

On Reading a Photograph: Race and Settlement in Kanaky-New Caledonia

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, the material conditions of race and settlement are explored through the lens of the circulation of photographs and of reading practices in the context of Kanaky-New Caledonia. More precisely, I read a photograph to reflect on what “reading” seems to be about. The emphasis on and analysis of “reading” herein is informed by debates in comparative literature around the terms of comparison, with its interests in the question of address, experience and consciousness that inform a concept of literature as “World literature”.

Diagnostical in approach, and engaging with questions related to hermeneutics, aesthetics, visual media, labor, racial subjection, this thesis is attempting to expose an understanding of the “material conditions” of this photograph’s “reading” as that which is actually “circulating” - not the photograph itself - with implications for an understanding of “race” and of “settlement”.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The greater part of the composition of this thesis took place around three to four years ago. What is presented therein was an earnest yet confused understanding of the issues at hand. By saying this, I do not mean to introduce a denial or a certain dismissiveness, characteristic of the liberal demands made on us, but rather more sober thoughts on the reality of things, which may be more easily exposed when one responds to oneself. Yet, it is not down to me to hope that I will forget what is written here, but I believe and hope that what doesn't bear repeating anymore, or what makes sense through repetition only, through the confusion of language for things, will be forgotten. This is thus less a matter of and for agency, but of contradiction. For the rest, I will say that I do hope for a revolution in Kanaky, and I hope for good and clarity to all of us.

I want to thank all those that helped me through the program, especially Sharon Luk and Tze-Yin Teo, as well as the members of my dissertation committee, Michael Allan, Lamia Karim, and Brian Klopotek.

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INTRODUCTION

On one afternoon in January 2023, I was in the area known as *le Pic aux morts* (or Hill of the Dead), an ancient place of burial in the neighborhood of Apogoti, with the families involved in a land struggle against: developers and contractors (*SECAL*); the provincial administration (the land distribution agency, or *ADRAF*); the city councils of the cities of Nouméa and of Dumbéa-sur-Mer; as well as against other families related to the land dignitary. I had been visiting them for quite some time, conversing around a cup of coffee, playing bingo, helping cook, gather wood or pick up crops to bring to the *commune* - a lived area of 300 square meters with benches, tables, mats, fire pits. The dozen households, with crops and cattle, had established themselves there for over twenty years by way of customary exchange before they became an increasingly active target of the imperialist class, the emerging Kanak national bourgeoisie, and of the state apparatus that serves them (the courts, the police, the military, the local “pro-independence” government). The area is known by a lot of people, who fish or catch crabs, and was already the site of contentious development projects including apartment buildings, the so-named *Médipole*, the largest public hospital on the territory, and the so-called “Mall”. Forty people were being bulldozed out, including many children, in order to build and sell home-ownership possibilities for around 400 people through high-rate credits, in the confines of wage-labor and monopoly capitalism, in the insularity of a colonial economy of extraction, import, and distribution.

We had gone to town to pack the courtroom in the morning, and people congregated back to share food and for the families to discuss the charges and verdict. People were sitting in different spots under the wide and open corrugated structure. The representative of the families’

GDPL¹ gave a small speech to sum up the situation to those who couldn't come to court or who had been asked to stay behind to cook or stoop watch. The court had rendered a decision and demanded the evacuation of the land by around the end of March. The document was a 20 pager in legalistic lingo. This sole copy of the verdict circulated from hand to hand in a circle for a long time, but it would not exactly stop at each person: some people skimmed it, others pored it over, while most wouldn't even try and simply passed it on as it was handed to them.

Whether it was fatigue, incomprehension, redundancy, irrelevance, illiteracy, etc. - what this shared moment of *non-reading* may underline is the primacy of the material conditions and the discursive means of negotiation through which to make sense of the possibility of the document to be “read”, through which one can practice, and can be said to practice, “reading”. It was not for the text itself, or the articulation of an expert reading. The assumption underlying the possibility of the latter, an expert, proper or even “literary” reading, would have meant deputying oneself to the State not simply in material interests but in abstraction from material conditions; in “translation” that assumed (textualized) understanding to stand out of anyone's material conditions². And to be clear, the people there had all but a fondness to the action of the State against them, and the violence and further threat of violence wielded was all but immaterial: bulldozers, crop destruction, dispersal from social networks of legitimacy and material support, police, imprisonment, loyalist militias, customary conflicts, etc. What is *not* underlined but always “read” or qualified - whether as “whiteness”, the “West”, the “colonizers” - is the character and nature of the violence from which those acts of repression and oppression are

¹ *Groupe de Droit Particulier Local*, or local group of particular law, a legal organizational structure that allows Kanak people to organize cultural, landowning, and economic activities under the state-colonial administration, in opposition to and within the “common” law (Droit Commun).

² I am here thinking and drawing from the interventions made by Talal Asad on “textuality” in “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology”, In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 141-164.

expressions. Here, the problem of racial logics appears in its very demand to be “read” by those who are being racially ascribed, muddying the question of its boundaries, or of the origin of its demand. And the trouble in the question is not that of a written text, but of expressions in the very social situations arising from the land struggle which the written text adjudges: the building contractors are mostly Wallisian; many a few police who showed up are Kanak; the government is led by the pro-independence party; some people in the families fighting back are confronted as being mixed Japanese. What is underlined, I would argue, is therefore this double or dialectical aspect, that of “reading” and “race”. “Reading”, not construed as understanding the context through which to make sense of the proper reading of the text (here the verdict and the charges) but the context in which reading for context is done, even when the former is oppressive. And “race”, or the “racial”, as it pertains to the impossibility to cognate the former, the question of determination, of material conditions - meaning evacuating them, resolving them into transparency, into an unbecomingness of the social: whether the social is called “Kanaky”, “Kanaky-New Caledonia”, “New Caledonia”.

What is recognized under the name “New Caledonia” is a settler colony under the administrative governance of the French imperialist state since 1853, whose non-indigenous population, in addition to the permanence of Christian missions, came during one short-lived phase of “free” European settlement (1894-1903), one phase of penal settlement (1864-1931), and multiple waves of “voluntary” (contractual, indentured) migrant workforce from across the colonial Empire (1872-1963³). When the different pro-independence political parties and movements gathered as collective front - the FLNKS, in september 1984 - and called for an active boycott of the upcoming election, New Caledonia had been under an uneven devolution or

³ Frédéric Angleviel, “De l’engagement Comme ‘Esclavage Volontaire’. Le Cas Des Océaniens, Kanaks et Asiatiques En Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1963),” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes*, no. 110 (2001): 65–81.

“decolonization” process engaged at an imperial scale since 1946 and the end of the juridically segregating *code de l’indigénat* code of law,⁴ and 1956 with the Deferre act that reformed electoral colleges, territorial governments and paved an involuntary path towards an electorally-decided independence for each of France’s overseas colonies (except for Cameroon and Togo, who were both under UN trust; and more notably Algeria⁵, and New Caledonia). By “uneven” I at least mean to echo that “decolonisation [is] a form of imperialism through retreat rather than invasion”, in the instance whereby the colonial power discursively and materially governs the relations of interdependence and the process of self-determination of all involved parties in complicity with the now established national bourgeoisie. To contextualize the range of interventions at hand and the study of the circulation of readings that will follow, two different historical moments and processes in KNC can serve as coordinates: one, the question of an electoral college not limited to the Kanak people themselves for self-determination referendum devised to happen within 5 years by the Lemoine status (1984); and two, the history of contractual migrant labor, *through which* the legal status of the *Indigénat* (the repressive code of legal obligations on colonized masses) was formed, implemented, negotiated, or its consequences instantiated.

First, it bears indicating that the issue of the definition of the electoral college - and the definitional prerogative at the pace and whim of the French national executive government and

⁴ First implemented in 1881 in Algeria, and the separation of the judiciary (military courts). Following, Cochinchina (1881), New Caledonia (1887), Senegal (1887), Annam-Tonkin (1897), Cambodia (1898), Mayotte (1901), Madagascar (1901), the AOF [French West Africa] (1904), the AEF [French East Africa] (1910), Somaliland (1912), Togo (1923) and French Cameroon (1924) - will all have different and specific legislative processes, articles, sentences and modes of applications.

⁵ If the path towards independence was given legibility because of the Deferre act by reason of which the French Empire-state now included and recognized locally elected governments, it is actually the change of Constitution in 1958 and its ratification, compelled by the impasse that the executive powers on the Fourth Republic were finding themselves facing the war for independence led by populations in Algeria, that paved the way for former colonies to opt out of the project of a *Communauté française* [*commonwealth*] and towards independence.

legislative electoral waltzes - was the reason for the formation of the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front) in september 1984 and the call for the boycott. The source of the conflict lied with the acknowledgement by the state, secured a year prior, of an “innate and active right to independence [*un droit inné et actif à l'indépendance*]” whose “self-determination” was to be “open, *due to historical reasons*, to the other ethnic groups [in New Caledonia] *whose legitimacy is recognized by the representatives of the Kanak people*” (*emphasis added*).⁶ Similarly, and despite the amendment of the French constitution to allow for the coexistence of different law regimes [*droits*] within the nation - despite the sheer irony of it never being raised prior to 1946 with the *Indigénat* -, Hamid Mokaddem highlights how the sovereignty of Kanaky and its prospect for independence from France is denegated and juridically foreclosed in the Nouméa accords (1998) as one *necessary* stage of recognition to be *necessarily* surpassed, or “eclipsed”, prerequisite for a “sovereignty shared [*partagée*] towards a common future [*destin commun*]”.⁷

Just like Mokaddem does, we can situate the acknowledgement/denegation of Kanak sovereignty rather in the order of the terms of discourse⁸ than within “voluntarist” politics by which all statuses and reforms are assumed to work towards greater self-determination and strategic acquisition of executive power only to the extent that the political power is in the

⁶ Point 2 in the *Declaration de la table ronde de Nainvilles-les-Roches*, July 12, 1983.

⁷ Hamid Mokaddem, “L'accord de Nouméa. Pratique de Discours et Forclusion de La Souveraineté de Kanaky,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes* 147, no. 2 (2018): 323. See Point 3 in the *Préambule de l'accord de Nouméa* (1998) on a framing of the consequences of colonisation that end in a description of “shared sovereignty [*souveraineté partagée dans un destin commun*]”.

⁸ “Les expressions de la souveraineté ne sont plus à chercher dans les théories du contrat social ou des institutions. Elles sont internes aux contraintes du langage et du discours. [*Sovereignty's expressions are not to be looked for in the theory on social contract or on institutions. They are internal to the constraints of language and discourse.*]” (Mokaddem, 320.)

“right” hands⁹ (the Defferre advancements overturned by the Jacquinot act (1963); or the Socialist government and its Pisani reform act (1984-86) versus the Pons reform acts under the Gaullist RPR (1986-88), before being back to the socialists and the landmark Matignon accords (1988-9)). This has been recently shown not only by the reactions to the first election of an pro-independence executive government in 2021 when the devolution phase of at least 4 consecutive executive governments prior to the self-determination consultations demanded by the Nouméa accord uncontroversially included loyalists only, but also by how the Macron government confirmed the date for the last referendum for December 12, 2021 despite the FLNKS having announced they would not participate or do campaign¹⁰.

