

Paper

“La Pause Décoloniale”¹: Women Decolonizing Kanaky One Episode at a Time

Anaïs Duong-Pedica*

Abstract: “La Pause Décoloniale” is a radio show and podcast from Kanaky/New Caledonia that explores women’s reflections, formulations of, and contributions to decolonization. Created in February 2022, it operates in a context of ongoing French settler colonialism and through a formal decolonization process. However, this formal decolonization process has been questioned and critiqued, especially when it comes to France’s interest to maintain its sovereignty in Kanaky/New Caledonia and in the Pacific region more generally. This paper explores “La Pause Décoloniale” as a feminist intervention by women to resist the despair and disappointment generated by the current political context. It discusses how the radio program came about, presents the members of the team and how they work collaboratively, and their vision of the relation between feminism and decolonization. The paper also reflects on the episodes produced and the importance of translation. It does so by connecting the practice of “La Pause Décoloniale” to the history of women’s political action in the Pacific and in Kanaky/New Caledonia and making visible the constellation of relations to people, to place(s), and to struggles that are necessary to meaningfully do the work of decolonization.

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* PhD researcher in Gender studies at Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Introduction

Welcome to the “La pause décoloniale” page, a radio program broadcast on Djiido Radio and dedicated to the reflections and contributions of women on the decolonization of the country of Kanaky/New Caledonia. How do they think about decolonization? How do they see the country’s evolution, its emancipation? How do they define their place in the country of today and that of tomorrow?

Do you want to participate in the show? Want to share your thoughts? Contact us; “La pause décoloniale” is a work that we can build together for the country.

I wish us beautiful exchanges on this page but above all, a good listening to the show. To find out more about the editorial line of our show, listen to the 4th edition of Thursday, April 07, 2022. https://youtu.be/vfAQiaTR_HA. Rosy.²

This is the pinned publication (La pause décoloniale 2022), dated February 8, 2022, that all those who come across the “La Pause Décoloniale” (LPD) page on Facebook can read. As the post says, LPD is a radio show and podcast that is broadcast on the only pro-independence radio station, Djiido Radio, in Kanaky/New Caledonia. It was founded by Roselyne Makalu (“Rosy” on the publication). In the fourth episode of the show, she explained that the inspiration for it came to her in 2018 when she was invited with friend and political activist Florenda Nirikani by Camillia Webb-Ganon to the “Women Decolonizing Melanesia: Women’s Leadership Challenges in West Papua and New Caledonia” public lecture and workshop at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, on May 23-24, 2018. The Facebook page for the workshop described the event as follows:

Women face particular challenges in their roles as leaders in the West Papuan and Kanak (New Caledonian) decolonisation struggles. They are also powerful and resourceful, drawing on their own sets of strengths, networks and opportunities to navigate these challenges and to empower their people to lobby for a referendum (in the case of West Papua) or prepare for the November 2018 referendum (in the case of Kanaky). Join Rosy Makalu (Kanak), Florenda Nirikani (Kanak), Rosa Moiwend (West Papua) and Nancy Jouwe (Netherlands) in a half day workshop to discuss activism and advocacy strategies, learn more about their struggles and what the role of diaspora and Australian institutions can do to support them, and to build solidarity networks across the Melanesian and wider Pacific region. (Oceania Network 2018)

Makalu was notably invited as a pro-independence Kanak activist who had been active since 2012 in the “Collectif Kanaky West Papua” (Kanak Collective in Support of West Papua), for which she hosted a radio show from 2012 to 2013 on Djiido Radio. She explains that the objective of the event for the organizers of “Women Decolonising Melanesia” was to show how women were the driving force of decolonization in Melanesia (Makalu 2022). Through this event and the ability to speak to other women from the region, she realized the importance of a feminist perspective on decolonization. This event was part of a genealogy of Pacific women’s internationalism, which was most significant in the 1970s and 1980s, “an intense moment of

Indigenous, Global South women's, and anticolonial liberation struggles across the region" (Swan 2018b, 38). For example, Quito Swan (2018) has explored the Pacific Women's Conference of 1975 in Fiji as well as the ways in which "Black, indigenous, grassroots, and working-class women" were often "the architects of anticolonial movements" during the era of decolonization in Oceania (Swan 2022, 7). Swan (2022, 49) notably demonstrates that "global and gendered networks of relational 'sisterhood and survival' were part of a political and conceptual Black Pacific of decolonization."

Four years after the "Women Decolonizing Melanesia" workshop, Roselyne Makalu was not sure how to continue this conversation in the context of Kanaky/New Caledonia. It was the way the last referendum for independence planned by the Nouméa Accord unfolded, in December 2021, that prompted her to start LPD:

The idea for the show came to me following the results of the last referendum, this farce, which in some ways impacted my hope to see my country differently from what the colonizer had been showing us since he arrived here. At that moment, I was torn between fear for the future, disappointment, anger, which were made worse by the long deafening silence of the pro-independence political camp. It was a silence that really wasn't reassuring. The question I asked myself was: "OK, what can I do at my humble level?" I thought about several initiatives, and I ended up opting for this 30-minutes radio show where I would leave the microphone open for women to renew the debate on the emancipation of the country. That's how this idea came to me. (Makalu 2022)

While Roselyne Makalu expressed a sense of hopelessness and despair, she did not let these feelings deplete her. Instead, she chose to take action and create a space where women's political visions could be centered. A year earlier, the editors of "Sista, Stanap Strong! A Vanuatu Women's Anthology," Mikaela Nyman and Rebecca Tobo Olul-Hossen (2021, 13), asked themselves a similar question in the context of post-independence Vanuatu: "How can we ensure contemporary and historical narratives [about Vanuatu] contain women's perspectives, too?"

