

cal life, in science and technology, the old mindset fixed on racial difference and cultural superiority imprisons people by their inability to read the world. The prison can be unlocked by transforming the map of reality promoted by politicians, whose main power derives from control of material resources, into a richer tapestry created through the power of alternative discourses and their appeal to the imagination. Only by first imagining a social transformation that re-visions the old realities can a people begin the quest for a better life.

Subramani addressed and dedicated this book to the people of Fiji. But in a broader sense it represents a record of thought about and imaginative response to reality in Fiji that fills in gaps and brightens the focus for any reader of works written about the Pacific by Pacific Island writers.

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*Chroniques Kanak: L'Ethnologie en Marche*, by Alban Bensa. *Ethnies-Documents*, volume 10, numbers 18–19, Autumn 1995. Paris: Indigenous Peoples and Development. ISSN 0295-9151, 350 pages, map, notes, bibliography, chronology. Paper, FF120.

Alban Bensa has worked as an anthropologist in New Caledonia for a quarter of a century and gathered insights from both his fieldwork in the center-north of Grande Terre (the main island) and his activities in the larger arena of a politically divided French

Overseas Territory, as shown by his 1990 book, *Nouvelle-Calédonie: un paradis dans la tourmente*. This new book assembles thirty-six essays written between 1984 and 1995 in forums ranging from anthropological journals to the *Bulletin de Psychologie* and *Le Monde* to the more overtly activist *Le Banian* and *Kanaky*. That diversity of audiences reflects Bensa's central theme: how to do anthropology in a highly politicized context? Bensa has labored, not during the heyday of colonial rule, but during an era of troubled, often violent decolonization, with all its contestations of meaning and representation.

In the title essay, "*Ethnologie en marche*" (Ethnology in action), Bensa reminds his readers that anthropology once treated indigenous Pacific societies like museum objects, as if they were neatly bounded by beaches, timeless, and composed of traits that could be measured exactly by detached observers whose "scientific data" were then taken off to distant academic institutions and used in intellectual debates about functionalism or structuralism. But when peoples like the Kanak revolt against foreign domination and attempt to take charge of their own destiny again, they reveal that they were connected to outside pressures and events all along. Bensa admits wondering at first what his role should be, as nationalist leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou was already re-presenting Kanak culture in dialogue with and resistance to French colonization. (Recent articles in the *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* have reevaluated Tjibaou's Melanesia 2000 project.)

Bensa saw two choices for himself: to say nothing, or to help explain what was happening to a wider audience. He chose the latter, treating the Kanak as “our contemporaries” in order to show that “we are engaged in a common history that ultimately puts in play the fate of the planet” (15). He notes a near-tradition of anthropological activism on Grande Terre, from the early work of missionary-ethnographer Maurice Leenhardt to the ongoing pro-nationalist writings of Jean Guiart. Yet unlike James Clifford, who in *Person and Myth* read Leenhardt’s life and work as almost a post-structuralist trope (especially the image in *Do Kamo* of people as relational “person-ages” operating in a changing, participatory sociomythic space), Bensa sees Leenhardt as more of an essentialist.

In an essay on “Colonialism, racism and ethnology in New Caledonia,” Bensa says the Kanak archetype that Leenhardt portrayed was a product of being confined in colonial reserves after failed revolts and land dispossession (France took 90 percent of Grande Terre). Leenhardt did protest against French colonial injustices, but he also had a religious agenda and saw in the Kanak “mentality” a ready-made spiritual basis for Christian conversion. Bensa pursues this theme in the longest entry of the book, a 1985 interview with Pierre Bourdieu that is interspersed with extracts from Leenhardt’s writings. Bensa outlines the various takes on Kanak identity used by Leenhardt and others, sympathetic or otherwise, who have made of “Kanak” what they wish—including rival nationalist parties. Bourdieu sees parallels to his own work in Algeria,

where (as he has argued elsewhere, in *The Logic of Practice*) “culture” was a mutable repertoire of strategic choices for active agents.

