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Locality and mobility in colonial/postcolonial New Caledonia

The case of the Kouare tribe (*xûâ Xârâgwii*), Thio (Cöö)

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Introduction

"*Vivre à la tribu*", "*aller à la tribu*": as formulated in French by the Kanak people in New Caledonia these sentences express a strong feeling of locality and belonging. At the same time, they reflect an embedded history of denial and dispossession, albeit more implicitly, and of the subsequent struggle for recognition and emancipation. The Neo-Caledonian notion of *tribu* (tribe)² is not a spatial concept, however; it is an administrative unit created in 1867 by colonization combined with the *Indigénat* code (1887), the administrative chieftaincy (1897), and the demarcation of indigenous land reservations. It is, therefore, part and parcel of the colonial apparatus of racial and spatial segregation crafted in the second half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, as opposed to the "village", the (slightly) urbanized centre of small rural towns where stores and administrative services are located and where the white population used to live, the tribe is the central location of everyday Kanak life in rural areas, also for people working in towns or in the mining industry. Beyond this primary duality, closer examination of the Kanaks' contemporary action spaces and residential patterns reveals a more complex picture, especially in areas where the mining industry has exerted its influence on local economies at the deepest. Thio is a telling example in this respect. Besides displacements due to military repression and within the reservation domain (during the colonial era), new forms of social mobility rely on multi-residential strategies, which can function as exit options in case of conflicts at clan or tribe level (e.g. in relation to the land reform issue; Naepels, 2006; Le Meur 2009a). Behind its appearance as a quiet Kanak "village" nestled in a side valley of the Thio

¹ I warmly thank Susan Cox for the quick and careful proofreading.

² Tribe will be used in this administration sense (*tribu*) in the text.

river, Kouare (Xârâgwii: litt. 'all the fingers of the hand'³) is the result of the superimposition, sedimentation and discursive mobilization of the successive layers of pre-colonial, colonial and post-war histories. This paper explores from a diachronic perspective the transformations of local geographies and governmentalities that have been reshaped over a period of over one century by customary, administrative, and property boundaries (clans and chieftaincies, reserve, mining concessions, stock fences, commune), infrastructure (church, school, road), and political struggles; it also examines their contemporary influence on the nexus organized around the issues of locality, mobility, and belonging in the specific case of the Xârâgwii tribe in Thio.

The paper is divided into four parts which document the transformations of the locality in Thio from complementary viewpoints.⁴ The first deals with the "invention" of the tribe as part of a colonial governmental project. The second focuses on the encounter of different pioneer fronts in Thio: the missionary, mining, pastoral and administrative frontiers.⁵ The third section explores the multilayered history of the landscape and settlement patterns⁶ in Xârâgwii/Kouare, and the final section analyses the interplay of locality and mobility since World War II.

The colonial invention of the tribe: Kanak confinement and limits of governmentality

The colonial history of Kanak population is one of dispossession and confinement embedded in a narrative of expected extinction (up to the 1920s). Liberated from its teleological and Eurocentric load, Foucault's conceptual triangle – sovereignty, government and discipline – can be usefully mobilized as an heuristic frame for the analysis of this "colonial situation" (Balandier 1951). To put it briefly, sovereignty is conceived as a form of control exerted by an authority over a bounded territory, discipline focuses on bodies and individuals, and, as an institutionalized form of power, governmentality targets populations and resorts to political economy as its principal form of knowledge and to security apparatuses as its essential technical means (Foucault 2002: 221). Governmentality is intrinsically linked to bio-politics "that is the set of mechanisms by means of

³ Actually a 'shortcut' for: "mii kôxêêni bwa xââdi" (ADCK, 2007: 43).

⁴ This paper is part of a work in progress. The oral history and interviews were carried out mainly in 2008 and the archival work commenced recently. The fieldwork will be completed in 2010. The historical dimension and the interpretative frame associated with it are highlighted whereas aspects of the village/tribal everyday life still are in the background and remain to be empirically documented in greater depth.

⁵ For a similar approach for the high country of New Zealand South Island, see McIntyre (2008).

⁶ On the anthropology of landscape, see Stewart & Strathern (2003); on New Caledonian ethno-archeology, see Sand (1995).

which, that which constitutes its fundamental biological features within the human race will be entitled to enter into a policy" (Foucault, 2004: 3). A brief description of the construction of the colonial institutional apparatus will help to situate this form of domination and the spatial and social confinement that underpin it – a sort of forced immobilization – within this analytical frame.

