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## Thinking with Suzanne Ounei

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### ABSTRACT

This article is a critical reflection on Kanak feminist activist Suzanne Ounei, one of the co-founders of the Group of Exploited Kanak Women in Struggle in Kanaky/New Caledonia in the 1980s. Through a close reading of her essays, speeches, and interviews, it explores the revolutionary character of her praxis. Specifically, the article looks at Ounei's contribution to making Kanak women into political subjects, her critique of antiblackness in Oceania and by settlers of color in Kanaky/New Caledonia, and her exploration of Kanak feminist resistance against French civilizational feminism. The article frames Ounei's struggle as Black Indigenous feminist thinking and doing.

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When I started my master's degree at the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York in England, one of the teachers asked the new students to come prepared to discuss some aspects of gender in our own countries and culture. We were asked to bring two small objects of data to explain something relevant to women in our country to students from other countries. I did not know what to bring. I had never thought about gender and feminism "back home," in New Caledonia. When I sat down with myself, I realized I knew nothing about feminism where I came from. This was 2013. I did a quick search on the Internet and did not find much. So when the day came to share our objects, I came with a *pareo* and a poem, and said in front of the teachers and the new students that there was no feminism where I came from.

I am a white-Vietnamese settler from Nouméa, the capital of Kanaky/New Caledonia. I was born and raised there. My father is a French-Italian man from France. My mother, who raised me and my little sister, is a white-Vietnamese woman who was herself raised in a children's home in Pwâdii wĩmiã/Poindimié.

The poem I shared was Cook Islander poet Vaine Rasmusen's "A Book and a Pen" (1995).<sup>1</sup> I remember reading it for the first time and how it spoke to me as someone who had grown up in Oceania and who had left to study in one of the imperial centers in Europe. The poem, as I read it, was a reflection on the divide between Western education/knowledges and knowledges that are place- and community-based.<sup>2</sup> While I am not a Pacific Islander, I could relate to the feeling of not being able to make sense of most of what I had learnt in my bachelor's degree in sociology and social psychology in the context of Kanaky/New Caledonia. I left my country

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wanting to come back, and I was wondering what these knowledges would allow me to do once back home. Later, when my critical thinking developed, I also realized that what I had learnt from primary school to high school in Nouméa was based on a French-centric way of viewing the world. As a result, I came to higher education knowing nothing of my history and the history of my country. Indeed, I discovered that I myself was a settler when I started reading about settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia for my master's thesis.

Rasmusen's poem ends with the acknowledgment of what she lost through those years of education and working jobs in the capitalist market, and her reconnection with her culture, language, and traditions. Finally, she concludes, "And I grew up at last/Realising I had missed a lot."

Through the education I gave myself, the searching of the history of my country, the academic straying I did since no one ever pointed me in this direction, *I grew up at last, realizing I had missed a lot*. In the following years, increasingly aware of how much I needed to (un)learn, I continued my academic path with the feeling of having been robbed, robbed of the opportunity to know, and of the opportunity to live in accordance with that knowledge.

This article is about Kanak feminist activist Suzanne Ounei.<sup>3</sup> Through this piece, I take the written legacy of Suzanne Ounei through the speeches and essays she wrote and the interviews she gave and conducted in order to unmute her thought and practice. I argue that she and other Kanak feminist militants, have been muted in the context of a patriarchal, racist, and settler colonial New Caledonia under French governance. To use Arundhati Roy's words, revolutionary Kanak feminists are "deliberately silenced" or "preferably unheard."<sup>4</sup> This has been observed in other contexts in the Pacific. For example, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui explored the way in which "feminist assertions within the Hawaiian nationalist movement are silenced, by male and female activists alike."<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Hawaiian context, however, in Kanaky/New Caledonia, feminism is seen as irreconcilable with Kanak cultural norms.<sup>6</sup> This silencing also happens through a sidelining of women in historical narratives about Kanaky/New Caledonia.

Indeed, the vast majority of historical narratives about Kanaky/New Caledonia have been written by men and has centered the lives and accomplishments of men. If one looks at the (auto)biographies that have thus far been published about significant political and cultural figures in the country, they will find resources on Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Nidoïsh Naisseline, Jacques Lafleur, Eloi Machoro, André Dang, Christian Karembou, Yeiwene Yeiwene, Appolinaire Anova, Alphonse Dianou, Jean Lèques, Louis-José Barbançon. One of the better-known female figures in the history of New Caledonia is Louise Michel, a member of the Paris Commune who spent seven years in New Caledonia after her deportation to the penitentiary in 1873. While it was exceptional that Louise Michel developed friendships with Kanak people and supported the 1878 Kanak revolt at a time when settlers were indoctrinated to see the Kanak people as inferior to justify French settler colonialism, it is necessary to question the absence of Kanak women and feminists in the known and told political history of Kanaky/New Caledonia in order to disrupt both settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. It is in this context that Suzanne Ounei interviewed Déwé Gorodé in 1994; the translated transcript of the interview was published in "Omomo Melen Pacific: Women from Non-Self-Governing Territories and Colonies of the Pacific" under the title "Kanak

Women Speak.” Indeed, it was important for them to tell their own stories as Kanak women and for Kanak women primarily.

For Ounei, writing was essential to the ability of Kanak women to tell their own stories, because she recognized that education was not playing its role in teaching the history of Kanak and settlers in Kanaky/New Caledonia:

None of the struggles about our people are in the books we read at school. So, it is necessary for me to write as many articles as I can in order to tell the reality of our people, because Kanak young people are taught that they are not worth anything.<sup>7</sup>

Writing becomes not only a question of survival, but also a matter of generating life in a context in which the French education system engineers ignorance about Kanak and about settler colonial violence. I think with Suzanne Ounei as a settler from Kanaky/New Caledonia, and it is as a settler that I wish to take up Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem’s call to “provide other ways of knowing the places we call home. Not places we return to, but places that are part of us. Places that we are embedded in.”<sup>8</sup> While I did not learn to think critically in Kanaky or in Oceania, it is with humbleness that I would like to make evident the wealth of Suzanne Ounei’s praxis for scholars and activists interested in Kanaky, as well as for people of Oceania, including Kanaky/New Caledonia, who may not have encountered Suzanne Ounei on their paths. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed political history of Kanaky/New Caledonia, I must engage with some historical context in order to ground Suzanne Ounei’s thought and actions. I start by introducing Ounei and her political trajectory, before exploring three elements of her political and intellectual praxis: the making of Kanak women into political subjects, her identification of antiblackness and settler-of-color critique, and her struggle against civilizational feminism.

