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Jean-Marc Regnault and Viviane Fayaud, eds., *La Nouvelle-Calédonie: Vingt années de concorde, 1988-2008*. Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, 2009. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. €32 (pb). ISBN: 978-2-85-970043-0.

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This book opens with a disclaimer culled from the ethnographer and Noble prize winning novelist, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio: “L’Océanie, c’est le continent invisible” (p. 9).<sup>[1]</sup> Le Clézio’s qualified dismissal of Oceanic islands from the broader consciousness (historical or otherwise) is seconded quickly in this volume by one of its editors, Jean-Marc Regnault, who writes, “Il est vrai que la Nouvelle-Calédonie n’a intéressé ce qu’on appelle le ‘grand public’ ... que lors des crises violentes” (p. 10). Despite these disclaimers this text presents a compelling history of the partial decolonization of New Caledonia. The text portrays a complicated and moving dance among the Kanak, French, and Caldoche, with occasional hints flung to the reader on what the Kanak agenda might be. Independence, as Déwé Gorodey, Caroline Machoro and Roch Wamytan all reiterate, is not a word in their Kanak languages (p. 60). Self-government, life, and dignity are their preferred expressions. This assertion by leading Kanak politicians leads us to consider what their goals are within the on-going (not yet post-) colonial negotiations. The Pacific way in politics is staged here, bringing a continent--invisible only to those who do not bother to focus--into view.

This book derives from a conference held in Nouméa to celebrate twenty years, 1988-2008, of peace in New Caledonia, and it celebrates this peace as New Caledonia’s claim to world-historical importance. The Caledonian model of non-violent resolution to a nationalistic/indigenous independence movement was achieved via the Matignon and Nouméa Accords that ended the 1980s militant Kanak independence movement. J.-M. Regnault makes this claim early in the volume, “Or, si tant de régions du monde ne sortent pas de la violence, la Nouvelle-Calédonie est là pour montrer un exemple de sortie de crise” (p. 10). This theme is echoed through out by a range of speakers. The nature of this achievement is worthy of reflection, as evidenced by the former French Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, in his provocative remark that the Russian presidential candidate, General Lebed, longed for an *entente calédonienne* with Chechnya (p. 140). We should also consider that the Accords call for a referendum on New Caledonia’s independence sometime between 2014 and 2018. Hence, claiming victory over violence in this colonial/postcolonial struggle is premature <sup>[2]</sup>. When (and if) that referendum is held, we shall see what types of reflections emerge.

If somewhat premature as a celebration of an end to colonial conflict, this collection nonetheless provides engrossing material for reflection on how the armed crisis was ended, how a power-sharing arrangement was constructed, and to what extent this power-sharing has succeeded in building a “Caledonian” citizenry. In 2008 (when the conference was held) the mood was largely optimistic, or, at least, overtly polite. Many of the signers of the Accords were present and contributed to this volume, if not by signing their name to an essay, then by making speeches or comments upon presentations. These comments are perhaps the most endearing aspect of this book. They open the academic analyses to controversy, contention, outright rejection, or nuanced shift of emphasis. The net result is to bring to life the open contest not just for the past but for the present and future of these islands <sup>[3]</sup>. Main

fault lines emerged in the conference, perhaps predictably, between Kanak speakers (especially Roch Wamytan) and French and Caldoche speakers (such as Michel Rocard and Jacques LaFleur).

The editors sought to avoid parochialism by soliciting international participation in this volume. Contributors hail from Japan, Canada, Australia, France, and French Polynesia as well as from New Caledonia. Nonetheless, this is not an introductory text. We are launched mid-stream into on-going political events and debates. Important figures, well known in New Caledonia but hardly household names in other locales, appear without introduction. Déwé Gordey, for example, is identified as the Vice President of New Caledonia, but left unmentioned is her role as an internationally famous poet and novelist as well as her roots in Kanak liberation movements (she was a co-founder of the Groupe 1878, in memory of the Kanak revolt of that year under chief Ataï, which later became PALIKA [Parti de Libération Kanak]) [4]. Other Kanak politicians who appear without introduction include Caroline Machoro and Roch Wamytan. Jacques LaFleur, the Caldoche leader of the pro-French party, Rassemblement pour la Calédonie, at least appears in the time-line at the front of the book, which will alert readers new to New Caledonian politics of his views and achievements.