Fourteen years after New Caledonia was declared a French possession in 1853, the tribe (*tribu*) was instituted by decree in 1867 as a legal category, a collectively accountable entity vis-à-vis the administration and police (*gendarmerie*), and endowed with "property attributes". The latter (*propriété territoriale indigène*) would be defined, as far as land is concerned, as collective and inalienable possession in a subsequent decree in 1868. After years of indecision and debate in relation to indigenous land tenure (Merle, 1998), this was the starting point of the enduring fiction of Melanesian collective ownership of land under the aegis of the customary chiefs. Furthermore, the notion of indigenous ownership would be progressively replaced by a mere use and occupancy right,⁷ paving the way for the creation of indigenous reserves (*grand cantonnement*) launched in 1878 and systematized under the rule of Governor Feillet (1894-1902) (see Saussol, 1979; Dauphiné, 1989). The decree of 23 November 1897 allotted an area of 3 ha per capita fully divorced from Kanak traditional residential and land tenure patterns.⁸ In the meantime, the "*code de l'indigénat*" (which was not actually a code) had been promulgated in 1887 defining the social (nominative) and territorial boundaries of the tribe, restricting the free movement of Kanak populations (in 1897 it will be forbidden to leave the reserve) and creating an administrative chieftaincy, without clearly defining its duties and responsibilities. The position of chief was formally systematized as late as in 1897 with the paramount chief (*grand chef*) at the district level and, in 1898, the headman (*petit chef*) at the tribe level (however chiefs had previously been nominated by the administration on ad hoc basis).

The interface between Kanak tribes and the colonial administration was, therefore, extremely narrow and embodied by the Kanak administrative chief and above him the *gendarme*, known as the "*syndic des affaires indigènes*" (indigenous affairs officer). It symbolized the spatial and racial segregation that underpinned colonial government in New Caledonia. This regime, which deliberately blurred the boundaries between administrative and judicial power and was devised as "permanently

⁷ See the decree of 1876 defining the "indigenous territorial property" (art. 9): "Tribes will not be allowed to mortgage, rent out or sell lands recognized as theirs. They will have free use of them according to their custom, until land demarcation can be completed by the creation of individual ownership".

⁸ In the meantime, a decree in 1884 attributed 110,000 hectares to the penal administration for the settlement of convicts. New Caledonia would become a penal settler colony from 1864 to 1897 (over 30,000 convicts - 10% of political cases – would be deported to New Caledonia during the period).

provisional"⁹ (Merle, 2004) and placed the emphasis "on the idea of control over the Kanak as individuals" (Muckle, 2002). In this respect, it can be seen as a disciplinary regime together with the missionary "government of souls" (Foucault, 2004) including its educational component, even though the coexistence of state and mission was far from peaceful (cf. Clifford, 1987; Delbos, 1993).

If we can speak of colonial discipline in this context, the question arises as to the extent to which the concepts of government and governmentality are, in fact, relevant. "To govern means to act on the action of subjects who retain the possibility to act otherwise" (Li, 2007: 17). Governmentality as an analytic appears to grasp how government aims to "sustain and optimize the process upon which life depends" (ibid.: 18). In the context of late-19th-century New Caledonia, the dominant idea among colonial agents and settlers was that the Kanaks were about to die out. Demographic curves were seen as confirming the widespread racialist and evolutionary ideology of the time. The Kanaks were not (or rarely) mobilized as a labor force for the booming mining sector (but used as forced labor for infrastructure work) and there would be no development policy targeting the Kanaks before the interwar period. Disciplines – *indigénat*, churches, and missionary schools – can be understood as educational devices aimed at training "backward populations" toward "progress". The provisional nature of the *code de l'indigénat* and its shifting sanctions focusing on individual conduct and bodies could be interpreted this way.

The systematic confinement of the Kanak population in indigenous reserves, justified in part by the increasing resort to the terra nullius legal ideology¹⁰ – and against the background of the expected Kanak extinction – brings us to the sovereignty element of Foucault's triangle. As Foucault showed (1978), unlike government that aims (at least formally) to promote the well-being of populations, sovereignty, which is marginally a matter of territorial control, is circular. The exclusion of the Kanak people from governmental action and their confinement in a kind of "non place" (*non-lieu*; Naepels, 2006: 44) are extreme manifestations of the colonial despotism. This is one of the limits of governmentality identified by Tania Li (2007: 12-19, namely violence. The others are politics as a practice of contesting order (see Rancière, 1995) – of which the 1878 insurrection would be a radical expression (see below) – (the complexities of) populations, and (lack of) knowledge. A classical response to these limits is the mobilization of expertise and making populations and territories

⁹ It was first promulgated for 10 years, and prorogated (and rendered more severe) several times until its abolition in 1946 (Merle, 2004: 154-155). See Merle (2004) also on the *Code de l'indigénat* as part of the imperial government (not a state of exception isolated from the functioning of the French state).

