Investigating the Social Beliefs that Attach to Indigenous Mining in New Caledonia

Peter Clutterbuck
University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
p.clutterbuck@business.uq.edu.au

Abstract: Nickel mining commenced in New Caledonia in 1868 and continues to be the major business activity of that region. Traditionally the mining sector has polarized New Caledonian society via a complex mix of economic, cultural and environmental issues. In 1999 the New Caledonian and French governments initiated a future-focused program of "rééquilibrage" or rebalancing of opportunities for the New Caledonian indigenous Kanak people. "*Rééquilibrage*" aims to create a new identity for all New Caledonians – an identity that builds upon the multicultural mix of modern New Caledonia. A critical component of this rebalancing is the commencement of a major new world-class nickel mining venture at Koniambo (in the Kanak Northern Province) in 2014 and this venture is majority Kanak owned and operated. The literature confirms that no published review of how New Caledonians view this venture has been completed since its opening. Such a review is important because New Caledonians must vote on 4/11/2018 on the issue of independence from France. Discourses are ways of representing the world – the processes, relations and structures of the social world, that is, the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of people. This research centres upon the contemporary social beliefs, i.e. the social discourses that circulate in relation to the Koniambo project. The investigation of these discourses must ensure that all stake-holder voices are represented accurately, that the investigation is not simply a one-dimensional "cost/benefit analysis", and that the amplitude of the voice does not dictate its relative importance within the overall discourse ensemble. This research fits within sociology, and within this domain, the research uses the following empirical investigative approaches: actor-network theory, historiography and critical discourse analysis (for core data analysis). Actor-network theory facilitates the identification of stakeholder relationships within New Caledonian society, regardless of how subtle or transient the relationships may be. In this sense, actor-network theory produces a maximised intersection of the Koniambo project across New Caledonian social life. Historiography provides the vital context that describes the social structures and social practices in which social beliefs are formed and constantly evolve. It is not possible to fully describe these beliefs unless we have a comprehensive, longitudinal appreciation of this overall context. Finally, critical discourse analysis is utilised to unpack fully the beliefs that are identified. Discourse analysis utilises the results from the historiography and actor-network theory research components to unpack the expressed opinions and beliefs and even policies that link stakeholder entities. In this manner the project results will be most representative of the current discourses concerning a flagship project of "*rééquilibrage*".

Keywords: New Caledonia, nickel mining, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

New Caledonia (1200 kilometres east of Australia) is a *special collectivity* of France that was granted special status as a result of the Nouméa Accord in 1998. The Nouméa Accord provides for a New Caledonian citizenship (with existing French citizenship), a gradual transfer of power to New Caledonia itself over the subsequent 15 to 20 year period (France continues to control military issues, foreign policy, immigration, police, and currency matters, and finally a referendum on the issue of full independence from France to be held by the end of 2018. The population of 268, 767 comprises approximately 40% Kanak (the indigenous population), 28% European descendants and 32% Polynesian and Asian migrant inhabitants (ISEE, 2014). New Caledonia has three provinces: Northern Province (mostly Kanak of 60,000), Southern Province (the European and business hub centring on the capital Nouméa with 180,000 inhabitants) and Loyalty Islands (small Kanak tribal population of 30,000). The GDP of New Caledonia in 2014 was 9 billion US dollars, the fourth largest economy in Oceania after Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. GDP per capita was $ 36,376 in 2014, lower than that of Australia and Hawaii but higher than that of New Zealand (ISEE, 2014). However, New Caledonia is a highly assisted economy in that France's financial transfers into the country are its highest revenue stream (surpassing mining revenues) and the gap between imports and exports is growing every year.

In 1853 New Caledonia was proclaimed a French colony because firstly, France required a Pacific presence to accord with its 19th century geopolitical strategy, and secondly France needed a new penal colony. From the 1860s until the end of transportations in 1897 approximately 22,000 criminals and political prisoners were sent to the colony. In 1864 nickel was discovered in the colony and mining began, however the Kanak were excluded from all aspects of the French economy in the colony. The first Kanak uprising in 1878 cost many

French and Kanak lives (Stanley, 1989). Economic and social deprivation for the Kanak was institutionalized in 1887 with the *Code de l'Indigenat*. This Code introduced state (not tribal) control within native reserve areas, forbade Kanak entry into the capital city of Nouméa, and facilitated nearly 90 percent of land in the colony to be transferred to colonists and the administration (Bensa et al, 1998). The *Code de l'Indigenat* was abolished in 1946 when France dropped the term "colony" and granted citizenship to the Kanak as part of a United Nations sponsored global decolonization plan. However, unlike in many African and Indochina French colonies, this did not lead to independence.

