to take part, but only in a fair fight — one where the contestants are evenly matched. Mr Lafleur is in a position to buy everything he wants and that is why we need to be able to trade directly with the other Pacific States and to be capable of providing jobs for the people in the provinces. If we can provide employment, we can also see people getting behind the independence goal.

S. H. — How have the FLNKS militants reacted to the Matignon Accords?

J.-M. T. — We have studied the document and its major points that relate to our demand for independence, focusing on the most important elements of the new statute-drawing of electoral boundaries, the electorate and the ‘ten years’. It was rejected outright by all parties, based on the charter of the FLNKS, which is what makes it an independence movement. In strict conformity with our principles, it was considered and rejected. However, this motion maintains the
consensus on how we determine short-term strategy; adhering to our principles, we oppose and reject the Rocard statute, but strategically, with a view to achieving independence, we say: ‘This isn’t the statute we want, but accompanying measures can be proposed or accepted.’ The one measure that is non-negotiable is electoral reform. We are adamant that there has to be something substantial on this. Where the 10-year timetable is concerned, we are well aware that many things can happen in this length of time. How are the FLNKS, the RPCR and the State going to be involved? We can accept the 10-year duration so long as the Government introduces measures of decolonisation. So we are calling for an evaluation to be carried out before the end of the first legislature — late 1992 or early 1993 — and before the next legislative elections. Our future attitude, our support or opposition, will be determined by the results of these elections. But if you are writing all this, it mustn’t come out this year! Only next year (laughs).

S. H. — But the FLNKS membership have been told they have to wait and see…

J.-M. T. — No, we have put forward a series of proposals. At our Union Calédonienne meeting, we agreed that we could start work on the 10-year question for example but clear guarantees had to be obtained for the question of the electorate. We have insisted on having accompanying measures that permit real sharing of economic power. Specifically, these cover foreign trade, training and also media and communications; we want quotas for television, radio and the public service because we comprise almost 50 per cent of the population now. We will judge the Government on the policies it puts in place to achieve this. We want at least 25 per cent shares in new mining companies — the only sector that is profitable — to be reserved for Kanaks. One would think increasing the capital of the companies would allow us to have shares.

We can only talk about sharing power if we are truly part of the economy. And it is the State that is in charge; it must get on with it and we will see by 1992 what has been achieved. Where electoral redistribution is concerned, we have called for what I would term
'side measures'. The people of the same cultural region must be able to work together and there must be faster, better equipped communications. People need to be able to get together in a half hour or so, rather than spending hours crossing the central mountain chain. This means investment in infrastructure; tar sealed roads, tunnels, etc. We are calling for other measures such as guarantees of employment in the resources sector, and especially in the hotel industry. If peace is restored, tourism will pick up at once. We will for example ask Club Méditerranée to form joint ventures with us, so that tourists can come to the bush. That means the Government would have to guarantee loans for tourist establishments to be built at Ouvéa, Hienghène, Canala, etc.

S. H. — How do you explain the current policy of Yann Célené Urégei's FULK, which is highly critical of the Matignon Accords?

J.-M. T. — They have nowhere to go. If they reject the Matignon Accords, what will they do? We say to them: ‘Choose leaders to reopen negotiations with the Government.’ To renegotiate, you have to be in a position of strength on the ground. Independence next year? France would have to be in a position of weakness to accept that. We’re in negotiations with them at the moment because of Rocard, but as for afterwards ... who can tell? So, for the time being we are standing back and waiting. We have had many deaths, many families plunged into mourning because of our commitment on the ground. We need breathing space.

S. H. — It seems there is growing opposition to Mr Lafleur within the RPCR. On top of that he is said to be quite sick.

J.-M. T. — Yes, but he is still very influential and he has financial means which reinforce his authority. Some joke that you can always count on Caldoche unanimity since those who dare to oppose Lafleur find their credit and their markets cut off.

S. H. — It could be said, however, that the RPCR has slid towards the centre ...
J.-M. T. — That’s no accident. They had gambled everything on Jacques Chirac winning. If Jacques Chirac had won …

S. H. — Are you optimistic for what follows?

J.-M. T. — Objectively, yes. But not passionately! (laughs)
CHAPTER 30
A Gamble that Reason Will Prevail

Jean-Marie Tjibaou uses this television interview to make his first address in a very long time to all Caledonians. His aim is to explain the logic behind the Matignon Accords as he sees it, as the French are to vote on a referendum on the Matignon Accords barely two months later. Obviously, the Kanak leader is beginning the ‘yes’ campaign. To this end, he takes as soothing a line as he can, addressing himself as much to disenchanted FLNKS militants as to sceptical anti-independentists. As we’ve seen in previous examples, as soon as the political temperature drops, Jean-Marie Tjibaou returns to questions of an anthropological nature about the place of Kanak culture in the modern world.

WALLÉS KOTRA — How significant was your handshake with Jacques Lafleur?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — It’s just as difficult for Jacques Lafleur to live with this handshake as for me. After the painful troubles suffered by our country, it was hard to imagine that one day we could consider taking the same path for a bit, consider a common future. This gesture has been criticised and repudiated on one side and the other, but for many it signalled hope. I think it is important for the future.

W. K. — How have the four months been since that handshake?
J.-M. T. — Crucial, with commercial salesmen, tourists coming and going on all the roads of the Territory. In the streets and shops, people don’t look at each other with the hostility of four months ago. There are meetings being held all the time, public meetings, Assembly committees … this is all part of the rules of this new stage and it shows New Caledonia has moved on from what it was six months ago. Sure, there are lots of promises, lots of hopes and also a lot to get done. For the moment, we’re just at the stage of drafting the work plans.

W. K. — Coming back to the past for a moment, could we have avoided all this violence, with 100 dead and many lives destroyed?

J.-M. T. — You know, it could have been said, back in 1789 — the time of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen — that millions of human lives could have been spared. But maybe it needed the sacrifice of so many people for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to come about in France.

The future can’t be other than what it is, at least for those of us who have lived through these events, who are living here and now. Suffering and sacrifice on both sides have perhaps opened many eyes. The pain and horror have made people ask themselves: why did we have all that, all these troubles, why all these deaths? The events at Ouvéa\(^2\) gave the French a terrible fright. The massacre at Hienghène\(^3\) and the ensuing display of justice [an allusion to the acquittal of the murderers], the amnesty which was to follow the Ouvéa drama oblige all who lived through these traumas to ask themselves, why did all this happen? If this path was taken by the FLNKS, it was to say: ‘Stop denying what we are! Stop colonising us!’

The impartial State has to get to work in our country, in the judicial system, in education, everywhere; whatever the colour of our skin, we should all be seen quite simply as members of the human race. Thanks to these troubles, we can’t regard each other the same way any more — that is changing, painfully, but it is changing nonetheless.

W. K. — Will you take up Jacques Lafleur’s suggestion of a joint tour to promote the Matignon Accords?
J.-M. T. — That depends on where! But his intentions are good and possibly it could happen, because the referendum is important for us: important for making the Accords irreversible, to give us time to work to ensure the Accords are not just with a party in the National Assembly or a government but rather endorsed by the whole nation. That is why we need to be able to speak to everyone everywhere, here, tonight. I took on board what the Deputy Lafleur said that I can address his constituents just as he can address those who support me, and I think it important that this exchange take place, but it remains to be seen under what conditions.

W. K. — Quite. You are flying to Paris tomorrow to explain the referendum. Will you meet Opposition leaders?

J.-M. T. — I don’t know yet. There have been lots of phone calls and appointments. I have meetings arranged with government people to discuss the economic follow-up to the Accords, and also I’ll make a point of seeing the support groups to ask them to get behind the referendum which is to take place.

W. K. — One last question on the Matignon Accords: what if, at the end of the 10 years, you are the loser?

J.-M. T. — I always leave the starting blocks a winner. Each side takes a punt that he can persuade people that he is the best, that what he is offering could turn into durable institutions for the country. To achieve this, we will be working together in the coming years to get institutions set up. Instilling confidence is more important than institution-building in this case, because the latter will happen in any case at the end of the 10 years.

The Matignon Accords don’t mean that we change what we each stand for — I represent the independentist movement and Jacques Lafleur those who want to remain with the Republic. The Matignon Accords don’t change any of this.

W. K. — Two short questions before moving on. The Canala refugees are still here. How do you feel about that problem and what can you do to settle it?
J.-M. T. — It is a painful problem, like Ouvéa. The people of Lifou have suffered the same problem. Where the people of Canala are concerned, some have come back; there are those whose children’s schooling for the rest of the year is a problem, but I'd say by year's end the issue should be resolved. In any event, those I represent in Canala, Union Calédonienne members, have no objection to those people returning to their homes.

W. K. — Are you prepared to go and tell them that yourself?

J.-M. T. — The difficulty is what I represent. There are also personal issues, as in Ouvéa, between people who have hurt each other. Signing the Matignon Accords doesn’t rebuild houses, doesn’t heal wounds. That takes time. Where we are concerned, we're trying to make an effort so that people can fit back in.