¹⁰ See the decrees of 1887 on the state estate, also the 110,000 ha allotted to penal colonization in 1884 (Dauphiné, 1987).

legible (Scott, 1998). The colonial fiction of the "Melanesian collective ownership of land under the rule of a customary chief" and the attribution of a per capita area without any reference to traditional social and land-use patterns relate to these processes of simplifying reality to better control it.

Thio: locality and the encounter of pioneer fronts

This early colonial history of Thio and, more specifically, the Kouare tribe results from the encounter of different pioneer fronts – missionary, pastoral, mining, and administrative – that produced a specific spatial patterning of governmental procedures and social/racial relations.

1-Thio, which is located on the south-east coast of New-Caledonia, appears on the colonial map as early as 1861 in the context of two military retaliatory expeditions against the hamlets or tribes (in a pre-administrative sense) of Yo and Aoui (the motive remains unclear but it appears that a settler was killed by a Kanak). In the same decade, tensions arose between Governor Guillain (a free-mason and atheist) and the Catholic mission over the establishment of a church in Nakety (west to Thio) in 1866. The Chiefs of Nakety and Yo (Thio) were put in jail (Delbos, 1993: 178). In fact, the arrival of Christianity in Nakety and Thio preceded the foundation churches (in 1866 and 1868 respectively). The new religion was first imported by the Borendy people (*Bwêrêdii*; south of Thio) from Touaourou (Yate) in the early 1860s as part of exchange networks linking clans of both localities and with the objective of protection and the accumulation of prestige.¹¹ By 1872, there were around 300 converts and 100 catechumens among the 1,700 inhabitants of Thio (Delbos, 1993: 179), and the entire population of Borendy would be converted by 1877 (ibid.: 213). There were two chapels; however the priest had the idea of building a bigger church in order to group the population and to avoid having to move around too much (ibid.). The church of the Thio Mission (re-built in 1909) would, in fact, become the core of a Kanak settlement established in the colonial mould of reserve demarcation launched in 1880 and systematized in Thio in 1900.¹²

2-The 1860s also saw the first white settlers acquire land in Thio: B. Balansa, a botanist who wanted to develop new crops in New Caledonia, rented 300 ha in 1868 and 500 ha in 1872. However, white

¹¹ See interviews/oral history sources: a member of Borendy chiefly family would have been sent to Touaourou to bring these new cult items to Thio. On the local appropriation of religious innovation, see Douglas (1998: chap. 8).

¹² The idea of a missionary land concession ("*reduction chrétienne*") in Canala (or Nakéty/Thio) was discussed in the early 1870s for the sake of the evangelization of the autochthons (away from the influence of the white settlers and especially of the convicts) (Delbos, 1993: 200).

settlement would really start in the 1870s with the issuing of occupancy permits for would-be cattle farmers from 1871.¹³ This policy, which replaced the large concessions allotted in the 1850-60s without convincing results, was aimed at contributing to the self-financing of the colony in accordance with the new colonial policy of the 1870s. In Thio, a range of white settlers, ex-convicts (*libérés*), free settlers, and companies (Ouaco) colonized the best (lower) parts of the valleys, pushing the Kanak groups towards its upper (and remote) reaches and destroying their crops, fields, and collective irrigated schemes (built, in particular, for taro cultivation) in the process.

3. Nickel was discovered in New Caledonia in 1864 by engineer Jules Garnier and its mining began in the mid-1870s with Thio as one of the hotspots of this new industry, which would alternating experience cycles of boom (e.g. mid-1880s, mid-1890s) and recession (1883, 1889-1894, 1921-23) from then on (Anonyme, 1955; Winslow, 1993). The company SLN rapidly became a key player in this sector,¹⁴ particularly in Thio where a first processing plant was built in 1889 in the *tribu* of Ouroue. The segregationist colonial policy excluded the Kanak population from waged labor opportunities and the booming mining sector resorted to different categories of work force: convicts and contract laborers from other colonies (Dutch Indies, French Indochina, New Hebrides, Wallis and Futuna) and Japan. The residences of the mine workers took the form of compounds and, very soon, villages located in the mining areas overhanging the village and the tribes. At the end of the 19th century, there were around 1,000 convicts living on the "Plateau", the most famous mine in Thio. This labor force was provided to the SLN by the penal administration. On the "Camp des sapins", another important mine, a Vietnamese school was funded by SLN which, in addition to its mining activities, had also become a major landowner and cattle producer in Thio.