The term "*Kanak*" emerged in the independence protests of the 1970s and was significantly defined by the leader of the independence movement, Jean-Marie Tjibaou (Fisher, 2014; Chappell, 2013). However, use of the term "*Kanak*" in a fully collective, unitary state sense implies a solid national framework and a common interest that overrides the diversity of chiefdoms, clans, territories and languages that make up the current reality (Bensa et al, 1998). Between 1976 and 1988, there occurred periods of serious violence (IEOM, 2010) between the Kanak separatists and the French authorities, culminating in April/May 1988 with significant loss of life on the tiny island of Ouvéa. Subsequently, the June 1988 Matignon Agreement introduced a decade of stability and dialogue leading to the signing of the Nouméa Accord on the 5th May 1998.

As part of the Nouméa Accord, in 1999 the New Caledonian and French governments initiated a future-focused program of "*rééquilibrage*" or rebalancing of economic and social opportunities for the Kanak. "*Rééquilibrage*" is a very ambitious program which aims to create a new identity of multiculturalism and inclusivity for all New Caledonians. A critical component is the commencement of a major new world-class nickel mining venture (a 7 billion US dollar investment) at Koniambo (in the Northern Province) in 2014 and this venture is majority Kanak owned (51%) and operated. The literature confirms that no published review of the societal impact of this venture has been completed since its opening. Such a review is even more important when it is noted that New Caledonians will vote by the end of 2018 in a referendum on the issue of independence from France. New Caledonia may now be considered as an *imagined political community* (Lassila, 2016), one visualized by those who may never meet each other but who are totally committed to the idea (Anderson, 1991). An important question for all stakeholders (internal and external) in New Caledonia is what influence Koniambo contributes to "*rééquilibrage*" and a multicultural, inclusive society for all citizens. This is the principal research goal for this paper: "What views and even ideologies shape the public discourse on Koniambo?" The principal research methodology used will be critical discourse analysis (CDA).

This paper will unfold in the following structure. Following this introduction, the paper will present a comprehensive discussion of the research methodological framework deployed within the research. Following that methodology, a context (of the New Caledonian mining sector) will be presented. The critical discourse analysis researcher must fully appreciate the context in which discourses are produced and then analysed (van Dijk, 1998). Finally, the paper will conclude with a very brief coverage of a small sample of the discourses that have been identified and analysed to date.

2. Research Methodology

This research fits within sociology, and within this domain, the research uses the following investigative approaches: *actor-network the*ory (to scope the research project, to identify relationships and entities), *historiography* (to establish the overall context that frames the social structures and social practices in which the discourses evolve), and finally *critical discourse analysis* (used to unpack the full meaning of the discourse, which "voices" are heard, which "voices" are suppressed). Actor-network theory facilitates the identification and selection of a specific entities (and networks/relationships of entities) regardless of the relative profile of the entity or the transience of their presence within the overall network. This allows for the identified entities and networks to represent a maximised intersection across New Caledonian life. The actor-network theory therefore is the basis for identifying the primary data sources (policy statements, press releases, and interviews) that form the basis of the texts used in the discourse analysis component of this research. *Historiography* is used to most accurately describe the context (social structures and social practices) in which the identified groups and relationships have forged their opinions, their ideologies - their discourses. Therefore historiography provides the secondary data sources within this research project. Historiography provides the social structure outline and social practice detail on a sufficiently longitudinal basis to ensure that discourses may then be unpacked and described most accurately. These social structure and social practice descriptions are essentially the detailed history of colonisation in New Caledonia, including an analysis of the mining sector