### **“A great pro-independence and feminist activist”<sup>9</sup>**

Suzanne Ounei was a Kanak activist who fought for Kanak liberation in Kanaky and abroad beginning in the 1906s. Originally from Iaai/Ouvéa island, she joined the Foulards Rouges (Red Scarves), a group of young Kanak activists led by Kanak chief Nidoïsh Naisseline, who had been studying in France and experienced the May 1968 workers’ and students’ uprising. The young Kanak people who were part of the Foulards Rouges movement were, in the words of David Chappell, “the pioneers of the ‘Kanak Awakening’ of 1969 that marked the beginning of nationalist movement in the territory.”<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Ounei spoke about the importance of reclaiming the word “Kanak” for the movement since it was used by settlers in a pejorative sense:

We wrote the word “Kanak” on our scarves. It was our slogan. When the French saw we were really proud to say “Kanak,” they began to call us “Melanesians.” We began explaining to our people why we wanted to make the term “Kanak” valuable. And we talked about the land; the need to demand the return of our land without conditions.<sup>11</sup>

This Kanak pride is present throughout Ounei’s anti-colonial writing.

In 1976, when Déwé Gorodé was given responsibility for the PALIKA’s (Kanak Liberation Party) international relations, Suzanne Ounei and Gina Monawa were elected to the coordinating bureau. As Ounei herself explained, they were “the first women to hold

leadership positions in a Kanak political party.”<sup>12</sup> In 1982, Ounei was one of the founders and a president of the Groupe des Femmes Kanak Exploitées en Lutte (Group of Exploited Kanak Women in Struggle) or GFKEL, the women’s organization that was one of the founding groups of the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS). The idea for the GFKEL started germinating when Suzanne Ounei and other young Kanak from the Groupe 1878 (another pro-independence movement on the Grande Terre) were beaten by the police and arrested in 1974 for protesting the celebration of September 24, 1853. This date represents the day when Admiral Fébvier Despointes took possession of the islands in the name of France. While it is a day of mourning for Kanak people, it was celebrated by settlers. Activists also occupied the court to protest against the imprisonment of two militants.

While in prison, Déwé Gorodé and Suzanne Ounei started thinking about addressing women’s liberation within the Kanak liberation movement. The need for an “autonomous, independent and feminist” organization was also triggered by the fact that the creation of the “feminine section” within the Libération Kanak Socialiste party, which Ounei was part of, in 1981, “was not to develop an emancipatory strategy, but to do sewing and cooking, in continuity with the model of activities offered to women by the missions during the colonial period.”<sup>13</sup> A couple of years after the dissolution of the GFKEL, Suzanne Ounei described the movement:

It aimed to recover all Kanak lands because unemployed Kanak women living in the tribes need land to grow food to feed their children. The GFKEL was well established in Conception, St Louis, Koinde Oui Point, Saramea, Monfaoue and Bourail. Apart from that, we had old women, younger women and young girls in the Nouméa group: women of all ages, over 60 and 14 years old. There were Europeans, one Chinese from Tahiti, but mainly Kanak women. They were teachers, bank employees, nurses, and house girls. However, the majority were unemployed and living in the tribes. In favor of independence for a socialist Kanaky, they wanted to develop in the interior of the country structures that would be equally fair to women and men for a future free Kanaky.<sup>14</sup>

The GFKEL started as a small group of women. It made itself known in January 1983 when armed military police had come to seize sawmill equipment that Ouipoin and Koinde tribes were blocking. The tribes acted after they had established that the settler-owned sawmill to which they belonged was polluting the river used by them for their everyday water consumption. The operation ended in a conflict that resulted in the arrest of 16 Kanak men and a Kanak woman. The founders of the GFKEL brought food to those arrested. They also protested in front of the High Commission in Nouméa in solidarity with Kanak political prisoners from Koinde-Ouipoin for a week. According to Christine Salomon, these actions encouraged the solidarity of Kanak women and the respect of men in the nationalist camp. While the GFKEL counted around 30 young women, it was quickly marginalized within the nationalist movement, due to age and gender norms within Kanak society which the young women were transgressing.<sup>15</sup>

In 1985, Suzanne Ounei went to Aotearoa New Zealand to learn English as a guest of the Council of Organisations for Relief Service Overseas (CORSO), where she was one of the few Kanak English speakers. To this day, she remains among the few Kanak people who has published in English about the Kanak liberation struggle in Kanaky/New Caledonia. She lived in Aotearoa New Zealand, where she earned her degree in sociology at the University of Canterbury and married New Zealand activist and

scholar David Small. Like Déwé Gorodé, she traveled to international conferences and gave speeches and interviews about the Kanak liberation struggle. Quito Swan notably writes about her two-month tour in the United States as the official representative of the FLNKS in 1985. There, she gave lectures, talks, and interviews about apartheid, the Nuclear Free Pacific movement, and the Kanak struggle for independence in universities, cultural centers, and churches, on the radio and in printed media.<sup>16</sup> This is notable since, at the time, decolonization was still predominantly men's business in Kanaky/New Caledonia. This in line with Tracey Banivanua Mar's argument that until the radicalization in the 1970s:

It was mostly men who were educated by colonial administrations in preparation for independence. It was men who traveled to conferences, joined constitutional committees and petitioned other men at the United Nations. By and large, but with notable exceptions, it was men who joined the "spatial oscillation" of the decolonization era.<sup>17</sup>

Ounei was one of these exceptions in Kanaky/New Caledonia. In late 1985, she was the editorial director of "Kanak's first newspaper," *Bwenando*, at a time when the media occupied a central position in the ideological strategies pursued by anti- and pro-independence forces.<sup>18</sup>