W. K. — Your party, Union Calédonienne, was formed under the banner ‘Two colours, one people’. Has that changed?

J.-M. T. — At the beginning, there were mostly Whites and Blacks, now it’s multi-coloured and it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep that motto. Our goal is more political now — to build an independent country that can hang together, look after itself, is self-sufficient, has the means to achieve its ambitions and is respected in the region. For us, country is sharing; a country where there aren't some with food on their table while others die of hunger. Our customary etiquette is that you don’t eat with your back turned; if you have a good meal prepared and there is someone around, then you should share the meal. You can't enjoy eating alone. Our banners say ‘Kanak Socialist Independence’: Kanak means the people, socialist means refusing to have the country's resources in the hands of only a few and being exploited only for the profit of those few. The country's resources should be developed for its benefit, for the benefit of the greatest number.

W. K. — As FLNKS President, do you find the constant criticism in party conventions and congresses upsetting?
J.-M. T. — It's the lot of every leader to be criticised — it's a healthy sign. If they are no longer listening and have shut themselves up in towers remote not only from the noise of the crowd but also from the anguish, the cries and tears of the people they claim to represent, then such leaders won't pick up hints of trouble, and they are stuffed.

W. K. — *What are UC's ideas in the current debate about restructuring the FLNKS?*

J.-M. T. — *Union Calédonienne* has proposed a way of improving representation for each group; but this doesn't mean much when your working method is to try and achieve consensus. If you want consensus then questions of majority/minority don't mean much. So it's a matter of ongoing debate.

W. K. — *I would like to know what you think of the EPK, the Kanak people's schools?*

J.-M. T. — The EPK are an attempt to respond to the marginalisation that comes from just being Kanak, so the cultural component is the main one. We are the Kanaks not because we are coloured — there are other men and women of colour in New Caledonia and throughout the world. What makes us what we are is the fact that we belong to a land. Our culture is anchored in that and it makes us the way we are today. The way this is expressed can change according to the times and the environment, but the fundamentals, our take on what it is to be human, our place in space, the cosmos and the world, all this remains the same. In the past, we used only traditional Kanak 'money' to 'make custom'. Nowadays, we add pieces of cloth and cash, but the speech has not changed. The philosophical underpinning has not changed. It's fundamental, it has not changed and I think it will stay that way always.

W. K. — *What do you see as the economic priorities for the Territory?*

J.-M. T. — A precondition for signing these Accords was political commitment from the State, accompanied by a mutual commitment
between the RPCR and us, the FLNKS. Next, we insisted that economic policies aimed at rebalancing the Territory be adopted. Rebalancing the educational infrastructure so that over the Accord’s 10 years the pre-schoolers of Hienghène, of Ouégoa or any part of the bush, should have the same opportunities as those from Vallée du Tir or the Latin Quarter [two Nouméa suburbs] to get into Year Six. Then we can talk about equal opportunity. This means roads, qualified teachers, that is, investment in teacher training and housing for teachers. Health and electricity infrastructure: in every country in the world, but especially in the Third World, those who are at the end of the service chain for manufactured goods pay the most for them. On the other hand, as primary producers, they sell at the lowest price. Our country is small, and within 10 years we want to see rebalancing bring changes in infrastructure, in health facilities, in education, culture and development.

W. K. — What are your thoughts on how to deal in practical terms with the problem of integrating Melanesians into the economy, into business?

J.-M. T. — This is the most important gamble that our people are currently taking. It raises enormous difficulties: we — Melanesians on the fringes of the economy — are taking the risk of trying to be involved, of using the economic machinery as a weapon in the fight to win leadership positions and to gain independence. It’s an extraordinary gamble because our people have always seen the economy as one of the means of alienation used by the Administration, the judicial system, in the arsenal of State apparatus that marginalises and alienates us. It is against this arsenal that we have taken sometimes strong action, in order to make ourselves heard. Now, taking this gamble assumes the training of cadres, which is not an easy task when we don’t have the same opportunities to get into Year Six, to gain industrial, craft, managerial or marketing knowhow. To acquire all that is a huge task, one that implies a sharing of responsibilities. Mr Jacques Lafleur has said: ‘We need to be able to share and perhaps to forgive.’ That will just be a pious wish unless there is a commitment, an understanding of the serious deprivation and inequality in human terms. A willingness to share is needed — to
share economic power, knowhow, business management. Such an option would mean opening company boards to people not used to being on them, who need to be shown the way in. Unless we share the present, sharing the future will be just a forlorn hope.

W. K. — Do you have any guarantees in this area?

J.-M. T. — Guarantees don’t come out of the blue for anyone. It is we as a group who will give the guarantee. It is crucial, for example, that people who can work a mine be allowed a share of the freight business as well as power in the boardrooms. People must be able to learn management and thus learn to share in the day to day running. It’s all very nice to share speeches and meetings, but the real world is earning a crust and the crust is the country’s resources and knowhow, and also ambitions and future projects, like more tourism, developing the cultural sector, etc.

It is my wish that people will start thinking independence and thinking Kanaky: a country in which they have a stake, feeling nationalism about that country and keen to produce — whether a craft, a coffee product, a shell souvenir, whatever, but a product ‘made in’ the country they want to make, to promote, and which draws together the energy of all the people who want to live in this country forever. ‘Sharing the present’, but the present is accepting one another, accepting that we are of different cultures and promoting these different cultures at school as well as in cultural events.

It is necessary also for tradesmen, shopkeepers and businessmen to invest in the bush: the more they do so, the richer Nouméa will become. We took the risk of going first to Matignon and then Rue Oudinot because we hoped to see people committing to each other with mutual respect and each knowing that nothing comes on a platter. We don’t want handouts from anyone. We ask to be treated with respect. We want to begin work on the future for everyone, and to do so conscious of the riches and shortcomings which exist on both sides, so that we can succeed together to the point that people give thanks to heaven for the sun and the sea. Their nationality doesn’t matter: they can stay Chinese or stay French; if the country becomes independent — which in any case is what I wish for —
then let everyone stay and keep working together to make this a
dream country, because it is the most beautiful, the most developed
and the most attractive in the Pacific.

W. K. — Do you think the Melanesian world should reform so as to better
face up to economic risk? For example, a very precise problem: the status
of land, do the land laws need revision? How do you feel about the talk of
introducing private property in the reserves?

J.-M. T. — There are no magic solutions. My feeling is that we
should evolve with what we are; Kanaks can't shake off their culture
just to please whomever. They have evolved with it through time,
because that is how they are. As to the land, I would say that the
notion of land is part of our personality; you can't just ignore the
notion of land, and you can't ignore the modern concept of land as
capital, of land as something to be promoted, something to be
brought to a business relationship, or into the capital holdings of a
company. So it's essential, I think — and this is in the Matignon
Accords — that responsibility for land, in terms of the underlying
principles, should stay in the hands of the State.

There are countries like Fiji and New Zealand where the system
of land development is evolving but I think the important thing is to
get people interested and get them involved in the economy as they
are. Once the principles are clear, and also the way the land is to be
used is spelled out, then all that's left is to motivate people, to get
people involved and get them involved in a business venture
knowing full well that choosing one path will produce dividends
while choosing another will produce nothing to be shared. Once
people know the rules of the game, they can get moving, but there
has to be the political will.

W. K. — You've talked about politics and economics but what place does
culture have in your political thinking?

J.-M. T. — Deep down, our claim, linked with our demand for
independence, flows from a fear of being absorbed into the wider
world, of losing what it is that makes us the inhabitants of this
particular part of the planet Earth. Kanaks say man is both flesh and blood and personality. The blood is given to us by maternal uncles and that is why we make custom to give thanks. In my case, I am Tjibaou, but from a certain clan. The name gives me a social position, the right to a particular piece of land, a space which also carries social significance. It’s our belief, our way of seeing the world.

Beyond, there are the ancestors — there on the other side of the mirror, reflecting ourselves back to us. But this world of people present and people present-absent, whom we can’t see, is one single world. There is no way of demonstrating that this belief system is more false than any other. It is what inspires us, it affirms us as the people of this particular place.

What are our basic claims? Acknowledgement of all this, in an all-encompassing form that includes the basic demand for independence and for recognition of our identity, in its fullest expression. All this hangs together. For me, culture is vital; it gives existence its savour. You can create the most efficient economic systems in the world but we aren’t robots who can truly live in these systems. There is a human dimension to our existence that means even in the most modern, most luxurious, most satisfying comfort, we are still a collection of needs and transcendence, always wanting to be better, whether it’s something more or something different; this is what culture does ... So that is why I said earlier that whatever the situation of Melanesians today or in the future, it is the same for everyone; I am thinking of Europe in 1993, which will be terrific! But everyone will feel the need to rediscover his national identity so as not to be lost in this universe of 300,000,000.

(Wallès Kotra shows a video clip of an Aboriginal rock group, ‘Coloured Stone’, whose entirely modern music is of traditional origin.)

W. K. — How do you react to this?

J.-M. T. — I think it’s terrific because what is important is the meaning each individual or group gives to his existence, but ways of expressing this change with time and the environment. In our
culture, there are the traditional ‘Aé Aé’ and they are evolving too: they have been sung at times of great sadness and suffering of our people but perhaps they are going to start being sung about modern life, of life today, in the city. I notice some groups are doing this already. They always speak with the same honesty about existence, the same experience of life of our people but with the modes of expression and the instruments of their time.