in terms of its operation and social impact within New Caledonia society. Finally, *critical discourse analysis* facilitates the operational data analysis of the primary data sources, that is, of the expressed views, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of people that link to this mining sector and Koniambo in particular. In this manner the project results will be most representative of the current social perceptions of the Koniambo project. This framework is represented in Figure 1 below.
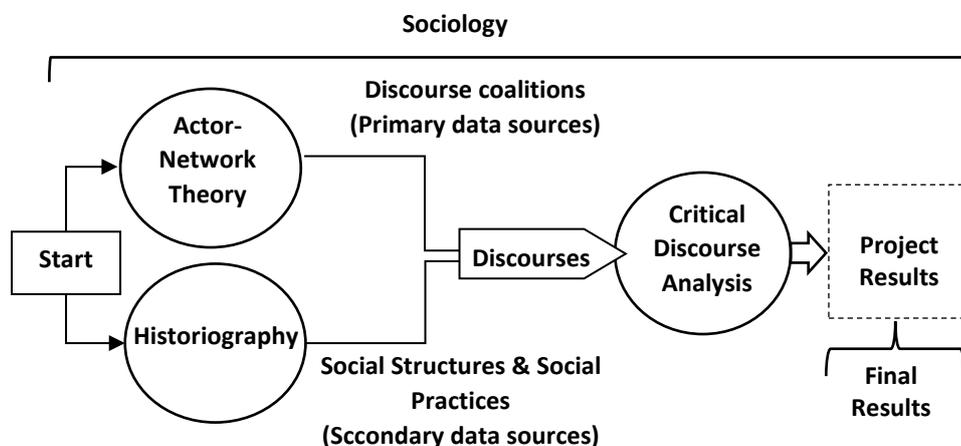

Figure 1: Overview of research methodology

2.1 Actor-network theory

As outlined earlier, this research is predicated upon the successful identification of the differing discourses (to the Koniambo project) that emanate from the overall set of all supporters, critics and outright opponents of that project. This then requires the comprehensive identification of all *voices* in that set. This research uses actor-network theory to identify this set of *voices*, and most importantly, to facilitate an understanding of the social relations operating between/among this set of *voices*.

Actor-network theory treats social relations, including power and organization, as network *effects*. The theory posits that networks are materially heterogeneous and that actors/agents, texts, devices and artifacts are all generated in, form part of, and are essential to, the networks of the social. All constituent components should be analyzed in the same terms and in full measure, to characterize the ways in which materials join together to produce institutional and organizational patterns in social dynamics (Law, 1999). At the heart of actor-network theory is the concept of the *heterogeneous network*. This concept is that the social is "nothing other than patterned network of heterogeneous materials … people, machines, animals, texts, money, architectures". (Law, 1999).

Operationalizing actor-network theory requires that a researcher must explore how actors and organizations *order* or *translate* within a network. *Translation* specifically describes how actors and organizations "*mobilize, juxtapose, and hold together the bits and pieces out of which they are composed; how they are sometimes able to prevent those bits and pieces from following their own inclinations and making off*" (Law, 1999). Operationalizing actor-network theory also requires actor-network research *explore* multiple forms of communications within a system, with a strongly longitudinal focus such as favored by the Annales School of History with its insistence on the "*longue duree*" (Braudel, 1975). The *Annales* School is a group of historians associated with a style of historiography developed by French historians in the 20th century to stress long-term social history. Fernand Braudel was the dominant leader of the Annales School in the 1950s and 1960s and has been considered one of the greatest of the modern historians who have emphasized the role of large-scale socioeconomic factors in the making and writing of history. Actor-network *exploration* in this research is via *critical discourse analysis* which firstly requires the construction of a detailed discourse *context* via *historiography*.

Actor-network theory, as it is deployed in this research, draws heavily from the very important heuristics outlined by Leah Horowitz (2012, 807) – that is, the identification of (actor-network) strategic alliances. Strategic alliances are essential to goal attainment, particularly where the goal-seeker(s) does not have a significant power base. Individuals and groups often choose to pursue common aims, thus maximizing possibly

scant resources. This then produces "*discourse coalitions*" or shared beliefs on a particular issue, even in situations where the coalition members are from different socio-cultural, economic and political groupings. It is also possible that strategic alliances quickly evolve to reflect "power differentials" and "partnership dissonance" that cause some coalition members/groups to be excluded completely or marginalized within the coalition – either transiently or permanently. Actor-network theory provides useful concepts within this research to analyse relationships among the voices expressed (i.e. the discourse coalitions) in relation to Koniambo.

To summarize, Actor-network theory provides the 'tool-box' for the identification of all relationships within the Koniambo superset, and subsequently it is these relationships that produce the primary data sources which in turn contain the discourses for analysis, that is for an appreciation of the full set of social dynamics concerning Koniambo (see Figure 1).

