

## Political Reviews

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*The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2013*

NIC MACLELLAN

*Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2013*

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## NEW CALEDONIA

In a year leading up to the 2014 municipal and provincial elections and a possible choice to hold a referendum on independence (or another negotiated accord), French loyalists and Kanak nationalists debated and postured, with some crossover on particular issues, while questions of sustainable development and reducing inequalities loomed in the background. The most dramatic event of the year was a massive protest against the high cost of living, as autonomy powers continued to devolve from Paris, which maintained its high levels of financial and technical aid. Defining local citizenship and voting rights became contentious, and environmental concerns haunted the expanding nickel mining and processing industry that fuels much of the local economy. It was also a year of commemorations, reconciliations, and regionalism.

In a survey conducted by the local government (NC, 27 Feb 2013), only three political leaders garnered public confidence ratings of 40 percent or higher: Paul Neaoutyine (47 percent), the pro-independence president of the Kanak-ruled Northern Province; Philippe Gomès (44 percent, though 40 percent said they distrusted him), deputy to the French National Assembly and leader of the loyalist Calédonie Ensemble (CE, Caledonia Together) party; and Gaël Yanno (40 percent), who had lost his deputy seat to Gomès in 2012, became a dissident within the loyalist Rassemblement–Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (RUMP), and finally created his own party, the Mouvement Populaire Calédonien (MPC), as well as a new coali-

tion against independence, the Union pour la Calédonie dans la France (UCF). Taken together, these leaders represent the three largest political groupings in the country today, though Neaoutyine's Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika) is rivaled in the independence movement by leaders such as Rock Wamytan of the Union Calédonienne (UC), who is president of the Congress of New Caledonia, and Yanno is challenging his former RUMP boss, Senator Pierre Frogier. The pro-independence Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), of which the UC and Palika are the largest of five member parties, has been trying to act together, but the loyalist factions of Gomès, Yanno, and Frogier have been waging bitter internecine politics for some time now. The CE has accused the RUMP of working in ad hoc coalition with the UC-FLNKS (that combination brought down the Gomès presidency of the executive cabinet in 2011), while Yanno's MPC/UCF has accused Gomès of agreeing too often with Palika on socioeconomic issues. In September 2013, cabinet president Harold Martin of the Avenir Ensemble party (AE, Future Together, an ally of the RUMP) closed the doors of Congress temporarily after political disputes over whether to finance moderate rental housing, leading the local paper to ask, "Is the country ungovernable?" (NC, 11 Sept 2013). In view of the 2014 elections, it may become a challenge to elect a new cabinet president.

Yet the delegation of governing powers from Paris to Noumea continues, in compliance with the 1998 Noumea Accord. The Overseas Ministry of the Socialist government

in Paris created a new structure to "accompany" New Caledonia as new administrative authority was being granted to the country, such as control over secondary and higher education, commercial and civil law, accident insurance, audiovisual communications, maritime and domestic aviation security, and civil defense (including fire departments). Because some transfers have been controversial or have languished for lack of preparation, a special delegate of the ministry will supervise and facilitate administrative reorganization and personnel training (NC, 19 April 2013). Commissioners sent by the French Parliament to examine the local situation expressed regrets that so little groundwork had been done since 1998 to enable such devolutions, which they had hoped would help the country to reduce socioeconomic inequalities. They concluded that local political quarrels over the country's future status had become an impediment to addressing problems of high living costs and unemployment, so Paris needed to take a more active role in pursuing a "decolonization" that offered better wealth distribution (NC, 9 Sept 2013). The French Parliament passed a special law that enables New Caledonia to create "independent" institutions as needed, such as a local antitrust authority to promote more competition. Deputy Gomès in the National Assembly saluted this reform, passed unanimously in both houses of Parliament, which allows for such a local "gendarme" to combat monopolism among importers who keep prices too high. The modified law also allows new government-subsidized businesses and associations to grow at the coun-

try, provincial, and municipal levels and empowers local governments to regulate expansion in the mining industry (NC, 3 Oct 2013).