Makalu's initiative resonated with LPD member Stéphanie Coulon, who explained why she volunteered to work for this project:

I volunteered to participate [in] the show and to be part of the team. For me it was clearly the [Facebook] publication of February 8th. I saw "women" and "decolonization," and something clicked in my head. Actually, it was more than a click: it was like a lightbulb moment, and I told myself "I want to be part of it because I think there will be interesting reflections and I want to be part of that." In terms of contribution, I thought that I had some skills in audio production, so I could possibly insert myself through the technical and editing aspects as well as bringing my perspective, even though modest, on feminism, et cetera. But I really wanted to be part of it because it instantly spoke to me. And the name "La Pause Décoloniale." . . . I thought "that's it! We're in 2022; it's about time we do this work! That we talk about it at least." (Coulon and Duong-Pedica 2022)

Around the same time Roselyne Makalu thought through the political situation of the country and what she could do to bring a feminist perspective on decolonization in Kanaky/New Caledonia, Sarah Kane Pelage and I drew on Suzane Ouneï and Déwé Gorodé, two historical figures of Kanak feminism, to write a piece we entitled “Tracing Kanak Feminist Earthly and Oceanic Paths.” Our conclusion was the following:

While figures like Suzanne Ouneï, Déwé Gorodé, and the [*Groupe des femmes kanak et exploitées en lutte* (GFKEL)] are part of our local feminist history and memory, we should not limit ourselves to remembering them. This history should move us to interrogate the type of feminist politics that are thought, practiced, needed, imagined, and imaginable in Kanaky-New Caledonia. In 1990, Suzanne Ouneï asserted that “even if the GFKEL no longer exists, the ideas are still alive. Everything has a beginning.” For her, just like for us, “the future of the women’s struggle in Kanaky will be built by Kanak women on the ground.” (Duong-Pedica and Pelage 2021)

Via different routes, be they attendance at international events, personal reflections, or reminiscing about our Kanak feminist ancestors’ struggles and their own international political relations and imaginations, we all interrogated the role that feminism as a politic, perspective, practice, and analytical method, could and should play in decolonization and in the way we could think our country otherwise.

I write this paper as one LPD team member as well as a researcher of and from Kanaky/New Caledonia. As a member of LPD, I have participated in the collective production of the show, thinking with other members about our editorial line and the making of episodes. My aim in writing this text is to disseminate our work to non-francophone audiences and to make visible the political perspectives of women from Kanaky/New Caledonia in a context of decolonization and ongoing French settler colonialism. This piece is also an intervention in a context in which very few “people of the country,” and specifically Kanak people, are producers of research about Kanaky/New Caledonia.³ This is the case in both francophone and anglophone research. This is also an issue in the context of Mā’ohi Nui, as Pauline Reynolds and Vehia Wheeler (2022, 1) observe that “Mā’ohi people [are] sidelined in and outside of the academy and in the very research that is about us.”⁴ Of course, as Eseta Tualualelei and Judy McFall-McCaffery note, “Pacific knowledge-seeking and knowledge-creation are not limited to the academy” (2019, 196), and indeed, LPD is an example of a platform on which Indigenous Pacific knowledge is used, created, and shared.

In addition, this paper is an intervention in a context in which the “francophone” Pacific is often ignored in Pacific research, and Melanesia is still not sufficiently engaged with as a political, intellectual, and cultural space beyond the fields of anthropology and history.⁵ The work of scholars such as Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (2015) or Maile Arvin (2019b), amongst others, who have explored Western racialist discourses about Melanesia and Melanesians and their internalization by Pacific islanders, helps to understand the undervaluation of Melanesia in the Pacific.⁶ Building on this work, Sarah Kane Pelage and I have argued that this history, coupled with “the introduction of colonial languages to the region and English imperialism, have contributed to the invisibilization of “francophone” Black Pacific islanders, such as the Kanak people, beyond the

francophone world” (Duong-Pedica and Pelage 2021). However, even this statement is rather generous and optimistic since it assumes that the “francophone world” engages with the realities of the Kanak people. Unfortunately, beyond the fields of anthropology and history, French academia mostly ignores Kanaky/New Caledonia and Mā’ohi Nui in conversations about (French) colonialism, decolonization, and race and racism. French media and politicians (especially those who are not working specifically on questions that pertain to the “overseas territories”) are also mostly disinterested from our realities except when exceptional events, such as a referendum for independence, take place, in which case, a few will address, cover, and report on it to French audiences. This gives an idea of the general ignorance and lack of curiosity about Kanaky/New Caledonia that can be found in France and, to a lesser extent, in the Pacific. Lastly, Kanaky/New Caledonia is also mostly absent from global discussions about settler colonialism.

