Melbourne Salon/French and Australian Dialogues: Sydney & Melbourne 2018

The final Melbourne Salon for 2018 was held on Thursday 8th November at the State Library of Victoria. Guest speakers were Robert Aldrich and Denise Fisher who also presented the second 'French and Australian Dialogues' event in Sydney, coordinated by ISFAR in collaboration with the Alliance Française de Sydney; the topic was 'The Referendum in New Caledonia: What is at Stake?' Below is a written version of the speeches presented at the Melbourne Salon.

The 2018 New Caledonian Referendum in Historical Perspective

Robert Aldrich

On 4 November 2018, voters in a referendum in New Caledonia answered the question 'Do you want New Caledonia to attain full sovereignty and become independent?'. Just over eighty percent of those eligible cast a ballot; 43.6 percent replied in the affirmative, 56.4 percent in the negative. At least for the moment, therefore, the French Pacific territory will not become an independent state. However, the vote does not mean the end of the story, but another chapter in a long history of the sometimes fraught relationship between Paris and one of France's remaining overseas outposts, and also in the conflicted relationship among New Caledonia's indigenous Melanesian population, descendants of French settlers and more recent migrants from the *métropole*, and the Asian and Polynesian communities that also make up New Caledonia's population.

This essay seeks neither to provide a comprehensive overview of the history and politics of New Caledonia nor to analyse in detail the results of the November 2018 referendum, but rather to make some observations on New Caledonia as part of the French *outre-mer* and the particularities of the territory.

As Denise Fisher, in particular, has persuasively argued, New Caledonia is important for Australia and for Franco-Australian relations. It is one of our nearest neighbours, and has figured significantly in Australian public affairs and debate, notably during the Second World War and during the *événements* of the 1980s. New Caledonia has an important geostrategic position and not insubstantial resources. Australia has again begun to look in a Pacific direction, in part because of the engagement or disengagement of old and new superpowers in the region. There are numerous links—trade, migration, tourism, education—between Australia and New Caledonia, and the histories of the two countries display certain interesting parallels and intertwinings. The question of independence for New Caledonia has nevertheless sometimes been seen from Australia in rather stark relief, a vision that blurs and misses complex features of its evolution. A longer-term and wider angle perspective can contribute to a more nuanced view of the New Caledonian situation and its options for the future.

The French *outre-mer*

New Caledonia is a small remnant of what was once a vast French empire in North and sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific and Indian Oceans; covering eleven million square kilometres and counting one hundred million citizens and subjects at its apogee in the early twentieth century, it was the second largest of the overseas empires conquered by European and other powers. Paris took control of New Caledonia in 1853, annexing the islands as a base for France's military and mercantile fleets and with a plan, inspired by the British experience in Australia, for the establishment of a convict colony and the hope that the transport of criminals and political prisoners would rid the metropolitan body politic of dangerous malefactors and rehabilitate the convicts for the development of a prosperous 'austral France'. The French also championed the benefits of bringing European civilisation to the 'primitive' indigenous people, the Melanesians or Kanaks, who became French subjects.

The takeover of New Caledonia represented an effort to secure a promising outpost for the French, to contest the predominant British imperial presence in the Pacific Ocean, and to enhance France's position at a time when commentators were already talking about the Pacific as the ocean of the future—a maritime highway from the Americas to Asia, a trove of trade commodities and a potential theatre of military confrontation. In the 1850s, the French were rebuilding an overseas empire, having lost many of their older colonies to Britain during the Napoleonic Wars, and seeing Napoleon failing to extend France's dominion in Egypt or to realise hopes for creating an extensive French domain in India, and indeed selling off France's huge Louisiana territory to the United States. Subsequently, in a 'scramble' among veteran and aspirational colonial powers, France would add dramatically to its imperial portfolio, relegating New Caledonia to a lower priority for colonial policy-makers though still championed for its potential by the 'colonial lobby'.

