

Division in the land of ‘the unspoken’ Examining journalistic practice in contemporary New Caledonia¹

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Abstract

While the Kanaks’ pro-independence protests against French settlers have been extensively documented in the global media and academic literature, another protest – more subtle and diffused, but deeply embedded – is now taking place in New Caledonia to decide whether to remain in the French Republic or become independent in a referendum between 2014 and 2019.

*This article suggests that there is a polarisation in the New Caledonian media sphere that deeply affects journalistic practices. Drawing on data collected from archival research, participant observation and interviews conducted at both the metropolitan daily newspaper, *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, and the pro-independence radio station, *Radio Djiido*, this article demonstrates how local journalists problematically navigate and, often, contest diverse sociocultural values, practices and principles prevailing at different times and places/spaces, creating a deep division in the New Caledonian media sphere.*

Introduction

Journalism, states Mark Deuze (2005, p. 442), “is and has been theorised, researched, studied and criticised worldwide by people coming from a variety of disciplines”. However, normative Western definitions of journalism and its role in society dominate the current

academic literature examining media and journalism practice throughout the world. Following up on what some critics, such as Eric Loo (2009), have argued, this article proposes that the definitions of journalism dominating the literature fail to acknowledge diverse values that have an impact on journalism practices in developing countries, such as those in the South Pacific, and that "practices in journalism are culturally interpreted and best understood from within the realities that define the socially transformative work of the respective [...] journalists" (Loo, 2009, p. 7). Quite obviously, Pacific journalism also has many characteristics in common with journalism in the developed world – not the least because much Pacific journalism derives from practices, aspired-to standards, and business models of the developed world. Western ideas such as "national sovereignty, human rights [...] among others, can be very helpful when deployed within decolonising projects" (Wood, 2003, p. 360). These ideas cannot be neglected when analysing media – in particular, journalism – in the South Pacific, given that modern journalists are often seen as government 'watch dogs'. In addition, media are commonly regarded as the so-called 'fourth estate' (Carlyle, 1894, p. 194), the *sine qua non* for transparency, accountability and openness in society and the foundation of good governance – all of which are, after all, very Western or *Westernised* notions.

However, conventional notions of modernity and even post-modernity seem inadequate or unsuitable for theorising the sociocultural context of contemporary Pacific societies such as New Caledonia – in particular, their journalistic practices because these concepts do not address co-existing cultural values that affect people living in these societies. This article demonstrates that, in contemporary New Caledonia, a colonial society in transition, the French presence is just as important as Kanak custom in influencing journalism practice.

New Caledonia (pop. est. in 2014: 268,767)², commonly referred to among the Franco-phone population as '*le Caillou*' (the Rock) and as '*Kanaky*' by the local indigenous population, is an archipelago located in the sub-region of Melanesia in the South West Pacific. The archipelago consists of seven main inhabited islands.

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Metro1	Metropolitan journalist – <i>Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes</i>
Metro4	Metropolitan senior journalist – <i>Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes</i>
Metro6	Metropolitan journalist – <i>Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes</i>
Metro10	Metropolitan journalist – <i>Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes</i>
K2	Kanak senior journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K3	Kanak journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K7	Kanak journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K8	Kanak journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K11	Kanak senior journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K13	Kanak journalist – <i>Radio Djiido</i>
K12	Kanak leader
K5	Kanak scholar
K14	Kanak leader

*The data presented in this article was collected through archival research, participant observation conducted in two New Caledonian newsrooms, and interviews with local journalists, Kanak leaders and local scholars. The participants are referred to in this article as shown in the table above.*³

Brief historical background

New Caledonia became a French colony in 1853 and was relisted by the United Nations Committee on Decolonisation as a non-self-governing territory in 1986. The official language is French, which remains the most widely spoken; however, local indigenous languages are also spoken. New Caledonia's population consists of several groups: Kanaks, the indigenous Melanesian population (44%); people of European heritage (dubbed "Caldoches" and "Metros") (34%); other Pacific Islander communities not indigenous to New Caledonia (Tahitians, Wallisians and ni-Vanuatu); as well as other nationalities such as Vietnamese and Chinese (22%). The French settlers, who work as colonial administrators on short-term appointments from metropolitan France, are locally referred to as 'Zoreilles' or 'Metros'. The descendants of early French settlers, prisoners and labourers, who were born in New Caledonia and many of whom are fifth- and sixth-generation Caledonians, are known as 'Caldoches'.

Agitation by the Kanaks for independence in New Caledonia since the 1970s caused armed conflicts in the colony between 1984 and 1988, followed by the Matignon Accords, a peace agreement among the French government, the main conservative anti-independence party RPCR and the pro-independence leaders of New Caledonia. The main purpose of the Matignon Accords was to establish a civil peace between supporters and opponents of independence and to reorganise public administration and the distribution of power in order to allow the people of New Caledonia to choose freely their 'destiny' – that is, whether to remain in the French Republic or become independent. Another agreement,

known as the Noumea Accord, was signed in May 1998, setting out a 20-year transition towards a new political status.

