

Curated Interview

**An Island Conversation with
Vehia Wheeler and Anaïs Duong-Pedica: Unsettling Knowledge
Production about/in the French-Colonized Pacific***

Vehia Wheeler** and Anaïs Duong-Pedica***

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VW: Vehia Wheeler

AD: Anaïs Duong-Pedica

VW: 'Ia ora na tatou and Aloha kākou. My name is Vehia Wheeler, and I am a PhD student in Pacific studies at the Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. I am located and trace my genealogy to Tahiti and Moorea islands in the South Pacific, and I am born and raised in Pearl City, on the island of Oahu, in the archipelago of Hawai'i. I feel a strong connection to Oceania, the Pacific Ocean in general, and that is what I also base my research around.



Caption: View of Pape'ete city on Tahiti island. Photo by Vehia Wheeler

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AD: My name is Anaïs Duong-Pedica. I originally come from Kanaky/New Caledonia. I was born and raised in Nouméa, which is in the Kanak country of Djubea Kapume. I am Vietnamese and white, and I left to study abroad. I have lived in the UK, and now I'm based in Finland. I am working on a PhD at Åbo Akademi in Finland.

We thought . . . that we would ask each other questions, and then we'll have a conversation about the themes that interest us.

Vehia, I wanted to ask you what makes you an islander, if you consider yourself to be one? And how has living on an island, or on different islands, shaped your identity and worldview?



Caption: Anse Vata beach in Nouméa. Photo by Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2018).

VW: Yes, I definitely consider myself a Pacific Islander. I consider myself Indigenous to the Pacific as my ancestors have come from the Islands of Tahiti and Mangareva, and also the Tuamotu Islands that I know of, that I can trace my genealogy to. I have always identified myself, since I was born, as a Tahitian person, and that's been such a part of how I live life.

The connection to my genealogy, and to islands, and to Oceania affects how I write about the world around me and what is important to me, and that affects also the research that I'm doing, because I'm in Pacific Studies. Everything that I'm writing about is from my own personal experiences and my ancestors' relationship that they've built over time to this specific place. When talking about islandness, and asking me those questions, it is not something that I have to really

compare to other identities and worldviews because I've only known this worldview. It's something that is natural to me, so it's not like I would ask someone who grew up in a continent, what they think of their worldview growing up in a continent because that's obviously something that's very natural to them and like it's the default for myself, but it doesn't seem to be the default for a lot of people.

I guess island research, it's looked at as something that we need to explain, but it's something that is very natural to us as well—if that makes sense. And I do my research in the Pacific, and I do it around Indigenous knowledges, and the relationship to using Indigenous knowledge, Tahitian knowledges in climate change resiliency.

And for yourself, Anaïs, what would make you, an islander, if you consider yourself to be one, and how does living on an island shape your worldview and your identity?



Caption: At the “A Travers” exhibition of Samoan artist Ela To’omaga Kaikilekofe in Nouméa. Photo by Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2018).

AD: As I said, I come from Kanaky/New Caledonia. I've thought a lot about this question because I've never described myself as an islander, and for me, "Islander," where I come from, means "Pacific Islander," so the "Islander" is never detached from "Pacific." And "Pacific Islander" means an Indigenous person, that is indigenous to the Pacific Islands. And so, I don't identify as a Pacific Islander because I'm not indigenous to Kanaky/New Caledonia in the sense that my parents were descendants of the Indo-Chinese labour and the penitentiary, people that were sent to the penitentiary, and also French, as in French settlers that came much later on to Kanaky. So, I don't see myself as an Islander, but . . . I learned that this is more of an identity that is put on me when I am in Europe, in France, or in the UK. I felt like people were referring to me when we're talking as an Islander. But that is not something that I do or that people do back home. And for me home is Kanaky/New Caledonia.