A major issue for France, and indeed for all expansionist powers, was how to govern their new domains, whether by direct rule, indirect rule (using indigenous kings or chiefs as vassals) or, in settler societies, by the devolution of power to the expatriate European elite. The first two options generally obtained in colonies in Asia and Oceania, though the French showed a preference for direct rule while the British favoured the maintenance of many traditional authorities so long as they recognised the paramountcy of the British Crown and obeyed the dictates of its representatives. As for the settler colonies, the British gradually transferred many of the responsibilities of administration to trustworthy Europeans implanted overseas. This was notably the case in what became known as the British 'dominions'—Australia, Canada and New Zealand—where settlers came to outnumber indigenous people, and also in South Africa, where they did not, but where Europeans formed a significant proportion of the population. In other outposts with a substantial number of British migrants, notably Rhodesia and Kenya, London also promoted 'responsible government' in the hands of the settlers. The separation of the dominions from the mother country occurred only gradually, with certain formal ties retained (in particular, the monarchy). In cases where the European population was substantial and bent on retaining its dominant position, as in South Africa and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, decolonisation followed an especially perilous trajectory.

France's conception of the colonial state was influenced by centralising tendencies issuing from the *ancien régime*, the Revolution and Napoleonic policies. Political power emanated from Paris, decisions about the periphery of the French 'hexagon' and the far more distant colonies were made in the palaces of French monarchs and presidents, ministerial chancelleries and parliamentary chambers. The colonies might be given representation in parliament—as indeed they did receive, somewhat intermittently, from the time of the Revolution onwards, though with balloting often restricted largely to European residents in many places—but they were not accorded self-government. The French notion of the state indeed mandated centralised rule, even with dramatic differences in the *outre-mer* between 'protectorates' (with residual nominal sovereignty in international law), fully-fledged colonies, concessions, a curious Anglo-French condominium in the New Hebrides, and other permutations of colonial rule. 'Natives' in colonies such as New Caledonia could earn French citizenship only by satisfying stringent criteria—usually, service to the French state, knowledge of the French language, evidence of a French style of life—that few could meet.

Nevertheless, there occurred various metamorphoses in colonial administration, especially with regime changes—for instance, during the mid- to late 1800s, from the Second Republic to the Second Empire to the Third Republic—in France. The events of the twentieth century, in particular the rise of anti-colonialism, the indictment of the racialist views that had been one of the foundations of colonial expansion, and the *bouleversement* of the Second World War in France necessarily led to renewed efforts to restructure the empire, or what from the mid-twentieth century was usually called the *outre-mer*. (Terms such as 'empire' and 'colony', in official discourse, were coming to be considered as anachronistic as pith helmets.) In the Brazzaville conference of 1944, the leader of the Free French, Charles de Gaulle, and senior administrators foreshadowed a new relationship between France and its outposts, though ruling out 'self-government' (the phrase so foreign to French political thought that it was used in English in the conference communiqué).

In 1946, the *vieilles colonies*, the old plantation colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Reunion Island, became *départements d'outre-mer* of the French republic, a new constitutional status whose adoption was spearheaded by Communist and other leftist *députés* from

the *vieilles colonies* (led by the renowned poet and then Communist, Aimé Césaire). They saw full integration with France as a means to secure rights for their inhabitants equivalent to those of the metropolitan *départements*—the *départements d'outre-mer* were intended to have exactly the same status and administration of the mainland *départements*—and as a way for the largely black and *métis* populations, the descendants of slaves in the Caribbean and Reunion Island, to achieve some leverage over the small but powerful white descendants of the planter class. The constitution of the Fourth Republic, also adopted in 1946, enshrined this arrangement in the context of a new Union Française that encompassed overseas *départements*, territories and 'associated states', which it was hoped, would retain protectorates such as Vietnam within the French Republic.

Just at that time, war broke out between the Vietnamese nationalists, aiming for independence, and the French, determined to re-establish control over their Southeast Asian territories after Japanese occupation and the collaboration of the local Vichy-aligned administration, and dreaming of effectively restoring the *status quo ante bellum*. The years that followed proved this to be impossible, the *dénouement* coming with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the same year that a rebellion began in Algeria, the start of another long war that pitted the French states and settlers, on the one hand, against indigenous nationalists, and that was resolved only with the independence of Algeria in 1962. In the meantime, the war had brought down the Fourth Republic and seen the return of de Gaulle to power in 1958 and the establishment of the Fifth Republic and a remodelled *Communauté* (without the adjective *française*). De Gaulle organised referenda in most of the colonies, asking voters (now including all Melanesians in New Caledonia) whether they wanted independence. Only Guinea voted in favour, in part because Paris threatened that no territory that chose secession should count on subsequent French aid and support. Most African leaders used the provisions of the constitution, and their representation in the French parliament, to seek reforms *within* the French system, and only gradually (and reluctantly in some cases) pressed for full independence. Yet what the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously referred to as the 'winds of change' were blowing through French as well as British Africa, and in 1960 most of the French territories in sub-Saharan Africa gained independence, following the independence of the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia in 1956. And India annexed Pondichéry and the other

French *comptoirs* (trading-posts) on the subcontinent. De Gaulle proudly proclaimed that France had successfully decolonised its empire because it was in the French interest to do so.