During the post-Noumea Accord period, France assisted New Caledonia at various levels, providing economic assistance to Kanak communities, decentralising the judicial process, investing in provincial courts and establishing a customary council, the *Sénat Coutumier* (Berman, 2001, pp. 279-280). In 1998, the Noumea Accord provided for a referendum, scheduled in late 2018, to give New Caledonian citizens the opportunity to decide whether or not New Caledonia should become independent.

Thus, New Caledonia has a unique status in the polity of France. Maclellan (1999, p. 245) argues that its "transitional status, created by the Noumea Accord is unique". New Caledonia is a special collectivity more than a colonial territory, but it is less than a fully independent state within the Francophone commonwealth. The French colonisation of the New Caledonian archipelago has profoundly altered the indigenous population's social organisation, ways of living and identity.

Liquid modernity in the New Caledonian context

Bauman proposes that, in liquid modern times, the values and standards of pre-, early, solid and post-modernity are now "disintegrating, overlapping and remixing" (Bauman as cited in Deuze, 2008, p. 851). Bauman (2004, p. 1) argues that, in liquid modern times, people live in a society "in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the way of acting to consolidate into habits and routines. Liquidity of life, and that of society, feed and reinvigorate each other. Liquid life, just like liquid modern society, cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long". Hau'ofa's Oceanian scenario, as exemplified in van Fossen's *South Pacific Future: Oceania Toward 2050* (2005), demonstrate that Pacific people will "delve into their past, in addition to other cultures, for concepts and inspiration" (van Fossen, 2005, p. 14). This scenario, allied with Bauman's concept of liquid modernity, provides a useful theoretical approach for examining the sociocultural context of New Caledonia and the way Kanaks borrow from Western values to allow their own culture to 'survive' in the contemporary world. For example, Maclellan and Chesneaux (1998, pp. 163-164) argue the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front "created tactics and structures that melded Kanak culture and tradition with new ideologies, [...] custom and modernity". Kanaks do not make a clear distinction between tradition and modernity *per se*; they tend to choose selectively some elements of modernity and adapt them to a traditional discourse in an attempt to take better control of their destiny. For example, the French anthropologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alban Bensa (1985, p. 72) argue:

In Paris, in 1968, Kanak students [...] started to feel freer to borrow new reflective political models from the West (socialism, revolution, etc...). [...] They would say, for example, 'Leenhardt [a French protestant missionary] insists on our privileged relationship to nature, well,

here is the argument to culturally legitimise our fight to claim our lands back'. [...] It is a way to formulate an anticolonial protest.

Along similar lines, the manner in which the 'norms' of journalism are expressed can vary widely in both time and space, and the manner in which local customs, agendas, and laws influence the practice of journalism is widely discussed in the Western academic literature on journalism. Many studies recognize this, along with the fact that "the notion of the 'fourth estate' was never a fully realised ideal but, rather, a set of aspirations always mediated by local context" (M'Balla-Ndi, 2015, pp. 599-600). This also applies in the South Pacific, "where the disembedding and re-embedding of traditional patterns and socio-cultural structures has led to the hybridisation of norms and practices of journalism" (M'Balla-Ndi, *ibid.*).

It will be shown in this article that Kanak journalists can sometimes also adjust their journalistic practices to modern or traditional standards in a strategic way and for specific purposes. Therefore, liquid modernity is useful in order to give consideration to local protocols and ways when examining journalistic practice in non-Western contexts. In other words, this article will suggest that Kanak journalists sometimes strategically reinterpret or re-adjust their customs to 'Western ways' or vice-versa in order better to navigate the tensions between modern and traditional ways.

Therefore, it will be argued here that the tensions between pre-contact, contact and post-contact values, beliefs and principles have forced New Caledonia's Kanak population to develop ways of living in this state of liquid modernity, reinterpreting and appropriating values from colonising powers – sometimes, in an attempt to regain power in a stratified society.

The notion of tourists and vagabonds

Bauman (1998, p. 86) redefines the notion of social 'stratification' in liquid living conditions, distinguishing the life of a 'tourist' from that of a 'vagabond'. Not to be taken literally, the tourists in contemporary society are those who "travel through life by their heart's desire and pick and choose their destinations according to the joys they offer" (*ibid.*). With reference to Bauman's notions of 'tourists' and 'vagabonds', Poder and Jacobsen (2008, p. 103) write:

The opposition between living life as a 'tourist' on the self-chosen search of pleasure experiences, or living as a 'vagabond' pushed around by the will of others is the major, principal division of contemporary society.

As mentioned earlier, the population of New Caledonia consists of several groups, with the major ones such as the Kanaks, Europeans and Metropolitans. In this context, the metropolitan population of New Caledonia can be seen as what Bauman refers to as 'tourists'.

Most of the metropolitan population that migrated to New Caledonia from the metropolis was primarily "drawn by the sun and to benefit from various bonuses and salary packages that guarantee them a standard of living far higher than colleagues in France" (MacLellan & Chesneaux, 1998, p. 146). They can stay or move at their 'heart's desire', and they can "abandon the site when new, untried opportunities beckon elsewhere" (Beilharz, 2001, p. 309). A major difference between the tourist and the vagabond is that, while the tourists "move because they find the world within their reach irresistibly attractive" – as many French expatriates benefiting from *la vie chère*⁴ in New Caledonia probably do, the vagabonds will move only because they "find the world within their reach unbearably inhospitable" (ibid.). In New Caledonia, Metros or tourists "can always return home, a luxury not shared by the vagabonds" (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008, p. 157). In this case, it is the Kanaks, who could be seen as "global travellers refused the right to become tourists" (Bauman, 1998, p. 94) and who lack alternatives and often only move because they are "compelled to move on" (Beilharz, 2000, p. 129). The lack of job opportunities, secondary and tertiary education, success at university, or even scholarship opportunities for the Kanak people in New Caledonia can illustrate this phenomenon.