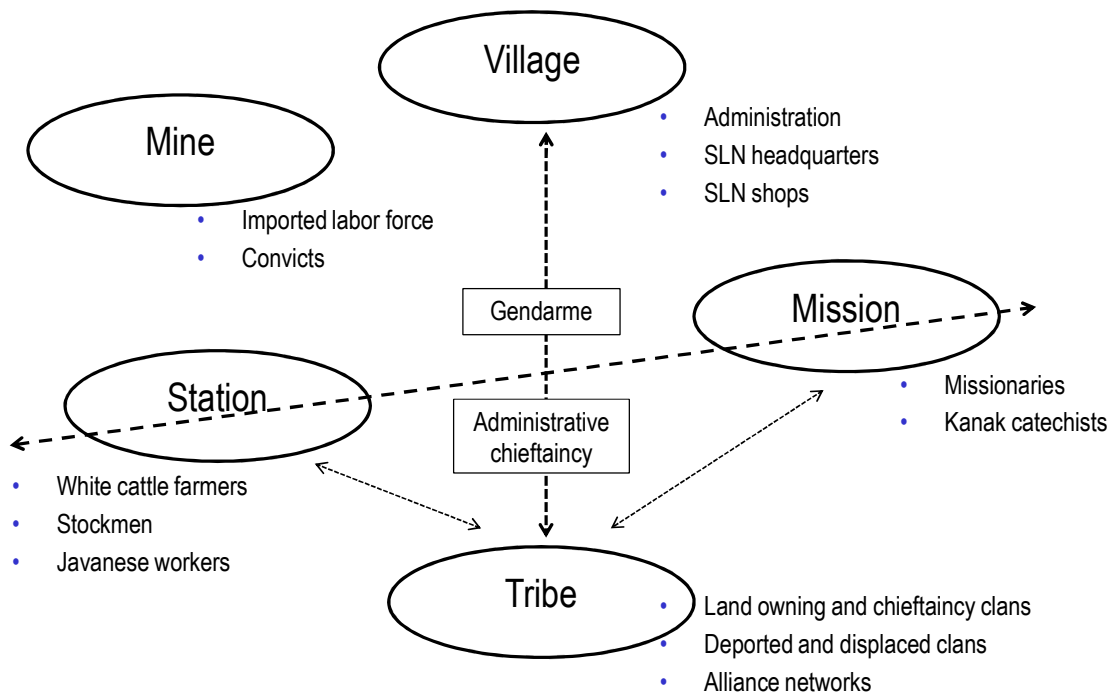
4. The local anchoring of the colonial state was slow to develop and weak. By providing infrastructure (the first hospital by the 1880s, schools on mining compounds, a bakery, butcher's, sport associations, and later housing estate and electricity), SLN functioned as a substitute for the state to a certain extent (see Le Meur, 2009b) and in a typical paternalistic style (Noiriel, 1988). However, the state was not only weak, it was also brutal and intrusive. Two events are pivotal in this respect: the

¹³ Livestock front development in New Caledonia: 1860: 1,000 ha; 1866: 26,700 ha; 1871: 77,700 ha; 1877: 230,000 ha (Saussol, 1994: 360-1). To compare with: in 1900, the operations of Kanak "cantonement" reduced the area of autochthonous reservations to 123 195 ha (Terrier, 2000: vol. 3, 73).

¹⁴ SLN (Société le Nickel) was founded in 1880 as a result of the merger of Higginson, Hanckar & C^{ie} and Basset & Marbeau. Having progressively absorbed smaller mining companies, SLN became the only large company operating in the nickel-mining and processing sector in New Caledonia in 1937. The Rothschild Bank took over the company in 1888.

repression of the 1878 revolt and the demarcation of indigenous reserves. The outbreak of the insurrection in 1878 was perceived as an earthquake by the colonial society. It was brutal and unexpected (as is often the case) and led to retaliatory bloodshed. Thio was located on the margins of the events; while a few tribes were heavily involved on the rebel side, others (in the lower part of the valley) protected (some) settlers and priests (e.g. Father Lacombes was hidden on an islet off the coast of Thio, now locally known as Lacombes islet). The demarcation of indigenous reservations was launched in 1880 and systematized under the aegis of Governor Feillet in 1899-1900. It resulted in the creation of the enduring landscape of an archipelago of Kanak reservation lands blocked between ranches and mining concessions.