France still had some overseas territories, later called the 'confetti of empire' by one journalist: the *vieilles colonies* that had become *départements d'outre-mer*, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, the vestige of France's North American empire, the French Pacific islands (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, as well as a stake in the New Hebridean condominium), and two remaining African outposts. In 1974, a referendum was held on independence for the Comoros Islands, lying between the eastern African coast and Madagascar, a group of four main islands with a Muslim population and only a nominal French expatriate presence. Three of the islands voted for independence, whereas Mayotte—which had been under French control for a half century longer than its neighbours—voted against independence. France was placed in a quandary, and after much toing and froing, the three islands gained independence, but Mayotte remained (and remains) French. In 1977, Djibouti, on the horn of Africa, gained independence, and in 1980, the condominium of the New Hebrides became independent Vanuatu, despite attempts by some there (and in near-by New Caledonia) to keep at least part of the archipelago under French rule.

None of the remaining French territories has become independent since that time, despite a wave of pro-independence campaigns, especially in the Caribbean and in Reunion Island, as well as New Caledonia and French Polynesia, in the 1970s and early 1980s. There have nevertheless been some constitutional changes including the creation of 'regions' in the *outre-mer* (another level of supra-departmental administration). More recently, there has been the scission of *Guadeloupe et Dépendances* to give autonomy (as 'territorial collectivities') to the small island of Saint-Barthélemy and the French half of the island of Saint-Martin in 2007. In 2011, the full integration of Mayotte as a *département d'outre-mer* of the French Republic took place, following more than thirty-five years of lobbying by Mahorais (residents of Mayotte), frightened of the dire poverty and near unceasing political chaos in the independent Comoros.

What emerges from this overview are several points. First, throughout its colonial history, the French conception of governance in the *outre-mer* has been based on the predominance of Paris, centralised administration

and the idea that parliamentary representation and universal suffrage (even though it was late in arriving) assure both democracy and, for the remaining outposts, can offer decolonisation without independence. Secondly, France has on many occasions restructured the relationship between the state and the *outre-mer* and, as in 1958 (and, at subsequent dates in various outposts including in New Caledonia in 2018), has allowed its territories to vote on independence, with the proviso that a majority must be in favour for separation to occur. In other cases independence has been wrested from Paris only with prolonged warfare, or in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, with negotiation (and occasional violence). A third point that also needs to be mentioned is that France has been consistently reluctant to let go of its colonies—the rejection of 'self-government' in 1944, provisions in the constitutions of 1946 and 1958 that aimed to keep ex-colonies closely within the French orbit, the wars against nationalists in Vietnam and Algeria, the division of the Comoros islands (and hopes of some for a splitting of the New Hebrides).

The reasons for French reluctance to see the departure of its territories are not difficult to identify. At the end of the Second World War, the (black) Guyanais who presided over the French Senate, Gaston Monnerville, remarked that without the empire France was just a small part of Europe, but with it, a great country. Forty years later, the distinguished conservative politician Michel Debré repeated that having the *départments et territoires d'outre-mer* was '*la chance de la France'* (and sometimes, he added, '*la chance de l'Europe*'). The *outre-mer*, its defenders argued, gives France a presence in all of the oceans of the world. It provides sites for military bases and troop deployment (and, until the 1990s, nuclear testing in French Polynesia). It gave France leverage in the Cold War and later in emerging geopolitical contests. It hosts, for France and Europe, launching facilities for satellites in Guiana. There are the nickel resources of New Caledonia, potential subsea mineral resources elsewhere, agricultural products from the tropics, and desirable destinations for tourists and retirees. France enjoys the largest maritime 'exclusive economic zone' in the world thanks to its insular overseas outposts. The *outre-mer* provides an opportunity for the *rayonnement* of French culture—the near untranslatable notion of the diffusion of French culture. And very importantly, the majority of the inhabitants of each of the territories—fully-fledged citizens with voting rights—do not want independence. French rule gives its territories

an indisputable level of social welfare unobtainable, and sometimes unimaginable, in neighbouring independent countries. Such points are used to justify the continued voluntary existence of the overseas outposts as part of the French Republic, and to mandate French commitment to them.