As pointed out by Jacobsen and Poder (2008, p. 145), much of the politics resulting from the tourists' society "can be explained by an ongoing effort to eradicate the vagabonds from the picture of their reality, such as through an obsession with security, law and order and the criminalisation of poverty" (see also Bauman, 1998, p. 97). This claim carries interesting parallels with the political and historical background of New Caledonia. France's retention of areas of control such as law and order, the judiciary, foreign affairs, finance, currency and defence during the entire transitional period provided by the Noumea Accord can be seen as this 'tourist's obsession' over certain control areas. The introduction of French politics in New Caledonia, the succession of 'accords' constantly postponing full Kanak sovereignty, and the French Republic's efforts to encourage white and Polynesian immigration to the archipelago to counterbalance a Kanak majority can be seen as examples of a determination to "eradicate the vagabonds" from the bigger picture. Discussing the Noumea Accords, Alan Berman (2001, p. 281) asks: "Are they merely another shrewd charade designed to continue the French colonial harness by further neutralizing Kanak activism and weakening Kanak resistance to continued French presence?" As Jacobsen and Poder (2008, p. 145) argue, in order to "keep the tourists in the global game, the hands of the vagabonds must remain forever unequal". With an indigenous local population now in the minority (resulting from decades of immigration encouraged by the French Republic) and a referendum for independence due in a few years, some would argue that the French Republic has been working hard to ensure this 'inequality'. For example, Francois Taglioni (2010, p. 11) argues that, although the accord guarantees in theory a political evolution

emphasising democratic ideals, the timeframe and stakes are set, and 'demography' – or, in other words, the majority – will probably be the deciding factor when the referendum takes place.

Media division: A disregarded protest

'Division' is a notion that none can miss when setting foot on the archipelago; it is the reality of the country's sociocultural and political context:

The antagonism between white colonisers and colonised blacks remains deep-rooted, despite the formal equality of citizenship established by the constitution of the Fifth Republic (MacLellan & Chesneaux, 1998, p. 147).

While pro-independence protests against the French settlers and, more broadly, the French Republic have been extensively documented in the global media and academic literature, there is another dispute taking place in New Caledonia. It is a quiet and diffuse quarrel, but it is still a protest against Western impositions and dominance (for Kanak journalists and their leaders) and against customs or indigenous rules shaping communication with local communities (for metropolitan journalists). As Chanter (1999, p. 92) argues, "the metropolitan journalist's presence in the territory, working on the daily newspaper, was a product of colonialism enabled by the imposition of French political, economic and cultural practices on the indigenous inhabitants and the emergence of new institutions, among them a French language press". However, in the mid- to late 1980s, pro-independence movements also gave rise to the establishment of indigenous pro-independence outlets. MacLellan (2009, p. 206) writes:

New Caledonia's independence movement needed outlets to carry its message to supporters in the indigenous Kanak population. To challenge the dominance of conservative voices in the media, the FLNKS helped establish the community station Radio Djiiido in 1985. Together with the magazine *Bwenando*, Djiiido was the only outlet to provide alternative views to the anti-independence voices, which dominated the airwaves.

Local media in New Caledonia tend to show antagonism toward the discourses of opposing political forces in periods of important transitions. For example, Chanter (1999, p. 100) argues that, "prior to the election of Socialist President François Mitterrand in 1981, the territory's state radio and television services manifested a [...] resolute opposition to independence, achieved largely through the denial of access to Kanak or European pro-independence politicians". Pro-independence media have also discursively excluded opposition leaders. For example, pro-independence news outlets such as *Djiiido* provided limited coverage of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's 2009 visit, whereas LNC gave high priority to this event. *Radio Djiiido* journalist K3 states:

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As our editorial policy sets it, we try our best not to discriminate against anyone. But we often feel like our own culture catches up with us, and sometimes we feel uneasy about the way white people are behaving. If we are working on a political story involving pro-independence groups and loyalists for example, we do not only give priority to the pro-independence activists because of the station's orientation, but also because of a cultural divide between us [Kanak journalists] and white people.

Many of the Kanak journalists interviewed shared this feeling even though most of them understand the need to eliminate such practices while reporting on stories involving the opposition. K2 states, "Broadcasting our opponents' message and attempting to encourage discussion is crucial". However, this is not always simply in an effort to promote balance and fairness, which are the main reasons 'providing the two sides of a story' is a common practice in Western journalism. According to K2, providing the opponents' message is crucial, first and foremost, because "we [Kanaks] need to know who we are fighting against". The claim above by K2 also shows that, when these practices are interrupted, it is not always out of respect for Western principles of journalism, and this has interesting parallels with the way metropolitan journalists seem to oppose Kanak customs or only comply with them for very specific reasons. This point will be discussed further later.