Another reason for writing a paper that presents and reflects on the work done through LPD is my acknowledgment of the ephemeral character of some gatherings, political actions, and coalitions. It is important to leave traces for the generations that will come after us so that we can avoid thinking we are the first or alone on a loop, generations after generations, and instead think ourselves in a genealogy of women thinkers and doers from the Pacific. This is particularly important in a settler colonial and patriarchal context that silences Kanak women’s histories of resistance. This is not only a local issue. Indeed, at a more international level, Joy Enomoto (2020) notes that Oceanian Black women are often excluded from conversations about global Black liberation struggles and Black indigeneity, despite their essential role in movements for Black Indigenous self-determination. When I read the text “Raising Women’s Issues, Fighting for Kanak Independence” (Ounei-Small 1995), in which Suzanne Ounei reflects on the actions of the Group of Exploited Kanak Women in Struggle (GFKEL), which was active for a few years in the 1980s, I was inspired by her reflection on the ways in which the group organized itself, its rationale and political objectives, and the conflicts and issues they encountered while being politically active. While today there are little traces of the work done by the GFKEL, and most of them were left by Suzanne Ounei, reading her reflections on the movement and its actions allowed me to understand the revolutionary contributions of anti-colonial Kanak women and feminists in Kanaky/New Caledonia as well as their place in international Black, Indigenous, anti-colonial struggles. While LPD works with the Internet and creates a digital archive of productions on Facebook and YouTube, it is also constructive for us to share not only the products of our work but our own reflection on what we produce and our thinking and production process. This is why LPD regularly records “debrief” episodes in which we introduce ourselves, talk about questions that pertain to the show and its editorial line, reflect back on past episodes, and introduce what is to come and can be expected in future episodes. These are also usually occasions to invite and encourage people to give us feedback or to become contributors themselves. Therefore, this paper is a “debrief” of sort after nine months of working together to create content for LPD. It also encourages further discussion and invites engagement and collaboration with those interested in thinking about shared political concerns around decolonization, settler colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, patriarchy, racism, violence, inequality, culture, nation building, and/or our hopes for better futures.

In the following sections, I will briefly outline the political context of Kanaky/New Caledonia from which LPD’s rationale emanates. Then, I will present the members who collectively work on the show as well as our work ethic and political objectives. I will end this paper by engaging with the idea of translation as a decolonial practice, especially in the context of Oceania. Throughout the paper, I will weave in Native feminist theory, Pacific feminist theory, decolonial feminism, Third-World feminism as well as Black feminist theory in order to connect our thinking and doing to fields, theories, and genealogies of thinkers, scholars, and artists who have written and spoken about the questions and issues we are working on from Kanaky/New Caledonia.

Political Context

As Roselyne Makalu has explained earlier, it was her disappointment in the last referendum for independence organized as part as the Nouméa Accord that prompted her to start LPD. The political context of Kanaky/New Caledonia has been described as being “in crisis” by Kanak literary scholar Aurore Hamene (2021, 199) and demands a brief presentation of what has led to this moment. The country currently known as “Kanak” for some and “New Caledonia” for others was proclaimed a French settler colony in 1853. According to Dean Itsuji Saranillio (2015, 84), settler colonialism is “a historically created system of power that aims to expropriate Indigenous territories and eliminate modes of production in order to replace Indigenous peoples with settlers who are discursively constituted as superior and thus more deserving over these contested lands and resources.” Indigenous Kanak people were expropriated from their lands and confined to reserves under a legal system called the Native code or Indigénat, which laid the foundations for the settlement of penal and free settlers and workers. This included being subjected to spoliation, forced labour, a headtax, spatial confinement, and violent repression. As Quito Swan points out, despite the violence inflicted on Indigenous people in the region, “Melanesia is not a sea of victims and possesses a longstanding tradition of resistance to colonial violence” (2018, 60), and indeed, the Kanak Indigenous people have “always revolted against the injustices and violence of colonization” (Hamene 2021, 199). The most studied and cited examples of this are the 1878 Kanak insurrection and the 1917 Kanak revolt. This was also the case in the 1980s Kanak insurrection euphemistically called “the events.” According to Hamid Mokaddem (2010), these were “a revolutionary political sequence constituting the Kanak people as a nation” (as cited in Tutugoro 2018). Following a series of revolutionary violent actions, political agreements were signed: the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) followed by the Nouméa Accord (1998). Signed between the French Government, the Socialist Kanak National Liberation Front (FLNKS), and the Rally for New Caledonia in the French Republic (RPCR), the Nouméa Accord introduces the idea of “common destiny” and is structured around the organization of referenda. Stéphanie Graff has suggested that:

The purpose of the “politics of common destiny” is perhaps to hide this burning question of the accession of the territory to full sovereignty, to make it fall into oblivion by giving a maximum of autonomy and by manufacturing a Caledonian citizenship that must, however,

remain a subset of French nationality. This political strategy attempts to present New Caledonian society as a multi-community society, drowning in a whole the indigenous and colonized people, who historically claim their independence. (2016, 20)

Similarly, Mokaddem (2018) has shown how the discourse of the Nouméa Accord negates independence and Kanak sovereignty by substituting the sovereignty of Kanaky to a shared sovereignty within a common destiny.