I do research about Kanaky/New Caledonia because I come from there, and I guess to some extent, . . . I do research about an island, a place which happens to be an island, but I don't think about it as [one]. For me, islandness is not the primary lens through which I think about home, even though it is a Pacific island. It's important for me to think about it and locate it in the Pacific, as something that's geopolitical, as something that's relational, as in relations between Pacific islands and Pacific Islanders, but not necessarily just because they are islands if that makes sense.

I think also the reason why "Islander" for me is a position that I'm not interested in occupying, that's also a political decision. . . . In Kanaky/New Caledonia, we have this collective, which is called "[La Pause Décoloniale](#)," where we do radio and podcasting. . . . We've had several discussions, and we've had recent episodes where we talk about this issue where a lot of settlers talk about themselves as "Oceanian," they'll describe themselves as "Oceanian." [Aurore Hamene](#) talks about this in one of our recent episodes and [Marylou Mahe](#) before her. And so, I think that sometimes describing yourself as something like "Oceanian," and for me to some extent, "Islander," or "Pacific Islander," is a strategy by which settlers make themselves native to a place. And some settlers can also call themselves indigenous, *autochtone*, in French, to mean "I was born there, and this is where I live, and this is my home" . . . and kind of obscure what is meant by indigenous in that context. I mean, indigenous as a socio-historical category, that is founded on settler colonialism, French settler colonialism in that context, and indigenous as a political category and as a political activator. So, those are some of the reasons why I do not consider myself as an Islander, but I was born and raised and I very much consider an island home, if that makes sense.



Caption: Oceanian literature published by Oceanian publishers: “Je suis née morte” by Tahitian author Nathalie Heirani Salmom-Hudry (2012) and “L’agenda” by Kanak author Déwé Gorodé (1996). Photo by Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2018).

VW: Yes, absolutely, and I think this is a good time to bring up the fact that we are both living in French-colonized Pacific islands, which also adds another dimension to our islandness I guess, because we’re living in the Pacific, which, as you said, exists within a geopolitical realm. . . . We’re surrounded by nations that have been interested in conquering us over the centuries (see Wesley-Smith 2016). A lot of our surrounding neighbours are English speaking and we are both living in and have attachments to [the] French-colonised Pacific. . . . We both know, as English speakers, and as French speakers, the differences between living within the French-colonised Pacific and English-colonised Pacific and the differences in philosophical thought and the specificities of French colonisation and how it acts out within these places.

And so when you’re saying that people or settlers identify as Oceanian, . . . it’s like the elimination of the Indigenous person, or people or population—that also happens in Tahiti, or French Polynesia, “where settlers will call themselves Polynesian” and then claim that relationship to land without recognising that Indigenous people, indigenous Pacific peoples, such as myself, have that relationship to land, which is completely different and not about ownership and conquering, which is more of what settlers are trying to do.

AD: One of the things that we had discussed, and that was important for me, is not thinking about “Islander” or “Island,” because I think it also depends on which context we are talking about islands, what’s behind Islandness and islander. I think, and correct me if I’m wrong, or if you don’t think that’s the case here, that there’s a lot of romanticization that comes with it, in terms of images that arise in people’s minds. I think that’s also especially in relation to the image of “paradise,” you know, that is also very much an image that is created by US and French imperialism in the Pacific.

That is also the reason for which, for me, it’s important to politicise Islandness, and to talk about how, when I think about islands in the context of the Pacific, I’m thinking also about Indigenous political struggles against settler colonialism, and against colonialism more generally. That’s also why we were interested in talking about this, in relation to the scientific productions about the Pacific and in the Pacific. . . .

VW: Yes, absolutely. I agree that we do have to differentiate between what narratives are being constructed outside of the Pacific and imposed onto us, (see Hau’ofa 1994), which is what we experience a lot in the Pacific as Pacific islands, I guess that’s what [you] mean? And also, what is coming from the people and our own voices and our own desires and determinations. So yes, that’s right—that’s something that we want to talk about. . . . Within the French-colonised Pacific where I live, in Tahiti, there is, and especially within the realm of academia, there is a continuation of using research for the Empire (see Wesley-Smith 1995).