W. K. — Can one be Melanesian in the city?

J.-M. T. — Custom occurs everywhere, even in apartment blocks — because you die in town, too, and we look after the corpses as well as the spirits when we are in the city. The aspect of existence which is our sense of ourselves — but which is the Kanak experience of this part of the species (a small drop in the whole of humanity) is part of the heritage of humanity and there is room for it in the city. The problem is we need to be better at making space for cultural life, so that we can breathe, so that cultural expression isn’t tucked away in some miserable corner, so that there is space for cultural life and I am thinking of deaths and marriages, for example.

W. K. — A last question on culture — what place does Melanesia 2000 have in your life?

J.-M. T. — Mélanésia 2000 was a tremendous experience because this was the first time that 2000 Kanaks had got together in Nouméa to declare together that they aren’t just the vestiges of a race on the edge of extinction, but that they are as large as life, wanting to shape the future, to take part by contributing their knowledge to modern life.

W. K. — Can you talk about your tribe, Tiendanite? What has it given you?

J.-M. T. — To me, the tribe of Tiendanite is basically the feeling of bonds with others; you don’t carry plates behind people’s backs, you stoop when walking in front of the elders, you don’t speak loudly
when so and so is there, you are respectful. Above all, it is the feeling of respect for others, but there is too the sad memory of what this tribe has witnessed through the last 50 years. In 1917, the village was burned down and my grandmother was killed. There were the recent events of 1984. It’s as if the land sticks to your skin and makes you one of its own, and only its own. As well, there is the pleasure of being with people who are anonymous except in our place and whose only pretension is just to be one of us, which comes out when there is custom. Everyone comes, gives and receives. That’s what is sacred.

W. K. — Where does your family stand in your political activity?

J.-M. T. — My family is somewhat hostage to my public life, because I blow in and out. My mother’s uncles, the uncles of my village — I would say that my family is pretty well the purpose of my life, but it is my family I am trying to serve along with all the others. In other words, trying to do everything, and I hope I succeed, so that people will be happy with me, and above all happier than I.

W. K. — When you look back on your political life — your speeches, your achievements, your plans — what are the essential things? What is it that really motivates you?

J.-M. T. — It is above all the hope that the people of our country might perhaps have greater well-being, better lives, and I should say to be able to die one day peacefully and joyfully. This is what keeps you battling away every day, you keep at it all the time in the hope that one day people will give you a smile because you have helped them to have a better life than they had hoped for.

W. K. — Have the Matignon Accords at last reached Tiendanite?

J.-M. T. — It’s still a long road to Tiendanite, but I hope that one day there will be more children at home getting the benefit of what I have just talked about; that is, better chances of getting into high school, and in the short term, that those who are enterprising might
get some advice and knowhow from the Nouméa people, so that one
day they can produce the wealth that will make them self-sufficient.
That they might themselves produce what they need and provide for
the well-being of their families.

1 Interview with the journalist Wallès Kotra on RFO (Radio France Outre-Mer — Radio
2 Twenty-five deaths in all: 19 Kanak independentists and six French soldiers (April/May
1988) (Editors’ note).
3 During the night of 4/5 December 1984, 10 independentists were killed (including two
of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s brothers) (Editors’ note).
4 These are the Melanesian anti-independentists who were expelled from the region by
FLNKS militants and who took refuge at the time in Nouméa (Editors’ note).
The campaign for the referendum of 6 November 1988 led the President of the FLNKS to address a number of meetings to explain the Matignon Accords. After recounting the history of relations between the Kanak people and the Europeans who settled in New Caledonia, Jean-Marie Tjibaou here puts the case that the Accords can offer the parties until then in conflict a final chance at mutual recognition and respect. Pursuing that idea, he sketches the outlines of a renewed Caledonia where everyone has their place and can contribute to building a national identity which is open to the world.

GOOD EVENING AND thank you for coming. I don’t know if you’ll agree with what I have to say or not, but your presence tonight makes a difference to us. We are very grateful to this committee and its members; we are aware of the circumstances in which it was established and what it has achieved. We have been through times that were very difficult and painful to experience on our own and it helped us to know there were French people at our side. I’m here on this occasion because of the referendum, to again seek your support; we need it if this peace-building attempt in our country is to have a real chance. The peace is fragile but it is the first time in our history that we’ve tried this kind of approach.

Right at the beginning, before colonisation, missionaries etc., there was James Cook. The French arrived later but Cook had already christened the country New Caledonia in memory of
Scotland. It was with the annexation of the archipelago by France in 1853 that the country was officially named. Cook reported that the first contacts were friendly and respect was evident between the two peoples. I think that makes sense: a small group landing among a much larger population, the balance of strength being unequal, would show respect. The goals of Cook’s voyages — science and exploration — were also a factor. Then, in the middle of the 19th century, came the time of the most severe colonisation. At the time of the sandalwood traders and coastal traders, relations were not too bad. Problems began from the moment the French colonial administration started taking land away. And when the Kanaks did not agree, they went to the gendarmes; but they were the ones who were prosecuted. This way of dispensing justice was to prevail right up until the Matignon Accords.

The colonial structure still exists today, but people can see it for what it is. The media make it easier for us to denounce what is going on. This is not the first time we have reacted and risen in revolt. The Kanak people’s most important date is the insurrection of 1878, because we have an account of it. Ataï had tried to negotiate, without success. Louise Michel and many others tried to intervene so that the abuses did not go so far that it was difficult to stop. The administrative structure was imposed to colonise, for the colons. The White people brought judges in for themselves but not for Kanaks. The teachers were also brought in for them only. That is why Kanak children were not entitled to go to school until the ’50s. That’s why there’s such a huge educational gap today.

I’m telling you this to remind you that there are attitudes and mentalities that have been around for a very long time, in which people move like fish in an aquarium. I know people who came back from visits to Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, saying, ‘over there, conditions were the same, we were the men. The others were Kanaks, wogs’, that is, not men. Consequently, civil institutions, culture and education were set up for ‘men’. The others remained on the outside. Trade and commerce were the prerogative of the civilised, of people who knew how to eat at table, how to behave correctly. Kanak women were the first to go into White houses — as cleaners — and they began to see how Whites lived and occasionally
to share their meals. This is recent, but I’m trying to show you how far we have come to get to the Matignon Accords. For example, the people who did the killing at Hienghène: they might as well have been awarded the Légion d’Honneur for having carried out such a mission against the ‘terrorists’ who threatened their ‘civilisation’.

There are many colons who have never known any cultural environment other than their own; many Caldoches who never had the chance that I had to study at Lyon and to visit France. For these people, their only world was their cattle station and its surroundings; their world was turned upside down when Kanaks started to use words like ‘independence’, ‘restitution of sovereignty’ and ‘return of land’. I don’t want to excuse my brothers’ murderers, but I must simply say that we can’t cast the first stone at them, because to them the Kanak claim meant the end of the world as they knew it, threatening their life’s work and, perhaps, threatening what they are ... who they are! Now, perhaps, we’re starting to think differently about each other ... But just as they considered us contemptible, so we thought the same of them — especially after you metropolitans started arriving. Conflict with Caldoches worsened with the late 1960s nickel boom that brought an influx of so many métros or zoreilles, as we call them. Why did conflict worsen? Because they had to hold their own with you. At the hotel where we’re with mayors and Kanak deputies, there are two Caldoches who try to identify with us by using swear words in our language ... home town stuff! It’s ‘we’ here, but at home they don’t want to know us. But this is a way of trying to find something to identify with. They reject you, they reject us and in the end they don’t belong anywhere. The poor souls! — culturally impoverished. I understand the abyss which opened under them when you real French turned up! You represent France! You represent the French, you represent what is authentic. And we’re something different.

I try to understand the behaviour of Caldoches today, but for some it dates from way back, from 1975 when we staged the Mélanésia 2000 festival. Much later on, there were two or three Caldoches who worked with us as we tried to organise Caledonia 2000 (planned for December 1984 then cancelled). At that time, we were able to go into things in depth: some Caldoches began to
acknowledge that they were descendents of convicts, something which had been a taboo until then. Kanaks talked more openly about land claims, explaining its significance as the land of our fathers and our homeland, indeed the only homeland for us, who don’t have any other. There is fundamental insecurity when it is so difficult to come to an understanding between people [the Kanaks] who have a culture, a frame of reference, roots, and people who think they represent France.

Today, I note that many poorer Caldoches say that they are treated as rejects in the New Caledonian economy! The violence of these lost people is appalling and it is appalling because they have lived in ghettos. They don’t know anything else and they find themselves in a situation where they are rejected and outcast. Yet some have gone through the process of recognising where they come from — and that’s a big step. But then problems arose as they were faced with Kanak political claims and the indifference of the 1981 French Socialist government; problems which could only be solved by violence. We lived through that violence and it was we who started the ‘actions’. I do not claim it is a good thing to have been the cause of suffering, but I am saying we turned to this in a bid to have our case heard.

All this is by way of explaining that what we have is a culture clash. You can’t expect understanding between two peoples when one looks on the other as worthless, as savages because we didn’t have diplomas and as uncivilised because we didn’t have good manners. I’ve already mentioned that the first to eat at the European’s table were housekeepers. Chiefs were invited from time to time, but they would practically put their feet up on the table, so the Europeans didn’t feel like inviting them a second time; essentially it was a clash of civilisations.

