

En Pays Kanak: Ethnologie, Linguistique, Archéologie, Histoire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, edited by Alban Bensa and Isabelle Leblic. Cahier de la collection Ethnologie de la France 14. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2000. ISBN 2-7351-0864-3, xii + 368 pages, maps, tables, illustrations, notes, references. 145 francs.

As the editors explain in their introduction, this collection is in large part the outcome of initiatives taken by the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture in the spirit of the 1988 Matignon Accords, to promote "reflection about the Kanak world" (2). Financed by the French Ministries of Culture and Overseas Territories, the projects embodied in these essays by eighteen contributors culminated in a colloquium in Paris in 1995 entitled "Studies of Kanak Societies: Social Systems in Evolution." The published anthology has already won a French book award, at a literary fair in Brittany in August 2000 dedicated to "islands," according to the Noumea-based daily newspaper *Les Nouvelles-Calédoniennes*.

Despite two or three essays that are rather technically oriented linguistic or anthropological studies, the overall collection merits the praise it has received, and its tone is generally quite sympathetic to indigenous Kanak cultural identities. As Octave Togna, director of the agency and the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre, says in his preface, "To research and understand our past is to contribute to making us men and women 'standing up' and proud" (ix). The most salient theme in these studies is cultural change. They all contest syn-

chronic, essentialist versions of Kanak ethnography in a mood reminiscent of Jean-Loup Amselle's *Logiques Métisses* (Paris, 1990). Amselle attacked the colonizing, orientalist imaging of non-European societies and proposed instead "a continuist approach" that recognized the lack of typological rigidity in social systems over time.

Alban Bensa sets the tone in his opening essay on the Kanak chief by problematizing Maurice Leenhardt's 1930 reification of the role of chiefs, noting Jean Guiart's surprise to find a generation later that the actual tendency was for Kanak societies to install strangers as chiefs, while reserving control over lands to descendants of the first settlers. Bensa examines the region of Koné from 1740 to 1878 to show that Kanak political competition during the early stages of foreign contact and colonization produced a misleading image in the minds of French observers in the mid-1800s that led to inappropriate fixity in "official" chiefdoms.

The French portrayed Chief Goodu as a conquering invader from Tchamba, against whom local chiefs allied with the French in order to protect their own "high chiefdoms." In reality, Goodu was as legitimate as Kanak tradition allowed, and his rivals were manipulating the colonial administration into giving them permanent recognition, while they profited from the disruptions caused by Kanak refugees' flight from French settlements to rearrange local politics to their own advantage. "Colonial war," Bensa observes, "unforeseen and outside customary law, rendered inapplicable the procedures by which Kanak were formerly able at times to

propose alternatives to violence" (31). Conflicts caused by colonization resulted in officially designated tribal chiefdoms that froze what was once a fluid dynamism.

This very issue came up at a recent conference in Noumea on Kanak land reclamations, where some Kanak in attendance recommended recovering the precolonial, oral history of the country rather than accepting the 150 tribal territories fixed in colonial records. Mori tribes of Aotearoa are finding similar difficulties in deciding which parcels of lands returned by New Zealand should go to whom. Dominique Bretteville expands on this relational complexity of traditional Kanak chieftaincies, locating them between the worlds of the living and of deceased ancestors at crucial times such as funerals and yam festivals, and Charles Illouz examines warfare between Protestant and Catholic factions on Mare in the context of hereditary chieftaincy in the Loyalties.

Dorothee Dussy shows that the presumed "no-man's land" of Noumea, the colonial capital, was in fact contested, and still is, by rival Kanak clans that are now allied with contemporary political parties. Guiart has also touched on this fascinating clientelism between official power and indigenous history-making in his locally published *Heurs et Malheurs du pays de Numea*.