Secondly, there is something at stake in understanding the politics of economic reliance on foreign workforce (accumulated labor-power surplus) both penal and “free contract”, European and non-European, that not only made that the Kanak people became demographically minoritarian by the late 1950s but also defined themselves out of a labor ontology reserved to, and thus defined by the experience of, the European-descended Caldoche and the alien population (mostly Pacific Islander and Asian from the overseas colonies). One could argue that the association of the Kanak people solely to the European travellers’ economy of plunder (sandalwood, coprah, whaling) prior to the later value-added agrarian (1853-1903) and nickel-ore exploitation (1874-) from which the *Indigénat* excluded them,¹¹ ultimately participate

⁹ However actually realized, and that prior to even the end of the *Indigénat* or to the Defferre act. If outside the exact purview of this thesis, I understand the question of indigenous sovereignty in the context of Kanaky to being expressed through, yet being irreducible to, economic self-sufficiency, diplomacy, government to government relations or coercive authority, but certainly not amounting to a teleological “awakening” like David Chappell suggests (David Chappell, “The Kanak Awakening of 1969-1976: Radicalizing Anti-Colonialism in New Caledonia,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes* 117, no. 2 (2003): 187–202.).

¹⁰ By reason of respecting a period of mourning for the passing of Kanak people, due to COVID related health complications.

¹¹ Angleviel, “De l’engagement Comme ‘Esclavage Volontaire’. Le Cas Des Océaniens, Kanaks et Asiatiques En Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1963).”

in the initiation of the discussion of an electoral college in the first place, as much as what the late nineteenth century commonplace of “a colony without colonizers” attached to KNC prior to 1895 may well tell us of its Caledonian subject formations through a heritage of all the involuntary hands’s work. As a consequence, the emerging ethnoracial, multicultural ascriptions to the supposedly “black” and “mixed-blood [*métis*]” “victims” of the FLNKS boycott’s road blockades, evictions and land-seizing actions across Kanaky in late November and early december 1984, can also be understood so: as an ideological stance which settlers would have to assume - or materially need to subscribe to - if we want to understand the accusations of “racism” leveraged against the independentists.¹² Speaking of “orchestrated minoritization [*minorisation organisée*]”, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, leader of the pro-independence Union Calédonienne party [UC] and president of the provisional government of Kanaky, would note this discursive evolution of the question of elections,¹³ while Eloi Machoro will make it the Kanak people’s point not to become “a green pea in a veggie soup [*ne pas être un petit pois dans un potage*]”.

The different waves of contractual, indentured, debt-peonage, labor-force import from Java (Indonesia), from formerly Tonkin, Indochina, New-Hebrides (Vanuatu) at the turn of the

¹² See for example Isabelle Doisy, *Chroniques Des Années de Cendres: Nouvelle Calédonie (1984-1986)* (Paris: Editions Jean Picollec, 1988).

¹³ “On ne parlait pas beaucoup de majorité à ce moment-là, mais par contre aujourd’hui, ils l’invoquent beaucoup par rapport à nos revendications pour dire qu’elles ne sont pas soutenables puisque nous sommes minoritaires. [*Nobody would speak much of ‘majority’ at that time, while today they invoke it a lot to refer to our demands, saying that they are unsustainable since we are minority.*]” (Jean-Marie Tjibaou, *La Présence Kanak*, ed. Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1996), 220.) Elsewhere, in an interview with novelist Marguerite Duras: “JMT: ‘Ils ont envie de quitter le pays, a condition...’/MD: ‘...d’emmener la terre...(Rires)’/ ‘Non. A condition qu’il n’y ait plus de Kanaks. Certains ont empoisonné l’eau des puits quand ils ont dû vendre leurs terres pour qu’après on ne puisse plus refaire de la culture sur ces terres la.’ [JMT: ‘*They want to leave the country, only if....*’ MD: ‘*... they could take the ground with them. (Laughs).*’ JMT: ‘*No, only if Kanaks don’t live there anymore either. Some put poison in the wells when compelled to sell their land so that we wouldn’t be able to grow anything on these soils.*.’]” (226)

nineteenth century, or from Wallis and Futuna during the 1970s nickel extraction boom - all can be seen to partake in a process (and analytics) of “racialization, in which economic efficiency is the basis for exclusion or assimilation”¹⁴. Within the different forms of global racial division of “labor” and the differential politics of distribution of dispossession and disposability (from its feudo-colonial to neoliberal range of expression, off of which I am bracketing what I see as the epistemological demands that compel an engagement with enslavement), we may mention the oft-noted exception of the workers coming from Japan, granted exemption from the many different contractual *Indigénat* codes reserved to all the other indentured groups, coevally.¹⁵ The *Indigénat*, having been first applied to indentured, imported foreign laborers from French and non-French colonies (like the New Hebrides, Malabar) rather than the Kanak people, complicates the rapport between discourse, indigeneity, labor, and blackness. Often reduced to the politics of reservation, a head tax, and a quota of 5 days of forced labor per year, the body of law instituting a social and spatial segregation can be broadly presented along those lines: that certain laws are there to be only applied to certain peoples considered “native” to the colony concerned, to another French colony, or to people “presumed” to share in a particular “racial community”¹⁶ (to which the body of law is redundantly applicable); and that the application of the law falls within the purview of the colonial administration (and surrogates), not the judiciary.

¹⁴ Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7. See also Colleen Lye, “Racial Form,” *Representations* 104, no. 1 (2008): 92–101.; Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

¹⁵ For example, the Indochinese, Japanese and Javanese indentures began in 1892, 1892, and 1896 respectively. The exemption is negotiated as early as 1901 and fully applicable in 1913. (Angleviel, “De l’engagement Comme ‘Esclavage Volontaire’. Le Cas Des Océaniens, Kanaks et Asiatiques En Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1963),” 72–73.)

¹⁶ See for example how the Kanak from the Loyalty islands were considered “Polynesian”, not Melanesian. (Adrian Muckle, “The Presumption of Indigeneity: Colonial Administration, the ‘Community of Race’ and the Category of Indigène in New Caledonia, 1887–1946,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no. 3 (2012): 320.)

As an example, the contract applied to the laborers from Tonkin constrained them to live on-site, they could not leave the village within which they lived, they were under an 8pm curfew, and could be susceptible to fines and corporal punishments; and article 3 of their contract stated that “an employer placing a Tonkinese worker under the directives or oversights of a *black indigène employee* [*un employé indigène noir*]” was a cause for the repeal of the contract and the release of the worker from their obligations (*my emphasis*).¹⁷ The entanglements of labor as an ontological mode (born out of conquest and a means to racialization¹⁸) with the juridical-discursive terrain of a sovereignty that constitute, in its various historical instances, a continuation rather than a break from colonization - are only one historical and theoretical contextualization in which I propose we may approach and scrutinize forms of the circulation of the photograph(s) of Machoro.

The purpose behind this thesis is to expose and initiate a reflection on the relation between “race”, “settlement” and “capital” to the extent that we do so at the conjunction of “labor” and of figures of “reading” in Kanaky-New Caledonia.¹⁹ By way of a photograph, my approach will be diagnostical in that it performs a reading of the object of study and thinks through that very performance to interrogate it, bringing to the fore the parameters and assumptions that determine and enable the acts of reading. In conjoining “labor” with “reading”, I am motivated by questions around intelligibility, consciousness and value in the context of the

¹⁷ Angleviel, “De l’engagement Comme ‘Esclavage Volontaire’. Le Cas Des Océaniens, Kanaks et Asiatiques En Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1963),” 71.

¹⁸ Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*.

¹⁹ Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

reproduction of the racial subjection at the level of the symbolic.²⁰ In yet another words, I am taking up the question of “race” and “settlement” by addressing the problem of “reading”.

My emphasis on and analysis of “reading” is informed by the debates taken up in comparative literature around the question of the ethics of reading, literary analysis, and the terms for the comparison of national literatures, with its interests in the question of cultural translation and consciousness-as-engagement in the concept of “World literature”. A concept with reliance on reception – “where reading and addressing never quite align” –, (World) literature (and literary analysis) are shown to be articulated around the possibility of ascertaining or approximating an intimate (authentic, proper) response to a literary text – whether bound by cultural or otherwise appurtenance, lived-reality, or a historical contingency. As a form of “edification” by production of an engagement with “experience”, the form of reading and literary analysis is, I will argue, at least one other way to think about race as unbecoming layer (even towards their assumption of removal in liberal fashion) in the discourse around questions of the “particular” and the universal. As such, reading (and reading race) is not necessarily about “engagement,” but about the circulation of what constitutes being “situated”, to which “engagement” appears as tautological: mediated by its act of mediation.

This thesis’s interest in studying race, while in the specific context of settlement in Kanaky, derives from an understanding of race (or the analytical priority given it) as a zone – or a historical configuration of coeval yet inequivalent processes for the deployment of violence –

²⁰ I would want to approach it in a dialectical relationship of the former with “supervision”, by which I understand not simply the coded practice of “overlooking labor” and the attendant documentation (or not) that legislates, organizes and legitimizes the racial economic order, but the “labor of overlooking” (see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890-1940,” in *Subaltern Studies II Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. 259-265).

with no margins. By building off of this argument of a diffuse nature of the material force of race, I want to emphasize the extensive implications of learning from the prolonged necessary attention to and struggle against racial thought and terror (and its disavowal) by groups, organizations, nations, movements, parties, polities, communities, in the very makeup of what we call the everyday, and thus that the tools for the practice of “understanding,” both vulgar and critical, are informed by forms of racial subjection at the level of the symbolic.²¹ It is in that very vein that Saidiya Hartman, among others, asks

what if the presumed endowments of man – conscience, sentiment, and reason – rather than assuring liberty or negating slavery, acted to yoke slavery and freedom?²²

Drawing from this proposition, the very “thought” and the problem of “reading” race, then – whether bodily traits or the result of social modes of reproduction or ascribed attendant structures of the mind (culture, history, language, comport) assumed as, *or* assumed to be compelled by result of, a cumulative, aggregative experience (of oppression and not) – provides the basis of a definition for “racial subjection”. The problem addressed here is not a “crisis” in criticism, or a Romantic move *qua* a self-scrutiny of ethnic studies pointing us towards “the nothingness of human matters”, as Paul de Man introduced into literary studies.²³ If anything, and away from the

²¹ I understand this as the theoretical groundwork and legacy of a metacritique impressed upon a centering of issues of exploitation, hegemony, and consciousness that seemingly resolve or place race outside of the structural makeup of the above questions, their transaction, and their material premises. I situate it as a critique emerging from the materialist (standpoint) study of racial slavery and indigenous genocide, a study of material relations formulating and demanding a reckoning with the place of symbolic forms as themselves modes of production of forms of material violence. In my argument, both the intellectuation and the material staging of such violence informs and are informed by the reproduction of social relations premised on the reproduction of the ascribed capacities of the Human – its affects and values (agency, freedom, self-determination, etc. – of which blackness and indigeneity (*qua* the elimination of those ascribed to be black and indigenous) are as much conceptual bookends and placeholders. Focusing on the conceptual vehicle of “labor” and its progressivism for those processes of anti-blackness and -indigeneity and the place of “abolition” in this process, my dissertation takes up the concept of “circulation” in conversation with the theoretical formulations of this critique.

²² Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

²³ Paul de Man, “Criticism and Crisis” In *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 3-19.

primacy given to the inherent nature of processes of signification, the very attention to the problem of “reading” suggested in this dissertation departs from such theoretical propositions in which “reading” (or “theory”) does away with readers.²⁴ To reiterate, one can see the problem of racial logics to appear in its very demand to be “read” by those who are being racially ascribed, or by those who are drawing its contours for making sense of social structure of repression and elimination, therefore muddying the question of its boundaries or of the origin of its demand.

