

**Twenty-five years of inequality-reduction policies  
in school achievement in New Caledonia**

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**Abstract**

New Caledonia, the largest French Territory in the South Pacific, enjoys a high standard of living but is marked by huge social inequalities as a result of geographic and ethnic origin. In New Caledonia, as in the rest of the world, we are witnessing an extension of the duration of studies. It is important to ascertain that this “massification of schooling” comes hand-in-hand with a reduced correlation between gender and ethnic origin on the one hand and education destiny on the other; in other words, that schooling is being “qualitatively democratised”. This study highlights the differences in school achievement between Kanak (indigenous people) and non-Kanak, female and male, as well as a combination of those groups. Using data from the four most recent censuses (1989, 1996, 2009 and 2014), we show that dramatic progress has been made in the area of school achievement; this improvement is particularly marked within the Kanak population. However, at all census dates, there have been fewer Kanak than non-Kanak diploma holders. When using odds ratios, we observe a strong decrease of inequalities in access to education since 1989. However, this decrease has slowed down since 2009, and there is stagnation for the 20- to 30-year-old age group. The general assessment of inequality reduction should therefore be nuanced when focusing in detail on the types of diplomas obtained (in particular the range of higher education diplomas) and on the level thereof (the higher the education level, the greater the inequality).

**Keywords:** Social and ethnic inequality, school achievement, “closing the gap” policy, New Caledonia.

**Introduction**

New Caledonia is one of the South Pacific region’s largest economies. It sets itself apart from other French overseas communities and islands of Oceania by its high living standard and advanced human development. The last 25 years have been marked by important social and economic progress. However, Caledonian society is characterised by substantial financial, social, geographical, and ethnic inequalities. The population of the North and Loyalty Islands provinces

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is mostly Kanak, it is the least wealthy, and it has access to the least developed infrastructures. In 2008, the median income in the South province was twice as high as that of the North province and 2.5 times above that of the Loyalty Islands. These disparities are accompanied by ethnic inequalities in the education system and in the job market.

The Matignon Accords (1988) and the Nouméa Accord (1998) launched disparity-reduction policies in favour of the North and Loyalty Islands provinces, and the Kanak people. Interprovincial economic rebalancing is implemented through a number of means, the most significant being *apportioning budget keys*. However, while rebalancing criteria are, by definition, beneficial to the North and the Loyalty Islands provinces,<sup>2</sup> they do not appear to be sufficient, and the South province's economic predominance remains considerable. In relation to rebalancing and Kanak access to positions of responsibility in all areas of activity, rebalancing policies are most conspicuous in the areas of employment and training through the implementation of training programs and structures, such as the *400 cadres* ("400 executive positions") program. This program targeted young adults with a completed secondary education who wished to continue their instruction. The goal was to train mainly Kanak executives in all sectors of activity over a period of 10 years. In 1998, this training program was extended and renamed *Cadres Avenir* ("Executives of the future"). In parallel, in order to offset the tightness of the Caledonian labour market and to reflect the emancipation initiated by the Nouméa Accord, a local employment protection policy was established by a local law of July 28, 2010. This legislation gives Caledonian citizens priority for jobs. Depending on the recruitment difficulties inherent to each type of employment, it subjects eligibility to different durations of residency, which can be as long as 10 years in the case of jobs for which recruitment is easy. The evolution in access to education in New Caledonia will be analyzed in relation to the 25 years of inequality-reduction policies, while paying special attention to changes in geographical and ethnic inequalities, which are significant (Gorohouna and Ris, 2013; Hadj, Lavigne, Lagadec, and Ris, 2012; Ris, 2014).

In New Caledonia, as in the rest of the world, we are witnessing an extension of the duration of studies. The proportion of graduates in tertiary education has certainly increased for younger generations, but it remains 16 points lower than the OECD average and 13 percentage points lower than the proportion observed in New Zealand, with which the gap tends to increase (Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> A 50% share of operating grants is given to the South province, 32% to the North province, and 18% to the Loyalty Islands. Population is distributed as follows: 74% in the South, 19% in the North, and 7% in the Loyalty Islands.

**Table 1: Share of graduates of higher education in New Caledonia (% of age group)**

	25-34 years	55-64 years
OECD Average	42.1	26.0
Australia	48.5	33.9
New Zealand	39.1	27.5
New Caledonia	26.3	17.3

Source: ISEE, 2014 census and OECD 2015.

It is important to ascertain that this “massification of schooling” comes hand-in-hand with a reduced correlation between gender, ethnic origin and education destiny, in other words that schooling is being “qualitatively democratised.” This is not only an issue of equal opportunities at school, inasmuch as inequalities in skills acquisition impact inclusion in the job market, and especially the constitution of social elites (Thélot and Vallet, 2000). Being successful in school has become a quasi-precondition for access to employment. Inequalities relating to schooling therefore affect social inclusion. These inequalities can relate to social mobility, an extensively studied phenomenon in France, or to discrimination against minorities (Beauchemin, Hamel, Lesné and Simon, 2010), in particular ethnic groups, as it has been highlighted especially in English-speaking countries (see Fryer, 2010, for an analysis of the United States).

The main findings are summarised below:

- Generally speaking, over the past 25 years, there has been significant progress in the level of education for the entire Caledonian population.
- This progress is particularly marked within the Kanak population. For example, in 1989, fewer than 1% of Kanak were higher education graduates, whereas in 2014, the figure was 5%.
- However, at all census dates, there have been fewer Kanak than non-Kanak diploma holders.
- When using odds ratios, we observe a strong decrease of inequalities in access to education since 1989.
- However, this decrease has slowed down since 2009, and there is stagnation for the 20- to 30-year-old age group.

