

THE SHARING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE PACIFIC: THE KANAK¹ EXPERIENCE

Emmanuel Kasarhérou
Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac

FOR MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, NEW CALEDONIA HAS EXPERIENCED DIFFERENT PROJECTS aiming to reconnect the Kanaks, the indigenous population of the archipelago, with their material culture from which they have been separated during a century. Mainly held abroad and particularly in museums in Europe, this part of their tangible culture has successfully found its way back to New Caledonia through different ways: temporary exhibitions, long-term loans, and publications. The Inventory of the Kanak Dispersed Heritage (IPKD) totalizing 5,000 significant cultural objects held in eighty museums throughout the world is the last project, which has been released in July 2015 in Noumea. This presentation will examine the conditions, expectations, and results of these experiences in a nation-building context and discuss its implications for reshaping relations between Europe and the Pacific.

When I received the invitation to deliver a keynote speech at the ESfO conference, I felt very honored, but at the same time, I realized that I might have reached a certain age for receiving such an invitation. It is undoubtedly a signal for me to look back at my already thirty years of personal and professional commitment to “culture.” A journey that started in Noumea in 1985, when I was appointed Director of the Museum of New Caledonia, and went on with the Tjibaou Cultural Centre project at the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture in 1994 and since 2011, here, in Europe at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. Back and forth from the Pacific to Europe, my personal life would illustrate by itself the theme of the conference.

I would rather take the opportunity to lead you through my own journey on the pathway of my memory retracing the conditions, expectations, and results of these three decades of cultural development in New Caledonia. Although New Caledonia may be a specific case in Oceania and certainly does not reflect the situation of most of the other islands nations, it will provide some information and inspiration.

Key Facts about New Caledonia Today

Let's start the journey by giving some facts to help and frame the geographical and the historical context. New Caledonia is an archipelago of 18,000 km² in Melanesia. The population is 268,767 inhabitants (2014 census), living mainly on the main island; 40 percent are Kanak, the indigenous population. Cultural diversity among the population with different origins—French, former French colonies, or overseas territories, other Pacific islands, etc.—results in a tiny microcosm. The dominant culture is the French.

On a political level, New Caledonia today is part of the French Republic with a special transitional status until 2018. It has one central government and three Provincial Governments with important local political competencies. New Caledonia is largely experiencing self-government: for instance, public taxes are voted and used locally. The population bears one nationality, the French nationality, but three citizenships. Probably a world record! We have the New Caledonian citizenship, which allows priority access to local employment, then the French citizenship, which allows us to participate in the election of the President of the Republic. It also allows New Caledonia to be represented at the French National Assembly by three elected MPs: one senator to the upper house of the French National Parliament and two MPs to the lower house. Last but not least, the New Caledonians are also citizens of the European Union, and they elect one MP to the European Parliament. New Caledonia is one the thirty-one Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) associated with the European Union.

Key Dates in New Caledonia History

To briefly help frame the historical context of our situation, let me also give you some chronological references. Archaeologists found the first pieces of evidence of human activity in the archipelago around 1300 BC. They called this period the “Lapita” culture, after the Kanak name of a site on the northern coast of the main island. In 1774, Captain James Cook, recalling his earlier navigations along Scotland coasts, put the main island on the map, calling it “New Caledonia.” Since then, New Caledonia’s shores have been visited by many ships seeking water, whales, pearls, sandalwood, or indentured servitude.

In 1842, the first Christian missionaries arrived and settled after many unsuccessful attempts. French Emperor Napoleon III decided to take possession of the archipelago in 1853, with the idea to send convicts to these faraway shores. The first convicts arrived in 1864 and the colonization started. Four years later, as the need for land in the new colony grew larger, the government decided to create “native reservations,” a unique case in France’s colonial history; hence special regulations were applied to the indigenous population. The land grab developed quickly and triggered the major uprising of 1878, led by chief Ataï. The subsequent repression had a significant impact on the Kanak’s demography, whereas indigenous lands were seized and opened to free colonization, fueled by misleading publicity in France. The Kanak demography dramatically collapsed around the turn of the century, but in a movement of despair, following the enrolment of Kanaks for the First World War, a major uprising, led by chief Noël, spread on the main island. The repression was harsh. The end of the Second World War opened a new era and in 1946; the ban of circulation outside the reservation without permission was withdrawn; French citizenship was extended to the Kanak and political rights gradually applied.