Kanak migration to modern Noumea and its environs is taken up by Christine Hamelin, who notes that 30 percent of Kanak now live in the urban center in various socioeconomic situations, but that they retain a double identity linked to both their rural tribe and their new city life. Their bilocality takes the form of construct-

ing houses in the village for retirement, while also saving to purchase a house lot in town: "Noumea is neither opposed to the tribe nor confused with it" (354). Michel Naipels adds, in his closing essay, that idealized versions of rural village life may conceal built-in tensions caused by the hierarchy between first settlers and later arrivals. Such conflicts impel family heads to migrate to town for other than the often-cited economic motives, because Noumea constitutes "a delocalized space" where the idea of return is dropped, and culturally uprooted Kanak seek community in churches and labor unions.

Other outstanding contributions include Marie-Hélène Teulières-Preston's essay on Kanak notions of maritime rights (reminiscent of Philippe Boyer's 1997 conference collection *La Mer*) and their clash today with commercial fishing operations and provincial governments. Christine Salomon addresses the often-unacknowledged inequalities of Kanak gender relations, which impel modern Kanak women to idealize the past less than their male counterparts do and to turn more today to French law and new opportunities for education, employment, and political office. Eric Soriano's study of the post-1946 political mobilization of rural Kanak by Protestant and Catholic church associations, whose leaders nurtured a delicate link between traditional chiefs and French-style electoral politics, makes a useful companion to Ismet Kurtovitch's 1992 doctoral thesis on the origins of the *Union Calédonienne*.

Most of the contributors are metropolitan French academics, including well-known figures such as Bensa and historian Isabelle Merle (whose essay

on the nineteenth-century creation of the Kanak reservation system nicely complements another essay on inadequate Kanak education). But Marie Lepoutre of Houailou offers a fine piece on the coexistence of “official” western and covert traditional medical practices on Lifou, and Teulières-Preston is Noumea-based. So is André Ouetcho, a co-author of the essay on precolonial archaeology—a provocative study that revisits fatal impact discourse by hypothesizing major Kanak depopulation from epidemics introduced by European ships before colonization, in contradistinction to accepted theories.

This book is a treasure of the latest scholarship on Kanak culture change, and it is regrettable, as Robert Aldrich pointed out at a workshop in Canberra ten years ago, that the general “lack of translations limits distribution and makes it difficult for undergraduate and postgraduate students to become acquainted with the French research on the Pacific” (*Pacific Islands History: Journeys and Transformations*, edited by Brij Lal; Canberra, 1992, 82–83). Apart from notable exceptions such as the University of Hawai‘i Press’s translation and publication of Joel Bonnemaïson’s *La Dernière Ile* as *The Tree and The Canoe*, and the current translation under way in New Caledonia of Dorothy Shineberg’s recent *The People Trade*, colonial linguistic boundaries continue to hinder our collective understandings of Oceania.

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Radio Happy Isles: Media and Politics at Play in the Pacific, by Robert Seward. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999. ISBN paper, 0-8248-2106-8; x + 234 pages, map, appendixes, glossary, notes, index. Cloth, US\$45.00; paper, US\$24.95.

In *Radio Happy Isles*, Robert Seward seeks to create a full portrait of a Pacific Islands mediascape, albeit a mediascape composed of distinct local voices. Seward chooses radio as his subject rather than television or video, as television has not yet become a dominant medium in the Pacific Islands. Seeing the Pacific as a full space of “overlapping voices on the radio,” Seward maps how radio is produced locally and also circulates within the broader space of the Pacific. The result is a highly readable study that makes a significant intervention in media studies and Pacific studies.

Seward’s book serves as an extended argument against the “cultural imperialism” paradigm in which “South” countries are seen at the mercy of “North” countries’ dominant media. Parts of the cultural imperialism model certainly apply to some developing nations of the Pacific. However, as Seward examines reciprocal radio flows to and from stations in the Pacific and how foreign news material actually is incorporated, the cultural imperialism argument breaks down considerably. *Radio Happy Isles* is more than a simplistic study of local resistance in the Pacific through radio. Instead, Seward provides an overview of Pacific Islands radio in formation and at work from the early 1980s until the late 1990s.