New Caledonia in the *Outre-Mer*

Placing New Caledonia in the context of the *outre-mer* is vital to comprehending the complicated nature of the conflicts there in recent decades. New Caledonia, along with Algeria, was the only real French settler society. In Vietnam, by contrast, there were only 30,000 French men and women among well over 20 million Vietnamese at the beginning of the Second World War. Yet even in Algeria indigenous people outnumbered the French by nine to one in the early 1960s. In New Caledonia, the arrival of convicts from the 1860s to the 1890s, and then and subsequently of free settlers, and the influx of *métropolitains* during the nickel boom of the 1970s (a wave of migration promoted by the French government) profoundly altered the territory's demographic structure. Migrants included, as well, political prisoners from Algeria transported in the 1870s, indentured labourers recruited from Vietnam and Indonesia to work in the nickel mines in the early 1900s, and men and women from French Polynesia, and especially from France's third outpost in Oceania, Wallis and Futuna, in the 1970s and afterwards. With this continuing current of in-comers, Kanaks are now a minority in New Caledonia's population—roughly the same proportion as those who voted for independence in the 2018 referendum. With 'majority rule', and even with restrictions on the electorate under the terms of the Noumea Accord of 1998, disqualifying recent arrivals from voting, non-indigenous people form the majority. Most of them, as events since the 1980s, as well as the referendum balloting, have shown, are opposed to independence.

Caldoches, in general, think of themselves as French in identity, culture and allegiance, as did the *Pieds-noirs* in Algeria—and as many white residents of the British dominions, at least until relatively recent decades, thought of themselves in relation to Britain. Other migrants to New Caledonia, especially Polynesians coming from islands with few resources and severely limited employment opportunities, fear for their future rights in an independent New Caledonian state (as do the *Caldoches*). Giving up the rights and benefits of French citizenship and rule is unattractive for those who consider themselves fully-fledged *Calédoniens* but also French.

This demographic situation is unique in the history of the French *outre-mer*, and it explains much about the conflict in New Caledonia and the results of the referendum. Yet it also points to an ideological or philosophical paradox involving diverse concepts of the nation-state. Indeed, the demographic situation makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile these competing concepts, which were already inherent in debates on empire in France throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

One of the most powerful political currents in the modern world (and one that is recrudescent today) is nationalism. Scholars differ on the genesis and development of nationalism as ideology and political movement. Some find its origins in the French Revolution with its notions of citizenship, a social contract and parliamentarianism, as well as (paradoxically) in opposition to the imposition of the French system under the expanding and conquering revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes. Others trace nationalism further back in history and link it primarily with notions of ethnicity. Certain it is, however, that a movement of both elite figures and eventually the masses in the 1800s promoted a notion of the 'nation' as people with shared history, territory, language, culture and aspirations, and who desired unification of fragmented territories (as in the case of Germany and Italy) or emancipation from cosmopolitan states (encompassing campaigns for independence by Greeks, Hungarians and Poles against the Ottoman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires). A sovereign nation-state was the aim. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the principle of self-determination in the wake of the First World War consecrated the dominance of the nation-state (though nationalism would take on a monstrous complexion in the inter-war years). Anti-colonialists adopted many of the precepts of nationalism, including the idea of the inherent rights of particular peoples to statehood, liberation from foreign overlordship, self-determination and independence. Ideas of nationalism animated independence movements in the overseas empires, through those pursuing strategies ranging from non-violence to warfare, and with veteran nationalist positions mixed in with ideas taken from pre-colonial cultures and, in some cases, strategies adapted from Marxist proletarian internationalism.

