

Conclusion

[All] political activity is a conflict aimed at deciding what is speech or mere growl; in others words, aimed at retracing the perceptible boundaries by means of which political capacity is demonstrated ... This distribution and this redistribution of space and time, place and identity, speech and noise, the visible and the invisible, form what I call the distribution of the perceptible. Political activity reconfigures the distribution of the perceptible. It introduces new objects and subjects onto the common stage. It makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals.

Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 2011, p. 4

I should like to conclude by returning to the interweaving of the threads I have tied and untied in this book. In this project, Houaïlou has served as an entry point for bringing together various levels of historical and geographical analysis, for grasping the way local social relations are inserted into economy-worlds, imperial projects, state structures, and the diverse points of view of individual and collective actors. It is by recounting the little histories that arise there, weaving them together step by step, that multiple temporalities and overlapping contexts can be articulated, and that I have been able to arrive at a more complex perspective on the use of violence in various historical political mobilisations. Thus, my decision to speak of banal or marginal events, for which there are few documentary sources and which are always neutralised by the epic macrohistorical accounts of colonisation and decolonisation, has led me to individualise violence to a certain extent, taking into account the imbalance between the actors involved, the diversity of their viewpoints and their own forms of subjectivation. My aim has been to describe the connection between violence and politics by means of contextualisation of documents and the heterogeneity of sources, creating a local history.

In tracing thus the history of the Houaïlou region, on the basis of forms of action taken by its inhabitants, I have attempted to combine a number of analytical approaches. On the one hand, I wanted to examine the conventions of the use of physical violence in war, through reference to what information exists regarding a number of cases: the late 18th-century war in Néajjïë, which involved on one side a complex chiefdom, possibly of Polynesian origin, and on the other families seeking to maintain their autonomy in the face of a hegemonic construction; the repressive operations of 1856, 1863 and 1867 (the Koro war), of 1868 and 1878, which opened up social relations on the regional level between some inhabitants of Houaïlou and the political spaces of the neighbouring regions of Canala, Ponérihouen, Bourail and Poya; the First World War, the repression of the 1917 rebellion, the Second World War; the 'events' of the 1980s; and, finally, present-day village conflicts in Wakaya. In this process, I have tried to focus particularly on practices and their history, sometimes in relation to the circulation of colonial models, sometimes not: thus I have looked at anthropophagy, the destruction of the enemy's means of production, the abduction of women and children, the cutting-off of heads and ears, mobile columns, ambushes, gunfights, brawls and insults, but also forms of psychic preparation and propitiation involving the use of stones or plants and, where it is involved, consumption of alcohol and cannabis by actors involved in warrior violence.

This interest points the way to a second thread of analysis, which I have tried to address at regular intervals, the subjectivation of conflicts. This focus covers everything that relates to the attribution of misfortune and adversity to a contrary and conflictual intentionality: hence the interpretation of the 1912 plague and of leprosy, the witch-hunt of 1955, the political activists' call on a healer in 1999 and, more generally, the overdetermination of current village conflicts (around land, family names or the chiefdom) by the invocation of witchcraft as the source of misfortune. Secondly, I consider all that brings into play techniques of the self – such as the ecstasy required to obtain war stones that support the appeal to ancestral powers – and affects – anger, tension, fear. In my view, moments of violence but also, where appropriate, moments when action is forgone, can be described in this register.

I have focused primarily on the most socialised, collective forms of resort to physical violence. This has led me to examine the modalities and temporality of the formation of collectives, and to address group mobilisations: the assembling of warriors in each of the repressive

