

*Nationalism and Interdependence: The
Political Thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou*

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I would not like New Caledonia to resemble any other Pacific territory.

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After the Second World War, following the political and social transformations that had occurred in their countries, Oceanian populations at last had the opportunity to start making their voices heard. While the winds of decolonization swept across Africa, advocates for the interests of the indigenous populations began to appear in Papua New Guinea, the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), and New Caledonia, as well as in Australia and New Zealand. In their thoughts and actions, these individuals were marked by the acceleration of history that had seen them pass from their villages to the city, from their rural and tribal communities to institutions to which the European colonizers had gradually given them access. Their exposure to western institutions made them privileged witnesses to the profound changes that had shaken the Oceanian world for over half a century.¹ Whatever their personal histories and origins, and whether or not they saw their countries achieve independence, it is remarkable that throughout their careers they embraced ideas, images, and strategies that were clearly comparable from one end of the Pacific to the other, to such an extent that today these leaders cannot be understood solely by looking at the specific people or culture to which they belonged.

In this respect, we believe that the case of Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–1989) helps to illuminate the very particular effects of French policy in

the South Pacific. The thought of the first president of the FLNKS (*Front de Libération Nationale Kanak Socialiste*) serves as a vital lead in an implicitly comparative study of the forms of political expression in both colonized and independent Oceania. We emphasize Tjibaou's ideas concerning diplomacy in order to highlight the extent to which nationalist demands in Oceania have always relied on expanding interinsular relationships.²

The magnitude of Kanak protest since 1984 has pushed New Caledonia onto the international stage and, likewise, has forced France to rethink its relations with the entire Pacific region.³ Was not one of the Kanaks' major objectives, through their demands for sovereignty, to rejoin the other independent countries of Oceania, notably the Melanesian countries that had met since 1985 as the Spearhead group? This geopolitical, economic, and ideological reorientation of New Caledonia's position toward its neighboring states found an advocate of high caliber in the person of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Through his thought and action he continually encouraged the Kanak community, and with it the entire Caledonian population, toward ever-increasing involvement with the entirety of Pacific problems, even if this led to a decisive break with French overseas policy. We therefore examine the way in which Jean-Marie Tjibaou contributed to this geostrategic reorientation, which, by gradually enlarging the political scope of New Caledonia, inevitably led to breaking the shackles imposed by colonial domination and to facing the problems that have confronted the microstates of Oceania for several decades.

BREAKING THE FRANCO-FRENCH YOKE

France officially took possession of New Caledonia in 1853, thereby expanding its budding empire to include another archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. It had already taken possession of Tahiti and the Marquesas. The territories falling under its supervision ended up forming small French enclaves in a region where the British gradually carved out the lion's share. Whether they became subjects of the Republic or the Crown, the Oceanian people were now incorporated in new political and institutional frameworks and forced to abandon the kind of relations through which they had previously communicated. Moreover, forced labor on plantations, resettlement imposed by missionaries, and legal exclusion in large part changed the intra- and interisland social fabric.

The people of New Caledonia in particular suffered because of such

restrictions. From the very first years of colonialization the Kanaks saw their possibility of movement seriously reduced with first the establishment of reserves from 1880, and then the *Code de l'indigénat*.⁴ This law allowed nearly 90 percent of the land to be confiscated, either to be given to colonists or controlled directly by the administration for economic or military ends. This vast project of confining the indigenous population under the name of colonialization cut them off somewhat from the life of New Caledonia, and isolated them from the rest of the world for over half a century (Merle 1995). Not until 1946 did France grant French citizenship to the Kanaks and bestow on New Caledonia the original and ambiguous status of “overseas territory.” These postwar arrangements were part of a global plan for decolonization that was put into effect in Africa in 1958, but did not lead to independence for the indigenous people of New Caledonia.⁵

The history of the British colonies was quite different. Australia and New Zealand became independent states at the beginning of the twentieth century, and following the Second World War, in the sixties and seventies, most of the remaining colonies also attained independence, this time to the benefit of the indigenous populations. Most of these countries exercise their sovereignty entirely separately and are represented in various international organizations. Although the microstates of the Pacific are largely economically dependent on the United States, France, and especially on the two regional powers of Australia and New Zealand, they also carry out policies that are their own, and so contribute to endowing the Pacific region with a specific identity.

In this large English-speaking zone, the French overseas territories are rather isolated. Although their standards of living are relatively high, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna suffer from weak regional involvement. In turn, their restricted autonomy in relation to the French government underlines their somewhat anachronistic character at the end of the twentieth century. This paradox has deeply influenced the circumstances in which the Kanaks have tried to understand themselves and their political role in the larger Oceanian context. Steeped in French administration, language, and culture, they have had great difficulty in thinking of themselves as members of the “Oceanian family” and legitimate interlocutors of the other Pacific countries. The Melanesians of New Caledonia have come up against the limits of a “French Oceania” that has made of its Pacific territories a sort of guarded reserve, considered

less as specific island areas than as satellites of a central power installed some twenty thousand kilometers away. For independence-minded Kanaks, the regaining of sovereignty could come only through breaking these shackles in order to renew their historic ties with other Pacific peoples, and in so doing assume a much broader political outlook.

The thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou developed in this milieu. His life and work exude a demand for openness, with the aim of connecting the most isolated Kanak reserve to the international scene by way of the Pacific countries. He disputed France's pretension as a great power, considering the confined and ultimately very limited character of its establishment in the "Great Ocean." Because it remains above all colonial, the French presence in the Pacific lacks the means to achieve its ambitions of "influence." Having listed the multiple restrictions hemming in the Kanak people and preventing their voice from being heard, Tjibaou in 1981 summed up the situation in New Caledonia with the words, "We attach great importance to the experience of the Pacific countries. But as a French colony, we are out of the circle" (1996, 119–120).

The biography of Jean-Marie Tjibaou is similar to those of the other major Oceanian leaders. Indeed, the vision of the Pacific as developed by the man who would become in 1984 the first president of the FLNKS is a constant reminder of the diverse modern influences on the indigenous peoples of Oceania.⁶ Born in 1936 at Tiendanité in the Hienghène valley, Tjibaou would leave this small reserve on the east coast of the island (Grande Terre) through his involvement in the Catholic Church from 1945. He studied at religious schools and seminaries that distanced him from his tribe for over twenty years and led ultimately to the priesthood in 1965. However, because of the stiff segregation still suffered by the Kanaks in the fifties, all this interminable schooling gave him little in the way of formal qualifications or opportunities. Whereas the public school would not allow him to go beyond the *certificat d'études* (equivalent to a primary school leaving certificate), the religious schools limited the horizons for Melanesians to a few subordinate positions in the Caledonian ecclesiastical hierarchy. Having become second vicar of the Noumea cathedral in 1966, Tjibaou had the feeling that the evangelical message was far from being put into practice in any fair way to help the Kanak people, who were now undergoing a particularly intense economic and moral crisis induced by the transformations imposed by unprecedented economic development in New Caledonia (Freyss 1995).

Another Kanak priest, Apollinaire Anova Ataba (1929–1966), had also been shocked by the indifference of the Catholic Church toward his people, and denounced this glaring contradiction in a thesis that for the first time considered the question of independence. Jean-Marie Tjibaou knew about this document, in which the regrettably short-lived Father Ataba laid down the basis for radical Kanak protest.⁷ Searching for “analytical tools” with which to understand the drastic “cultural alienation” of the Kanaks, Tjibaou turned toward the human sciences and in 1968 left for France, where he first enrolled in the *Croissance des Jeunes Nations* (Growth of Young Nations) program at the Institut Catholique in Lyon, and later in the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris.

THE KANAK RENAISSANCE

At the time, discussion concerning Kanak society was dominated by ethnology, which focused on “traditional structures” and did not address the effects of colonialization. Jean-Marie Tjibaou drew positive references to Kanak culture from the work of the missionary Maurice Leenhardt. Ethnology, which places a proper value on each society, provided him with arguments he would use throughout his career to respond, in the domain of cultural dignity, to the supposed superiority of the western world. But he also attended a seminar of Roger Bastide, whose works on syncretisms in Brazil and Africa offered keys to interpreting the unprecedented social changes imposed on peoples of the third world, outlining a program of “applied anthropology.” In the wake of this attention to the recent evolution of societies, Tjibaou reconsidered the traditional Melanesian heritage from which the church had distanced him. Despite this apparent return to his roots and his voluntary return to the secular state in 1971, the former priest would remain strongly attached to his Christian principles.⁸ Tjibaou in fact relied on a progressive conception of Christianity to free the Kanaks from the rather heavy, stilted image of the “primitive” developed in more classical ethnology.⁹ When Tjibaou declared, “We want to proclaim our cultural existence. We want to say to the world that we are not survivors from prehistory, even less some sort of archaeological relics, but rather men of flesh and blood” (1996, 48), shouldn’t it be taken as a direct response to all those who, under the cover of science, have shown little hesitation in considering them “living fossils”?¹⁰ Beyond criticizing a certain ethnology, Jean-Marie Tjibaou intended to give new value to the Kanak identity today, and by so doing