Colonial political arena and geography in Thio, 1900s-1940s



As a result of the encounter and overlapping of these different pioneer fronts, the political and spatial colonial organization was structured around the fundamental dualism of a settler colony with a very narrow interface between tribe and state (embodied by administrative chiefs and gendarmes) and marked by drastic restrictions on freedom of movement on the Kanak side. At the same time, the emergence of three other poles – livestock station, mine, catholic mission – rendered the residential and institutional landscape more complex (see figure). More specifically, the spatial distribution of indigenous reservations reflected this interplay. Some of them (Ouindo, Kouare, Koua)

are located in the upper and remote parts of the side valleys, due to the pressure exerted by the pastoral and mining fronts, whereas others (Saint Philippo II, Saint-Paul) are in the main valley around the church. The others were displaced as a result of the movement of the mining front: Ouroue as a result of the construction of the railway and processing plant, Saint-Philippo due to – to say the least – difficult relations with the convict compound at the mine.

Kouare: the historical layering of locality and conflict

On entering the side valley where the Kouare tribe is located, the first thing one sees are two isolated houses (one built after cyclone Erika in 2003, the other, a "maramwa house" built as part of a social housing project), a few fields along the river, and a seemingly typical Kanak hamlet named Xarageu, which combines traditional round huts with more modern structure and is planted with the gendered symbols of araucarias (*Araucaria columnaris*) and coconut trees and surrounded by yams, cassava and small fields of vegetables. Following the road upstream, you pass a few cultivated plots nestled along the river and after a curve you come into a larger village called Merigu with a school on the right and series of small houses, many of which have cars or pickups parked in front. You then cross a small bridge and there are a few more houses some distance away from the rest of the village. The track then winds along and above the upper valley of Xârâgé river and after a few kilometers of meandering course, down the hill, you can see steep fields with mixed food crops (cassava, banana, taro, chayote) and two houses beneath, close to the river bed. You then see a path on the right-hand side with a small cemetery and a small cluster of houses. If you go further upstream, you might locate two groups of araucaria pines and coconut trees close to the river but without any visible habitations, indicating deserted villages. Upstream, on the left bank, a small power station is supplied by a dam. The track goes through a landscape of *niaoulis* (paper bark tea trees or *Melaleuca quinquenervia*) savannahs and becomes a bit difficult, steep and slippery with stony creeks to cross, and in the end, you discover two unexpectedly recent houses which appear to be completely isolated from the rest of the village. This is not the end of the path, however: the ruins of a burned sawmill await the rare visitor, far from any habitation.

A reading of the landscape provides information and clues, but also raises many questions and thus highlights the need for interviews. In conversation with Zaccharie Béou, an old stockman who lives in Xarageu, I learnt that the latter name was actually recent (Toxwaixa was the previous toponym in xaragurè) and that, in the first half of the 20th century, the place used to be a livestock station belonging to the Ouaco ranch, the biggest cattle farm in Thio and part of the Ouaco canning and livestock company settled in Gomen, in the North of New Caledonia and run at that time by an Australian manager, Colonel H.P. Dix. In fact, a wooden colonial house and cabins for Javanese farm

workers, who arrived at the beginning of the century through indentured/contract labor (*engagement*), actually stood on the very location of Z.B.'s hamlet. The Javanese men used to live in the station alone, the women being settled in Saint-Pierre in the main Thio valley near coffee plantations. Z.B.'s grandfather was a Ni-Vanuatu recruited through 'blackbirding' operations¹⁵ by the O'Donoghues, a family of Irish settlers who arrived in New Caledonia in 1862. Patrick O'Donoghue managed the Ouaco ranch in Thio from the late 1920s/early 1930s before being replaced in 1946 by Raymond Lacroze, a former stockman who eventually acquired the land from Dix in 1975.¹⁶ O'Donoghue arrived with Z.B.'s father, a half Ni-Vanuatu, half Kanak stockman. When the Javanese workers had left the area (mostly in 1950-60s), Z.B. who had succeeded his father as foreman and stockman, decided to destroy the colonial house in order to avoid disputes, hence the current re-traditionalization of the housing style. Despite intermarriage with Kanak clans in Kouare and other tribes in Thio and a strong involvement in the livestock groups born in the wake of the land reform in the 1980s, the Beou family remains on the margins of Kouare. Incidentally, the two isolated houses mentioned above are inhabited by two Zaccharie's sons who reproduce the individualistic familial ethos strongly expressed by their father (stressing the unitary nature of the person and of the need to make one's own way in life).