The Kanak Struggle for Cultural and Political Recognition: A Short Overview of Kanak Cultural Renewal 1975–2015

Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1936–89) was the charismatic leader of that period. Educated to become a Catholic priest, he quit priesthood in the late 1970s and became an activist in the field of social and cultural development. In 1975, Jean-Marie Tjibaou organized the festival called “Melanesia 2000” with the support of other Kanaks but also with New Caledonians of French origin. The festival’s motto was: “Settle the tribe into the city.” It was the first indigenous gathering on a national scale in the capital city of Noumea. The “White Noumea” had to feel the indigenous presence. The festival advocated cultural revival and cultural recognition, but the scenic play that was staged also involved clear criticisms of colonialism.

“Téā Kanaké” was the name of the central figure of the scenic play created for the festival. Seeking a hero’s name for the entire indigenous population of New Caledonia, which would unify the twenty-eight languages, each of them having its own term, Jean-Marie Tjibaou probably attracted by the homonymy, used the name of a mythical hero from the *Paici-cèmuhi* cultural area, who happened to be one of the ancestors of his wife’s family. He asked permission from the elders of the clan and was given the right to use the hero’s name for the scenic play. The name, graphically merged with the old colonial word spelled “Canaques” with “C,” was used pejoratively until that time to designate the indigenous Melanesian population. Nowadays, Téā Kanake, the name of the

private ancestor of a clan, tends to be used symbolically as a common ancestor for all Kanaks.

The “Melanesia 2000” festival was a real shock on both sides: the Kanaks and the other New Caledonians came to realize the importance of Kanak culture and the force it represented. In the idea of the organizers, the festival was a first step, which would be followed by a second one, a part called “Caledonia 2000,” which would have brought together Kanaks and the other inhabitants of the archipelago under a common cultural vision. However, the second part of the festival never happened because a political confrontation threw New Caledonia into violence and military operations of repression.

The years between 1984 and 1988, during which the archipelago was on the verge of civil war, was euphemistically called “The Events.” In 1984, there were casualties on both sides. Ten men from Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s village were killed in an ambush at Hienghène. Among the deceased were two of his own brothers. The tension culminated in 1988 with the hostage taking of the constabularies of Ouvéa Island, where two men were killed, and with the intervention of the storm troops of the French army, which caused the death of nineteen Kanak from Ouvéa. These events coincided with the second round of the presidential elections in France, and their violent resolution owes much to this context. In May 1988, a new government was formed in Paris and the new Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, initiated negotiations to restore peace.

On 26 June 1988, the “Matignon Agreements” were signed in Paris between Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the Kanak leader, Jacques Lafleur, the European leader and the French government. These political agreements put an end to the emerging civil war and opened a ten year period providing a new balance into three main domains: political, economic and cultural. A referendum on self-determination was planned for 1998. Administrative boundaries were redrawn, resulting in the formation of three “Provinces” with significant autonomy. The redistribution of the nickel mines, the major economic resource of New Caledonia, between the Southern Province and its pro-France majority, and the Northern Province and its pro-independence majority, rebalanced the previous political and economic situation. The creation of the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture was the cultural component of this rebalanced organization of the archipelago.

The “Matignon Agreements” were signed in Paris with a very small number of representatives, who had to convince their followers, back home, to endorse the agreements. The task was not an easy task on both sides, but the agreements were ratified by referendum on 6 November 1988. New Caledonia was at peace again, and with a new vision to share: build a common destiny with all its cultural components.

