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"Moral Rubbish in Close Proximity": Penal Colonization and Strategies of Distance in Australia and New Caledonia, c.1853–1897

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Abstract: In the second half of the nineteenth century, the two convict-built European settler colonial projects in Oceania, French New Caledonia and British Australia, were geographically close yet ideologically distant. Observers in the Australian colonies regularly characterized French colonization as backward, inhumane, and uncivilized, often pointing to the penal colony in New Caledonia as evidence. Conversely, French commentators, while acknowledging that Britain's transportation of convicts to Australia had inspired their own penal colonial designs in the South Pacific, insisted that theirs was a significantly different venture, built on modern, carefully preconceived methods. Thus, both sides engaged in an active practice of denying comparability; a practice that historians, in neglecting the interconnections that existed between Australia and New Caledonia, have effectively perpetuated. This article draws attention to some of the strategies of spatial and temporal distance deployed by the Australian colonies in relation to the *bagne* in New Caledonia and examines the nation-building ends that these strategies served. It outlines the basic context and contours of the policy of convict transportation for the British and the French and analyses discursive attempts to emphasize the distinctions between Australia and New Caledonia. Particular focus is placed on the moral panic in Australian newspapers about the alleged dangerous proximity of New Caledonia to the east coast of Australia. I argue that this moral panic arose at a time when Britain's colonies in Australia, in the process of being granted autonomy and not yet unified as a federated nation, sought recognition as reputable settlements of morally virtuous populations. The panic simultaneously emphasized the New Caledonian penal colony's geographical closeness to and ideological distance from Australia, thereby enabling Australia's own penal history to be safely quarantined in the past.

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INTRODUCTION: RE-CONNECTING THE HISTORIES OF NEW CALEDONIA AND AUSTRALIA

In the second half of the nineteenth century, France's colony in New Caledonia and Britain's colonies in Australia were geographically close yet rendered ideologically distant (Figure 1). Observers in the Australian colonies characterized French colonization as backward, inhumane, and uncivilized. The French, meanwhile, although recognizing some fundamental debt to the British in their own penal colonial project, insisted that theirs was a significantly different venture, built on modern, carefully considered methods. In effect, both sides actively denied the comparability of the two penal projects. Historians have perpetuated this culture of distancing and differentiation by neglecting the interconnections that existed between the British and French settler colonies built from convict labour. In this article, I draw attention to the significance of some of the strategies of distance employed in the Australian colonies in relation to the penal colony (*bagne*) in New Caledonia. Beginning with a discussion of the historiography, I outline the context and contours of convict transportation as penal policy for the British and the French in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then, I discuss the moral panic in the Australian colonies about the dangerous proximity of New Caledonia, as presented in Australian newspapers, which included arguments about the need to monitor and restrict the mobility of suspect populations. In the final section, I argue that these efforts to control physical mobility were accompanied by constant discursive attempts to emphasize the ideological distinctions between the British and French colonial possessions, which, at the same time as buttressing Australian colonial claims to self-government, also tied them more closely to the British world. In sum, this article contends that discussions of the New Caledonian *bagne*, at a time when the Australian colonies sought recognition as reputable settlements of morally upright populations, both emphasized the French penal colony's geographical closeness to Australia and its ideological distance. These strategies of distance acted as effective means by which the penal origins of British settlement in Australia might be safely quarantined in the past.

As penal and settler colonies, Australia and New Caledonia share remarkably similar and, indeed, closely interwoven histories, yet historians have neglected to examine their interconnections. Several decades ago, historians lamented the tendency to characterize coerced migration to Australia as "an aberration" and called for greater attention to be paid to the comparative experience of penal colonization in Australia, French Guiana, and New Caledonia.[1] These calls have remained largely unanswered. Recent scholarship examining New Caledonia directly through the lens of settler

1. Stephen Nicholas and Peter R. Shergold, "Transportation as Global Migration", in Stephen Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 28–42,

Figure 1. Map of Australia and New Caledonia.

colonialism omits its relationship to Australia.[2] Historians have explored France's early fascination with Britain's Australian experiment,[3] but little attempt has been made to study the strange synchronicity of France's incorporating convict transportation into its penal-colonial repertoire at the very moment that Britain, under the force of resistance by settlers in Australia

29. Lauren Benton critiques the tendency to represent Australia as exceptional in *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York, 2010), p. 165.
2. David Chappell, "Settler Colonialism in New Caledonia, 1853 to the Present", in Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 409–423.
3. Colin Forster, *France and Botany Bay: The Lure of a Penal Colony* (Melbourne, 1996); and *idem*, "French Penal Presence in New Caledonia", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 26:2 (1991), pp. 135–150.

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and the Cape Colony, was gradually abolishing it.[4] This arresting conjuncture, however, exposes some important dynamics of penal colonization and settler colonialism. Australia's panic about escaped French convicts and resultant diplomatic altercations are not unknown. The topic received scholarly attention at least as early as the 1950s.[5] More recently, fruitful analysis has set the phenomenon within the context of Australian nation-building agendas in the decades leading up to Federation in 1901, when Australia's six colonies were granted self-government as part of the Commonwealth of Australia.[6] These recent studies have situated the moral panic about French convicts as "part of a larger story of post-convict shame".[7] I have pointed out elsewhere that this contrasted with the explicit engagement with the problem of New Caledonian convicts and constituted an act of projection on the part of Australian colonists.[8] While interactions between Australia and New Caledonia on the issue of French convicts have been examined, the basis for and implications of denying foundational ideological similarities have been largely overlooked. Here, I extend these existing studies and introduce a more dialectical analysis, examining how arguments about controlling the mobility of French convicts fed into ideological narratives about the origins of British settlement in Australia, and presenting a wider argument about discursive and legislative strategies of distance and disassociation. Rather than analysing state-level diplomatic exchanges, the focus here is on how French convict transportation and penal colonization were presented to the newspaper-reading public in the Australian colonies.

4. Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820–1850* (Melbourne, 2004); Christopher Holdridge, "Liberty Unchained: Anti-Convict Lobbying, Popular Politics and Settler Self-Government in the Australian Colonies and Cape of Good Hope, 1846–1856" (Ph.D., University of Sydney, 2015); and Holdridge, "Putting the Global Back into the Colonial Politics of Anti-Transportation", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 14 (2012), pp. 272–279.

5. Clem Llewellyn Lack, "The Problem of the French Escapees from New Caledonia", *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, 5:3 (1954), pp. 1046–1065; Anny Stuer, *The French in Australia* (Canberra, 1982). See also Pierre-Henri Zaidman, "Les condamnés de Nouvelle-Calédonie en Australie et en Nouvelle-Zélande", *Criminocorpus, revue hypermédia. Histoire de la justice, des crimes et des peines*, 1 January 2010, available at: http://criminocorpus.revues.org/176; last accessed 10 March 2019; and Russell Brennan and Jonathan Richards, "'The Scum of French Criminals and Convicts': Australia and New Caledonia Escapees", *History Compass*, 12 (2014), pp. 559–566.

6. Alexis Bergantz, "French Connection: The Culture and Politics of Frenchness in Australia, 1890–1914" (Ph.D., Australian National University, 2015), ch. 2; Bergantz, "'The Scum of France': Australian Anxieties Towards French Convicts in the Nineteenth Century", *Australian Historical Studies* 49:2 (2018), pp. 150–166; Jill Donohoo, "Australian Reactions to the French Penal Colony in New Caledonia", *Explorations*, 54 (2013), pp. 25–45.

7. Donohoo, "Australian Reactions", p. 29.

8. Briony Neilson, "Settling Scores in New Caledonia and Australia: French Convictism and Settler Legitimacy", *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 64:3 (2018), pp. 391–406.

