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Kanak Cultural Presence, Pedagogy, and Reformulation: An Interview with Will Nerho aka WillStyle

Abstract

In this interview, Kanak musician and graffiti artist Will Nerho (WillStyle), from the Neaoua tribe in Waa Wi Luu (Houaïlou) in the A'jië-Arhö region of Kanaky/New Caledonia, discusses his creative practice and navigation of cultural politics. He calls attention to the rejection of Kanak cultural markers he has experienced in Nouméa, capital of the country, located in the South Province. He also discusses the place of local animals in his art, their connection to Kanak culture, and the ecological pedagogical practice that comes with painting animals. Nerho offers a critique of French colonial appropriation of Kanak art, objects, culture, and knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of reclamation and transmission of culture within Kanak society, notably through language. He explains the significance of the flèche faîtière (carved wooden rooftop spires on Kanak houses) and reflects on his work reformulating and redesigning those flèches faîtières scattered throughout Europe that have lost their identity.

Keywords: *graffiti, Kanaky, New Caledonia, Kanak art, cultural politics, flèche faîtière, Kanak culture*

In April 2025, Anaïs Duong-Pedica interviewed Kanak musician, visual artist, and graffiti artist Will Nerho (who goes by the artist name WillStyle) from the Neaoua tribe in Waa Wi Luu (Houaïlou), located in the A'jië-Arhö region of Kanaky/New Caledonia.¹ In the interview transcript that follows, Nerho speaks of his creative practice as a Kanak graffiti artist having to navigate the cultural politics of different places and spaces throughout the country. Specifically, he calls attention to the rejection of Kanak cultural markers in the South Province, and most specifically in the capital city Nouméa.² The rejection of Kanak cultural markers in this region is notable because ninety-one percent of the settler (non-Kanak) population and ninety-two percent of the white population of Kanaky/New Caledonia are located there. While the North and Island provinces are managed by pro-independence

political parties, in the South, anti-independence parties dominate in the management of the province and the municipality of Nouméa.

Nerho also discusses the place of local animals in his art, their relation to Kanak culture, and the ecological pedagogical practice that comes with painting animals. In the final part of the interview, Nerho offers a critique of French colonial appropriation of Kanak art, objects, culture, and knowledge, and underscores the importance of reclamation and transmission of culture within Kanak society, notably through language. He explains the significance of *flèche faîtière* (carved wooden rooftop spires on Kanak houses)³ within Kanak culture and reflects on his efforts to reformulate and redesign examples that are now scattered across Europe and have subsequently lost their Kanak identity.⁴

The interview highlights the ongoing struggle to make Kanak culture known in a context of French settler colonialism. It touches on the legacy of one of the most prominent leaders of the Kanak independence movement, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, his work around the recognition of Kanak culture, and its impact on Kanak artists like Nerho. To explain the necessity of Melanesia 2000, a festival organized in 1975 in Nouméa to celebrate Kanak culture and arts,⁵ Tjibaou wrote that to “exist fully, Kanak culture, like the whole Kanak world, fundamentally needs this recognition by the world around it. It is vital. Denigration by indifference and the absence of cultural dialogue can lead only to suicide or revolt.”⁶ Despite being written more than five decades ago, his words are still relevant today and are echoed in Nerho’s artistic and pedagogical practice.

Anaïs Duong-Pedica (ADP): *As a graffiti artist, you are often asked to paint murals of varying sizes for schools, municipal markets, and other public places. Can you talk about who asks for this kind of work and your creative process for these communal spaces?*

Will Nerho (WN): Most of the time, requests come from a municipality, province, school, or association. Municipalities usually ask me to work on communal walls and school walls. The most significant requests I have gotten have come from institutions, such as the Koné prison (Fig. 1) or the Camp-Est prison in Nouméa, as part of their work towards the social reintegration of youth, to help them find job opportunities when they get out of prison.