Such a welter of ideas took root in New Caledonia. The French notion of the republican nation-state had long been triumphantly proclaimed, a republic *une et indivisible*, with its revolutionary heritage, sacred trinity of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, republican institutions and principle of *laïcité*

(among other hallmarks). After the Second World War, statesmen reaffirmed those principles, while also promising modernisation, development, and greater participation by citizens in government. In the late 1960s and 1970s, ideas of the New Left penetrated New Caledonia, particularly among those with experience of the 1968 events in Paris, and those who adopted a contestatory stance towards the state, capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and who saw tactics of direct action, sometimes outside parliamentary and electoralist circuits, as legitimate strategy. At the same time, Melanesians were rediscovering their own cultural patrimony, which received a showcase in the first 'Melanesia 2000' festival organised by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in 1975. Melanesian culture, earlier depreciated by many Europeans (using such explicit words as 'primitive', 'savage' and 'a relic of the stone age') was revalorised as a heritage that linked Melanesians together into a cultural community and indeed a nation within New Caledonia, and sustained connections with Melanesians in other countries.

The first calls for independence were publicly voiced in New Caledonia at exactly that time, and the name of the movement that emerged in the 1980s, the 'Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste', was (as the French say) *tout un programme.* The name explicitly harked back to the Front de Libération in Algeria, with the New Caledonians seeing themselves engaged in another campaign of decolonisation against a privileged settler population and an obdurate state. 'Front' alluded to coalition-building, and in fact the FLNKS was an often unwieldy alliance of political parties espousing different platforms, a labour union and a women's group. 'Nationale', of course, recapitulated the notion of a nation aspiring to become a nation-state. 'Socialiste' drew on the history of socialism *à la française* (from the genesis of the socialist movement in the nineteenth century to the Socialist Party of François Mitterrand in power in Paris in the early 1980s) as well as both more radical models and a pre-colonial Oceanic communalism. 'Kanak', a word that a century earlier had been spoken in a largely derogatory fashion by Europeans, privileged the indigenous people as original inhabitants and those with whom the rights to decide the territory's future ought primarily to reside.

What was being manifest were two competing versions of the state. In one view, the majority must prevail in decisions on status, and the French Republic could assure the actualisation of the wishes of all its citizens and the redress of their grievances through parliamentary means. The Republic

was egalitarian, colour-blind and secular, refusing to privilege any particular cohort of citizens over another. In the competing view, indigeneity was primordial, the right of the 'first nation', which, in the event, had been reduced to a demographic minority and a second-class position—for long politically disenfranchised, economically exploited and culturally alienated subsequent to invasion and occupation by colonial forces. Majority rule (when the majority was non-indigenous and resolutely opposed to independence) could not be squared with the primacy of indigenous rights (when the objective of indigenous people was independence), whence the disputes and violence of the 1980s.

Those ideologies did have nuances at the time, and have since undergone modification. The FLNKS formally acknowledged the *victimes de l'histoire* in New Caledonia and their role in a future independent 'Kanaky', though it was unclear exactly who was included in that designation—descendants of convicts and free-settlers, long-term inhabitants, Polynesian migrants or other groups. The FLNKS also welcomed into its membership Europeans, Asian New Caledonians and Polynesians (though they were few in number) who supported demands for independence. For its part, the French state, as part of the 1998 Noumea Accord, agreed to restrict the electorate for projected independence referenda to Kanaks and those resident in the territory for twenty years as of that date, and it recognised a New Caledonian *citoyenneté* distinct from French *nationalité*—remarkable concessions from a state that had placed such emphasis on the 'one and indivisible' character of the Republic.

Over the past thirty years, both of the main factions, despite some fission and much in-fighting in each camp, have pursued their objectives. The French state has, since the Noumea Accord, increasingly assumed the role of arbiter, whereas some of the earlier governments in Paris had been firmly allied with the *loyalistes* and deployed the might of the French military and administration to safeguard *Calédonie française*. Since the 1980s the French state has poured massive amounts of development funding into New Caledonia; it has promoted the training and employment of Melanesians in the public and private sectors; and it sponsored the division of New Caledonia into three largely autonomous 'provinces', two of them under Kanak control. Generously, this can be seen as an effort to right past wrongs against the indigenous people and to modernise the territory; more cynically, as an effort to dampen *indépendantiste* ardour by incorporating some

Kanaks into the political, commercial and cultural elite. At least some of the *loyalistes* have also moderated their position, for instance, by transferring administrative and even economic responsibilities and resources (such as several mines) to Kanak control. The level of dialogue and collaboration since the late 1990s, especially in view of the violence of the 1980s, has been extraordinary.