However, on 4 May 1989, a new tragic event threatened the peace process: Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yéiwéné Yéiwéné were assassinated on the island of Ouvéa

during a ceremony for the nineteen Kanak who had been killed a year before by the French Military Forces on the same island. His murderer, a Kanak activist, who was against the peace process ratified by the Kanak leader, was killed. Yet these assassinations failed to throw back New Caledonia in a new cycle of violence.

The Birth of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre

The Tjibaou Cultural Centre was not part of the Matignon Agreements, as one can frequently hear or read, on Wikipedia for instance. What was planned, at this stage, was the construction of a building for the newly created Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture. Still, it was not a cultural center yet. The decision to build the Tjibaou Centre was an attempt to overcome the loss of a great elder by turning his vision and words into a cultural action.

Less than a year after the death of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the Prime Minister of France, in full consent with pro-French and Kanak political leaders, submitted to President François Mitterrand the proposal to build a Cultural Centre that would bear the name of Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

The project was accepted and integrated into the major building program called: “Les Grands Travaux du Président” (“The Major Works of the President of the Republic”). Among the buildings erected during this program are: Le Grand Louvre, Paris (by Leoh Ming Pei), La Grande Arche de La Défense, Paris (by Johann Otto von Spreckelsen, Paul Andreu, and Peter Rice), La Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (by Dominique Perrault), etc. The Tjibaou Cultural Centre building was the only one to be built outside metropolitan France. The Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture was then designated to implement the project. In 1990, an international architectural contest was organized, and Renzo Piano’s project was chosen among ten others from the short-list.

At the same time, the definition of the cultural project started. A quotation from Jean-Marie Tjibaou inspired us: “Our identity lies ahead of us.” This sentence is taken from an interview published in 1985 (Tjibaou 1985), which reflected his vision:

The return to tradition is a myth.... No people has ever experienced it. For me, the search for identity, the model, is in front of you and never behind you.... And I would say that our current struggle is to put as many of the components of our past and our culture into the human and social model that we want to build for the future.... Our identity lies ahead of us.

The forthcoming cultural center should not look back to the past. The past should be known and acknowledged, but the cultural vision for the Kanaks

should be anchored into the present and driven toward the future, opened to all the other cultural sensitivities represented in New Caledonia.

This open vision of the indigenous culture and its possible merging with the nonindigenous ones of New Caledonia echoed the abort festival “Caledonia 2000.” The center must become a forum for experimentation in developing a New Caledonian identity, based on Kanak culture as the cultural benchmark but open to the other human and cultural components of the country. The center’s vocation is also to be a new space for expression, situated at the meeting point between politics, religion, and custom.

An ongoing process of consultations with Kanak representatives and the Kanak population (twenty-eight languages, eight customary areas grouping 335 tribes) took place throughout the eight years of construction of the building. It was the first time that one place would gather all our different identities and would talk for all of us. At the same time, frequent discussions and negotiations took place between the architect and the Agency for the Development of Kanak Culture. I took it as a normal procedure, but I realize now that this strong connection between a famous architect and the future users is, in fact, rather uncommon. It was attributable to Renzo Piano’s vision of his work as an architect: a building achievement based on mutual understanding and human exchanges. Brilliantly using Kanak cultural references, without copying them, the design of the building and its inclusion into a natural landscape, produce, a subtle blend between New Caledonia and Europe

The choice of the building site was an issue at the beginning. Although some preferred the Northern Province, Noumea finally received approval from all suffrages, because it was a strong statement to inscribe the Kanak identity into the capital city. The city of Noumea donated the ground for the construction of the center. The choice echoed, in a way the motto of the previous decade: “Settle the tribe into the city.” Moreover, the chosen building site was the very place where the 1975 festival “Melanesia 2000” had taken place more than two decades earlier.

