Deconstructing Narratives of Self-Determination, National Identity, and Economic Independence (Working Paper)

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New Caledonia, an island nation in the Pacific is one of the last remaining UN Non-Self-Governing Territories of France (alongside French Polynesia), and the most populated of the sixteen remaining territories. According to an agreement signed in 1998, beginning in May 2014 New Caledonia entered the last stage of power transfer from France. This process will culminate in a series of three referendums to determine whether New Caledonia becomes an independent state, freely associated state, or an integrated state. Although small and geographically isolated, New Caledonia's political transformation has global ramifications for policy makers and sub-state groups struggling to resolve issues of political participation, recognition, and self-determination. Regardless of how self-determination is defined numerous sub-national groups endeavor to gain control over resources or access to rights. France's history of assimilation, changing definitions and policies towards their overseas populations, current problems integrating diverse mainland ethnic groups, and economic situation makes the struggle for independence in New Caledonia particularly relevant. Colonization and contemporary globalization have created a world of states forced to deal with multinational populations. The allocation of rights, citizenship, recognition, control over resources, access to healthcare and education, and the preservation of culture and language have become everyday forums for the independence debate.

Discovering ways in which diverse groups can be peaceably incorporated and recognized is one of the most persistent problems facing this world today. The situation in New Caledonia, the current independence debate, and the widespread inclusion of sub-national groups in the

political system offers a unique perspective on these issues. The slow transition of power and contemporaneous political development of New Caledonia combined with its diverse population provides an ideal setting for identifying and analyzing the discourses that shape contemporary political claims for and against independence. My research has sought to 1) identify the various discourses that underpin the independence debate, 2) deconstruct those discourses and examine the roles of national identity and ethnic cleavages, French aid and the nickel mining industry, and varying definitions of self-determination, and finally 3) analyze the extent to which these discourses and the knowledges they produce limit the options for the resolution of the independence debate and effective multicultural governance.

Despite a rich literature on methods for implementing multiculturalism through a variety of political systems there is a dearth of literature examining these approaches from a geographic and indigenous context. Furthermore, the role of discourses in limiting or mobilizing particular approaches to multicultural governance has yet to be explored. This research will advance knowledge of power sharing where a majority group's power becomes marginalized after an indigenous group becomes the primary political player. This situation is rare in contemporary politics and deserves further exploration. Geographic understandings of multicultural governance, indigenous conceptions of self-determination, and the role of counter-identity in anti-independence movement will be transformed through this project.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The transition from colonial empire to federated mainland-island system restructured the relationships between colonial states, integrating self-determination at a variety of scales. When the UN recognized the legitimacy of practicing self-determination within non-independent relationships metropolitan states began formally integrating some of their territories (McElroy

and Sanborn 2005; Cohn 2003; McElroy and de Albuquerque 1996; Aldrich and Connell 1997; Ramos and Rivera 2001; Lampe 2001). However, the colonial legacy of pluralism resulted in an often-difficult transition to self-government, and the inclusion of disparate groups. The relationship between the UK, US, Netherlands, and France and their overseas territories is thus characterized by different forms of inclusion and exclusion via citizenship, hierarchical and representative power structures, and definitive local and federal powers (Kymlicka 2007; Clegg 2011; Baldacchino and Milne 2009; Corbin 2011; Daniel 2005; De Jong 2005). Within these contemporary systems of governance, this research will build on the existing theoretical framework concerning the implementation of the UNDRIP (Oldham and Frank 2008) and the achievement of social justice through the recognition and mediation of cultural difference (Asch 2001; Feit 2001; Povinelli 1998; Rose 1999; Taylor 1994; Tully 2000) by identifying the discourses that support these political endeavors and their mobilization.