The general assessment of inequality reduction should therefore be nuanced when focusing in detail on the types of diplomas obtained (in particular the range of secondary education diplomas) and on the level thereof (the higher the education level, the greater the inequality). Hadj et al. (2012) have shown that disparities appear at the primary school level (second year of the fundamental learning cycle – CE2), widen at the sixth year of schooling, and lead to an orientation towards vocational training at the *lycée* (High School) level. It therefore appears that the Caledonian schooling system does not fully promote the goal of equal opportunity. Let us remember that the Caledonian educational system is very much inspired by the French system

and it is similar to those of other developed countries. It receives transfers of public funds from the State.

The following section presents the means used around the world to measure inequalities in schooling opportunities. Section 3 provides an overview of the evolution of the Caledonian population's level of instruction since 1989 and a breakdown by province and community. In section 4 we demonstrate that a general extension of the duration of studies can also help to bridge the gap and therefore to diminish the correlation between ethnic origin and schooling destiny. Section 5 concludes our study.

## Measuring educational inequalities

There is a substantial body of international theoretical and applied literature on the subject of educational inequality, whether the factors are social, geographical, or ethnic. French research is characterised by a lack of focus on measuring ethnic inequalities<sup>3</sup> due to the “French exception” in regards to ethnicity data. However, in recent years, interest in the ethnic dimension of inequality has been growing, owing to the availability of precise and rich statistical datasets (Aeberhardt, Fougère, Pouget and Rathelot, 2010). The limitations placed on measuring the dimension of ethnicity result in a paradox: the ethnic variable has itself become a category of the perception of the educational system and institutions, without being analysed as such. This also leads to eclipsing segregation and discrimination phenomena and avoiding recognition of the extent of their impact on pupils' schooling trajectories, and, more generally, on measuring social achievement. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, measuring inequalities is therefore becoming a key political issue in multicultural societies. It is subject to debate because it involves delimiting the elements considered and therefore defining ethnicity. While the effect of the general extension of the length of studies is spectacular, the qualitative democratisation of schooling is rather modest.

The English-language literature on the topic of ethnic inequalities is much more abundant. For the purpose of our study, we focus on the findings of American research and present analyses of Australia and New Zealand because we can draw a parallel between them and the situation in New Caledonia. In the United States, the issue of concentration and clustering of ethnic groups is tackled as early as the 1920s by the Chicago School. Starting in the 1940s, a new generation of more quantitative research rapidly produced a series of indicators and measurements of segregation. The availability of clear and easily readable numerical measurements, establishing the degree of segregation of the population of colour, whether on the housing, educational, or job market level, is of primary importance (Fryer, 2010). In the United States, disparities between whites and blacks are persistent (Heckman, 2011). They go against American values of equality, opportunity, and social mobility. It has indeed been shown that disparities in school attainment appear at a very early age, and the environment, even in kindergarten, significantly impacts individuals' future position in the job market.

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<sup>3</sup> Henceforth, French researchers focused more on analysing social inequalities (see Vallet, 2010, reviewing the key milestones in international sociological research in this field).

In Australia, the work of researchers at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (Australian National University, Canberra) has demonstrated the evolution of the situation of Australian aboriginal peoples (Aborigines and Torres Strait aboriginal people) and non-native groups (European, Asian, Pacific Island communities, and so on) in reference to socio-economic characteristics and access to employment (see in particular Altman, Biddle and Hunter, 2009). On the basis of 1971 to 2011 data, these authors depict slowly decreasing ethnic inequalities, in particular in the area of education. This finding refutes the claim that inequality-reduction policies implemented since the late 1980s by the Australian government have failed.

Likewise, in New Zealand “Closing the gap” policies were launched for the benefit of the Maori population. Chapple (2000) shows a slow and continuous convergence between Maori and non-Maori populations in terms of endowment for education. The pitfall in measuring inter-ethnic group inequality is that it entirely conceals intra-group variations, which are quite significant in the case of some large groups.

In view of the sizeable international literature devoted to analysing ethnic disparities, the Caledonian situation provides for a fertile and original case study. It constitutes an exception within French territories in terms of official collection of ethnic data through population census. This question was recently raised in the current political and social context of releasing new statistical sources. Hadj et al. (2012), Gorohouna and Ris (2013), and Ris (2014) have analysed the evolving ethnic inequalities in relation to education and access to employment. In New Caledonia, as elsewhere in the world, material lack in childhood due to poverty is an obstacle to school attainment and obtaining a diploma later on. Aside from socio-economic factors in schooling, community divisions among youth perpetuate educational inequality. Although the Caledonian population’s skill level has strongly progressed for all communities over the past 25 years, significant disparities remain.