The construction started in 1994 and was completed in 1998. At the same time, we planned the “Kanak path” in the gardens, a cultural vision of Kanak culture using the plants, in conjunction with the architect, and developed the museography of the inner public spaces. In 1995, we launched the first season of prefiguration, which started the cultural program of the future cultural center. These three cultural seasons from 1995 until the opening in 1998, gave us the opportunity to experiment with the cultural programs that we were developing for the center, to educate our future public, and to test the cultural and technical knowledge of the newly formed staff. It was also a great opportunity to promote the center by touring in different villages and islands in the archipelago as well as abroad, in the Pacific region.

On 5 May 1998, a new political agreement was signed in Noumea, extending the previous agreement for a new decade, and the referendum for self-determination was postponed to 2018. Noumea Agreement, as it is called, reinforced the cultural aspects. In its introduction, the agreement says: “The past was the time of the colonization. The present is the time of the sharing, by the rebalancing. The future has to be the time of the identity, in a common destiny.” The cultural program of the cultural center, which opened to the public on May 6, 1998, the first day after the signing of the official act, was based on the same lines. It was a convergence of visions and a fortunate coincidence of timing.

The Missions of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre

Since its opening seventeen years ago, the Tjibaou Cultural Centre has developed its artistic mission by organizing contemporary visual arts exhibitions and offering theater, music, and dance performances from local artists as well as international productions, favoring the emergence of Pacific based artists. The Contemporary Kanak and Oceanian Art Collection (FACKO) was founded in 1994 and counts 1,200 items today, documenting the development of visual arts in the Pacific since the 1970s.

The second mission of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre is to preserve research and promote the unique intangible Kanak heritage. Because the Museum of New Caledonia has one of the best collections of Kanak material heritage in the world, the Tjibaou center focuses its efforts on recording and the preservation of dances, music, and oral traditions and know-how. The collection of oral traditions and know-how is partly a subjective process, reflecting age, family relations, and the social status of both the collector and the resource person. The quality of the results relates closely to the quality of the relationship between both. Thus, it requires a proper protocol acknowledging Kanak social control of traditional knowledge. At the first encounter, the collector informs the resource person of the purpose and the future use of the data he is about to give, which is the procedure of obtaining prior informed consent.² Oral tradition might be sensitive; thus, it needs protection. Prior to his work, the collector then explains how the collected data will be stored and accessible according to the decision of the elder.³ Then the work starts, and by the end, the resource person decides which protection he wishes to apply.

Oral traditions and know-how may be expressed by an individual, but they belong to the community. Thus, the process of collecting also needs to be inclusive. The priorities and themes are decided with the customary councils for each area, and the collectors are chosen in conjunction with them, according to their social status and in relation to the chosen theme of collecting. A team of Kanak researchers of the Tjibaou center organizes and assists technically the

collectors with the recordings, the transcription in the local language, and storing the results in the media library of the Tjibaou center.⁴

Publications, media programs, including radio program in four main languages, make it possible to distribute and broadcast the activities of the center to remote villages. The multimedia diffuse the productions; therefore, today the Tjibaou center constitutes one of the major resource centers on Kanak culture.

The development of the Tjibaou Center was not easy. Suspicions locally and internationally had to be overcome. This is how I got in touch with the late Epeli Hau'ofa, the famous Pacific Island writer, and founder of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture based at the USP in Suva. Some months after the opening, I read a critical interview with Epeli on the Tjibaou center. I wrote him a message, asking how it was possible to criticize the center without visiting it, and I sent him an invitation. He came and was impressed by the design of the building, which he realized was unique. He visited the exhibitions and attended a performance and realized what a useful tool the Tjibaou center was, not only for New Caledonia, but also for the entire Pacific. From that visit onward, we began exchanges of artists between both cultural centers. The dancer and choreographer Allan Alo⁵ was among the very first artists from the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in Suva to benefit from the "artist residency program" of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Noumea.