Research into imperial history continues to expand,[9] sensitivity to cross-imperial exchange and mobility deepens,[10] but historians have yet to explore connections and relations that existed (or, indeed, were denied) between colonies controlled by different foreign powers.[11] Recent work highlights "imperial careering" in the construction of the British Empire, but work remains to be done on how one colonial power's imperial knowledge was taken up by another.[12] Research spearheaded by Clare Anderson, in particular, has expanded understandings of the global patterns of convict transportation, but the specifics of how one state explicitly invoked the practice of another remain considerably understudied.[13] Isabelle Merle's perceptive observation that "the geographical distance that separates Sydney from New Caledonia is historically very great"[14] inadvertently reinforces nineteenth-century observers' arguments of incommensurability, masking broad ideological continuities between European settler colonies built from convict labour. Assertions of exceptionalism are, of course, a standard posture in imperial regimes' official discourses.[15] Two central contributions of this article to the existing historiography are, firstly, its analysis of the Australian colonies' active denial of equivalence with New Caledonia, which served strategic political ends, and, secondly, its contextualization of these questions within the frame of international criminal justice reform and imperial expansion agendas in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Between 1787 and 1868, over 167,000 male and female convicts, many of them young, were transported from the British Isles to Australia.[16] From 1864 to 1897, France sent more than 23,000 prisoners to New Caledonia

9. Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire", *History Compass*, 4 (2006), pp. 124–141; Tony Ballantyne, "The Changing Shape of the Modern British Empire and Its Historiography", *The Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), pp. 429–452.

10. Tony Ballantyne, "Mobility, Empire, Colonisation", *History Australia*, 11:2 (2014), pp. 7–37.

11. See, for instance, Angela Woollacott, *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies: Self-Government and Imperial Culture* (Oxford, 2015), ch. 7.

12. David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2006).

13. Clare Anderson and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Convict Labour and the Western Empires", in Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (eds), *The Routledge History of Western Empires* (London, 2014), pp. 102–117, 102; Christian G. de Vito and Alex Lichtenstein, "Writing a Global History of Convict Labour", *International Review of Social History*, 58:2 (2013), pp. 285–325; and Anderson (ed.), *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies* (London, 2018).

14. Merle, *Expériences coloniales: La Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853–1920)* (Paris, 1995), p. 408, n. 23.

15. Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, "Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains", in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue (eds), *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), p. 12.

16. Clare Anderson, "Transnational Histories of Penal Transportation: Punishment, Labour and Governance in the British Imperial World, 1788–1939", *Australian Historical Studies*, 47:3 (2016), pp. 382–383.

Figure 2. Allan Hughan, 'Le boulevard du crime, 1877'. Bagne at Île Nou, New Caledonia. *Musée Balaguier, La Seyne-sur-Mer, France.*

(Figure 2).[17] For both European powers, convict transportation had a dual purpose – cleansing the metropole and expanding imperial holdings by putting convicts to work. This dual purpose, however, produced tensions at the system's very heart: economic returns of coerced labour were undercut by the expenditure required to transport convicts to the antipodes. In duration and scale, the New Caledonian *bagne* was dwarfed by both Britain's penal project in Australia and by France's other overseas penal colony in French Guiana.[18] Contemporary observers and historians in their wake subjected French Guiana to greater scrutiny than the penal colony in the South Pacific.[19] Even when interest in New Caledonia was shown in the French metropole, it was overwhelmingly focused on Communards' experiences.

17. Merle, *Expériences coloniales*, p. 115; Louis-José Barbançon, *L'archipel des forçats: l'histoire du bagne de Nouvelle-Calédonie (1863–1931)* (Lille, 2003), p. 15.
18. Merle, *Expériences coloniales*, p. 116. See also Jean-Lucien Sanchez, "The French Empire, 1542–1976", in Anderson (ed.), *Global History of Convicts*, pp. 123–155.
19. See Miranda Spieler, *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Jean-Lucien Sanchez, *À perpétuité: Relégués au bagne de Guyane* (Paris, 2013); and Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley, CA, 2000).

Figure 3. Allan Hughan, Encampment of Deported Communard Prisoners, Île des Pins, New Caledonia, private collection.

From 1872 until the amnesty in 1880, Communards were exiled to the Isle of Pines, an island southeast of the Grande Terre, while the political prisoners considered more dangerous (among them Henri de Rochefort and Louise Michel) were held on the Ducos Peninsula (Figure 3).[20] With only the rare exception (i.e. Michel, who, after being transferred from Ducos to the Isle of Pines, embraced Kanak culture),[21] the Communards portrayed their exile as utter desolation.[22] After the amnesty, some, among them the artist Lucien Henry, elected to settle in Australia.[23] The overwhelming majority, however, returned to France.

From its earliest years, Britain's penal colonial project in Australia fascinated the French, producing a mythology about "Botany Bay".[24] Colin

20. Roger Pérennès, *Déportés et forçats de la Commune: de Belleville à Nouméa* (Nantes, 1991). See Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790–1900* (Stanford, CA, 2000); and O.T. Kramsch, "'Swarming' at the Frontiers of France, 1870–1885", in H. Donnan and T. Wilson (eds), *A Companion to Border Studies* (Hoboken, NY, 2012), pp. 230–248.

21. See Louise Michel, *Légendes et chants de gestes canaques* (Paris, 1885); *idem*, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1886); and Joël Dauphiné, *La déportation de Louise Michel: Vérité et légendes* (Paris, 2006).

22. Pérennès, *Déportés et forçats de la Commune*.

23. Ann Stephen (ed.), *Visions of a Republic: The Work of Lucien Henry. Paris, Noumea, Sydney* (Sydney, 2001).

24. Forster, *France and Botany Bay*.

Forster invokes the "anachronistic air" of France's decision to adopt "such an ambitious penal venture so late in the day" – decades later than the British and precisely when Australian colonists, asserting their right to self-government, were demanding transportation's abolition. In positioning the French as Britain's backward heir, Forster insinuates that their project was doomed to fail. With his gaze firmly directed backwards, Forster traces the genealogy of France's introduction of penal colonization and leaves untreated the history of the *bagne* in operation.[25] Such a choice implies that the French project was dead in the water, perpetuating arguments repeatedly posited by nineteenth-century observers about the backwardness of the *bagne* relative to British settlement in Australia. In a context in which the Australian colonies were eager to assert their deservingness of self-government, this characterization was expedient, helping to create a point of rupture with Australia's own convict past and thus facilitating the Australian colonies' claims to a more respectable system of social organization and a more legitimate birth as a settler colony than their French colonial neighbours.

As colonizer of distant territories using convict labour, Britain was attributed the mantle of pioneer by the French. In truth, however, in banishing convicts and requiring them to perform labour as a condition of their sentence, the British were following a lead set by foreign powers. Historians have begun to address this longer history of convict transportation, situating it along "a continuum of coerced labour and migration, […] enslaved labour, indentured contract work, military and maritime impressment, and indigenous expropriation".[26] For centuries, Russia had transported convicts to Siberia for the purposes of colonization, and between the sixteenth and the mid-eighteenth century, hard-labour convicts in France were put to work as galley-ship rowers and later in port city *bagnes*.[27] For decades before convict transportation to Australia, Britain's parliament rejected detention with hard labour on the grounds that this French practice was tyrannical and antithetical to British liberty. The loss of the American colonies and the resultant overcrowding of metropolitan prisons in the 1780s, however, propelled Britain's lawmakers to pass the, ostensibly temporary, "Hulks Act"

25. *Ibid*., p. 1. Stephen Toth picks up the story where Forster leaves off, but discards Australia, examining the policy's implementation, which, for Forster, remains a glimmering chimera. Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies, 1854–1952* (Lincoln, NE, 2006).