Media practitioners sometimes experience antagonism and resentment from the local communities. Journalists may be side-lined by members of the public because of this European/Kanak divide, political and editorial pressures, and rules of secrecy or confidentiality clauses framed in an indigenous system. Metro1 argues:

Metropolitan journalists sometimes find themselves at the mercy of custom leaders because, at times, the only way we can get a story is by observing *la coutume* (custom protocols). This enables them to dictate not only what we can witness but also, more disturbingly, what we can cover, what we can photograph, what words we can report. If we don't play by the rules, we know we will never get any information from these people again.

Structural issues in media ownership also affect the patterns of bias among journalists. For example, journalists from *Les Nouvelles* recently called for an all-out strike to protest the increased editorial pressure that could result from the imminent sale of the newspaper by the Hersant Group to local businessmen. Moreover, political disputes in New Caledonia and the state of press freedom in France have a significant impact on the practice of journalism in the archipelago. For example, Perrottet and Robie (2011, p. 175) observe:

There are pressures on press freedom from local political disputes and also changes to media laws that affect France's three Pacific dependencies. Private radio stations [...] receive grants from the three provincial administrations in New Caledonia, which opens the way for political pressure to be applied.

Nevertheless, this section focuses on journalistic practice at *Les Nouvelles* and *Djiido* to suggest that New Caledonia's current media landscape reflects the archipelago's sociocultural

and political context: that is, it is polarised. This polarisation represents a significant threat to fair, transparent and responsible journalism in New Caledonia.

In fact, the discursive media spaces of New Caledonia appear to be polarised between journalists who favour independence and those who do not. For example, K7 argues, "Here at *Djiido* we are not only journalists, and not only Kanaks. We are also militants and our fight is for independence". Metro1 also argues, "Our audience is rather metropolitan, and we write our articles accordingly". In other words, the journalists from *Les Nouvelles* suggest their audience is mainly metropolitan, while Kanak journalists from *Djiido* tend to claim they are the voice of Kanak people in '*Noumea la Blanche*' (see Chanter, 1996), which implies that they mainly speak to a Kanak audience. To date, there is no tangible evidence to verify these statements. However, if it were verified that the public in New Caledonia selectively consumes news, one might also suggest that this practice is reinforced by the media practitioners themselves; the statements above by local journalists demonstrate that both metropolitan and indigenous pro-independence outlets tend to report their stories for a specific audience, which is not peculiar to New Caledonia (newsrooms and outlets over the world have set agendas and clear audience targeting strategies). However, it remains a telling – and, perhaps, concerning – suggestion in a historically divided archipelago set to vote for independence in the near future, where only one daily newspaper runs. In other words, at a time of crucial decision-making in New Caledonia, the willingness and capacity of local journalists and their outlets to navigate differing socio-cultural norms effectively are critical. The following sections will show how journalists interviewed for this study may oppose or, sometimes, even fail to navigate the diverse norms, values and principles.

On being a journalist in New Caledonia

The term 'journalist in New Caledonia' is deliberately used instead of 'New Caledonian journalist'. As suggested by the data explored in this article, two distinct media spheres coexist in New Caledonia: an indigenous Kanak pro-independence media sphere and a metropolitan loyalist anti-independent one. Consequently, it is somewhat difficult to proclaim which of these journalists can legitimately be referred to as New Caledonian journalists, the way this study refers to ni-Vanuatu journalists or Samoan journalists. French scholar Mireille Darot (1997) points to this complexity in an article titled '*Calédonie, Kanaky ou Caillou? Implicites indentitaires dans la désignation de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*', which argues that designations of New Caledonia and New Caledonian identity (or identities) are "interwoven with political, historical and social oppositions".

In New Caledonia, solely examining the practice of indigenous journalism failed to conceptualise the reality of the New Caledonian media sphere and to identify phenomena valuable for the purposes of this thesis. Journalists from a local metropolitan newsroom (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*) were, therefore, observed in addition to local Kanak journalists from *Radio Djiido* in an attempt to grasp the features of two distinct ontologies

of journalism in New Caledonia. The following two sections discuss being a metropolitan journalist in New Caledonia and being a Kanak journalist in New Caledonia/Kanaky.

On being a metropolitan journalist in New Caledonia

Western journalists would be familiar with the practices of metropolitan journalists in New Caledonia, which are similar to those of any Western country. This part of the article, therefore, will focus on the challenges faced by metropolitan journalists rather than attempting to describe their practice on a daily basis. This part focuses on 'interruptions' to the practice of Western journalism and the challenges metropolitan journalists face in the New Caledonian context. The themes addressed in this section are: the lack of knowledge metropolitan journalists have about local customs, Kanak leaders' abuse of customs, and the challenges these two things pose for metropolitan journalists.

The French journalism schools attended by the majority of journalists from *Les Nouvelles* who studied journalism neglect the study of the South Pacific's indigenous population. This results in many challenges for metropolitan journalists in New Caledonia because, as argued by Metro1, "Metropolitan journalists' lack of knowledge about Kanak customs as well as their refusal to overcome this lack and their will to keep reporting as they would in France is problematic. Journalism in New Caledonia involves many things that you do not learn in Western journalism schools".