Kanaks never say no because we have a society where opposition is antisocial. One must always say yes, and I hope you’ll say yes to me for 6 November. Sometimes European politicians don’t understand because when they come into a tribe everyone applauds, but this doesn’t stop people from later voting for the other side. Kanaks never say no — it’s bad manners, it’s not civilised. It’s up to you to understand when yes means no. This is where the ambiguity began. The first
Europeans were welcomed by Kanaks. In the valley of Hienghène, they were received by the great chief who told the warriors ‘lay down your weapons because these are my children’; then the Europeans moved in with their pigs, sheep and cattle and these ‘sons’ of the great chief started grazing their herds. New Caledonia wasn’t the only place where this happened. But each time the stock came into their fields, the Kanaks left. They didn’t kill the stock but left in protest, and the colon said: ‘Great, they’ve given me the land.’ The Administration asserted itself more forcefully. There is this key difference, that when you question people, they say ‘yes’ or ‘I don’t know’, and finish up falling silent. With Europeans, if you fall out, they send you packing, but with us very often we’ll just keep quiet. And then the Whites think we’ve agreed with them. This gulf is still there today.

It’s much easier for us to get along with French, Italians or Germans who come out to New Caledonia than with those who settled in our country [the Europeans of New Caledonia] last century. There are people in New Caledonia who applauded the massacre of Hienghène and the assassination of Eloi Machoro and Marcel Nonnaro, and recently they applauded those killed during the Ouvéa business. Some people brought out the champagne when the soldiers killed the Kanaks.

Nothing guarantees our basic security. We live with this threat, but we still signed the Matignon Accords. Why did we sign? … When I try to look at the causes objectively, I note that it was we who launched the mobilisation to say No! No to the Pons referendum! No to the new institutions! No to the refusal to listen to us! The government went so far as to seek the legal suppression of the FLNKS and even envisaged our physical elimination, denying what we are. It was very hard living through these events. We took the decision to boycott the institutions and to embark on action to make the government listen to us and to gain a position of greater strength, which would enable us to negotiate the future, safeguarding the interests of our people. Action was taken on the ground. In response, there were soldiers, gardes mobiles and nomadisation. They were everywhere, up to 12,000 men in arms for 60,000 Kanaks! And what is admirable is that this little people resisted and never gave in, never ran away from a fight.
Today, we are reviewing our situation, and we’ve stopped the violence because of what happened at Ouvéa and the problems at Canala etc. We realised that our adversaries had sophisticated weaponry while our militants only had hunting rifles; this is pathetic compared with the arsenal held by RPCR militias and the military. We could have pushed on, upped the ante to get a better balance of forces, but that would have meant risking the deaths of two, perhaps three times more militants. Even four or five times more, as at Ouvéa, and thus get ourselves into a stronger position internationally and in terms of French public opinion, so that the government would have got sick of supporting the Caldoches. Some influential government members were already starting to ask themselves this question: ‘To just what point will France allow its reputation to be sullied like this, just to protect the interests of 50,000 Caldoches?’

Comparisons, weighing up … The people in charge looked first to France’s higher interests. That also explains the Matignon Accords. This isn’t my thinking, it is, I think, that of the French Government.

The Caldoches would have continued killing us, inflicting heavier punishment on the FLNKS, behaving as they did in 1878 and 1917, and [thus] silence the people for a long time. Many said so: ‘we only have to kill 5,000 or 6,000 to calm them down.’ But in doing so, would they really have been protecting settler interests? This, I think, was the stage we had reached: We could perhaps have gone on longer but that would have led to hatred, racial hatred. From the moment the conflict hardens, people start to be identified by their colour. The risk of racial hatred made us stop and think, and all this is why we accepted Rocard’s proposal to talk. Talk, and try to find a delicate balance between the interests of each side, to see if was possible to build a future.

What we, the FLNKS, asked was that a vote of self-determination be organised during the current parliament, with voting rights restricted to those we termed at Nainville-les-Roches ‘the victims of colonial history’, that is to say, Kanaks and the descendents of settlers. That wasn’t accepted, but we agreed that in the current parliamentary term, we absolutely had to find solid guarantees to ensure the survival of these fragile accords we tried to sign and get accepted. The idea of the 10-year period came out of this — as a
response to the insistence on guarantees by the FLNKS and also the RPCR, guarantees not just from the current parliament but with the weight of a national referendum. That is why this vote is so important for us.

We signed; certainly not everyone was jumping for joy about it; many wanted militant action to continue. In New Caledonia, many members of the Front national, the RPCR and the Front calédonien want to carry on because they have the means to neutralise the Kanaks. As we signed, we said: ‘Having now rejected racial hatred, we have both decided to build peace, to accept each other as we are.’ For the RPCR, that means accepting the independentists and their claims, for us it means accepting the anti-independentists and their claims. But during this 10-year period we shall try to build the country economically. I tried to explain to FLNKS militants: ‘Admittedly, we could have carried out tougher actions, which would have put us in a stronger position to negotiate independence with the government in a more definitive and decisive way, but would we have had the competent people and businesses capable of providing funds to pay for the functioning of the State? Would we have had people with financial training? This was the rationale behind our setting out to use the economy during this period in order to gain power in the end. The economic system is in the hands of the Europeans, as well as finance and knowhow. The economy is not a product of custom, it’s not part of our birthright. Agreed, we have a lot to do with it as consumers, but this is a revolution we’re trying to begin today.

We’ve always rejected the economy, technology, justice — or injustice — the police and the judicial system, the Administration, the gendarmes, because to us these were always synonymous with alienation. But Nouméa’s business leaders can be very optimistic with the economic choices we’re adopting. They are on side, and they will vote for the Matignon Accords! During the troubles, money was leaving the country, but at the moment things are going better. Thanks to 1984, thanks to 1988, businessmen no longer look at us in the same way. We are able to negotiate because of the new balance of forces we created. Today, we are essential to the establishment of durable institutions for the country. There are new
investors, Japanese who buy hotels and want to build others. But straight away they say: ‘Do the Kanaks agree?’ Before, they negotiated only with Nouméa people; today, they want the views of the Kanaks. That’s new! We want to use this bargaining position to try to get a bit more of a share in the exploitation of our resources, so that the wealth taken from the soil can be reinvested in our country. We want to be better represented on the boards of companies.

We also need a ‘confidence capital’. A number of Caldoches ask me: ‘If I vote for you in 1998 for independence, how am I going to fit in? I don’t want to become Kanak, I’m French, I want to stay French but I want to stay in New Caledonia. I’ve got my house, I’ve got my work here.’ How to do it? Today it’s possible to establish a climate for peace, to create ‘confidence capital’, the habit of sharing. It has to be done now; at the time of independence, it will perhaps be more difficult. If you’ve got a viable enterprise that pays dividends, it would be a pity to destroy the financial capital and also the confidence capital.

During these 10 years, we’ve scheduled a first review in 1992, a second in 1997, to evaluate the rebalancing of the Territory, its economy and its infrastructures. There’s no reason why Nouméa should be the only place to have sealed roads, electricity, educational and health infrastructures. It’s this momentum, all these hopes we’ve tried to share, which mean that in the country today we’ve stopped insulting each other. Traffic is normal. You can go to a restaurant in the usual way, people no longer fight ... The first result of the Matignon Accords is that people discover each other as if they’d never known each other. There is still this cultural gap, this incomprehension, but today you see a new phenomenon: people are a bit hesitant with each other, as if they’re looking at each other for the first time.

Where business and shopkeepers are concerned, it’s under way; dialogue has started; we can already start to move forward, people are coming and going normally. At the top management level, it’s still a bit difficult. The entrepreneurs and merchants are a bit ahead because ‘business is business’, but also because it forces people to meet each other and to talk: ‘So, you want to come into the business, good! How much do you want to invest?’ And something is done. People speak like this now, I’ll say it again, it’s truly new, it’s the first
time that we can build together. People are still a bit afraid, but there is a confidence even if it's fragile. That's why we need you to ensure we have this period of 10 years. Rocard's signature is that of the government, but only up until 1993. After that, the guarantee of the Accords rests with you. I ask you to understand how important your support is to us, so that if there's a change in 1993, the Accords, and the hopes that people over there have placed in them, won't be in doubt.

In 10 years, what will have become of the Matignon Accords? I don't know; what I do know is that we want to get things done now, and that we fight on. We are getting advice and support, but it's our struggle. We negotiate from where we are and as we want. We demand independence, we demand no longer to be a pawn in a struggle between Left and Right.

We're gambling on using the economy to promote the cultural values that are our own, and which allow us to affirm our identity. The Europeans of New Caledonia today, the artisans who make objects for tourists, they don't make Eiffel Towers, they don't make Arcs de Triomphe, they make flèches faîtières and cases; that's us, it's our heritage. I think the essence of culture is sharing. I have this idea that you have to acquire a lot, but not die with it. In any case, it's a fundamental principle of Kanak society that clashes with the notion of saving: your status grows the more you give. The more you have the more you have to give, but we have to live with that. That means that within business, we need public relations divisions with more means. Despite being big capitalists, the Japanese have nonetheless integrated this idea of gift giving and service into their economic life, and thus remain Japanese.

