John Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky? The Political History of a French Colony.* Pacific Research Monograph, no. 16. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, 1987. Pp. 493. A$25.00.

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In Paris on 26 June 1988 the broad lines of the institutional and developmental future for New Caledonia were laid down. If what has come to be known as the Matignon Agreement is definitively accepted, the people of New Caledonia will determine its destiny by means of a self-

determination referendum in ten years' time, in 1998. For the first time, such an agreement was signed by delegations representative of all three parties to New Caledonia's future: the French government of Michel Rocard; the Melanesian pro-independence minority alliance, the FLNKS; and the majority, predominantly European party determined to remain French, the RPCR. The prospects for achieving a durable settlement in New Caledonia thus appear unusually positive. Yet the joint declaration that headed the Matignon Agreement began by affirming the central experience of New Caledonian society: "The communities in New Caledonia have suffered too much from several decades of lack of understanding and of violence." It is the history of those "several decades" --from annexation in 1853 to 1986--that John Connell recounts in impressively comprehensive fashion in *New Caledonia or Kanaky? The Political History of a French Colony.*

In so doing Connell renders a double service. Firstly, his work effectively supplies an invaluable, expanded update of the earlier standard reference work by Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The French Pacific Islands* (University of California Press, 1971). While adopting a somewhat narrower scope than Thompson and Adloff, the first half of Connell's narrative nevertheless offers authoritative coverage of the principal features and developments in New Caledonia's difficult history. From indigenous settlement and European discovery to the emergence of Melanesian nationalism in the late 1960s, the political, demographic, social, and economic dimensions of French colonization are traced firmly and informatively.

Much of the tale is necessarily familiar from having being told else where: the French penal colony, land settlement policies, Melanesian insurrection (in 1878 and 1917 especially), nickel mining, agriculture, Asian and subsequently Polynesian immigration, the Second World War, the rise of the Union calédonienne (UC), and, incessantly, disputes over land. Familiar, but not redundant: Connell's new synthesis springs from detailed knowledge of the burgeoning range of secondary literature in French and English, much of which has been published only during the last decade and a half.

For the most part Connell's exposition is lucid (although concision is not a strong point: the argument too often progresses in a semirepetitive spiral fashion), moderate, and balanced. His occasional recourse to pan-Melanesian relativism is invariably informative, breaking out as it does of the habitual Melanesian/European binary contrasts within New Caledonia to draw parallels with aspects of Melanesian social experience elsewhere in the South Pacific. The account is relatively light on

political developments before 1945. With the exception of some reference to the work of Governor Feillet, no thoroughgoing analysis of colonial administrative policies is attempted. Territorial or French metropolitan policies in the century following annexation tend to be reduced to generalized assertions of their neglect or paucity. The two pages given to education (pp. 166-168) are similarly inadequate, and (to anticipate remarks to come) partial, being slanted towards Melanesian dissatisfaction with a Eurocentric system. Of Caldoche or Polynesian attitudes to that same externally imposed education system nothing is said.

Again, chapters 8 and 9 on the Melanesian economy and land questions are excellent--as far as they go. Connell's deeply informative account is refreshingly frank, open-ended (albeit usually nonquantitative), and directly reflective of Melanesian confusions and contradictions concerning economic activity, in particular regarding participation in the capitalist system (pp. 190-191). These chapters paint an important composite picture of the traditionalist constraints operating --"to a greater extent than in the vast majority of Melanesian environments outside New Caledonia where opportunities have often been fewer" (p. 190)--on modern Melanesian evolution in diverse fields: formal educational attainment, coffee and other cash-crop agricultural production, commerce, employment in the urban setting. His claim that "in every area of economic life in the rural areas of New Caledonia *coutume* retains more validity, if not necessarily being more important, than the dictates of capitalism" contains a distinction vital to the territory's developmental future (p. 186). But non-Melanesian (for example, European or Wallisian) attitudes and experience regarding land and the economy are either assumed or neglected, or allowed only the most conventional of unsubstantiated (and derogatory) generalizations. Thus of the French who migrated to New Caledonia between 1971 and 1976: "These new European migrants, unlike earlier settlers, had come primarily for high incomes, had no intention of making a commitment to New Caledonia and had little time for the local population" (p. 219). This and similar assertions are riddled with moral and social assumptions that, while often plausible, require argument and substantiation.

On a more general level, Connell's account is infused with the double regret that on the one hand Melanesian culture has deteriorated while on the other Melanesian participation in the territory's European economy has been slow and inequitable. The intrinsic incompatibility--if not outright contradiction-- that this position involves is nowhere questioned. Such reservations should not be taken to detract substantially from the value of the account. The first half of *New Caledonia or*

Kanaky? offers the fullest, most representative, and informative account of New Caledonian history currently available in English or in French. It is an account that will doubtless serve for some years ahead as the indispensable initial source book for students of New Caledonia. A substantial analytical index would have greatly enhanced the book's usefulness in this regard.

The books declared intention is "to elucidate the events of the past few years in the context of the social, economic and political history of New Caledonia" (p. xiii). In consequence, having established the historical context, Connell devotes the books second half to "elucidating" the evolution over the last twenty years of Melanesian nationalism in New Caledonia, from the UC to the FLNKS, "the strongest independence movement that has ever existed in the South Pacific" (p. 445). The outcome is the most exhaustive account available of modern New Caledonian politics. The results of the most important elections (from 1950 to 1985) are presented in commendable detail, in both tabular and textual form. The origins, policies, and tactics of the territory's abundant political parties--parties often both ephemeral and minuscule--are thoroughly recorded (although the painfully microscopic scale of reproduction of a chart showing the evolution of the parties between 1950 and 1985 is unfortunate [p. 271]). Used in conjunction with the generous bibliography (pp. 465-493), this account will surely prove to be of durable reference value.