In general, when an institution asks for something, they already have a project in mind—like at the prisons—so I only come in to teach them the technique of graffiti. Other times, when there isn’t a pre-planned design, we work

together to come up with a design. For example, for the town hall of Koné, for which I drew a kagu [*Rhynochetos jubatus*, a bird endemic to Kanaky/New Caledonia], they asked me to do something that would bring people together (Fig. 2). Because Koné’s Le Bosquet neighborhood is multicultural, we drew a swordfish, which is a totem animal for Polynesians.



Figure 1. Will Nerho in front of a wall he painted at Koné Prison with the detainees, 2024. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

ADP: *A lot of your work is based in the North Province, but you have expressed to me that you would like to graff on walls in Nouméa, in the South Province.*

WN: Yes, it’s easier in the North Province. I am in the collective known as ATM Couleurs du Pays—the brothers from the South, the North, and the Islands who graff. We applied to work in the South, but apparently, we were rejected by a South Province official because our work would “kanakize” the space. In Nouméa [South Province], there are graffs of butterflies, things that fly, weird things with weird colors, but there are no graffs of *flèche faïtière* [the carved wooden rooftop

spires on Kanak houses]. There are no artistic representations of *flèche faîtière* in Nouméa [at all]. There are people who graff them, but their graffs are quickly erased. The only thing the boys [ATM Couleurs du Pays] managed to negotiate was to paint a whale mural in Koutio [just north of Nouméa] on a little *case* [French term for a traditional Kanak dwelling] with a *flèche faîtière* in the background, but officials even complained about this, saying that only the whale was planned.

ADP: *It's interesting to think about how the walls speak when we consider the referendums for independence and the revolt in May 2024 (when Kanak people protested France's decision to open the provincial electoral roll to recent residents of the country—contributing to the disenfranchisement of the Indigenous Kanak—in and around Nouméa).*

WN: Yes, the walls speak. But sometimes the messages are subliminal, and sometimes they are racist, too. When you don't know the codes of graff, you cannot know, but in the graffiti world, there are codes, and when you see them, you know. The people who paint with these codes know. Examples include codes for the year the country was taken as a "possession" of France, the beginning of the Native code, and "blackbirding" in the Pacific.⁷ Local institutions in the South Province never ask ATM Couleurs du Pays to paint anything—even though we have made requests many times, with well-written applications! Either the institutions don't have time, or the space we picked wasn't right, or nothing is right. But sometimes the spaces we had picked are painted a year later by someone else. We feel like we've wasted enough of our time, so now we try to do what we want. In the North Province and in the Island Province, it's not the same. In the South Province, we do this [use Kanak cultural symbols in the city] to show our culture.

ADP: *I saw that you did some graffiti at the Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa.⁸ It seems that for the South Province, the Tjibaou Cultural Center is the one space that's designated for Kanak culture, and yet it's almost exclusively tourists who go there. It seems that Kanak culture must be contained within that space and it shouldn't leave that space.*

WN: That's it. We are being told: "Your Kanak space is over there, far away, hidden. You can go paint there." Spaces in the city center are good because all the cultural communities can see them, but the space that they *do* want us to use is

not made for graffiti. There comes a moment when you realize how things really are. For instance, I have applied for projects in the South Province that were supposedly open to all. I called the province to ask for the application form, and they told me, “But you’re from the North Province.” That’s how I found out that the project was not actually open to people of the North Province. I asked them, “Why do you say, ‘Call for artists from the country’ then?” They then proceeded to change [the project application requirements]; ten minutes later, the website said, “Call for artists from the South Province.” They also know who I am, and they know I graff *flèches faïtières*, so they’re thinking, “No, no. He’s not going to ‘kanakize’ our walls.” It’s as if they don’t want us to “taint” the walls.

One time, I graffed for a school in Nouméa attended by the daughter of an anti-independence politician. The school’s principal told me to paint the totems of all the cultural communities present in the country. I started to paint, and I included a *flèche faïtière*. Everyone was okay with it, especially the parents. Some Wallisian and Javanese people were happy because I had included their totems. Two days later, the school principal called me to let me know that she had received a lot of complaints after putting pictures of the graffs on the school’s website—she told me people said things like, “Kanak art is forbidden in schools.” She told [the complaining parents] that this school was meant to bring communities together, so they complained about that.