Metro1 was one of the very few metropolitan journalists interviewed who appeared to have a sound knowledge of Kanak customs as well as numerous contacts within local Kanak communities. While Metro1 acknowledged local customs as an "indispensable mark of respect" when practising journalism in New Caledonia, this view was not shared by most of Metro1's colleagues as illustrated by the following quote from Metro4:

We only rarely observe *la coutume*. We only do so when we know it is the only way for us to get the information. We do not do it out of respect for the Kanak culture but, rather, to ensure that we will get the information we need.

The majority of the metropolitan journalists expressed the same views: observing customs is just a means to an end, a strategy deployed to get information for a story. The rest of the time, Kanak customs are neglected by the majority of metropolitan journalists, which can often cost these journalists a lot if they publish a story involving Kanak communities or leaders who, upset with their way of reporting, can also unfairly call on customs to side-line metropolitan reporters and put them in a bad light:

Kanak leaders unhappy with previous coverage of events involving them, their community or members of their community can sometimes call on custom to prevent us from getting the information we need to write our stories (Metro1).

In other words, metropolitan journalists can be refused access to information for legitimate cultural reasons, forcing them to abandon a story. However, metropolitan journalists might also 'be played' by Kanak leaders, and step back from stories, thinking they are doing so because of cultural reasons when they are, in fact, being side-lined for reasons that have nothing to do with local customs: "Because so few of us [metropolitan journalists] know anything about *la coutume*, we can't fight a fair battle when these things happen" (Metro1).

In some instances, instead of totally preventing metropolitan journalists from accessing information, local leaders can side-line them by "greatly delaying the access to specific information needed for a story" (Metro1). Leaders may argue that the information must first be discussed at the clan level before being made public or use more traditional ways of transmitting the information through the customary channels. However, a minimum knowledge of what constitutes genuine culture is needed to recognise these practices; and as Metro4 argues:

It is difficult for us [metropolitan journalists] to identify which persons have the authority to talk, to locate these people and their rank or their level of influence in a tribe or a community because we are not Kanak.

Thus, it may not be too problematic for leaders to side-line these journalists, who often do not know about basic Kanak traditional protocols.

Metro6 also discussed *la force des propos et de la parole* as another challenge faced by metropolitan journalists reporting on some stories that could involve Kanak communities. Literally, *la force des propos et de la parole* would translate into English as 'the strength of what is said and of the oral word'. K7 argues:

'La parole' plays an essential role in this country. This is a phrase that we can see in our country's motto: *'terre de parole, terre de partage'* ['land of speech, land of sharing']. But the definition of *'la parole'* varies according to the *world* we are referring to. For us Kanak, *'la parole'* is similar to a person. She is born, she lives, dies and is related/affiliated to someone. Every *'chefferie'* [chiefship] possesses a *'porte-parole'* [spokesman]; this person has authority to convey and carry *'la parole'*. When it comes to information, the news, the Kanak population in Noumea borrows from this philosophy, keeping the information within specific reciprocal circles.

Metro6 argues that, in these Kanak customary channels, which are embedded in indigenous structures or systems of delivering messages, "information circulates very fast and we [Metros] have no clue, most of the time, what is happening". In addition, like many Melanesian populations, the Kanak people were masters of the oratory and traditional message-running long before the arrival of Western journalism to the Islands. Metropolitan journalists who are side-lined through the use of customary channels – by having so little knowledge about not only these channels but also the hierarchies and rules of Kanak

clans – might find themselves disadvantaged next to a Kanak journalist, who will be able to retrieve the information quickly because “they know ‘how it is done’” (Metro4).

Thus, metropolitan journalists do find *la coutume* more complicated than Kanak journalists and might only respect it because they have no other choice if they want to get the information. Metro1 argues that “[o]bserving *la coutume* is a big waste of time for most metropolitan journalists as, unlike the Kanak journalists who know this practically innately, it takes us forever to figure out who to talk to, what protocol we need to use, or even just what to say as part of performing *la coutume*”. Unlike their Kanak colleagues, who are fully aware of their customs, metropolitan journalists can sometimes spend a great amount of time locating an information source – especially, when it originates from a tribe that refuses to talk about internal affairs with an outsider. Kanak leaders occasionally exploit this weakness in order to control what information metropolitan journalists will be able to access. “This is very frustrating”, states Metro6, “especially because, while Kanaks seem to have all the time in the world, we [metropolitan journalists] practise a ‘rushed’ journalism just like we do it in the West”. In fact, metropolitan journalists practise a Western-style journalism often based on news values, such as ‘timeliness’, which do not seem to be a major priority for the Kanak people, including their journalists. Many other Western news values such as ‘sensationalism’, ‘shock’, and ‘drama’ are emphasised in most of the metropolitan newsrooms of New Caledonia, but they are problematic for the Kanak population. Many Kanak journalists appear to think that these values often lead to a negative portrayal of their communities. K13 argues:

French journalists develop their vision of journalism and the values attached to it, the kind of journalism that goes on the front page, ‘conflict journalism’ that aims for the scandalous because it sells. Meanwhile, Kanak journalists will work their story angles in line with Kanak values and in line with respect for these values.