The question of future status in the currently “autonomous” (a vague term) but *sui generis* (unique) country (for which no term adequately describes its place in the overseas French political system) continued to be discussed by an advisory French “pilotage” (steering) committee of experts, at the annual follow-up meeting of the committee of signers of the Noumea Accord, and in political and legal debates over definitions of a local citizenship in terms of voting rights and job hiring priorities. The 2010 signers’ committee meeting in Paris had called for expert advice and information to enable local leaders to decide what options were available to fulfill the provisions of the Noumea Accord. After three years of research into issues such as what is sovereign independence in a globalized world and can citizenship differ from nationality, two metropolitan experts offered a report that included four possibilities: (1) full sovereignty after a referendum that would devolve to the country the so-called “reserved” powers of defense, public order, foreign relations and trade, and currency; (2) full sovereignty in partnership, as in France’s relationship with Monaco (a sovereign city-state and United Nations member, but defended by France); (3) expanded autonomy in a federal arrangement (which is what is already happening); or (4) permanent autonomy, ie, the status quo engraved in marble, as the local newspaper put it (NC, 26 Sept, 9 Dec 2013). In 1960, the United Nations

suggested the options of independence, free association, or integration, but France has preferred to invent its own “internal” categories. In comparing the two approaches, they basically resemble each other, though the three French alternatives to full sovereignty appear to be variations on association (a negotiated arrangement in any case, as demonstrated by the five countries in Oceania that are freely associated with either the United States or New Zealand), all of which imply more self-government than integration (eg, Hawai’i’s statehood). In a sense, the three alternative options are designed to allow loyalists some wiggle room, since most of them prefer self-rule that is close to but still short of sovereignty because of security concerns.

In October, the annual signers’ committee meeting was collegial, in anticipation of the May 2014 provincial elections that will also choose a new Congress, which can decide whether to hold a referendum on independence (if 60 percent of members want one) or to negotiate a lasting accord on future status. Loyalists touted the degree of consensus reached in the talks, which focused mainly on educational, administrative, financial, and economic issues, including ongoing French aid. Pro-independence leaders such as Wamytan agreed to examine the four options the experts had proposed, but they also stressed the need to re-verify voting rights (only long-term residents can now vote in provincial elections, the results of which proportionally determine Congress members) and to accelerate the rate of transfers of authority to the country from Paris that the Noumea Accord specified (some of which the

loyalists consider optional). Neaoutyine urged more coordination in the mining industry, since nickel will someday run out and three processing plants were now competing during a world nickel price slump. (One idea floated was not to export any more raw ore in order to keep the value added via processing.) The French government also empowered its high commissioner in Noumea to monitor bank charges and if necessary reduce them to moderate the cost of living. A commission of the local congress was said to be making progress in coming up with a common flag for the country (both the French and Kanak flags now fly in tandem over public buildings), and an exposition of Kanak art had opened at the Quai Branly museum in Paris (NC, 14 Oct 2013).

Citizenship was a contentious subject as a possible referendum loomed, and Wamytan wanted more Kanak qualified for and some non-Kanak disqualified from the voter rolls. He took his case to the French court of appeals, the European Court of Human Rights, and the United Nations, so a team of judges arrived to certify the electorate (NC, 4 March 2013). New Caledonia has three voter categories: those who can vote in local municipal, French legislative, and French presidential elections; a smaller group who could vote in 1998 (or their resident offspring) and are thus eligible to vote in provincial elections; and a still smaller group who can vote on “exiting the accord” (ie, choosing future status), for whom the qualifying date is 1994 (another small group can vote in European Union elections). Restricting the electorate on important matters, as eventually approved and enshrined in

the Noumea Accord, was something the FLNKS long struggled for ever since the massive nickel boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s when government immigration policies deliberately skewed the electorate against local autonomists despite explicit UN resolutions against such tactics. A local citizenship identity card is in preparation, to fulfill a neglected Noumea Accord provision, and favoring locals in hiring (depending on job skills needed) is now a country law (NC, 6 April 2013; NCLatere, 4 April 2013).