Racial subjection is one process I want to scrutinize and analyze by way of the production of a “positive” environment, a “transparency” of the social or nature of “reality” reproduced by the thought of “material conditions” as *comparative* impediment to (*and ontologized as*) individual and collective organization – an annihilation not simply of life but maybe of death itself.²⁵ Rather than “racialization” or “racial subject formation”, “racial subjection” allows me to name and expose a sanctioned deployment of total violence in its dialectics of actual and symbolic forms of coercion (even when they may not appear as such²⁶) that both ultimately amount to the production of “group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death,”²⁷ *without* ultimately dismissing the power of race as a form for collective struggles,

²⁴ See for example Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); or, even the “anti-deManian” interventions on “misunderstanding” inherent to literary and political language in Erin Graff Zivin, *Anarcheologies: Reading as Misreading* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). A productive direction would be Asad’s emphasis on language as discursive tradition, as “instruction” and negotiation, rather than “unmasking” in his reading of two different expressions of the secular: “Language is not an abstraction that stands apart from “the real”; it embodies and mediates the life of people, gestures, and things in the world.” (Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 62-66.

²⁵ I am thinking here of the pairing of the concepts of “transparency” (Da Silva) with “flesh” (Spillers).

²⁶ See Hartman, *Scenes* on the “phenomenologically momentous” yet “nonevent” of abolition. At hand is the attempt at formulating and understanding antiblackness through the mutual constitution (“defamiliarization”) of slavery and freedom by way of a dialectical interrogation of the forms of “pleasure” and “terror”, “witness” and “spectator” and the documentary nature of the sustainment of the social mode of reproduction of the Human (“the very language of persons, rights and liberties”) and the (in)commensurability of racial slavery with the capitalist mode of production: “Only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible.” (*Scenes*, 4)

²⁷ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Introduction,” in *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 5–29.

identities or social modes of reproduction (even as its “abolition”²⁸) – meaning, affirming or suggesting a thought and practice of “material conditions” not solely reducible to impediment²⁹ but rather as the naming and even the very object of spaces of negotiation and struggle against the social (racial, economic) relations of capitalism.³⁰

My intervention is to emphasize the stakes in broaching the work of “determination” – this homologue of “material conditions” – operationalized by the very “disavowal” of determinations presented herein, or by the marked irrelevance of any similar disavowal or negotiation and struggle among “those” to be disavowed. As such, I suggest it amounts to what I

²⁸ There may be a comment to make on the different thought of “abolition” of capitalist, racial, colonial social relations in Marx and Engels’s Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Hartman’s *Scenes* and Rabasa’s *Without History*. I mean “abolition” here outside of the historical specificity of the formal termination of racial slavery, and more towards the identification and analysis of the mechanisms (material conditions) that produce social relations of domination as well as for the formulation of practices that would end the identities and social relations being reproduced – proletariat, Black, subaltern. In the last part of this document, I address the relation between “labor” and the reproduction of racial subjection through the political ontological formation that Marxist historical materialism usually implies – the self-determined creative producer – and adjacent interrogation on the role of “value”.

²⁹ I must here note the ideological *differential* ascription of material-conditions-*as-space-of-negotiation*, in that they can also be marked and operative as valuable, irrelevant or redeemable, depending on the historical material contours of the definition of such identities, citizenships, origins, always in relation to other coeval processes of racial capitalist domination. Part of this dissertation (esp. through chapter 3 and the question of cross-settlement with the *pieds-noirs* from Algeria for example) will be to interrogate the contours of the thought of material conditions and its relations to indigeneity and race in those very terms. This is part of the re-writing of modernity’s “objective” institution of the “subject”, i.e. all the intellectual expenditure compelled by the (self-determined) subject’s damnation to think about itself as an (affectable) *object* of scientific reason (see Da Silva *Towards*).

³⁰ This is a form of materialism that I identify to be common to the works of Hartman, Spillers and Williamson among others, as extensions of earlier formulations of “double consciousness” (du Bois) and critiques of the standpoint epistemologies of materialist feminisms (de Beauvoir, Hartsock, Firestone) and that of intersectional feminisms (Collins, Crenshaw, hooks): departing from the former in their evacuation of the material contours of black women’s historical experience as “laborers” defined by relations of sexuality and reproduction (“ungendering”) that is shaping their character of their refusal of and resistance to slavery irreducible to the outside presumed by a liberation into political agency (see Hartman “The Belly”; Williamson’s chapter 4); and departing from the latter on the basis of the order of the terms (the identification of primary locus of determination, or “antagonism”) by way of the scrutiny and suspicion of the formulation of an outside (legal, representational) predicated on identification and legibility (consciousness) of forms of antiblack violence and their additive, cumulative character in relation to material conditions upon which rely sociological categories (women, race, etc.) (see Hartman chapter 5; see Williamson chapter 1). Ultimately, it belies a differential, inherent derivative value to certain social relations (inhabitation), or it implies that the forms of violence themselves are irrelevant to the possibility for their cognizance or for consciousness itself and at that any negotiation of the terms for capacities. This is as materialism, in the sense of a discourse of material conditions, that I also understand Spillers’s turn to psychoanalysis and the place it gives to the process of “signification”.

would call, following several scholars, “counter-insurgency”.³¹ I understand “disavowal” to be is the process by which is affirmed social, racial transparency. “Disavowal” names not the possibility of resolution in “consciousness” (or of primary contradiction in “discourse”) although it may attend to consciousness because it rather starts from the necessary cognition of that which is performed (and performed as necessary or “originary”) and eluded. Thus the question may be not who (individually) is disavowing, but about a scrutiny of the determination for the processes of identification (or self-adequacy) with process by which we understand our identities (a collective of individuals) as the comparative referent to those that are the product of outer determination (whether as impediment to individual or collective organization). To clarify further, situating this process of disavowal as being part and parcel with the racial capitalist social mode of reproduction is due to its form: it is not necessarily a disavowal of what is negotiated as “resistance” by an “Other”, but a disavowal of the material force of negotiation itself, what we may call “social modes of reproduction”,³² such that disavowal is the active recursive product of one such socially organized negotiation – meaning therefore that “disavowal” ultimately is at least the very thing being disavowed. Put differently, staking out the standpoint of an investigation into racial subject production might further be about an engagement and interrogation of what is determining “resistance” as well as *what a discourse of “resistance” is made to determine.*

³¹ I am thinking in particular of Estes, Nick, Melanie K. Yazzie, Jennifer Nez Denetdale, David Correia, Radmilla Cody, and Brandon Benallie, *Red Nation Rising: From Bordertown Violence to Native Liberation* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021); and Khiari, Sadri. *La contre-révolution coloniale en France: De de Gaulle à Sarkozy* (Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2009).

³² Luk, *Life of Paper*, 169.

In thinking about the differential ascription of “material conditions,” my attention considers the labor that goes into the very “reading” of those ascriptions.³³ To put it another way, my project takes academic writing and critical theory itself as objects of theoretical attention, underlining the figure of an underdetermined “consciousness”, or the naming of which, resolving or exhausting race in an act of “proper” reading – an act of reading in which the racial would be the subsumed or overwritten iteration of a production of violence. I understand this process of subsumption to be one condition of a social and political “transparency”, a plane whereby “racial subjection” is parametrically reproduced, whereby “race” discursively serves as an analytic of mere layers of illusory, exorbitant, unbecoming, encumbered, pathological relations.³⁴ Therein, “transparency” is the premise of racial subjection or its horizon: a configuration that amounts to the either a priori or deferred irrelevance of “material conditions”, of the latter’s centering of “determination” as an object of negotiation and address in the reproduction of material (bodily, social) existence. To go round fully, it is also the investment in the literary in the study of race - by which I mean not only the turn to literature as a source or object of analysis,³⁵ but the forms of literariness and its analytical approach in literary studies as a model through which to think race³⁶ - that justifies or drives the conjoined endeavor.

In all, I am asking: what can the discursive evacuations and foregroundings of race in the readings of a photograph, a poem, or memoirs, through time, can tell us about the political economy of “reading”? about the relation between reading and racial subjection? between

³³ Rei Terada, “Hegel’s Racism for Radicals,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. Autumn issue (2019): 11–22. See infra, Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

³⁴ I am here building off of and drawing this definitional and analytical work of “transparency,” in its relation to “self-determination” (or “interior/historical” determination), from Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

³⁵ I am thinking here about the use of Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred* in Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Cambridge MA: Sternberg Press, 2022). ; and in Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”, *Small Axe*, 26 (Vol 12, 2), 2008, 1-14.

³⁶ I am thinking here of Colleen Lye, “Racial Form”, *Representations* (Vol 104, 1), 2008, 92-101.

political economy and racial subjection? What can the circulation of this figure of “reading” in Kanaky, in the context of the history of penal colonization (especially with the deportation of Communards, of the Kanak themselves and of other *indigènes*) tell us about the relation between reading and labor? between labor and racial subjection? How would an interrogation of the concept of “settlement” regroup Blackness and Indigeneity under an analytics of racial subjection? Further, how may “reading” ask us to revise our meta-language about race? What is the nature of the articulation between racial subjection and capitalism?

CHAPTER 2

A PHOTOGRAPH

A photograph, of Kanak teacher and militant Eloi Machoro, breaking with a *tamioc*-hatchet the plastic ballot box in use for the ongoing territorial elections at the townhall of Canala, in the north-west of French-occupied Kanaky - was taken on November 18, 1984.³⁷ In this photograph, one can see the hatchet being hurled down to a yet unimpaired box, while the audience is either expectingly or weariedly observing, waiting, leaving, smoking. Two months later, and in the continuity of the declaration and constitution of the Republic of Kanaky and its provisional government (of which Machoro would take part as *Ministre de la Sécurité*), Machoro

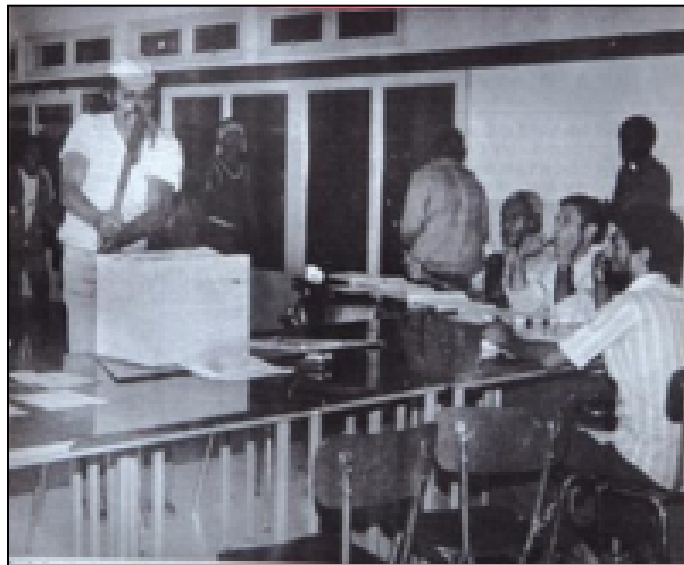


Figure 1

³⁷ I am using below the terms “New Caledonia”, “Kanaky-New Caledonia”, and “Kanaky” to refer to specific ontological and epistemological frames of reference and socio-historical contexts that organize, as such, different social, material realities.



Figure 2

and co-fighter Marcel Nonnaro will be murdered on January 12, 1985 by the G.I.G.N. backup forces sent by the French state. This series of concatenated events triggered the ensuing four-year period of insurgence, reform, impasse and repression popularly referred to as “*les Evènements* [the Events]”.