Nevertheless, the November 2018 referendum results have shown that neither the *indépendantistes* nor the *loyalistes* have been successful in convincing their foes of the justness of their own cause. Most Kanaks voted for independence; most non-Kanaks voted against independence. *Loyalistes* were disappointed at their lack of a better score (as, quietly, was the French state); *indépendantistes* were buoyed by their support, and heartened in view of the further referenda mandated for 2020 and 2022. They reaffirm that their objective is sovereignty, though some Kanak leaders intimate that they would not be adverse to consideration of some constitutional arrangement that would preserve a degree of formal affiliation with the French Republic. *Loyalistes*, by contrast, restate their full commitment to a New Caledonia within the Republic, and some of the *Caldoches* vociferously refute any arrangement that would dilute their being part of France. The competing ideologies based on majority rule and French republicanism, on the one hand, and the primacy of indigeneity and the inherent right to independence, on the other, continue to confront each other—the ideological circle has not been squared. More positively, it would seem that, at least for the time being, all groups acknowledge the referendum results and agree to continuing dialogue with each other and with Paris.

Decolonisation today

Over the long run, the history of decolonisation has favoured the full independence of former colonies, though other options have been essayed, with or without success. The British tried to set up imperial federations in eastern Africa and West Indies (as did the French in West Africa), though they were ill-fated. The *vieilles colonies* (and, latterly, Mayotte) were fully integrated into the French Republic—just as the former colonies of Alaska and Hawaii became fully fledged states of the United States, several of the Dutch West Indian islands are now municipalities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Norfolk Island has been more fully incorporated into

the Commonwealth of Australia. New Zealand and the United States have treaties of 'free association' with Pacific Island polities. Around the world there are dozens of off-shore territories that are dependent parts of larger nation-states, though with a baffling variety of constitutional provisions. These 'overseas countries and territories' (to use the European Union nomenclature) encompass French, British, Dutch and Danish territories, ranging from Greenland to Aruba to the Falkland Islands. Some of these, and others, are listed on the rather eclectic United Nations roster of 'non-decolonised' countries. There are also many other polities around the world with special statutes that link them to continental states (such as the Channel Islands and Britain). The general trend has been to accord greater degrees of autonomy to peripheral regions such as the Canary Islands in Spain and the Azores and Madeira in Portugal, though metropolitan governments occasionally intervene when they consider situations warrant—these range from responses to natural disasters to attempts to control corruption and financial instability.

In the remaining 'colonies', demands for self-government and outright independence have not fallen silent, though in many they have been more muted in recent years. The decline of the leftist rhetoric and Marxist analysis that inspired earlier rebels, a relatively high standard of living, fears of irrendentist neighbours (that is, those with claims for a territory historically or ethnically related to one political unit but under the political control of another) or expanding outside powers, globalisation, devolution of administration, the material benefits of social welfare systems and various other factors have contributed to a diminution of pro-independence sentiment in many of the dependent territories. In some, such as Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States, there have been campaigns for integration (in this case, full American statehood).

Demands for independence in recent decades have rarely been realised. Voters in Québec, for instance, in referenda in 1980 and 1995, rejected independence from Canada. Elsewhere, central governments have simply denied, repressed or defeated by military means independence movements, as for Tamils in Sri Lanka, West Papuans in Indonesia, Bougainvilleans in Papua New Guinea, and Tibetans in China. The only independent states to emerge in the twenty-first century and to be fully recognised by the international community are Timor Leste and South Sudan. In Europe, nationalism resurfaced with the bloody ethnic and political confrontations

in the wake of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and did lead to the birth of successor states, though with continued tension about boundaries, political control and outside interference (as well as the recent Russian takeover of Crimea). A type of nationalism that aims at sovereignty has experienced a renascence in the contemporary world, somewhat surprisingly and most evidently manifest in Scotland and Catalonia. The urge for sovereignty clearly has not disappeared, nor has opposition to it.

No one can convincingly foresee what the future holds for further referenda in New Caledonia, or its subsequent fate. However, from a historical point of view, the ability to see both the particularities of the colonial legacy in New Caledonia and the more general experiences and experiments with constitutional restructuring in France and the *outre-mer*, together with understanding the different ideologies that have underlain campaigns for change in status, provides a perspective from which to articulate future options.

The University of Sydney

Baies de Nouméa, M. Dosdane/NCTPS.