The control of one's destiny and the promotion of dignity are conditional on not being beggars. For that, the country must help people to get together to produce the wealth that will make it financially autonomous. If not, it'll be a disaster. A little country like ours is lucky to have significant potential, unlike some other countries in the Pacific. Investing, creating viable activities, is ensuring the country's political independence.

It remains to be seen how young Kanaks will receive the Matignon Accords. Like youth around the world, they have diffi-
culty finding their place in a modern society which doesn’t give them much room. The Accords provide for a significant training program. As well, our goal of Kanak Socialist independence is to assert who we are in a cultural sense. It's not a matter of rejecting others, but of influence and having the wisdom to share. To that end, we have to create culturally. In the arts, we need youth who want to be trained. In the fields of painting, theatre, literature, dance, music, they’ve got to find a voice based on real life experience. We’re always talking about traditional culture, but what is traditional? What others lived before; but in 100 years what we are living will be traditional, and in 1,000 years what you’ve lived today will perhaps be like gold! I think we always have an overly archaeological notion of culture; if it’s from the past, it's authentic culture; on the other hand, all contemporary creation is perceived as needing to be authenticated, perhaps by time.

The presence of Kanaks in today’s cultural life depends on their capacity to produce. Thanks to today’s youth, the existential dimension of our heritage is seen in music and new forms which don’t express life from 100 years ago, but rather the suffering and joy of life today.

The strength of our independent country will be to mobilise people. Blacks, Whites, whatever they are, to create ‘made in Kanaky’ products that can stand on their own in the market place. That’s a Kanaky product! We have to promote our nationalism on the basis of our culture, to affirm Kanak identity and the identity of the country. It’s not any old country; the tourists going there know where they’re going and the souvenirs they buy there won’t be Eiffel Towers made in Hong Kong. It’s culture that eliminates competition in the market place. If we do nothing but try to imitate Westerners, we’re likely always to come last.
1 Speech by Jean-Marie Tjibaou to the Montpellier Committee to Support the Kanak People.

2 Many committees of support for the Kanak people were set up in France in 1984, after the outbreak of the events in New Caledonia and the slaughter at Hienghène (Editors' note).

3 Captain James Cook (1728–1779) was discovered by the Kanaks during his second voyage to the Pacific. Caledonia is a region of Scotland (Editors' note). Translators' note: in fact, the Roman name for Northern Britain, used in Cook's time as a literary name for Scotland.

4 At the beginning of the 19th century, European navigators came looking for sandalwood in the islands of the Pacific, before more intensive commercial relations developed. On this period, see D. Shineberg, Ils étaient venus chercher du santal, Nouméa, Société d'études historiques (first edition, Melbourne, 1967) (Editors' note).

5 Feted as heroes by the Nouméa Europeans after their acquittal, the Hienghène murderers also received large financial compensation for the loss of their property, including their weapons (Editors' note).

6 Translators' note: pejorative term for metropolitan French (métro) — see Glossary.
CHAPTER 32
The Fight Goes On

In France, the Matignon Accords, closely identified with the skills of Prime Minister Michel Rocard, were seen as bringing about a happy and definitive settlement of the New Caledonian crisis. However, for Jean-Marie Tjibaou there were many issues still unresolved, most notably that of cleaning up the electoral rolls. In this interview with a major Australian daily paper, Tjibaou provides a technical analysis of the problem — not reproduced here — and uses it to distance himself from the Government’s euphoria. Two months after the national referendum of 6 November 1988, the FLNKS President takes great care not to allow himself to be caught up in the logic of the moment and goads his political interlocutors: he is already thinking about next steps, after the Matignon Accords ...

SARAH WALLS — Is it possible politically to change something that’s been voted like that?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — Nothing is irreversible in politics. We’ve already had one referendum (1987); now, we’ve had another one and a new statute. After the Stirn statute, the Pons statute, this one, there’s nothing to say we can’t have another one.

S. W. — But supposedly you’re set for 10 years.

J.-M. T. — Yes, but nobody’s got control over 10 years.
S. W. — Do you believe in the 10 years?

J.-M. T. — I want to believe, but it depends on everyone. The FLNKS isn’t married to the 10 years, but it will stick to it if the others stick to it. The minute the partners drop it, we ask for independence, we don’t ask for 10 years. We stopped the disturbance because of the Accord.

S. W. — So you can say yes to the statute in August and in January say no?

J.-M. T. — Why not? We are in a political situation. We are not in heaven or hell. What are the people who signed doing as far as the sharing is concerned? They are sharing nothing. They are trying to exclude everybody. We’re not all taken in.

S. W. — So there is not even the progress that there should be up to now?

J.-M. T. — No … perhaps there is some progress by the Government. We are just going round in circles.

S. W. — What should be happening?

J.-M. T. — We’ll talk about that in a year’s time. The balance sheet will be more interesting then.

S. W. — Isn’t this going to be a problem for you internationally? Doesn’t that worry you?

J.-M. T. — On the contrary. It would worry me if it didn’t cause a problem. If there were no further problems in the next 10 years, it would mean we, the FLNKS, were dead. Because with the Accords there is the Government, us and the RPCR. The RPCR has already said no to the Accord — at the last poll. The majority of people said no. Eh, what do we do? (…)

S. W. — So what happens if Rocard goes, and say, Barre comes in?
J.-M. T. — That’s not a problem. The problem is the way the Accords are put into practice. Perhaps Barre can apply them more strictly than Rocard. It’s wellknown that the Left always carries out the Right’s policies a little — everywhere. Perhaps because they are fundamentally incapable of situating themselves on the Left. They try and please everyone — everyone’s nice, everyone’s lovely — and the result is they sink. The Left has never decolonised. Now that they are finally talking of decolonising, it’s within the French Republic (laughter).

S. W. — How do you see Mr Lafleur’s participation in the Accords?

J.-M. T. — (pause). He’s loading nickel.

S. W. — What about the other loyalists?

J.-M. T. — They don’t agree, but they are not saying so, because they want the money from the Accords — the money, the calm, the business. That’s all that interests them.

S. W. — Did you know when you pushed for the referendum that there was a good chance the loyalists would reject the peace plan in November?

J.-M. T. — That’s not the problem. Anyone who comes out against the Accords is part of the international scene, and that’s the level we’re concerned with. Whoever comes out against the Accords is in the spotlight, and that makes it easier for us — if we create havoc, it will be easier for us as far as international opinion goes. For us the fight goes on. Nothing has been won. It’s just a stage. The next stage is perhaps 1992. It all depends on the application of the Accords. But it’s in 1992 that we will look at the balance sheet. Either we’ll keep on going or we’ll stop. But as far as the investments go, we would prefer that it lasts 10 years.

S. W. — Will it need a national referendum to get independence, as was the case in Algeria?
J.-M. T. — We’ll see. We’ll see in 1992.

S. W. — But the logic of the Accords appears to be separate development.

J.-M. T. — That’s impossible. That’s fine in theory, but in practice it’s not viable. To do what? To go where? To live how?

S. W. — The Government appears to be gambling on the money, and on dividing the FLNKS.

J.-M. T. — They’re all the same. They have understood nothing. You see very clearly when you’re talking to them — they haven’t changed. They don’t understand. We have confidence in ourselves. We do what we can quietly. We make progress.

S. W. — And the ministers who keep coming — is that useful?

J.-M. T. — They bring nothing. They come and talk. That’s why I say we have to wait a year to draw up the balance sheet of all these visits.

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2 The Matignon Accords were overwhelmingly rejected by anti-independence voters in the referendum of 6 November 1988.
CHAPTER 33

Tradition Today

Jean-Marie Tjibaou is asked to compare the situation of Kanaks with that of Africans in this interview with a Togolese journalist based in Nouméa. In his usual very personal way, he looks for common ground between Pacific and African societies, especially in terms of their histories as countries of the South which have had to decolonise. Tjibaou expresses concern about the economic failures which have beset numerous African countries and also tries to imagine the ways in which the Kanaks’ traditional heritage could be used to spearhead their entry into modern life.

LEDJI BELLOW — How do you see Africa? What do you think are the lessons to be drawn from the African experience of independence?

JEAN-MARIE TJIBAOU — I can’t say that I know Africa at all. I don’t have any real experience of it, though I know some Africans. The longest visit I made was to Yaoundé in Cameroon, where I spent ten days, and I have spent a week in Zimbabwe. However, apart from this, I have only travelled briefly through other countries.

L. B. — What did you come away with from these visits?

J.-M. T. — My visit to Cameroon in 1982 was to attend a conference on links between Christianity and the pre-Christian religions which other people are trying out there these days. They were mostly
Africans, but there were also some American Indians. There were Catholics, Protestants, ‘traditional doctors’ as they are called in Africa, and a young African psychiatrist from Yaoundé Hospital who worked with traditional doctors, people we call healers. We were able to visit a traditional doctor who practised with this African psychiatrist. This made quite an impression on me and I think that we should increase this type of contact between doctors and healers.