26. Anderson, "Introduction", in Anderson (ed.), *Global History of Convicts*, p. 23.

27. Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590–1822* (New York, 2008). André Zysberg, "Le temps des galères (1481–1748)", in Jacques-Guy Petit (ed.), *Histoire des galères, bagnes et prisons, XIIIe–XXe siècle: introduction à l'histoire pénale de la France* (Toulouse, 1991), pp. 79–106; Zysberg, "Au siècle des lumières, naissance du bagne", in Petit (ed.), *Histoire des galères*, pp. 169–197; André Zysberg, "Le modèle des travaux forcés et son application", in Petit (ed.), *Histoire des galères*, pp. 199–229; Michel Pierre, "La transportation (1848–1938)", in Petit (ed.), *Histoire des galères*, pp. 231–259.

inaugurating forced labour (in naval dockyards) in the criminal justice system. With the door prised open, forced labour was applied to convicts transported to Australia from 1787 onwards. Into the nineteenth century, against reformers like Elizabeth Fry who insisted on detention's rehabilitative purpose, proponents of convict transportation asserted the system's humanitarian ends and its regenerative capacities, in addition to its clear advantages for public safety in the metropole, which would be of moral and economic benefit, both individual and collective. Transported prisoners would be transformed into hard-working, productive settlers.[28] Transporting convicts beyond the seas had a clear social control function in protecting the metropole from unruly populations, but the system also had a clear economic utility. In France, this was foregrounded by Napoleon III. Prior to the passage of legislation in May 1854 and amid growing opposition to the *bagnes* in French port cities, Napoleon argued that transporting convicts to colonial territories would make it "possible to render the punishment of hard labour more effective, less costly, and, at the same time, more humane, by using it for the advancement of French colonisation".[29]

DENYING COMPARABILITY

To most mid-nineteenth-century French penal reformers, and indeed to their international colleagues, convict transportation smacked of exploitation. They were adamantly opposed to it, preferring penitentiaries, whose proximity to political centres of authority made them more readily regulated mechanisms for prisoners' humanitarian reform and long-term social defence. Among the international community of penologists, meeting regularly by century's end, France was viewed as outmoded in continuing to practise transportation.[30] As Clare Anderson has recently pointed out, historians, following Michel Foucault's lead, have tended to emphasize the penitentiary as the dominant modern penal practice without paying due attention

28. See, for instance, Heather Shore, "Transportation, Penal Ideology and the Experience of Juvenile Offenders in England and Australia in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Crime, History & Societies*, 6:2 (2002), pp. 81–102.

29. Quoted by Zysberg, "Le modèle des travaux forcés et son application", *Histoire des galères*, p. 228.

30. Briony Neilson, "The Paradox of Penal Colonization: Debates on Convict Transportation at the International Prison Congresses 1872–1895", *French History and Civilization*, 6 (2015), pp. 198–211. See also Nir Shafir, "The International Congress as Scientific and Diplomatic Technology: Global Intellectual Exchange in the International Prison Congress, 1860–90", *Journal of Global History*, 9 (2014), pp. 72–93. On international criminology conferences, see Martine Kaluszynski, "The International Congresses of Criminal Anthropology", in Peter Becker and Richard F. Wetzell (eds), *Criminals and their Scientists: The History of Criminology in International Perspective* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 301–316.

to the persistence of transportation to penal colonies, or, indeed, to its importance in helping to shape practices in the metropole.[31] While the abolition of British convict transportation to Australia mid-century adheres to Foucault's schema of the rise of the modern penitentiary, France's synchronous introduction of convict transportation sits less neatly. Moreover, although France was singled out for particular discussion at the International Prison Congress in the mid-1890s, it was not the only Western power to engage in late-phase transportation; Russia, Portugal, and Spain all increased their shipments of convicts overseas in the latter part of the nineteenth century.[32]

Among international penal reformers, however, advocates of transportation were vastly outnumbered. In an attempt to solidify their endorsement of convict transportation from a moral and reformative perspective, champions of French convict transportation appealed to Australia's success as a flourishing colonial holding. Advocates further pointed to Australian colonists' rejection of further shipments of British convicts as evidence of the system's regenerative efficacy.[33] In 1863, as news that French convicts were finally set to be transported to New Caledonia, the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented that "we can claim to have great experience, and to be in a position to judge more truly what may be the probable result from a French point of view", declaring that:

> We have the strongest possible impression that no successful colonisation will ever be accomplished through the interposition of convict labour in proportion to its cost and to its waste of life in proportion to the social mischief which accompanies it, and that it is more likely (except by adventitious circumstances) to permanently destroy than to advance the settlement of a new country.[34]

In 1884, as French statesmen debated a bill on transporting recidivists, the *Herald* dispatched a "special commissioner" to file reports on New Caledonia and its penal settlement. The journalist wrote that, in sending convicts to distant territory, France was "re-attempt[ing] an experiment which has been made time after time by ancient as well as modern nations, and always – without one exception to set against the experience – with absolute and indisputable failure".[35] Any allegation that New Caledonia had been modelled on Australia was undermined by this observation that Britain was far from alone in having employed the practice. In a subsequent piece,

31. Anderson, "Introduction", in Anderson (ed.), *Global History of Convicts*, pp. 9–11.
32. See Timothy J. Coates, "The Portuguese Empire, 1100–1932", in Anderson, *Global History of Convicts*, pp. 37–64; Christian G. de Vito, "The Spanish Empire, 1500–1898", in Anderson, *Global History of Convicts*, pp. 65–95; and Sarah Badcock and Julia Pallot, "Russia and the Soviet Union from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century", in Anderson, *Global History of Convicts*, pp. 271–305.
33. Neilson, "Paradox of Penal Colonisation", p. 208.
34. *Sydney Morning Herald* [hereafter *SMH*], 20 June 1863.
35. *SMH*, 12 May 1884.

the journalist wrote that Australian colonies had only flourished when convict transportation was suppressed.[36]

This argument was reinforced a few months later in the same newspaper by Howard Vincent, London's former Director of Criminal Investigation, who stated that France's decision to transport its convicts to New Caledonia "had its basis, doubtless, in the popular delusion among Frenchmen that such prosperity as they hear credited to Australia is due to the early system of transportation to some of the colonies".[37] Colonization, however, it was argued, could only truly develop through free migration. In 1890, the Melbourne weekly newspaper *Leader* argued that "New Caledonia, both from a colonising point of view and as a reformatory for criminals, is confessedly a failure" and "Australian experience offers no encouragement to the idea that a free and prosperous civilisation can be established on a rotten and criminal foundation".[38] New Caledonia thereby served as a powerful negative example of penal colonization, enabling the Australian colonies to assert their own relative superiority and arguably helping to foster a feeling of closeness to Britain and a "sense of colonial connectedness".[39]

Within Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century, resisting an influx of convicts – no matter their provenance – was viewed as an important means for building respect from Britain. In 1874, Melbourne's *Argus* asserted that the Australian colonies were entirely justified in complaining to France about New Caledonia's use as a convict depot:

> Great material sacrifices have been made by two at least of these colonies [i.e. New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land] to get rid of the convict taint which formerly attached to them, and to avoid the odium they had thus incurred in the estimation of their own countrymen at home. The injurious impression originally produced upon the English mind has been gradually effaced, and may now be considered to have altogether disappeared. But it will be revived among Europeans generally if the neighbouring islands of New Caledonia are to become the *égout collecteur* for the criminal filth and feculence of France; Australia will be once more associated with convictism, and such association cannot fail to be most detrimental to our reputation and inimical to our progress and prosperity.[40]

Similarly, in 1884, in response to the prospect of French repeat offenders being transported, the *Argus* declared that "the more determined our resistance to foreign convictism, the more we earn the respect of Englishmen at

36. *SMH*, 31 May 1884.
37. *SMH*, 20 December 1884.
38. *Leader*, 8 February 1890.
39. Woollacott, *Settler Society*, p. 4.
40. *Argus*, 20 April 1874.

home".[41] While the French tended to claim a shared heritage with Britain's penal colonization, Britain and its Australian colonies sought to distance themselves from their self-proclaimed heirs. Indeed, the Australian colonies activated a conscious programme of discrimination, introducing ever more precise border control measures to restrict New Caledonian transported convicts, monitoring anyone suspected of a connection to the *bagne*.