Caption: Entrance to the City Hall of Faa'a, Tahiti. Located on the entrance wall is a quote from Kanak political leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou which reads, "The power of the mind is everlasting." Photo by Vehia Wheeler

Anthropology, archaeology, history, all the things which have historically been coming from France, our metropolitan France, sending out researchers to collect data about us and then create data and send it back to the Empire, create these narratives about who we are and what we do. And our migration patterns and whatever they want to talk about, geography and things like that, environment. . . . It was sent back to the Empire, and used as tools of imperialism, to conquer us, information to conquer us, data to conquer us, and that's still an ongoing trend and an ongoing problem where we live, where there's still many researchers within French academia who come to our islands to do "field work" and send it back to the Empire. It creates an extractive relationship, it creates a relationship that isn't reflective of the actual people, and who we are and what we want, but it's still used as information, which continues to justify imperialism in our islands.

Anaïs, do you have anything else to say about that?



Caption: “OUI” (“Yes”) and “NON” (“No”) ballots for the 2018 referendum for independence in which voters were asked to answer the question “Do you want New Caledonia to attain full sovereignty and become independent?” Photo by Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2018).

AD: Yes, one of the things [you], Vehia, and I talk a lot about, because we are affected in our personal lives by it, is the supremacy of metropolitan scholarship about the Pacific, and in the Pacific. This is something that we have noticed. As we also come from different fields, you and I, I probably should have talked about what it is exactly that we’re researching. Because you said you research Indigenous peoples, but you didn’t talk about specifically what your research was about. And I think it will perhaps help grounding where we’re coming from in our critique?

I read Pacific studies, but I wouldn’t say I have been trained in Pacific studies, and I would struggle to situate myself in one specific field. But I specifically research the politics of mixed-race identity in Kanaky/New Caledonia, contemporarily, in this moment, especially a moment that is described officially as formal decolonization from France. But we know that this is not actually what is happening. I look at the ways in which multiraciality and mixed-racedness are taken up, and can contribute, this is my observation, to a discourse of a postracial and postcolonial Kanaky/New Caledonia. And how there is a type of settler discourse that mobilises this category of the mixed-race person, or the project of a multiracial Kanaky/New Caledonia to mean that, to some extent, colonisation is over. This is what I look at, and for that, I use settler colonial studies, as well as Indigenous studies, Black studies and critical race theory as well as Pacific studies; that is what I work on.

Vehia, can you talk about just a bit more about what you work on, so then we can move on to talk about what we have observed when it comes to this scholarship about the Pacific?



Caption: Portrait of Kanak leader Eloi Machoro on a bus stop on the road between Poindimié and Touho. Photo by Léopold Lambert (2019).

VW: I am in Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, and I think it's actually good that I started with the history of academia and how it exists and its exploitative [nature]. I think it has been addressed before in many different domains, but Pacific Studies is meant to turn that on its head and not continue those exploitative relationships which academia was born out of.



Caption: Memorial for three activists who fought for decades against French nuclear testing in Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesia) – John Taroanui Doom, Roland Oldham and Bruno Barrillot. Photo by Vehia Wheeler.

Historically, we have [had] people in the Pacific coming from [different] disciplines; anthropology, history, archaeology, geography, and creating research about us that benefits the Empire. And so Pacific studies in, . . . I guess in the '70s and '80s, and '90s, was kind of hijacked by Pacific Islander scholars (see Enomoto et. al. 2021) who are saying we can't have that anymore, we cannot continue this type of research where outsiders are coming in and giving information about us to the Empire. So we are going to redefine how we want to do research, why we do it, who we do it for. And we're going to critique the research along the way. An essential part of it is, it's interdisciplinary, but [also] an essential part of it is absolutely being self-reflective and critical, understanding who you are in relationship to the research that you're doing, why you're doing it. Is it serving the purpose of what the people want?