The first referendum for independence organized by the Nouméa Accord took place in November 2018 and resulted 43.6 percent voting “yes” to independence and 56.4 percent against it. In October 2020, the pro-independence vote rose in the second referendum to 46.74 percent while 53.26 percent voted against. The last of three referenda planned by the Nouméa Accord took place in December 2021, despite FLNKS requests to postpone the date, which was too close to French presidential elections, did not correspond to the timetable initially set by the French state, and occurred in a context in which Kanaky/New Caledonia, which had been sheltered from COVID-19 thanks to strong restrictions on flights and entries in the country, started being affected by the global health crisis. Responding to the French state’s unwillingness to listen to pro-independence political parties and the imposition of a third referendum date in December 2021, as well as following the political tradition of vote boycotts in Kanaky/New Caledonia (Tutugoro 2017, 187-188), the FLNKS called on pro-independence voters not to participate to this last referendum. Marylou Mahe (2021), a young Kanak woman and a pro-independence and decolonial feminist, explained to anglophone audiences that the referendum was undemocratic and should be postponed based on the arguments presented by pro-independence militants. She notably described how the COVID-19 crisis impacted campaigning, especially for pro-independence activists, and the fact that the Customary Senate had called for a one-year mourning period for the Kanak people disproportionately touched by the health crisis. Mahe (2021) explained that for those reasons, she would follow the FLNKS’ call for non-participation and concluded: “As a young Kanak woman, my voice is often silenced, but I want to remind the world that we are here, we are standing, and we are acting for our future.” On December 12, 2021, only 43.87 percent of eligible voters voted in the referendum (by contrast, in 2018, the participation rate was 81.01 percent, and 85.69 percent in 2020) and 96.50 percent of them voted against the independence of the country. While the FLNKS does not recognize the legitimacy of this last referendum, the anti-independence political parties supported by the French state recognize the result of the referendum as legitimate despite the significant abstention rate. It was the aftermath of this referendum and the lack of visibility for the future of the country and its decolonization process that created a fertile ground for feelings of despair and hopelessness.

The Team

At the time of writing, there were five active members within LPD: Roselyne Makalu, Stéphanie Coulon, the person who manages the literary account Bookanaky on Instagram and Facebook (who remains anonymous), Héléna Poédi, and me.⁷ Some of us are based in Kanaky/New Caledonia and working there; others are working or studying in France or, in my

case, in Finland. We are all born and raised in Kanaky/New Caledonia and have diverse family backgrounds. The majority of the team members have Kanak or mixed-Kanak origins while I am white-Vietnamese. There is a certain significance in the fact that we are all “daughters of the country” (“filles du pays”) since LPD does not believe in a version of sisterhood that views all women as equal in Kanaky/New Caledonia. In fact, we reject the idea that women in Kanaky/New Caledonia are a meaningful social or political group. As feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued:

What is problematical about this kind of use of “women” as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts, this analytical move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities. (2003, 31)

This critique of “women” as an analytical category is also relevant in the political and associative realm, where we observe that there is little to no interrogation of this category in spaces or actions that are put in place by and/or “women.” We also challenge settlers’ and arrivants’ claims to Oceanian identity, especially as it contributes to the invisibilisation of Indigenous Pacific women and normalizes settler presence in Kanaky/New Caledonia and in the Pacific more generally. This is also something of which I am deeply aware as the only non-Indigenous member of the team. As Roselyne Makalu has reminded our audience, “Let’s remind everyone that, here, only the Kanak people has been colonized” (2022), thus exemplifying an ethic of incommensurability that resists settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 35), as practiced by Kanak activists such as Suzanne Ounei (1985, 6), Jean-Marie Tjibaou (1996 140-141), Paul Néaoutyine (2006, 124), and Florenda Nirikani (Caledonia 2022), to cite only a few. While there can be collaborations with non-Indigenous women, these need to be grounded in a shared understanding of the history and present of settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia and the common aim of decolonization—a decolonization that is inseparable from the liberation of Kanak people from French colonization.⁸ This resonates with one of the key challenges that Native feminist theories offer to feminist discourse, as identified by Native feminist scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill (2013, 19), which is to “actively seek alliances in which differences are respected and issues of land and tribal belonging are not erased in order to create solidarity, but rather, relationships to settler colonialism are acknowledged as issues that are critical to social justice and political work that must be addressed.” Therefore, in our coming together, we must be mindful at individual and collective levels of the ways in which hierarchies of oppression and settler colonialism influence our existence in and away from Kanaky/New Caledonia as well as in our relations to each other, to our political goals, and to what we produce.