### **The evolution of the level of education of the Caledonian population since 1989**

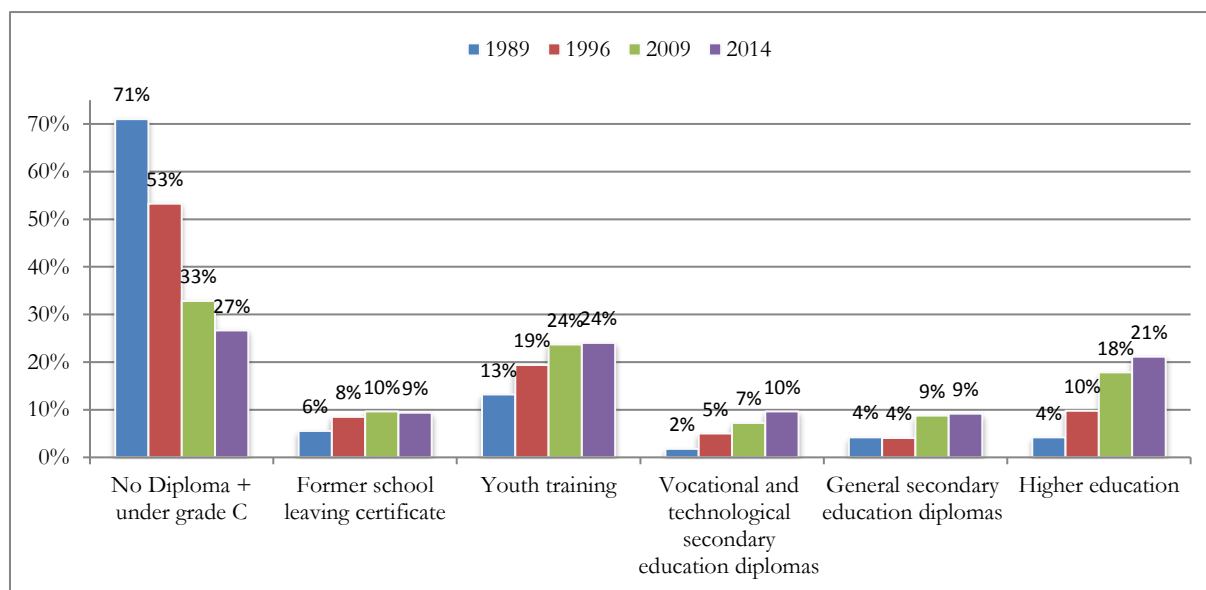
For the purpose of this study, we use four of the last five ISEE population census reports<sup>4</sup> to describe the situation in the area of education in New Caledonia. Census data contains personal information such as gender, age, province of residence, ethnic background, and level of education.

The Caledonian population for 1989 was 164,000, and by 2014, it had reached 268,000, i.e. a 63% increase. We have selected unschooled individuals aged between 15 and 64. There were 98,270 such individuals in 1989 and 164,749 in 2014.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2004 census was left out of the scope of our study because it did not include the ethnic background parameter.

**Figure 1: Evolution of population distribution according to the highest diploma obtained**



Interpretation: in 1989, 71% of the population had no diploma.

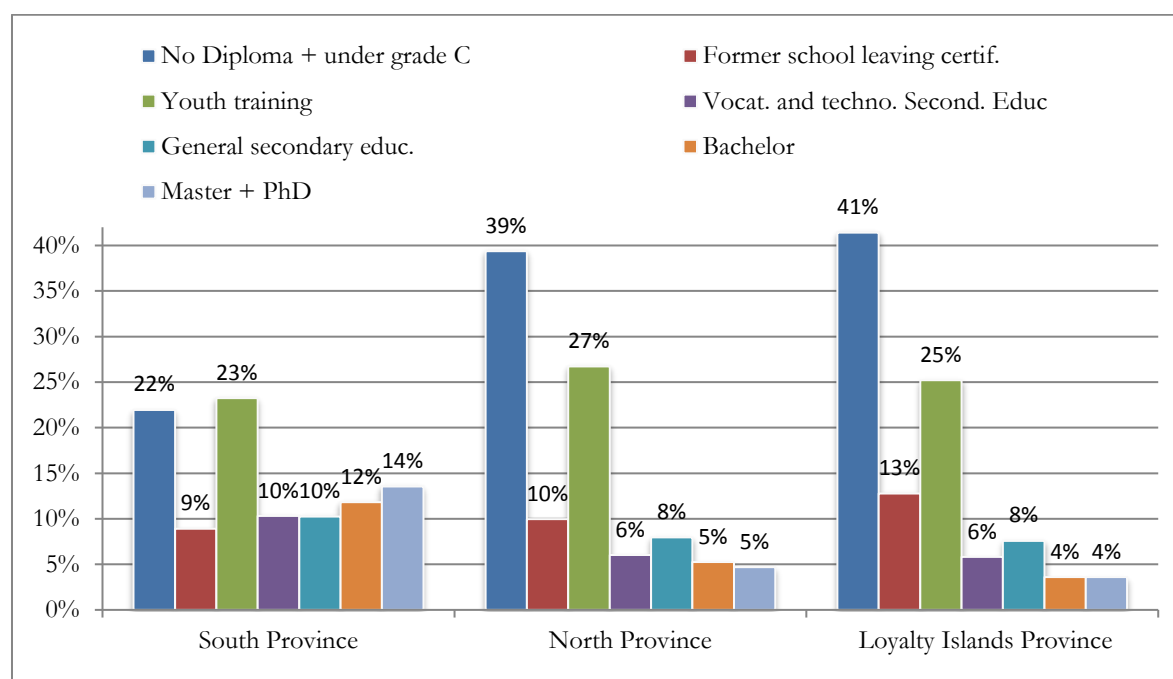
Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 1989, 1996, 2009 and 2014 censuses.

As shown on fig 1, the Caledonian population’s level of education has significantly progressed over the past 25 years. In 1989, 71% had no diploma or only a primary school certificate (CEP), whereas in 2014 this figure had dropped to 27%. Higher education graduates numbered 4% in 1989 and 21% in 2014. It should be noted that this is the highest level of education based on the collected data. The progression is significant for vocational and technological secondary education diplomas (from 2% to 10%), and for general secondary education diplomas (from 4% to 9%), but this also means that these individuals did not pursue their education. This would be understandable for those who achieved vocational diplomas, but considering the broad scope of the study, including the general population, we would have expected individuals with other types of high school diplomas to have pursued further studies.