Although beneficial for some island populations the dependent system (Baldacchino 2004; 2010; Baldacchino and Hepburn 2011; Baldacchino and Milne 2006; Dunn 2011; Hintjens 1997; McElroy and Mahoney, 2000; Trompf, 1993), colonial legacies, and the power-sharing systems born from decolonization have resulted in island states with marginalized societies, unequal power structures, and inadequate representation. Various modes of administration (Fraenkel 2006; Berg 2009; Schmidt 2002; Smooha 2002), federal systems (Lijphart 1977; Dieckhoff 2004), multi-party electorates (McLeay 1980; Knight 1982; Reilly 2001), accommodation (Barelli 2011; Nimni 2009), the right to consultation (Barelli 2011; Klabbers 2006), collective participation in decision-making (Barelli 2011), recognition, control over territory and resources (Kolvuriva 2010; Weller 2009; Berg 2009; Knight 1982; Barelli 2011; Niezen 2003), diversity in institutions and policies (Galston 2004; Larmore 1996; Rawls 2005),

and mandating cultural identifiers as a means of cultural protection (Kymlicka 2007) have been implemented to mediate these legacies.

Colonial systems have also had a significant impact on framing group identity, categorization, and citizenship. The definition and application of citizenship and France's reframing of its overseas populations is characteristic of a broader issue facing the successful implementation of multicultural governance: policies, modes of governance, and other forms of self-determination are informed by international and local discourses on human rights and views of the 'other' (Murphy 2002; Said 1978; Dalby 1991) that create unequal power relationships. This social structuring leads to questions about methods of oppression, responses to power structures that entrench them (Crook, 1998), the role of collective and individual rights (Colchester 2009; Mackey 2005), and the subsequent implementation of group differentiated rights (Bowen, 2000) that informs this research. Many claim that social justice is best realized through the negotiation of cultural difference (Asch 2001; Feit 2001; Povinelli 1998; Rose 1999; Taylor 1994; Tully 2000). Therefore, this study on indigenous political participation, definitions of self-determination, and changing notions of political inclusion, plays a particular role in identifying potential avenues for multicultural governance in other societies.

CASE STUDY: NEW CALEDONIA

An outpost for British and French missionaries, by 1853 the small island nation of New Caledonia was formally seized by France (Berman 2006). Congruent with colonial practices elsewhere; French policy subverted traditional notions of indigenous Kanak life and established a Western European model. The French colonial geopolitical program in New Caledonia incorporated assimilation, economic control, and minoritization (Rumley 2006). The goal was to create an economically and politically powerful French settler majority that would undermine

and control indigenous populations. However, a rising wave of pro-independence rhetoric and anti-colonial violence culminated in the 1988 Matignon Accords (Berman 2006). Ultimately, the agreement was simultaneously an attempt by France to maintain control over its territory and gain indigenous complacency through modest devolution.

Nearly a decade later the governing elite of New Caledonia and France would again agree to postpone the decision on independence. The 1998 Noumea Accords delegated greater autonomy to the New Caledonian government and set a 2018 deadline for a referendum on independence (Berman 2006). Like the Matignon Accords, the concessions in the Noumea Accords were designed to placate the Melanesian population and decrease inequalities. However, elite control over the nickel economy, international fluctuations in prices, overall dependence on this singular resource, and French aid has done little to alleviate poverty and foreign dependence.

The political future of New Caledonia cannot be disentwined from its economic situation. Nickel mining is the single most important export in New Caledonia's economy and accounts for 93% of their exports. French control over the nickel industry and increasing demands by pro-independence Kanaks for control over this resource make it a critical part of the independence debate. A geoeconomic understanding of New Caledonia's economy can be used to evaluate the role of French aid and nickel mining in the construction of various political claims. Internal colonization, for example, describes how supranational relationships and unequal control over the market result in the reinterpretation of social networks. Specifically, internal colonialism is the institutional devaluation of sub-national populations resulting in collective inequalities: a form of "system[atic] inequality" (Penderhughes 2011, 236). This leads to uneven development, inequality, and the formation of regional identities (Agnew 2001). Combined with the devolution of power, these variables often produce regional movements predicated on decolonization,

democratization, supranationalism, or widespread identity crises (Agnew 2001). French assimilatory practices, economic control, minoritization, and colonial governance exemplify internal colonialism. France has long fostered an assisted economic program in New Caledonia comprised of large amounts of aid donated to various development programs with little supporting infrastructure (Horowitz 2004; Rumley 2006; Chappell 1999; McClellan 1999). The systematic inequalities created under colonial rule have not been adequately mediated (if not outright perpetuated) in contemporary institutions and governance. The Matignon and Noumea Accords are prime examples of French attempts to perpetuate internal colonialism and retain control over sub-national populations and resources.