Pro-independence parties, like their opponents, began to campaign in this lead-up year to the 2014 elections. At the Palika party congress, Neaoutyine raised the issue of whether all FLNKS members were still pursuing full sovereignty or some were content to remain within the confines of expanded autonomy. Palika had been founded in the mid-1970s by leftists, unlike the UC, which had been founded in the 1950s by churches and chiefs. Neaoutyine wanted full sovereignty, and his question during the party congress was likely referring to the UC’s quasi-cooperation with the RUMP since 2011, which itself might be due to an older generation’s becoming satisfied with well-paid government positions (in replacing some colonial settlers) and a relative independence at the mercy of global financial institutions and multinational corporations, without making significant structural changes in the country (NC, 29 Jan 2013). Naku Press said that Kanak had become a minority due to nickel boom immigration, which led to 1980s violence and then to the softening process of dialogue while France continued its “cornucopia” policy of financial largesse, which

institutionalized economic dependency and diverted politics into a struggle for self-interest and incomes among local leaders on both sides. Leaders should serve the people, it said, not the reverse, and that requires delivering more concrete actions: “The slogan no longer suffices, the independence advocate must now go farther to defend his socio-economic project” (MNP, 8 Feb 2013).

For its part, the UC wanted to get out the vote better, considering the lingering apathy among some alienated Kanak, notably in the outer islands, and to promote unity in the form of a “nationalist bloc” to take advantage of disunity among loyalists and perhaps even gain a majority in the Congress (where 43 percent of seats are currently held by pro-independence parties, who need nine more votes in order to hold a referendum). Concrete projects were needed to rally popular support and to persuade opponents of self-rule what its real benefits would be for everyone. Revealingly, a former UC president was suspended for a year for supporting a CE (Gomès) motion of censure against the current cabinet president, Martin, who is an ally of the RUMP (NC, 11 Feb 2013). Aloisio Sako, president of the Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO), which is a full member of the FLNKS, hopes to convert more resident Polynesians to the independence cause by emphasizing the need to obtain New Caledonian citizenship, since they have often voted loyalist in the past for fear of losing their right to work there (NCLaIere, 17 June 2013). Wallis and Futuna, his homeland, is almost totally economically dependent on France and on

remittances from its mostly working-class diaspora in New Caledonia. The FLNKS held a series of “citizen meetings” to urge independence supporters to vote (NC, 15 July 2013).

In August, Wamytan was elected president of the Congress for the third time, after one year in which a CE Kanak held the post. This year, the loyalists did not combine their thirty-one votes on the third round of balloting, suggesting the unwillingness of the CE and the RUMP to work together anymore and, in effect, the RUMP’s tacit willingness to share some top posts with the UC-FLNKS, despite the consequent defeat of its own loyalist Kanak candidate. The mostly settler loyalists still control all four New Caledonian seats in the French Parliament in Paris as well as the presidencies of the executive cabinet and the populous Southern Province. The CE Kanak incumbent, Gerard Poadja, was seen as too partisan in his management of the dossiers in the Congress and in his opposition to allowing the chair of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) to head the meeting of that regional organization in New Caledonia because the chair was Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama of Fiji, who had come to power in a military coup in 2006. Poadja criticized the RUMP for even fielding a candidate (former Senator Simon Loueckhote) and thus helping the FLNKS, whereas Loueckhote blamed the CE for his not being elected. Palika backed Wamytan’s election, obtained the post of first vice president of the Congress (out of eight vice presidents who make up a kind of congressional mini-cabinet that examines proposed bills), and touted the success

of pro-independence unity with 2014 in mind. The final vote was 23 for Wamytan, 17 for Loueckhote, and 13 for Poadja. Wamytan, a Kanak high chief and former president of the UC, FLNKS, and MSG, gave a conciliatory speech but emphasized the need to move forward in fulfilling the Noumea Accord's goal of a consensual "common destiny" while recognizing the country's diversity, decolonization with economic rebalancing, and the integration of the country into the Pacific region: "Each of you is here by the will of the Caledonian people. It's you who make the laws. It's you who fashion the look of Caledonia of tomorrow" (NC, 6 Aug, 9 Aug 2013). Daniel Goa, president of the UC, proposed the creation of a constituent assembly after the FLNKS wins the 2014 elections in order to hold a referendum, create a constitution, and clarify New Caledonia's relationship with France. That idea drew criticism from both Palika and loyalists as a bit premature, but Goa still asserted that "independence is inevitable" (NC, 9 Aug 2013; NClatere, 4 Nov 2013).