operations, but also political, economic, association-based and customary mobilisations following the end of the *indigénat* in the 1950s, those that paved the way for the ‘events’ of the 1980s and, finally, contemporary attempts to invent new forms of communal life in spaces of rural collective habitation, through the investment of the self in political parties (I have used the example of the FCCI (Fédération des comités de coordination indépendantistes (Federation of Pro-Independence Co-operating Committees)), but it applies equally to other groups) and in customary institutions (the Senate or the area council) or cultural activities (led, for example, by the ADCK (Agence pour le développement de la culture kanak, Kanak Cultural Development Agency)). The various forms of collective action I encountered are heterogeneous: sometimes they are based on constructions that draw on the inventiveness and determination of the actors involved, a certain degree of spontaneity, whereas in other cases they appeal to age-old and incorporated, sometimes even institutionalised, ways of structuring the social experience. Thus I have focused particularly on the link between the institution of the chiefdom, in its various, temporally shifting forms, and the ability to gather others around one for specific practical purposes; I have also investigated the existence and meaning of the so-called councils of elders as a way of structuring collective action. Clearly, these considerations cannot be conceived without taking into account the temporality of the various periods of colonial and postcolonial governance (the establishment of the colony’s legal framework, the tightening of control under governor Feillet, the end of the *indigénat*, the ‘events’, the Matignon-Oudinot agreements and the Nouméa Accord), and the interaction between the local issues of rural communal life and their place in broader networks and territories, through the flows of goods and people through them.

Within these processes, the Kanaks of Houaïlou have continued to struggle for their spaces, their times, their places, their identities, and to make their voices heard on shared stages, well before their ‘entry into the citadel’ (Guiart 1966) following the Second World War, or their ‘eruption’ (Coulon 1985) at the time of the ‘events’ of the 1980s. Thus, if I am to do justice to my Kanak interlocutors, I cannot substitute my voice for theirs; they have no need of it. What remains is to understand what kind of historical and anthropological writing then emerges. Jean-Frédéric Schaub recently highlighted an important aspect of this question: ‘We have to try to understand the colonial moment of these [colonised] societies as if it were not only external, but also internal’ (Schaub 2008, p. 438). This is

what I have tried to do, for example, in linking a fragmentary account from the oral tradition, collected orally from Narcisse Kaviyöibanu, with the repressive operation of 1856, or in connecting a range of accounts of the Koro war with the repressive operation of 1867. More broadly, I have engaged throughout the text in historicisation (through the successive periods of colonisation) of the concepts of ‘chiefdom’ and ‘council of elders’. Doing this obviously means stepping beyond the colonial division of knowledges between history and anthropology,¹ which in itself is a denial of the historicity of colonised societies and the shared time that binds us to them.²

I have focused on the description of conflicts rather than how they might have been resolved. The moments of peace (sometimes armed), the periods of demobilisation, the acts of contracting more peaceful social relations evoked in the study of ceremonies and the speeches made there have concerned me less than the accumulation of disagreements and the reactivation of past conflicts in contemporary disputes: this reveals starkly that moments of consensus form points of temporary equilibrium in shifting relations of power. Making a history that is not the discourse of power, therefore, means not confining my analysis to the most public forms of action and the most visible actors. The weight of unequal gender and age relations in these forms of mobilisation makes the ‘family’ a key site for understanding conflict and violence, particularly in terms of the acquisition of repertoires of action, of modes of socialisation in a continuum of domestic violence (by parents against children, older brothers against their younger siblings, men against women), and of construction of habitus in which physical violence, sexual violence and intimidation are not experienced as illegitimate.

My thematic focus on conflict ultimately poses the question of what can be seen of social relations in the sources available, of the ways in which the real is projected onto the documentary spaces (written or interactional) to which empirical ethnographic and historiographic research can give access. Peaceful mornings may not be those that leave the strongest traces in histories and memories.³ My book can thus also be read as a reflection on a number of documents central to my analysis, around which succeeding chapters are organised: a short extract from

1 Wallerstein 1991, 1996 and 1999; Naepels 2010a.

2 Fabian 2002, Thomas 1989a.

3 I sought to develop this point in Naepels 2011.

an interview describing a war on the Houaïlou coast, a well-known text from New Caledonian anthropology entitled 'Jopaipi', the notebook kept by high chief Mèèjà Néjà, the Indigenous Affairs Department's *Register of Chiefs*, the 'list of those accused of witchcraft' given to Jean Guiart in late 1955, and some extracts from interviews that I have conducted in the course of my field research since 1991. In this process I have drawn on a multitude of other documents, always seeking to understand as far as possible the social aspects of the production of these materials. It is in their ingrained form that I have attempted never to stop envisioning the richness and complexity of the links that make up the torn fabric of social life, in Houaïlou as elsewhere.

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