to contest French policy in New Caledonia, which refused to consider the original inhabitants of the archipelago as anything but second-class citizens, or at the very most "*autochtones*" or "natives." To help this "renaissance" to materialize, Tjibaou organized Melanesia 2000, a great festival of Melanesian art held in Noumea in 1975. Several thousand Kanaks gathered for two weeks to assert their specific culture and to express collectively for the first time a nationalist sentiment that from then on would not stop growing (Bensa 1995). By means of this festival, Jean-Marie Tjibaou took up the idea that was blossoming at the time throughout the Oceanian world, that of the Pacific Way, or the Melanesian Way.¹¹ During this period, the birth of independence was accompanied by a highlighting of the "tradition" that was understood, beyond local differences that were sometimes very great, as a way of life and thought specific to the first inhabitants of the Pacific. The dawning nationalisms were accompanied by a pan-Oceanian ideology intent on being distinct from western values. This conception tried to emphasize a cultural background, or an art of living that was common to all indigenous societies in the Pacific. Jean-Marie Tjibaou accorded great importance to what appeared in the Pacific as a resurgence of a *Volksgeist*, a foundation for spontaneous complicity between Kanak and ni-Vanuatu, between Papuan and Māori, and so on. "I don't know why, but whenever we meet in groups where there are Westerners or Asians, there is always a feeling of complicity among Oceanians. This affinity exists because there is a cultural basis which leads to a sharing of concepts used to explain the world, people's relationships within society, with the land, with the gods, or concerning the future. One doesn't find the same affinity among Westerners; with them, there is always the need to explain" (Tjibaou 1996, 198).

The evocation of these common references painted a portrait of an Oceanian civilization that goes beyond specific characteristics and embodies a philosophical, moral, and ecological message. If the Pacific Way ideology allowed certain leaders to promote the idea of a precolonial Oceania that was egalitarian and free of conflicts (Winslow 1987; Howard 1983), it also played a role in the attempted cultural revalorization, indispensable in any liberation struggle. For Jean-Marie Tjibaou, as a Kanak, the cultural widening implicit in the Pacific Way proved even more delicate, as the opportunities for contact with other Oceanians at this time were virtually nonexistent, despite the presence in New Caledonia of a rather large Wallisian community.

On the other hand, the movement of people and ideas contributed in the rest of the Pacific to forging a common platform of political and cultural demands. Rare were the leaders of island states in the Pacific once under Anglo-Saxon tutelage who had not frequented the university centers of Guam, Suva, Auckland, or the Australian School of Pacific Administration at Mosman in Sydney. Management studies, the introduction to international politics, and the establishment of multiple contacts among people from all corners of the Pacific contributed considerably to the creation of an Oceanian elite. Not just the Kanaks, but Caledonians of whatever background, were not to benefit from any such institutions. Whereas the Australian government as early as 1947 created the Research School of Pacific Studies in Canberra to better understand this Oceanian environment that they had “discovered” during the war in the Pacific, the *Université Française du Pacifique* did not open its doors until the end of the 1980s.¹²

The stakes for Tjibaou, as for his Oceanian neighbors, were certainly also political. The call for unity was a way to get around the borders by which the French state had isolated all Caledonians from the rest of the Pacific and forced the Kanaks into a painful confrontation with the colonial administration. Imagining that all Oceanian peoples were members of one large family with the right to underline its singularity, Jean-Marie Tjibaou nourished a consensual ideology that was relatively effective outside New Caledonia but of very limited effect inside the territory; there, communities of different origins, whether indigenous or not, tended to oppose one another, for economic or political reasons, rather than blend into the same mold. Until quite recently, for example, the independence-minded Kanaks had never had close relationships with the people from Wallis or Futuna living in New Caledonia.

A DIPLOMACY UNDER INFLUENCE

Dividing to better rule, and making use of a literary and evolutionary ideology that defined types, from the dark-skinned Melanesians of dispersed institutions to the light-skinned Tahitians organized in kingdoms, the French authorities strengthened the cleavages and competitive divisions among Oceanians. That is the case in New Caledonia, where the Wallisians, as good nickel-mining immigrants, oppose the Kanaks, those troublesome indigenous yam growers. For the French nationals in the

Pacific, the effect of being hemmed in is much more intense and fraught than for those of Anglo-Saxon derivation, whose relationships cover the entire Pacific Ocean, extending from Asia on one side to the Americas on the other. French overseas territories have nothing in common with Commonwealth countries; they function more like faraway untaxed sub-prefectures entirely subject to French international policy. Thus, Tjibaou noted, "France looks at itself, and through itself looks at the world. From this basis, it is difficult for France to allow a certain autonomy, to accept that other people can take pride in existing by themselves" (1996, 210).

Indeed, France bestowed on New Caledonia a political and administrative system directly modeled on its own. Since becoming French citizens, the Kanaks have only been able to express their points of view (concerning autonomy, independence, or other questions) through institutions (municipal, territorial, provincial) that frame the rules of political behavior within restrictions that render any expression of indigenous nationalism very difficult. Due to the massive immigration that New Caledonia has experienced,¹³ the rules of formal democracy ("one person, one vote") have limited the number of Kanak representatives in the national assembly, the territorial assembly, and even in certain districts in New Caledonia where Europeans are dominant. Within this electoral configuration, the Kanak nationalist movement could only find itself in opposition to the French government in power, whether of the right or the left.