Circumnavigated by both James Cook in 1774 and Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux in 1792, European influence in New Caledonia remained limited until 1840. When Britain sent convicts to Australia in the late eighteenth century, the territory's extreme isolation from Europe and its unmapped interior had made the erection of prisons and walls unnecessary. For convicts, the distance from the metropole and the wildness of the Australian bush acted as natural deterrents against escape: to flee the colony was to disappear into the great unknown.[42] Convicts transported to Australia were not explicitly barred from returning to the mother country once their sentence had been served. So isolated was Australia from Britain at the moment of first European settlement, any such provision presumably seemed superfluous. By the time that France established its penal colony, the entire region had been brought into a relationship with Europeans; New Caledonia's contours had been explored and mapped and, although internal access was largely undeveloped, routes across the seas were well established. Disappearing internally into the New Caledonian bush was possible but more limited, so much smaller was the territory. The statistics on the rate of recapture of escapees from the *bagne* are very telling: between 1864 and 1880, more than three quarters of all escapees were re-apprehended, and between 1896 and 1900 that figure had risen to almost nine tenths.[43]

French advocates of convict transportation held a rather ambivalent attitude to the Australian model. While admitting a basic conceptual debt to the British, they rejected substantive similarities, arguing that whereas the British in their experiment in Australia had constantly felt their way along, theirs was a rational, pre-conceived system. The British, they maintained, may have been the pioneers, but their methods were experimental.[44] Commentators in Australia similarly denied any shared characteristics with the New Caledonia colony. The incapacity of its governors and the incompatibility of the French way of life with migration were a constant refrain

41. *Argus*, 17 April 1884.
42. The Colony of New South Wales's entirely open nature is alleged to have made flogging particularly significant among disciplinary measures. John Hirst, *Convict Society and Its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales* (Sydney, 1983), pp. 68–69.
43. Merle, *Expériences coloniales,* p. 136.
44. *Ibid*., pp. 48–49. See also Neilson, "Paradox of Penal Colonization".

among observers in the Australian colonies. The French were too careless, inept, and immoral to be able to colonize – a situation that further threatened Australian colonial society since, it was argued, rather than remain in the mismanaged French colony, prisoners would opt to escape to Australia either while under sentence or on receiving their freedom. Even *with* good management French colonialism was severely hampered by a perceived reluctance among the French to emigrate. Unlike other Europeans, especially Germans or Italians, French people would not readily volunteer to uproot themselves.[45] Amid discussions about competition for control of New Guinea, Melbourne's *Australasian* claimed that Britain's rivals lacked any flair for successful colonization, remarking that "It is idiotic to talk of France, Germany, or Italy as a colonising nation; none of them ever has been in the real sense of the word, or ever will be, a colony-planter."[46] Sydney's *Evening News* in 1897 commented that the French had "no desire to wander, none of the Anglo-Saxon restless spirit of exploration".[47] French people's unwillingness to migrate to distant territories led foreign observers to argue that France had greater need for coerced forms of migration in order to build up its imperial holdings, and French advocates of transportation argued that the people's close attachment to the *patrie* made coerced migration all the more terrifying and all the more necessary.[48] French people's aversion to free migration was confirmed by the fact that five years after New Caledonia was claimed, Australians were being headhunted by the French to colonize and cultivate the land.[49]

Criticisms in Australia of French methods of colonization extended to the very process of annexation of New Caledonia in 1853. Although France's claiming of the archipelago was considered audacious, the state's right to claim sovereignty was not disputed. Nonetheless, the fact that France had simply annexed the territory rather than conquering it through warfare or securing it through a treaty was considered improper. This, coupled with the fact that the French had not been responsible for having first "discovered" New Caledonia in the late eighteenth century, led to a perception of France as having breached the "law of civilised nations".[50] Decades later,

45. Merle, *Expériences coloniales*, pp. 56–62.
46. *The Australasian*, 21 July 1883.
47. *Evening News*, 27 March 1897.
48. Le comte de Beauvoir, *Australie: Voyage autour du monde*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1869), pp. 324–325; "Réponse de la Cour d'appel d'Amiens", in *Enquête parlementaire sur le régime des établissements pénitentiaires,* vol. 4: Rapports des cours d'appels de France (Paris, 1873), p. 299; Merle, *Expériences coloniales*, pp. 59–61. In contrast, the "psychic costs of migration" are alleged to have been less for transported British convicts because of the established culture of movement within Britain. Stephen Nicholas and Robert R. Shergold, "Convicts as Workers", in Nicholas (ed.), *Convict Workers*, pp. 54–56, 58.
49. *SMH*, 18 June 1858.
50. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 12 November 1853.

following the 1878 Kanak revolt, commentators pointed to French ineptitude and insensitivity in provoking the Indigenous people's rancour and violence. In one of a series of on-the-ground dispatches on "The War in New Caledonia", a *Herald* correspondent commented on the Kanak people's cooperativeness, attributing it to the "fact that Englishmen or Australians in New Caledonia have always treated the natives better than the French".[51] A few months later, another article noted that although "throughout this struggle public sympathy in these [Australian] colonies has naturally been on the side of the colonists" there was if not justification, then "ample excuse for the native revolt". The "unscrupulous and meddlesome French colonists" failed to respect the basic principles of colonial diplomacy with indigenous peoples. Casting British colonial rule as benevolent exemplar, the journalist concluded that the French had "much to learn before they are likely to become successful colonizers in the South Seas".[52]

CONTROLLING MOBILITY: FRENCH CONVICTS ON THE MOVE

As early as November 1853, when news of France having claimed New Caledonia first reached Australia, the alleged dangers posed by a proximate French colony became a recurrent topic of discussion in newspapers. Reports focused not only on France's audacity in laying claim to the archipelago, but also on the perceived humiliation to the Australian colonies produced by Britain's inattention in allowing the seizure to occur.[53] Although New Caledonia would not serve as a penal colony for the French until the 1860s, the prospect of this was planted early in the minds of Australian readers. In November 1853, two months after Admiral Auguste Febvrier-Despointes officially claimed the archipelago for France and one month before Britain abolished transporting convicts to Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania), the *Sydney Morning Herald* told readers that

> We have reason to believe that the immediate object of the French government is to establish a penal settlement on the island […] [and] we cannot refrain from expressing our deep regret that, by the laxity of the British Government, notwithstanding the repeated and earnest representations which have been made to it […] the opportunity of colonising that fine group has been lost. That regret is enhanced by the consideration that after all our struggles to get rid of the withering curse of convictism, after the bitter differences which had arisen between

51. *SMH*, 15 October 1878.
52. *SMH*, 22 February 1879.
53. Elizabeth Rechniewski, "The Perils of Proximity: The Geopolitical Underpinnings of Australian Views of New Caledonia in the Nineteenth Century", *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 12:1 (January 2015), available at: https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/portal/article/view/4095/4590; last accessed 10 March 2019.

> the colonies and the mother country have been happily reconciled by the total abandonment of transportation to these shores, a convict settlement should be formed by a powerful foreign nation in our immediate neighbourhood.[54]

The implications were made clear; while acknowledging that Sydney might reap some commercial benefit from New Caledonia's colonization

> even by the French […] such a consideration […] sinks into insignificance by the side of the moral, social, and political consequences attaching to the occupation of one of the most splendid islands in the Pacific by a rival nation, whose aims and objects are so dissimilar, not to say opposite, to those which have for many years been earnestly contemplated by the most intelligent colonists of Australia and New Zealand.[55]

The following day, a *Herald* reader wrote that "Whatever may be the surprise created by this recent act of the French Government, upon reflection the cause is patent […] British energy thwarted by Downing-street *apathy*, has allowed New Caledonia to become a French Penal Settlement, instead of a British colony, free from that curse."[56] Another article pursued the issue with greater fervour: "No sooner […] have we got rid of British convictism than we are threatened with French convictism."[57]

As the years went by, and while the islands had not become a settlement for French convicts, Australian newspapers regularly peddled stories about the risks posed by a potential penal colony located so close to Australia's east coast. Attention focused particularly on the risk of escapes from the *bagne*. Less than 1,500 kilometres to the east of Australia (about 730 nautical miles), New Caledonia was a relatively short journey from the Australian colonies, and significantly less than the distance separating the Swan River Colony near Perth in Western Australia from the more settled east coast. New Caledonia was said by Australian journalists to represent a dangerous proximity, the Coral Sea's hazardous conditions and perilous reefs were downplayed, considered no match for resolute prisoners desperate to escape their island prison. When New Caledonia was finally confirmed as a site for convicts in 1863, newspaper reports articulated outrage. The *Sydney Morning Herald* observed that coerced migration to a penal colony made sense to the French because as a people they lacked the entrepreneurial and voluntarist spirit necessary for the successful free colonization of distant lands. Penal colonization would not, however, produce a healthy settlement and the effects of this for Australia would be significant: "as the criminal population of New Caledonia becomes ripe for discharge, we may expect that large numbers of them will seek a home in the colonies of England.