2.2 Historiography

Historiography is defined as "the study of the way history has been and is written — the history of historical writing... When you study 'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians." (Furay et al, 1988). Stone (1979) states: "More and more of the 'new historians' are now trying to discover what was going on inside people's heads in the past, and what it was like to live in the past, questions which inevitably lead back to the narrative." Consequently, in recent decades the traditional diplomatic, economic and political lens used by historians is being replaced by a social and cultural analysis. *Historiography* is used in this research project to describe the *context* in which discourses are produced, circulated and evolved. Historiography in this research focuses mainly on the secondary data sources that describe all relevant events, that is the relevant context. Context is defined as the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse (Duranti et al, 1992; van Dijk, 1998) – that is, context describes the social structures and social practices in which discourses are expressed. Context must be fully understood for successful *critical discourse analysis* (van Dijk 1998).

To summarize, the discourse coalitions of actor-network theory, combined with the understanding of social structures and social practices – the relevant data sources (both primary and secondary) contain discourses. It is these discourses that are then unpacked and fully understood in our final research stage (see Figure 1).

2.3 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

The research methodology used in this thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This methodology builds fundamentally on the social science research methodology of discourse analysis. Consequently, this section will firstly discuss discourse analysis, and then outline how certain social science theorists, including Norman Fairclough, have extended discourse analysis and created critical discourse analysis (CDA). This section will conclude by providing a summarized description of Fairclough's CDA approach (2003).

Discourse analysis is a social science research methodology that draws on a number of academic traditions (Mills 1997, Howarth 2000). Within discourse analysis, the work of Michel Foucault is fundamental because he is considered most concerned with analysing the power relations and the context of social relations associated with discourses (Gare 1995). In his works *The Order of Things* (1970) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault considered discourses, not simply as texts, but as "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49) and "historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects" (Foucault 1972, 49). Very late in his life in 1984, Foucault commented on this own use of the word "discourse" when he wrote:

> *"I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements."*

Discourse analysis for Foucault is the analysis of the domain of 'statements' – that is, of texts, and of utterances as constituent elements of texts. However, that does not mean a concern with detailed analysis of texts – the concern is more a matter of discerning the rules that 'govern' bodies of texts and utterances. This assessment of Foucault's discourse definition and research approach are discussed in the analyses of Chris

Weedon (1987) and Gary Kendall and Gary Wickham (1999), and are concisely stated by Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace (1993, 26) as:

> *"Foucault thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language (in the sense of linguistics system or grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline. … Fundamentally, then Foucault's idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)"*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) fundamentally builds upon the work of Foucault by applying his rich set of theoretical hypotheses not only to social theory but also to language analysis (Fairclough 1992, 56; Hastings 1998, 195). During the past several years, CDA has attracted considerable attention within social science research, usually as an approach to language which is concerned with the critique of relations of power and ideology in society at large (O'Regan and Betzel, 2016, 282). Fairclough (2003, 124) summarizes the strong link between discourse and text as follows:

> *"I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world … In any text we are likely to find many different representations of aspects of the world … The relationships between different discourses are one element of the relationships between different people – they may complement one another, compete with one another, one can dominate others, and so forth."*

The Fairclough CDA textual approach (Fairclough 2003, 191 – 194), can be described as the "close study of language in use" (Taylor, 2001). CDA is concerned with studying meaning, and it studies meaning where it occurs, that is, in language and in text. Consequently, the inter-relationships of *language*, *discourse*, *text* and *discourse analysis* must be understood.

Language can be regarded as a set of signs, which are part of the system for generating subjects, objects, and worlds (Shapiro, 1984; Silverstein, 2004). *Language* is social, a series of collective codes and conventions through which things (objects, subjects, material realities) are given meaning and endowed with particular identities. Language is not just a simple system of concepts referring to things and phenomena directly, but rather it is a social system that follows its own logic and this logic constitutes peoples' reality. We say that *language* does not *explain* the world as much as language *produces* the world.

The concept of *discourse* captures how this production happens. The term *discourse* is used in a broad number of ways in the social sciences. *Discourse* "*means anything from a historical monument, a lieu de mémoire, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se*" (Wodak et al, 2009). *Discourse* is "*language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice'…discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of relationships between people and groups of people…discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people*"(Fairclough et al, 1997). Societies construct and attach meaning to the surrounding material world - this is the construction of discourses. A discourse is a system of producing a set of statements and practices that, by entering into institutions and appearing like normal, constructs the reality of its subjects and maintains a degree of regularity in a set of social relations. Discourses are both structured and relational. They are structured in the sense that they produce a field of intelligibility within the social realm. They are relational in the sense that this structure has no fixity, centre, or permanence. Discourses are open-ended and incomplete – that is, emergent. A discourse is always shifting, a given discourse is always arbitrary and contingent. There is always space for contestation, which provides further analytical opportunities for researchers. *Discourses* are systems of meaning-production that enable all of us to make sense of the world.