In 1988, a two-year campaign against the independent movement involved aggressive violence from the French administration, leading to the Ouvéa massacre. This started with a group of FLNKS activists in Iaai/Ouvéa occupying the gendarmes' quarter in Fayawe. This action resulted from the FLNKS encouraging its activists to prevent the elections of the Pons status, following the French state's response to FLNKS' nonviolent strategies with violence and dismissal of Kanak political leadership and demands. Each Kanak region was to occupy its gendarmes' quarters, since gendarmes had been ordered to protect polling stations.<sup>19</sup> The French decision to release military troops on the island after Kanak activists took the gendarmes as hostages resulted in a terror campaign against Kanak civilians and the death of 19 Kanak men and 2 French gendarmes. Following what Ounei has called "French war crimes against Ouvéa," the French Government, represented by Prime Minister Michel Rocard, initiated the Matignon Accords. These were peace agreements signed by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, who represented the pro-independence political side, and Jacques Lafleur, who represented the settler opposition.<sup>20</sup> Providing context for this "colonial war" implicating the French state in the killing of Kanak activists, Caledonian historian Louis-José Barbançon explains that "the Matignon agreement announced on June 26, 1988 is first of all a ceasefire, an armistice, opening a truce." As Barbançon sums up the situation, "The agreements signed on Oudinot Street the following August 20<sup>th</sup> transform this armistice into a peace treaty" that focused more on the present than the future, which would become the main focus the Nouméa Accord, 10 years later.<sup>21</sup> Following the signing of these agreements, "dialogue and reconciliation have become dominant features of the New Caledonian landscape," Eric Waddell suggests.<sup>22</sup> The signing of the Matignon Accord and the "longer-term requirement for all signatories to begin to forge some type of functioning consensus" led to a shift in media strategies, which resulted in a change of political tone and the disappearance of *Bwenando*, the militant newspaper that Ounei directed.<sup>23</sup> Media scholar Alain Chanter notes that while the reasons behind the end of *Bwenando* were not clear, it was at least partly related to ideological differences and an unwillingness of the



militants at *Bwenando* to “fall into line” and comply with the “call to unity and consensus.”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to predominant views about the Matignon Accords, Ounei claimed they were “designed to create division within the independence movement.”<sup>25</sup> As she describes it, “The Matignon Accords were signed in blood – the blood of my brothers and cousins and nephews from Ouvéa. Beneath the appearance of a peaceful agreement lies extreme state violence.”<sup>26</sup> She was among those activists who perceived the Matignon Accords as a betrayal and thought that the agreements did not guarantee the independence of Kanaky. Indeed, some considered Jean-Marie Tjibaou a “traitor to the Kanak cause,”<sup>27</sup> which led to the murder of Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene by Djubelly Wéa on May 4, 1989. Wéa, whom Ounei was close to personally and politically (he was her uncle and married to her cousin), had been a victim of French military torture as a Gossanah resident and had been imprisoned in France. He saw the agreements as “a sign of submission and cowardice.”<sup>28</sup> After the Accords and the assassinations, Ounei writes of a climate of insecurity for the opponents of the political agreements, who were “forced to keep a low profile.”<sup>29</sup> Ounei felt this pressure, which was compounded with French authorities’ persistent refusal to deliver a visa to her husband so that they could live in Kanaky. For this reason, Ounei lived in exile in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In the 1990s, the secretariat of the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC) was relocated from Aotearoa/New Zealand to Suva, and Ounei was appointed as assistant director for decolonization. During that time, she worked to have the issue of colonization heard and addressed at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Notably, she was working with the International Women’s Development Agency’s documentation project to record Pacific women’s stories. This is where Ounei and Teresia Teaiwa, who went on to be an internationally known Pacific studies scholar, educator and poet, first met.<sup>30</sup> In 1995, Ounei left her position in Fiji and moved back to Iaai/Ouvéa with her children after her family asked her to take over the ancestral land and her mother’s guest house in Fayawe. Her stay there lasted five years. After Ounei’s death in Wellington in 2016, Teresia Teaiwa praised her “uncompromising leadership – the choice to keep the struggle going, to refuse to be bought, to always pick the rough road and never the well-paved one.” Teaiwa suggested that it was the radical character of Ounei’s political praxis that was the reason why she had few followers: “sometimes, the most honorable leaders are the ones left by the wayside, speaking too much truth to gather a following.”<sup>31</sup>

My first encounter with Suzanne Ounei was in 2014 as I was reading for my Master’s thesis on the Western imagination, mermaids, and Tahitian women. I came across a speech entitled “For an Independent Kanaky,” which she gave in 1985 at the nongovernmental forum segment of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace, in Kenya. The speech was given in a session she chaired with U.S. Black feminist anthropologist Angela Gilliam on “The Impact of Racism and Class Oppression on the Scholarship about Women.”<sup>32</sup> It was later published as a chapter in Leonora Foerstel and Angela Gilliam’s edited book *Confronting the Margaret Mead Legacy*.<sup>33</sup> This was the first time that I read a Kanak woman writing and speaking about racism, sexism and settler colonialism in Kanaky, and I was struck by her passion and straightforwardness.

I “saw” Suzanne Ounei for the first time in 2018, two years after she had passed away. I had returned home to interview people who identified as mixed-race for my Ph.D. research.



One evening, NC1ère, the national television channel, was rebroadcasting *Pays de Femmes* (*Country of Women*), a 1999 documentary produced by Thierry Rigoureux which presented the portraits of several women in Kanaky/New Caledonia. Suzanne Ounei was one of them. She was filmed in the guest house she inherited from her mother in Iaai/Ouvéa. She sat on a *natte* (woven mat) and the person behind the camera zoomed in on the books she had picked and put on the ground, and then filmed her going through her bookshelf. As those images scrolled on the screen, Ounei explained:

Not only do they not read, but when they read, they read detective or romantic novels. I have nothing against love, it is human and it is part of nature, but that's not all there is to books, there are books that contain things that go on in the world, that are connected to what we live here.<sup>34</sup>

She went on to talk about women in Bougainville and in Timor, and concluded that “it’s important to know these women’s experiences.” Even though she was addressing Kanak women, I could not help but feeling compelled by what she said, as a young woman from Kanaky/New Caledonia who had grown up in a household where there were no books except for my mother’s romantic novels. For Ounei, reading had a revolutionary potential. When talking about her time at the University of Canterbury in Aotearoa/New Zealand, she said: “I don’t give a shit about their bourgeois university! Even if I used it to read a lot of books in Canterbury ... And many things revolutionized me!”<sup>35</sup> As I was watching and listening to her, I had only recently started developing a political consciousness and reading politically, so I was very aware of the need to read and to learn more about ourselves as well as the world around us. Her straightforwardness and passion struck me again, which encouraged me to be intellectually and politically curious.