In fact, an aunt of mine is a healer. When I was in hospital she came to see me and we had to wait until the nurse had left the room before she could do her stuff ... Likewise, when I went to visit my mother in the hospital I carried a ‘medicine’ that an uncle had given me for her; there was something I needed to do before giving her the medicine but the atmosphere made this impossible. You never know if the doctors are hostile to all this, whether we would be thrown out ... From that perspective, I found the experience very interesting. Moreover, it was held as part of a conference of the Ecumenical Council of Christian religions; it is important to have open, official contact with animists, with people who connect with a transcendental power we are not master of, that we don’t control ... that, in a sense, doesn’t come under the scalpel. It was an extraordinary experience, all the more so because it corresponded to my own beliefs. Life is something we are given, we don’t order it. We are given it, we try to protect it, we can observe its passing but no-one can produce it. Consequently, everyone should have sufficient humility to respect the decisions made by someone who is sick, by someone who is in danger of breathing their last, of losing what no-one can hold on to.

Also during this short visit, I met a Jesuit priest, Father Mveng, who has worked hard for reconciliation with the African religions and their thinkers. We have to examine the links between Christianity and modernity, to look at the ‘religious imperialism’ which converts people and appropriates the rites, the thought, the ways of experiencing transcendence and which ends with more or less ‘baptising’ them. This was what Catholicism was trying to do in the old days; nowadays Westerners are perhaps a bit more respectful...
L. B. — People often wonder about the role of faith and tradition in your stand as a moderate in recent times, despite the bloodshed which plunged your people into mourning.

J.-M. T. — Talking recently about this with members of the Reformed Church of France, I was asked about the ‘signs’ that had led Lafleur and me to see that dialogue was needed and sign the Matignon Accords. I told them: ‘If you are looking for religious signs, I am not your man.’ I signed simply because there was no more sugar, no more rice … the troops, the insecurity; could these be signs of Providence perhaps? For us, it was a purely practical matter. It was sign or else move on to guerrilla warfare, but to do that you have to have the means … As it says in the Bible, the Spirit blows where it wishes, so perhaps we were inspired in these choices — I hope so.

The Bible is a birthright that Westerners have picked up along the way. It doesn’t belong to them. Spirits and rites from pre-Christian times have been taken out but some things remain, and what is more, Christian practices are also coloured by these old practices. If everything is Christianised, then we are all indistinguishable. We agree to dialogue, to share, to seek work and responsibility, but where relations with the hereafter are concerned, each culture has its own experience, its rituals, its songs, its incantations and its prayers. In Christianity, the group enters into communion or not, and within it, each individual is in communion or not, but everyone is part of the group, all on the same level. At Mass, you are all communicants … and what takes place? We don’t know. Materially, you see something, but what takes place between the believer and the objects of his faith? We don’t know. Christian faith is in principle shared by all believers, or at least they share the words and rituals and so on. In contrast, in the Kanak world, participation in rituals is not for all, only for certain special clans.

Before eating the first yam, we give one to our celebrant so that he will open the next season. In my tribe, where I am responsible for it, I am the one that gives this gift to the celebrant and thereby asks him to do the ceremony. At the time of new plantings, there will be an identical ceremony conducted by me and the celebrant. The two of us can on these occasions call other people to come and join us.
But I won’t call on the pastor or the priest: he is not allowed to come because he is not initiated. The ritual requires it. We don’t want him to come and add a Christian prayer.

L. B. — Politically, to what extent is Africa a model?

J.-M. T. — I was fortunate enough to meet Sankara. He was a young fellow but a great person. He is the only African statesman whose passing we mourned. While it is true we didn’t know the others, what was significant was that Sankara arrived with a message. He was young, he embodied the hopes of an Africa just emerging from colonisation. For those of us watching from the sidelines, it seemed there was no transfer of power in Africa from the mandarins to the people. We didn’t see any evidence of economic individuality, of urban projects, any specially adapted health and environmental projects. We’re told all that costs a lot, though why it costs a lot I don’t know.

During the 1986 UN vote on whether to re-list New Caledonia with the decolonisation committee, the delegate from Burkina Faso said: ‘I came here with the instruction from Sankara to support Jean-Marie Tjibaou; now that he is dead, the instructions have changed.’ We were deeply saddened.

L. B. — Did you have links with other African countries at the UN?

J.-M. T. — I met other African delegates sympathetic to our cause, but their voting instructions were tied to the economies of their countries, which are not controlled by them. During the de Gaulle referendum of 1958, New Caledonia chose to remain with France. In Africa, only Sékou Touré voted no, a big event for us. Here, we chose to follow the Union Calédonienne, which was at that time run mainly by Europeans and missionaries; the party voted yes, as did all the French colonies. Later, we were tricked, as a whole series of different statutes were imposed on us.

L. B. — And yet you seem more conciliatory now.
J.-M. T. — We admired Sékou Touré and Sankara very much. During the Matignon Accords, my thoughts turned again to these African countries and their decolonisation experience: political power can be mastered only if you are established economically and financially. Sankara was somewhat the lone voice in the desert. The African countries were smothered by the West and their leaders have lost the nerve to walk with their people. They are undergoing a new form of colonialism, perhaps a more insidious one: the countries are drained of their wealth and destabilised at the behest of the United States and the West, whose monetary, commercial and especially, financial system, methodically orchestrates impoverishment. Now what is insidious is that it is the Blacks themselves — whether African or Oceanian — who are now the agents of the pauperisation of their peoples.

L. B. — So you remain convinced that you are on the right track?

J.-M. T. — We decided to try and win recognition for our cause, and ultimately independence, by working within the institutions. But first we must focus on education and invest in brain power so that people, albeit with the assistance of the coloniser, can liberate themselves intellectually, sociologically and psychologically. You could say human development is our aim. That is why we said: priority for education, without arrogance but also without flinching. You can aim for things like this in a small country like ours, where people don’t die of hunger or cold. We have to invest in the stimulation and growth of brain power, to increase the imaginative potential of the elders and the people, so that they become entrepreneurs, with shows, singing, puppet making, so that they can become people who create new species of plants, new industries or whatever, to enrich both the country and the planet. We need to think like managers, so that people are well trained, that they become intelligent and creative, telling themselves: ‘We are missionaries, messengers for future generations, standard bearers for the future of the planet.’ Things need to be managed efficiently, but always with this concept of birthright in mind.

I am transient but I must do my utmost to ensure that the country I leave for my sons will be the most beautiful country, one where
there is wealth, wealth of thought, wisdom, flowers and nourishment. To ensure abundance, if I can. We’re aiming for self-sufficiency. No matter where you are, you have the same responsibility towards the current and future generations.

L. B. — How do you plan to cope with the problems of Melanesian youth?

J.-M. T. — Traditionally, we give young men manual jobs such as building cases, agriculture, fishing and hunting. This is still the case, but the problem is that as society becomes more and more individualistic, it gets harder to view the country’s development in group terms. And yet we have to be able to think in terms of the group. We’re trying to do this at the municipal level at Hienghène, with our limited means. We are pitting ourselves against the ethos of a whole education system which doesn’t train people for collective goals, but instead moulds them for work in individual compartments. This is the problem for young people here.

And as well our young people are conscious of what others their age are up to in the wider world — fashion is the same here as elsewhere. We want to help them express themselves, whether it is in cultural, artistic, or sporting terms ... to inspire them to creativity and originality. I hope the Provinces will have the funds to help them do that.

L. B. — With the Provinces shortly to be established, and especially with independence in sight, you seem to want to ensure that both you and the youth are not cut off from your traditions?

J.-M. T. — In my view, today’s world is a world of struggle. Look at the Japanese, they greet you politely, but at each step, they move ahead. I don’t think there is any other way. If we are to keep our customs, we have to find ways of communication and understanding that strengthen traditional ways of knowing. There are modern ways of doing this — video, television, radio, and we have the computer now too. To be competitive, we have to use all these things, and while this is no doubt sad, in competitive terms, we don’t have a choice — we have to be the best. It is no use learning a culture just
to play with it. We have to develop our culture and value our craftsmen so that they can decorate official houses and offices. In that way, the people will live in an environment which reflects their own culture. I support a strong place for tradition in the modern world so that people will be comfortable there; Kanaks creating their world in the century they are living in.

Our frame of reference relates to what our fathers created in a given world. Today, we have to find the message which gives a philosophical dimension to everyday living. Like everyone else, I go to the supermarket, but there are also rituals, ways of being, of doing, of welcoming and of sharing which are unique to us, which can be promoted by the media and by the things we produce.

Maybe it’s not so much in terms of some ideas of authenticity or what is authentic, but for me authenticity is what has been lived and which adds savour to every life. What my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather lived, all their experiences of the rituals, tradition and the environment are different. They were saturated with it socio-logically and psychologically. But not me — I have my own experience of the world. One day perhaps I will be authentic, an authentic piece in a museum in 2000 or 3000. Meantime, it’s up to me.

1 Recorded by Ledji Bellow, 17 April 1989, at Hienghène. The interview was reproduced in part in the weekly Jeune Afrique, no. 1481 (May 1989).
CHAPTER 34
The Dead Live On

The following speech was delivered by Jean-Marie Tjibaou on 4 May 1989, as he presented custom gifts on behalf of the FLNKS political bureau to the people of Ouvéa 12 months after the massacre of 19 of their number. These were his last words. Several minutes later, Tjibaou and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné were assassinated by Djubelly Wéa, a Kanak former pastor and an opponent of the Matignon Accords.

Tjibaou’s notes for his speech marking the end of mourning period the next day were found with his papers.