It’s not the parents who go to school but the children, and the children who had made the graffs with me were happy. Can you imagine what these parents tell their children? “You drew a Kanak spire, now you are grounded.” Can you imagine how the children must feel? These parents will destroy their children culturally. That’s how young people end up like their parents and there is conflict among this youth.

When I was in France, I painted a *flèche faïtière* in a high school in La Rochelle, and the people there were happy about it because they felt like I was leaving them a part of me. They gifted me a miniature of the La Rochelle tower. It’s the experience of sharing something that’s important. I do not understand why those people in Nouméa don’t like the spire in the school graffs since there are other totems by its side. . . . It’s as if they reject us, we who are from this land. They accept the other communities, but within the South Province, in Nouméa, we are rejected.

ADP: *Earlier you were explaining that when you graffed for the Koné town hall, they asked you to paint something that would bring cultural communities together*

and you also mentioned the whale project in Koutio. I wonder to what extent animals appear more innocent than a Kanak spire with regard to cultural politics. What animals do you graff and what do they represent for you?

WN: I graff whales, geckos, sharks, turtles, kagus [bird], humphead wrasses [fish], sea kraits [semiaquatic snake], notous [imperial pigeon], and flying foxes because many local animals are endangered species. I want to remind people that they're not just beautiful; these species live with us. We have to care for them, let them live, and not capture them. I know some people who catch kagus and put them in cages, which isn't good. We have to be careful when we have cats or dogs at home for example.⁹ The notou lays one egg every year, and the flying fox has only one pup per year, so we have to be careful. These animals are universal totems that belong to the Pacific. Around here, when whales swim through our waters, it is time to eat yams.¹⁰ The entire country eats yams. At the same time, the whale travels throughout the world, and she is endangered. We have the same characteristics here for whales as someone who would tell you about the whale from Tahiti, Hawai'i, or Tonga. We are an island and we are surrounded by water, and all these species live with us. We have stories with the turtle, the kagu, and so on. When I'm asked to graff, public institutions are interested in the pedagogical aspect of the graff. They are interested in my work because part of my practice involves explaining the importance of preserving these animals as humans, as ourselves.

The people of the A'jië region say that the kagu was the first master dancer, that the kagu is the origin of all the dances of the Kanak people. It is the kagu who taught Kanak people to dance; they mimicked him to become choreographers. That is why he opens his wings, he jumps, he sings, he barks, and he yells "ka kou kou kou ka ke"—those are the yells we use in dance "hoo hoo hoo." The elders say that the kagu is a supreme being. It is human, but it is also a bird, so he is part of us. He shouldn't be considered a bird either because he is a man; this is the same for the gecko, the notou, and the flying fox. Those are people who take this form. In A'jië, to say "kagu," we say "awöö" and when we say "wea awöö," it means "this man we call kagu"—we refer to him as a man, not as a bird. This bird is not just an endemic bird; it is superior to us, even to me who draws him. He has a status. That is why when the chiefs go to war, they wear white feathers, kagu feathers; it means that they are dangerous, because they are in the kagu spirit, beyond the human spirit.



Figure 2. Will Nerho, graffiti in Le Bosquet neighborhood of Koné with elements of Kanak culture such as a kagu, yam, taro, *flèche faitière*, and a jade-bladed *tamioc* (axe), 2022. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

ADP: *Within the pedagogical aspect of your practice, you also raise awareness around the need for Kanak people to reclaim their culture.*

WN: I see people taking Kanak art objects with them to France and selling them. Then, they come back, organize exhibitions, and teach us what the objects mean. After that, a Kanak person might say: “Oh yes, I saw this at the exhibition.” But sometimes I’m scratching my head, thinking, “Brother, are you serious? You waited for the exhibition to know what this is?” He then looks at me and tells me that unlike him, I was taught Kanak culture—but in fact, I wasn’t taught Kanak culture; I had to research all this. I had to ask my family. I was a little lucky because I grew up with my grandparents, so a lot of what I know I learned from them. For the rest, I researched it myself. I went to customary ceremonies to watch the protocols, to observe the gestures and everything.¹¹ I understand that some people are disappointed that they have not learned many things, but it’s never too late to learn and you must approach people and speak with them.