In a phone interview, a Kanak leader from a very influential family in New Caledonia (K12) claimed that metropolitan journalists tend to provide “sensational, mistaken or provocative reports” when dealing with local issues.⁵ Thus, some Kanak leaders might ensure that journalists from “their own radio [*Radio Djiido*]” (K12) get the news first by sending it to them via customary channels, for example. Counting on metropolitan journalists’ ignorance of these channels, Kanak leaders think they are ensuring their people are given ‘the right’ story before any kind of erroneous or exaggerated report by allowing the information first to be gathered by Kanak journalists who understand “everything at stake for the Kanak people when working on their stories” (K12). Thus, metropolitan and Kanak journalists’ modes of operating differ not only because, as indigenous people, Kanak journalists know the cultural environment they work in better but also, as will be discussed below, because customs force them to observe certain rules and, sometimes, reject the normative functions or principles of a more Western way of doing journalism: “Kanak journalists do not

practise journalism as we [metropolitan journalists] define it, understand it or perceive it" (Metro1).

The following section describes some Kanak journalism practices that differ from metropolitan ones.

On being a Kanak journalist in New Caledonia/Kanaky

Twenty years ago, Alaine Chanter (1996, p. 205) observed that Kanak journalists from *Radio Djiido* "claim to constitute a Kanak presence in 'Noumea la Blanche' ['Noumea the White'] and to be the voice of the Kanak people". Interviews conducted with Kanak journalists for the present study corroborate Chanter's observations. K3 states that "*Djiido est la radio de chez nous*", meaning that *Radio Djiido* is the radio of local people. This has many implications in terms of the way Kanak journalists operate. Some of these implications are described in the following sections.

K7 claims that *Djiido* adopted the Western format of radio simply because it allows Kanak people to make their voice heard and preserve customs. This is consistent with the statement made earlier that Kanak people can sometimes appear to choose some elements of modernity or the West and adapt them to more traditional discourses or practices – often, in an attempt to regain control over colonial domination:

*'La parole'*⁶ is a strong concept in Kanak culture. We use Western journalism, the format of radio, for example, to perpetuate our customs. Through radio, we make our voice heard, so our customs can survive (K7).

Thus, some Kanak journalists claim that radio is more efficient than sending an envoy up and down the hills to convey a message or deliver a piece of information from one chief to another or one clan to another. However, this information is still delivered according to traditional protocols, so their news items may differ greatly from the way a metropolitan radio station would broadcast the same piece of information. As an example, when reporting on the death of a Kanak community member, *Radio Djiido* will not only announce that someone has passed away but will also give their condolences to the family members – sometimes, announcing each of their names as well as the names of all the people who rang the radio station to give their condolences (and even their title as well as where they are from, as required by *la coutume* when introducing oneself). News items may, therefore, be two or three times longer than the time restrictions commonly imposed on radio stations adopting a more Western style of journalism. But this does not seem to bother journalists or editorial staff from *Radio Djiido* because it is the way *la coutume* works. K11 argues:

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Time limitation is problematic for us [Kanak journalists] because reducing time on air means we cannot always reproduce speeches properly, the way they have been expressed, according to *la coutume*.

Debates of any kind on *Radio Djiiido* also exceed the time limitations with which metropolitan journalists are familiar because:

Kanak customs suggest that, during debates, you need to let people speak and wait until they are done before you start talking. A metropolitan journalist would probably interrupt their interviewees when they talk for too long. We [Kanak journalists] tend not to because our cultural heritage imposes this behaviour (K2).

Therefore, Kanak journalists tend to prioritise *la coutume* over Western time restrictions and conciseness on air in their news reporting.⁷ In addition, stories seen as less important than others in a metropolitan newsroom might be perceived differently in a Kanak newsroom. Kanak journalists may see some stories as more meaningful because of their cultural aspects and give these stories more time on air even when they are less timely than others (usually, prioritised by metropolitan media outlets). Metro6 refers to this in a statement quoted earlier as to the perception that Kanak journalists "seem to have all the time in the world" while metropolitan journalists rush to get information, answering to strict values of timeliness. K2 argues, "The Western way of doing journalism forces you to run all the time. We [Kanak] never understood this. Why would you have to run all the time? Why?"

The concept of time itself is different not only in Western and Kanak culture but in many other Melanesian and Polynesian cultures. In Fiji, for example, the local concept of *talanoa* is not as constrained by time as more Western processes:

Talanoa is a traditional Pacific Island deliberation process that goes round in circles; it does not follow a straight line, aiming towards a final decision like many Western processes. [...] As the concept of *talanoa* has no time restrictions, it can lead to problems and conflicts between 'slow' and 'fast' thinkers, with some people arriving at a decision more quickly than others. However, this does provide the opportunity for 'slow' thinkers to be engaged in the discussions (Robinson & Robinson, 2005, p. 25).

The Maori⁸ concept of *hui* has similar implications:

Hui are open-ended meetings; there is no time constraint and no pre-determined outcome.