The Merigu hamlet upstream is inhabited by families belonging to all of the Kouare clans. Merigu was founded in the 1960s as an extension of Kouare reservation located far away in the hills, in order to bring people closer to facilities and work: road, school, village, mines. The area of 22 ha and the surrounding pastures were exploited by Lacroze, who was still the Ouaco Co manager of the Thio ranch, though a lease on state estate land. Local land tenure arrangements were passed between the Ouaco and Lacroze ranches and Kouare farmers outside the reservation area: as long as the latter made and maintained the fences themselves (therefore contributing to the cost of the protection of their own crops) they were free to use the land for cropping on the river banks (incidentally, not the best place for cattle farming). Fences and bush fires for clearing pastures were two contentious issues between the Kouare tribe and the Ouaco station. The reservation extension request was submitted to the territorial administration by the tribe headman and negotiated with R. Lacroze as the Ouaco local representative under the aegis of a *gendarme* (still the interface between tribe and

¹⁵ Systematic recruiting of Oceanian workers, mainly from the New Hebrides but also from Wallis and Futuna, started in 1865 and the trade continued, with two interruptions (1882-84 and 1885-90), well into the 20th century (Shineberg, 1999: 8-9; Comité Tavaka, 2009).

¹⁶ Dix would have received Ouaco lands in Thio in 1964 as a reward for his good job for the company. He later sold them to Lacroze before leaving New Caledonia for Australia.

state in the 1960s and later). Merigu was equally divided among Kouare families for housing. Nowadays, just outside Merigu, behind the creek, you find a few houses deliberately built beyond the reservation boundaries. These belong to members of the Gouemoin (*Gwéimwâ*) clan whose origin is not linked to the other Kouare clans belonging to the large Öwi grouping. They come from the neighboring commune of Canala (belonging to the *Xùrùchaa* clan) and maintain poor relations with the other clans due to the adoption of opposing positions during colonial wars and diverging opinions on land property demarcations reactivated from the 1980s with the land reform process. Recent disputes prompted one clan elder to return to Canala where, it appears, he was not welcome either (due to other deeply rooted opposition). Living on the margins of Merigu appears to be an acceptable compromise for as long as the conflict endures.

And conflicts endure: some of them (e.g. the aforementioned one) can be traced back to the 1878 insurrection and even further back to pre-colonial wars and settlement history. The Kouare tribe (*xûâ*: place where one lives) is located in a remote lateral valley in a mountainous area of the central chain of southern New Caledonia. The signification of its *xaracûu* name (*Xârâgwii*: 'all the fingers of the hand') is not known thus far but the origin of this tribe is closely linked to the history of Öwi clan (also spelled Awi, Owi, Ahoui in the colonial literature), an important social grouping which settled in the upper part of the neighboring locality of Bouloupari (*Berepawari*) in the 19th century, but probably came from further away (maybe Kouaoua, north of Canala), and today includes clans living in the Kouare and Kouergoa tribes.¹⁷ Oral histories of wars between Öwi and other groups in the lower Thio valley (*Bwéré mê Tura*) have been collected and myths focus on a conflictive duality between mountain and coastal groups (Yora vs. Firiagö myth) in the early history of settlement. Echoing this history, when the Öwi clan was decimated by an epidemic in December 1860,¹⁸ just after a postal service had been established between Noumea and Canala, clan members believed that the

¹⁷ Relations between clans are expressed and reshaped through the public declaiming of so-called 'genealogies' (*xwââxa*) in ritual events, which are, in fact, lists of paired names. One list corresponds to a set of clans or lineages (*xwâmwââdö*; agnatic social groupings) defining a territory or "country" (*mwâciri*). The names constituting the list are chained according to various criteria: i.e. of hierarchy between clans (chief/subject), of trajectories, and alliances (see Pillon, 1992; Naepels, 1998: 119-125; Demmer, 2002: 341-345; Guiart, 2004: 95 and ff.). Name changes (for different reasons: witchcraft, protection, etc.) and influences introduced by the colonial registry office pose difficulties in the investigation of this field.