Ultimately, Bensa’s version of Kanaky, past and present, is one of constant renegotiation in changing contexts. Precolonial dynamics generated what Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer have called Lamarckian or consocial identities, rather than primordial, “biological” ethnicity. Each Kanak individual and clan carries a genealogy that includes a point of origin but also itineraries of migration and intermingling, to the extent that respected but powerless “chiefs” were often chosen from newcomers to represent the oldest clan (masters of the soil) to outsiders. The works of Tjibaou and Guiart contain similar notions of movement, changing genealogical charters, and relational, clientelist loyalties. When De Gaulle abolished the *Code de l’Indigénat* in 1946, freeing the Kanak from confinement in their reserves, they knew exactly what places to revisit along their ancestral routes to roots.

Bensa’s Kanak society is filled with competition and bluff, not rigidity in danger of extinction. Hence the mobilization by nationalists via local committees using gift exchanges and oratory, the fluctuating rivalry and cooperation of parties within the independence coalition, and confrontations with the French state, which Bensa says have used symbolic acts of violence and martyrdom to win concessions. Kanaky thus becomes a culmination of long-term solidarity-building tactics, a shrewd adjustment to new conditions of power. Bensa

shows himself a partisan who has worked “alongside” the Kanak for many years and come to appreciate their cultural pride and political creativity. In his inevitably overlapping essays, he repeatedly condemns historical French oppression and racism toward the Kanak people and validates the richness of their resilient subaltern identity. Anticolonial martyrs like Atai, Machoro, and Tjibaou must be compensated for like any other deaths in a Kanak clan: “By extension, decolonization is regarded as the payment of a blood debt, of stolen lands and of humiliation” (46). One is reminded of Guiart’s *La terre est le sang des morts*, which was misunderstood a decade ago as “sensationalist.”

Among the targets of Bensa’s criticism are the authors of racist colonial stereotypes, from a 1922 French work that compared Kanak to Neanderthals with monkey-like toes, to recent loyalist graffiti, fatal impact historiography that he says reinforced “a racism of annihilation” (116); right-wing terrorism in the 1980s against the land reform office, the Kanak cultural center, and Kanak participants in the territorial council; Premier Jacques Chirac’s “politics of reconquest” (175) that supported renewed Caldoche land grabbing; police brutality toward peaceful Kanak demonstrators; pseudo-history that claims Melanesians are not the original inhabitants of New Caledonia or that the 1878 revolt was simply a civil war rather than an anticolonial struggle; even liberators indigenous or foreign who would impose modernist or socialist development on a predominantly rural society.

He argues forcefully that anthropol-

ogists cannot simply treat their subjects like “ants” to be studied but must recognize their own participation in a reciprocal relationship. Kanak, like many “others,” help to create the texts of anthropologists, and they may use the data politically. In fact, he observes, most informants move between “traditional” and “modern” spheres, reciting oral traditions or organizing labor union strikes according to context: “Must we chop this discourse in two?” (23). If the charter of the liberation front treats twenty-eight indigenous language groups as one people, it cannot simply be dismissed as an invented founder-myth comparable to “ancient” chiefly ploys, he says, but must be seen as an innovative response to increasing immigration and mining expansion caused by the nickel boom of the 1970s. As an “anthropologist-citizen” (315), Bensa gave advice to the architect of the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center about the late ideologist’s strategic goal of using cultural displays to enable Caldoches and Kanak to understand each other’s common and comparable human heritage.

Ironically, after all his emphasis on creative resilience, Bensa’s closing essay, written after five weeks in New Caledonia in late 1995, assumes the tone of an old friend who is worried about where things are headed. Entitled “Malaise in Kanak Civilization,” it describes an “abyss of contradictions” (329) into which the 1988 Matignon Accords pushed the Kanak: urbanization, growing dependency on cash incomes, youth suicide, family violence, failure in schools, provincial governments that seek to expand min-

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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*La présence kanak*, by Jean-Marie Tjibaou; produced and presented by Alban Bensa and Éric Wittersheim. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1996. ISBN 2-7381-0399-5, 326 pages, photographs, notes, chronology, index. FF140.

“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 pre-occupations: 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-