Significantly, observers of the Caledonian situation feel a certain awkwardness in classifying the supporters of independence according to the pattern of French political life. Are the colonized people who demand an independent state on the right or the left? There is a strong temptation to categorize nationalist movements that emerge in the French territories as leftist or traditionalist movements, unless one prefers to judge them as more or less "radical" or "moderate" without really taking into account their plans for global decolonization. However, the independence-minded Kanaks themselves have rarely rejected the political structures offered to them, accepting positions on town councils and even claiming the right to be provincial administrators, at the same time French and independent. In so doing, they run the risk of finding themselves opposed to the principle of independence by insistently questioning the "plans for society" underlying that claim.¹⁴ Jean-Marie Tjibaou, for example, often hedged between the "nonnegotiable" demand for independence and short and middle term administrative necessities likely to "prepare" for that independence.

Within the FLNKS, among several possible paths for development, no choice has yet been clearly made. For his part, Tjibaou never laid out a precise economic plan, either capitalist or anticapitalist. He endeavored to extend into the present-day world the subsistence economy through which the Kanaks of the eighties thought they could keep their identity, while at the same time asserting their desire to take over the mines. In the end, this path has been chosen by today's elected independence supporters, by favoring the development of mineral resources on Kanak land and, consequently also, associated industrial projects (Bensa 1996).

In the area of international relations, New Caledonia, including the Kanak independence supporters, has relied on the particular perspectives of French diplomacy. Always concerned with asserting its preeminence in the Pacific, the French state has never managed to set up appropriate constitutional frameworks for its Oceanian possessions that were likely to promote dialogue with neighboring countries. For their part, while careful to protect their particular interests, Australia and New Zealand have opened the way for recognition of the local reality. The setting up of constitutional models for the states associated with New Zealand (Cook Islands, Niue), or even the overdue legal recognition of land rights for Aborigines by an Australian court, contrasts with the rigidity of the French constitution, which seems to prevent envisaging any kind of "independence in association" for New Caledonia.¹⁵ Likewise, France had trouble agreeing to grant independence to the New Hebrides, which the British had long favored.¹⁶ Through its diplomacy, and notably its nuclear policy, France has shown itself extremely reluctant to behave in any way other than as a "great power" exposed to the supposed hostility of the Anglo-Saxons. These constant demonstrations of force have left no room for the possibility, in the areas controlled by France, of establishing any sovereignty other than French, which would have restored to the populations an essential part of their history. Jean-Marie Tjibaou was not hindered by this difficulty inherent in French political culture, as he distinguished between restitution of sovereignty and the exercise of independence by underlining the fact that the small island states of the Pacific, like African states, are never really independent but rather "interdependent." "Sovereignty means the right to choose one's partners. For a small country like ours, independence means working out interdependency" (Tjibaou 1996, 179).

By bringing a relational conception to the practice of politics, Tjibaou seemed to employ a particularly Melanesian way of placing oneself within

relationships of power. He applied to the diplomacy between states manners that, among Kanaks, first prevail between people. The representation and rules of politics common to the Kanaks—insofar as they express cultural specificity—play an important role in the contemporary history of the independence movement. Is there a uniquely Kanak way, or Oceanian way, of practicing politics today? Jean-Marie Tjibaou never wrote extensively and was never loquacious on the subject. Like all Kanaks, he was content to advance the famous rule of “consensus” that aims to achieve agreement among all participants in a debate, without voting or delegating speech. “You know, among ourselves, we work more through consensus than by elections. This means that we try to work out questions together, and try to find shared common ground before deciding. This is how we live. Although this does not exclude the possibility of individual positions, the people are particularly respectful of common commitment. And if one takes a new position in relation to the collective thought, I would say the unspoken rule is not to break things apart” (Tjibaou 1996, 180–181).

This notion of consensus, whose roots and contexts of application should be retraced, does not seem to have always worked perfectly, if one judges from the diversity of speech and action among the various components of the independence movement or, more recently, from the problems encountered in the negotiations between the FLNKS, the French state, and the RPCR (*Rassemblement Pour la Calédonie dans la République*) concerning the future of New Caledonia. Neither is it certain that consensus is operational in the internal decision-making procedures in the chiefdoms, elders’ councils, or any of the other political structures that the Kanaks claim to be strong points of their “custom.” Beneath the surface, behind these practical and ideological problems, the entire question of the relationship between the Kanak social organizations (clans, chiefdoms, masters of the soil, and so on) and the life of political parties was raised when Jean-Marie Tjibaou speculated on preserving Kanak specificity at the heart of an independent state.