¹⁸ This epidemic of measles, dysentery, and pneumonia had a wider impact on the whole colony from October 1860 to early 1861 before devastating Tanna and Aneityum in Vanuatu (Sand, 1995: 306; Douglas, 1998: 303-305).

disease was due to magic hidden in the postal box by a coastal tribe (McKee, 1972: 200). The Öwi on the Thio river west bank and the Koa on the east bank were both pagan at the time of 1878 insurrection. The tribes living in the lower part of the valley were Christianized (St-Philippe, St-Paul, St-Pierre), but not all of them opted for the French side (even though a strong contingent of Kanaks from Thio participated in the repression). Léopold, the St-Pierre chief, took part in the rebellion and was eventually captured and executed (Dousset-Leenhardt, 1976: 90) and colonial representatives and high-ranking military officers expressed strong distrust of Father Morris in Thio. Four settlers were killed in Thio during the war¹⁹ and the repression of the Öwi and Koa of the upper parts of Thio was strong. Apart from the killings, many men were deported to the Isle of Pines. Every family in Kouare told me similar stories of an ancestor (great grandfather) being deported in 1878 and amnestied in 1894 to meet the need for labor on the white farms. Members of the Nessore (Nönarö), Maperi, Ipere (or Upere/Övere), Kando (Kadöö) families obtained a five-year 'labor contract' and went to work on coffee plantations in Canala and Nakety before returning home at the time of the *grand cantonnement* in 1900.²⁰ Hence, the reservations were part – albeit only to a certain extent – of a governmental project to control and exploit of the population – and not only discipline and confine it – and this shift was the result of negotiations with influential settlers who were able to mobilize economic and political capital (for example Marc Le Goupils in the case of Nassirah and Kouergoa; Delathière 2008).²¹

The resulting settlement pattern of both Kouare and Kourgoa was only partially stabilized. It was not exactly a "return home". The former cemetery in Kouare is close to Merigu not to the Kouare indigenous reservation as demarcated in the late 19th century. The site called Houindeho (located between Merigu and Kouergoa) would have been the first place of settlement of the deported on their return from the plantations. They would have lived there for five years or so before the

¹⁹ During the ten months of war (June 1878-April 1879), 200 white settlers and 1200 Kanaks were killed, 200 stations were plundered and burnt. Six-hundred Kanaks were deported to the Isle of Pines and 200 to Belep Island (Dousset-Leenhardt, 1976: 168).

²⁰ Source: various interviews with Kouare elders, June to November 2008.

²¹ Another examples illustrating this trend, Douthio, a side valley of Thio close to Nakety, was emptied of its inhabitants in 1895 for the sake of free settler colonization scheme, which was typical of Feillet's governorship. It was a failure, only one family settled there and a reservation of 164 ha was created so that "indigenous people will be able to give some help to the settlers" (Territorial "Private Council", 26 Jan. 1900).

definitive demarcation of the Kouare and Kouergoa reservations.²² Once settled in this area located in the most remote upper part of the valley, people lived in enforced immobility in relation to the outside world but not within the reservation itself. There were movements between the two tribes of Kouare and Kouergoa due to the fact that members of the same clans lived in both places. Furthermore, the first Kouare village site on a small island on the Xarâgé river (Mîrî or Mîdî) was subject to floods, making relocation necessary (and carried out in the 1940s). Relocation was not made all in one piece and the new settlement pattern, actually a split into two hamlets, reflected pre-colonial allegiances as well as colonial reconfiguring, involving clans belonging to the Öwi groups as well as one clan member of the Xùrùchaa, who was on the French side during the 1878 war. Resettlement was not a simple matter of the physical translation of a human group or an opportunity for the updating of social ties. It was also a way for the colonial administration to assert its local presence. Based on this, the destruction of traditional round huts and their replacement with rectangular house was a tool that accompanied the "villagization" policy implemented in most parts of New Caledonia. Considering the Kanak demographic upturn from 1926, this policy was carried out on the ground by the *gendarmes* as (military) officials in charge of indigenous affairs. It comprised a strong hygiene theory (*hygiénisme*) dimension combined with the first steps of a development policy specifically targeting the Kanaks (mainly through the promotion of coffee farming; Kohler & Pillon, 1986). It appears, however, that as far as house building is concerned, the process was implemented rather early in Thio as the Swiss botanist and ethnologist Fritz Sarasin (1917) had observed it by the 1910s.