When Stéphanie Coulon asked Roselyne Makalu about the meaning of “decolonization” in the first debrief episode of the show, she answered:

Decolonisation for me is the way in which we individually and collectively think differently to what the colonizer has imposed on us. It's about deconstructing and exiting this mental conditioning and take inspiration from our own resources, notably cultural resources, as well as in our environment. It's about opening oneself up to other perspectives of evolution rather than the one imposed by the dominant vision of our society, which is a French and francophone vision. (Makalu 2022)

In this same episode, Stéphanie Coulon prompted her with another question: “What characterizes LPD and makes it different from other programs that can be heard in New Caledonia?” to which Roselyne Makalu answered:

It is different first in its name, which clearly shows a political positioning in the use of the word “decolonial” in the title. Actually, that's something that has raised a lot of questions for people.⁹ At a time when the country's independence and decolonization are suffocated by the strategies of the colonial state, it was important for me that the word “decolonial” resonates on Djiido Radio notably. “La Pause Décoloniale” is a call for the children of the country, to tell them that we are still a colony, and that from 1:30 to 2:00 p.m. on Thursday on Djiido, twice a month, we invite you to have a break and listen to women thinking the country of today and tomorrow otherwise. . . . We “have a break” because we live under pressure every day so it's really to have a break and tell ourselves, OK, we live this every day, but we need to be able to breathe and understand where we are situated and how everything is evolving. So yeah, it's a break to take a breath, and especially a new breath. . . . Lastly, LPD is also different because I've made the decision that this show is made by women and for women. This is also a political standpoint because I think we need to create spaces where women's voices can be heard without any barrier. We need to gather amongst ourselves to weave mats of dialogue and enrich the decisions made about the country and that of our children. It's not to exclude men but just to say that we need to be amongst each other and talk. (Makalu 2022)

Makalu's answer and her choice of title for the show demonstrate how central the commitment to ending French settler colonialism is in the creation of the program. According to Kanaka Maoli scholar Maile Arvin (2019a, 341), “creating spaces that are productive for (not just inclusive of) Indigenous feminists is required for more substantial alliances between Indigenous feminists and other feminists.” We must also account for the fact that our identities are more complex than Indigenous/non-Indigenous, as we all have different relations and ties to the Kanak world. Each of us also came with diverse understandings (and practices) of feminism and decolonization. For example, some of us were skeptical of the term “feminism” as a Western concept (see Makalu 2022; Underhill-Sem 2019), and some of us were comfortable using it. Similarly, we have different professional trainings, experiences of political education, militancy, and activism: some of us grew up in political and militant families while some received no political education other than what we learnt through the French education system and mainstream settler media. From the fertile ground of these acknowledged differences, we have co-created a space of coming together, kinship, solidarity and sisterhood that is not based on an assumption of shared experience but on our willingness, as women, to face our histories (hooks 1994, 102-3) and our

shared commitment to decolonization. Over the months, we have shared many times how LPD has become a “space for the renewal of the spirit” (hooks 2006, 248) as some life-sustaining political communities can become.

In her article “The Audacity of the Ocean”, Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem (2020, 2) argues that “relational positing made by indigeneity invites other ways of framing the links between centres and peripheries and everything in between.” Indeed, by acknowledging our relationship to place(s), we show “where we take our original compass bearing, where our gendered knowledge practice began, where we learn to think critically.” This is a core part of Kanak identity and oceanic indigeneity more generally. One way in which LPD has tried to incorporate this mode of relation to history, space, and ancestors has been to introduce the “flèche faïtière” (“rooftop spear”) pedagogical tool, as developed by the Cemea Pwără Wäro (Sirota n.d.), into one of our episodes. The “flèche faïtière” is an emblem of the Kanak chiefdom in Kanaky/New Caledonia. As “a traditional element of Kanak housing, [it] is a wood carving that dominates and adorns the imposing cone-shaped thatched roof of the large hut or ceremonial hut of a clan.” The “flèche faïtière” as a pedagogical tool was created by educator and militant Florenda Nirikani and the late Jean-Philippe Tjibaou, a Kanak sculptor, educator, and militant. Tjibaou adapted the “flèche faïtière” and created “a stylized drawing transforming it into a mediating figure between generations, tribes, and the self and others, thus opening up an original potential space to promote access to the spoken word for everyone addressing a group. It is a way to mediate a listening space that engages everyone equally, while leaving everyone the freedom to say what they want” (Sirota n.d.). This tool can be adapted in a variety of contexts but uses the following structure: In the first circle of the spear, one must explain what they are proud of having done in their life. In the second circle, one must say their name, explain where it comes from, and identify the names of their parents or carers. In the last circle, one must suggest a line of conduct that they will follow. Then, at the top of the page, the person working on their “flèche faïtière” is encouraged to write their last name, first name, and name in their (Indigenous) language and write down how their ancestors named or spoke about their territory. Based on Makalu’s suggestion, we used the “flèche faïtière” tool in the second debrief episode. During this episode, Stéphanie Coulon and I introduced ourselves through the “flèche faïtière” tool and then reflected on our experiences and feelings using it. This exercise was an intimate one and not evident to do publicly on the radio. Stéphanie Coulon notably noted in her personal reflection that the tool encourages people to be vulnerable, which also makes the exercise difficult. On my end, I raised the fact that this was a tool that should be used by researchers doing research on and in Kanaky/New Caledonia because “it allows to make our relation to the country visible” (Coulon and Duong-Pedica 2022) since it demands that we engage with and acknowledge our relationship to place and ancestors. Indeed, if the exercise is done properly, one’s connection to place becomes clear through naming oneself, our kin, our ancestors, or the land we come from or, on the other end, what becomes clear is our lack of relation to place as well as how settler colonialism has impacted our lives and what we (don’t) know about our history, ancestors, and the place in which we find ourselves.¹⁰ As Underhill-Sem (2020, 7) argues, “the naming of places is a political act of recognition with an expansive geographical and

historical imaginary.” Through this exercise, we make visible our different relationship to Kanaky/New Caledonia for ourselves and the audience, but also collectively as members of LPD in a space that we co-construct as caring, curious, and productive for conversations that engage French settler colonialism and decolonization.