Instead of the research being for the Empire, the research is for the people where you actually are. I'm located in Tahiti; it's best that my research is in relationship to the Tahitian population, and what are our needs and wants and benefits and desires for our own place? I do research around using our own Indigenous knowledges, Tahitian Indigenous knowledges, as a form of resilience in climate change.

Climate change is a pressing issue within the Pacific, as you know; we see a change in climate with global warming. There's this crisis, it's kind of like a gold rush, what do we do? And how do we adapt? And all this kind of stuff. And as usual, it's a lot of outsiders telling us what to do in terms of climate change, how to adapt and what ways we're supposed to adapt, and who's going to do the adapting for us. We're going to adapt ourselves! My position is that we've always been here in the Pacific dealing with changes. We've always been depending on our own knowledges and skill sets to adapt to all kinds of changes within the last 1,000 years. And so, we continue that continuation of using our own power for the future. That's basically what I do.



Caption: Va'a canoes sitting on the beach of Parc Pā'ōfa'i, Tahiti, with a view of Mo'orea island in the background.

AD: Thank you Vehia. Now that you've introduced what Pacific studies was, [Teresia Teaiwa \(2010: 111\)](#) acknowledged at some point in one of her texts that, and this is a quote from her: "Anglophone scholars typically neglect Francophone territories in literature from their investigations." This is something that's very obvious; the majority of the Pacific studies literature is in English. There is very little about the "Francophone Pacific" and here I'm going to put

quotation marks around “Francophone Pacific” because we did acknowledge, we both come from places that have been colonised by the French, and I’m saying Francophone because some people speak French in those islands. But there are also a lot of Indigenous languages that are not necessarily recognised by calling it “Francophone Pacific.” I just want to make sure that we acknowledge that there’s a lot of Indigenous languages in those islands, but French does happen to be the national language because those are still French colonies.

This is something that we observe when we do our research: that there is very little in the Anglophone literature on the Pacific, on the Francophone Pacific specifically. You have to go to French literature on the Pacific to read about the Francophone Pacific such as Mā’ohi Nui or Kanaky. We do observe that there are a lot of differences in the ways in which the Pacific, or Pacific Islands, or Pacific Islanders are studied in Anglophone literature, and in Francophone literature. And this is not to say that this is always the case, this is just a general observation that we are making.

One of the observations that we’ve made is that a lot of the Francophone scholarship on the Pacific is really dominated by, what we would call, “metropolitan” scholars. But there is also a move to no longer talk about the “metropole” because we are not satellites around the Metropole—we think from the Pacific (see, for example, *Cris d’Océanie*’s video “MÉTROPOLE, un mot à bannir”). We are our own places and countries. So, the scholarship about the Pacific in French is dominated by French scholars, that is to say, people who are not from the Pacific Islands, as opposed to Pacific Islander scholars, or even scholars who are from the Pacific and who may not be Pacific Islanders.

Do you want to add something to that Vehia?



Caption: Graffiti by WillStyle at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Nouméa.
Photo by Anaïs Duong-Pedica (2018).

VW: I'll just confirm that, that sounds about right. It's still dominated by metropolitan scholars, as the experts, you know, outsiders as the experts. And that's by design, like I had originally touched on earlier. And that is also quite alarming in 2022, that French academia is at this point, still, where it's privileging metropolitan works and ways of thinking, (see Reynolds and Wheeler 2022), when there are so many conversations within [the] Anglophone Pacific, about being self-reflective, and, like I had explained earlier, about having disciplines that are moving away from empirical objectives and more about what Pacific people want, and creating research for Pacific people, by Pacific people.