54. *SMH*, 2 November 1853.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *SMH*, 3 November 1853 (emphasis in the original).
57. *Ibid.*

This will, of course, bring the question practically to our doors".[58] *The Australasian*, which described New Caledonia as "an island so near to Australia as to be almost a part of it", expressed a preference for "a Bengal tiger [to be] loose among our women than genuine French 'Forcat' [*sic*] from the Bagnes of Brest or Toulon, for the tiger could only take life, and the galley slave would take life and something else".[59]

When the first shipment of convicts arrived in New Caledonia in 1864, paranoia in Australia had thus already long been prepared. The anxiety adheres to the contours of a classic moral panic, as defined by Stanley Cohen.[60] New Caledonia – "the modern Pandemonium of the Pacific"[61] – aroused coverage and commentary from newspapers throughout the country; in original and syndicated form, newspapers in urban, provincial, and rural areas all drew attention to the alleged dangers posed. A basic and sustained anxiety about French convicts could not have been the *creation* of newspapers alone; in order to get traction, a phenomenon identified as problematic must dovetail with an existing concern to which the media then gives definition, meaning, and scale.[62] Firmly rooting this moral panic were its origins in tensions between the Australian colonies in the first half of the nineteenth century deriving from whether they had been founded by convicts or free settlers. After formal abolition of transportation to New South Wales in 1850 and Van Diemen's Land in 1853, this manifested primarily as a concern about the dangers of free movement of transported (British) convicts between Australian colonies. From here, it would be a short step to seeing French convicts as equally dangerous. Convicts on the move were the subject of "blame gossip", serving as a useful scapegoat for any instability within colonial society.[63]

While divisions emanating from British convictism would not entirely disappear, the French threat largely overtook it as a preoccupation. Importantly, resisting French convictism became a way that the Australian colonies, with or without convict histories, could assert their own probity. For some French, the colonies' very resistance provided further evidence of the success of the system.[64] While legislation relating to British convicts on the move pitted the Australian colonies against one another, the issue of French

58. *SMH*, 20 June 1863, p. 4.
59. *Australasian*, 2 June 1866.
60. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed. (London, 2011), pp. 1, 26–46, 66–67. Evidence suggests that not everyone in Australia considered French escapees undesirable. For example, in 1883, an escaped French convict declared that, in full knowledge of his background, a local Queensland magistrate had offered him work. *Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton)*, 10 February 1883.
61. *The Age*, 28 August 1885.
62. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 47.
63. Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (London, 1965).
64. Neilson, "Paradox of Penal Colonisation".

convictism had greater potential to unify them – something that would appeal to interest groups pushing for the Australian colonies to federate. As the years went on, police in Australia were called on to monitor and report on the presence and activities of any person residing in their jurisdiction suspected of having ever been detained in the New Caledonia colony.[65] Until well beyond the quiet suspension of transportation of convicts in 1897,[66] the French settlement was viewed from Australia with intense distrust. At the same time that authorities were making efforts to control the movement of former convicts between the Australian colonies and similarly to restrict the movement of Chinese, they sought to monitor the mobility and migration of French prisoners from New Caledonia.[67]

As cases of French convicts reaching Australia materialized from the 1860s onwards, the long-standing latent danger of infiltration was seen to have finally eventuated. In 1866, concerns about Australian border security were raised in relation to a case of French convicts who absconded from the vessel docked in Sydney Harbour that was transporting them to New Caledonia. At that time and until the mid-1870s, the absence of extradition arrangements between France and Britain limited the capacity for colonial authorities in Australia to intervene in such cases, provoking frustration and alarm.[68] As further New Caledonian escapees arrived in Australia in the 1870s, journalists were quick to point out the inevitability of such events.[69] In keeping with Cohen's model of the moral panic, the arrival of one boat was not read as a rare occurrence, but rather as a harbinger of a much greater problem.[70] At this time, the more geographically proximate French convict settlement, which from the early 1870s received participants from the Paris Commune, was seen as a greater threat to the (emancipated) eastern colonies of Australia than the British convicts of Western Australia.[71] Arrivals, among them a group of Communards including Henri de Rochefort in Newcastle in 1874, were noted by journalists and

65. *New South Wales Police Gazette and Weekly Record of Crime*, 51, 19 December 1883, p. 477.

66. Although from 1897 New Caledonia received no further convicts, it remained a penal colony until 1931. Louis-José Barbançon, *L'archipel des forçats.*

67. Alison Bashford, "Contagion, Immigration, Nation", *Australian Historical Studies,* 33 (2002), pp. 334–358; Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, ch. 1.

68. Bergantz, "Scum of France", pp. 156–157. The agreement, which did not extend to political prisoners, is reprinted in Etienne de Vazelhes, *Étude sur l'extradition: Suivie du texte des traités franco-belge de 1874 et franco-anglais de 1843 et 1876* (Paris, 1876), pp. 213–225. In 1881, the Fugitive Offenders Act was passed, but this legislation only dealt with extradition within the British Empire.

69. For a non-exhaustive list of cases, see Zaidman, "Les condamnés de Nouvelle-Calédonie en Australie".

70. Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 35.

71. Western Australia continued to receive British convicts until 1868. See, for instance, *SMH*, 28 March 1874; *Brisbane Courier*, 2 April 1874.

status-conscious public statesmen expressed concern about their destabilizing effect.[72]

The anxiety was intensified in the 1880s when French recidivists were added to the archipelago's population. The *Sydney Morning Herald* condemned France's decision to carry on "the practice of shooting more of her moral rubbish in close proximity to our shores".[73] In response to France's wilful polluting of areas close to Australia, the Colony of Victoria's chief secretary called for the Australian colonies to unite as a federal council, asserting the greater dangers posed to the free Australian colonies by French convicts' border breaches than by West Australians. Although convicts from Western Australia had been "degraded, [they were] at least of the same blood and same language as ourselves", which made them easier to control than foreigners.[74] Opposition to French convicts was thus invoked in processes aimed at building a sense of common interests between the Australian colonies. The steady stream of critical rhetoric about the French penal settlement and the need to protect Australian colonial society from exposure to its populations effectively served to foster a perception of ideological distance between these European settler colonies – a useful strategy for imagining a proto-national community and building social bonds between the disparate inhabitants of the Australian colonies, a component of which entailed emphasizing their common moral rectitude.[75] As recent research has suggested, opposition to and differentiation from New Caledonia contributed to the solidification of a sense of Australian nationalism, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, as part of a climate of imperial competition for territory in the South Pacific.[76] In 1880, Adelaide's *South Australian Register* reflected on the objections raised to the establishment of the French penal colony decades earlier and concluded that "experience has proved that the danger apprehended was not imaginary. More than one party of prisoners has found its way to New South Wales, and although, owing to increased precautions, there have been no recent escapes, it is impossible to say how soon fresh relays of criminals may discover means of reaching Australia".[77] Into the 1890s, this sense of nationalism took on racial overtones as a moral panic about an Asian invasion took root, part

72. Henri de Rochefort, *Retour de la Nouvelle-Caledonie: de Noumea en Europe* (Paris, 1877). See also Kenneth R. Dutton, "Henri de Rochefort and his Companions", *Explorations*, 32 (2002), pp. 3–39.
73. *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 4 December 1886.
74. *Argus*, 10 April 1884.
75. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).
76. Bergantz, "Scum of France".
77. *South Australian Register*, 27 January 1880.