FROM THE LOCAL TO THE UNIVERSAL

The political thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou attempted both to find roots in an Oceanian uniqueness and to establish ties with other peoples throughout the world who have endured French colonialization. Like other independence leaders before and after him, Tjibaou also sought support

from the “nonaligned,” taking inspiration from the strategic diplomacy of Vanuatu. This quest for support was not free of ulterior motives. By evoking the ghosts of Algeria, Indochina, and even Libya, the Kanak movement hoped to attract attention. But for his part, Tjibaou understood the effects of colonialization first in cultural terms, before criticizing them in a political way. His “portrait of the colonized” is original in that it is not modeled on the third-world rhetoric prevalent at the time. Whereas, at the end of the sixties, other Kanak students residing in France drew concepts as well as models from the revolutionary thinkers, Tjibaou, for his part, never took them into account, preferring to develop the hypothesis of a specifically Kanak model instead. This leitmotiv in his thought is stamped with a humanism marked by the influence of the church.¹⁷ He attempted to establish links between the local and the universal, between the Kanak civilization and all other civilizations. He hoped that relationships of mutual exchange would take shape between cultures, and rejected the idea that only the west is capable of bestowing benefits on humanity. This rebalancing in favor of nonwestern populations was not exempt from questioning:

To understand our hopes and fears, one must remember that we are not yet decolonized. We still perceive the non-Kanak environment which we are asked to join, not only through land alienation, but also through the obstacle of exams, administrative rigidity, and the cold laws of economics. This “modern” world that we have not yet exorcised continues to bear the mark of colonialism which belittles and mortifies us, as the persistence of an organized amnesia concerning the Kanak reality, the refusal to recognize the reality of cultural interbreeding, and the negation of vestiges well demonstrate. The colonial system has rendered the Kanaks anonymous. We have not become marginalized by accident, or by passive refusal. If today I can share what I possess of French culture with a non-Kanak from my country, it is impossible for him to share with me that universal part inherent in my culture. (Tjibaou 1996, 158–159)

Jean-Marie Tjibaou anticipated the painful problems appearing at the end of the twentieth century due to the relationship between community membership (traditional, ethnic, national) and respect for individual rights. It is as if Tjibaou had hesitated between a formula deliberately rooted in the Kanak identity, which would run the risk of inciting racism or exclusion, and a more balanced hypothesis that would advance cultural specificity without endangering democratic expression. His concern for the universal precluded him from any holistic, relativistic apprehension cut

off from social and political systems. He placed the “Kanak question” at the intersection between an international third-worldism, which he knew had resulted in failures and oppression, and a cultural nationalism that also carried the possibility of sectarianism and violence.

He thus took up the criticism of French colonialism leveled by the Algerians, the Indochinese, and the Africans when, strengthened by the events that had shaken New Caledonia ten years before, he wanted to demonstrate that the ideology of domination was still at work against his people. However, by deepening the syncretic approach, he contrasted this logic with a reminder of the rule of rights, thus turning against the colonizer the same moral and legal arms forged by the French Revolution—the people’s right to self-determination, the rights of citizens, human rights, and the respect for the state’s word. His relationship with France was never entirely negative; he sought to recapture a part of the colonizer’s heritage, therefore rejecting the idea of an eternal and immutable “Kanakitude.” Jean-Marie Tjibaou noted a certain number of western civilization’s contributions—techniques, Christian values, reference to the state. To his mind, no fixed conception of culture was acceptable, and therefore any reference to the Kanak identity could only be relative to the history of Oceania over the last two centuries. This resolutely modern dimension to his thought led him to vigorously criticize all traditionalisms. “One always speaks of traditional culture. But what is traditional? It is how others lived before us. But in one hundred years, it will be how we are living today that is traditional, and in one thousand years, what we are living today will perhaps be worth its weight in gold! I believe we always have an overly archaeological conception of culture; the culture of the past is considered authentic, but that which is of contemporary creation must be proven to be authentic, perhaps by time” (Tjibaou 1996, 296).

Tjibaou’s untimely death robbed him of the possibility of clarifying his ideas concerning the political system. If the constitutional plan for Kanaky is really that of a democratic state, its reference to tradition remains ambiguous. Likewise, if he believed in the individual, Tjibaou did not seem convinced by the form individualism has taken in the west. In this he even saw a danger for the maintenance of both political and clan solidarity, which play an essential role in Kanak social life. He liked to point to the fact that the principle of universal suffrage, of which the west is so proud, is also the reason why the Kanaks can never hope to achieve independence as a result of elections. The Kanaks have become a minority in New Caledonia as a result of the deliberate importation of other popula-

tions. Since the end of the sixties, successive French governments have used this demographic reality to justify, through the ballot box, keeping the territory within the Republic.¹⁸ On the other hand, where nationals are a minority, as in Algeria, Vietnam, or Vanuatu, France is careful not to promote the principle of "one person, one vote." Jean-Marie Tjibaou always rose against this variable use of formal democracy.

The prospect of a Kanak state stresses the nationalists' claim that the principle of a Kanak people overrides all linguistic, territorial, and social differences. Yet this diversity remains a living reality and, in the practice of the chiefdoms and clans, resists the unitary model promoted by those seeking independence. Of course, all plans for state control, whatever their nature, necessarily come up against regional powers, but in the case of the Kanak homeland, where the very principle of a Melanesian state is but a recent idea, local strategy is rooted in the usual workings of "customary" political systems. Each group sees things its own way and accepts with difficulty decisions made in the general interest that lead to the emergence of a solid public and national framework. These tensions become particularly intense during land disputes. Elected officials of the FLNKS have often encountered great difficulty in convincing clan authorities to transfer land necessary for the construction of hospitals, ports, or schools. The private logic of traditional social units resents receiving injunctions handed down by those responsible for a growing policy of state control.