Indeed, this book exhibits history as much as it describes history. By this awkward expression I mean that the book bears symptoms of New Caledonia's small island status, of its deeply racialized colonization, and of its on-going struggle with racial divisions (and overcoming those divisions). Former Prime Minister Rocard opened the conference and dominates the first section of the book. And yet, the discussion is centered around a film, *Les médiateurs du Pacifique* directed by Charles Belmont, that is not described [5]. Participants in the conference viewed the film together, but the readers of this book are left in the cold, like strangers who have arrived late. This odd start to the book becomes even odder as speaker after speaker hails from the French or Caldoche community. These dimensions to the conference and book exemplify what I mean by bearing the symptoms of history rather than explaining history. Nine or ten (depending on how you count) speakers and one film (made by a French man) claim our attention before we hear a Kanak voice. As it happens, this voice is Déwé Gorodey's (pp. 24-29). She speaks in an official capacity, as the Vice President of New Caledonia standing in for the President, and so her words are tempered by the responsibilities of her office. At length, after Jean-Jack Queyranne, Jacques LaFleur and (again) Rocard are heard from, we come upon Caroline Machoro's contribution, which injects a fierce note into what had until then been a rather rosy-hued memory of diplomatic achievements (pp. 35-39).

The difficulties with reading this text might prompt some to discard it altogether. I would council forbearance. For those willing to read the text for its content and with attention to its symptomatic qualities, this book yields enormous insights into an instance of (late and partial) decolonization. The participants in the political process that produced the Matignon and Noumea Accords emphasize the adroit dialogue and conciliation that shoved armed confrontation off the historical stage. Prime Minister Rocard speaks candidly of the terrifying responsibility he assumed immediately upon taking office, May 10, 1988 (p. 13). On May 5, a mere five days previously, special French commando troops had stormed a sacred cave, la grotte d'Ouvéa, killing nineteen Kanak militants. Two military men died in this assault. Events at la grotte d'Ouvéa represent the culmination of the violence, which had begun in April 1984. With Rocard at the helm of French policy toward New Caledonia, an emphasis on mediation and reconciliation was immediately adopted. Violence and murder gave way to political restructuring, power sharing, and the valorization of Kanak culture. The reflections of those present at these events dominate the first section of this book.

Vice-President Gorodey praises the years of stability achieved by the Accords (p. 25). Gorodey explains that via the Accords New Caledonia has received a government structured especially for its own identity, which granted a role for Kanak identity, without excluding others (p. 26). The Accords further stabilized the country by fostering economic and social development of Kanak communities, and established Caledonian citizenship within the context of French nationality, allowing this citizenship to

express the common destiny of those with roots in these islands and who live long term in New Caledonia (p. 26). Kanak identity has been valorized by establishing courts of customary law, by creating a Senate of customary law and local customary *conseils*, and by creating a corps of officers to uphold public order via customary methods. The construction of the Jean Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, as well as the teaching of Kanak languages in public schools, testify to this new centrality of Kanak people within New Caledonian affairs. This new identity for the islands is made tangible in the recently created New Caledonian symbol and a flag. The stability of New Caledonia, Gorodey acknowledges, rests as well on the recent economic growth, which has increased Kanak employment rates and lessened the rather severe racial disparity in incomes. The Accords, as Gorodey presents them, provide the day-to-day inspiration for government guided by respect for cultural difference as well as by respect “de ce qui nous unit, l’amour de cette terre de Nouvelle-Calédonie et l’avenir de nos enfants” (p. 28). Prior to concluding her remarks, Gorodey injects a note of hesitation. Quoting from Aimé Césaire, Gorodey evokes the deforming weight of racism on these islands (p. 29). Gorodey then returns to the path of reconciliation charted by the Accords, emphasizing that these Accords are built upon a pact made with human intelligence, the intelligence to choose confidence in others and in oneself. Such confidence cannot be legislated, she observes, but is a type of gamble that must be constantly renewed.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou led the Kanak in the peace-making process and was the chief Kanak negotiator at Matignon, meeting with Jacques LaFleur and Prime Minister Rocard. Tjibaou signed the Accords with a heavy sense of responsibility, and with a foreboding that his fellow Kanak would understand his actions as capitulation rather than as compromise (see Machoro’s contribution, pp. 38-40). One year later he and his colleague Yeiwene Yeiwene were murdered by more militant Kanak. Tjibaou’s absence has been keenly regretted over the years, not least because his legacy is now shrouded in controversy. Eric Waddell’s contribution is a lively investigation of the historical documents to discover Tjibaou’s motivations and his thoughts after signing the Accords. Waddell documents Tjibaou alleging that the Kanak had once again “been rolled” and “swindled” and that “governments understand nothing” (p. 172). Tjibaou apparently acted both under duress caused by French military superiority and duress caused by his own peoples’ suffering (the people no longer had sugar or rice in their homes) (p. 172). Rocard, to the contrary, insists that Tjibaou was a full and willing participant in dialogues at Matignon and in signing the Accords (pp. 202-203).