In August, the Congress voted unanimously to respect the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which France had supported in 2007. But despite that encouraging consensus, loyalists still showed bitter divisions. When the Congress had to choose someone to prepare a country law that froze prices on necessities, the RUMP and CE traded jibes, passing the task to each other sarcastically and evoking laughter from others. Cabinet President Martin reminded them that the May 2013 strike against the high cost of living had disrupted the country, so they should take responsibility

and not mock their colleagues. But the CE accused Martin's cabinet of asking the high commissioner to intervene instead of signing the protocol with the unions, so Martin traded angry insults with the CE. Jacques Lalié of the FLNKS finally volunteered to prepare the law (NC, 20 Aug 2013). Gomès's CE had earlier splintered from Martin's AE party, which had then allied with the RUMP, against whose domination the AE had first arisen in 2004! Now, Yanno's faction had split from the RUMP, which Yanno felt was not taking a strong enough stand against independence, yet he also promised, like Gomès, to unite the loyalists. At first, Yanno allied with a splinter group of the Gaullist metropolitan Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) in Paris that arose when Nicolas Sarkozy lost his reelection bid in 2012 to Socialist François Hollande. Frogier of the RUMP had then suspended Yanno and Sonia Backes for party disloyalty, so in March they had formed their own party, the MPC. When Yanno decided to run against the RUMP as candidate for mayor of Noumea, the capital, the metropolitan UMP conducted a poll among its local followers to choose which candidate to endorse, and Yanno won, thus reentering the UMP fold—but not that of the local RUMP (NClatere, 21 Nov, 19 Dec 2013). The conflict appears to be among strong personal egos and settler "clans."

Centrist Didier Leroux, formerly of the original AE/CE, warned loyalists that patronage politics and electoral maneuvering risked "gangrenizing" local society without addressing pressing issues such as socioeconomic

inequalities and stable future status (NC, 5 April 2013). Frogier, a part-Tahitian descendant of a deported convict, argued that the old blocs of independence versus loyalism were obsolete and that the majority could not impose itself on the minority. Instead, leaders of vision needed to achieve an enduring solution. He said independence was not feasible, but he was unclear as to what would replace that goal other than the ill-defined status quo. He wanted a new accord, perhaps even a form of independence in association with France, though he hotly denied actually using that specific term, as the CE asserted (NC, 10 April, 22 April 2013). He also proposed opening up citizenship and voting rights to make the country “generous and attractive”; changing the division of revenues so the populous, multiethnic, mostly loyalist South would benefit more (since 1988, to promote economic rebalancing, the two Kanak-ruled regions receive 75 percent of nickel income); and implementing a form of self-government that did not mean separation from France (NCLaire, 19 Sept 2013). Meanwhile, the sale of firearms has increased so much that perhaps 100,000 are owned in a country of 250,000 inhabitants, partly because of a possible independence referendum (and the growing problem of juvenile delinquency). Gomès, the high commissioner, and Overseas Minister Victorin Lurel called for tighter restrictions on guns (NCLaire, 8 Nov, 16 Dec 2013; PIR, 15 Nov, 23 Dec 2013).

To acknowledge the success of the CE in winning both deputy seats from the RUMP in 2012, Martin agreed to reshuffle some cabinet portfolios (NC,

16 April 2013). Loueckhote claimed he could unite the loyalists, but the CE was not interested. Instead, Gomès announced his plan for a “clarified” referendum choice, not just yes or no, so that people would understand exactly what their real options were. His party had been rather centrist and social democratic in its policies when he held the cabinet presidency before Martin, but after the UC-RUMP tandem ended the Gomès reign in 2011, he gathered up some remnants of other small loyalist groups, including the right-wing Front National (FN), which had lost its congressional seats in 2009, partly due to a more restricted electorate of long-term residents. At his party congress in June, Gomès said he had supported the reconciliation ceremonies this year and wanted peace for the country through a consensual solution like the accords of 1988 and 1998, not a “guillotine” referendum that would produce winners and losers and lingering tensions. He noted that pro-independence groups, most notably the Parti Travailiste (PT, Labor Party), which was affiliated with radical labor unions, expected to win the 2014 elections, while Frogier was colluding with the UC for a status somewhere between becoming independent and remaining French. Gomès warned that New Caledonia did not have the resources for defending itself, maintaining public order, and running the courts or higher education system—hence the ongoing need for financial aid from France. He warned of foreign threats from instability in neighboring Melanesian countries as well as rising Chinese power (even at the United Nations). He wanted the two choices of becom-



ing independent or remaining part of France to be clearly spelled out, but so far he has failed to do so himself (NClairere, 20 June 2013). Nor have the situations of the five “associated” countries in Oceania been seriously studied for what might bear on New Caledonia’s case.