So, I'll just say that you're hitting it on the spot. And the fact that it's not self-reflective in the way that Anglophone Pacific scholarship is self-reflective, is alarming, and again, does a disservice to the actual people that they're writing about. Myself, the Indigenous people, are constantly having to be subordinate to outsiders, who are the experts, when Tahitian people and Indigenous people have been critiquing this all along and [basically] saying, "You guys are not the experts and that's proven by the ways that you guys don't speak our languages, you don't live here, you are not in relationship with us and you're extractive."

AD: I think also, Vehia, perhaps you would agree that this is not to say that all Anglophone scholarship about the Pacific is ethical and always uses Indigenous knowledges, or, you know, is more in relation with Indigenous people in the Pacific. Because there is problematic scholarship in English as well. But I think what we're pointing to is that, and especially we're noticing this in the different spaces in the world that have conferences about the Pacific, or you know, academic gatherings about Pacific studies or about Pacific related topics, is that there is a huge difference in those spaces [depending on whether] they are Anglophone or Francophone. For example, when there are conferences, at the Université de la Polynésie Française or Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, that's the University of French Polynesia or the University of New Caledonia, which are the two French universities of the Pacific. Those are universities in French colonies, French universities. It is very clear that very often, the majority, when there are Pacific Islander scholars, many of them are English speaking. For me, it is also very clear when I work in the context of Kanaky and I can mostly speak to the context of Kanaky, there are very few Kanak scholars. In the Francophone context, Pacific studies isn't normalised. This isn't necessarily a framework, a way of doing research that is normalised.

What I noticed is that the majority of the work produced on the Pacific in French is still coming from anthropology and history, from those two fields. And those fields are important to Pacific studies, as well to the beginning of Pacific studies. Even Indigenous students that go to France to be trained academically, receive also an anthropological training about the Pacific. . . . And then you have archaeology and literature potentially. But for example, you don't have a sociology of the Pacific in French. . . . I'm talking about sociology, because that's my own personal training. Even though you might have Pacific Islanders or even Kanak people who have PhDs in sociology. But there is nothing that's really coming out and being produced that would be, for example, a Pacific sociology or a Kanak sociology, not much.

You only recently have stuff coming out about Kanak philosophy. But what I know of that, is that this is coming from people who have travelled to other Pacific islands, to Anglophone Pacific islands, to see that there has been work done on Indigenous Pacific Islander philosophies before. And again, I want to say that we're solely talking about academia, because these conversations are happening beyond academia. But right now, we're talking about academia and scientific production. This is not to say that there aren't any discussions, as there are always discussions about Kanak philosophy or Indigenous philosophy beyond academia in the Pacific Islands.

I think that it is important to think about what this supremacy of anthropology and anthropological training for studying the Pacific does to the type of scientific production that we have about the Pacific, and the ways in which people relate to what it is that they're studying. Whether it is the Pacific Islands themselves, the societies themselves, cultures, the relations between peoples. . . . And I think there is still, in Francophone scholarship about the Pacific, a way to think about the Pacific or Oceania or Pacific Islanders as objects of study, as opposed to thinking

about Indigenous Pacific Islanders and people in the Pacific more generally as people who are makers of meanings.

I think this is also in the way in which, Vehia, you were talking about the power dynamics that are at play in research that have not shifted very much in Francophone academia or in Francophone scholarship about the Pacific. I rarely ever see Francophone scholars position themselves, being reflexive, talking about what it means to do this research as a French person, or talking about what it means to do this research as a settler, being honest about what kind of relations they have, what is their relation to the country they are writing about; whereas this is something that I see more often done, or with more comfort, in Anglophone academia. I don't know if this is something that you'd agree with as well?



Caption: Université de la Polynésie Française. Photo by [ggallezot](#) (2016).

VW: Yes, I agree that it's not to say that Anglophone Pacific is 100% decolonised, if you want to say that. I wouldn't go that far; decolonisation is the land back (see Tuck and Yang 2012). Decolonising academia is an ideal-level kind [of] thing. But I would say that, even though the conversations that are happening in Anglophone Pacific, there is a clear resistance to it in the French academic realm within the Pacific. As you're saying, you still don't have people being very reflexive, you still don't have people acknowledging their position, as an insider, as an outsider, you don't really have people acknowledging the history of their disciplines, and the damage that their disciplines have done on to our peoples. I mean, they're coming in as objective researchers to a blank state. And that's just not true. And there's so much work around that, countering that, and they're still ignoring those conversations. . . .