Essays by François Audigier, Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard and Pierre Bretegnier provide detailed exposés of French, Kanak and Caldoche party politics with respect to the Accords. In an essay misplaced in the Pacific section of the book, René Dosière traces the disinterest of the French parliament toward New Caledonia and documents persistent refusal to oversee the implementation of the Nouméa Accord (pp. 159-163). We learn from Audigier that in France, policy toward New Caledonia is driven more by the desire to curry French votes than by any real concern for New Caledonian issues (p. 74). Hence, the achievement of socialist Prime Minister Rocard was eventually adopted (if in somewhat corrupt manner) into RPR policies. LaFleur, chief agent for “la Calédonie française” and founder of the RPC (later RPCR and later still, Rassemblement-UMP), signed the Matignon Accords in defiance of his local party hardliners and of the French RPR (p. 67). To his credit, the conciliatory course he pursued with Tjibaou and Rocard has indeed become the foundation from which New Caledonia is making its history. In a contribution that hews closely to events and shifting alliances Mohamed-Gaillard anatomizes the various Kanak political parties. French and broader Pacific influences on these politics could have been included to good effect. Bretegnier, a life-long RPC/RPCR/Rassemblement-UMP politician, treats us to a delightfully feisty defense of Jacques LaFleur’s party. The Caldoche, he explains, do not share metropolitan guilt over colonization; rather, they resent the economic privileges of the metropolitan elite that flits on and off the islands. Moreover, the Caldoche have a very real interest in the fate of these islands should they become independent (p. 89). Kanak were drawn to membership in LaFleur’s party, he explains, out of recognition for the civilizing role of France (p. 90). The rejoinders to Bretegnier are as lengthy as his essay, indicating (again) the live contest over Caledonian history.

The making and working of the Accords compose the subject of essays contributed by Alain Christnacht, Jean-Yves Faberon, Patrice Jean, Régis Lafargue, and Yoko Oryu. All of these essays are relegated to the second half of the book whereas they might more reasonably have been placed first, laying the groundwork for the political interpretations and debates. Hence the astute contribution by Christnacht on the Nouméa Accord, which provides concrete methods for implementing the self-determination envisioned in the Matignon Accords, comes long after the many party views and contests over these Accords have been aired (pp. 101-108). Jean-Yves Faberon ably describes the dual federal system established by the Accords; an internal federalism between the provinces of New Caledonia is doubled by its federal link to France (pp. 11-119). He valorizes this political form as providing a union that preserves diversity (p. 118).

The Accords have been interpreted (this interpretation is itself contested) as demanding a fixed a residency term of ten years in order to qualify to vote in the referendum on independence. The right to vote is the essence of democracy; fueled with this passionate insight Patrice Jean traces the legislative adoption of this item of the Accords. The ten year residency requirement might be assumed to favor a particular voting block, but Jean's analysis does not extend into this volatile question. Lafargue's contribution shares Jean's preoccupation with legal analysis, focusing on customary status within Caledonian law. Jean claims to address "Kanak identity" in this essay, but remains mired in legal complexities which will speak with difficulty to most historians of race, post colonialism, and identity. This is unfortunate, as the nuances of customary law and personal identity are rich, especially when considered from a gendered perspective [6]. Oryu's contribution on the precursor to the Accords, the 1983 Nainville-les-Roches meeting at which the principle of Kanak self-determination was first recognized by the French, asks how modern law can accommodate the peculiarity of insular islands (pp. 175-182). Her competent account of Mitterand's organization of this event is enriched by LaFleur's long interjection, relating the story of how Eloi Machoro (a Kanak leader later killed in the "events") came to the meeting holding a letter Mitterand had signed when he was still a candidate, which promised independence to New Caledonia if he were elected. Machoro crumpled up this letter and threw it at "the very respectable" Georges Lemoine, "ce qui a considérablement change l'ambiance qui régnait là" (p. 183).