The most dramatic grassroots protest of the year was the twelve-day union strike in May against the high cost of living (one-third higher than in France), which people often blame on importer monopolism and the doubled salaries and benefits paid to metropolitan contract workers and retirees. Didier Guénant-Jeanson of the largest labor federation, the Union Syndicale des Ouvriers et Employés de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (USOENC), in alliance with three other unions and with encouragement from Gomès’s CE, mobilized marches in Noumea and elsewhere involving 20,000 protesters, demonstrations in front of supermarket chains, and barricades at intersections and the port, among other actions that were reminiscent of a similar effort in 2011. In pushing the government to act on accumulated studies and recommendations over the years, the USOENC leader vowed not to give up the quest for a fair share of business profits through lower prices, after two years of failed negotiations. Experts agreed that the importers and distributors needed to lower their markups, especially on essentials like foods and fuel. Guénant-Jeanson said he wanted “a new equilibrium, a different sharing of the wealth . . . to build our country” (NC, 16 May 2013). Because the strike was announced in advance, the cabinet passed two measures just beforehand,

in the form of tax code revisions lowering income taxes on the middle class and taxes on the construction of middle-income rental housing, while also seeking fuel from Singapore, extending the Paris-funded “jobs for the future” program for youth, and subsidizing workers with incomes below the minimum wage (NC, 13 May 2013). The protocol signed by the unions and government lowered prices by 10 percent on 300 food and hygiene products, as well as 200 non-food products such as fuel; created a streamlined, new general tax on commercial activity that reduces multiple markups and taxes on products; and enacted other measures such as reduced bank charges and better deals on bus, air, and sea transport tickets and telephone cards, to be enforced, ironically, by the French high commissioner (NC, 27 May 2013).

Critics from both ends of the political spectrum argued that such Band-Aid measures would not really address deeper structural problems, such as the lack of an equitable mining royalty fund (which French law actually prohibits), tax reforms that benefit the middle class more than workers, insufficient state regulation of private enterprises, and needed reforms such as the construction of affordable housing. The second largest-labor coalition, Union Syndicaliste des Travailleurs Kanak et Employés (USTKE), which is affiliated with the PT and supports independence, called it an “agreement for nothing” because it failed to address wage increases, limiting hiring to locals whenever possible, and inter-provincial rebalancing (NC, 31 May 2013). The local Socialists, led by Michel Jorda, praised the organization

of the strike but said the superficial outcome that neglected affordable housing, renters' rights, higher taxes on the rich and on luxury homes, and other progressive social measures was "a great ridiculous moment of the whole political class" because it relied on the high commissioner to enforce it instead of local leaders: "We walk on our heads" (NC, 31 May 2013). Frogier of the RUMP said the agreement could have been reached two years earlier, while Pierre Bretegnier of the same party said it might even increase unemployment. Gomès of the CE denounced the cabinet's middle-class tax reforms as "dishonest and scandalous," in effect agreeing with Caroline Machoro of the FLNKS that they did not address the work of the special congressional commission on broader fiscal reforms (NClatere, 29 May 2013). As economist Gaël Lagadec of the local university put it, every subsidy produces new costs: "The horizon of a politician is almost always that of the next election, thus it's short-term." Even in France, incurring new debts instead of making structural changes leaves it to future generations to solve the problem (NC, 21 May 2013). The visiting head of the Bank of France recommended gradual elimination of the "indexing" (doubling) of metropolitan civil servant salaries in New Caledonia (NClatere, 12 June 2013), which Wamytan had also called for. Before the end of the year, the USOENC was again calling for deeper reforms (NClatere, 4 Nov 2013).

