

## Book and Media Reviews

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*Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak Witness to the World: An Intellectual Biography*, by Eric Waddell. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 23. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008. ISBN cloth, 978-0-8248-3256-8; paper, 978-0-8248-3314-5; xx + 231 pages, photos and maps. Cloth, US\$55.00; paper, US\$25.00.

This is a remarkable book about a remarkable man who emerged to prominence at a critical time in the modern history of New Caledonia, and whose violent death at the age of fifty-three was a defining moment in that history. Eric Waddell has written what he terms an "intellectual biography," light on the personal and workaday details of Tjibaou's life, but very strong on the forces that shaped the man. Tjibaou's murder, and that of his lieutenant, Yeiwéné Yeiwéné, on Ouvéa in May 1989, and the death of their assassin, Djubelly Wéa, immediately afterwards at the hand of one of Tjibaou's bodyguards, brought a desperate period to an end. The movement for Kanak-led independence of a colony in which settler Europeans were as numerous as the Kanaks began in the 1970s and reached an important stage in 1984 with the formation of the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste (FLNKS). Though he had just entered national politics in 1977, Tjibaou, already leader of the multiethnic Union Calédonienne (UC), was appointed president of the FLNKS. Events quickly moved toward crisis.

In 1986, Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's new French government was determined to clamp down on the FLNKS, a decision that sent several

thousand French conscripts to New Caledonia and reversed progress toward realization of Kanak demands. Sharp differences emerged among the independence supporters. Some, such as Wéa, saw growing confrontation as the only way forward; others, especially Tjibaou, were aware of their lack of arms and power and instead sought dialogue. A bungled confrontation on Ouvéa in 1988 led to a fierce military intervention in which nineteen young Kanaks were killed on the land of Wéa's village. Three days later, in France, socialist François Mitterrand was reelected president, and Chirac's "cohabitation" government lost power. The new prime minister, Michel Rocard, took immediate steps to reopen dialogue in New Caledonia. He brought delegations of both Kanaks and Europeans to Paris, where they were sat down in the Hôtel Matignon until they reached an agreement, which they did very swiftly. It included new constitutional arrangements in New Caledonia, strong measures to strengthen the economy of the Kanak regions, and a referendum on independence, but only in ten years' time. Not all the FLNKS representatives signed, and Tjibaou and Yeiwéné had to work very hard to convince their people at home that they had done the right thing. Many thought they had been betrayed, and among them was Djubelly Wéa.

All this and much more is recounted in Waddell's major book, but his main purpose is to show how Tjibaou reached the position he finally took in Paris. Born into a chiefly family, Tjibaou first learned the importance of tradition and the land to Melanesian identity, and of his own

responsibilities to his people. From the age of nine until well into his twenties, he was educated in the theology of the Catholic Church, leading to his ordination as a priest in 1965. He never saw a conflict between Christianity and the Melanesian cause but, like many of his fellow seminarians, found himself confronted by an inflexible colonial Church. He escaped first into study in France at the time of the 1968 upheavals. Then, in the 1970s, he engaged in social and cultural action back in New Caledonia, leading to his organizing of the *Melanésia 2000* festival in 1975. This festival was a major attempt to present the Kanak world as a civilization in its own right, in parallel with that of the Europeans. It was from this initiative that he was drawn into politics.

Waddell's hardest task is to show how the ever-pragmatic Tjibaou sustained his belief in the potential of dialogue despite the hard blows of the 1980s and retained his leadership without ever fully adopting the more revolutionary stance of many of his colleagues. Unlike this reviewer, who had two memorable meetings with Tjibaou during those years, Waddell never met the man; thus he has had to rely wholly on what Tjibaou said and (more rarely) wrote, and on what was recorded by others. Particularly in a long discussion between pages 107 and 114, Waddell does this brilliantly, capturing for the reader the soul of a man profoundly responsible to his own conscience and twin Catholic/Melanesian identity. Tjibaou was an eloquent speaker. Only partly following French anthropologists Alban Bensa and Éric Wittersheim in linking Tjibaou's intellectual evolution

to wider political trends in the Pacific (see their article in *TCP* 10:369–390), Waddell places stress first on Tjibaou's profound belief that Melanesian identity is fundamentally cultural and locality-based. The wider exposure to international thinking that he experienced in the Païta seminary and in France is considered secondary. Waddell's argument is that Tjibaou's convictions were his own and were not derivative. In the last years of his life, the close relations he developed with French peasants resisting the land grabbing of the army in the Larzac region of southern France shaped his ideas as much as any amount of anti-colonialist writing. Waddell does not compare Tjibaou with his older contemporary and friend Kamisese Mara in Fiji, but the man he draws emerges as an equally charismatic leader, but much less arrogant and ruthless than Mara. Tjibaou did, however, make mistakes. Ultimately, his fatal error was in failing to involve Djubelly Wéa in the critical discussions in 1988, even though Wéa was in France at the time.

Writing this brilliantly crafted book has taken Waddell fifteen years, and it emerges almost twenty years after Tjibaou's death. Waddell's final assessment is therefore illuminated by the events of those twenty years in New Caledonia and in France. Prime Minister Rocard kept his word in handing over control of more than half of the territory to the Kanaks and in initiating a major thrust for economic development of the north, but he may also have been Machiavellian in creating the conditions for emergence of a Kanak bourgeoisie. No charismatic new leader has emerged,

and instead of the promised referendum on independence, the tenth anniversary saw a new agreement to defer decision on the constitutional future for a further fifteen or twenty years. Few expect startling new initiatives under French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is visiting New Caledonia during 2009. The striking Tjibaou Cultural Centre outside Nouméa is now in full operation, and in New Caledonian politics, cooperation has replaced confrontation. But Tjibaou's principal legacy is the word, and this is what Waddell brings, in English, to a Pacific readership that is overwhelmingly anglophone. A French-language version is planned (the author is as fluent in French as he is in English), but the present book is likely to stand as Waddell's most important contribution to Pacific writing. Tjibaou was a passeur, a man who moved between cultures, and Waddell is also a passeur, who in his Canadian homeland has moved successfully between French and Anglo-American cultures. This makes him a particularly appropriate biographer. This book deals with topics of immense complexity in a readable manner and convincingly presents the story and contribution of a great man who lived in a critical period of time for all Oceanian people.

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*Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics*, by Yunte Huang. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-674-02637-7; xi + 187 pages, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$37.00.

For the past twenty years or so, the field of American studies has undergone a post-national turn that has elicited diverse scholarship that takes hemispheres, regions, areas, borderlands, and the planet as founding critical geographies. This turn, once cutting-edge, has become more or less the norm for the field. In *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics*, a work of post-national American literary history, Yunte Huang brings together readings of canonical American and Asian-American literature, Chinese historiography, and the faux-Hiroshima writings of Yasusada. Huang argues that transpacific imaginations refer to "literary and historical imaginations that have emerged under the tremendous geopolitical pressure of the Pacific encounters" (2).

The first section of the book, "History: And the Views from the Shores," is divided into three brief chapters on the transpacific travel writing of Mark Twain, Henry Adams, and Chinese historian Liang Qichao. In 1866, Twain was sent as a newspaper correspondent to Hawai'i, where he wrote a series of letters in which he celebrated the Pacific as a space of economic opportunity and expansion. Twain's uncritical endorsement of Orientalist and Pacific pastoral mythologies was complicated, though, when discussing Cook, who represented a violent,