By coming together in this way, we go against the French settler colonial project that would have us believe that Kanak sovereignty is a racist and xenophobic project and that a French New Caledonia is the only possible way of “living together.” Indeed, as Rock Pidjot, Gabriel Païta and Jean-Marie Tjibaou (cited in Merlo 1985, 15) argued: “The independence of Kanak is thought in terms of liberation, rehabilitation, and affirmation of cultural identity and not in terms of revenge for the lived or endured history. The constantly used slogans that suggest that Kanak independence would lead to the oppression of other ethnicities embrace a colonial mentality that attributes the natural capacity to be just only to Whites.”

Instead, we show that it is possible to build new relationships and hold space for our differences in our decolonial reflections on the present and future construction of our country and our relation to the rest of the world. Indeed, as Makalu (2022) explains, “LPD is different because it is participatory. It is co-constructed with willful militant people who have something to say and want to put their skills at the service of the show, and it works really well.” Lastly, LPD anchors itself in a politics of hope. This is evident in the target audience of the show: “To all partisans for the decolonization and emancipation of the country, whether they are leaders or militants, to all women who have political positions to share, also to all the young people who think there is no more hope. We want to tell them that there is still a persistent struggle when everybody does their part of the work” (Makalu 2022).

The Episodes

Episodes last from thirty minutes to an hour and are the result of hours of exchange and conversations between members as well as guest speakers. At the time of writing, eighteen episodes have been broadcast on the radio and published on our YouTube channel. The episodes usually consist of an interview with a guest activist, artist, or researcher, sometimes paired with a book presentation. Guests can be from Kanaky/New Caledonia or from abroad, and the topics vary. Some episodes are relevant to local news. For example, the episode on femi(ni)cide with researcher Aleida Lujan Pinelo was a reaction to the death by feminicide of a young woman in July 2022 and the protest organized by women’s associations that followed (Madec 2022). The tribute episode to Déwé Gorodé was done after the acclaimed author and political figure’s passing (MacLellan 2022), and the planned episode on militarization in the Pacific with researcher Talei Luscía Mangioni was a direct response to some of our members’ participation in the workshop “Kanak Pacific Feminist Forum,” a branch of the Pacific Feminist Forum NGO, on the topics of climate change and militarization, and to our observation that there was colonial ignorance and misinformation on the topic of “militarization” in the country and region. Other topics are more general, such as when Fara Caillard spoke to us about Kanak feminism, Muneiko Haocas discussed the subject of Kanak women in politics, or Laurie Humuni and Sarah Luepack answered the question “What is

patriarchy?” and addressed whether Kanak society was patriarchal.¹¹ The team behind the online platform “Présence Kanak” explained the importance of having a digital space *by* Kanak and *for* Kanak, and Yvette Danguigny was interviewed about the “La Route de la Nette” project and Kanak women’s traditional knowledges and weaving practices. We also invited French anthropologist Christine Salomon to present her research on inaction and public policy in relation to gender-based violence in Kanaky/New Caledonia and Samaï Gualinga, a Kichwa activist, who spoke to us about the “Wayra Supai” radio station and struggles of the Kichwa Indigenous people.

More recently, Bookanaky interviewed researchers Aurore Hamene and Raissa Weiri on the themes of Oceanian, Kanak, and postcolonial literature. Literature is a topic that has notably been explored on several occasions at LPD. Indeed, this recent conversation built on an interview with Marylou Mahe on her research on Indigenous Hawaiian women’s voices in literature as well as the “Salon International du Livre Océanien” (“International Festival of the Oceanian Book”), which took place in October 2022. LPD covered the event on its Facebook page, sharing profiles of Indigenous Oceanian authors and critics to counter the appropriation of “Oceanian” by settlers to mean “everyone living in Oceania.” Indeed, as Aurore Hamene (Hamene and Weiri 2022) suggests:

What characterizes an Oceanian book is an Oceanian writing. Oceanian writing is adopted and deployed by people indigenous to islands in Oceania, because within them there is a millennial genealogy, within them, there is their experience of time, their experience of perception, of the perception of emotions, of the perception of many things. . . . And we know that in literature, but not only, perception poses several problems. All of this characterizes Oceanian writing. But of course, others have their place, but we’re talking about Oceanian literature.