Thus, especially when covering cultural matters, journalists in Kanaky "do not run a race to access information; we take our time like the Kanak population as a whole, which has fought for years and years for independence" (K2). Because they share the same values as the rest of their community, Kanak journalists have an obvious advantage over metropoli-

tan journalists, who will 'run this race to get the news' and, sometimes, come back to the newsroom with no information at all because they upset the Kanak leaders "by rushing them and often by not observing *la coutume*" (K2). As mentioned above, stories meaningful to the Kanak community can sometimes be prioritised to the detriment of more current stories making the front page in metropolitan media. Such stories are often covered in a later bulletin or, sometimes, not at all. For example, *Les Nouvelles* gave a significant amount of space to former French President Nicolas Sarkozy's first visit to New Caledonia and covered all his appearances and speeches as well as the symbolic meaning of his presence in 'the territory'. *Les Nouvelles* portrayed Sarkozy, whose visit was largely approved by the local population, extremely positively. *Radio Djiido*, on the other hand, gave the minimum amount of coverage to the event. Corridor discussions in *Radio Djiido* were also quite telling of the journalists' feelings about this visit. For example, K3 said, "The country is once again fooled by beautiful speeches and promises of the French Republic".

In New Caledonia, *la coutume* also implies taboos and sensitivities. For example, 'details' are generally treasured in a more Western way of doing journalism for which detailed reports are often synonymous with accuracy and strong research skills. However, for Kanak journalists, this level of detail in stories about topics such as death or even sex offences is not well received by local communities (as in Vanuatu). According to K11, the provision of details in many of these instances is:

[j]ust a way for Western journalists to satisfy their audiences' misplaced curiosity. Kanak journalists will just provide the bare minimum in their stories. We don't take pleasure in providing outrageous details; it would go against our beliefs and principles.

Thus, for Kanak journalists, in-depth details are sometimes unwelcome in their stories, which can also force them to curtail some information.

While death is not a taboo in Kanak culture, suicide might need to be reported tactfully. K7 states that, "I prefer to talk about a tragic death without necessarily spelling out that the person committed suicide". K13 also states:

Once I received a fax informing me someone had died from 'an accidental death'. I called the police straight away to gain more details about the accident, and no one would tell me anything. So, I conducted my own investigation and found out it was, in fact, a suicide. I deliberately made the decision not to cover the story. The following day, this story was widely covered in LNC's newspaper. For our families, our clans, this sort of event is shameful. [...] If a relative commits suicide, this will raise many questions in the family, the clan, the tribe. [...] We also have mystical beliefs, and we would think: was this a malediction, a punishment, for the entire family?

In *Radio Djiido*, "suicide is also made taboo to protect our youngsters. I am not sure that making this issue a free topic for everyone to discuss will solve the deeper issue of suicide"

(K13). Similar issues apply for some illnesses or diseases. For example, HIV is problematic – mostly, because many people associate HIV with homosexuality or sexuality in general. These topics are hard for Kanak journalists to discuss, and the data collected for this study suggests these topics are even more problematic for Kanak female journalists. K11 recounts:

I once worked on a story about a preventive campaign for HIV. There was nothing wrong with the story, which was mostly positive. My brother heard my voice on the radio discussing HIV and pronouncing words such as 'condoms' or 'sexual relations'. He called me straightaway and told me to come by his house in the evening. He gave me the hardest time on that evening, asking me if I realised how shameful it was for him and the rest of the family to hear my voice on the radio talking about such things. I will never cover any kind of story that can put such shame on my family again. These stories are important and need to be told; everyone in my family agrees about this. However, they need to be told by another voice than mine.

However, most journalists in the *Djiido* newsroom agree that issues such as HIV are important and need to be discussed. K13 states: "we now have a program that deals with issues of sex and HIV because it is important to discuss them". Nevertheless, from what K11 recounted above, *Djiido* must carefully decide whose voice will pronounce these words on air because the opinions of *Djiido* journalists do not reflect the whole Kanak population's views on these sensitive issues – at least, not the most traditional male views. Thus, some topics judged taboo by the Kanak people might cause some journalists (such as K11) to back away from stories or topics and to let other journalists discuss them. K13 argues, "In some places, a male journalist will be more welcome than a female journalist". Perhaps, for some traditional families, having male journalists discuss sensitive issues such as the ones described above is a good compromise in an attempt to keep harmony within families, clans or tribes.

However, customs also involve rules that affect all Kanak journalists regardless of gender. For example, it is hard for Kanak journalists to question a *grand chef* (high chief) because *la coutume* prevents them from doing so:

It is seen as disrespectful to question chiefs, let alone if these questions are a bit provocative. You just listen to what the chiefs tell you. They say what needs to be known by the rest of us. They have a reason not to say what remains unsaid and asking questions about it is disrespectful (K7).

K2 adds, "I will never conduct an interview if it means that I have to question one of my chiefs". Kanak journalists know when not to ask questions, and they also know what questions not to ask, unlike the metropolitan journalists with whom they convivially interact on a daily basis at press conferences or similar events. K3 argues that there are several reasons for this:

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(1) We often have the answer to some of these questions, and so do our listeners because, unlike the metros, we understand customs; and (2) if questions are answered too early, before an issue can even get a chance to be solved at the clan level, it could cause turmoil in the clan, or (3) they will offend the chiefs.

In some cases, the questions to be directed to the chiefs are not offensive or inappropriate in any way but may remain unasked (at least, by Kanak journalists) in order not to question the chiefs' authority. K3 also states, "In press conferences [...] sometimes, metropolitan journalists do ask the questions we do not dare ask, and we have our answers". In these cases, however, two issues can arise. First, when metropolitan journalists do not ask any of the questions, Kanak journalists keep silent; these questions simply remain unasked. Second, when questions asked by metropolitan journalists are too provocative for the reasons mentioned above, airing the answers to these questions in radio reports is often inconceivable for Kanak journalists (even though they did not ask the questions) because they could put the chiefs in a bad light.