Text may be understood as anything that carries the discourse (e.g., images, performances). *CDA* uses text as a vehicle for understanding social, political and cultural phenomena. It is important to note that text itself is not the object of study. Discourse analysts tend to interrogate the ways in which specific systems of meaning-

production (often called *representations*) have been generated, circulated, internalized, and/or resisted. These *representations* can be put forward repeatedly and become a set of statements and practices through which language becomes institutionalized and "normalized" over time. CDA involves showing the affinities and differences between representations in order to demonstrate whether they belong to the same discourse. In overview, CDA follows a simple structure: (1) identify the discourse, (2) delimit the discourse to a wide but manageable range of sources and timeframes, (3) identify the representations that comprise the discourse, and finally (4) explore change, uncover layering and reveal the most complete meaning within the discourse. *Critical discourse analysis* is predominantly qualitative NOT quantitative and significantly traces back to Michel Foucault who understood discourses as constituting the objects of which people speak. Indeed Foucault (1972) asserted that it is important that scholars analyze discourses by "no longer treating discourses as a group of signs but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". Consequently CDA scholars often reject the notion that knowledge is separate from the social realm and rather see knowledge as constitutive of reality.

Within this research project, the critical discourse analysis is conducted as described in the CDA Framework (Fairclough, 2003). The CDA Framework considers that all texts are written from a specific viewpoint and comprise two main discourse structures: *internal relations* and *external relations*.

- *Internal relations* are how the vocabulary and grammar are used in a text. This structure is further expanded into "three types of meaning" (Fairclough, 2003): the categories of *action*, *representation* and *identification*. *Action* describes the text format, such as interrogative, declarative, persuasive or implicative. *Representation* involves the descriptions of people, places and actions. *Identification* relates to the representations used by the text authors to get the overall picture of the intent of the text. The interplay of *action*, *representation* and *identification* "brings a social perspective into the heart and fine detail of the text (Fairclough, 2003).
- *External relations* comprise the social effects and personal beliefs of the text authors. This is at the heart of CDA because "we can unlock the ideologies and recover the social meanings expressed in discourse" (Teo, 2000). Fairclough subsets the external relations into three categories: *social events*, *social practices* and *social structures*. *Social events* comprise actions that have been taken and are a function of social factors (the social events analyzed in this research are corporate announcements from Koniambo and group articles). *Social practices* are actions taken in social situations (examples are critical essays, historical reflections, community discussions). *Social structures* are described a "very abstract entities" (Fairclough, 2003) and can be understood to be the overall edifices in which the social practices take place (e.g., democratic political systems, tribal hierarchies, religious organizations).

3.   Discourse Context - Mining in New Caledonia

The nickel mining sector in New Caledonia has been a defining economic, environmental, cultural and political issue in the country since French colonisation first occurred in 1853 and significantly touches all aspects of New Caledonian daily life (Le Meur, 2015a). Nickel is first discovered in New Caledonia in 1864. Nickel today is very heavily in demand in the manufacture of stainless steels, and is also used in many sectors of the economy such as home appliances, automobiles, building and aeronautics. Nickel demand will inevitably increase with emerging technologies also requiring the mineral, for example electric cars are recharged using nickel-cadmium batteries. The metal is also used in certain coins, e.g., in the one and two Euro coins). In the mid to late eighteenth century, the fledgling New Caledonian mining industry needs a workforce but the French colonists are too few in number. The Kanaks are excluded from mining and also deplore the exploitation of the land which is culturally considered to be one of the abodes of the ancestors. In 1891 convicts from the prison camps are used to expand mining activities. From 1878 onwards, thousands of workers from Asia, Europe and Polynesia arrive on a contract basis in New Caledonia and in 1923 the colony numbers approximately 14535 Asian workers (three quarters of miners). This practice ends in 1946 but the influx will ultimately make the Kanak a minority in their own land. More settlers arrive and commence mining and some, for example John Higginson (1839-1905), Louis Ballande (1817-1882), Lucien Bernheim (1856-1917) and Henri Lafleur (1902-1974) will spectacularly succeed, creating immense personal wealth and powerful New Caledonian (*caldoche*) family dynasties with profound political implications for the territory.