Placing New Caledonia within a broader history of the Pacific in addition to understanding its evolving relation to France is the goal of several essays, including those of Sémir Al Wardi, Nathalie Mrgudovic, Regnault, and Robert Aldrich. Al Wardi's essay presents French Polynesia within the context of events in New Caledonia, pointing to the possibility of growing ties between the two groups of islands as their respective ties to France attenuate. Nathalie Mrgudovic's contribution portrays the resonance of the independence movement in New Caledonia among other island, post-colonial, and indigenous peoples, with key international support emerging from Fiji, the Pacific Island Forum, and eventually from the United Nations Committee on Decolonization. To this date New Caledonia remains on a United Nations list of territories awaiting decolonization. Regnault takes a long-term view, probing why the French first came to the Pacific. He finds poor rationale behind French seizing Pacific lands compounded by mismanagement over the years. In a region that can appear destined for American or Asian dominance, Regnault offers the observation that the best means for France to exercise its power is via astute management rather than meddling in the internal affairs of New Caledonia and Polynesia (p. 193-194). Aldrich, who has written broadly on the French in the Pacific, contributes the closing essay to this volume and focuses on the many ways in which the Pacific is ripe for rediscovery. He sketches a platform for further research—including social and political structures, island cultures, islands sinking due to global warming and other environmental concerns—which he proposes with conviction and yet without linking specifically to the themes of the conference.

Rocard's reflections on the conference are given the last word in this volume. This seems fitting for a book which is at heart a live political debate concerning a Rocardian legacy. Rocard emphasizes the

achievements in New Caledonia within the context of conflicts around the world, whether in Rwanda or in the Basque country. The lessons of conciliation, of dialogue, of forsaking Jacobin tendencies in order to achieve enduring peace, are emphasized here. This, he would say, is the Pacific way.

Rocard expresses surprise that no serious discussion of the economy is included in this collection (p. 203). Indeed, in the early era of New Caledonia's colonization one of the chief justifications for colonizing these islands was "mise en valeur" [7]. The strength of New Caledonia's economy is cited several times in this book as evidence of the success of the Accords and of the health of the territory (pp. 27, 136, 183). Left without discussion are the huge subventions supplied by metropole France. This type of largesse is deeply familiar to historians of France. The nickel industry, however, is a story particular to New Caledonia and essential to its history (see hints at this on pp. 27, 35, p. 70 note 17, 82, 136). With one quarter of the world's nickel reserves, the Grande Terre island is an international nickel conglomerates' haven. The hefty per capita income on the islands is heavily dependent on this extractive industry, which until fifteen years ago operated without any environmental constraints. In Nouméa at this time, household dust carries concentrations of nickel (a known carcinogen) that are three times as dense as the ore mined from the ground [8]. All nickel mines are open pit, so the island is deeply scarred, heavily eroded, and bleeding into the World Heritage Site corral reefs that circle the island. The Kanak environmental group, the Rheebeu Nu Committee, is alluded to very briefly by Gorodey (p. 27, and also see p. 94), but nowhere in this text is the role of nickel in New Caledonian politics explored.

Since the Rothschilds established Société le Nickel (SLN) in 1880, mining has dominated the economy. SLN was partially nationalized in the 1980s and later part ownership was granted to provincial governments in New Caledonia. For non-self governing territories (i.e., colonies) the United Nations frowns upon international investment in extractive industries, but this has not prevented international investment during the "peaceful twenty". No simple equation links the Kanak and nickel either, as the wealth created is seemingly coveted (if not shared equally) by all. Finally, if nickel is the silent partner in New Caledonian history, Jacques LaFleur raises the stakes by citing the discovery of hydrocarbon (oil and gas) deposits off-shore from New Caledonia. He uses this discovery as a reason for opposing independence, arguing that an independent New Caledonia could not negotiate successful extraction contracts and that the paternal authority of France is needed (p. 35). Independence, in whatever guise, will not deliver freedom from the blessing/curse of natural resources.

Colorful, local and global, idiosyncratic and a bit difficult to decipher: this book provides fine material for integrating New Caledonia into lectures and research on post-colonialism and conflict resolution. Suitable for professors and advanced graduate students, this book delivers much to the patient reader. Working with this text, we can better insert this Pacific history into post-colonial narratives.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

François Audigier, "Le RPR (puis l'UMP) et les Accords de Matignon de 1988 à nos jours."