Despite the advancements made towards decentralization and independence via the Accords, a highly controlled dependent relationship between New Caledonia and France remains. Land redistribution under both agreements merely created a rural Melanesian poor (Connell 2003) and resulted in greater migration to the capital. Recognizing the importance of economic independence, pro-independence leaders have promoted domestic business creation and greater local control over the mining industry (Horowitz 2004). However, financial assistance and technical dependence on France has fostered unwillingness among individuals to form businesses without direct government support (Horowitz 2004). This dichotomy is similarly present in debates over mining and associated land rights. At a local scale, conflict over mines revolved around local inhabitants' desire for power over decision-making and recognition of land rights (Horowitz 2002). Local leaders' concern with self-determination of land rights stems from increasing integration into the global market and a perceived loss of traditional authority; mirroring the independence situation at the national level (Horowitz 2002).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Politicians, academics, and the media present competing visions of the effects of independence. These narratives are framed by national and ethnic identities, economic dependence and competition, and varying definitions of self-determination. Using a critical geopolitical framework that calls for the inclusion of formal (academics), practical (politicians), and popular (media) perspectives, I conducted interviews and collected articles and statements from leading congressmen, academics, and policy experts. Articles referencing the independence debate were collected from the most widely disseminated news sources in the country. A discourse analysis of this data examined how both sides of the independence debate have been framed and the role of these narratives in shaping New Caledonia's options for the future. Ancillary questions about the role of migration and customary culture, education among indigenous youth, and the electorate dispute were also discussed. The last stage of this project is analyzing the extent to which these discursive formations (or support systems) and the knowledges they produce limit the options for the resolution of the independence debate and effective multicultural governance. The referendums offer an opportunity for this nation to reimagine both its external and internal relationships.

Discourse analysis is a highly effective method for elucidating hidden or underlying frames expressed through the narratives found in textual sources. From a critical geopolitical perspective, discourse mobilizes particular understandings of the world that are used to justify certain policies and shape meaning (Dodds 2005; Muller 2008). Discourses, unlike narratives, are not associated with any one particular author (Foucault 1972). They are part of larger networks or "discursive formations" that form "bodies of knowledge" that are context-driven and

can be articulated through a variety of mediums (Tyner 2004, 13; Foucault 1972). Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis are concerned with identifying how and why particular discourses become dominant and others peripheral (Mills 2002). Through news media in particular, individuals (primarily elite decision-makers) will present geopolitical representations designed to influence public perception (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992) or gain and maintain power, particularly over space (Ackleson 2005; Browning and Joenniemi 2004; Hollander 2005; O´Tuathail 2006). Discourse analysis, then, examines the way in which language is used to accomplish various political projects (Tyner 2004). This method will be used to identify particular discourses, found in articles, papers, media, and interviews that support and shape the independence debate.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Among politicians and experts, self-determination was either presented as a right or an institutional imperative. Loyalists define self-determination institutionally, in terms of the referendums and the right to choose or vote in them. Therefore, the debate over independence, association, or integration has become somewhat of a cost-benefit analysis. Showing some continuity, nationalists define self-determination as a right: a right that is granted to them through international law, the decolonization following WWII, and as part of France's reparations from a tragic colonial history. However, when they speak of self-determination as a right, it is more than the right to choose their future vis-à-vis the referendums. It is the right to control every aspect of governance, the economy, public administration, foreign relations, etc. There is a sense of being owed these things as a form of social justice. This is characteristic of a significant difference between loyalist and pro-independence discourses. Nationalists talk about reparations and victimization, while these terms are ignored or glossed over by loyalists. I

believe this is a consequence of inadequate reconciliation. Nationalists are still seeking it in some form or another, but loyalists either feel that the past is best forgotten or that adequate reconciliation has already occurred. For academics and policy experts, self-determination is alternately defined as a right, critical to the fulfillment of the Noumea Accord, or in terms of electoral policy. Regardless, all of these definitions are institutionally framed. Even the right to self-determination is explained in terms of international agreements and the requirements of the United Nations.