### Making Kanak women into political subjects

Kanaky/New Caledonia has the largest influx of Western immigration for an island in Melanesia. Because of the violent history of settler colonialism in the country – including convict settlement, land spoliation, the imposition of the Indigénat (Native code) on Kanak people for two generations – Christophe Sand, Jacques Bole, and A. Ouetcho have argued that “the question of the number of indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago has over the last 150 years been a major issue of local social history.”<sup>36</sup> The immigration policies promoted by the French state in their effort to minoritize Kanak further politicize the issue of demography. Since independence is voted on by referendum, special electoral lists for referendums and Kanak demographic growth have determined the electoral weight of the pro-independence vote.<sup>37</sup> Within this context, we should consider Ounei’s observation in 1985: “In 1853 our grandmothers fought against the bloody colonization. They hid their children in the bush to prevent the army from killing them. If there are 60,000 Kanak people today it is because of the great courage of our grandmothers.”<sup>38</sup> Here, Ounei shifts the way we perceive resistance in order to unmute the role of Kanak women in it. Traditionally, political resistance to French settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia has been understood in terms of revolts, protests, boycotts, roadblocks, all practices that tend to be imagined as male-dominated. By referring to Kanak grandmothers hiding children in the bush, for example, Ounei is giving her readership a lesson in “what counts as political.”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, she roots Kanak women’s actions in political agency, “acting in accordance with

the logic of resistance.”<sup>40</sup> Not only does she retroactively identify Kanak women from 1853 as political subjects, but she asserts that the legacy of this political act carries into the 1980s and the future. By shedding light on their participation, Ounei enacts what Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask describes as “a struggle against our planned disappearance.”<sup>41</sup> In this light, anti-colonial resistance in Kanaky/New Caledonia rests on Kanak women ancestors responding to violence and dispossession with life sustaining strategies and knowledge passed on by transgenerational memory.

Making evident the fact that Kanak women are political subjects is particularly significant since the political exclusion or marginalization of Kanak women has meant that they have mainly organized themselves in women’s associations. This is in line with Banivanua Mar’s observation that in Pacific decolonizations, “women tended to be incorporated into the new nation as mothers, or the keepers of the custom rather than as political individuals.”<sup>42</sup> The creation of GFKEL was part of this project of countering the erasure of Kanak women as political subjects. Suzanne Ounei’s work consistently (re-)inserted Kanak women into the frame of anti-colonial and feminist resistance. For example, following the Ouvéa Massacre, she requested money from CORSO in order to support the widows and children of the 19 Kanak activists who had been murdered by the French military. She also stayed with the Gossana and Teouta women, some of whom had been tortured alongside men, and explained that she learned from their determination and their organization:

Almost everyday, there were meetings organized by the women. I think that the future of the women’s struggle in Kanaky will be constructed by Kanak women in the field. I see women starting to raise the issue of exploitation. And it is only a beginning, because all the obstacles they will meet will strengthen their thirst for emancipation. It is encouraging to see that there are women who are fed up with baking cakes for political parties.<sup>43</sup>

In observing and retelling Kanak women’s resistance, I see Suzanne Ounei as what decolonial feminist María Lugones calls a “faithful witness”: a person who “witnesses against the grain of power, on the side of resistance.”<sup>44</sup> Through her faithful witnessing, Kanak women are seen as powerful resisters, organizers, knowledge holders, dissenters – subjects with agency who negotiate what Alison Jones, Phyllis Herda and Tamasailau M. Suaalii refer to as the “bitter-sweetness” of family, colonization, and the land.<sup>45</sup> Through her praxis, Suzanne Ounei contributed to the kind of world building that Kanaka Maoli scholar Maile Arvin alludes to:

[W]e have to build worlds in which Indigenous women are recognized as activists, artists and scholars with valuable knowledge and theories about our own lives and our communities’ histories and futures, which are not marginal or isolated from other communities, but often just erased and unacknowledged.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, resisting the erasure of Kanak women as political agents was central to Ounei’s work.

### **From antiblackness to settler-of-color critique in Oceania**

In her writing and speeches, Ounei denounced antiblack racism in Oceania. Through her personal memories, she demonstrated how Kanak people experience racism as Indigenous people, but also as Black. Indeed, part of the dehumanization of Kanak people lies in the way that the imagination of European imperialists assigned savagery and hostility to Black

Oceanians, creating a racial hierarchy of Pacific islanders that placed Melanesians at the bottom and Polynesians at the top. Ounei notably recalled reading a history book that “said that we Kanaks are the lowest of the black Melanesians, not like Polynesians who are like whites.”<sup>47</sup> At times, this racist colonial construction takes the form of an invisibilization of the Kanak people in Kanaky:

When they introduce a picture of New Caledonia overseas, they always introduce the picture of New Caledonia with beautiful beaches and a *wahine*—a Polynesian woman—who dances the *tamoure*. But they never show a picture of the Kanak people. The Kanak people are us—the black people—who live there. That is why when we hear the sister from South Africa, we can find our story, too. On one side there is us—the black people—and on the other side there is the white settler.<sup>48</sup>

As Arvin has shown, the image of a “welcoming hula girl” – here, the tamure dancer – “is often deployed to erase or contain the hypermasculinized Western images of savages and cannibals in Oceania.”<sup>49</sup> Building on Arvin’s argument, using “Polynesian” women when representing New Caledonia intends to market the islands “as a place of respite for the [w]hite (implicitly male) visitor, and indeed a place where [w]hiteness is natural and even native.”<sup>50</sup> This situation is compounded by French racist and assimilatory practices in education which negate Blackness. Indeed, Ounei writes that “at home, they teach us to deny our skin color.”<sup>51</sup> As Quito Swan has argued, Europe transformed Oceania into the imagined space that is the Pacific through violence. The violent gendered and racialized imaginations of spaces and Oceanian women and people “were about legitimizing [w]hite patriarchal power.”<sup>52</sup> Taking this logic a little further, it is not only the racialized and gendered character of violence that is of significance here, but also its settler colonial character, as Native feminist scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill point out in their research.<sup>53</sup>

The combination of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy has specific effects on Black Indigenous women in Oceania. In “Black Is the Color of Solidarity,” Joy Enomoto notes that:

Black women of Oceania are often left out of the frame in discussions about global Black liberation struggles, and ironically they are left out of many conversations of Black indigeneity, even though they remain central players in movements for Black self-determination.<sup>54</sup>