### ***Disparities among provinces***

The improved level of education is generalised and true for all New Caledonia provinces. However, when we look at each province individually (Figure 2), we observe an over-representation of under-educated people in the North and in the Loyalty Islands provinces (39% and 41% respectively), versus 22% in the South province. Conversely, 26% of higher education graduates are in the South province, 10% reside in the North province, and 8% in the Loyalty Islands. Only the percentage of holders of a vocational or technological high school diploma is higher in the North and Loyalty Islands provinces (27% and 25% respectively) than it is in the South province (23%). The gap may have been bridged at this level, but this mainly shows that residents of the North and the Loyalty Islands stop their studies at the high school level more often than residents of the South province.

**Figure 2: Level of education by province in 2014**

Interpretation: in 2014, 22% of the population of the South province had no diploma.

Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 2014 census.

There are wide disparities among provinces: not only does the South province remain “ahead,” but also progress in the level of education does not concern the same type of diploma holders in the different provinces. We observe a stronger shift to the right in the distribution of the population among the various diploma holders in the South province than in the other two provinces:

- In the South province, the education level advancement benefits holders of a secondary education diploma and higher education graduates, whereas
- In the North and Loyalty Islands provinces, the individuals concerned are mainly holders of a vocational education diploma, which is inferior to a secondary education certificate.

The higher level of education must be connected to rebalancing policies that gave rise to structures and training programs. Serious efforts have been expended with a view to improving infrastructures for communication (transportation, roads, bridges, and so on) and education (new *collège* (Intermediate school) and *lycée* (High school) school buildings), in particular in the North and Islands provinces, but also in order to meet the needs of a growing population, in the South province especially.

### *Ethnic disparities*

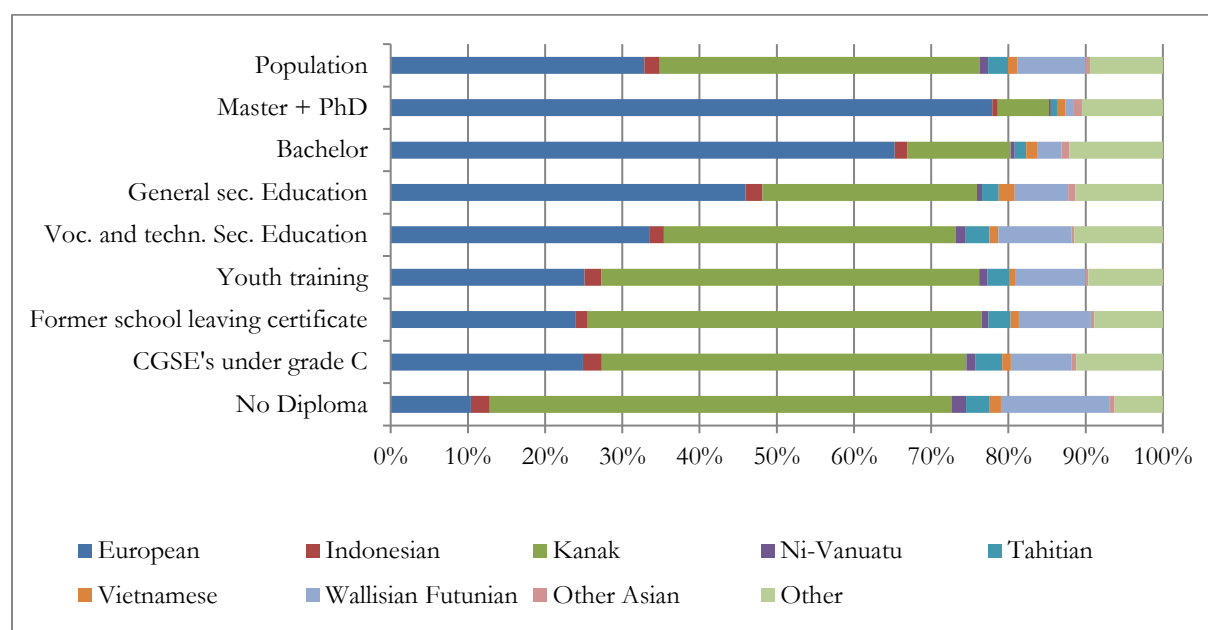
There is no New Caledonia-wide statistical source providing both individuals' social background and ethnic origin. For this study, we draw upon population census reports which enable us to use a variable of community belonging – but which does not allow for an assessment of social mobility – by incorporating social and cultural background. Albeit aware that these two sources of inequality (social and ethnic) are mutually reinforcing, we focus on ethnic inequalities by distinguishing Kanak and non-Kanak groups. The latter is highly heterogeneous,<sup>5</sup> but the distinction is nevertheless justified partly because it provides results that are comparable to those obtained in Australia and New Zealand, where heterogeneity of non-Indigenous groups is even more pronounced, and partly because it serves to measure the efficacy of “Closing the gap” policies in favour of the Kanak community within the spirit of the Matignon (1988) and Nouméa (1998) Accords. The situation in New Caledonia differs from that of France and most other Western countries in that discriminated communities in the territory are not from an immigrant background. On the contrary, New Caledonia was a land of immigration (settlement colonisation), and immigrants are the favoured group in the context of the observed inequalities, to the detriment of the indigenous population. In this sense, it is similar to its English-speaking neighbours in the region, Australia and New Zealand. The difference is that in the Caledonian case, the disadvantaged group is not a minority, as Kanak represented 40% of the population in 2014. The school attainment issues that are raised in regard to Kanak apply to the Maori and to Aborigines. Indigenous communities share neither the culture nor the socio-economic characteristics of non-Indigenous groups.

Figure 3 draws a parallel between Kanak representation within the general population and within the population of various levels of diploma holders. If there were a random distribution, we would obtain an ethnic distribution close to the one observed in the population for each education level. In other words, if Europeans were 33% of the population, we would find a comparable proportion within the unschooled population and within the second or third cycle diploma holders. However, in fact they represent respectively 10% and 78%, showing an under-representation within the unschooled population and an over-representation within higher education graduates. Conversely, 41% of the studied population are Kanak, but they account for 60% of persons without a diploma and for only 7% of higher education graduates.