From the start of the twentieth century, mining in New Caledonia experiences several major phases (Pelletier, 1990):

> Until the 1920's, nickel mining is totally manual. The 1950s are marked by the mechanization of mining operations, the creation of an export stream, and the commencement of profound environmental damage.
>
> Between 1963 and 1972, New Caledonia has exceptional prosperity due to the explosion of nickel demand triggered by the Vietnam War. The nickel boom also creates a second huge inflow of new arrivals with approximately 35,000 immigrants, mostly metropolitan French, joining the colony. The Kanak still do not benefit from the boom because of cultural obstacles and a lack of trade training. In 1972 nickel prices collapse and major environmental damage in New Caledonia becomes evident. The recession continues into the late 90s.
>
> The market is normalized in 1999. The period after 2000 has seen an upsurge in nickel processing capacity with the establishment of two new plants, Goro in the Southern Province and Koniambo in the Northern Province. Goro is a Brazilian corporate investment (Vale, 2012) and provides very little direct local employment (2004/2006 some 4000 Filipino technicians arrive in the colony). Koniambo, however, has majority Kanak ownership (51%) and provides considerable Kanak employment and trade-training. Koniambo is a high-quality nickel deposit that will facilitate a long-term, low-cost operation (Risenborough, 2013).

Today, New Caledonia ranks fourth among the world's nickel producers and has approximately 15% of the world's nickel reserves and its economy remains heavily dependent upon nickel production.

The social structures and social practices at the heart of the nickel mining history of New Caledonia show clearly that the industry has historically produced clear winners and very many socio-economic victims. These social structures and social practices must be centrally considered when we unpack and attempt to fully appreciate the discourses of Koniambo as expressed from the viewpoint of all stakeholder relationships.

4. Discourses Identified and Analysed – a Small Sample

This research has identified and analyzed several discourses that relate to the "*rééquilibrage*" project of Koniambo. All identified discourses have evolved within a certain social structure, and within certain social practices – and this context a texturing parameter in the highly summarized discussions below. The following small sample comprises: *autochtonie*, *économie assistée* and *propriété foncière*.

Autochtonie: The French word "*autochtonie*" means the identity of an indigenous person, that is, identity in the sense of "*self*" or "*identity*". "*Autochtonie*" was initially a United Nations discourse in which indigenous populations were recognized as "*champions*" of biodiversity (Blaser et al, 2004). In New Caledonia, the principal Kanak political group FLNKS (*Front de Liberation Nationale et Socialiste*) used *autochtonie* to primarily publicize the Kanak struggle to the world. However, with the Noumea agreement (1998), the Kanak population was formally recognized and nickel became the new centre to the FLNKS's political strategy – culminating in the Koniambo mine. However a new Kanak group (*le Comité autochtone de gestion des resources naturelles* (CAUGERN) is challenging the FLNKS logic (and therefore Koniambo). CAUGERN asserts that there is no guarantee that Kanak mining ownership will be maintained because nickel has long benefited both France and the foreign multinationals and this situation is very unlikely to change. CAUGERN also draws upon the long-term suspicion of nickel mining and its negative impact on the natural world which is so central in the Kanak value system. As an alternative, CAUGERN wants a direct taxation on all mining revenues. This tax revenue would be payable to the Kanaks alone and would not form any part of general revenues for the country. CAUGERN declares that this is not simply a claim for revenue. It is a political strategy, on the grounds of *autochtonie*, to re-value and reconstruct Kanak identity even in a context where they are not sovereign (Harper, 2008). Autochtonie is a catch-cry for a strategy that is designed to leverage the Kanak position of "first people", and guarantee to them a share of New Caledonia's mineral wealth regardless of who is running the country or who owns the mines.

