Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Cultural Identity in French Polynesia: Current Tendencies to Revive Ancient Cults

Since World War II there has been an anti-colonial nationalist movement in French Polynesia. Having endured severe setbacks in the 1960s due to French colonial repression and internal splits, it re-emerged in a more radical form in the 1970s and 1980s and became a leading political force in the 1990s, representing now about one third of the population. Its political objective – independence from France – has always been underlined by a strong Christian identity which often takes a millenarian shape, going as far as adopting the cross as the coat of arms by today’s largest pro-independence party. However, there is now a group coming from within the nationalist movement, who strongly criticise its Christian orientation, arguing that Christianity is contradicting traditional Polynesian identity. Instead, they try to restore pre-Christian religious cults, thus challenging an accepted concept of identity.