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<sup>5</sup> Caledonian population distribution by community according to the 2014 census: 40% Kanak, 34% European, 17% other Pacific communities, and 4.5% Asian. Source: ISEE.



**Figure 3: Share of education level and share within the population in 2014**

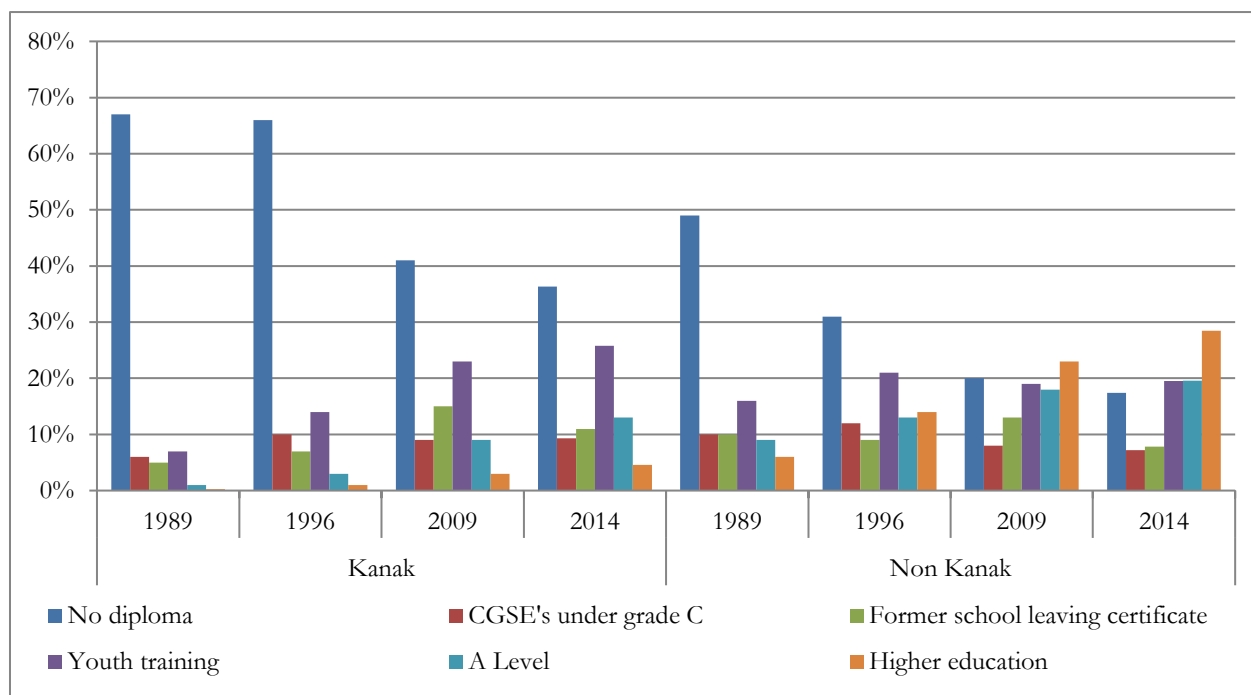
Interpretation: In 2014, 78% of post-graduates were Europeans.

Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 2014 census.

Figure 4 highlights the important improvement in education level for all communities, which comes however with wide disparities between communities. In 2014, while there were more non-Kanak higher education graduates, there was still a significant number of Kanak without a diploma. Among Kanak, 36% had no diploma, and among non-Kanak, the figure was 17%. Only 5% of Kanak obtained a higher education degree, versus 28% of non-Kanak. The disparities observed on the level of higher education begin in primary school (Hadj et al., 2012) and become wider at higher levels of education (the inter-community gap is relatively small in the early years of schooling and increases with education level).

**Figure 4: Evolution of education level by ethnic group**

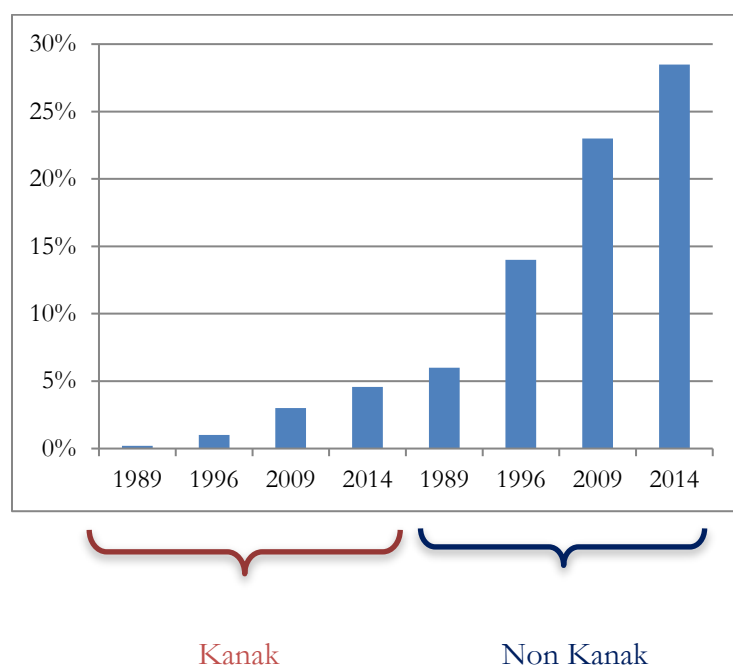


Interpretation: In 1989, 67% of the Kanak population had no diploma.

Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 1989, 1996, 2009 and 2014 censuses.