Économie Assistée: In English, this terms means a supported economy and it is this discourse that profoundly shapes modern public opinion in New Caledonia (across all ethnic groups). The discourse,

"*économie assistée*", is very prominent in many of the public texts analysed in this research project and reflects widespread socio-economic and cultural beliefs in New Caledonia. The term "*économie assistée*" traces back to a seminal work titled "*Économie assistée et changement social en Nouvelle-Calédonie*" (Freyss, 1995). Le Meur (2015) states: "*This book became a mainspring of recent literature on the topic of mining in New Caledonia.*" Freyss used a socio-economic approach to analyse daily life in New Caledonia and also the process of social change within the Kanak community (both urban and provincial). Freyss maintained that this overall system of "*assisted economy*" is the result of a French political calculation that wanted to place New Caledonia in a state of dependency to end all calls for independence. The nickel boom of 69 – 72 created a massive need for labour, and the French government responded with a surge of immigration that caused the Kanaks to become a numerical minority in their own country. During the subsequent long recession period, the French government significantly increased public funding transfers into New Caledonia and these transfers also served as a substitute for growth and made the territory even more dependent on France. In his work, Freyss also claims that Kanak social values do not map well to western capitalism. Freyss asserts that the Kanak place a high priority (in both time and energy) into the maintenance of their complex networks of family and tribal relationships, and this focus runs contrary to a conventional western focus on work and business interests. Secondly, Freyss states that Kanak culture does not prioritise the individual accumulation of wealth – it is the "*customary norms of good living*" (tribal needs) which define the average social level of needs for the Kanak.

Propriété foncière: This French terms, in English, means land ownership. It continues to be a prominent discourse in New Caledonian society.

In New Caledonia indigenous value-systems, land ownership forms the basis of cultural identities and social positions. Land ownership does not mediate financial wealth and therefore it does not fit within a Western capitalist discourse. Land ownership to the Kanak does not mean monetary value, but rather "prestige", which is defined as the right to be respected by peers, and also the right to "symbolic capital" in terms of constructing family names that link to land or a place of dwelling. In Kanak societies, this prestige and symbolic capital are acquired as a result of being a member of a clan among the first to arrive in a place. This, in turn, confers a right to make any decision related to the use of the land, and the right to construct family names that link to the land. Consequently, the Kanak view of land ownership has clashed with the traditional French capitalist-shaped law of property (imposed in New Caledonia since colonization in the nineteenth century).

The significance of this long-term discourse is perhaps best illustrated by a social practice relating to the establishment of the Koniambo mine (Horowitz, 2003). In 1983, the inhabitants of Oundjo (Northern Province) had claim (under Kanak customary practice) to the Pinjen Peninsula (an area in the region of the Northern Province in which Koniambo is situated), which belonged at the time (under French property law) to a multinational agricultural company. Shortly after, in accordance with French law, the members of several clans in Oundjo formed a Group of Economic Interest (GIE), that is to say a juridical entity that can receive the title of property. (We must remember that the Kanak population is first divided into tribes, then into clans within these tribes). In 1989, this GIE received the title to Pinjen Peninsula. Subsequently, the traditional owners of the peninsula (six clans, four of whom are residents of Oundjo) transferred the rights of these lands to the GIE through a customary procedure. The traditional owners, however, continue to retain certain rights on this peninsula. For example, they continue to be the only ones able to name their children after the peninsula.

In 1999, the mining company Falconbridge (later replaced in the Koniambo project by Xstrata) sought and obtained permission from the traditional owners (not the GIE) to conduct a feasibility study for the construction of a plant in Pinjen. This is now the Koniambo complex with a billion dollar (US) capitalised value). Predictably the GIE protested and subsequently blocked access to the peninsula. In response, the customary landowners began to occupy the land so that the mining company could continue the study. Following these actions, the atmosphere deteriorated considerably within the overall tribe of Oundjo. As a result the customary landowners of Pinjen have lost much of their symbolic authority within their own indigenous communities.

5. Conclusion

This paper has described how a combination of social science research methodologies has been used to investigate the discourses (the beliefs) relating to a billion-dollar business entity at the centre of a complex societal reconfiguration (*rééquilibrage*) in New Caledonia. The paper has shown that social beliefs must be identified across all relevant strata of society and not just from within the prominent, obvious stakeholders. For this purpose, this research has deployed actor-network theory. The paper has also shown that social beliefs (discourses) develop – and continue to develop - over time and space. Therefore this research has used historiography to build a longitudinal, detailed description of the social structures and social practices that form the context for this ongoing belief/discourse development. In this manner, the researcher may better appreciate the subtle nuances of these beliefs, how the beliefs continue to be textured and changed, how different voices represented in the beliefs come to the foreground – or lapse into the background, and how the beliefs contribute to power relations and social cohesion.

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