At least three comments can be made: first, two versions of this photograph circulated at the time (one in the mainstream, colonial newspaper *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* (figure 1); the other in a pamphlet of the pro-independence Union Calédonienne political party (figure 2); second, the two photographs are completing one another – meaning that both were cropped, or altered; third, taking a picture of this act was not intended: the photographer, front desk worker at the townhall Louise Takamatsu, arrived there “by chance” with her Canon camera and even stopped “Eloi” in the middle of the action – “*attends, Eloi, je ne suis pas prête. [Wait, Eloi, I’m not ready.]*”³⁸ – announcing either or both her residential (or tribal) proximity,³⁹ or her familiarity

³⁸ Marion Pignot, “Marquée Par Un Cliché,” *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, Juillet 2013, <https://www.lnc.nc/article/pays/marquee-par-un-cliche>.

³⁹ Isabelle Merle, “La Construction d’un Droit Foncier Colonial: De La Propriété Collective à La Constitution Des Réserves En Nouvelle-Calédonie,” *Enquête 7*, no. Les objets du droit (1999): 1–22. for an account of the administrative construction of the “*tribu*” or “*chefferie*” as a unit of political, social and residential organization for

with the national liberation cause. She is also the only woman, and Kanak woman, “present” in this event of photography.

The use of this photograph as illustration or icon of the Events is ubiquitous in the national and local media yet it remains so far untheorized, while at least a few particular consequences could be inferred from those three comments above. The first consequence is that of the relation between the material economy of its circulation, irreducible to optics, and, virtually, the eventual murder of the designated main agent. The second is that of an implied stability of reference, of meaning, and of interpellation into action (whether support or repression) that the croppings manifest, underwritten by competing forms of legitimation of violence. The third consequence is that of the simultaneity of intentions *for* action that the iterable doubling of the hacking by its halting lays bare, which I mean as much for the independentists than for the settlers. Indeed, interested in the latter, the thought of the circulation of the photograph (albeit altered) can appear to muddle the logic of settler intent.

By tracing a certain shift today in the weight of referential attention from Machoro to Takamatsu, it can appear to displace, or augment, the question of intent or its absence in the production of settlement from the material to the hermeneutic, if not the symbolic, exposing the circulation (economy) of a form of “reading.” I mean to speak of “reading” by way of a focus on “the cultivation of the terms under which the reading occurs,” of which the reader is an effect.⁴⁰ I am interested in the circulation of “settlement” for the ontological terrain assumed and sustained

the indigenous population of Kanaky-New Caledonia, against that of the “*clan*” (the Kanak “segmented” social formation) dating from 1867 and based from the Loyalty island polities, and the colonization of Algeria (see also Judith Surkis, “Propriété, Polygamie et Statut Personnel En Algérie Coloniale, 1830-1873,” *Revue d’histoire Du XIXe Siècle* 41, no. 2 (2010): 27–48.). Machoro was from the tribe of Nakety; Takamatsu that of Gelima, both in the Xârâcùù linguistic and administrative division.

⁴⁰ Michael Allan, “Reading with One Eye, Speaking with One Tongue: On the Problem of Address in World Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 1–2 (2007): 5.

by practices that instantiate that “text” and of its properly reading settler subjects, whose instantiated propriety makes it the gauge and possibility of the circulation of the former. Neither from the point of view of a historian, nor from that of a media scholar, my point will be to yield questions about the conditions of possibility of settlement that the figurative presence-absence of “Louise Takamatsu” in or *as* this photograph manifests or allows to theorize: “what is it an image of?”; or, what is the image of a “reading”?

Taking a circuitous route in order to find threads of questions to grasp and fray, this thesis will want to be regressive in its approach to photography - isolating the place of the viewer - and speculative on two counts: that of reading from the point of view of settlement, in a phenomenology of settler “common sense” (or is the settler common sense of phenomenology?) while alert to how “common sense”, rather as Whiteness, “gains currency by being unnoticed”⁴¹; and that of its converse, namely from a phenomenological settler knowability of the Kanak people as “vanishing” or as a “threat” - whereby settler violence is converted into Kanak criminality, as well as its failure to repress the latter into a perpetual specter. Yet, the cognition and inclusion of Kanak “resistance” creates a remainder that, I am suggesting, may compel us in putting emphasis on this circulation of a “reading”. If settler colonialism has been paradoxically premised on movement,⁴² an analysis of this “circulation” of reading may help in addressing the

⁴¹ Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149.

⁴² We may understand this proposition in several ways. My overall approach to the formulation of settler “movement” is more akin to Maile Arvin’s, who attended to how the European-colonial entitlement and sense of belonging to the Pacific islands was predicated on a theorized Aryan descent (and thus movement from Europe) of the inhabitants of the islands ascribed as part of “Polynesia”. (Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai’i and Oceania* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).) Patrick Wolfe’s notion that “settlers, by definition, come from somewhere else” is an apt formulation to address material unevenness, to the extent that, according to him, and “compared to the fixity of the Indigenous stock, settler resources are elastic and globally reproducible. There are always more settlers where the first ones came from – and, if needs be, from somewhere else.” (Patrick Wolfe, “Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3 (2013): 257–79.) If I am sympathetic to his interrogation of the “repudiation of binarism” as a form of settler expression, I do not construe or fix an antinomy of “settler” to be predicated solely against

mobilization of an obdurate staying, lest we can't analyze settler claims to rootedness, belonging, or autochtony more seriously. I will ultimately suggest that staking out an investigation into settler subject production, just like in this case, might not only be about an engagement and interrogation of what is determining "resistance" as much as what *a demand for* a figuration and discourse of "resistance" *is made to determine*.⁴³ With in mind and taking to task questions of "common sense" in settler colonial studies - bearing on what we could call "agnotological" or "myopic" theorizations of settlement with their presuppositions for resistance sublated as "consciousness", ultimately bearing on theorizations of indigeneity and blackness - I will try to explain what it may mean for the study of settler subject production in Kanaky-New Caledonia to see the photograph as the effect of a circulation of a "proper" reading of settlement as "racial text": that which expunges the racial by instantiating the subject who can read it and read it out.

"native" in isolation, or their relation as one of land and labor only, which can only mean that we comprehend descendants of enslaved people, colonized contractual labor forces, or displaced indigenous people, as irremediably "settlers", outside of any dialectics. (see among others Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)., Vicente M. Diaz, "Oceania in the Plains: The Politics and Analytics of TransIndigenous Resurgence in Chuukese Voyaging of Dakota Lands, Waters, and Skies in Mini Sóta Makhóche.," *Pacific Studies* 42, no. 1/2 (2019): 1–44., Dean Itsuji Saranillio, "Haunani-Kay Trask and Settler Colonial and Relational Critique: Alternatives to Binary Analyses of Power," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 4, no. 2 (2018): 36–41.). Similarly, Lorenzo Veracini asserts that "settler colonial traditions are premised on moving somewhere else" to situate "proposals that envisage renewed displacements" as "retaining a fundamentally settler mode of operation" (100), which is problematic for its adjudication of a struggle against colonialism as ultimately voluntarist or premised on the location of agency with settlers. His assertion of a global settler colonial present is however productive to point to the limits of a localized, isolated, "material" operation of colonization. (Lorenzo Veracini, "Conclusion: Transcending the Settler Colonial Present," in *The Settler Colonial Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 95–109.)

⁴³ Because of the trans-historical and cross-colonial aspects at stake and the anchorage of settler-colonial discourse outside the strictly national bounds within which they seem to discretely operate, and heeding the call made by Ann Stoler, "urg[ing] attention to practices of colonial comparison by colonial governments themselves" and thereby to also "treat comparison, not as a methodological problem, but as a historical object" (Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 831, 862.) - I am rather interested in the *demand for comparison* as the object of study. That may involve the place of "resistance" as content for the formulation of comparison.

Electing Violence, Elected Violence

The initial cover article of *Les nouvelles calédoniennes* dated the day after the event and displaying the photograph was titled “*LES ELECTIONS DE LA VIOLENCE* [the elections bound by violence/electing violence/ or, voting violence in]”.⁴⁴ The signification of images is of course entangled with the production of discourse, and photographic images as much as the production of their autonomous indexical and illustrative power, are “bound by the structures of language”: “how much authority do I ascribe to the image, the printed text below it, and the handwritten notes around the edges?”⁴⁵ Yet, if any visual representation cannot do without “language” or the discursive practices of its readers (the negotiation of meaning in relation to their social material relations), or, if neither of those can do without a recipient, a slip between the absence of the latter and of any clear “intention” of the photographer is something that the croppings, more than the conditions of its taking by Takamatsu, may however ask us to consider seriously. More so, in the context of settlement in which the viewer/reader is not distant to the photographed event but rather proximate, and insofar as we know she is called to identify (knowingly or unknowingly) with the cropping-as-camera, it can allow us to ultimately shift attention from “representation” as a mode of control to the control “over the interpretative framework of its consequences.”⁴⁶ Taking the risk of being “regressive” or formalist, lest we cannot see the necessary traffic between the two, we may however still pay attention to the forms of cultivation of a “destined”

⁴⁴ “LES ÉLECTIONS DE LA VIOLENCE,” *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, November 19, 1984.

⁴⁵ Michelle Erai, *Girl of New Zealand: Colonial Optics in Aotearoa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020), 8.

⁴⁶ Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 231.

viewer,⁴⁷ to more unary and assumed forms of identification of a represented subject, together amounting to the possibility of its sustained circulation.

And indeed, one could argue that both photographs easily yield to a reading relying on optical identification, or interpolation, more than it does on representation. On the left photograph, the empty chairs almost call to have been filled, warmed, and sat up from, potentially interpolating one, in a triangulation of gazes, to identify *as* or vicariously *with* a member of the actual audience, composed of the civil body in charge of representing the government during the electoral process and witnessing it front-hand. I would argue that it is by way of contrast with any other version of the photograph that the alterations work to highlight a similar yet different triangulation of optical and vicarious identifications than in the second photograph (in which the civil representatives are relatively cropped off and the group of militant behind on the right, and the man of the left-hand side, are kept within view). We may more so identify with the man on the left – Leopold Joredie, who had delivered a speech announcing/warning of the event – his arms on his hips and looking in the direction of Machoro; or with the group of militants who accompanied them, bearing witness and force to the event in the background. In contrast with the staticity of the first photograph, whether capturing passivity or powerlessness, there’s a certain motion to the pose in the second, whether due to the actual or semblance of a footstep forward, accompanying the hacking, that we can identify on Joredie and a couple of other militants; or whether it is due to investment in the realization of the action itself, in the axe, in the arms, in the ballot box. It’s almost kind of too slow.

⁴⁷ See Michael Allan. *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016; and “Reading with One Eye, Speaking with One Tongue: On the Problem of Address in World Literature.”