The governments of Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, also, are confronted with such problems of adjusting to different jurisdictions. More fundamentally, they bring into play possibly irreconcilable conceptions of personal rights and communal rights. It is citizenship within the postcolonial Oceanian states that is the source of the principal arguments over legitimacy. In the end, should control over land, but also over goods, and perhaps even over persons as well, remain in the hands of local authorities who fiercely defend their autonomy, or should it pass to state institutions that favor the national perspective over regional particularities? The Kanaks define individual rights on the basis of their statutory position within the kinship system and within the political organization (Bensa 1992), whereas a state necessarily bases its room for maneuver on the enfranchisement of people and respect for individual property. However, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that no compatibility exists between these frames of reference. In practice, the Melanesians, as well as all Caledonians, play on the confusion of possibilities offered in situations for which the rules of behavior are never defined beforehand.

The membership of Oceanian leaders in a great variety of groupings (lineage, church, party) does not allow clear contrasts between the fundamentalists of tradition and the proponents of modernity. The choice of attitudes proves even more delicate when particular individuals find themselves, according to the context, sometimes able to intervene on the local level, and sometimes in reference to national needs. The evolution of Pacific societies must be grasped in its entirety, as a process affecting old structures as much as emergent ones. Nationalist ideologies have been forged from the exaltation of values common to all Melanesians, rather than according to abstract designs for emancipation (Marxism, neoliberalism, or liberation theology). Interspersed between regional tensions and the aspirations for unity of those seeking independence, are profound social transformations—the rise of classes, unions, new churches, and so forth. With these changes, Oceanians are gradually distancing themselves from their original village backgrounds as well as from official political authorities. A middle class and a rural-and-urban working class are forming, in a way that seems to preclude the building of a statist culture, either on the eventual ruins of traditional institutions, or on a nationalistic spirit radically at odds with the past.

Without doubt, one of the originalities of the Pacific microstates is the almost utopian desire to remain unchanged while acceding to new forms of social and political structures. Based on this analysis, it is remarkable that these countries have become independent without being shaken by ethnic conflicts, as in the case of Africa. Above all, the conflicts over power were between different political and religious groups (Francophones against Anglophones in Vanuatu, Christians against pagans in the Solomon Islands, and so on). The statist models of Oceania are found halfway between traditional references, which have often been reformulated, and ideals of western origin, which have had problems taking root. The uncertainties thus generated led to the easy rise of new social structuring, and clientelism.

In most independent Oceanian states, tensions between the local and the national constitute one of the major obstacles to the development of economic and political life.¹⁹ Where there was no white settler population, the autochthonous reference was hardly problematic; on the other hand, it became central in New Caledonia, as in New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji, where populations of different origins had to coexist in the same territory. Any unilateral demand by one community to exercise power now appeared, if not totalitarian, at least prejudicial for those not belong-

ing to the dominant ethnic group. Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the independence movement got around this problem by offering citizenship to any resident asking for it. But would Jacques Lafleur wish to become Kanak? The leader of the RPCR and those against independence defend a multi-ethnic society that will remain an integral part of France. Tjibaou was surprised by this argument, which refuses to see the Kanak homeland as the base for a future nation: "This independence called 'multi-ethnic' has the drawback of not referring to nationalism" (Tjibaou 1996, 129).

Kanak supporters of independence oppose this "melting pot" ideology, which was arbitrarily grafted onto a colonial situation rather closer to apartheid. They insist on recognition of the indigenous people and their resulting right to welcome settler populations to their land. The ethnic argument for the rights of kinship has never worked in the history of the Kanaks of New Caledonia, where foreigners have repeatedly been seen becoming integrated into local social structures. However, New Caledonia as a whole is certainly not a melting pot where diverse populations come to blend together. Its colonial history has been so marked by confrontation that the notion of interbreeding has not yet proved capable of becoming a social or political reality. An examination of daily life in New Caledonia shows a practically airtight partitioning along ethnic lines, and no policy of assimilation, however good its intentions, has ever been able to be applied. Tjibaou thought these divisions could be overcome, and tried himself, several times, to open the dialogue.

The internal problems raised by the building of a Kanak or Caledonian state, were complicated by others related to the territorial dispersal of these islands in the Pacific. None of the Pacific microstates is capable of providing for all its needs—certainly in the economic sphere,²⁰ but also concerning defense—without external help. Contemplating a future removed from French tutelage, those seeking independence feel the constraints of insularity more deeply—relative isolation, the necessity for integration into the region, the search for new sources of aid. Faced with these requirements, the Pacific Way is unable to take the place of an economic program, just as independence raises as many questions as it resolves.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE

Aware of these future difficulties, Jean-Marie Tjibaou endeavored to imagine how to overcome the handicap of every Pacific archipelago. He vaunted the island ecology as having a potential for tourism, and, follow-

ing the example of Vanuatu, advanced the diplomatic effort necessary for surpassing geographical dispersal. By achieving recognition from some international organizations, the Kanaks have succeeded in somewhat loosening the colonial vise. They owe their success in large part to the support of neighboring countries, most notably Vanuatu, as well as to the support of the United Nations. Jean-Marie Tjibaou was the most visible architect of this diplomatic offensive, which gradually allowed the FLNKS to establish itself as a solid and inevitable partner in any political solution for New Caledonia.

