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En Pays Kanak, written in French, is a collection of papers on the Kanak, the indigenous people of New Caledonia. The title means ‘Kanak nation’, or in other words, ‘Kanak world’. Much research on the Kanak nation has been done since the late nineteenth century by European scholars such as Leenhardt, Haurdricourt, Guiart, and Bensa. Leenhardt published Do Kamo, a well-known ethnography of the Kanak, where he criticized the dichotomy of ‘primitive mentality’ and ‘modern people’s mentality’ as described by Lévy-Bruhl. Leenhardt stated that the Kanak did not only hold a so-called ‘primitive mentality’ as European scholars had perceived, but also hold a ‘modern mentality’. This assertion was novel even at the time of his studies. Leenhardt’s works were valuable in developing a ‘humanistic approach to anthropology’. Research on the Kanak that followed Leenhardt’s can be divided into two main streams: political studies on the Kanak’s independent movements relating to their identity, and studies on the Kanak culture. These studies tend to focus on narrow fields, so it is difficult to comprehend the whole Kanak world.

However, the book En Pays Kanak is an interdisciplinary work on the Kanak, corresponding to several basic study fields. The two editors of this book are ethnologists who aim to describe the Kanak culture and their dynamic cosmology. The book consists of sixteen chapters, that are each organized into one of three parts based on content.

Part I, which focuses on the Kanak customs and regulations, includes six papers written by Bensa, Leblie, Ozanne-Rivierre, Bretteville, Teulières-Preston, and Dussy respectively. Bensa expounds on the acculturation of chiefdoms in Koné, the northern part of the main island (Grande Terre), while considering the oral tradition of myths and several historical events that occurred during French colonization. Leblie defines adoption as a mode for the system of direct exchange among clans, comparing it with marriage as a custom of exchanging women. Ozanne-Rivierre points out that many relative designations in the proto-Oceanic language have also been found in the proto-New Caledonian language, although the variations of Kanak languages hold little homogeneity. Bretteville’s paper is focused on the chiefdom (Paimboas) of a tribal village in the northern part of the main island. Bretteville observes that the Kanak funeral ritual is analogous to the Kanak’s yarn harvest ritual, for the resemblance of the cycles of life and death to each other. The rituals are practiced by five regional groups; one of them, named ‘l’os et le soufflé (bone and breath)’, is respected as the descendants of a great chief. Teulières-Preston presents two areas of friction he observed: one is the Kanak fishermen vs. the provincial administration, and the other is the Kanak fishermen vs. the representatives of the French government. All of this friction originated from a difference between the local traditional law and occidental law. Dussy considers the confrontation of Europeans against Oceanic people, mainly focusing on the Kanak in Nouméa, a valley traditionally predominately White which has
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changed to a more integrated area.

Part II, which explains the manifestation of conflicts between the Kanak and the French colonial administration, includes five papers by Sand, Bole, and Ouetcho; Illouz; Merle; Soriano; and Pineau-Salain. Sand, Bole and Ouetcho take up and evaluate the Kanak population and the socio-cultural change before and after contact with European people. Illouz examines Maré Island, where the Kanak practice the harvest ritual (Wanimoc), and a religion which merges magic and Christianity (Kaze). Merle compares Kanak history with that of Algerians' from the point of view of the law provided for the Kanak reserves. The most important theme here is how the Kanak are represented by Europeans. Soriano refers to the role of missionaries who try to be the link between Kanak society and Europeans in order to obstruct the indigenous resistance to colonization. Pineau-Salain's paper focuses on the school for indigenous pupils as an educational institution before World War I.

Part III, which focuses on the Kanak initiative under modernization, consists of five papers written by Bril, Lepoutre, Salomon, Hamelin, and Naepels respectively. Bril investigated Nélémwa language in the extreme north of the main island and the connection between variations in vernacular. He also examines educational-cultural matters and presents a teaching method for one of the Kanak languages in his paper. Lepoutre focuses on the duality of the Kanak's medicine; the so-called traditional remedies and occidental medications have both been observed on Lifou Island. Moreover, this paper refers to the Lifou Islanders' belief in the concept of sorcery. Salomon describes gender problems and sets forth as follows: the Kanak think women are so harmful that they bring men illness and risks because of their odor of blood. In the modern world, the Kanak women suffer from dual ethos between 'the tradition of subordination' and equality of both sexes. Hamelin writes about the Kanak living in Nouméa, where they are said to belong to two societies: one is their original tribal society, and the other is their city society where they dwell. Naepels states that the migrants in Nouméa, whose origin is the Ajié area in the middle of the main island, identify themselves as the people of Houailou region and now live in a de-localized, politically French-dominated city.

I was especially impressed with Part III, where Salomon, Hamelin and Naepels refer to "the Kanak culture which lives in the modern world." They write about the Kanak who dwell in Nouméa, holding commitments to their origin, but whose lives have been changed because of French colonization, so that they suffer from the duality of belonging to both tribal villages and a capital city.

Naturally this one book does not fully synthesize the Kanak ethnicity. However, because of this book readers can easily understand the transformations occurring in the Kanak culture, social system, and their worldview.

This is a unique book because it contains interdisciplinarily collaborated papers about the Kanak and is effectively organized into three parts. The sixteen papers contribute a new approach to the study of the Kanak in that they represent the ambivalent indigenous situation, living both in the traditional and the occidental world. This book would be helpful for extended research on the Kanak in a plural society.
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References


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