The connection with the tangible heritage of the past is not always easy in our culture. The day-to-day objects, of course, cause no problem, but the three-dimensional objects, used for instance in rituals, still have a great impact on the population who is familiar with their previous role, which can be very confusing. Christianization has created a movement of fear or at least, of disinterest, that has since been overcome by some of us, but for many, these pieces in museums are still connected to a "demonic past" or, at least, they are to be feared. The reconnection with these objects takes time, and one of the main roles of the museum in New Caledonia is to facilitate this relationship with the tangible past.

From Cultural Dispossession to Cultural Reputation: Museum Objects as "Cultural Ambassadors"

For decades, Kanak's tangible heritage has been destroyed, desecrated, taken away, or sold. Many objects are today in museums around the world, but thanks to the establishment of a museum in the early years of the colony, in 1863, New Caledonia does have one of the most important collections of Kanak art in the world.

During the 1980s, Jean-Marie Tjibaou has questioned the French government asking for a survey of the pieces held in museum collections in France.

Roger Boulay, Curator at the National Museum of African and Oceanian Art in Paris, carried out the first survey in France, which made possible the first international exhibition on Kanak art and culture. Entitled “De jade et de nacre: Patrimoine culturel Kanak,” the exhibition was opened at the Museum of New Caledonia in Noumea in 1990 and then in Paris at the National Museum of African and Oceanian Art.

The exhibition was the occasion of a première; the spelling “Kanak” was used, instead of the former colonial spelling “Canaque,” throughout the catalog of the exhibition that was printed in France (Boulay 1990). The foreword, signed by Jack Lang, the French Minister of Culture, officially promoted the change. Yet, the question of Kanak with a “K” or a “C” was so sensitive in Noumea that we were asked by local authorities to destroy all the invitation cards on which Kanak was still printed with a “K,” and to reprint a new card at the last minute with “Canaque” in the old-fashioned way. This side story is very instructive of the changes that have occurred in New Caledonia over the past twenty-five years. The use of “K” for Kanak is now dominant, and the Kanak flag is one of the two official flags of New Caledonia along with the French one.

Noumea as a venue for the exhibition “De jade et de nacre” was a première, with more than 120 pieces, sometimes gone for two centuries, coming back to their country of origin! The emotion was great, but they had to go back to their museums at the end of the exhibition. I was directing the museum in New Caledonia during this period, and long before the opening of the exhibition, we conducted discussions with elders at the museum about these Kanak objects scattered in museums all around the world. What should we do? Should we ask for their return? The answer was “no.” These objects went away a long time ago, and in most cases, it is impossible to know to which clan they once belonged. Some may also have been given or were sold. The waves of history had driven them far from their original shores. They are now serving as “ambassadors” of the Kanak in the world, and it will be good to see them back in New Caledonia from time to time, before they return to serve their purpose again.

The idea of the “Objects Ambassadors” also found a realization at the Tjibaou center with the program called “Bwenando,” meaning the traditional gathering. Instead of men of flesh and blood, the “Objects Ambassadors” will reunite with their country of origin. One of the rooms was specifically dedicated to the program, and special environmentally controlled display cases were designed according to international museum standards. For fifteen years, regular visits by cultural “ambassadors” from museums abroad (e.g., France, Switzerland, Australia) came to the Tjibaou center for a period of three years. The objects were selected because of their cultural or historical significance and as a supplement to the permanent collections of Noumea’s museum. Through the Bwenando Program, links were established with colleagues in museums,

mainly in Europe, through negotiating loans and researching the history of each object as well as its collectors.⁶

Reconnecting with Our Tangible Heritage: The Inventory of Kanak Dispersed Heritage

As mentioned earlier, the idea of a general survey of Kanak heritage pieces started in the 1980s as a pioneer work. “We need to know where they are and what it is said about them”—it is in these terms that Jean-Marie Tjibaou expressed to Roger Boulay his mission in the 1980s. It was then mentioned in the Matignon Agreements in 1988 but without permanent sufficient financial support. Later, the program was enshrined in Noumea Agreement in 1998. At long last, it was implemented in 2011 and funded entirely by the government of New Caledonia.