The improvement of level of education is even less noticeable when the focus is placed on higher learning. As shown in fig 5, the percentage of Kanak higher education graduates increased more than five-fold between 1989 and 2014. For non-Kanak, the evolution was almost the same, just below five percent. In direct terms, in 2014 the proportion of Kanak higher education graduates (5%) almost reached the figures for non-Kanak of 25 years ago (6% in 1989). However, it must be noted that we included all individuals aged between 15 and 64, whereas the depiction of the evolution would have been more accurate if we had focused on younger individuals.

**Figure 5: Evolution of higher education graduates**

Interpretation: In 2014, 5% of Kanak were higher education graduates.

Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 1989, 1996, 2009, and 2014 censuses.

In the Australian and New-Zealand literature, an attempt to explain school attainment inequalities with respect to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities led to the development of two different approaches: the cultural approach, stressing that school and Western teaching methods are not appropriate for Indigenous, and the socio-economic approach, according to which the social and geographical background of Indigenous is different and puts them at a disadvantage with regard to their non-Indigenous counterparts. A study based on a survey conducted in the North province (1900 observations) by Gorohouna (2011) brought to light the geographical, social and family environment factors determining pupils' academic success in New Caledonia, i.e. determinants above and beyond ethnicity and gender:

- Individuals living in “villages” (small urban centres) succeeded better in school than those living in tribal communities and

- Children from higher socio-professional category (SPC) families were more likely to graduate from secondary school than children whose families were less privileged. The SPC of the mother has a stronger positive influence on the opportunity to obtain a secondary school diploma than the SPC of the father.

## *Gender Disparities*

When the gender dimension is added to the ethnic element, we observe that throughout the world, girls' school attainment has progressed, and that women's average education level has outpaced men's, and continues to grow. In all European Union countries, women do better than men<sup>6</sup>, except for higher education in the areas of mathematics, science, and technology, where they are a minority.

However, girls are penalised by their choice of academic orientation. In their first *lycée* year, they prefer general options, whereas boys prefer technological ones. In the penultimate *lycée* year, girls tend to choose the economic and social stream (ES) and the literary stream (L), and boys prefer the scientific stream (S) and the industrial sciences and technology stream (STI). This explains the fact that in 2010, 76% of Bachelor degree holders and 57% of PhD holders in literature, language, and social sciences were women versus 43% and 38% in the sciences.

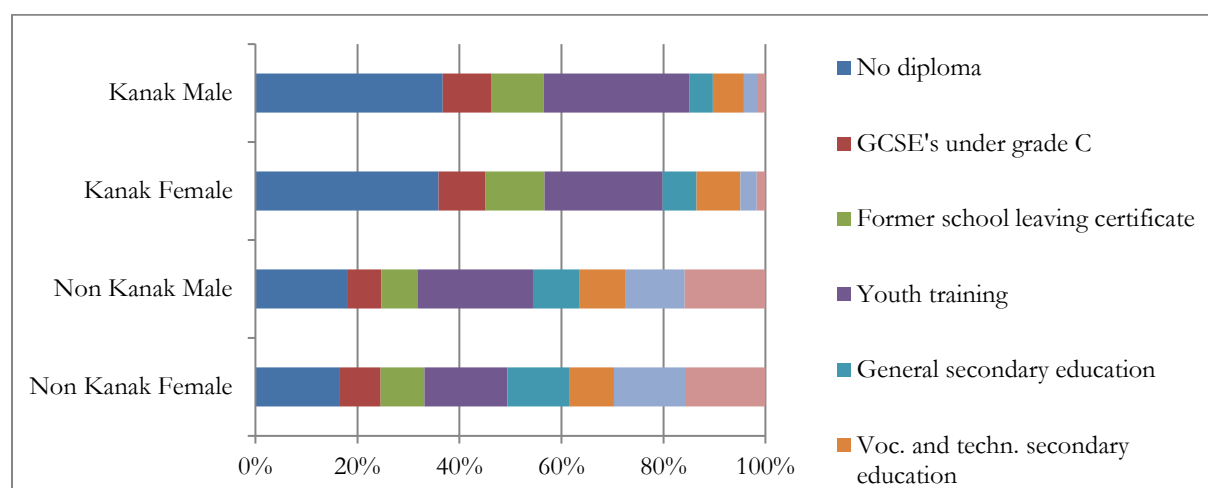
As shown by Berrah and Ris (2015), in New Caledonia also girls perform better than boys in school. For the 2013 session, 3,344 students were enrolled in the final *lycée* year, 53% of whom were women. Women were also over-represented in the general (58% girls) and technological (56% girls) secondary education diploma types, and they were on par with boys in the vocational type. Regardless of their good secondary school examination results, Caledonian girls continue to have a marked interest for some fields over others. They also outnumber men as diploma holders. In 2013, 30% of employed women and only 20% of employed men had a secondary school diploma or a diploma corresponding to two years of post-secondary school studies.

These choices partly explain the results of the observed evolution on women's professional success. In addition, women continue to bear the burden of household chores, including the responsibility of child upbringing. Workplace environments seldom encourage combining maternity and employment. Villeval (2012) also explains gender inequalities by women's indifference to competition in case of competition with men.

The two charts below are an attempt at assessing the combined effects of ethnic background and gender in New Caledonia for the entire population on the one hand (Figure 6) and for the younger generation on the other (Figure 7). We find that ethnic disparities are more important than gender disparities, but within each ethnic group, women are more educated than men. This result is even more pronounced for the generation of 20 to 30 year olds.