The colonizer always wants to remind us of who we were before they came. Once, I had a conflict with a guy on my Facebook page because I told him,

“It’s not you who will teach me my culture, brother,” and he replied, “Yes, but I have read.” But the books [about Kanak culture] have been written by outside people who have come here to learn. I have not needed to write a book to learn—I have learned on my own. This [process of colonizers claiming authority over our culture] leaves us or represents us as ignorant, so that colonizers can later come and teach us.

You don’t need to know everything about your culture, what’s important is for you to speak your language. Once you speak your language, you’re already fifty percent in your culture. This is because, thanks to the words, you understand what we are talking about. You don’t need to know what the *flèche faïtière* is used for, or everything else. Fifty percent of yourself is speaking. Once you speak, you are already above someone who will teach you something from a book. [An outsider might] tell you, “I’ve been here, [meaning New Caledonia generally, or a specific place],” and then you’ll speak to him in your language, and he won’t understand anything and that’ll settle it. I know the same as you, but I speak my language, that’s all. For me, there is always this sentence by Jean-Marie Tjibaou: “We have a culture, and we have to show it. If we don’t show it, they think we don’t exist.”¹² So we must show them first what we know, [to show the self-proclaimed “experts” that they] cannot be a master of something that they are still learning.

ADP: *Can you talk about the symbolic place of the flèche faïtière in Kanak culture? What is your creative process when it comes to designing spires from your region, A’jië-Arhö, and from other Kanak countries? How do you find inspiration?*

WN: The *flèche faïtière* (Fig. 3) represents the ancestor of the clan. It is a pointed object that we put on top of the *case*. The face that is on it is the ancestor of the clan. It is the connection between the world of the living, the world of the dead, and the spiritual world. These are three different worlds: The *case* is the living, under the *case* is the dead, and above it is the spiritual. Consequently, that’s what the *flèche faïtière* is: it’s the big brother. It represents the face of the big brother. The spires have an identity that depends on where you live. In the A’jië-Arhö and Xârâcùù countries, the spires have two faces: one in front and one behind. In the A’jië-Arhö country, we say that the good looks ahead, and the bad looks behind. The latter is the one who protects you from those who want to stab you in the back. We also say that the face in the front looks at the sea, and the face at the back looks at the mountain.