Post-war social and spatial mobility

Hence the hamlet of Merigu hamlet is quite recent in origin and linked to the post-war colonial liberalization and, more specifically, the policy of the extension of indigenous reservations. Access to school was of primary concern in the request to move downstream and before a school was built in Merigu in the 1980s, parents organized a rotation for taking care of the children and taking them to the crossroad where they could get on the bus to go to the Catholic school in the Thio Mission. Prior to this, like the other tribes, the Kouare had a place (dormitory) where pupils could stay. They also

²² Kouergoa was created in 1907. Some uncertainty remains in relation to Kouare. Its foundation would have been part of the decree of 15 March 1880 for the creation of most of the Thio indigenous reservations (see map 33_005R made by Caujolle probably in 1880; file no. 2 num 16-56, New Caledonia Archives). However, I have not discovered any evidence of the subsequent redrawing of its boundaries up to now.

relied on kin and alliance networks to have their children accommodated close to the school.²³ The polarization of these networks was twofold, referring to different historical layers: down to the mission in Thio and up to Koinde (*Kwêdé*) and Ouipoint (*Wipwô*) through the central chain where the Öwi clans had pre-colonial links.

The former location of the Kouare tribe is still inhabited by a few people. For some of them (e.g. Casimir Nessore), it is a way of asserting identity and independence, a way of life close to yam fields and forests for deer and fruit bat hunting. Other elders (the Ipere brothers, for example) opted to build a house in this remote part of the valley after a long professional and political career, however they still keep their main residence outside the Kouare location, i.e. in localities (Pétroglyphes) or housing estates (Thio Mission) born out of the SLN housing policy. They also have a house in Merigu which has become the centre of gravity of the Kouare citizens' multi-residential strategy. For example, Moise Mapéri, the Kouare headman, resides most of the time in Pétroglyphes as an SLN retired worker (he was able buy his house as part of a SLN program of privatization of its housing estate), partly because of political divergences with his tribe fellow members. While most of Kouare tribe is on the Independentist/FLNKS side, he, like several headmen and chiefs of the South Province who belong *de facto* to the clientelistic network polarized by the political-economic entrepreneur Jacques Lafleur,²⁴ is affiliated to the main loyalist party (RPCR, now RUMP). For the younger generation, working for the mining industry is a central ambition and a means of getting away from the tribe or, at least, of accessing autonomy, and residence outside of the Kouare location (with regular commuting to the tribe) – if not with the SLN in Thio, through the new industrial projects of Goro or Koniambo – appears to offer a good solution.

These transformations of residential patterns result from the new mobility allowed by the political liberalization of the colonial regime, symbolized by the abolition of the *code de l'indigénat* in 1946. From that point on, Kanak could enter the economic and political spheres as wage laborers, mainly in the mining sector (see Gaillard, 2009), and as full citizens, eventually entitled to vote and be elected. The dual status of land and persons remains, however, and people adapt to this double duality by reverting the value of the reservation – from the symbol of the colonial negation of their being to the

²³ The Maperi had a house near the Thio mission (*'patte d'oie'*), in an area that is now a Wallisian squat. The Maperi clan is present in the Kouare, Kouergoa and Ouroue tribes (Ouroue is on the coast near Thio village) as well as in Saint-Louis.

²⁴ The situation has a changed somewhat in this respect since the 2004 provincial pool and 2005 and 2008 communal pool.

cultural assertion of their autochthony – and by commuting between residences, and beyond this, between social worlds.

Accessing the industrial and civic polity (in the sense of Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991) was not a smooth process for the Kanak as it implied the recognition of a principle of "common humanity" that colonization had largely denied them. The 1984-85 clashes (euphemistically called "the events" in New Caledonia) resulted in a deep mutation of the political balance and residential landscape in Thio. Road blocks flourished, the village was seized by the Independentists led by the charismatic Eloi Machoro, the SLN headquarters located near Thio Mission was burnt, and most of the whites (but also many Vietnamese, Indonesians and Polynesians) eventually left the place. After one year of direct administration by the state, the first Independentist mayor, Louis Maperi from Kouare, was elected in 1985. In the same period, a double process of privatization (of housing estates and villages: Nakalé, Pétroglyphes, Thio Mission) and communalization (of electric networks) of SLN assets was under way, together with the progressive rise of the communal institution and the emergence of provinces as the main instance of the decentralized state (Dégremont, 2008; Le Meur, 2009b). The relative de-urbanization of Thio village, the deepening of complex multi-residential patterns and strategies, the evolution of land reform – all of these processes are currently at work and they are contributing to the ongoing and combined reshaping of locality, governmentality, and political arenas in Thio, nevertheless within the frame of persistent – though transformed – dualisms originating in the colonial order.

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