WE STAND HUMBLY before you — the chiefs, the big men, the leaders of clans and struggle committees, the various groups concerned with the blood which has been shed — before you present today and those to come tomorrow, and ask permission to say a few words, as the blood that was shed belonged to you.

We don’t have the right to tread this ground without speaking of this blood that has been shed. Thank you for allowing us, the political bureau, to be here today. Many who will not be able to come because we have other commitments and other meetings have to be arranged. As Paul said earlier, we are a delegation from other islands, from the south of the Grande Terre, from the Centre and the North, come to acknowledge that the blood that has been shed belongs to you. It belongs to the clan of the mothers who have given their sons.

But today we are here because this blood has also been shed for us. We have spoken these words at Hienghène, we have spoken
them at Ouégoa, we have spoken them at Nakéty, we have spoken them at Canala and on all the other days when lives have been lost. And it is the tribe and the clan who have carried these dead to the cemetery. My little tribe of Hienghène saw people arrive from everywhere; those killed, the 10 of 1984, no longer belonged to us. And we have come today, just as delegations went to Nakéty, just as other delegations went to Canala, as other delegations went to Voh, as other delegations went in 1984 to Ouégoa. And it is with all through these last years, as the elder said a moment ago, that the living blood is shed and yet lives on. And we come running because this blood of the fallen lives and calls to us; it’s our blood, the blood which cries out for our people’s freedom.

So we are here today, there is nothing to be said. We are here simply to be together with those who all alone bear in their hearts the departure, the absence or the death of a son, of a husband, of a brother. I want to underline that simple thing, that we are together when big things are happening, but in daily life it is the mother, bereft of the father for her children, who shoulders alone the struggle of our people. We have experienced this in our family, which is why we too are very aware that this is the silent burden of many families.

The blood of those who have gone is still with us as a constant call to the militants and to each of us. And I think, when we come now, as has been said elsewhere, it is to say that we have a duty not to forget, to acknowledge how much further this sacrifice has taken us. But this sacrifice, the anniversary of which we honour today, takes its place in the long line of martyrs our people have lost or given in the quest for consideration and respect.

Forgive me speaking at length. Here is the length of manou from the political bureau and the delegations that have come. Also here are young people from Balade, here to visit the graves of their cousins, and that length of manou is just to say we are here, that we are here with the families today, with the leaders responsible for those who have gone, the clans responsible for them, responsible for remembering ... remembering not to forget, because it is only human, sacrifices are soon forgotten.

We benefit from the progress made but sometimes our vision is a little blurred and we can’t always see clearly along the path of the
word that we’ve set ourselves. Here is the length of *manou* that the political bureau and the delegates who’ve come present to the people in authority and the clan leaders.

I would like to present you with this *monnaie*, the *thewé*, the *andi* and the *mieu* — for those who are familiar with Grande Terre languages. This *monnaie* will stay with you. At the end of the Tibarama Congress [19–20 February 1988] we parted determined to boycott the elections; this *monnaie* was given by the Tibarama people to us, the political bureau, in appreciation for our words together. And it was by these words that your sons lost their lives. This sacrifice remains. We are returning this *monnaie* to you. These words we have shared mark today a stage in our struggle where we have perhaps never been taken so seriously, and this is because people give respect, and only give us respect, when we fight like strong men. There is the *monnaie* and over there some yams, this is the custom which still unites and gathers us together. They are mostly yams from the islands, since there are almost none on La Grande Terre due to cyclones, or perhaps we are too idle to plant them. So then, there are the yams and then over there are yams grown in Nouméa, several boxes of them and some bags of rice. That’s it!

A year has already passed … thunder rumbled, lightning zigzagged from all directions, the sky joined the anger of the Kanak people and the grief of the weeping families of iaai.

Nineteen FLNKS militants had just died on the path of struggle for our people’s freedom.

On that day, I cursed the sinister figure who ordered the butchery in Ouvéa; may the deaths of those killed in the Gossanah cave plague his conscience and their spirits forever inhabit his sleep …

It was a day of anger for our people. Nineteen sacrifices on the altar of freedom for the Kanak people.

And on this, the first anniversary of their sacrifice, I salute their memory and their courage and I thank them for giving their blood for our cause.

I pay tribute to the families who in the silence of their sorrow feel the absence of a son, a husband, a father or a brother, militants gone forever.

Thank you, all who mark this first anniversary.
1 Speech given during the custom presentation by the FLNKS political bureau delegation, 4 May 1989, at Wadrilla, Iaai (Ouvéa). Recorded by Radio Djjido.

2 Published in L’Avenir Caledonian, no. 997, 7 June 1989.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000 BCE</td>
<td>The ancestors of the Kanaks populate the New Caledonian islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>Kanaks see Captain Cook sailing past their shores. He names the islands New Caledonia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>24 September: Admiral Febvrier-Despointes takes possession of New Caledonia and its dependencies on behalf of France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Convict settlement established at Nouméa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>First group of <em>communards</em> sent out to Nouméa, among them Louise Michel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Kanaks from the centre of La Grande Terre revolt, led by Chief Ataï. The insurrection is to last a year, with 200 dead among the Whites and more than 1,000 among the Kanaks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Regulation of Kanaks through the Native Code, the system of reserves and various prohibitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Second Kanak revolt, led by Chiefs Noël and Bouarate in the North of La Grande Terre. Tjibaou’s grandmother is killed during subsequent repression; his father, then aged four, is saved by his sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Jean-Marie Tjibaou sent to Canala seminary at the suggestion of Father Rouel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1946 Creation of Caledonian Communist Party. In response, religious authorities set up the Union des indigènes calédoniens amis de la liberté dans l'ordre (UICALO, Catholic) and the Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens français (AICLF, Protestant), the forerunners of the Union Calédonienne (UC).

1953 UC wins the first election to the General Council held under universal suffrage. Jean-Marie Tjibaou passes his primary school certificate in Nouméa.

1956 The Deferre law is passed by the French Parliament, giving Kanaks and other non-European ethnic groups in New Caledonia the right to take part in local affairs and in economic life. Under the law, New Caledonia becomes an Overseas Territory the next year.

1958 Jean-Marie Tjibaou attends Païta Seminary, doing fourth year secondary studies (at the age of 22), then studies philosophy for two years and theology for four.

1963 The Jacquinot law strips New Caledonia of the autonomy granted by the 1956 law.


1966 Jean-Marie Tjibaou appointed assistant curate at Nouméa Cathedral.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou leaves to study sociology at the Catholic Faculty of Lyon, then at the Ecole des hautes études (School of Higher Studies) in Paris. He would return to New Caledonia in 1970 after the death of his father, going back to France for a few months before returning permanently to the Territory.

Student riots in Paris, spreading to other cities and countries, known as ‘May 1968’ or ‘the events of 1968’.

1969 Beginning of the nickel boom and the heavy European immigration it entailed.

The Billotte laws entrench control of the Territory’s natural wealth by the French State.

Creation of the Foulards rouges (Red Scarves) by Kanak students back from studies in France. They are the first pro-independence group.
1971
Jean-Marie Tjibaou leaves the priesthood at his own request. The following year, he establishes the Groupement mélanésien pour le développement social et culturel (Melanesian Grouping for Social and Cultural Development).

1975
September: at the initiative of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the Melanesia festival is held, attracting over 50,000 spectators from all of New Caledonia's various communities except the Caldoches.

1976
The Foulards rouges and the 1878 Group (established in 1974) merge to become the Parti de libération kanak — Kanak Liberation Party — (Palika).
Publication by Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Philippe Missotte of the work Kanaké, Mélanésien de Nouvelle-Calédonie (Tahiti, Editions du Pacifique).

1977
March: Jean-Marie Tjibaou leads his own Maxha (Raise your head!) Group in the local government elections and is elected Mayor of Hienghène.
UC newcomers Tjibaou, Yeiwéné Yeiwéné, Eloi Machoro, François Burck and Pierre Declercq push New Caledonia's oldest party to adopt a pro-independence platform during the Bourail Congress.
Jacques Lafleur, son of former MP Henri Lafleur and also an RPR MP, responds by establishing the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) — Rally for Caledonia in the Republic.

1979
Creation of a Front indépendantiste — Independentist Front (FI), comprising UC, Palika, the Union progressiste mélanésienne — Progressive Melanesian Union (UPM), the Front uni de libération kanak — United Front for Kanak Liberation (FULK) and the Parti socialiste calédonien — Caledonian Socialist Party (PSC).

1981
Kanak independentists welcome the victory of François Mitterrand in the French presidential elections.
1982 The Kanak independentists, in alliance with the centrist Fédération pour une nouvelle société calédonienne — Federation for a New Caledonian Society (FNSC), take control of the Governing Council, with Jean-Marie Tjibaou as Vice-President. (The French High Commissioner was President ex officio of the Council, which was the executive arm of government in New Caledonia.)

1984 July: the FL is dissolved to make way for the Front de libération nationale kanak socialiste — Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), which opposes the planned introduction of the Lemoine Statute of Autonomy. The FLNKS leads a successful militant boycott of the territorial elections on 18 November.

