ing and tourism rather than rural projects (as Tjibaou wanted), resistance by local mayors and customary leaders to the “national” visions of the new Kanak elite, and unrealistic dreams of the immediate benefits independence would bring. He even compares the militant behavior of some of today’s young Kanak to juvenile delinquency.

Here perhaps is the risk of Bensa’s admirable advocacy. Fanon said each generation must fulfill its mission or betray it, but contexts change. Like Mandela and Arafat, Tjibaou himself might be hard-pressed to understand or control what is happening now. New Kanak leaders are sharing power with their old enemies and proposing free association with France. Yes, the old discredited “social scientists” may be chuckling in their academic graveyards at Bensa’s laments over “the passage of a Melanesian peasant society, endowed with its own political power, into a ‘popular culture’ subjected to a Kanak state” (336). But then, even Leenhardt ended Do Kamo with a question—whether dynamic interaction between individuals and sociomythic domains belonged “to the Melanesian world alone?”

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“Jean-Marie Tjibaou traversed the end of this century like a meteor.” These opening words in Alban Bensa and Éric Wittersheim’s presentation of a hundred or so texts evoke the incredibly fertile mind of the Kanak (New Caledonian) independence leader who was assassinated in 1989.

Tjibaou had all the qualities of a great international statesman: intelligence, warmth, generosity, fluency, a sense of timing, innate pragmatism, and transcending values. As a truly Melanesian statesman, he wrote little, but left behind a very substantial legacy of interviews, taped conferences and speeches, all tributary to the rapid succession of events that marked New Caledonia’s political scene in the 1970s and 1980s. In this sense alone, subsequent generations of Pacific Islanders and Pacific Island scholars owe a debt to him of as yet undetermined dimensions.

Tjibaou entered the political arena from the perspective of Kanak culture and identity. And he never lost sight of what were for him fundamental preoccupations: of dignity and justice, and of the place of small peoples and small nations in a world increasingly intolerant of marginality and difference. He was concerned both to understand intellectually the nature of colonial domination and alienation, and to act politically in order to trans-
form Kanak society and achieve independence for Kanaky/New Caledonia. His thoughts bear witness to this powerful mix of ethical, intellectual, and practical preoccupations.

Bensa and Wittersheim have conducted the task of preparing this collection with both intelligence and discretion: intelligence in opting for a strictly chronological presentation, and discretion in reducing their own presence in the volume to a strict minimum. The first allows the reader to follow the development of Tjibaou’s thinking, while the second ensures that his words are not muffled by academic discourse and theoretical constructs.

The writings and interviews cover the last fifteen years of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s life, from his emergence on the New Caledonian scene in 1974 as one of the principal artisans of a strictly cultural event, Melanesia 2000, to his untimely death in 1989 in the aftermath of the signing of the Matignon Agreement, this latter a profoundly political act.

The collection is divided into five periods, each a crucial stage in the life and work of Tjibaou and in the recent political history of the French Overseas Territory: 1974–1976 “Relever la tête” (self-esteem); March 1974–March 1984 “Penser l’indépendance” (conceiving independence); November 1984–February 1986 “Kanaky en marche” (building Kanaky); March 1986–June 1988 “Résister” (resisting); June 1988–May 1989 “Ouvrir la voie” (paving the way).

The portrait that Tjibaou offers of his people and his country is a terribly moving one. It is also the quest of a very singular person with a typical leader’s profile—that of a university-educated Melanesian Christian—who gravitated constantly between dignity, despair, and dialogue in an unflinching concern to bring the Kanak people intact into the twenty-first century and to ensure that their voice be heard in international debates on humankind’s future. His speeches and writings reveal an unequivocal desire both to share his land with the latecomers and to inscribe local experience on the universal human condition.

The sentiments, strategies, and reflections set out in some three hundred pages of text reveal that Jean-Marie Tjibaou was unflinching in his goals but remarkably flexible in his means. He was an eminently pragmatic man who had the capacity to see far into the past and into the future, and he had the values to guide him on his way.

In “Relever la tête,” Tjibaou articulates his preoccupations with culture and the future of Kanak identity. In organizing Mélanésia 2000 he was concerned with matters of dignity, self-respect, and respect by others. In opting for Noumea as the site of the festival, his objective was for Kanak civilization to invest the city. It was a courageous decision at a time when other Melanesian leaders were demanding strictly political action. It was also a first, eminently symbolic, attempt to engage a dialogue with the Caldoche community, an invitation that was left too long unanswered.

Subsequent sections chart Tjibaou’s shift to the political arena and to his elaboration of economic and institutional strategies for his people. His
unceasing quest for dialogue with the French government is revealed, in spite of a hardening of relations, accelerating violence, and mounting repression. His words reveal the development of a strategy of peaceful resistance dictated both by philosophical considerations and by the simple fact that it was the only avenue open for a small and ultimately defenseless people.

The last section, “Ouvrir la voie,” focusing on the signing of the Matignon Agreement, reveals the extent to which this remarkable political act was the logical outcome of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s intellectual trajectory. Dialogue with the Caldoche community and, through it, the French government, was achieved, and New Caledonia withdrew from the brink of civil war.

In their brief general introduction and the few short paragraphs that preface each section, Bensa and Wittersheim evoke the unbroken threads that run through a decade and a half of thoughts and action: of Melanesian humanism, of Christian morality, of anthropological scholarship, of political intuition, . . . and of much more besides. And they have the wisdom to recognize that the words speak for themselves. Western scholarly analysis is superfluous here.

Marie-Claude Tjibaou, Jean-Marie’s wife and compagnon de route, states in the preface that this collection was prepared at her request. For fellow indépendantistes it is intended to serve as witness to the respect and loyalty of her deceased husband, while for all those whose destinies are interwoven with those of the Kanak people, she expresses the wish that the collection “may help to understand the reasons for our determination.”

Despite the writings of the journalist Helen Fraser and his being declared Man of the Decade in January 1990 by Pacific Islands Monthly, Jean-Marie Tjibaou is relatively little known or appreciated in the anglophone Pacific. This collection, although written in French, will hopefully go some small way to remedy the situation.

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