The program started in Paris in July 2011 and coincided with my appointment to the Quai Branly Museum that authorized my involvement in the program. Two people were in charge of the scientific aspects, Roger Boulay and myself, one for the database aspect, Etienne Bertrand, whereas Ms. Renée Binosi from the Maison de la Nouvelle-Calédonie à Paris became responsible for the logistics and the financial aspects.⁷ The ambition of the project was a comprehensive identification of museums and collections and the systematic inventory of all relevant artifacts (description, photos, and history).

The program was completed in July 2015: ninety-seven museums were visited among the 190 identified in the world. The database contains 5,002 significant cultural objects from eighty museums, 16,500 related documents, 35,000 photos, and 919 biographies of collectors from the end of the eighteenth century until the 1960s. The general survey showed that 17,000 Kanak objects are scattered across 190 museums in the world (157 museums in Europe, including 113 museums in France) and sometimes held for more than two centuries. Fifty-eight percent of the dispersed Kanak heritage is located in six main museums. One third of the collections are weapons. A new cultural map has been revealed, identifying the “Kanak Ambassadors” in the world.

One of the main results of the program was a comprehensive vision of the Kanak material culture evolution and its transformation during the last 200 years of collecting. The variability of types during the time and their diversity led to a much more dynamic vision as before. The second result of the study involved a reframing of Kanak collections into global history. By tracing the history of Kanak ethnographic collections in museums and reconstructing the biographies of their donors, it became easier to follow the transformation of Kanak material culture but also the evolution of European visions. It was a rediscovery of a complex but rich past.

Every year, collaborators from New Caledonia were invited to join the project of making an inventory of objects in European museums. Museum professionals, researchers from the Tjibaou center or cultural experts from the provinces joined the group on our European tour. For some of them, it was their first trip to Europe. They were trained into inventory techniques, but they also met museum professionals, which was a very valuable encounter on both sides.

In conjunction with the inventory operations in Europe, the Department of Heritage and Research at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre focused its investigation on the categories of objects revealed by the inventory, questioning the elders in different regions about the techniques, the material, associated know-how, vocabulary and cultural significances. Each year the Paris team met the local experts working with the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in New Caledonia. The questioning about objects that had not been manufactured for decades or centuries triggered new interest and led to the rediscovery of forgotten techniques. During one of our meeting in Hienghène, we were surprised to meet an elder who came with a throwing-spear woven device, recently made by him using a technique thought to have disappeared a century ago. The technique was the same as the one recorded in museum collections and old descriptions. The only difference was the material used: it was woven with plastic fibers taken from a rice bag. The elder told us that he did not have time to fetch and prepare properly the vegetal material and found this new material very interesting!

The database is now located in Noumea at the Museum of New Caledonia and serves as a resource for museum professionals as well as for local weavers, carvers, and artists to find inspiration for their future creations. The last result was data sharing: a copy of each photo taken and new identifications made by the inventory team were given back to the museums that welcomed us. It was a sharing of knowledge on the collections between professionals in Europe and Oceania. It created mutual understanding and helped to identify and foster long-term loans for the museum in New Caledonia.⁸

Future Cooperation for the Sharing of a Common Heritage

Created in the Pacific and preserved in other parts of the planet, the Pacific Island cultural heritage, as well as the heritage of others, is part of the human heritage. Their presence here and there helps to share a common vision of human culture, away from ethnocentric visions.

The digitization of collections provides accessibility to objects, photos, videos, films, and archives held in Europe and elsewhere. Archives, museums, and resource centers have started to do it for the major benefit of everyone, including resource communities. 100 percent of the 310,000 objects from the Quai Branly Museum, for instance, are available online, along with photos and

archives associated with each object. The interconnection between museums and archives in Europe and in the Pacific should help to develop the professional skills and expertise among Pacific museums and cultural institutions on new technology in relation to cultural heritage.