Figure 3

A material-historical analysis would point out to the conditions of emergence, in the Western aesthetic tradition, of a subjective-based form of perspective (linear perspective) in the process of conversion of reality (*ousia*) to visual appearance (*phainomenon*).⁴⁸ For Panofski, the “subjective” has come not to become the objective but has rather been “objectified”, “mathematized,” in the mere application of the construction of the “vanishing point” as rational, repeatable means of representation of space, as if irrelevant to content matter. From Panofski, we

⁴⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

could argue that the construction and perfection of photography and the camera as a mechanical medium of reproduction of the psychophysiological relies on (material) demands for the production of linear perspective - in our case, “a consolidation and systematization of the external world as an extension of the domain of the self”⁴⁹ as well as the possibility and the prospect of an access to an “authentic” perception of the domain of the Other, or its being “posed”⁵⁰. Juxtaposed with the headpiece of chapter seven in *Souvenirs de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (1881) by Henri Riviere (figure 3, above), the photograph of Machoro seems to simultaneously condense - manage - numbers and time into one single actor and “pose,” reminiscent of Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotography (figure 4, below).⁵¹ As palimpsest, however, the ballot box may shed its metonymic relation with the peaceful voting citizen and electoralism carving itself out of violence⁵² (just as does penmanship, or “writing”, both *on* the image and *out of it* into the authoritative account, blood and ink spilled).

Yet, by drawing from a material-historical analysis I do not mean to suggest a play of mechanical necessity, or palimpsestic linearity; or the inherent programmatic subject producing function of any technology; or conscious intent - which I will want to show is however irreducible to “ignorance,” or “myopia”.⁵³ The assertion that “[frames] must circulate in order to establish their hegemony” can run the risk of being merely contemplative if only to state the “iterability” or “collapsability” of said-“frame”, or of the norm.⁵⁴ Put another way, to show that

⁴⁹ Panofsky, 68.

⁵⁰ See Fred Moten, “Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 17, no. 2 (2007): 217–46; Gerald Vizenor, “Edward Curtis: Photography and Disanalogy,” in *Visual Representations of Native Americans: Transnational Contexts and Perspectives*, ed. Karsten Fitz (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), 101–12.

⁵¹ See Sianne Ngai, “Animatedness,” in *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 89–125.

⁵² See Olivier Ihl, “L’urne et Le Fusil: Sur Les Violences Électorales Lors Du Scrutin Du 23 Avril 1848,” *Presses de Sciences Po* 60, no. 1 (2010): 9–35.

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 5.

⁵⁴ Butler, 12.

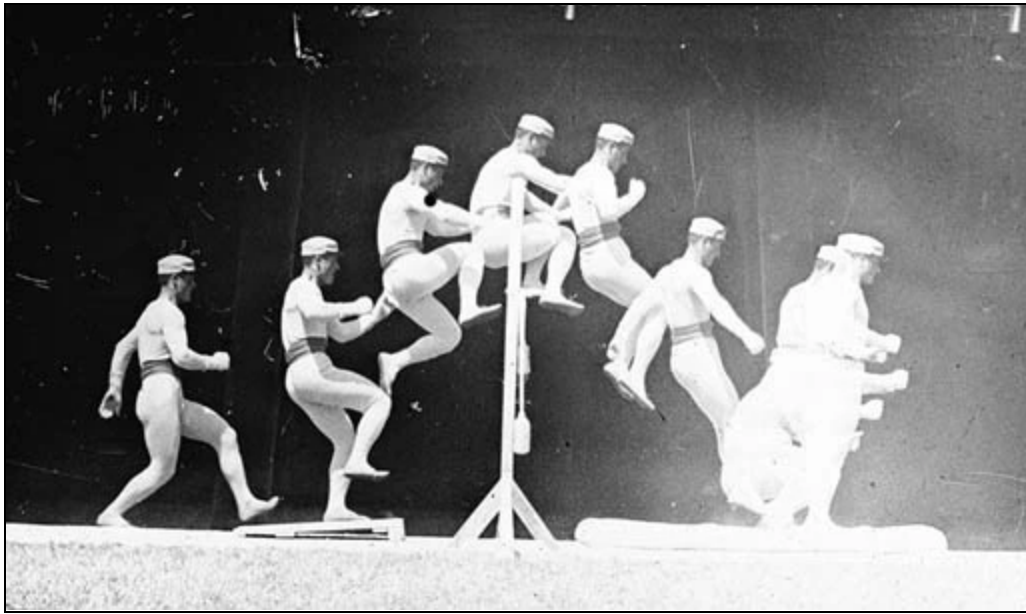


Figure 4

“the norm functions precisely by way of managing the prospect of its undoing, an undoing that inheres in its doings”, cannot attend to the persistent or recursive “doings,” in their specific ways.⁵⁵ Moreover, such a framework cannot account for how photography didn’t necessarily operate as an advancement but as “a scientizing aid” for former and coeval forms of representation,⁵⁶ and cannot ultimately account for any ascription of photography’s processes signification as epistemologically irrelevant.⁵⁷ Michelle Erai, in her study of the scopic circulation of images of Maori women, speaks of “optics” as representative of the “dense transfer point” for political perceptions and discourses “that constitute the space between a mode of apprehension – e.g. the retina, in the case of visual media – and the object – e.g. a photograph.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Butler, 29.

⁵⁶ Moten, “Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis.”

⁵⁷ James T. Siegel, “The Curse of the Photograph: Atjeh 1901,” in *Objects and Objections of Ethnography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 76–96.

⁵⁸ Erai, *Girl of New Zealand*, 5.

In addition to the extension to Panofski's scholarship that, one could argue, she renders in the context of colonial conquest, what I find interesting in Erai's notion of an "innocent eye" as episteme is her reliance not on simulacrum or equivalence but on "consumption."⁵⁹ Put simply in a political economic sense, consumption doesn't involve or imply material needs or use value (say, eating, like eating a chocolate bar) but only the economic social relations and election of a standard form (money) through which material needs appear legible (buying a chocolate bar, regardless of its being eaten). (What Marx names "realization," or "the dissolution of things accumulated in individual gratification", grants circulation the nature of a demand for rupture, or segmentation, between the "productive" (extractive and appropriating) and "consumptive" chains.) Of the money-form under a capitalist mode of production (meaning "within circulation seen as a constantly repeated circle or totality" through the matrix of exchange-value), Spivak speaks of a "*vanishing moment*," the role of which is to "facilitat[e] the exchange of two commodities"⁶⁰ or to remunerate (consume) according to the socially established measure of (time for) the reproduction of labor-power (like the eating and thus, in "ideal" or "sublated" circulation, the exchange-value of a chocolate bar, just like sleep would be legible only through tenancy or mortgage).

Bringing it back to the process of identification in the photographs and the perspective form, the focus on money/perspective as a "negative relation of circulation" (outside of which money would be either a commodity like others, or mere instruments of production like linen,

⁵⁹ Erai, 17: "An image created by an image maker and consumed visually by the sighted optically fixes ideas in a way that differs from what a reader of words on a page may construct within their mind and again what a writer may have intended. The debates about what meaning might be attached to what is presented (semiotics, philosophy, theology, history) and how possible it is that each internal simulacrum of the presented is measurably similar to another's mind picture (sociology, neurobiology, psychology) is a qualitatively different discussion than that which is based on the consumption of an image" (17)

⁶⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," *Diacritics* 15, no. 4 (1985): 77.

cotton, synthetic fibers, or gold; and perspective merely an algebraic calculation applied to geometrical representation of space) can be helpful to think morphologically not about the movement of the representations themselves but rather of the terms under which the reading of representation and subject production (as effects of the circulation of the reading) can occur.⁶¹ We may infer that this can be exacerbated by photography, its mechanical apparatus epitomizing linear perspective to the extent that it appears codeless, unencumbered by its material or semiotic production: “it is not it [the photograph] that we see.”⁶²

For how it underlines this prosthetic potential of linear perspective parasitic on individual standpoint, the scholarly work on the use and commodification of lynching postcards and their circulation in the US is helpful for our case when thinking about the work of “arrest,” of policing, that the photographs were in part enacting by “put[ting] spectacle into motion”, “giving their producers, their senders, and *especially their recipients* a kind of prosthetic access to the

⁶¹ Specifically, scholarly attention to the social relation of “hoarding,” or thesaurization, as the very ruptures in the circulation of commensurable commodities that serve to ceaselessly preserve the latter (circulation) as well as money as a petrified, latent measure of value, can be significant in seeking not only a metaphor but a morphological operation for thinking the abstraction of the “demand” made through the photograph as a demand for reading *as* reading (just like the demand of money *as* money), and its recursive, negative, seemingly-autonomous economy (see Suzanne de Brunhoff, *Marx on Money*, trans. Maurice J. Goldbloom (New York: Urizen Books, 1976), 39–44.). Rather than an exegesis of Marx’s *oeuvre* from which to “access” or situate an idealized subject (see for example Chakrabarty), by way of those comparisons with the “money-form” I mean to think about how to approach racial capitalist symbolic forms through morphological comparison with the material (economic), which is what I understand scholars attending to the formation of blackness, the commodity-form, and a symbolic economy do (notably Saidiya Hartman, and Hortense Spillers). One thing that the use of economic forms as means of expression of the racial by scholars like Colleen Lye or Iyko Day show is that the social relation of capital are phenomenological (for people don’t literally ascribe “relative surplus” value) but it may also seem to give only prevalence to the material (base) rather a morphological, supplementary relation to symbolic that any reduction to the “superstructure” or ideology would rehearse a sociological of exclusion producing a telos of transparent subjects. As such, my attention to the traffic between settlement and racialization (the settler text as racial text, see below) are in keeping with the therein reflections.

⁶² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 2010), 6. The interest in thinking about “reading” and circulation by way of photography, of those photographs, is informed by those questions that render photography as epitomizing questions of “frame”, “framework”, “context” (see for example Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*) and sociologies of in/visibility or consciousness, and the effacement of the recursive racial production of emancipation.

definitional authority [over the social space].”⁶³ Here, at least three comments may bear noting. First, that it is through this economy (circulation by number) that the stability of reference and cultivation of the subject is performed, for, regardless of the recipient, the act of dissemination can be understood on “the assumption that, [the recipients] too, are partners in the same discourse.”⁶⁴ Second, that the prosthetic access marks the “annihilation of space” both by the immediacy of embodied spatial experience that linear perspective, ultimately productive of “section[s] cut from infinite space”,⁶⁵ allows for or demands, as well as by the expansion of circuits of trade and transportation that allows the circulation of the postcards. As such, it builds upon and instantiates the ensuing “collapse between global and corporeal spaces” in the context of the translation and channeling of excess capital into foreign investments abroad.⁶⁶ The converse, as the impossibility - or irrelevance - of a Kanak recipient in the case of our photograph, indexes the racialization undergirding and sustaining Indigenous peoples as “*vanishing*” – i.e. they cannot be the viewer, or/because they are the infinite natural spatial terrain whose annihilation (material and symbolic) permits bodies to come forth as investor, viewer, or Human.⁶⁷ Finally, we may note that it is “repeatability” that governs the circulation of the prosthetic access to the definitional authority of the social space policed to the color line, and that as such it also marks a “deficit”: the completion of the photograph happens at each moment of viewing, or re-viewing, its iterability.⁶⁸ (As such, rather than the “symbolic”, one may

⁶³ Mark Simpson, “Archiving Hate: Lynching Postcards at the Limit of Social Circulation,” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 30, no. 1 (2004): 24–25 (*my emphasis*).

⁶⁴ Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 75.

⁶⁵ Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 56.

⁶⁶ Jaime Hanneken, “A World Girded: Saint- Simonian Space and Race in the Nineteenth- Century Latin Transatlantic,” in *The Global South Atlantic*, ed. Kerry Bystrom and Joseph R. Slaughter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 48.

⁶⁷ See also the question of “*décor*” in Moten, “Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis.”; see Tiffany L. King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), especially chapter 2.