Visiting French Premier Jean-Marc Ayrault did not favor ending "indexation" for metropolitan salaries overseas (even though it suggests neocolonial "hardship pay" in colonies, since

it doesn't apply to New Caledonians who move to France), but he said that France would enforce the agreed-to reforms and continue to maintain aid levels for affordable housing and education. The struggle to reduce inequalities was important, he said, because metropolitan salaries overseas were twice as high in New Caledonia as in France, and the political campaigning for 2014 should not mask the country's socioeconomic challenges. When asked if the state ownership of the Société le Nickel (SLN) via its multinational holding company, Eramet, would hinder New Caledonia's ability to increase its own share of control from 34 to 51 percent, the premier said vaguely that Eramet's international scale also needed to be considered (NC, 27 July 2013). The world nickel industry was suffering from a glut and lower prices, due mainly to the economic crisis in Europe and a consequent decline in the demand for stainless steel, while China was becoming a major consumer and also producer by processing imported ore from Indonesia and the Philippines. New Caledonia has one-fourth of the world's nickel reserves, and, in addition to the SLN's Doniambo processing plant outside Noumea, two new plants were starting production, at Koniambo in the North and Goro in the South, creating more local competition and environmental concerns (eg, Goro's repeated crises). Local leaders and outside experts have called for "synergy" in nickel mining and processing in New Caledonia as well as more planning for a future when the nickel supply will inevitably run out, but such a vision still awaits concrete actions (MNP, 28 June 2013; PIR, 1

July 2013; NClairere, 2 July 2013). Meanwhile, the overall economy of the country is stagnant, as new jobs and household expenditures are both in decline. Squatter camps continue to grow around Noumea while the CE argues with the RUMP in the Congress and in the courts about whether to build more affordable housing or to renovate the existing camps. The Congress finally resumed the construction of affordable housing, with French aid and CE and FLNKS votes, after the RUMP (which runs the South) had stopped construction. The Islands Province, however, lacks nickel and remains less developed, so it exports young people to the main island, where some unemployed Kanak resort to delinquency (NClairere, 10 July 2013; NC, 25 Feb 2013).

Independence supporters continue to try to reorient the country toward Oceania instead of Europe. The Melanesian Spearhead Group had formed in the 1980s to support the Kanak decolonization struggle, and the FLNKS is a member. Kanak play roles in the MSG staff, and the Kanaky flag flies over all MSG offices, alongside the flags of the other four members, which are, however, independent countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji). Wamytan is a past chair of the MSG, and this year Victor Tutugoro of the FLNKS became chair (NC, 5 April 2013; PIR, 5 April 2013). In a leaders' meeting in New Caledonia, despite objections by the CE that the outgoing MSG chair, Prime Minister Bainimarama of Fiji, was allowed to participate, the organization signed various juridical and economic cooperation agreements and endorsed the establishment of a

Department of Peacekeeping Operations within the MSG secretariat (PIR, 24 June 2013; NC, 19 July 2013). A delegation of the Pacific Islands Forum also visited New Caledonia, where Cabinet President Martin repeated his request that the country could become a full, not just associate, member (he also wants the country, not the FLNKS alone, to belong to the MSG), to no avail. Both the Forum and MSG await more progress in fulfilling the Noumea Accord (NClairere, 18 July 2013). The FLNKS continues to report to the UN Decolonization Committee, on whose list New Caledonia was reinscribed in 1986, and French Polynesia joined it this year, despite objections from France and its notoriously corrupt client leader in Tahiti, Gaston Flosse (NClairere, 17 May 2013; TPM, June–July 2013). Kanaky and Vanuatu continue to nurture close ties apart from Martin's dollar diplomacy, and the FLNKS and the Customary Senate of New Caledonia are trying to help Vanuatu resolve a maritime border dispute with France. The New Caledonia Museum also returned some traditional red feather money to Solomon Islands (PIR, 20 Dec, 24 Dec 2013). But France still regards New Caledonia as a strategic asset, for intelligence listening stations; geopolitical, military, and trade cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region; and a potentially profitable exclusive economic maritime zone. As the French defense minister said, "France is a power of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. She has territories where certain inhabitants have recently expressed their desire to live within the national community . . . which necessitates security and protection" (NC, 2 June 2013).