Museum objects may be interpreted in many ways because they not only bear their original meanings from the culture in which they originated but also from the history of the societies that decided to collect and preserve them. Their long presence in museums has displaced and shifted them from their unique original signification to wider and entangled significations. They tell the stories of human history and development. The dialogues between museums in Europe and museums in source countries develops through exhibition projects for instance. The return, even temporarily, of cultural items to their countries of origin, enriches both sides and widens our vision of humanity. Controversial issues, for example the colonization period, should be addressed by combining both visions from Oceania and Europe.

Linking Oceanic and European Researches

The exhibition “Kanak: L’art est une parole,”⁹⁹ held in Paris in October 2013 and in Noumea in March 2014, offers an example of an attempt to reinterpret museum collections from both sides. The exhibition was structured into two discourses facing each other: the “Faces” and their “Reflection.” The faces represent Kanak history and culture as seen by the Kanak; the reflection represents the same themes as seen by the Europeans. The faces use five Kanak concepts: *Nô* (the “Verb” and word), *Mwârō ma Mwâciri* (the ceremonial house and its realm), *Mwa ma Mêu* (yam and taro, the two main crops), *Bèmu ma Rhee* (the ancestors and the spirits), and *Kamö ma Vibéé* (the person and its links). These five sections, using five phrases extracted from traditional speeches represent the Kanak as how they see their human condition, using their own categories. Because cultural objects are produced and developed according to a singular cultural vision and language of the society that produces them, they can only be understood properly in an exhibition if they are properly reconnected to their original mental world, a network of interwoven significations, concepts, sounds and poetry. Thus, the objects were displayed in the exhibition according to their relationships to each theme, although certain types of objects would appear in different sections because of their polysemy in Kanak culture. The text in this section used the “we” instead of “they,” creating a closer relationship with the visitor.

In parallel, and on the opposite wall, the second narrative, Reflections, was developed in four sections in counterpoint with the previous one. They described the Kanak as they were seen by Europeans from the late eighteenth century through the twentieth century. These four sections showed Kanak

objects collected at different periods but also many original documents from the very first oil painting made in situ in 1774, to the popular newspapers and comics of the twentieth century. These four sections were chronologically organized and provided an historical timeline to the visitors. The exhibition was mostly using heritage pieces and documents, but also included contemporary Kanak art items, scattered through the different sections.

A catalog of 339 pages was published and sold out before the end of the exhibition (Boulay and Kasarhérou 2013). Unfortunately, the exhibition was not shown in any English-speaking country and the catalog has not been translated.

In this article, I have shared with you my personal perception of that part of the dream Jean-Marie Tjibaou had for his culture and his country. Among many others, I have tried to help making the vision partially real in my field of expertise.

Culture should not be “the cherry on the cake” as I heard sometimes. Culture is at the basis of human development. This is what makes us strong enough to face life as a group or as an individual. Although the political history has never been peaceful in New Caledonia, this conviction was sufficiently shared to fulfill the cultural program developed by our predecessors in the late 1970s.

From the “Melanesia 2000” festival to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, from the “Objects Ambassadors” to the Inventory of Kanak Dispersed Heritage, we have continually moved back and forth between New Caledonia and Europe. All that we achieved was done “our way,” but we were not alone as we worked together.

New Caledonia will have to face a new crucial step in the years to come. Our “Kanak Way” or “Melanesian Way” or “Pacific Way”, whatever you would like to call it depending on which level of perception you are referring to, let us say “our way,” has guided us in the past with confidence, sometimes through very difficult times. I hope that it will help us again to keep on plaiting the mat made of more and more strands that have reached our shores from here and there. And my hope is that the mat will still be strong and big enough for all the children of our country, so they may sit on it, talk, sing all together and enjoy life, sharing the same vision of a common destiny.

NOTES

1. The word “Kanak” derives from a Polynesian term “Kanaka,” which means “human being.” It was largely used during the nineteenth century to designate the indigenous people of Oceania. In French, it was gradually restricted to designate the Melanesians and, finally, the New

Caledonians. Spelled with a great variety, such as “Kanakcs,” “Kanaque,” or “Canaque,” the word was finally fixed in French around the mid-nineteenth century as “Canaques.”