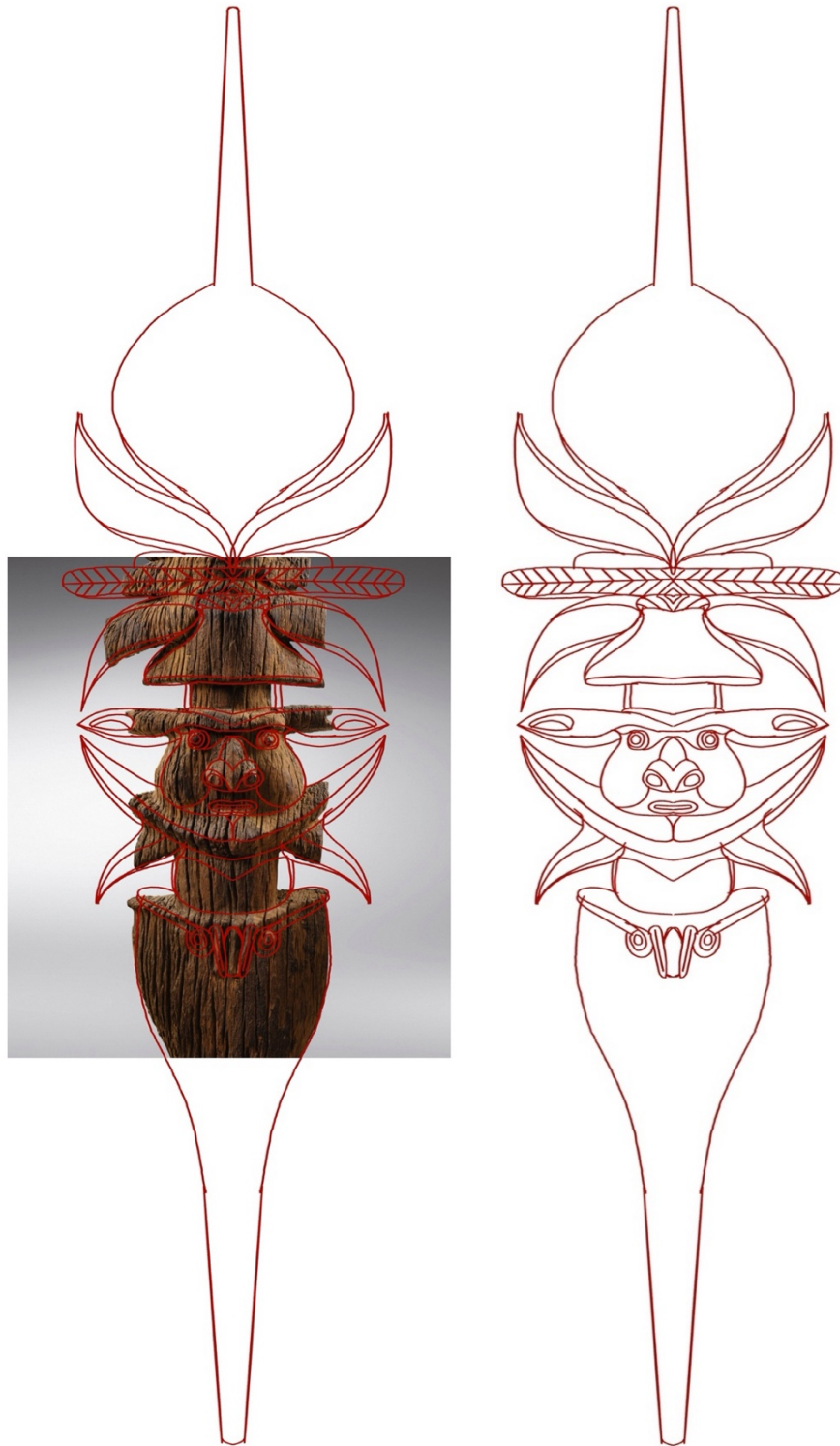


Figure 3. Will Nerho, example of the reformulation of a *flèche faîtière* from the A'jië-Arhö region, 2019. Courtesy of Will Nerho

How do I proceed? With all the knowledge I have of sculpture and of the *flèche faïtière* in the A'jië-Arhö country, I know almost all the geometries and the designs that go on it. This is because I have worked with elders and sculptors. My uncle is also a sculptor. When I was younger, I spoke with knowledge-holders to understand the spires from different Kanak regions. I then went around the entire country, because once you understand the design, you can understand the place and environment where the people are from. For example, those who live in the forest won't have the same spires as those who live by the sea because they don't have the same types of trees. Everyone has their own design.

In my work, I re-design the spires spread across the world that no longer have faces.¹³ On Facebook, I've shared some photographs of spires that are abroad for which there is no identified place of origin. . . . The place of origin is stated only as "New Caledonia" [by the museum that holds the spire], so the specific region is missing. That means they no longer have an identity. That is when I come in, and I work on them [by designing the missing parts of the spire] (Fig. 3). Based on the bit that is left and its shape, I determine which Kanak country it belongs to. I give them an identity based on their shape, which always corresponds to a specific Kanak country. Sometimes, some have lost their shape entirely, and in those cases, I reinvent. Our task now in our culture is to reformulate, reinvent, and recreate our spires. This is because we say that this is what our elders did, what our parents did, what our grandparents did. It's our turn to reformulate with contemporary designs, but we keep in mind that the face must remain the same.

ADP: *Are there workshops that exist to do this specific restoration work on the flèche faïtière?*

WN: I worked on this with young people from the Camp-Est prison in Nouméa, but it is not the same as the work I am doing on my own with spires. You need to have a lot of knowledge to understand and make young people understand. They make their own *flèche faïtière* however they like it: "It's my thing; because I am imprisoned, I create this," you see? I understand that; you can create spires that are about your individual identity and that only belong to you, and not to a clan, a family, or a region—just to you.