In making a connection between Kanak and South African women, Ounei asserts Kanak Blackness through affirming Black solidarity and kinship in an antiblack world. Blackness becomes significant for her to respond to the invisibilization of Black Indigeneity in the Pacific, but also her experiences of antiblack racism from white and racialized (including non-Black Pacific Islander) adults and children. In an interview with Jacques Gauthier, she recalled her experience of antiblack racism when her family moved to Uvea/Wallis: “The Wallisians were very racist and called me ‘kili uli’ which means black skin or ‘mea uli,’ black thing. So at my young age, I already had to fight the small Polynesians who believed themselves to be superior to me because their skin was lighter.”<sup>55</sup> Arvin explains that the colonial and racial associations of Polynesia with whiteness sometimes give rise to a Polynesian exceptionalism in which some Polynesian people internalize, investing in the idea that they are superior to Melanesians.<sup>56</sup> In recalling the name calling she and other Kanak girls experienced in schools in Kanaky/New Caledonia, Ounei adds “even the little girls from Martinique, China, or Polynesia treated us the same way.”<sup>57</sup> These experiences

challenge assumptions about allyship and racial solidarity between Kanak and non-Black racialized or Black non-Kanak people, shifting our attention away from a U.S.-centric way of understanding racisms. As Teresia Teaiwa affirms, the Pacific is a space from which to theorize race and racisms, explaining that “[t]he Pacific has taught me most of what I know about the complicatedness of race and racism.”<sup>58</sup> While Ounei did not intend to theorize Oceanian antiblack racism, she underlines its political significance in her becoming a resister. In response to antiblackness, Ounei asserts: “I need to say that, in spite of racism, I never felt ashamed of being black.”<sup>59</sup> On the contrary, she reiterates her resistance, even as a child, and calls for Kanak pride.

Ounei expands her critique of antiblackness to a settlers of color critique already in the 1980s. Much like Trask two decades later,<sup>60</sup> she distinguishes settlers of color from Indigenous people: “Communities? [The French Government] can call other people ethnic communities because they are from overseas, but not us. We are not a community, we Kanaks are the true people of the land.”<sup>61</sup> Hawai‘i and Kanaky/New Caledonia are similar in that the United States and the guarantors of the French order in New Caledonia invest in an ideology of “a mosaics of races.” This post-racial construction aims to make redundant any challenge of racism and settler colonialism; therefore, Kanak people struggle for sovereignty, while, at the same time, they occupy the bottom of the social hierarchy. Ounei’s observations are in line with Arvin’s research on how colonial discourse characterizes Polynesians as almost white.<sup>62</sup> Just as Arvin explains, in the context of Hawai‘i, that this discourse serves to naturalize and normalize white settler presence in Polynesia, Ounei suggests such rhetoric is used by white settlers to control Polynesian settlers:

On one side there are the whites with other ethnics like Wallis, Tahitian, etc, and on the other the Kanaks. These immigrants have a clearer skin than ours, so the white bosses tell them that they are more intelligent than the Kanaks. The tragedy of it all is that they believe what the whites tell them and fight with them against the Kanaks.<sup>63</sup>

The report Ounei wrote in May 1985 cites examples in which Wallisian people allied with white settlers to antagonize Kanak.<sup>64</sup> She deplores the fact that Wallisian people reaffirmed their support to white settlers continually, despite Kanak people defending their interests when asked to.

In another speech, she remembers how Tahitian and Wallisian settlers joined with white settlers to celebrate the 1985 murder of Eloi Machoro, the pro-independence activist and Minister of Security under Jean-Marie Tjibaou’s provisional government, by French police.<sup>65</sup> In her report, Ounei asserted:

We Kanak people are aware of the fact the Wallis Islanders, the Tahitians, the Javanese and others are used by the French Government to oppose us. We have tried to involve them in our struggle and not let the white colonial system divide us. But it is impossible to continue to give our hand to the people who are deaf to us and who help the army and the white settlers to carry out their attacks against the Kanak people.<sup>66</sup>

This instrumentalization of non-Kanak groups has been also noted by Polynesian political leaders in New Caledonia, such as Michel Hema from the Union Océanienne (Oceanian Union) in 1975 and Milakulo Tukumuli from Eveil Océanien (Oceanian Awakening) in 2019, although such acknowledgments do not necessarily result in a political support for independence.<sup>67</sup> Tensions between the Wallisian and Futunian community and Kanak people have continued beyond the 1980s, notably with the Saint Louis conflicts at the

beginning of the 2000s, which Nic Maclellan has characterized as “a failure of the ‘Pacific Way’.”<sup>68</sup> While conservative media frames such conflicts as animus between Oceanian communities, the conflicts are often political and related to dissent on the question of independence as well as land and customary authority, all of which result from colonial dispossession and displacement.

Today, there are two Oceanian pro-independence parties that are led by Polynesians: Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien (RDO) created in 1994 by Aloïsio Sako, and the Mouvement des Océaniens Indépendantistes (MOI), created in 2019 by Arnaud Chollet-Leakava and nine previous RDO members. Nevertheless, the majority of people who vote for independence are Kanak and the majority of those who vote against it are overwhelmingly non-Kanak (white, non-Kanak Oceanian, Asian, etc.). In that sense, Ounei’s words still resonate today. They find an echo in Trask’s challenge to “non-Natives to examine and reexamine their many and continuing benefits from [Native] dispossession.”<sup>69</sup> Trasks asks non-Natives to answer a simple question everyday: “[W]hich side are you on?” These connections highlight the need for a more complex analysis of racial politics in settler colonies. They also demonstrate the importance of theorizing race and racisms from Oceania – including in the Pacific colonized by France, where French universalism may be operating. Making these associations underlines the intersection of political demands between Hawai’i and Kanaky and the presence of a trans-Oceanic and decolonial way of thinking-doing.

### Against civilizational feminism

A cornerstone of Suzanne Ounei’s political praxis was the critique of and resistance against white Western bourgeois settler feminism. As she explains:

From the moment one speaks of Kanak and socialist independence, the GFKEL has nothing in common with conservative women who assert the individual rights to women and at the same time remain unrelenting in front of the needs of colonized women.<sup>70</sup>

This perspective articulated itself around three axes: 1. a refusal to ally with civilizational feminists; 2. avoiding the practice of gender separatism; 3. a disengagement from state-feminism. Françoise Vergès has defined “civilizational feminism” as the form of feminism that turns “women’s rights into an ideology of assimilation and integration into the neoliberal order, reduces women’s revolutionary aspiration to an equal share of the privileges granted to white men by white supremacy.”<sup>71</sup> This form of feminism expresses itself in settler colonies through the desire to assimilate Indigenous women and women of color into the settler nation. In French republican colonial regimes, Shirley Tate and Ian Law argue that the assimilation of the colonized “depended on a process of transformation that could take place only gradually through education and a transformation from tradition to modernity.”<sup>72</sup>