2. “Informed consent” is originally a medical notion in which a patient is informed of treatment issues.

3. Five levels are distinguished on a scale of 0–4, with 0 denoting nonavailable (before seventy years after the death of the resource person); 1 denoting consultation restricted to the designated persons by the resource person; 2 denoting consultation with authorization from the chief council; 3 denoting free access but copy with authorisation; 4 denoting free access and copy. Most of the documents produced and preserved from the beginning of the project ten years ago are in categories 3 and 4.

4. For more details on the collection of Kanak oral heritage in New Caledonia, see E. Kasarhérou (2005b), *Le collectage de la mémoire orale kanak: Expériences et enjeux, Mwà Véé: Revue Culturelle Kanak* 50 (October–December), 2005: 4–12; or E. Kasarhérou (2007), *Le collectage de la mémoire orale kanak: expériences et enjeux, Erreffe: La Ricerca Folklorica—Contributi allo Studio delle Classi Popolari* 55: 27–37.

5. The choreographer Allan Alo appeared in “Moana—The Rising of the Sea,” the performance presented during the ESfO conference in Brussels in 2015. The performance was written by Vilsoni Hereniko, directed by Peter Rockford Espiritu, and performed by the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices.

6. For more details on the “Objects Ambassadors” see Kasarhérou (2005a; 2014, 207–217; 2015).

7. The official representation of New Caledonia in France.

8. For more details on the inventory of Kanak Dispersed Heritage program, see: Kasarhérou (2013).

9. Curated by Roger Boulay and Emmanuel Kasarhérou, the exhibition, totalling 320 objects and documents in 2,000 m², was held in Paris at the Musée du quai Branly from 14 October 2013 to 26 January 2014. It then went to Nouméa where it was on display in the Tjibaou Cultural Centre from 22 March to 28 June 2014, showing 160 objects and documents in 600 m².

REFERENCES

Boulay, Roger, ed.

1990 *De jade et de nacre: Patrimoine artistique kanak*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Boulay, Roger, and Kasarhérou, Emmanuel

2013 *Kanak: L'art est une parole*. Paris: Actes Sud.

Kasarhérou, Emmanuel

- 2005a L'ambassadeur du brouillard blanc. In *Cent ans d'ethnographie sur la colline de Saint-Nicolas 1904–2004*, ed. Marc-Olivier Gonseth, Jacques Hainard, and Roland Kaehr, 28. Neuchâtel: Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel.
- 2005b Le collectage de la mémoire orale kanak: Expériences et enjeux. *Mwà Véé: Revue Culturelle Kanak* 50 (October–December): 4–12.
- 2007 Le collectage de la mémoire kanak: Expériences et enjeux. *La Ricerca Folklorica* 55: 27–37.
- 2013 The inventory of Kanak collections in Europe: Stolen heritage or common heritage to revive? In *Beyond modernity: Do ethnography museums need ethnography?* ed. Sandra Ferracuti, Elisabetta Frasca, and Vito Latanzi, 99–106. Roma: Espera Libreria Archeologica.
- 2014 Un caso di patrimonializzazione condivisa: Gli oggetti ambasciatori della cultura kanak. In *La densità delle cose oggetti ambasciatori tra Oceania e Europa, Percorsi di antropologia e cultura popolare, Quindici*, ed. Anna Paini and Matteo Aria, 207–17. Pisa: Pacini-Ricerca.
- 2015 Un exemple de patrimoinalisation partagée: Les objets ambassadeurs de la culture kanak. In *Patrimoine naturel et culturel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, ed. Céline Castets-Renard and Guylène Nicolas, 261–70. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Tjibaou, Jean-Marie

- 1985 Nouvelle-Calédonie: Pour l'indépendance. *Les temps modernes* 41 (464): 1587–1601.