I haven't yet done the work of reformulation in the sense that, for me, this work will start when the spires are being sculpted. . . . I started working with my

brother-in-law, Jean-Phillipe Tjibaou, who has now left us, and Florenda Nirikani¹⁴ to figure out how to reformulate. Jean-Phillipe had done a lot of reformulations of *flèches faïtières*, so we started working together. I started to reformulate masks. I had drawn many masks (see Fig. 4), because they are as important as . . . [and] have the same principle as the *flèche faïtière*. The mask is the face of the ancestor that is walking. The *flèche faïtière* don't move, but the masks walk.



Figure 4. An exterior wall of Nerho's home with his gecko totem, a mask, and *flèche faïtière*. Photograph courtesy of Will Nerho

I have had calls from schools that want to create spires and work on identity, and I have accepted them. I love to create things, to invent. . . . At the moment, I'm working with two sculptors to sculpt the spires I've been reformulating by creating 3D designs. They're into it. We will create a spire that doesn't exist.

We'll be able to touch it. We can give it a spirit afterwards. That's what reformulation is about. I took a picture of a spire lost in a museum in Europe, I re-designed it because it no longer had a face, and then we will sculpt it. We give it life, we give it a spirit again, to reconnect it to its land.

Willfrid Nerho is a visual artist, stencil artist, musician, graffiti artist, and graphic designer from Waa Wi Luu (Houailou). He finds his creativity in music. His name in the A'jië language, Bëvia Nô Nörö, was given to him by his grandfather and means "tie the word of the thunderstorm." Topics that affect him and constitute the basis of his artistic struggle include societal issues, Kanak culture, and the environment, along with issues related to youth and finding an aesthetic identity specific to his country. Nerho teaches and intervenes in schools and works as a facilitator at a youth house and in carceral environments. He also practices his art for private people and institutions and sometimes does collaborations with other artists. His creative process is always in movement and active. He has participated in many artistic and cultural festivals in the Pacific and internationally.

Anaïs Duong-Pedica is a settler researcher and teacher from Kanaky/New Caledonia. Her doctoral research focuses on the politics of contemporary mixed-race discourses and settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia. She has also written about revolutionary Kanak feminism within the Kanak struggle for independence. Duong-Pedica contributes to the podcast "La Pause Décoloniale," broadcast on pro-independence Djiido radio in Kanaky/New Caledonia.

Notes

¹ Kanaky/New Caledonia comprises eight different customary regions or Kanak countries: A'jië-Arhö, Drehu, Drubea-Kapumë, Hoot ma Whaap, Iai, Nengone, Paicî-Cèmuhî, and Xârâcùù. The A'jië-Arhö region is located in the center of the *Grande Terre* (the main and largest island) and in the North province. For the interview, the two had a video call—Nerho from Waa Wi Luu and Duong-Pedica from Turku, Finland, where she is finishing her doctoral studies. The interview was conducted in French and translated by Anaïs Duong-Pedica in collaboration with Will Nerho.

² Following the Matignon-Oudinot Accords (1988) and since the early 1990s, Kanaky/New Caledonia has been divided into three provinces: the South, North, and Islands provinces. This provincialization was one of the solutions suggested to better share the political and institutional power between settlers and Kanaks. While most residents in the North and Island provinces are Kanak, the majority of settlers are concentrated in the South Province, where the capital is located. Nouméa

is also the home of many Kanak families who have been displaced by colonialism and/or came to the urban center to seek employment. In 2019, fifty-two percent of Kanak people live in the South Province, which represents thirty percent of the population of the South Province. See Institut de la Statistique et des Études Économiques Nouvelle-Calédonie, <https://www.isee.nc/population/recensement/communautes>.