In addition, Kanak journalists – especially, when dealing with local people – observe traditional protocols. K3 states, "We perform *la coutume* not only out of respect but also because this is who we are; this is what we know and the way we have been taught things ought to be". However, K7 also states:

We do not have to do it if we interview a white person or even a Kanak in a setting that is Western, like the congress. But, in 90 percent of cases, I would say I perform *la coutume*. It is imperative for me to do so.

Performing *la coutume* (*faire la coutume*) involves "introducing yourself to the person, showing them your face, telling them where you are from, for whom you work, why you are here and what you want to ask them" (K3). It also involves offerings such as money, tobacco or the '*manou*' (a traditional fabric).

Thus, the data collected suggests that differences in the practice of journalism can be observed between Kanak and metropolitan journalists in New Caledonia, and many of these differences result from cultural dynamics. Kanak journalists seem to have easier access to some information compared to metropolitan journalists, who are strongly challenged by customary ways and channels still alive in New Caledonia/Kanaky. However, this is counterbalanced by the many rules imposed by *la coutume* that also deeply affect and, sometimes, challenge (when seen from a more Western perspective) the way Kanak journalists practice journalism and report on stories.

Conclusion

Based on the data explored in this chapter, it is the author's contention that journalism practice in New Caledonia reflects a state of liquid modernity in which colonial and tradi-

tional values are contested and negotiated. In other words, in a liquid modern context, the impact of the globalisation of media coupled with a heritage of Western colonialism and local customs requires journalists in New Caledonia to navigate winds and swells coming from many directions. Participant observation and interviews conducted at the daily newspaper *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* and the radio station *Radio Djiido* suggest that Kanak values are often opposed by many journalists (mostly, working for *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*), who often refuse to give any consideration to cultural factors. On the other hand, journalists from *Radio Djiido* also sometimes tend to reject some of the principles of Western (or 'modern') journalism, adjusting to these values for specific or strategic reasons such as preserving *la coutume*.

Deploying an approach that engages with the concept of liquid modernity and re-emerging Oceanic epistemologies proves useful for studying journalism in New Caledonia. However, it also raised questions about the applicability of Western concepts and theoretical approaches to examine journalistic practice in non-Western context. In fact, this paper, as part of a larger study examining journalism in two other Pacific countries (Samoa and Vanuatu), suggests that Bauman's concept of liquid modernity may need amendments in order better to conceptualise South Pacific indigenous contexts. For example, liquid modernity, when described as being 'contested' in New Caledonia in this article, may be navigated differently at other sites. As another example, some of the themes Bauman discusses (e.g., the irrelevance of space) do not fit non-Western contexts (e.g., relevance of land tenure in South Pacific countries), which suggests that this concept, as presented by Bauman, may be more nuanced than it appears.

However, the weaknesses of Bauman's concept when deployed in non-Western contexts could be overcome by combining it with local epistemologies in order to understand phenomena that might not be found in the West and, therefore, are not identified by Bauman.

Repetitive coups, failures in governance, insurrections, tensions in the media or even media crises in some Pacific countries could represent more than a fluid contest between tradition and modernity or even liquid modernity. Thus, it is also important to develop theoretical and methodological approaches for identifying 'genuine' tradition as well as abusive invocations of traditions. These approaches also need to examine whether and to what extent Pacific journalists contradict rules and norms established in an indigenous framework as well as journalistic norms of 'objectivity' and 'impartiality' outlined in standard journalism codes of ethics or are simply being targeted by those trying to achieve such domination. In this sense, Bauman's concept – even when combined with Oceanic epistemologies – might not be sufficient; nevertheless, it is a useful approach to identify and consider cultural factors that influence contemporary journalistic practice in the South Pacific region.

Notes

- 1 The expression '*le pays du non-dit*' (or 'land of the unspoken') was first used in 1992 by Caldoche historian Louis-José Barbançon, as the title of his book about New Caledonia.
- 2 http://www.insee.fr/en/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ip1338. Accessed November 2016.
- 3 All metropolitan journalists participating in this study have studied journalism at various journalism schools in France. All Kanak journalists have learned 'on the job', except for one journalist who recently conducted journalism studies in Fiji (USP). Note also that none of the Kanak journalists participating in this research hold the title of chief.
- 4 *La vie chère* is an indemnity received by French expatriates to counterbalance the high cost of living in overseas territories.
- 5 As an example of this kind of report, K11 argues that there will be major differences between the court report of a Kanak and a metropolitan journalist when covering a trial for rape. K11 believes that metropolitan journalists will include as much outrageous and gruesome detail of the incident as possible in their reports, while a Kanak journalist will tend to avoid providing this kind of detail.
- 6 '*La parole*' can be translated here as 'speech', 'speech-making', or even 'art of oratory'. Other dimensions of '*la parole*' were discussed earlier.
- 7 The rest of their programming (e.g., music) is a Western-style format although Djiido may play more Pacifika and RRB than other stations in New Caledonia, as just one example.
- 8 Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.

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