The centrifugal forces pushing small independent states to multiply and reinforce their ties to larger states could not but accentuate the economic, social, and political transformations. Are not these small island societies, which are always very reliant on the outside world, also those that could be most profoundly upset by the rapid introduction of new techniques and new values? For the Kanaks, does not economic and political success signify an increased acceptance of the very modernization that threatens what remains of their traditional world despite—or because of—one hundred and fifty years of colonialization? In other words, can the old rural world of the Kanak, both poor and marginalized, withstand the new responsibilities imposed by modern economic management? This dilemma pervaded the entire thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Between pragmatism and utopianism, he imagined a Kanak modernity that will be neither a forceful return to tradition, nor an unbridled cult of goods and technology. His thought was marked by the search, at times pathetic, for an original form of development and sociability that recalls the “third way” envisaged by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (1968)²¹ or by Walter Lini of Vanuatu (1980). He therefore allowed himself to criticize the most destabilizing aspects of contemporary life, while seeking to adapt the Kanak reality to urbanization, industrialization, and globalization. In so doing, Tjibaou encouraged the Kanaks to take the initiative that will allow them to appropriate the tools of modernity. In his view, access to political sovereignty would be incomplete if it were not accompanied by the emergence of a new Kanak, who would be distinctively Melanesian, certainly, but would also embody a certain universality. This link between politics and humanism is at the heart of his reflection concerning identity, which looks boldly to the future, to “allow the new people of Kanaky to edify themselves, and to create an image of themselves which is well rooted, but also new, favourable, and influential” (Tjibaou 1996, 27).

The path taken by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, like those taken by some other Oceanian leaders, leads both to the continuation of the Melanesian heritage and to new forms of political, economic, and religious practice. A study of the lives and works of these “guides” cannot help but reveal the stakes involved in the contemporary history of the Pacific. The social sciences seldom address these questions, and when they do, it is through today’s well-worn argument over the invention of tradition (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Keesing 1989; Babadzan 1988). Oceanian leaders have most often been placed in one of two restrictive categories, either as manipulators of tradition or as clones of western politicians. But their true nature precludes such simplistic classification (Jolly 1992). For an understanding of these men, and through them an understanding of contemporary Oceanian societies, one must clarify their customary roots, their relationships with the various churches, and their manner of taking up western models. By focusing on the point where these three great lines of reflection meet, one may step beyond both the glorification (or stigmatization) of the traditional, and the passion (or repulsion) for anything that seems new and modern. The words of Bernard Narokobi, Papuan lawyer, politician, and eulogist of the Melanesian Way,²² express our commitment to this line of research:

There are those who are so ill-informed, simplistic and narrow-minded as to believe Melanesians have the choice between the so-called “primitive” past of our ancestors and the “civilized and enlightened” present of Western civilization. The choice is in fact more complex than this. The secret to that choice lies in the dual pillars of our Constitution. These pillars are our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now, enhanced by selected technology. It is my hope that we would not blindly follow the West, nor be victims to technology and scientific knowledge. These belong to humankind. They are not racial or national. It is the same with music and good writing. These are physically located in time, place and people, but in their use and enjoyment, they belong to all. Thus it is with Melanesian virtues. (1983, 17)

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Notes

The quote of Jacques Lafleur is from an interview in *Le Monde*, 2–3 June 1996, 8.

1 In France, research on the political history of Oceania owes much to the works of Jean Chesneaux (1987; Chesneaux and McLellan 1992), and to the *Atlas des Iles et Etats du Pacifique Sud* by Benoît Antheaume and Joël Bonnemaïson (1988), who deserve credit for centering the problem on the entire Pacific, thus escaping a too “Franco-French” approach to the subject.

2 This text follows our publication of the works of Jean-Marie Tjibaou (*La Presence Kanak*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1996; translation forthcoming from Institute of Pacific Studies, Suva). We have deliberately given him a pragmatic character. This refers to research currently undertaken by Eric Wittersheim on the emergence of elites and the building of a national identity in Vanuatu. Until now, study of the political leaders of Oceania has not received the attention it deserves.

3 The “active boycott” of the territorial elections of 18 November 1984 by independence-seeking Kanaks led New Caledonia into a long period of “troubles” that did not end until June 1988 with the signing by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Jacques Lafleur, and the French government of the Matignon Agreement.