³ The terms “*flèche faïtière*” and “spire” are used interchangeably in the translation of the interview. The *flèche faïtière* is a wooden sculpture that is placed at the top of the central pole of a Kanak house. It represents the face of the clan’s ancestor. Due to its emblematic and prestigious character within a chieftaincy, the spire has appeared in the center of the pro-independence Kanaky flag since 1984. The Kanak names for the *flèche faïtière* reference Houp wood (*Montrouziera cauliflora*). In Kanak society, the Houp tree symbolizes the body of the chief and the ancient character of his lineage. The sculpture of a *flèche faïtière* is divided into three parts: The central part is a face surrounded by motifs, below it is a base that ties it to the roof, and above the face is one or more needles ornamented with seashells. Three stacked circles represent the chest, face, and neck of the chief. See André Sirota, “Une flèche faïtière pour parler avec les autres,” *Yakamédia*, accessed December 16, 2025, <https://yakamedia.cemea.asso.fr/univers/comprendre/comp-culture/une-fleche-faitiere-pour-parler-avec-les-autres>.

⁴ In this translation, I use the word “reformulation” which alludes to Kanak leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s concept of *reformulation permanente* in French and which Nerho draws on in his own work. This has been translated by Helen Fraser and John Trotter as a “permanent process of renewal” in English. In 1985, Tjibaou explained this process: “The return to tradition is a myth—I keep saying this over and over again; it is a myth. No people has ever done it. I see the search for identity, for a model, as being ahead of us, never in the past—it’s a *permanent process of renewal*. I feel that what we’re striving for at the moment is to bring as much as we can of our past and our culture into constructing the personal and social models we want to guide the building of our polity. Some might view it differently, but that is the way I see it myself. Our identity is ahead of us. At the end, after we are dead, people will take our picture and put it on the wall, and it will help them fashion their own identity. Otherwise, you never move out of your father’s shadow, you’ve had it.” See Jean-Marie Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, trans. Helen Fraser and John Trotter (Pandanus Books, 2005), 160.

⁵ Melanesia 2000 drew fifty thousand spectators and was “the earliest explicitly Melanesian arts festival.” See Anna Naupa, “The Melanesian Way in the 21st Century: Culture, Politics, and Festivals,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 60, no. 2, (2025): 208. The festival was co-organized with the Kanak women’s association Mouvement Féminin pour un Souriant Village Mélanésien, led at the time by Scholastique Pidjot. See Michel Degorce-Dumas, “Le point de vue de Jean-Marie Tjibaou président et organisateur du festival,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 100–101 (1995): 109–15; and Jean-Pierre Velot, “Tous vibraient de la même force,

de la même conviction: Témoignage de Marie-Claude TJIBAOU,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 100–101 (1995): 117–24.

⁶ Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, 5.

⁷ Auguste Febvrier-Despointes “took possession” of New Caledonia on behalf of France on September 24, 1853. While the date of annexation is a day of mourning for Kanak people, it has been celebrated by settlers throughout history. See Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, 68. Since the Nouméa Accord, this anniversary has become New Caledonia’s “Day of Citizenship” or “Citizenship Celebration” (Journée de la Citoyenneté or Fête de la Citoyenneté) leading to conflicts around how the date should be memorialized. See Stéphanie Graff, “Visibilité du destin commun et invisibilité de l’histoire: discours, célébrations et construction de la citoyenneté en Nouvelle-Calédonie,” *Anthrovision* 4, no. 1 (2016). The Native code or *Indigénat* was an imperial legal framework that “provided for a deviation of the Penal Code” by establishing a legal exception for “natives,” legalized at the level of the state. In New Caledonia, the Native code applied from 1887 to 1946. See Isabelle Merle and Adian Muckle, *The Indigénat and France’s Empire in New Caledonia: Origins, Practices and Legacies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 6.

“Blackbirding” refers to the nineteenth-century Pacific labor trade and kidnapping of coerced Melanesian workers to work in plantations in Australia, Fiji, and New Caledonia. The Australian-Pacific indentured labor trade that started in 1863 and was abolished at the beginning of the twentieth century, involved men, women and children who mainly came from the Solomons, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Kanaky/New Caledonia, and Fiji to work in the sugar industry in Queensland. See Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 1.