The year 2013 was also one of commemorations of past tragedies and peace accords, as many people of goodwill tried to nudge the country along the path of decolonization and reconciliation in quest of a “common destiny,” as the Noumea Accord prescribed. In 2012, a film by Matthieu Kassovitz had stirred up local emotions with its depiction of the bloody Ouvea conflict of 1988 (in the Islands Province) between Kanak nationalists and French troops, and this year Kassovitz said the conflict could have been avoided if France had respected Kanak traditions more than a century earlier, instead of marginalizing and dispossessing the indigenous people: “France must make honorable amends to close the wounds. . . . Respect opens every door” (Caledosphere.com, 1 Feb 2013). Annually, for twenty-five years, a French priest and supporters have relit a flame at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, hoping for a monument to the dead on Ouvea: “The politicians should not have sent in the army” (NC, 20 April 2013). There are multiple monuments on Ouvea and elsewhere to the French and Kanak dead from that conflict, and this year a visual exposition was displayed in the local Gossanah church. It featured Djubelly Wea, who killed Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene in 1989 for compromising in signing the Accord of Matignon after the tragedy and was then himself killed. His relatives now said, “Young people must absorb this history”; “They shout Kanaky and sometimes insult whites, but they don’t really know what happened”; “We must remember for the children, never forget. Whites, Kanak, we’re all brothers. It’s up to

us to build the country together” (NC, 22 April 2013). Robert Kapoeri, an attacker on the police station twenty-five years ago, felt sorrow that they had underestimated the risks that led to so many deaths on both sides: “What a waste!” (NClairere, 2 May 2013). But Jacqueline Deteix said to New Caledonian loyalists, “It’s time to decolonize your heads and understand that we cannot NOT demand the independence of our country” (NC, 6 May 2013). Premier Ayrault, visiting Ouvea, vowed to see the Noumea Accord through to self-determination on behalf of all local citizens (NC, 27 July 2013). In Koné in the Northern Province, where local Kanak had also attacked a police station in 1988 (and had revolted in 1917), people draped a statue of a French soldier in the world wars and a statue of a Kanak warrior with their respective flags, the tricolor and that of Kanaky (NC, 3 May 2013).

In July, the local TV news reminded people of the Nainville-les-Roches round table of 1983, thirty years earlier, when Paris, Kanak, and settler leaders had almost reached a peace agreement, only to have the settler Rassemblement refuse to sign the document, which led to five more years of violence before the Matignon Accord (NClairere, 8 July 2013). In another reconciliation effort, the French Museum of Natural History said that in 2014 it would finally return home the skulls of Chief Atai and his priest, both leaders of the 1878 Kanak revolt (NC, 21 Nov 2013). A colloquium was held in Paris to commemorate the quarter century of peace since the Matignon-Oudinot Accords of 1988. Among the speakers, legal scholar Mathias Chauchat reminded listeners,

“Only the reduction of inequalities and the agreed to project of a common society will enable an exit from communitarianism” (NC, 27 June 2013). Pro-independence Naku Press said that most of the French dignitaries present were leftists because all the peace accords had been negotiated by the Socialists, but even so, the discourse had evolved considerably since the 1980s talk of “terrorism.” The Noumea Accord is not a simple decentralization, it said, but is explicitly a decolonization, and Neaoutyine and Machoro had reminded the audience that much work remained to do (MNP, 1 Nov 2013). Wamytan suggested that when the current power transfers are complete, the legal difference between expanded autonomy and full sovereignty will be no thicker than “a cigarette paper.” Michel Rocard, who negotiated the Matignon Accord with Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur in 1988, agreed that the path had mostly been completed (NC, 11 Oct 2013). Local historian Louis-José Barbançon, a convict descendant whose centrist party had worked with Tjibaou’s independence coalition in the early 1980s, calculated that the violence during that decade had taken seventy-three lives and created 1,200 refugees and was thus a war, which could have been avoided. Over half the loyalists had rejected even the Matignon Accord, similar to the failed Nainville talks, but overall a majority of the country prevailed, and the Noumea Accord ten years later was approved by 72 percent of voters. The country had therefore changed, as socioeconomic conflicts had replaced communal ones, and an educated Kanak middle class had arisen. He

read aloud the names of the 1980s dead and said the peace accords were written with “the ink of their lives” (Barbançon 2013). Fellow convict descendant Bernard Berger is writing a three-volume history of the country to educate young citizens; it is entitled, “We Cannot Remake History.” Two new local TV stations have started up, and the one in the North is run by trained Kanak, who are promoting “the best of common destinies” (NC, 24 Jan 2013).

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### PAPUA

In 2013, the Indonesian government faced the increasingly complex political challenges of separatism in Papua as well as the internationaliza-