While citizenship is primarily defined in the context of the electoral body sub-groupings, there are pressing questions about more recent migrants to the country. The integration of these institutional and in some cases ethnically aligned populations is not the only challenge facing New Caledonia. Significant differences exist in the construction and definition of the present and future national identity. The term common destiny is often used in the media when referring to the collective future of the country and its people. It is a buzzword whose meaning is both reflexive and ill defined. Some claim that the idea of a common destiny is an artificial construct and others describe it as working together to create a common community or common framework. For academics and experts, common destiny is described as a Commutarian ideal, legal pluralism, intercultural dialogue, the social intersection of different population groups, or an artificial ideal (Poingoune and Merle 2013; Mokaddem 2014). The common framework incorporates aspects of both French and Oceanian cultures. While members of loyalist and pro-independence parties do not always agree on a definition of common destiny, many promote an integrated framework for future New Caledonian governance and justice systems. Even experts argue that there is a need for a clarification of a new New Caledonian justice system that manages to smoothly incorporate French and customary models (Poingoune and Merle 2013).

In articles and presentations given by policy experts, New Caledonian communities are repeatedly relegated to three distinct groups with little recognition given to how these groups are defined or outliers incorporated. The three groups include: Metropolitan French or New Caledonian, Customary Kanak, and others (populations that are often lumped together as Pacific Islanders or Wallisian and Futunans). These groups are referred to as communities, not ethnicities. In fact the term ethnicity is actively removed from the institutional lexicon (Mokaddem 2014). Kanak identity, even among scholars, remains a nebulous concept. It is alternately defined as those who suffered under colonization (Mokaddem 2014), those under customary jurisdiction (Merle 2013), and multilayered definitions – politically French citizens, legally subject to customary law, and culturally Oceanian (Lafargue 2012). One loyalist said a future national identity would consist of a double identity, with a public New Caledonian identity and a private Kanak identity for those who choose it. This is vastly different from some nationalists' claims that the Kanak identity should be applied to all citizens of the country. Almost a form of reverse assimilation, a broad application of Kanak identity involves everything from cohesive incorporation of customary culture into institutional frameworks to naming the country Kanaky.

Both loyalists and nationalists agree that New Caledonian and Kanak identities are being influenced by global culture. For both this is viewed as an unavoidable phenomenon and is intimately tied to questions of inequality and standard of living. For nationalists equality is tied to the concept of rebalancing, victimization, and the influence of individualism and personal property introduced during colonization and reinforced through global culture. As more people begin to move out of the tribes, work for their own income, and become global consumers, they lose their sense of collective responsibility.

One of the other primary variables in the independence debate is economic dependence on France. Reducing reliance on French aid is promoted across the political spectrum. Both sides agree that tax reform and reducing the number and wages for public servants is a significant part of the solution. The primary difference between the two factions is their view of France's economic role in New Caledonia. Loyalists view France as a protector; independence is equivalent to opening the doors for exploitation by China, Australia, Canada, or the United States. Instead, they advocate for the continuation of French protection while simultaneously developing the domestic export market, educating an intelligentsia (entrepreneur and expert) class, and promoting competition. Nationalists view continued French involvement as directly hindering diversification and competition. While not opposed to maintaining an economic relationship with France, they want to do so as an equal partner: state-to-state. Independence would mean the freedom to explore new regional economic networks.

With various domestic minorities and overseas populations, France provides an interesting case study for examining the successes and failures of multicultural governance. Since the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), indigenous groups have been increasingly concerned with implementing self-determination at a local and international scale. France's colonial history, changing notions of inclusion, and current struggle with sub-national populations underscore the importance of this research in the evolving territory of New Caledonia. The independence debate in New Caledonia offers a unique view into the process of and negotiations in political development and sub-national rights.

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