of a longer anti-Chinese immigration campaign that culminated in the White Australia policy of 1901.[78]

Although commentators focused on the latent and actual dangers posed by the physical closeness to the French penal colony, there was a deeper aspect of propinquity. To some degree, the New Caledonia penal colony constituted a "return of the repressed" for the Australian colonies, reminding them of their own convict origins. Rather than accept any similarity, the Australian colonies preferred to scapegoat the French. Indeed, despite the protestations about the presence of a penal colony on their doorstep, the existence of that reminder was not altogether unwelcome or without utility as it bound the Australian colonies together, just as the issue of *domestic* convictism tended to drive them apart. For instance, shortly after its creation, the Colony of Victoria asserted its distinction from New South Wales (from which it had issued in 1851), and protected its status as a free society by passing the Convicts Prevention Act to prevent the entry of convicts without a ticket-of-leave (which indicated that they had served their full sentence).[79] In ensuing years, this legislation was further extended. The primary target was convicts from Van Diemen's Land likely to be attracted north by the prospect of striking gold, but Western Australia, which officially began receiving convicts in 1850, also became a concern.[80] In 1863, representatives from the anti-transportation Australasian League in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania petitioned Queen Victoria to abandon sending convicts to Western Australia in the interests of the general welfare and prosperity of the surrounding colonies.[81] That same year, New Caledonia became part of France's penal portfolio, replacing French Guiana, whose tropical conditions had proven deadly, and in May 1864 the first convoy of hard-labour convicts disembarked (Figure 4). For the most part they would be

78. See Neville Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14* (Sydney, 1976); Anthony Burke, *In Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety* (Annandale, 2001); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008). Recent work explores Australian responses to North African convict escapees from New Caledonia. See Karin Speedy, "'Arab Castaways'/'French Escapees': Mobilities, Border Protection and White Australia", *Law, Crime and History*, 6: 2 (2016), available at: http://www.lawcrimehistory.org/hjournal2016Vo6Is2.html; last accessed 10 March 2019.

79. On legislation preventing "Vandemonian" convicts entering Victoria, see Stefan Petrow, '"Convict-phobia": Combating Vandemonian Convicts in 1850s and 1860s Victoria", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 14 (2012), pp. 260–271.

80. In fact, Western Australia (then the Swan River Colony) had received coerced labourers for some time, disguised under the label "juvenile government immigrants". Andrew Gill, *Forced Labour for the West and Convict Assignment in Western Australia, 1842–1851* (Maylands, 1997).

81. Lloyd Evans and Paul Nicholls, *Convicts and Colonial Society, 1788–1868* (Melbourne, 1984), pp. 265–266.

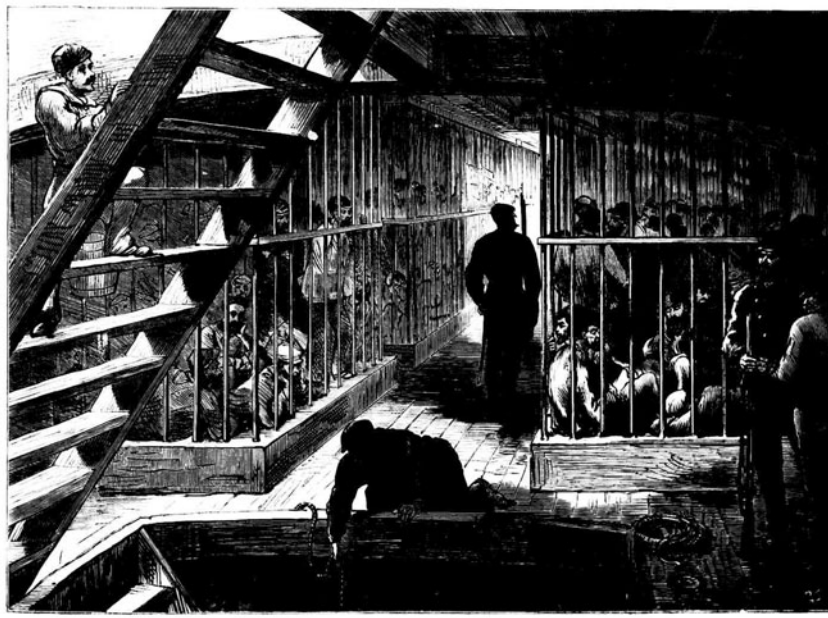

Figure 4. 'The French Transport Ship *L'Orne* – Caged Prisoners', *Illustrated Sydney News and New South Wales Agriculturalist and Grazier*, (NSW: 1872-1881), 10 June 1873, p. 5. National Library of Australia. Available at https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/63619442

held on the Île Nou, an island off the west coast of the Grande Terre (New Caledonia's main island) (Figure 5).[82]

The New Caledonia convict threat encouraged the Australian colonies to rise above internal divisions derived primarily from questions of whether they had been founded by convicts or free settlers. The Colony of South Australia, as the *South Australian Advertiser* reminded its readers (in February 1872 in the context of plans by the French to transport Communards to New Caledonia), had "always protested against convicts from the penal provinces being permitted to land [there]". "We have been anxious", the article continued, "to keep the land free from the convict taint, and hitherto we have been successful".[83] The Colony of Victoria had identical aspirations. In November 1854 – the same year that France formalized its convict transportation legislation – the Legislative Council of Victoria passed an "Act to Prevent the Influx of Criminals into Victoria", empowering colonial authorities to arrest any person reasonably suspected

82. On the demography of the first convoy, see Barbançon, *L'archipel des forçats*. The Île Nou would later be connected to the mainland.
83. *The South Australian Advertiser*, 21 February 1872.

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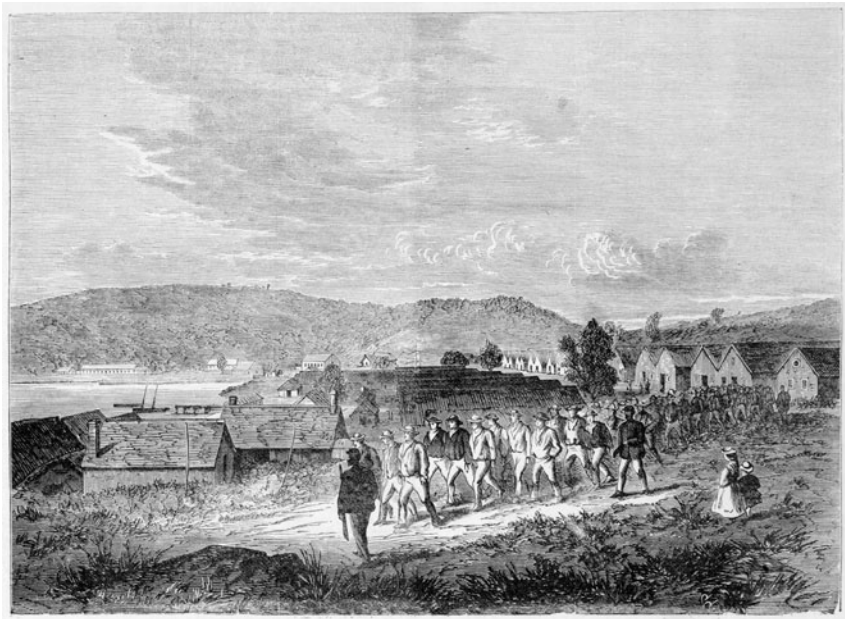

Figure 5. Samuel Calvert, 'The Convict Settlement, Isle of Nou, New Caledonia', print (wood engraving), published in *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 22 April 1873. State Library Victoria. Available at: http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/241643

of having been found guilty of a felony or transportable offence in Britain or any British possession.[84] This legislation was primarily aimed at preserving Victoria from the "taint" of British convictism emanating from Van Diemen's Land.[85] Although the persons from whom Victorians sought to preserve themselves were distinguished by being convicts, they were nonetheless British subjects, which as time wore on would become a more salient element of identity than their criminal backgrounds. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this existing fear of the (British) transported convict was transposed onto the French. These debates intersected with the stringent restrictions in place for Chinese immigrants. In 1879, Hobart's *Mercury* newspaper observed that there was much talk about Chinese contagion and a poll tax in place to control it, but little being done about the French. Endorsing an observation recently made in Sydney, *The Mercury*