I'm doing work in Pacific studies, about Francophone Pacific or French-occupied Pacific, French-colonised Pacific, and yourself as well; we are a few of a handful, but we want to have

more of these conversations. And we want to break that divide that has been not benefiting us basically. Like, I choose not to be in anthropology and archaeology and all that kind of stuff because I don't want to continue that sort of research. I want to be in Pacific studies, because that's the research that I want to do and the space I want to do it in. I think that's rare in the French-colonised Pacific . . . and we have to acknowledge the researchers here, who are Indigenous and the people that would benefit ultimately from that kind of research.

I guess we can talk more about the Francophone universities, and I guess their resistance to sort of opening up that conversation about self-reflexivity. And . . . when you start that reflexive sort of conversation, it is basically like handing over power, right? I don't think the French Empire wants to hand over that power. And that's why it's been perpetuated for so long, in 2022, where it's glaringly colonial, and the big elephant in the room, yet nobody's addressing it. And that's then aided by how the universities run here in French-colonised Pacific, if you want to go into that.



Caption: Université de la Nouvelle Calédonie. Photo by [gérard](#) (2011).

AD: I think . . . there's so many things that we could discuss about the universities in the French-colonized Pacific. I mentioned quickly about how the kind of courses that are possible to do, the types of training, the type of research that is possible to do in those universities, the type of things that students are going to learn, are still mostly what outsiders have written about the Pacific, and

about culture in the Pacific. It's also very much a culturalist [approach]. . . . When one could instead, for example, focus on social movements, and things like that.

But there is also the fact that there is this observation that we are making, that the majority of the scholarship on the Pacific that is produced is still produced by outsiders, from France most of the time. This is also something that we find in our universities, where the majority of the teaching staff and the research staff is French. I'm just going to share an anecdote. . . . At the University of New Caledonia, once I heard a white scholar kind of taking pride in himself for teaching to a majority of Pacific Island students. The majority of the students who attend the University of New Caledonia are Pacific Islanders, so they are Kanak, or you know, Tahitian, Ni-Vanuatu, from Wallis and Futuna, for example. He was taking pride in this. But I think we also need to look at why is it that it is the majority of Pacific Island students in those universities. I think what's important to look at is that a lot of non-Pacific Islander students go abroad to study, they go to France, Australia, Canada. And so, we need to think about that: people don't necessarily have the same types of choices when they choose an institution.

Now, for me, it's really problematic if you look at [it], . . . and I don't know exactly what the statistic is, . . . but let's say that 90 percent of the students are Pacific Islanders. But then the vast majority of the teaching and research staff is French, from France. For me, this is clearly an issue, because then you are reproducing that very thing where the people who have the knowledge to teach, and especially about the Pacific but not just, since there are other degrees, they are French, and most of the time, white people. And the people who are in positions of learning all the time from those people are Indigenous Pacific Islander students.

Those aren't new critiques; those are critiques that have been made in other contexts.

Vehia, you mentioned [Sereana Naepi's work in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#) (see Naepi et al. 2019; Naepi 2019, 2021; Barber & Naepi 2020; McAllister et al. 2020; Leenen-Young et al. 2021; Thompson et al. 2021). There's also Haunani-Kay Trask that has made a critique of the University of Hawai'i in her book ["From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i"](#) (Trask 1999). We're seeing this in our universities and how our universities . . . train students, their students that are coming out of those universities with degrees, with PhD degrees and titles, but they are not being employed by those universities. There are people who are trained, but those people aren't hired. There aren't more Pacific Islanders occupying positions of responsibility in our universities in the Pacific, and that's an issue.