This focus on literature is also enabled by the literary activism on Bookanaky, an online platform on social media (Facebook and Instagram). The activist behind Bookanaky explains that:

The creation of the [Bookanaky Instagram] page came out of a period of strong political conscientization during my studies, during which I re-learned to love to read. I built myself a library with our own references that spoke to me more. So I told myself, Why not share this around me instead of keeping it to myself? I had made an alarming observation, which was that I had not really read writers from home because of the colonality of knowledge that is perpetuated in education. So it was imperative to create another space of contestation of these dominant knowledges, of these “legitimate knowledges” as Bourdieu calls them, which correspond to elitist knowledges, such as reading Proust, Victor Hugo, or Baudelaire. . . . For me, that’s not my legitimate culture. Therefore, the space that is open thanks to Bookanaky allows to share readings that look like us a little more, through which with we recognize ourselves and we recognize our realities as Oceanians. The idea is not to totally reject Western knowledges, not at all. The idea is to first know and share our own references so that we can better appreciate that of others. (Bookanaky 2022)

Building on Bookanaky’s existing work to promote Oceanian and postcolonial literature, and following her suggestion, we have started presenting books by Oceanian authors in longer formats.

Our first one was a discussion of Mā'ohi writer Titaua Peu's "Mūtismes." This was notably suggested because up until then, book presentations had been short and focused on non-Oceanian feminist literature. For example, the work of bell hooks (2015; 2021), Françoise Vergès (2020), and decolonial feminists from South America (Collective 2022) had been presented to our listeners. However, while we introduce feminist theory that is not necessarily from Oceania, it is always selected based on its availability in the French language and our ability to make connections with our local context.¹²

Translation as a Decolonial Practice

Kanaky/New Caledonia and Mā'ohi Nui are the only "francophone" non-independent countries in the Pacific with ongoing struggles for independence in a context in which "English . . . has emerged as the default cross-Pacific language" (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 198). This means that LPD is aware of the fact that this colonial language divide can occasionally create a barrier between our islands and the rest of Oceania. This is not unique to us. Indeed, the Haitian feminist organization *Nègès Mawon* (2021, 7) chose to publish "ALASO," a collection of books edited by the organization in Haitian creole, French, and English in order to:

circumvent our situation of insularity as the only nation-state in the region to speak French to overcome the linguistic and geographical barrier inherent in Haiti as an independent French-speaking island state. Indeed, this Haitian singularity considerably slows down the dissemination of our realities and our struggles to our fellow feminist activists in Latin America and the Caribbean who share the same social, economic, and political problems.

Following a similar logic, LPD currently uses translation as a way to bridge existing gaps in knowledge and relations. Thus far, it has done so in three different ways. First, LPD invites international non-francophone guest speakers on the podcast and translates the conversations into French for the audience in Kanaky/New Caledonia. This allows us to promote the realities of women and people in Kanaky/New Caledonia beyond the francophone world and to encourage international guests to think with us. It also allows for audiences in Kanaky/New Caledonia to access the knowledges of and be introduced to non-francophone scholars, artists, and militants, thereby broadening our political horizons. This first year, two international non-francophone guests were interviewed: Aleida Luján Pinelo, a Mexican researcher working on the topics of femi(ni)cide in Germany, discussed the importance of collecting data on femi(ni)cide, and Talei Luscia Mangioni, a Fijian/Italian scholar and activist, talked to us about militarization in the "Pacific and the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement." Second, LPD contributes to international events and publications when possible. As we have seen, the show was itself inspired by the "Women Decolonizing Melanesia" event, which took place in Sydney in 2018. International events allow us to build relations, to increase our consciousness, and to expand our political imaginations. Since the creation of the program, there has also been a presentation of the show done during a talk I gave at the Museum of Impossible Forms in Helsinki entitled "Learning from Revolutionary Kanak Feminism." The talk included the screening of an excerpt from the

documentary *Liberty, Equality, Kanaky* (Butler 1987), directed by Martin Butler and presented by Jacques “Kiki” Karé, and an interview done in English with Roselyne Makalu. Moreover, writing texts in English, as I am doing for this special issue on “Island Activisms,” about the work we do is motivated by the hope we have to create more political relations with women and people who may be facing similar social, economic, and political issues and be in solidarity with Kanak people and women in the process of decolonization. The third type of translation we have been doing follows the same motive as the second in that it aims to make our political reality accessible to non-French speakers. Since the Pacific is a region that is predominantly English speaking, it is necessary to be able to share information and interact in English in order for connections to be made and sustained. We have therefore recently translated an interview we did with anti-nuclear and pro-independence Mā’ohi activist Hinamoeura Cross into English and published it on The New Outrigger, “a digital storytelling platform that speaks across geographical and institutional boundaries . . . for emerging perspectives, research, and commentary on Oceania” (The New Outrigger n.d.).¹³ The objective was to share some of the historical and contemporary political struggles in Mā’ohi Nui and the portrait of a young Mā’ohi woman activist with “anglophone” Oceanians, especially in a context in which the colonial-language divide makes it difficult for Mā’ohi struggles and resistance to be known in our region and in the context of the wider Pacific anti-nuclear movement. Therefore, translation is a decolonial practice because through it, we “seek to build connection among related struggles against coloniality” (Espinosa-Miñoso, Lugones, and Maldonado-Torres 2021, 14).