84. The Act is reprinted in Travers Adamson (ed.), *Acts and Ordinances in Force in Victoria*, Vol. 1 (Melbourne, 1855), pp. 529–531.
85. Petrow, "'Convict-phobia': Combating Vandemonian Convicts in 1850s and 1860s Victoria", p. 260. In 1856, when granted responsible self-government, Van Diemen's Land was officially renamed Tasmania, aimed at enabling a distancing from convictism.

commented that although New Caledonian immigration to Australia was smaller numerically than Chinese, the threat it constituted was great.[86]

The following month, the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed extracts presented to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly from documents "having reference to the influx into New South Wales from New Caledonia of persons who have been deported thither as convicts by the Government of France", opening a window onto the inter-colonial communications between the Australasian colonies (New Zealand included). In August 1876, Sir John Robertson, Premier of New South Wales, telegrammed the Chief Secretaries of other colonies inquiring whether laws existed to prevent pardoned "Communists" from entering their respective colonies and expressing his conviction that "the Australias should unite in a remonstrance, which I have reason to believe France will respect".[87] New Zealand, Queensland, Tasmania, and Victoria all replied that no such legislation existed. South Australia's Chief Secretary pointed to that colony's "'Law Convicts Prevention Act', No. 9 of 1863; amended by No. 14 of 1865", but this act only applied to British colonies or possessions. Moreover, the South Australian representative pointed out, such legislation only had purchase for common law offenders, not political ones.[88] In June 1879, the NSW Legislative Assembly debated "A Bill to Make Provisions Against the Influx of Certain Foreign Criminals into New South Wales", primarily directed against Communards. The bill failed to pass on its second reading and its purpose was rendered redundant in any case after the granting of amnesty to Communards in 1880.[89] In 1887, Melbourne's *Weekly Times* reported enthusiastically that the New South Wales Parliament was debating a foreign convicts bill (it did not pass).[90] In April 1896, a newspaper from the goldmining town of Bathurst encouraged New South Wales to adopt legislation preventing entry to foreign convicts, arguing that colonies should only have to deal with their own criminals – "New South Wales should be confined to the consumption of its own smoke only".[91]

CONCLUSION

As neighbouring European settler colonies, New Caledonia and Australia were marked by simultaneous forces of closeness and distance. In the

86. *The Mercury*, 25 March 1879. Victoria's *Hamilton Spectator* suggested in April 1884 that a poll tax be put on all new French arrivals just as was done for Chinese. *Hamilton Spectator*, 19 April 1884.
87. Quoted in *SMH*, 24 April 1879.
88. Reproduced in *SMH*, 24 April 1879.
89. Stuer, *The French in Australia*, p. 132.
90. *Weekly Times*, 2 April 1887.
91. *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 23 April 1896.

1880s, a journalist described the profound culture shock experienced travelling from Australia to New Caledonia: "It is the greatest possible change an Australian can have. In five days from Sydney he lands in a foreign country, under foreign laws; he listens to a foreign language, and lives according to foreign habits."[92] There is in these words a clear sense of New Caledonia's exoticism and an implicit neglect of the obvious equivalence between the French settler colony employing convict labour and the Australian colonies. The opposition to the establishment of a French penal colony contiguous to Australia was a natural extension to the existing anti-transportation campaigns directed against Britain, but it also served a further purpose: asserting outrage was a mechanism for the Australian colonies to underline the rupture between the past of penal colonization and the present (and future) of free settler colonialism. It was, in short, a tool of disassociation. The opposition to the transportation of convicts to the Australian continent or its immediate neighbours effectively reinforced the notion that traces of the convict system were only to be found in the individuals transported and their descendants and not in the system of governance itself. Indeed, the degree of virtue of free settler governance was located precisely in its distance from the convict taint. Through a reflection on the constant and vociferous protestations from certain quarters in the Australian colonies about the contaminative dangers posed by a population of foreign miscreants residing so close, the New Caledonia *bagne* served a powerful symbolic and discursive function for the Australian colonies, ultimately acting as a vehicle by which the convict foundations of British settlement could be negated.

New Caledonia played an important role in the Australian colonies' transition to self-government in the nineteenth century, a process that entailed the conscious dispossession of Indigenous Australians[93] and, as I have argued elsewhere, helped to legitimize British settler authority by casting it as superior to the French.[94] In important ways, the focus on the scourge of French convictism served to further reinforce the notion that convictism was a curse of foreign origin, which, through colonial resistance, had left no lasting negative effects on colonial society and that overwhelmed to the point of silence any consideration of Indigenous presence. The proximity of the French penal colony was said to threaten efforts in Australia to build a morally respectable settler society, which could, in turn, jeopardize the colonies' chances of gaining greater administrative self-government from Britain. In effect, whether embodied as an actual threat because its prisoner populations were on the move, or constituted as a looming latent danger, New Caledonia could be

92. *Argus*, 18 August 1883.

93. Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell, "The Advent of Self-Government, 1840s–90", in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia* (Melbourne, 2013), pp. 149–169.

94. Neilson, "Settling Scores in New Caledonia and Australia".

mobilized as a scapegoat for introducing division or instability within the Australian colonies. Convictism was portrayed as fundamentally a system which had no substantive influence on power relations within the colony and thus could be transcended simply by "turning off the dirty water tap" beyond the colony's borders.[95] So long as that flow was kept closed off at the source, the convict system would remain safely in the past. This convenient, self-exculpatory theory offered a means of avoiding the more difficult business of thinking through how the penal period had affected the Australian colonies structurally; for instance, in terms of policing.[96]

The waters separating Australia from New Caledonia acted redemptively, enabling past sins of white Australian settlement to be cleansed,[97] while New Caledonia itself became effectively a *lieu de mémoire décalé* for the Australian colonies, a space of projection that facilitated Australian settlers' active rejection of their own origins.[98] In addition, Australian observers' allegations of French misrule – both in terms of management of convicts and relations with Indigenous peoples – cast into shadow the violence of forces of settler colonialism in Australia. France's penal colonial settlement could become a vehicle for asserting the relative respectability and rootedness of British settlement; a means through which the penal phase of settlement and its bloody dispossession of Aboriginal people might be quarantined safely in the past – despite the violent conflict still ongoing in this period in many parts of Australia. In their standard discourse on New Caledonia, the Australian colonies produced a distorting perspective: constantly portrayed as dangerously close in geographical space, this effectively made the

95. Paul Feillet, Governor of New Caledonia, coined the phrase in the mid-1890s. On Feillet's career, see Patrick O'Reilly "Paul Feillet, Gouverneur de la Nouvelle–Calédonie (1894–1902)", *Revue d'histoire des colonies*, 40, 138 (1953), pp. 216–248.

96. Inversely, a colony's penal origins impacted on the way that the criminal law developed. For instance, the extensive surveillance in New South Wales, required in a convict settlement, persisted as the society evolved to be dominated by both free settlers and emancipists. See Paula Byrne, *Criminal Law and Colonial Subject: New South Wales, 1810–1830* (Cambridge, 1993). Historians have disputed how unfree convict society in Australia was. John Hirst argues that convict society did not have to *become* free; it always *was* so. Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies,* pp. 109–111, 118. David Neal, however, disputes Hirst's assessment; see Neal, *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony: Law and Power in Early New South Wales* (Cambridge, 1991). See also Neal's direct critique of Hirst in "Free Society, Penal Colony, Slave Society, Prison?", *Australian Historical Studies*, 22 (1987), pp. 497–518, and Hirst's rejoinder "Or None of the Above: A Reply", *Australian Historical Studies*, 22 (1987), pp. 519–524. Grace Karskens endorses Hirst's position in "The Early Colonial Presence, 1788–1822", in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia* (Melbourne, 2013), pp. 91–120, 120.