⁶⁸ Quoting François Robichon, Hanneken brings in the example of the diorama which, according to the former, was created “by a deficit in the mechanism that the spectator must supplement with an imaginary that adheres to the

understand this deficit by way of Benjamin's theorization of allegory.⁶⁹) Perforce, the photograph of Machoro, although not the photograph of a lynching, is itself marked by stakes that are governed by repetition - the ballot box being forever to be broken, or the social order to be menaced by Kanak violence.

On Kanak Specters

Adrian Muckle's research on the internment of Kanak shows how the *code de l'indigénat*, either practically, discursively or in its very material conditions – i.e. the use of appointed “native” surrogates to enforce provisions of the code – was more concerned with the racialization of the “native”⁷⁰ and therefore to “obscure acts of Kanak resistance [...] without bringing the process of colonization into question.”⁷¹ Overall, the code worked by individualizing and pathologizing criminality – painting them as disorderly subjects or troublemakers.⁷² Muckle argues that the identification “habitual” behaviors were necessary for the differential constitution of Kanaks as French *subjects* as well as in the naturalization of “native” political and customary systems, and this “alleged existence of customs particular to Kanak were cited as the principal justification for not referring the case to the judicial system.”⁷³ Muckle does insist in his reading of settler anxiety of a Kanak threat in the nineteenth century – and our photograph could rather indicate so in a different time frame – on the fact that the Kanak were and are actively shaping

spatialization of his body” (1985, 83) (Hanneken, “A World Girded: Saint- Simonian Space and Race in the Nineteenth- Century Latin Transatlantic,” 48.

⁶⁹ See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (New York: Verso, 1988).

⁷⁰ See Muckle, “The Presumption of Indigeneity: Colonial Administration, the ‘Community of Race’ and the Category of Indigène in New Caledonia, 1887–1946,” 310.

⁷¹ Adrian Muckle, “Killing the ‘Fantôme Canaque’: Evoking and Invoking the Possibility of Revolt in New Caledonia (1853-1915),” *The Journal of Pacific History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 39.

⁷² See Adrian Muckle, “Troublesome Chiefs and Disorderly Subjects: The Indigénat and the Internment of Kanak in New Caledonia (1887–1928),” *French Colonial History* 11 (2010): 131–60.

⁷³ Muckle, 145.

the settler response.⁷⁴ But Muckle identifies a variety of “specters” of the threat from the Kanak, of which the “constant musing” might “have served to encourage white solidarity” just as it might have served a perpetual hermeneutic exercise.⁷⁵

For evidence need not be found. In *For the Record*, Anjali Arondekar shows how “absence” or “failure” are also a productive forces of the colonial archive through a “negative idiom of representation”:

Each source is granted evidentiary equivalence, with the (“rare”) official record emerging as a mere reflection of an already established claim. The colonial archive no longer reads as the failed effort to produce an exhaustive panopticon, but becomes instead (or perhaps in addition) even more successful through its articulation of that very failure.⁷⁶

In nineteenth-century New Caledonia, Muckle differentiates two types of evocation: that of the settlers; and that of the administration. On the one hand, and responding to genuine or illusory threats, settlers would use the “specter” of the revolt to legitimize self-defense, demand for greater security, or to criticize the government’s inaction. (And we may now notice the one civil servant walking away, the one smoking, or the others sitting in a rather passive manner.) On the other side, the tendency of the administration was to assuage fears – to kill the “*fantôme Canaque* [Kanak phantom]”⁷⁷ – and deny or downplay the possibility of revolt by individualizing criminality – troublemakers for common crimes; chiefs for collective, racial, customary ones.

Notably, if they would admonish the settlers for taking the matters in their own ends, they would

⁷⁴ Which is obviously not to say that it justifies the response (see discussion below on “transparency”).

⁷⁵ Muckle, “Killing the ‘Fantôme Canaque’: Evoking and Invoking the Possibility of Revolt in New Caledonia (1853-1915),” 31.

⁷⁶ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 11.

⁷⁷ Muckle, “Killing the ‘Fantôme Canaque’: Evoking and Invoking the Possibility of Revolt in New Caledonia (1853-1915),” 42.

actually acknowledge and therefore help “to keep the specter alive”, albeit “one of a different nature with a more *manageable* form”.⁷⁸ Returning to the photograph, one could notice how both versions seem to simultaneously individualize and desingularize Machoro: in the first, only one Kanak, any Kanak; only Machoro, anyone of us, in the second. (Machoro is usually associated with the figures of the Chef Atai of the 1878 uprising, or Chef Noel of one in 1917, just like when the three of them were celebrated and painted across Kanaky on abandoned bus stops, especially during the blockades that followed his murder - “management” - by the G.I.G.N.)⁷⁹

Given the photograph’s extreme ubiquity at the time, just like today, it would never be completely a stretch to consider its physical circulation as having played a role in Machoro’s eventual “fate”. To be sure, Machoro was an important figure prior to November, 18, and his leading role in the seizing of Caldoche lands and farm estates and of the village of Thio would only bring him further to the fore, against the backdrop of a more formal political negotiation with the national government led by Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene.⁸⁰ The death on January 10, 1985 of Yves Tual, a Caldoche youth, by two independentist militants from Machoro’s group during a scouting operation, was only an awaited-for “excuse”. However, I rather want to raise

⁷⁸ Muckle, 44.

⁷⁹ Eddy Banaré, “Images et Textes d’Ataï (1969-2016) : L’élaboration de Discours Politiques Kanak,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes* 147 (2018): 518. Machoro, being from Canala, knew the history of his clan having been on the loyalist side during the 1917 uprising. He had performed a “*coutume* [relational recognition ceremony]” to acknowledge and bring justice to those past event.

⁸⁰ That’s the version of René Guiart, accusing Tjibaou and Yeiwene for their role in fostering a division between a terrain- and a carpeted corridor-strategies of pressure on the national-colonial government, despite the known commitment to nonviolence of Machoro and the militants and families working together (René Guiart, “Témoignage : La Vie et La Mort d’Éloi Machoro,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes*, no. 92–93 (1991): 129–39.. The moderate anticolonial campaign meant to establish a timetable for independence and release from custody 17 FLNKS militants. (See Bronwen Douglas, “Reflections on Political Murder: New Caledonia, 1984,” in *Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific*, ed. Donald Denoon (Canberra: Australian National University, 1997), 69–72.) In a letter dated November 17, Machoro makes the link between the election boycott and the imprisoned militants judged under common law - where sovereignty can be apprehended as that of judicial definition and decision. (Hamid Mokaddem, “Éloi Machoro (1946-1985). Recherche d’anthropologie Politique Sur Une Trajectoire,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes*, 2013, 185.)

attention to the underside of “fate” and “excuse”, in how the murder of Kanaks is comprehended, or read, even in the words of loyalist Caldoches, as a “tragedy”. Isabelle Doisy - an alias - will write in her chronicles of the first three years of the Events that

En outre, si les gendarmes avaient reçu l'ordre d'intervenir depuis le début, Eloi Machoro ne serait pas mort. Le lendemain du jour où il se faisait photographe brisant l'urne du bureau de vote de Canala à coups de hache, on aurait dû lui réserver le sort prévu pour ceux qui se permettent ce genre de “fantaisies”, c'est-à-dire une arrestation. Eloi Machoro en prison, le siège de Thio n'aurait pas eu lieu, l'enchaînement et l'escalade de la violence auraient été stoppés et Yves Tual serait vivant lui aussi.⁸¹

[Besides, if the gendarmes forces had been ordered to intercede since the very beginning, Eloi Machoro wouldn't be dead today. The day after he was shot axing down the ballot box at Canala, it's an arrest we should have had in store for him, like for anyone indulging in such whims. *Eloi Machoro in jail, Thio would not have been sieged, violence would not have escalated but put to a stop* and Yves Tual, him too, would be alive.]

(my emphasis)

It bears saying that the Caldoches were actually critical of the Mitterand government (1981-1995) in its management of an “unrest” which they would accuse them to have initiated and sustained since the very beginning (remember the Nainvilles-les-Roches declaration earlier, to which could be added envoy Henri Emmanuelli's description of “white power” in New Caledonia in 1981, the Lemoine referendum project, or the *haussaire* Pisani negotiations in december 1984, etc). This tension - this “misunderstanding” - between the populations of the metropole and New Caledonia, both actual and specious (the loyalists are very much fine with a right-wing government, and the ascendancy of the Socialist party to the executive was not only of their own fear) is still today something being referred to. Should we lose sight of it, it is as

⁸¹ Doisy, *Chroniques Des Années de Cendres: Nouvelle Calédonie (1984-1986)*, 90.

redress for Yves Tual and the restoration of the *status quo*, the deferment of which she laments – “for Machoro will now become the martyr of the FLNKS”⁸² – that Doisy is here establishing this sequence as a result, one she rationalizes and naturalizes not only for the death of Machoro but that of any Kanak as the “necessary outcome” in, as Denise da Silva puts it, any similar “confluence of events”.⁸³

Through an account of the modern institution of the “subject”, by tracing all the intellectual expenditure compelled by the (self-determined) subject’s damnation to think about itself as an (affectable) *object* of scientific reason, the work of da Silva is a critique of the underpinning “sociologics” of exclusion within critical race theory scholarship which he argues rehearses modern racial subject production, what she calls the analytics of “raciality.”⁸⁴ In our case, her shorthand definition of a “scene of nature” is generative for us to grasp the “reservoir” of raciality as expressive of this space of the affectable (exteriority/global, i.e. racial), charting a “what-is-known” Kanak “needing neither expression nor actualization.”⁸⁵ Differently from the archival evidentiary “absence” or “failure”, the closure of this knowledge “takes place in justification,” in the constation of a “fate”: that which *must happen* (and retrospectively, that which has always already happened before it occurs) by reason of the given social situation in which it takes place, with its distribution of identified protagonists - Caldoches, Europeans, Kanaks, Javanese, etc. What da Silva takes to task is therefore also the sociological terrain by which are formulated pathological (exterior) accounts of inclusive and exclusive representations, necessarily wedded to an assumed proper referent (rather as the national subject) that they can

⁸² Doisy, 90.

⁸³ Denise Ferreira Da Silva, “The Scene of Nature,” in *Searching for Contemporary Legal Thought*, ed. Justin Desautels-Stein and Christopher Tomlins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 283.

⁸⁴ Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ Da Silva, “The Scene of Nature,” 287.

only partially inhabit and whose partial inhabitation is the trace of their would-be “transparent”, accessible, and self-determined selves they are prevented to become. Violence is therefore construed not only as physical but as something “collectively understood to be appropriate”⁸⁶, a form of “justice”⁸⁷, a proper result to the situation discernible through a proper reading: in those conditions, and following Doisy, Eloi Machoro, as a non self-determined subject, only that whom is coping with either their localized essential dispositions, or that which are ascribed him - could not *not* have died.

Yet, even if the European historical (interior) subject is understood to be autonomous, “affectability” is also haunting the “justice” or propriety of his response. Indeed, for example, the group of settlers who organized the Hienghene ambush on December 10 that led to the death of ten Kanak men - an “event” eluding Doisy - invoked (but therefore, rationalized) their “fear”:

Little mention was made of the plight of Kanak victims or of a tribe which had lost half its adult men; there was reference rather to the terrible provocation which settlers had endured from the FLNKS, justifying their fears. It was argued that such fears had produced an extreme, but understandable response, given the intolerable laxity of French authorities in refusing to crush the FLNKS campaign and restore law and order.⁸⁸

Shedding further layers on the haunting predication of this double inscription and effacement of the murderers’ affectable state, Bronwen Douglas adds that the prosecution, however, will eventually attribute the events to the settlers being “‘metis [people of mixed descent] and even one Melanesian.’ At a stroke,” writes Douglas, “he dismissed the aspect of racial conflict by

⁸⁶ Erai, *Girl of New Zealand*, 14.