⁸ The Tjibaou Cultural Center opened in Nouméa in 1998, nine years after the assassination of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. It is “dedicated to the life and aspirations for Kanak culture of Jean-Marie Tjibaou.” See Berenice Murphy, “Centre Culture Tjibaou: A Museum and Art Centre Redefining New Caledonia’s Future,” *Humanities Research* 9, no. 1 (2002): 78. The cultural center is located on the Tina peninsula, close to the Tina golf course, away from the city center of Nouméa. Peter Brown has noted the inaccessibility of the center to those relying on public transportation and “its highly institutional character,” which means that Kanaks do not identify strongly with it and that it is attended mostly by white people. See Peter Brown, “New Caledonia: A Pacific Island or an Island in the Pacific? The Eighth Pacific Art Festival,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 34–35.

⁹ The primary predators of kagus are free-roaming domestic dogs.

¹⁰ The yam is central to Kanak culture, as time is structured around the cultivation of yam. Jean-Marie Tjibaou writes: “For Melanesians, the rhythm of the year is set by the cultivation of the yam, the principal nourishment, which is offered to chiefs, to the elders and to all guests of honour. It is the noble offering, the symbol of man, of the phallus, of honour. It is the yam which is offered on the altar where it

symbolises the *kaamo*, the country with the chiefs, the old men, the children and everything which makes the country live. The yam with the *thawé* (the string of traditional money) and the *mada* are the main items in the exchange of traditional wealth that is effected for a marriage or a bereavement. The yam is carried with as much delicacy as a child. It is cultivated with quite particular methods, an activity that keeps people of the tribe occupied for a good part of the year.” See Tjibaou, *Kanaky*, 43.

¹¹ A customary gesture is part of the protocols enacted by “clans [which] meet on the occasion of an engagement request, a wedding, a birth, a death or a request for forgiveness. [These] customary exchanges are carried out according to precise protocols depending on the geographical area in which one is located.” See Anthony Tutugoro, “A Kanak Way of Being to the World: The Appropriation of Customary Diplomatic Protocols in New Political Contexts,” in *Oceanic Diplomacy: Reasserting Indigenous Pathways through the Contemporary Pacific*, ed. Salā George Carter et al. (Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies Press, 2025), 226. Jean-Marie Tjibaou explains that “custom is less an interpersonal relationship than a relationship between groups, communities. . . . Custom, for us, is the *gesture* which, at every moment, at every meeting, brings this relationship to mind. . . . For us, the generic term ‘custom’ really means the law, the way we live, all of the institutions which govern us” (emphasis mine). Etienne Cornut, “Kanak Custom – Legal Overview,” in *Understanding New Caledonia*, ed. Caroline Gravelat, trans. Elaine Sutton (University Press of New Caledonia, 2021), 286.

¹² Nerho is referring to a speech that Jean-Marie Tjibaou gave at the Melanesia 2000 Festival in 1975, in which he said, “If we want to organize Melanesia 2000, it is so that the kids know that there is a culture in this country. It is so that our European friends who are here can know that we are men. We are men with a culture, and we must show this culture. If we don’t show it, people think we don’t exist.”

¹³ *Flèches faïtières* located abroad become unidentifiable when their place of origin is omitted from collection records and display signage and/or when their faces and shapes become less recognizable due to wood wear, damage during transportation, and conservation. According to Nerho, the place of origin of the *flèches faïtières* are sometimes missing because this information can be willfully omitted when an object has been stolen. This is because, in the case of an object being reclaimed in the future, the place of origin can lead to finding out who took or stole the object. Nerho also explains that, in some instances, those who took the objects prefer to hide all traces of their stay in specific clans or tribes.

¹⁴ Jean-Philippe Tjibaou was a traditional sculptor from Hyehen (Hienghène) who was one of Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s sons. He passed away in June 2022. His partner, Florenda Nirikani, is a political and cultural facilitator. For Jean-Philippe Tjibaou’s explanation of the *flèche faïtière* in the Hoot ma Whaap region, see “Construire une flèche faïtière,” Boutures de paroles, YouTube, May 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MaPbqfid70>.