97. This portrayal of convictism proved persistent. See David Andrew Roberts, "Russel Ward and the Convict Legend", *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 10 (2008), pp. 31–58, 50.

98. Babette Smith explores the phenomenon of amnesia but does not mention New Caledonia. *Australia's Birthstain: The Startling Legacy of the Convict Era* (Crows Nest, 2008).

French penal colony reassuringly distant in "civilizational" development, and thus also – importantly – ideologically dissimilar.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS
FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Briony Neilson. *"Ordures morales à proximité immédiate": colonisation pénale et stratégies de la distance en Australie et en Nouvelle-Calédonie, env.1853–1897.*

Dans la seconde moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, les deux projets coloniaux européens de colonisation construite par des bagnards en Océanie, en Nouvelle Calédonie française et en Australie britannique, furent géographiquement proches mais idéologiquement distants. Les observateurs dans les colonies australiennes qualifièrent régulièrement la colonisation française d'arriérée, d'inhumaine et de barbare, évoquant souvent comme preuve la colonie pénale en Nouvelle-Calédonie. À l'inverse, les commentateurs français, tout en reconnaissant que la déportation britannique de bagnards en Australie avait inspiré leurs propres conceptions coloniales pénales dans le Pacifique Sud, insistèrent sur le fait que leur dessein était différent et construit sur des méthodes modernes soigneusement conçues à l'avance. Ainsi, les deux côtés s'engagèrent dans une pratique active de négation de la comparabilité; pratique que les historiens, négligeant les interconnexions qui existaient entre l'Australie et la Nouvelle-Calédonie, perpétrèrent effectivement. Cet article attire l'attention sur certaines stratégies de distance spatiale et temporelle déployées par les colonies australiennes en relation avec le *bagne* en Nouvelle-Calédonie, et examine les stratégies de construction de nation que ces stratégies servirent. Il retrace le contexte et les contours fondamentaux de la politique de déportation de bagnards pour les Britanniques et les Français, et analyse les tentatives discursives de souligner les distinctions entre l'Australie et la Nouvelle-Calédonie. L'accent est particulièrement mis sur la panique morale dans les journaux australiens concernant la prétendue proximité dangereuse de la Nouvelle-Calédonie par rapport à la côte est de l'Australie. Je soutiens que cette panique morale naquit à un moment où les colonies britanniques en Australie, en passe de se voir accorder l'autonomie et non encore unifiée en une nation fédérée, cherchèrent à être reconnues en tant que colonies renommées de populations moralement vertueuses. La panique mit simultanément en valeur la proximité géographique et la distance idéologique de la colonie pénale nouvelle-calédonienne par rapport à l'Australie, permettant ainsi à la propre histoire pénale de l'Australie d'être mise en quarantaine dans le passé en toute sécurité.

Traduction: *Christine Plard*

Briony Neilson. *"Moralischer Abfall in unmittelbarer Nähe": Strafkolonien und Distanzierungsstrategien in Australien und Neukaledonien, ca.1853–1897.*

In der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts waren die beiden auf Sträflingsdeportation beruhenden europäischen Siedlerkolonieprojekte in Ozeanien, das französische

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Neukaledonien und das britische Australien, einander geografisch nah aber ideologisch fern. Beobachter aus den australischen Kolonien zeichneten die französische Kolonisierung regelmäßig als rückständig, unmenschlich und unzivilisiert, wobei die Strafkolonie in Neu Kaledonien häufig als Beleg diente. Umgekehrt räumten französische Kommentatoren zwar ein, die britische Verschiffung von Sträflingen nach Australien habe die Planung französischer Strafkolonien im Südpazifik angeregt, bestanden aber darauf, die französische Unternehmung habe gänzlich anderen Charakter als die britische, stütze sie sich doch auf moderne, sorgfältig bedachte Methoden. So leugneten also beide Seiten aktiv ihre Vergleichbarkeit – worin ihnen Historiker, indem sie die Verbindungen zwischen Australien und Neukaledonien vernachlässigt haben, im Grunde gefolgt sind. Der Beitrag zeigt einige der Strategien räumlicher und zeitlicher Distanzierung auf, mit denen sich die australischen Kolonien vom *bagne* in Neukaledonien abgrenzten, und untersucht die Zielsetzung der Nationsbildung, der diese Strategien folgten. Kontext und Konturen der Politik der Sträflingsdeportation werden sowohl für Großbritannien als auch für Frankreich skizziert, und es werden die diskursiven Versuche analysiert, die Unterschiede zwischen Australien und Neukaledonien zu betonen. Ein besonderes Augenmerkt liegt auf der moralischen Entrüstung, die australische Zeitungen anlässlich der vermeintlich gefährlichen Nähe Neukaledoniens zur australischen Ostküste verbreiteten. Im Beitrag wird die These vertreten, diese Entrüstung sei zu einem Zeitpunkt geäußert worden, da die britischen Kolonien in Australien – die im Begriff waren, ihre Autonomie zugestanden zu bekommen, sich aber noch nicht zu einer bundestaatlichen Nation vereinigt hatten – bestrebt waren, als ordentliche Siedlungen mit moralisch achtbaren Bevölkerungen anerkannt zu werden. Durch diese Entrüstung wurde zum einen die geografische Nähe der neukaledonischen Strafkolonie zu Australien betont, zum anderen aber auch die ideologische Distanz zwischen Neukaledonien und Australien. Das ermöglichte es Australien, seine eigene Geschichte als Strafkolonie abzuspalten und in eine nunmehr unbedrohliche Vergangenheit zu verlegen.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Briony Neilson. *"Basura moral en las cercanías": Colonización penal y estrategias de distancia en Australia y Nueva Caledonia, c.1853–1897.*

En la segunda mitad del siglo XIX los dos establecimientos coloniales europeos en Oceanía destinados a acuartelar a la población reclusa, la Nueva Caledonia francesa y la Australia británica, se encontraban es un espacio geográfico muy cercano pero muy distantes en su planteamiento ideológico. Desde la colonia australiana no faltaba quien caracterizara de forma regular a la colonización francesa de atrasada, inhumana y bárbara, señalando casi siempre a la colonia penal de Nueva Caledonia como evidencia de sus observaciones. Desde la otra parte, los comentaristas franceses, al tiempo que reconocían que el traslado de convictos a Australia por parte británica había sido la inspiración para sus propios proyectos de establecer colonias penales en el Pacífico Sur, insistían en que se trataba de una empresa muy diferente, construida sobre métodos modernos y preconcebida de forma muy cuidadosa. En este sentido, desde ambas partes se promovía de forma muy activa la imposibilidad de establecer comparaciones entre uno y otro caso; una apreciación que los estudios históricos,

soslayando las interconexiones que existieron entre Australia y Nueva Caledonia, han seguido perpetuando de forma efectiva. En este texto enfocamos nuestra atención en algunas de las estrategias de distancia espacial y temporal desplegadas por las colonias australianas en relación al *bagne* en Nueva Caledonia y trata de examinar los fines del proceso de construcción nacional a los que estas estrategias contribuyeron. Se subraya e contexto básico y los contornos de las políticas de traslado de la población convicta llevadas a cabo tanto por los británicos como por los franceses y se analizan las propuestas discursivas para enfatizar las diferencias entre Australia y Nueva Caledonia. Especial atención se dedica al pánico moral que la prensa australiana enfatizaba respecto a la peligrosa cercanía de Nueva Caledonia con la costa este de Australia. Planteamos que este pánico moral surgió en un momento en que las colonias británicas en Australia, en un proceso de asentamiento de cierto grado de autonomía todavía no unificada como una nación federada, aspiraban a recibir un reconocimiento como asentamientos reputables con poblaciones moralmente virtuosas. Este pánico enfatizó de forma simultánea la cercanía geográfica de la colonia penal de Nueva Caledonia con la distancia ideológica de Australia, y de esta manera pasaba a recluir la propia historia penal australiana en la segura cuarentena del pasado.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*

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