At the same time this second half of *New Caledonia or Kanaky?* functions more successfully as an account of, rather than as accounting for, modem Caledonian politics. When the linear chronological, events- and institutions-based approach makes way for evaluation and assessment the presentation often becomes more partisan, and consequently less persuasive. In part this may be seen as the combined product of the lack of historical perspective with the inherent difficulty of maintaining intellectual detachment in an intensely contentious domain. Connell makes much the same point in his preface, admitting, "This account is certainly not wholly academic" (p. xv).

However, to the inherent difficulties of the undertaking have been added methodological, stylistic, and conceptual shortcomings that must remain the author's responsibility. The complex political developments of recent years are too frequently not clearly dated: it is for example impossible to be sure from Connell's account of even the month in which important 1983 France-Caledonian round-table discussions took place at Nainville-les-Roches (pp. 309-310). Precise dating of the many incidents of violence in the 1980s is similarly often lacking. The confu-

sion is compounded by an unwarranted reliance on slack sources: leaving aside the question of their intrinsic reliability, to quote what *Pacific Islands Monthly* claimed the French newsweekly *Le Point* had to say seems a doubtful and unnecessarily oblique procedure to adopt (p. 319). Generally speaking the serious daily and periodical press of metropolitan France is heavily underrepresented. Detailed as Connell's account is, it has its gaps: there is for instance no mention of the Fabius/Lemoine proposals generated in Paris in the critical days between the disruption by the FLNKS of the 1984 Territorial Assembly elections and the appointment (on 1 December 1984) of Edgar Pisani as special government delegate to New Caledonia.

Stylistically too the account frequently irritates and distracts. Sentences such as "Collectively the department and territories are administered by the DOM-TOMS" (p. 381) and "[South Pacific colonies'] possible future strategic significance became insignificant" (p. 378) are perhaps no worse than uninformative and ungainly. "Already historically divided by geography and language, European contact brought new divisions of religion, language and culture" is a classic example of ruptured grammar (p. 414). Emotive overwriting and partisan journalese are more serious since they attempt to foster conviction in the absence of more dispassionate argument. Thus: "past history" (p. 426); "the historic indigenous population" (p. 411); the costs of France's strategic nuclear defense policy are referred to as "the costs of the nuclear warfare [program]" (p. 407); the pressure on an independent Kanaky to modernize and develop is described as "insidious" (p. 405); the "Thio picnic" organized in February 1985 by elements of the New Caledonian extreme Right is "notorious" (p. 347); the RPCR mayor of Nouméa, Roger Laroque, is referred to as "outspoken" when in the same context the FLNKS leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou is not, in spite of his having "made passing reference to the use [by the FLNKS] of force" (p. 308). Connell's pro-Kanak, anticolonialist presentational slant is insistent; this list of illustrations is far from being an exhaustive one.

The broad conceptual model that underlies most of the discussion is the well-worn binary one of authentic indigenous nationalism versus illegitimate immigrant colonialism. Up to the fertile final two chapters that transcend it, this model imposes certain constraints. It leads Connell for example to pay minimal attention to French metropolitan perspectives (other than those of hard-headed economic or strategic interest), and in particular consistently to underestimate democratic constitutional considerations that have prevented France from decolonizing New Caledonia as expeditiously as it might otherwise have done.

The communiqué published after the 1983 talks at Nainville-les-Roches was interpreted and exploited by the FLNKS in a truncated form. The communiqué certainly affirmed that the Melanesians as first occupants of New Caledonia had an "innate and active right to independence." No subsequent French government, liberal-conservative or socialist, has revoked that right. But the communiqué went on to state that the Melanesians' right must be exercised "within the framework of the self-determination provided for and defined by the Constitution of the French Republic, self-determination open equally for historic reasons to other ethnic groups whose legitimacy is recognized by the representatives of the Kanak people" (pp. 307-308). Connell quotes all of this essential text, but then effectively adopts without question the selective interpretation placed on it by the FLNKS. Yet it might well be argued that it has been the repeatedly demonstrated determination of the FLNKS since 1984 to flout both constitutional procedures and democratic elections that has allowed successive Paris administrations to rely on the bedrock principle that none of them are able to flout: namely, no electoral majority, no self-determined independence. Interpreted in very different political lights, that principle lay behind the self-determination referendum of September 1987; it remains the driving force of the 1988 Matignon Agreement. Seen in this constitutional perspective, France's "opposition to decolonization" appears to be more coherent and consistent than merely--and emotively--"intransigent" (p. 402). The consequences in the last two years of the overthrow of constitutional democracy by the Melanesian minority in Fiji have not diminished that coherence.

The final two chapters are among the best in the book. In them Connell examines, speculatively but with wide-ranging and sober lucidity, the prospects for New Caledonia, and in particular for the future shape of the territory's economy. He concludes that a viable form of Kanak independence in balanced material self-reliance is most unlikely to be achieved. Neocolonialist dependency looms, probably within the French sphere of interest. The essential differences from the present situation may be difficult to detect. "There are good reasons to be extremely cautious about predictions of imminent, or even eventual, independence in New Caledonia," he concludes (p. 441).

To be a moral supporter of a nationalist movement that today has little and diminishing chance of realizing its political objectives is a difficult and contradictory undertaking. In *New Caledonia or Kanaky?* John Connell manages that undertaking with authority and energy. "This account will please few," Connell writes in his preface (p. xv).

"Wholly academic" or not, books aren't as simple as that. His "account" of New Caledonia is as authoritatively enlightening and as provocatively stimulating as any yet published.