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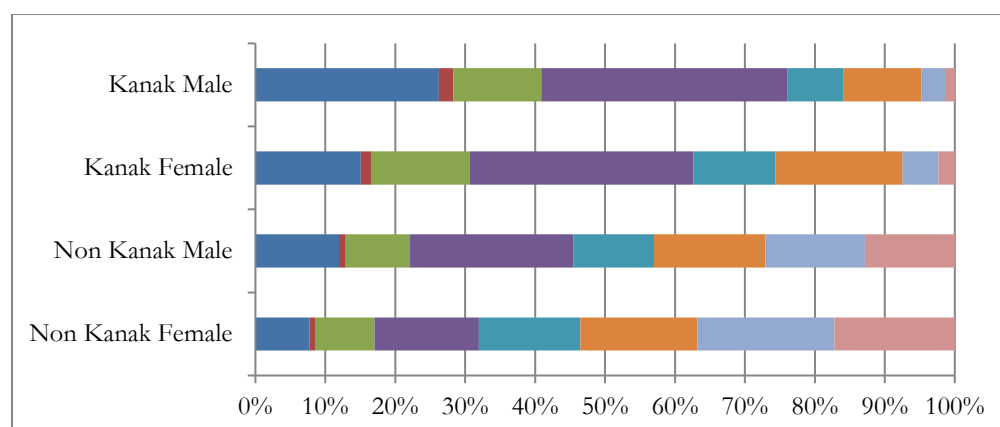
<sup>6</sup> As an illustration, in France, 53% of High School Degree (baccalauréat) are women.

**Figure 6: Distribution of populations over 15 years of age by level of diploma**

Interpretation: In 2014, 37% of Kanak men over 15 had no diploma.

Scope: Population over 15 years of age, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 2014 census.

**Figure 7: Distribution of the population of 20 to 30 year olds by level of diploma (legend similar to Figure 6)**

Interpretation: In 2014, 26% of Kanak men aged between 20 and 30 had no diploma.

Scope: Population aged between 20 and 30 years, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 2014 census.

Beyond the descriptive approach used to shed light on the general improvement of the level of education and within this context, a quantitative assessment should be made of the respective shares of lengthening of studies in general (massification) and the potential weakening of the correlation between belonging to a given community and access to education (qualitative democratisation).

## **Massification or democratisation?**

The general extension of the length of studies corresponds to a “massification of education.” But this massification can be accompanied by a simple translation of inequalities (geographical, social, ethnic, gender, and so on) as the education destiny gap between youth of different backgrounds remains important. Conversely, it can also be accompanied by a narrowing of the gap, hence a reduction of the correlation between ethnic background and educational destiny. In this case, we speak of “qualitative democratisation of education.”

We therefore calculate odds ratios corresponding to relative ratios between the probability of having a secondary education diploma and the probability of not having one for a particular group; for example, non-Kanak. We can also calculate odds ratios by controlling the observable characteristics of the individual. Unfortunately, as we have already pointed out, the data available to us does not make it possible to measure individuals’ social background. The only explanatory factors we have aside from belonging to a given community are age, gender, and province of residence. We thus obtain conditional odds ratios.

To determine if the average level of education is accompanied by reduced inequalities (“rebalancing”), Table 2 presents the relative odds ratios between the two groups for different levels of education.

**Table 2: Evolution of Kanak and non-Kanak relative odds ratios (OR) in relation to access to education**

	1989		1996		2009		2014	
Age	over 15	20-30	over 15	20-30	over 15	20-30	over 15	20-30
<b><i>Diplomas (all diplomas)</i></b>								
OR	4.2	4	4.3	3.5	3	2.6	2.7	2.4
Conditional RO	N/A	N/A	3.5	2.6	3	2.2	2.8	2.1
<b><i>Secondary education diploma (all types)</i></b>								
OR	12	8.4	9.6	7	5.2	4.2	4.3	3.6
Conditional OR	N/A	N/A	9.5	6.1	5.6	3.8	4.7	3.1
<b><i>Vocational and technological secondary education diploma</i></b>								
OR	5.4	4.8	4.4	3.3	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1
Conditional OR	N/A	N/A	3.7	2.7	1.6	1.3	1.4	1
<b><i>General secondary education diploma</i></b>								
OR	14.6	9.3	11.7	8.6	6.6	4.7	5.6	4.3
Conditional OR	N/A	N/A	11.7	8.2	6.7	4.4	5.6	3.7
<b><i>Higher education diplomas</i></b>								
OR	34.3	28.3	17.6	15.5	9.8	7.6	8.3	7.2
Conditional OR	N/A	N/A	17.9	18.7	9.9	7.1	8.3	6.2

Interpretation: In 2014, non-Kanak aged over 15 years were 7.2 times as likely as Kanak to obtain a higher education degree. When controlling for age, gender, and province of residence, the ratio was 6.2.

Scope: Population aged over 15 years or between 20 and 30 years, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 1989, 1996, 2009, and 2014 censuses.

These results clearly establish the strong ethnic inequalities plaguing access to education. They also confirm a degree of democratisation in this regard: relative odds ratios have dropped significantly over the last 25 years. This is most noticeable for the technological secondary school diploma and for higher education degrees. Odds ratios vary strongly when we make distinctions based on the type of diploma. The higher the level of education, the wider the gap becomes: in 2014, there was a disparity between 1 and 2.7 for any diploma, and between 1 and 8.3 for higher