Some aspects of this transformation were raised by Kanak activist Lucette Néaoutyne at the 1975 Pacific Women’s Conference, who discussed how colonial education destroyed traditional Kanak women’s knowledges and skills and attempted to turn Kanak women into imitations of white women.<sup>73</sup> In a similar fashion, Suzanne Ounei made evident the historical divide between Kanak women and white women:

At the time when white French women or Europeans or Americans were taking up the ideology of liberalism, liberty and equality between human beings, of human rights and were claiming equal treatment for men and women, women's representation in public institutions, education for women just as for men, Kanak women were losing their dignity and their land, or were being slaughtered together with their husbands by the French colonial army. While liberal feminists were asserting claims for the protection of children, Kanak mothers had no time to take proper care of their own children. They were working without pay alongside men, on the construction of roads, the harvesting of coffee, copra and sandalwood for the colonists.<sup>74</sup>

Ounei describes that there is a lack of relationship between Kanak and white French women "who say they understand the problem of Kanak women because they have grown up in Kanaky," highlighting the fact that "the Kanaks who were close to them when they were kids were all house employees."<sup>75</sup> By analyzing women "as socioeconomic political groups" within the context of Kanaky/New Caledonia, she demonstrates that there is no ahistorical universal unity among women. Unlike Western feminists, she shows how social class, colonial, and racial identities constitute women's identities, moving away from what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has identified as "simplistic formulations" that "men exploit, women are exploited," which reflect a historically reductive perspective for designing strategies to struggle against oppression.<sup>76</sup>

For this reason, activists from the GFKEL were against gender separatism and struggled along side Kanak men against exploitation, to support them and "raise questions together with them"<sup>77</sup>: According to Ounei, "we think that we can change our Kanak brothers, because both Kanak women and men are exploited. So we must fight side by side with them; occupy the land together; fight on the barricades with them."<sup>78</sup> Still, Ounei acknowledged that the Kanak feminist struggle was not only against white settlers, but also to "fight to change the place of women for the future" within Kanak society. This work is made difficult by the fact that civilizational feminists frequently instrumentalize this struggle, as Ounei suggests: "They love to raise the issue of exploitation of Kanak women in the traditional society. But they forget the priority for Kanak women is to fight against [...] imperialistic interests ..."<sup>79</sup> Ounei's observation here alludes to the way in which Kanak women are frequently constructed as being in need of saving from the pathologized violence of Kanak men, a common trope of white liberal and settler feminisms. In light of this, Ounei did not extend her sisterhood to women who oppose the Kanak liberation struggle and refused to work with them on issues that they may commonly share such as contraception, abortion, and domestic violence. Indeed, her sisterhood and allyship were deeply political: "I will do that work with Kanak women and with the few white women who support our struggle."<sup>80</sup>

More recently, Christine Salomon has noted a shift from the revolutionary Kanak feminism of the 1980s toward a more moderate institutional feminism which depoliticizes gender equality.<sup>81</sup> She observes that there currently is no ideological debate within women's associations. We should be particularly attentive to the depoliticization of feminism as well as the perception that feminism, racism, and colonialism are distinct and separate issues. French settler colonialism creates a discourse of a people incapable of being sovereign and in need of French protection, notably to protect the rights of women. For example, in his 2021 new year's wishes, Sébastien Lecornu, the then Minister of Overseas Territories, asked "what will be the rights of minorities, women's rights, gay rights?" as a question Caledonians needed to address in relation to a possible independence.<sup>82</sup> Six months later, Eric Steiger, a colonel who had been found guilty of physical and psychological violence



against his wife by a French court of law, was appointed to the position of police commander in New Caledonia. Sonia Togna, the President of the Union des Femmes Francophones d'Océanie (UFFO – Union of Francophone Women in Oceania) noted the irony of this appointment in August 2021:

We are shocked because all women's associations in New Caledonia mobilized themselves to work with the State on grenelles. Do you think it's a good message to send? Who did we speak to when we organized the grenelles? Who did we speak to?<sup>83</sup>

Togna is notably referring to the grenelle (or national plan) on domestic violence, which was spearheaded by Marlene Schiappa, the French State Secretary in charge of Equality between Men and Women.<sup>84</sup> Kanak feminists such as Déwé Gorodé and Suzanne Ounei went beyond a state-centered approach to decolonization in recognizing Western racism and sexism, interrogating the role played by settler colonialism in violence against Kanak women.<sup>85</sup> Ounei mentioned the fact that she wrote to French women politicians in charge of women's rights in France and never received any support. Instead, she sought and found political support from Black and Indigenous women throughout the world.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

Maile Arvin writes that “[w]e have to build worlds in which other feminists believe that Indigenous women exist.”<sup>87</sup> Through this paper, I attempted to show the significance of Suzanne Ounei's praxis, along with the political activism of other Kanak feminists, in the struggle against heteropatriarchy, white supremacy and settler colonialism in Kanaky/New Caledonia. Kanak women's political struggles have been largely ignored in feminist scholarship and in scholarship about Oceania. This is due to the colonial language barriers between “Francophone” and “Anglophone” Oceania, as well as a representational invisibilization of Black Indigenous women.

The work of Suzanne Ounei still has relevance for the current political situation in Kanaky/New Caledonia, and there is much to learn from her uncompromising politics beyond our islands. Through recalling her personal and political experiences, Ounei expresses how Indigenous feminism requires being on various fronts and constantly reiterating the world it intends to build:

We were the extremists among the extremists. Only a few men listened to us and supported our ideas, and no political party seriously addressed the issue. Instead they tried to undermine us and protect their own power by creating low-status and non-threatening “feminine sections” to make cakes and sew dresses to raise money for the party . . . .