Conclusion

Through the constellation of relations that LPD creates and cultivates, the opening up of spaces for Kanak women to be political subjects, the centrality of resistance to settler colonialism, and the practice of translation, LPD seeks “to spark new connections and pathways to decolonization” (Banivanua Mar 2019, 195). Its feminist politics go beyond a desire for gender or racial equality since in the context of a settler colony, equality is not decolonization. Indeed, as historian Tracey Banivanua Mar (2019, 188) writes, “[I]n the hands of a settler colonial state, equality could be an oppressive imposition of sameness, a denial and assimilation of indigeneity, and an affirmation of dispossession.” Instead, LPD seeks to imagine an anti-colonial, anti-sexist, anti-racist community that remains critical of French settler colonialism but also of Kanak nationalism. While independence is still one of the political horizons, we are also exploring how to *do* independence by building networks consciously and strategically, using digital tools as well as media services gained by the pro-independence movement such as Djiido Radio. Indeed, we are mindful of the fact that historically, “decolonization in the Pacific was not configured by a departing power as an instrument for the liberation of people” and independence does not equal decolonization. This has meant that for many Indigenous people in the Pacific, decolonization has developed “as a process, rather than event” (Banivanua Mar 2019, 218), a process that women from Kanaky/New Caledonia and the Pacific continuously engage with.

Notes

¹ A translation of the name of the show would be “The decolonial break.”

² All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

³ By “people of the country” (“gens du pays”), I am referring to those of us who are rooted in and committed to this country regardless of its political future.

⁴ In both the contexts of Kanaky/New Caledonia and Mā’ohi Nui, research would be needed to evaluate the number of Indigenous students graduating from PhD programmes who manage to find non-precarious research and teaching positions in higher education, specifically in universities located on their islands (Université de la Nouvelle-Calédonie and Université de la Polynésie Française). This would allow the analysis of the situation of francophone Indigenous Pacific researchers and the making of comparisons with the “anglophone” Pacific and between Kanaky and Mā’ohi Nui. Anecdotally, when the Center for Pacific Island Studies at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa released volume five of their essential *Teaching Oceania Series* on the topic of “Islands of French Speaking Oceania,” while several Mā’ohi scholars were part of the team of contributors, none were Kanak nor Ni-Vanuatu, despite the series’ usual effort to work with Indigenous scholars. This is not necessarily a critique of the *Teaching Oceania Series* or of the team of contributors who participated to this volume, but rather an observation that I believe is worth investigating further in the context of the relation between Kanak people and research production about Kanaky/New Caledonia and the general comfort that settler scholars in Kanaky/New Caledonia (and Mā’ohi Nui) seem to feel when it comes to researching and teaching in contexts where they have few or no Pacific Islander colleagues.

⁵ It is worth noting that “francophone” refers to the colonial language acknowledged as the national language, but many people in Oceania are plurilingual. In Kanaky/New Caledonia, twenty-eight Kanak languages are spoken, and in Mā’ohi Nui, there are seven Indigenous languages.

⁶ This goes beyond the academy. Recently, Melanesian communities in Aotearoa were overlooked in the government’s new Pacific Languages Strategy (see Isno 2022).

⁷ Members joined at different points throughout the year.

⁸ This is worth noting since there are a variety of political understandings of “decolonization” in the context of Kanaky/New Caledonia. Most significantly, the French state and anti-independence settler political parties have appropriated the term and made it relevant to their political projects, leading “decolonization” to lose its meaning and revolutionary purpose.

⁹ Makalu further explains that the “decolonial” aspect does not resonate in Kanaky/New Caledonia despite the fact that it has some purchase in France. She is suggesting that it is as though it is a “swear word.” What she is underlining is that even in anti-colonial circles, “decolonial” is not a word or a framework used in Kanaky/New Caledonia, whereas in France, anti-colonial and anti-racist activists use it even though it is resisted by mainstream media, academics, and politicians.

¹⁰ I have reflected on this briefly in Duong-Pedica (2021).

¹¹ This question was addressed in light of the 2014 Charter of the Kanak People created by the Customary Senate, which posits that one of the general principles of Kanak society is its patriarchal character where “rights, powers, and responsibilities [are] based on the man” (cited in Salomon 2017, 63). See Salomon (2017) for a discussion and contextualization of this charter within the history of Kanak feminism.

¹² However, we have noticed that many of the texts we have presented or wish to review in the future are neither available in bookstores nor public libraries in Kanaky/New Caledonia. The aim of these short book presentations is to expand our listeners’ political imaginations but also to encourage them to engage with global anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist literature. In order to make this literature available to people, we have been in touch with libraries to explain to them the importance of referencing revolutionary anti-colonial and anti-racist feminist authors. Thus far, only the media library of the Centre Culturel Tjibaou, a Kanak cultural centre based in Nouméa, has asked us for a list of titles to purchase.

¹³ I would like to thank the editor of The New Outrigger, Talei Luscia Mangioni, for being so responsive and interested in working with us to publish the interview with Hinamoeura Cross. The interview can be read in English here: <https://thenewoutriggercom.wordpress.com/2022/10/31/the-greatness-of-france-i->

[carry-it-in-my-flesh-and-blood-hinamoeura-cross-on-anti-nuclear-and-pro-independence-activism-in-maohi-nui/](#).

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