⁸⁷ See Vince Schleitwiler, “A Demonology of Comparisons: Imperialism, Justice, and Anti/Blackness,” *Comparative Literature* 68, no. 2 (2016): 116–29; Mohamad Amer Meziane, “States of Violence: Some Reflections on Civility and Race,” *Critical Times* 4, no. 1 (2021): 102–9.

⁸⁸ Douglas, “Reflections on Political Murder: New Caledonia, 1984,” 70.

implying that the whole thing was almost intraethnic, between Melanesians; [meaning that] real white men would not act like that, whatever the provocation.”⁸⁹

The choice of the term “scene” by Da Silva is interesting for what it evokes and thus theoretically expounds. As that which is witnessed, it calls on the senses, perception, apprehension, and the social sanction of the latter. As the subpart of an act, if “scene” shows itself to be irrespective of the locale or of its performers, and although different from the French in which “stage” and “scene” are homonyms [*scène*], then the phrase “scene of nature” concentrates space (infrastructure) into that very which is a content repeated, rehearsed. As repetition, rehearsal, the work of visual or “optical” interpolation, for Erai, shows itself to operate not only towards the settlers but towards the native subject, the latter being hailed into filling up a subject position “recreated as a body that is an iteration of the markers that make it possible to discern her as racialized and gendered.”⁹⁰

In addition to the interpolatory dialectic, as well as the gendered distribution of propensity for violence and for suffering violence that’s at stake for Erai’s definition of the racial and that we will return to with in mind the figure of Takamatsu, what I find interesting in her attention to the “Girl of New Zealand” portrait (ultimately the copy of the portrait of a male Maori youth captioned as that of a “girl”) is what it yields in terms of settler subject production through, or *as*, a form of symbolic circulation: “what is [this portrait] an image of?” asks Erai pointedly. She adds that

here the hail is not issued directly to the subject, nor does it require that an actual individual take up residence within the location for which they are being recruited.

⁸⁹ Douglas, 70.

⁹⁰ Erai, *Girl of New Zealand*, 46.

Rather, the hail is as through a loudspeaker, an alert to all that the subject of the image is a native woman, and persons other than (but possibly including) Maori women are thus afforded the discursive means by which to apprehend her very existence.⁹¹

Although the “image” Erai is herself interested in is not one bound by a question of representation (a Maori “boy”/“girl”) but, “reading for analogies”, the “image” of the *directionality* of the hailing, I am on my end interested in taking the form of the hailing, the possibility of its reading/consumption and the subject it instantiates as what the photograph of Machoro is an “image” of: that is, the subject of a circulation not in numbers but of one whereby the infrastructure (the “*stage*”) is the content of the “scene”. The question is only one of analytical priority, or emphasis, and in this way the analysis is only ever one thread of much broader efforts to comprehend practices of colonial subjectification and domination. I suggest we can approach this analysis of settlement in Kanaky by underlining how today the figure of “Machoro” can at times be heralded as incarnating a form of settler “resistance” as “Takamatsu” is *simultaneously* presented as the author of the photograph.

Accumulation

Is the photograph of Eloi Machoro breaking the ballot box an image that (still) circulates? What is it an image of? When considering the recent displays or evocations of the photograph in the media, what seems significant to me is that it is circulating in a rather celebratory or elegiac mood across the political spectrum. Indeed, contrary to the other major “event” of the Events – the hostage situation on the island of Ouvéa between the two rounds of the 1988 presidential elections – one that epitomize the period that spanned the moment captured by Louise Takamatsu to the killing of two of the movement for political self-determination’s leader, Jean-Marie

⁹¹ Erai, 46.

Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene on May 4, 1989 – the references to Machoro are rather imprinted with a rather pacified, “settled”, tone.⁹² Tellingly, in a more recent interview on Radio Rythme Bleu, the gaslighting insinuation made to Charles Washetine⁹³ of a risk in the repetition of history following the announcement by the FLNKS to boycott the third referendum, were made in relation to the boycott of the referendum of December 1987 that preceded the events on Ouvéa, not that of November 18, 1984.⁹⁴ What I want to emphasize, however, are the vicarious reference to the photograph by way of the one who took it – which, if not celebratory of causality, I see at least as an iteration of a political nullity or obsolescence of Machoro’s political perceptions, and by extension of Kanak and Indigenous legitimacy for governance.

Indeed, headlines like “*Marquée par un cliché* [Impressed by a Snapshot]” or more clearly “*Louise Takamatsu, figure et photographe de Canala, est décédée* [Louise Takamatsu, Figure and Photographer from Canala, Passed Away]”, and that in the very newspaper, *Les nouvelles calédoniennes*, that had disseminated the smaller version of the photograph in an cover titled “The elections bound by violence”, seem both to equate the person - Takamatsu - with the photograph so as to *settle* it twice over: by way of the narrative focus on an individual and its construction detached from the said “event” – with photography as a “hobby” away from violence or political intents –; and by way of their passing. Moreover, most articles are also keen on emphasizing how Machoro had captured the village of Thio from the French forces in -

⁹² For example, see those article from Mediapart and France 1ère: Joseph Confavreux, “Nouvelle-Calédonie: De l’urne Brisée Au Vote Espéré,” *Mediapart*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/011118/nouvelle-caledonie-de-l-urne-brisee-au-vote-espere?onglet=fu>
⁹³ Erik Dufour, Gilbert Assawa, and Jean-Noël Méro, “Eloi Machoro et Marcel Nonnaro Commémorés à Canala,” *Nouvelle Calédonie La 1ere*, January 13, 2020, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/nouvellectaledonie/province-nord/canala/eloi-machoro-marcel-nonnaro-commemores-canala-788501.html>.

⁹³ Current leader of the scientific socialist pro-independence party, PALIKA, part of the FLNKS coalition.

⁹⁴ “L’INVITE DU MATIN : MARDI 16/11/21,” *L’invité Du Matin* (Radio Rythme Bleu, November 16, 2021). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo1wx5EE1gk&feature=emb_title

indeed - bloodless manner, or emphasizing how the “heirs” of his actions are - all of them of course, it can only be - working towards a unified Nouvelle Calédonie – “*on ne va chasser personne* [We won’t drive anyone out]”.⁹⁵ Additionally, just like one of the articles states, a necessary reference or emphasis on Takamatsu herself suggests that it was not “known” that it was her – or that it is a Kanak woman – who took the picture that had travelled the world over.

However, not only was it not known by, say, the settler and loyalist socius, that it was Takamatsu who took the photograph, but even one article by a media scholar analyzing the representation of the early Events period in Caledonian and metropolitan newspapers went so far as assuming the provocation that such a photograph at this moment - conflated with the cropping - as necessarily revealing of the intentions of its taker, although they would in the last instance acknowledge the possibility of two readings, depending on whether the viewer is independentist or loyalist.⁹⁶ This reflex of binary readings shows how unsatisfactory can be a comprehension of every reproduction of the archive as the production of postmodernist *différance*. Indeed, the shift in perception of the re-discovered photograph of Machoro shows how signs are anyways captive to historical conditions and, as such, how the chain of signification and contestation over material can be inscribed to be moving not between but *within* each of the established (antagonist) frameworks, regardless of whether the frameworks understands their existence in the form of a binary or not. In the end, *différance*, or “reading” as the naming and submission to operations of textual language, would not only naturalize those antagonistic poles but also

⁹⁵ Joseph Confavreux, “Nouvelle-Calédonie: De l’urne Brisée Au Vote Espéré,” *Mediapart*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/011118/nouvelle-caledonie-de-l-urne-brisee-au-vote-espere?onglet=fu> ll.

⁹⁶ “L’intentionnalité du photographe quant au dynamisme de l’image participe à la mise en avant du caractère phénoménal, voire choquant de l’acte, qui connaît une double lecture selon que l’on soit indépendantiste ou loyaliste.” (Prescilla Illido, “La Photo de Presse et Les Événements de Nouvelle-Calédonie (1984-1989),” *Outre-Mers* 97, no. 366–367 (2010): 71.)

objectivize the archive as evidentiary promise of analytically “transparent” access, or abstract itself out of the contest over signification, even while the latter may oftentimes be a form of teleological subject production snugged as a *demand* for “more capacious ways to look”.⁹⁷ In studying race and reading at the junction of each other, what I see as imperative in this thesis is to reckon with and interrogate this demand.⁹⁸

Mark Simpson attests to something akin to this problem and the politics of archivization, consumption, circulation of lynching postcards, in his study of the 2000 *Without Sanctuary* exhibit curated by James Allen. What Simpson interrogates by way of the referential stability that a national archive seems to assume, is the meaning to be derived from the idea of – and imperative for – lynching postcards being *re-discovered* when the very process of their re-collection and the weight of their exhibition (or commodified spectacle) always implied and continues to imply their preservation both material (market-based) and in form⁹⁹: “at stake,” Simpson suggests, “is the artificial sanctity of an American ideal: for by isolating images this way [...] [it] can emphasize their aberrance while avoiding messy questions about the inextricability of lynch law from familiar routines of national life and familiar modes of national

⁹⁷ Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, 6.

⁹⁸ Especially as I understand Indigeneity to be further assimilated and secularized in a large part of liberal scholarship (which is also re-hailed) as a form of epistemological alterity predicated on recognition (i.e., demand) of an (otherwise) internal capaciousness. This failure of capaciousness (understood liberally, as that which is programmed and anxious to include all present and future individual identities) is what ironically owed the Kanak accusations of “racism”, shedding the literal and sociological “racial” dimension to the settler text and reading instances I am trying to link together.

⁹⁹ Part of the argument that I am cutting here is Simpson’s analysis of the 1908 federal legislation proscribing circulation of the lynching cards by mail which belies as much the complicity and complementarity of the extralegal with the rule of law as it rendered the circulation “more properly bourgeois” that “retool[ed] the relation between racist belief, on the one hand and bourgeois subjectivity on the other. (...) In this argument the federal will to prohibition and concealment served not at all to refute and resist white supremacy but instead, by obscuring its obscene supplement, to normalize and sustain it.” (Simpson, “Archiving Hate: Lynching Postcards at the Limit of Social Circulation,” 26..) The argument for the symbiosis between the private extralegal and the legitimacy of the public/state is also at play in the construction and the sustainment of the specter of Kanak revolt that Adrian Muckle describes and to which I make reference below. (see David Theo Goldberg on an elaboration of the neoliberal demands of an appropriate private locus for racism).

belief.”¹⁰⁰ Simpson will further add that “giving [...] only an archive of outrages – but not one of outrage,”¹⁰¹ the logic underpinning the rediscovery of those “images” are predicated on the legibility of anger as “an affect only for the present.”¹⁰² If this last point is something I can acknowledge for how it points to the relation between affect and epistemological, I want to rather linger on the materialization of a dominant directionality for rediscovery, and the transit of symbolic identification it foregrounds.