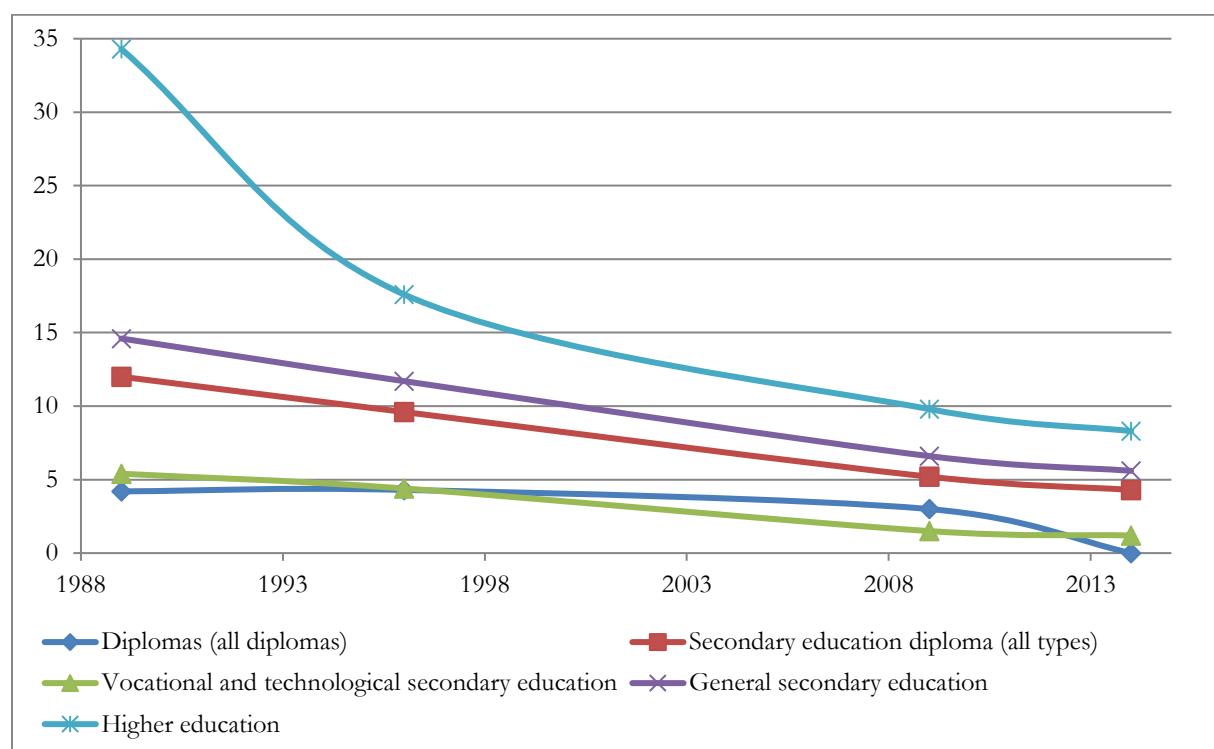
education diplomas. When we look specifically at different types of secondary education diplomas, we find that the gap is wide for the general-type diploma (5.6) and weak for the technological type (1.2). If we focus on the 20 to 30 age group only, the disparity is slightly smaller, but the trend remains true: the ratio drops from 34.3 in 1989 to 8.3 in 2014. In other words, in 2014, Kanak aged between 20 and 30 years were 8.3 times less likely to obtain a higher education degree than non-Kanak of the same age group.

The apparent reduction of inequalities should therefore be put in perspective when we focus on diplomas in greater detail. Thus, rather than disappearing, inequalities are changing. The first wave of democratisation resulted in an increased concentration of new secondary education diploma holders with an unprivileged socio-economic background in the vocational programs. In particular, there has been no democratisation at all in the access to elite secondary school programs. This significantly limits the extent of democratisation of education because opportunities do not depend on the level of diploma, but rather on the program field. The process underlying this fact starts in kindergarten, where children face the linguistic skill expectations that apply to French-speakers.

In addition, in New Caledonia, we note a shift in inequalities: today they are no longer around access to secondary education, but rather on the level of access to higher education. Because the number of Kanak higher education graduates in 1989 was so low, any increase appears significant (there were 99 Kanak graduates at the time, and in 2014, the number had risen to 3,200). We have observed that whatever the diploma, including control variables reduces the odds ratio (conditional OR), meaning that the community individuals belong to is not the only factor explaining access to education. However, all else being equal, the community that individuals are part of always has an important impact on the diploma obtained, and the higher the level of diploma, the stronger the impact.

Figure 8 highlights the decrease in inequalities, measured by the odds ratios. We can see that it was quite rapid between 1989 and 2009 and less so since 2009. The gap in access to higher education has been significantly narrowed



**Figure 8: Evolution of odds ratios**

Interpretation: In 2014, non-Kanak aged over 15 years are 7.2 times as likely as Kanak to obtain a higher education degree.

Scope: Population aged over 15 years, excluding pupils and students.

Source: ISEE, 1989, 1996, 2009 and 2014 censuses.

## Conclusion

Since the Matignon – Oudinot Accords (1988), progress has been made in the area of education in New Caledonia through a range of investments in school infrastructure, in the Greater Nouméa area, inland, and in the Loyalty Islands province. Efforts have been undertaken both in education and in professional development. The results are quite evident today, and the level of education has significantly progressed over the last 25 years. Nevertheless, the reduction of inter-province and inter-ethnic group inequalities that accompanies this massification remains slow. Consequently, it can be said that the massification of education has been greater than the democratisation thereof, in particular with regard to higher education. Recent developments in terms of school attainment have favoured women more than men. Like elsewhere in the world, Caledonian women perform better in school than men.

These inequalities, in particular inter-province and ethnic disparities, which have persisted and stagnated since 2009, show that the efforts undertaken must be assessed in the long term and that pro-active policies in favour of the least privileged segments of the population remain pertinent. New Caledonia's newly adopted educational program, to be implemented as of the 2017 school year, is aimed at supporting school attainment for all segments of the public—a necessary initiative in view of our findings. Although the level of education has risen, requirements in the job market have also increased. The strong improvement of the level of education is not

necessarily noticeable in the job market, and this can be a source of frustration for certain categories of the population (Gorohouna and Ris, 2013).

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