We were accused of being divisive elements. We are supposed to avoid these important issues for the sake of unity. Although we agree that we must fight for independence alongside our brothers, we want to be clear about what sort for society we are fighting for.<sup>88</sup>

Not only did she refuse to work on the terms set by the men, she also refused the terms of the French state which attempted “to undermine the growing consciousness of Kanak women” by “offer[ing] encouragement to the polite Kanak women's groups who talk about everything except the struggle against French imperialism.”<sup>89</sup> Ounei's practice is akin to what Arvin has termed “regenerative refusal,” which refers to “actions that seek to restore balance and life to Indigenous communities that continue to live with structures of settler colonialism.”<sup>90</sup> These



rejections of the moderate offers made by the French state, institutions, political parties led by Kanak men and civilizational feminists are not negative. Through the lens of regenerative refusals, they can be seen as “positive, future-oriented acts aiming to realize a different way of being in and relating to the world,” as Arvin poignantly explains.<sup>91</sup>

The work of Kanak feminists, like other Indigenous and Black Indigenous feminist perspectives, is a call to build new relationships between gendered Indigenous people, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In this way, I view Kanak feminists’ scholarship, art, and activism as intellectual gifts which come with, in Arvin, Tuck and Morrill’s words, “a responsibility that is less a burden than a desire to continue to create a future for Native feminist theories to thrive.”<sup>92</sup> Departing from an analysis of the social situation of women at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy in Kanaky/New Caledonia, Suzanne Ounei’s thinking-doing gestures toward another possibility, going against the grain of heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, and settler colonial domination and toward life affirming futures. It challenges us to refuse anything less than that.

## Notes

1. Vaine Rasmussen, “A Book and a Pen,” in *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English since 1980*, ed. Albert Wendt (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995), 52.
2. Here, “Western” is understood as a historical construct rather than a geographical one, since, as Stuart Hall put it: “the West’ is no longer only in Europe, and not all Europe is in ‘the West’”. See Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (The Open University, 1992), 276.
3. The spelling Suzanne Ounei is used in this article, even though her name commonly appears as Susanna Ounei in English. Suzanne Ounei is how she spelled her own name and how it appears in Kanaky/New Caledonia.
4. Arundhati Roy, “The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecturer” (speech, Seymour Theatre Centre, University of Sydney, 2004), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/roys-full-speech-20041104-gdk1qn.html>.
5. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, “Native Hawaiian Decolonization and the Politics of Gender,” *American Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 2008): 282.
6. Christine Salomon, “Quatre Décennies de Féminisme Kanak,” *Mouvements* 91 (Fall 2017): 62–6. For a questioning of the differences in experiences between Melanesian and Polynesian women when it comes to women’s liberation see Quito Swan, “Giving Birth: Fiji, Black Women’s Internationalism, and the Pacific Women’s Conference of 1975,” *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 53–4, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jcivihumarigh.4.1.0037>.
7. Suzanne Ounei, “For an Independent Kanaky,” in *Confronting the Margaret Mead Legacy*, ed. Lenora Foerstel and Angela Gilliam (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992): 165.
8. Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem, “The Audacity of the Ocean: Gendered Politics of Positionality in the Pacific,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* (July 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12334>.
9. The title of this section is a translation of the title of an article written about Suzanne Ounei after her death and published on the USTKE (Union for Kanak and Exploited Workers) website. Ingrid, “Suzanne Ounei, une grande militante indépendantiste et féministe,” USTKE, June 23, 2016, [https://ustke.org/communiques/b.c/Suzanne-Ounei,-une-grande-militante-independantiste-et-feministe-at\\_707.html](https://ustke.org/communiques/b.c/Suzanne-Ounei,-une-grande-militante-independantiste-et-feministe-at_707.html).
10. David Chappell, *The Kanak Awakening: The Rise of Nationalism in New Caledonia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), viii.
11. Suzanne Ounei, “The Kanak People’s Struggle for Independence in New Caledonia,” Tok Blong SPFF, July 1985, <http://pacificpeoplespartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/12-Tok-Blong-SPPF-12-July-1985-m.pdf>.

12. Susanna Ounei-Small, "The 'Peace' Signed with Our Blood," in *Tu Galala: Social Change in the Pacific*, ed. David Robbie (Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1992), 167.
13. Salomon, "Quatre Décennies de Féminisme Kanak," 56.
14. Susanna Ounei-Small, "Raising Women's Issues; Fighting for Kanak Independence," in *Omomo Melen Pacific: Women from non-selfgoverning territories and colonies of the Pacific* (Christchurch, NZ: Omomo Melen Pacific, 1995), 38.
15. Salomon, "Quatre Décennies de Féminisme Kanak," 57–8.
16. Quito Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 47–9.
17. Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 217.
18. Alain Chanter, "The Media and Politics in New Caledonia in the 1980s," *The Journal of Pacific History* 26, no. 2 (1991): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349108572671>.
19. Hamid Mokaddem, *Pratique et Théorie kanak de la Souveraineté* (Province Nord, n.d.), 76–7.
20. For a list of the main features included in these agreements see Stephen Henningham, "The Uneasy Peace: New Caledonia's Matignon Accords at Mid-Term," *Pacific Affairs* 66, no. 4 (Winter, 1993–1994): 521–2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760677>. The full text of the Matignon-Oudinot Accords can be found here: [www.mncparis.fr/uploads/accords-de-matignon\\_1.pdf](http://www.mncparis.fr/uploads/accords-de-matignon_1.pdf).
21. Louis-José Barbançon, "Des accords de Matignon à l'Accord de Nouméa 1988–1998" (Presentation at the Colloquium on the Accords, Paris, 2013), 3.
22. Eric Waddell, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanak Witness to the World* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 206.
23. Chanter, "The Media and Politics," 314.
24. *Ibid.*, 325.
25. Ounei-Small, "The 'Peace,'" 163.
26. *Ibid.*, 174.
27. Mokaddem, *Pratique et Théorie kanak*, 87.
28. *Ibid.*, 81.
29. Ounei-Small, "The 'Peace,'" 176–7. Ounei is relatively elusive about this climate of insecurity and writes about "rumors of a complex conspiracy" aiming at isolating the opponents of the accords after the assassinations of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene. She evokes the targeting of specific individuals rather than political parties, explaining that these individuals "have had a hard time, especially in the first few months after the assassination."
30. Teresia Teaiwa, "You can't rate a leader by the followers," E-Tangata, July 30, 2016, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/reflections/you-cant-rate-a-leader-by-the-followers/>.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Swan, *Pasifika Black*, 46.
33. Ounei, "For an Independent Kanaky."
34. *Pays de Femmes*, directed by Thierry Rigoureux, Nouméa, Kanaky/New Caledonia: RFO, 1999.
35. Ingrid, "Suzanne Ounei."
36. Christophe Sand, Jacques Bole, and A. Ouetcho, "What Were the Real Numbers? The Question of Pre-Contact Population Densities in New Caledonia," in *The Growth and Collapse of Pacific Island Societies: Archaeological and Demographic Perspectives*, ed. Patrick V. Kirch and Jean-Louis Rallu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 307.
37. Pierre-Christophe Pantz and Scott Robertson, "Exploring the Kanak Vote on the Eve of New Caledonia's Independence Referendum," *Department of Pacific Affairs* (August 2018): 1–19; Peter Brown, "The New Caledonian referendum: Events, processes, decolonization," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 22, no. 1&2 (2019): 87–113, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.22.1-2.87\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.22.1-2.87_1)
38. Ounei, "The Kanak People's Struggle," 13.
39. María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 2.
40. *Ibid.*, 12.
41. Haunani-Kay Trask. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 26.

42. Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation*, 216.
43. Ounei-Small, "Raising Women's Issues," 42.
44. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 7.
45. Alison Jones, Phyllis Herda, and Tamasailau M. Suaalii, "Introduction," in *Bitter Sweet: Indigenous Women in the Pacific*, ed. Alison Jones, Phyllis Herda & Tamasailau M. Suaalii (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press, 2000), 11.
46. Maile Arvin, "Indigenous Feminist Notes on Embodying Alliance against Settler Colonialism," *Meridians* 18, no. 2 (October 2019): 353, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-7775663>.
47. Ounei, "For an Independent Kanaky," 165.
48. Ibid., 163–4.
49. Maile Arvin, "Polynesia Is a Project, Not a Place," in *Beyond Ethnicity: New Politics of Race in Hawai'i*, ed. Camilla Fojas, Rudy P. Guevarra, Jr., and Nitisha Tamar Sharma (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 22.
50. Ibid., 23.
51. Ounei, "For an Independent Kanaky," 165.
52. Swan, *Pasifika Black*, 16.
53. Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 8–34.
54. Joy Enomoto, "Black Is the Color of Solidarity: Art as Resistance in Melanesia," *Postmodern Culture* 31, no. 1 (2020).
55. Ounei-Small, "Raising Women's Issues," 41.
56. Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 29.
57. Ounei-Small, "Raising Women's Issues," 41.
58. Teresia Teaiwa, "Mela/Nesian Histories, Micro/Nesian Poetics," *Amerasia Journal* 43, no. 1 (2017): 176.
59. Ounei-Small, "Raising Women's Issues," 41.
60. Haunani-KayTrask, "Settlers of Color and "Immigrant" Hegemony: "Locals" in Hawai'i," *Amerasia Journal* 26, no. 2 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.26.2.b31642r221215k7k>. While I am connecting Trask's concept of "settlers of color" to Suzanne Ounei's critique, I am in no way suggesting that the position of Asian settlers in Hawai'i is equivalent to that of Polynesian or Wallisian-and-Futunian islanders in Kanaky/New Caledonia. While there are more Wallisian-and-Futunian islanders in Kanaky/New Caledonia than in Wallis-and-Futuna, they do not outnumber Kanak people nor do they dominate politics or the economy. Their role in politics has increased in the last years with the creation of the Eveil Océanien (Oceanian Awakening) party in 2019; however, Wallisian-and-Futunian islanders often experience social inequality such as housing discrimination. They are also, with Kanak people, the social group with the lowest proportion of higher education graduates. In the contexts of both access to housing and higher education diplomas, they seem to be more disadvantaged than Kanak. With regard to unemployment, Wallisian-and-Futunian and Ni-Vanuatu islanders have a greater rate of unemployment than "Europeans" but a lower rate than Kanak people. See Sylvain Chareyron et al. "Seeking for tipping point in the housing market: evidence from a field experiment," *TEPP – Institute for Labor Studies and Public Policies* (2019); Amélie Chung, "Politiques publiques éducatives et inégalités en Nouvelle-Calédonie" (PhD diss., Université de Nouvelle Calédonie, 2021), 58; Laure Hadj, "Provinces et rééquilibrage des inégalités en Nouvelle-Calédonie – Quelle mesure de la pauvreté?," *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 131 (2016): 55. The historical basis of their settlement and respective land tenure is also not equivalent to that of Asian settlers in Hawai'i.
61. Ounei, "The Kanak People's Struggle," 7.
62. Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians*.
63. Ounei, "The Kanak People's Struggle," 11.
64. Ibid., 11.
65. Ounei, "For an Independent Kanaky," 169.
66. Ounei, "The Kanak People's Struggle," 12.

67. I only mention Polynesian political leaders because the Polynesian community, especially Wallisian-and-Futunians, are the only community to have a history of having their own political parties, while members of other communities tend to align with white settler parties. This could partially be explained by the fact that they are the third largest ethnic group in New Caledonia as they represented 8.3% of the population in 2019, while Kanak were 41.2%, “Europeans” represented 24.1% and other communities including Indonesian, Vietnamese, Tahitian, Ni-Vanuatu as well as others accounted for 7.5% of the population. The Wallisian-and-Futunian population represents a significant percentage of possible voters in the referendum which can explain political tensions between them, Kanak and white settlers. See ISEE, Communautés, Recensement, <https://www.isee.nc/population/recensement/communautes>.
68. See Nic Maclellan, “Conflict and Reconciliation in New Caledonia: Building the Mwâ Kâ,” *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia* 1 (2005): 8–10.
69. Trask, “Settlers of Color,” 21.
70. Ounei-Small, “Raising Women’s Issues,” 40.
71. Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 12.
72. Shirley Tate and Ian Law, *Caribbean Racisms: Connections and Complexities in the Racialization of the Caribbean Region* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 22.
73. Swan, “Giving Berth,” 53.
74. Ounei-Small, “Raising Women’s Issues,” 39.
75. Ibid., 40.
76. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 31.
77. Ounei, “For an Independent Kanaky,” 167.
78. Suzanne Ounei, *For Kanak Independence: The Fight Against French Rule in New Caledonia* (Auckland: Labour Publishing Co-operative Society, 1985), 13.
79. Ounei-Small, “Raising Women’s Issues,” 40.
80. Ounei, “The Kanak People’s Struggle,” 8.
81. Salomon, “Quatre Décennies de Féminisme Kanak,” 64.
82. See <https://outre-mer.gouv.fr/voeux-de-sebastien-lecornu-ministre-des-outre-mer-aux-caledoniennes-et-aux-caledoniens>.
83. Sonia Tonia, interview by Caledonia, “Colonel Steiger : Une nomination qui choque,” *Caledonia*, August 20, 2021, video, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=173808788173657>.
84. “Grenelle” refers to a major political programme or consultation of the French government.
85. Chappell, “The Kanak People’s Struggle,” 143.
86. Rigoureux, *Pays de Femmes*.
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## Notes on contributor

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