4 The *Code de l'indigénat* was passed by decree on 18 July 1887, and extended by the decrees of 12 March 1897, 23 March 1907, and 27 May 1917. The Melanesians were assigned to live on reserves, except if hired for work. The decisions of 14 September 1920 and 20 September 1934 regulated movement at night. All of these restrictions were abolished by the law of 1946.

5 On the occasion of the 1958 referendum (which led to independence for French Africa), the political party of the Kanak majority, the Union Calédonienne, demanded broad autonomy. During the vote on self-determination the same year, Caledonians as a whole chose to keep the territory in the French Republic.

6 A lively and well-documented biography of Jean-Marie Tjibaou was published shortly after his death by Alain Rollat (1989). On Tjibaou's political discourse, see also Waddell (1994) and Milne (1996).

7 The bishopric of Noumea prevented the publication of this memoir. Not until 1984 did the independence movement succeed in bringing this important text to light by publishing it on their own press (Ataba 1984).

8 As almost everywhere in Oceania, following methods still to be analyzed, this powerful relationship with religion (Catholic and Protestant) continued to mark the Kanak people, including the leaders of the independence movement.

9 See in particular the work of the philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1983), who greatly influenced Maurice Leenhardt.

10 This expression, attributed to a certain Pales, cited by Maurice Leenhardt in *Do Kamo* (1979), has often been used by those against independence.

11 The term *Pacific Way* was first used in 1970 by Ratu Mara, then prime minister of Fiji, during a speech at the United Nations. *The Pacific Way* is also the name of a book (Crocombe, Slatter, and Tupounia 1975) that contains articles by some of the leading scholars and politicians from the Pacific Islands. *The Melanesian Way* refers to the work of Bernard Narokobi (1983), but also to Walter Lini's "Melanesian socialism" in Vanuatu (1980). It is significant that the title of Tjibaou's work *Kanaké: Mélanésien de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (1976) was translated as *Kanaké: The Melanesian Way*.

12 The student revolt of 1996 by ni-Vanuatu students of French-speaking origin due to the lack of openings offered them by the *Université Française du Pacifique* is a symptomatic example.

13 The development of the nickel industry encouraged workers to come to New Caledonia at the end of the sixties. Wallisians and Futunans, Tahitians and French increased the nonindigenous population, so that today the indigenous Kanaks represent only 43 percent of the total Caledonian population, which is near 200,000 according to the 1995 census.

14 Independence-seeking Kanaks have often been asked about the way they imagine their country's future if it becomes independent. Though central, this question has frequently been used to justify the maintenance of the political status quo. The historian Isabelle Merle (1995) has clearly shown that when the French took control of New Caledonia in 1853 they had no precise political plan for the archipelago, and ever since the French state has only proposed plans and statutes for New Caledonia in response to the successive crises the territory has experienced.

15 As Stewart Firth (1989) has rightly underlined, the different manners of decolonization correspond to precise strategies, according to the specific interest that each territory represents. Nevertheless, France, like the United States, distinguished itself above all by its desire to never "give up land" in the Pacific, even when different strategic justifications disappeared one after another.

16 The New Hebrides, which became Vanuatu at independence in 1980, was colonized by both France and England, with a legal framework, as strange as it was inefficient, called Condominium. See Van Trease (1995).

17 The influence of doctrinal reorientations within the Catholic Church during the twentieth century on Oceanic leaders, has until now not attracted particular attention.

18 In 1972, Prime Minister Pierre Messmer stated, "New Caledonia, a peopled colony devoted to a multi-racial patchwork, is probably the last non-independent tropical territory where a developed country can emigrate its nationals. . . . In the long term, the nationalist claims of the indigenous population will only be avoided if the non-Pacific communities represent a demographic majority" (cited in *Les Temps Modernes*, March 1985, p 1608).

19 For recent reflections on this topic, compare the books edited by Foster (1995) and Otto and Thomas (1997).

20 Even in the case of New Caledonia, where the almighty nickel constitutes only 10 to 20 percent of the gross domestic product each year (Freyss 1995).

21 Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922–) became in 1962 the first president of independent Tanzania, and emphasized *Ujamaa* (familyhood), a unique form of rural socialism, frequently called *Tanzanian socialism*. Thus the term *Melanesian socialism*, alleged to have been forged in the early 1970s by Barak Sope (1974), then Walter Lini's main collaborator within the Vanua'aku Pati.

22 See Narokobi (1983) and an article by Ton Otto about Narokobi's life and works in Otto and Thomas (1997).

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Abstract

The publication of the writings and speeches of Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–1989) allows us to sketch the main directions of his political thought, which aimed to reintegrate New Caledonia into the cultural, political, and economic Pacific framework. The apparent originality of the Kanak example might be illuminated by a comparative approach to the pan-Pacific ideology known as the Pacific Way. But when nationalisms lead to the emergence of new states, new difficulties arise—economic interdependence, and the necessary invention of new models, both regional and national, local and universal.

KEYWORDS: interdependence, leadership, Melanesian Way, nationalism, nation-state, New Caledonia, Tjibaou