Caption: Demonstration at the Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie on Friday 18th January 2023 to denounce discriminations in access to positions with responsibilities in higher education for local populations as well as the incompetence of the state in the implementation of the decolonization process. Photo by Jannaï Tokotoko (2023).

VW: Yes, I agree, that's absolutely an issue within universities that privilege metropolitan degrees. I mean that the justification is through the degree system, like what kind of degrees they need to have, how much experience they need. And so, since those things are not available at our universities here, because we have smaller cities, then the chances of having people with those types of degrees is smaller, obviously. It sets people up, where again, the metropolitans are privileged over the Indigenous people even if they (Indigenous peoples) are getting these diplomas, like PhD degrees. . . .

We still have at the University of French Polynesia, very few Indigenous Mā'ohi people who are teaching, and even less people of the Pacific. I guess you could blame that on the language divide, but a lot of other universities that I've attended or been to, the native population is employed but also people from other [Pacific] nations. Then you have those conversations in which you can discuss regional identities, have regional conversations, you can compare and contrast things, and at the moment, which is really unfair to us, the relationship still remains focused on metropolitan France for intellectual discussions.

It remains that the University of French Polynesia is still talking to metropolitan France in French, so we're not speaking to our surrounding brothers and sisters, as much as we should be. We're not creating robust intellectual conversations and comparing political statuses and comparing political rights, Indigenous human rights with other Pacific nations that are in the Pacific and next to us. And in Tahiti, it would be logical to have conversations with Hawai'i or Aotearoa/New Zealand instead of a European country that is halfway around the world from us,

and intellectual conversations on top of that, when their (France) context is so different. I'll leave it at that.

AD: Thank you for this Vehia. I'll just add one last thing, that is important when thinking about our universities, and also that when students want to go and do PhDs in France, that not everybody can supervise PhD thesis. There are very few Pacific Islander scholars who can. There are already very few Francophone-Pacific Island scholars, and there's even less of them that can supervise PhD thesis in French universities, according to the French system. That means that a lot of Pacific Island students that may want to work with Pacific Island scholars, and for good reasons, because, you know, they don't want to deal with very colonial ways or they don't want condescension, they want to be seen as knowledge holders, they don't want their topics to be treated in colonial ways, etc., but they have to go with French scholars, in France, or in our French Pacific universities, as their supervisors. And that's really an issue because it does mean that a lot of scientific production in the Pacific has to go through, at some point, something French, whether it is an institution, a reviewer, a supervisor. . . . Even the main journals that publish French scholarship about the Pacific, they are mainly managed by outsiders, by people who are not from the Pacific Islands.

We've been talking about Indigenous Pacific Islanders, . . . also just people from the Pacific Islands, but specifically Indigenous Pacific Islanders. There are so many aspects that we could talk about, and we only have so much time, . . . but thank you so much Vehia for having this conversation with me. These are such important issues, and unfortunately, because of the language barrier, not many people are talking about this. We are working between different spaces, Francophone and Anglophone spaces, and I think we can see all of those different worlds and the kind of power dynamics that are at play in all those different worlds, and we really wanted to share that with you.

VW: Thank you for this opportunity. I hope this was interesting. . . . I think it's really important to talk about, and to talk about it in the French language, talk about it in the Indigenous languages, talk about it in the English language, because even though we're speaking specifically about our French-colonised experience here, in academia, there's so much overlap as well with Anglophone Pacific academia. It's better to build conversations and at the end of the day, build power around those things that we would like to see and need to see change for the betterment of the Pacific.



Caption: “No matter the result, as long as there will be one Kanak alive in Kanaky, this land will never belong to you. Kanaky, for you, I would give my life.” Banner on the road to Tiendanite. Photo by Léopold Lambert (2018).

Notes

Some reading suggestions to think further about the politics and colonial dynamics of knowledge production in and about the Pacific:

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