1 December: Tjibaou is elected President of the Provisional Government of Kanaky. Palika formally joins the FLNKS.

4 December: 10 Kanak militants from Tiendanite are murdered in an ambush, including two of Tjibaou’s brothers. Jean-Marie Tjibaou was the target of this ambush by Hienghène Caldoches.


12 January: Eloi Machoro and Marcel Nonnaro are killed at La Foa by GIGN marksmen who were supposed to neutralise them. Declaration of a State of Emergency as Nouméa experiences 24 hours of rioting by French loyalists following the murder of Yves Tual, a young Caldoche man.

August: the ‘Fabius/Pisani’ plan is implemented, with the FLNKS winning control of three of the four Regions established under the plan. Jean-Marie Tjibaou is elected President of the Northern Region Government, Leopold Jorédie President of the Central
Region Government and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné President of the Loyalty Islands Government.

1986
20 June: election of RPR government under Jacques Chirac as Prime Minister, the first ‘cohabitation’ of a Socialist President and a government of the Right.

1987
13 September: The Chirac Government, seeking to repress the independence movement, holds a referendum which denies Kanak identity and is boycotted by the FLNKS as part of a campaign of non-violent resistance.

1988
During the presidential election campaign, Jean-Marie Tjibaou calls on President Mitterrand to intervene in the name of justice.

22 April: as part of a militant boycott of the new statute put forward by DOM-TOM Minister Bernard Pons, Kanak militants attack the Fayaoué gendarmerie station on Ouvea Island, killing four gendarmes and taking 27 others hostage in the Gossanah cave.

5 May: elite French Army troops and the GIGN storm the Gossanah cave to free the hostages, causing the death of two soldiers and 19 independentists. An independent commission of inquiry and revelations by Le Monde newspaper establish that at least four hostage-takers had been executed after surrender.

8 May: François Mitterrand re-elected President. The new Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, sends a ‘dialogue mission’ to New Caledonia.

26 June: signature of the Matignon Accords. New Caledonia is to have a new statute which will promote the economic advancement of Kanaks to give them a more equal share in the economy, leading to referendum of on self-determination in 1998.

1989
4 May: Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné assassinated by former pastor Djubelly Wéa during custom ceremonies on Ouvéa Island for the end of the mourning period for the 19 Ouvéa Kanaks killed a year earlier. Wéa is shot dead by one of Tjibaou’s bodyguards.
July: elections for the three provincial governments give FLNKS control of the Northern and Loyalty Islands Provinces, with RPCR winning the Southern Province.

1990

24 March: Paul Néaoutyine, a Palika member and former chief-of-staff to Jean-Marie Tjibaou, is elected President of the FLNKS.

1993

The Right returns to power in parliamentary elections in France.

1995

Local government and provincial elections reveal divisions within the independentist movement, which, nevertheless, retains control of the Northern and Islands Provinces. The functioning of the Territorial Congress is held up for several months by the emergence of an opposition within the anti-independence movement — previously united behind RPCR leader Jacques Lafleur.

December: UC deputy leader Roch Wamytan is elected FLNKS President. Paul Néaoutyine does not seek re-election.

17 May: Jacques Chirac elected President of France.

1996

January: the Matignon Accords signatories begin negotiations on New Caledonia’s constitutional future.

1997

5 May: opening of the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Nouméa.

1998

9 July: Nouméa Accord signed by FLNKS, RPCR and the French State, providing for self-determination in 15 to 20 years and the devolution of greater powers to the territorial government. Subsequently, the French Parliament overwhelmingly accepted the Nouméa Accord, approving the constitutional amendments required to open the way for New Caledonia to enter into a period of greater autonomy from 1999, amendments which were in turn approved by a referendum of all French voters.
ACRONYMS

ADRAF : *Agence de développement rural et d’aménagement foncier* :
Rural Development and Land Management Agency

AICL : *Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens* :
Association of Caledonian and Loyalty Island Indigenes

AICLF : *Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens français* :
Association of French Caledonian and Loyalty Island Indigenes

BRGM : *Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières* :
Geological Mining and Research Bureau

CRNS : *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* :
National Centre for Scientific Research

DOM-TOM: *Ministère des Départements et Territoires d’Outre-mer* :
Ministry of Overseas Departments and Territories

DST : *Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire* :
Territorial Surveillance Directorate

EPK : *Ecoles populaires kanak* :
Kanak People’s Schools

FNSC : *Fédération pour une nouvelle société Calédonienne* :
Federation for a New Society in Caledonia

FULK : *Front Uni de Libération Kanak* :
United Kanak Liberation Front
GIGN : Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale : Gendarmerie SWAT Group

LCR : Ligue communiste révolutionnaire : Revolutionary Communist League, Trotskyist

LKS : Parti de Libération Kanaque Socialiste : Kanak Socialist Liberation Party

OAS : Organisation de l'Armée Secrète, Secret Army Organisation, a group led by senior retired and serving French military officers opposed to the independence of Algeria which used violence to oppose President de Gaulle's Algerian policy

OCEF : Office de commercialisation et d'entreposages frigorifiques : Marketing and Cold Storage Board

Office foncier: Land Office

Office culturel, scientifique et technique kanak: Kanak Cultural, Scientific and Technical Office

ORSTOM: scientific research organisation for overseas territories, now called Institut français de recherche scientifique pour le développement en coopération (French Scientific Research Institute for Development in Co-operation)

RFO : Radio France d'Outre-Mer : state radio service for the DOM-TOM

RPCR : Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République : Rally for Caledonia in the Republic

RPR : Rassemblement pour la République : Rally for the Republic

RPR-UDF: Rassemblement pour la République-Union pour la Démocratie Française : Rally for the Republic-Union for French Democracy coalition
SICNC : Société d’investissements et de constructions de la Nouvelle-Calédonie: New Caledonia Investment and Construction Company

SLN : Société Le Nickel : The Nickel Company

UC : Union calédonienne : Caledonian Union

UICALO: Union des indigènes calédoniens amis de la liberté dans l’ordre : Union of Caledonian Indigenes Friends of Liberty with Order

USTKE : Union syndicale des travailleurs kanaks et des exploités: Union of Kanak Workers and Exploited Persons
**GLOSSARY**

*autel*: altar, specifically, a stone altar used by Kanaks for ceremonies related to the cultivation of the yam

*Caldoche*: New Caledonia-born person of European origin

*case*: traditional Kanak house, cone-shaped around a central pillar

*chefferie*: the office of chief of a clan, group of clans or tribe; the geographical and social area over which his authority extends; the residence of the chief

*colons*: European settlers and their descendants (usually used of those engaged in farming)

*communard*: member or supporter of the Paris Commune (May 1871); many were exiled to New Caledonia

*fait colonial*: colonial situation, but a term invested with more emotion than simple translation suggests: it refers to a power structure in which a remote government has final authority over a geographically discrete territory, the indigenous inhabitants of which are under the political, economic and social domination of that government and/or a resident non-indigenous community

*fleche fâtière*: decorated top of the central pole of a traditional *case*

*Foulards rouges*: Red Scarves — early independentist group established in 1969 by Nidoish Naisseline, precursor to Palika
Groupe 1878: Kanak protest movement, established in 1974 and concerned mainly with the land issue, with the *Foulards rouges* a precursor to Palika

*Lapita*: Refers to an ancient Pacific culture (1500–500 BC) that archaeologists believe to be the common ancestor of the contemporary cultures of Polynesia, Micronesia, and some areas of Melanesia. The culture takes its name from the site of Lapita on the Western coast of New Caledonia, one of the first places in which its distinctive pottery was discovered.

*manou*: length of cotton used as a garment by men

*métis*: person of mixed race, specifically Kanak and another

*monnaie*: ropes of sea shells used as 'money' in traditional Kanak exchanges

*Mouvement familial chrétien*: Christian Family Movement

*paicî*: people living East coast of Grande Terre between Poindimié and Ponérihouen and inland valleys; their language.

*pilou-pilou*: community celebration and by extension the communal dancing which is a major part of it

*terroir*: land: the material base of the clan, distributed in such a way as to ensure the needs of all are met, but at the same time the source of life and a highly significant symbol of the clan and its persistence through time and space; Kanaks belong to the *terroir*; they do not own it.

*Top 82*: political slogan, reflecting UC aspiration to achieve its goals by 1982.
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This collection of interviews with and essays by the charismatic Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–1989) reveal the remarkable scope of his political career: his rhetorical power, his passionately held beliefs and his persuasive ideology of Kanak unity and independence. Through his intellectual legacy covering ethnology, development, Kanak culture and spirituality, as well as political analysis, the reader is given an unparalled insight into the social and political dynamic of New Caledonia and the Kanak people.

Following his ordination as a priest in 1965, Jean-Marie Tjibaou studied sociology and ethnology in France before abandoning the priesthood and returning to New Caledonia in the 1970s. His establishment of the Melanesia 2000 festival in 1975 marked him as a passionate advocate for the culture and heritage of the Kanak. In 1984 he became head of the Front de liberation nationale kanak et socialiste (FLNKS) and was made president of the Provisional Kanaky Government. He was an active participant in the Matignon Accords and his contribution to the pursuit of Kanak freedom is his enduring legacy.

The original text of this collection was published in French in 1996 under the title *La Présence Kanak* and was edited by Alban Bensa and Éric Wittersheim. This edition has been translated by Helen Fraser and John Trotter.