

New Caledonia or Kanaky? The Political History of a French Colony, by John Connell. Pacific Research Monograph 16. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1987. xx + 493 pp, figures, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, glossary, bibliography. A\$25; US\$20.

In the 1980s, the rise of Kanak nationalism and recurrent protest and violence have focused attention on the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia. Unfortunately, however, those seeking a fuller understanding of the struggle between the indigenous Kanaks and their European and other immigrant opponents have been handicapped by the absence of a detailed, up-to-date general history. John Connell's *New Caledonia or Kanaky? The Political History of a French Colony* does much to fill the gap.

After a chapter on Melanesian society before the European arrival, Connell reviews the history of the island group from the visit of Captain James Cook in 1774 to the election in March 1986 of the conservative French government of Jacques Chirac. The book concludes by setting New Caledonia in its regional and international context and by discussing political and economic prospects. Connell, a human geographer at Sydney University, served in Noumea with the South Pacific Commission from 1981 through 1983. He draws on some primary sources and a wide array of secondary material, and also brings to the task his rich experience of the South Pacific. Connell combines the approaches and methods of the human geographer with

those of the general historian to increase his reader's understanding of the roots of the Kanak drive for independence. To a lesser extent, he illuminates the interests and attitudes shaping the settlers' attachment to France, as well as French metropolitan perceptions and objectives.

Writing soon after the Chirac government won power and began reversing the reforms of the socialist Fabius government, Connell concluded that "the strongest independence movement that has ever existed in the South Pacific is located where independence is quite unlikely" (445). One could argue that in Vanuatu the nationalist movement, embodied in the Vanua'aku Pati, became equally strong, for the self same reason of French opposition to decolonization. That point aside, Connell's conclusion will be put to the test over the next few years: a plan for peace and development, leading to a referendum on independence in 1998, was introduced in mid-1988 by the new French government of Michel Rocard. Prophetically, Connell also wrote that "it may be that the key element is force; some as yet unknown constellation of events, possibly violent, will rapidly transform the existing system in a dramatic manner" (444). This seems to have come to pass in early 1988. The unrest and violence sparked by the remobilization of the FLNKS, combined with the reelection of President Mitterrand and the coming to power of the Rocard government, led to an evolution in attitudes. Both Kanak nationalists and their opponents showed an unprecedented willingness to compromise, and the settlers conceded that greater account must be taken of the

disadvantages and aspirations of the Melanesian community. A spectrum of possibilities remains open, but the prospects for an eventual transition to a form of independence, qualified by strong links with France, are stronger than before. Such a transition could either be achieved via the present plan or follow further mobilization by the nationalist movement.

Connell's argument is that, whatever the political outcome, New Caledonia's narrow resource base, limited economic options, and dependence on France, along with the pragmatic orientation of the nationalist mainstream, will ensure strong socioeconomic and political continuities. But this assessment perhaps underestimates the potential influence of radical ideas and elements in the nationalist movement, the bitterness of many on both sides, and the prospect that renewed unrest and violence could bring about a more abrupt and dramatic denouement. The possibilities include both partition and the departure of large numbers of settlers.

Despite its timeliness, the book has some weaknesses. The synopsis does not do it justice, and the lack of an index is regrettable, especially in a book of over 200,000 words. Instead of a bare list of references, a bibliography, annotated to highlight the patchiness and partiality of the available sources, would have been preferable. On occasion, Connell smoothes over the rough edges of historical debate rather too neatly and uses his sources uncritically. For example, the discussion of Melanesian demographic trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is confusing. Although

the book demonstrates the merits of the comparative approach by lucidly situating New Caledonia in its regional and French colonial contexts, it also perhaps underemphasizes the territory's special characteristics.

But let me not damn with faint praise. The book is an important addition to the scant English-language literature on New Caledonia. It is the first major study on the politics of the territory to appear since Myriam Dornoy's comprehensive *Politics in New Caledonia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1984), which ends in 1978, with a postscript to 1982. Connell's study will be an indispensable reference for academic specialists. For the student and the general reader, this reasonably priced book provides a detailed introduction to the history and politics of this beautiful yet tragically divided country.

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Torres Strait Islanders: Custom and Colonialism, by Jeremy Beckett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiii + 251 pp, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$49.50.

This book is a welcome addition to a growing literature that may be called the anthropology of colonialism. As "Australia's other indigenous minority" (171), the Torres Strait Islanders' experiences under alien rule provide fascinating material to compare and contrast with the colonial histories of Australian Aborigines and Papua New Guineans. The author's effort to com-