Sarah Mohamed Gaillard, "Les parties indépendantistes depuis les Accords de Matignon."

Pierre Bretegnier, "Le Rassemblement et les Accords de Matignon et de Nouméa."

Alain Christnacht, "L'Accord de Nouméa comme reconnaissance mutuelle d'une citoyenneté commune et outil d'une décolonisation consensuelle."

Jean-Yves Faberon, "L'idée fédérales en Nouvelle-Calédonie depuis les Accords de Matignon."

Patrice Jean, "La condition de résidence exigée pour certains scrutins en Nouvelle-Calédonie: de Matignon à Versailles."

Nathalie Mrgudovic, "Les événements de Nouvelle-Calédonie vus des États et Territoires du Pacifique du Sud."

Sémir Al Wardi, "L'influence des Accords de Matignon et de Nouméa sur la vie politique et institutionnelle de la Polynésie française."

Régis Lafargue, "Statut personnel et 'identité kanak': Le Droit saisi par le politique."

René Dosière, "L'Accord de Nouméa au Parlement."

Eric Waddell, "'La parole est sacrée': Jean-Marie Tjibaou et le véritable enjeu des Accords de Matignon."

Yoko Oryu, "La préparation des Accords de Matignon-Oudinot. Nainville-les-Roches: le droit à l'indépendance comme patrimoine kanak ou l'identité culturelle dans l'outre-mer français."

Jean-Marc Regnault, "Les Accords de Matignon et de Nouméa dans la longue durée de la présence française dans le Pacifique Sud."

Robert Aldrich, "La redécouverte du Pacifique."

#### NOTES:

[1] Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio won the 2008 Noble Prize in literature.

[2] Earlier reflections on the achievements of these accords are offered by Stephen Henningham, "The Uneasy Peace: New Caledonia's Matignon Accords at Mid-Term," *Pacific Affairs* 66:4(Winter, 1993-1994):519-537; and Jean-Yves Faberon and G. Agniel, *La souveraineté partagée en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (La Documentation française, 2000).

[3] Frédéric Angleviel grappled with the often intimate contest over history in New Caledonia in "Un pays du non-dit à une libération du parole: L'histoire comme enjeu culturel en Nouvelle-Calédonie," in Matt Matsuda and Alice Bullard, eds., *Emotional Latitudes: The Ambiguities of Colonial and Post-Colonial Sentiment*, special issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 34:1(Spring 2008):104-121.

[4] See, e.g., Raylene Ramsay, "Déwé Gorodé: The Paradoxes of Being a Kanak Woman Writer," *KUNAPIPI* 27:2(2005):23-42; and Peter Brown, "A Singular Plurality of Voices: Tradition and Modernity in Déwé Gorodé (New Caledonia)," in Kamal Sahil, ed., *Francophone voices* (Exeter UK, Elm Bank Publishers, 1999), pp. 125-140.

[5] The director's description of this film is available at [http://pagesperso-orange.fr/felina/doc/agend/presentat\\_mediateurs.htm](http://pagesperso-orange.fr/felina/doc/agend/presentat_mediateurs.htm)

[6] For a brief discussion of Kanak women in relation to custom and Western rights, see Alice Bullard, "Paris 1871/New Caledonia 1878: Human Rights and the Managerial State," in Lynn Hunt, Marilyn Young and Jeff Wasserstrom, eds., *Human Rights, Citizenship, and Revolutionary Traditions* (New York; Rowman Littlefield, 2000), pp. 79-98, and Alice Bullard, "Le théâtre des plages en Nouvelle-Calédonie: La Présentation du corps et l'art kanak féministe," *Journal de la société des océanistes* 108:1(1999):133-43.

[7] Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 61.

[8] The sole nickel refinery on Grande Terre is in Nouméa. The U.S. government Department for Health and Human Services, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, lists nickel as carcinogenic. See <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts15.html>. Saleem H. Ali, "Contesting the "Noble Savage" on Sustainability: Indigenous Politics, Industry and Biodiversity in New Caledonia," Paper for the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Tampa, Florida, March 2007, p. 7.

[9] Kim Munholland, *The Rock of Contention: Free French and Americans at War in New Caledonia, 1940-1945* (Berghahn Books, 2006).

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