In this context, I find generative how Erai links her concept of “optics” to that of “primitive accumulation” by way of the retrieval and “smuggling” of a painting from Paris to Britain at the outbreak of the second world war. Erai comments that

this process (“smuggling”) may itself constitute an expansion upon Luxemburg’s notion of primitive accumulation; perhaps colonial efforts facilitated the movement of wealth from the dying European royal coffers into the bank accounts of the bourgeoisie through illegitimate markets operating on the borders of capitalism and colonial bureaucracy.¹⁰³

The one thing, at least, that I find important about this passing theorization is how here “smuggling” does not necessarily need to impart or rely on a particular nature to the “smuggled” – for I don’t understand the original example (a drawing by Charles Meryon entitled *Death of Captain Marion du Fresne at the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, 12 June 1772*) to be particularly famous for its overt (or contested) radically abolitionist stance and aesthetics. But, as a consequence, this fact takes our attention to the complicity between the material (political economic) and the epistemological (symbolic) even as, or rather because, the locus of value extraction is in this example one colonial nation-state for another by danger of invasion of yet

¹⁰⁰ Simpson, 32–33.

¹⁰¹ Simpson, 33.

¹⁰² Simpson, 33.

¹⁰³ Erai, *Girl of New Zealand*, 58.

another. For I suggest that only to the extent that we dare account for how the liberal concepts of “emancipation” are not simply synchronous with *but* dialectically concomitant to a striated mode of material accumulation that recursively demand and found forms of racial distribution whose coercive nature can appear sublated¹⁰⁴ – is it possible to glimpse how material (political economic) relations are carried out in and by the structure of (symbolic) identification.¹⁰⁵

This predication of the subject, inclusive but irreducible to labor-power, a symbolic economy of interpolation and annihilation (occupation) of space connected but irreducible to overseeing labor,¹⁰⁶ is what I understand the concept of “fungibility” to capture: “the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity” and “the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons.”¹⁰⁷ Neither exactly the solipsistic witnessing of pain (or vicariously, by way of Machoro’s “fate” or ascribed Kanak essential “vanishing”) nor that of criminal agency (or by way of its conversion into “affectability”, that which is determined by reaction, however rationalized like the “fear” of the settlers), it is rather *witnessing* itself, or a form of witnessing of witnessing, morphologically close to the forms of “proxy” described earlier, that I see here to be “acknowledged to the degree it can be imagined”.¹⁰⁸ As such, the photograph of Machoro highlights that is not necessarily the physicality of a body, “the fleshy substance of the embodied and encumbered” that is a necessary form of primitive accumulation evidentiary of the Human

¹⁰⁴ “The cross-hatchings of slavery and freedom as modes of domination, subjection, and accumulation” (Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 120.)

¹⁰⁵ See Rosalind C. Morris, “Ursprüngliche Akkumulation: The Secret of an Originary Mistranslation,” *Boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016), especially 62-65: “A mode of production becomes material in the minds of the subjects who operate it. Otherwise, there are only means of production.”

¹⁰⁶ See Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Oversight: The Ordering of Slavery,” in *Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 48–76.

¹⁰⁷ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in the Nineteenth Century*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Hartman, 19.

(interior/historical) volitional subject, but its doubling, with the materiality of a body known to be outside the frame, evoked by their presence whose very optical absence is even more productive of the identification as “an abstract and empty vessel”.¹⁰⁹

I argue that such predicative exchangeability governs the exchangeability of the photograph - meaning, its (and Machoro’s) having become innocuous - which is not so much to say that it is irrespective of content but that the latter is now irrelevant otherwise than by this mode of consumption/accumulation/circulation of the photograph by way of the author’s *intent*, that is, by way of the perpetually recursive foregrounding of Takamatsu as its taker – and this because her authorship is in all cases the only thing they have to say about her: the photograph taken by Takamatsu, who is the person who took the photograph, etc. Thus, lest we remain trapped in the tautology, or remain unable to account for why Takamatsu can be mentioned as a mixed-blood [*métisse*] “Japanese-Kanak”,¹¹⁰ I argue for the figure of “Takamatsu” to be one element productive in this photograph and reproductive of its settler circulation, doing labor for the settler reader, where “intent” (the witnessing) provides a form of access, which is an access (which I also see as the formulation of a boundary) to legitimacy. If we saw how a visual economy of interpolation and annihilation of space was connected to the good pursuance of surplus value extraction, it can be added here the practice of using surrogates as overseers, by way of which not only was division fostered but “the psychic vulnerability of domination” was surrogated, “allowing the owners to maintain (...) ‘positive, benevolent self-images’”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Hartman, 123, 21. On “primitive accumulation”, see Chapter 4 and 5, pp. 115-124, 125-163.

¹¹⁰ Confavreux, “Nouvelle-Calédonie: De l’urne Brisée Au Vote Espéré.”

¹¹¹ Mirzoeff, “Oversight: The Ordering of Slavery.”; see also the discussion on “injurability” in Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 25–26, and 178-179.

Taking once again the risk of being simultaneous regressive, digressive and speculative, I want to linger in investigating the circulation of the photograph – as the circulation of settler subject production and its accounting for race – by way of the place of the one who takes/intents the photograph, and that in “personal” photographs.

Speculation

One summer, my mother had brought back from Noumea a small box belonging to her recently deceased father, inside of which were two consecutive letters typed and addressed to then *Ministre des D.O.M. T.O.M.* [Overseas departments and territories] Bernard Pons and signed by Pierre-Hubert Jeanson, a local sport and political figure; as well as a series of photographs, most likely all from the same event, witnessing a loyalist demonstration in Noumea (figures 5-11). The letters are respectively dated February 1 and 26, 1987, but it is difficult to determine a clear timeframe to the photographs themselves. The weather looks summerly, and the demonstration (if only one and on the same day) seems to be a rather calm and relatively sparse procession, which makes it therefore unlikely to be any of the more massive protests of January 19 and February 26, 1985 despite the possibility to clearly identify some of the same banners with a simple web search (like the one about Yves Tual (figure 5)). By reason of the banner, the photographs could range anywhere from around January 10, 1985 and to the end or even outside the bounds of the Events (1984-89). The photographer is bearing witness to a loyalist demonstration with her gaze from its margin. The observer shows herself to be at times static, choosing viewpoints from the sidewalk in anticipation of the procession’s directions, more occasionally overlooking it, or to be ambling around, offering scenes away from the main bustle: buses, index of the demo’s material mobilization; people joining in; people gathering outside



Figure 5

closed stores, or on the popular *place de la Marne*, where protesters and bystanders must have mixed. Charting the haul around the city as well as the city itself, the photographs are amenable to reconstruction, and so to proxy optical identification.

My grandfather, a military officer who married my grandmother, descendent of Feillet “free” settlers (1894-1903) from the Canala region, may well have not been present at the time, for he and my grandmother only formally moved back to Kanaky-New Caledonia during August 1988, and it is unlikely – or forgotten – whether they could have visited. It may then be the case that the photographs didn’t belong to my grandfather at all, just like the letters may have - or the box and the whole arrangement, for that matter. If at stake are certainly the material conditions of its preservation, one which now involves myself and their reproduction, I am however invested here in the twice subjunctive field that informs the thought or intent (or circulation) of the preservation of this box and its contents: I have been reading those photographs, on the one hand,

with or without my grandfather's presence at the demonstration; and on the other, without knowing whether he was with or against it. The letters demand being read with the photographs, and vice versa; and the photographs call for a reconstruction of their intent, their stance – which even an absent grandfather could have well performed as well. Take the scene in the street that appears to be the vicinity of the *haussariat*, guarded by gendarmes forces (figures 9-11). What did the photographer walk up the street towards the collusion for? Was it a collusion? Was the photographer walking up to or down from them? Was the photographer called in up close by the scene of discussion or interjection, or was the photographer leaving it behind them?



Figure 6



Figure 7

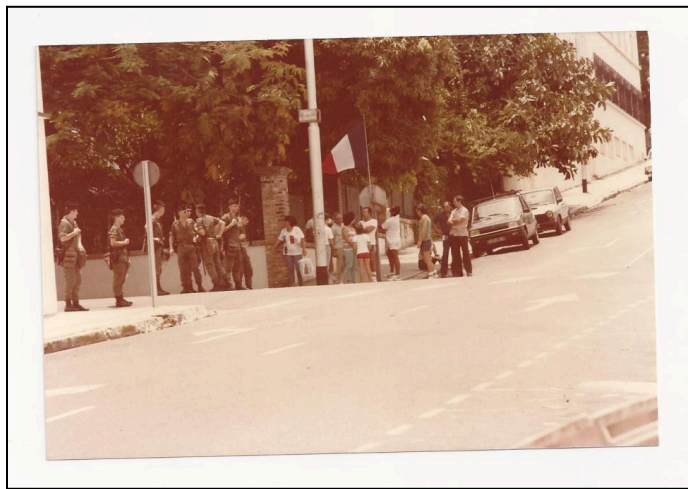


Figure 8



Figure 9

What I am getting at is that a reading for/by intent, witnessing witnessing – which is also a form and assumption of “access”, and the knowledge produced for and by that access – can be here a reading for and instantiating the augmentation of the viewer/reader – whether indignation, support, resistance, their stance against or for the demonstration then, as well as today. We saw and can see here that identification is not staged - it is outside the frame - but dependent on iterability. If the conditions for iterability - the materialization of identification - in this set of photographs are different than for the one of Machoro (especially in the plurality of arrangements of the set and its reliance on spatial and temporal orientation) what I am arguing is that, in all cases, a discussion of the identity and intent of the photographer are only a transit for the (good) intent of the viewer (as settler). More particularly, if the iteration of support in the contemporary reading of the photograph of Machoro is by way of “Takamatsu”’s witnessing, this is not to say that all of its readings are reducible to support for the Kanak people’s resistance (it is, of course, not). However, this latter iteration I am describing is in any case by way of “Takamatsu”’s witnessing: the transit is there is thus double, and it seems that both “Takamatsu” and “Machoro” are doing some work that neither are allowed or made to appear to perform on their own. What I am indexing as the reason for that photograph’s “circulation” is the form and the control over the consequences of that witnessing, a circulation that I am wanting to glance at or grasp, by fraying or teasing out the formal relations that the processes of interpolation and identification we observed earlier may have with the present ones.

My point is of course not to assign or reveal “inherent” colonial or racial violence to any visual media form or to any and all processes of identification, as if exterior to the dynamic social relations through which they are being negotiated, framed and forwarded. I am however



Figure 10



Figure 11

wary of all alleged incommensurability between seemingly “immediate” and “mediated” forms of colonial violence, when both amount or assume demands for elimination, *even by way of demands for resistance*. Interrogating the assumed or underlying clean separation of symbolic and material (physical) iterations of violence will be the occasion not of blanket statement on violence itself, but of thinking about the “thought” or effacement of the material conditions for the proper reader, the reader reading race out of themselves through naming its ideological

contours. The question behind will always be remaining: whose elimination, whose resistance, in what conditions, to what ends.

What I am interested in is thinking about the trajectory of a text for the ontological terrain assumed and sustained by the reading practices that instantiate that (racial) text and its reading (settler) subjects, whose (effaced) propriety makes it the gauge and possibility of the circulation of the former. The irreducibility of circulation of those photographs to the essence of those photographs themselves is one aspect of what I mean, when dealing with an analysis of forms of dominance, by an attention not solely to the economy of iterability but of the recursive. For another aspect is one of analytical priority: namely, rather than celebrating or giving priority to “other possibilities of apprehension” that emerge from how forms – or norms, or “frames” – are necessarily having to “manage the prospect of [their] undoing,” inherent in their doing,¹¹² there may be an emphasis to be given to *the origin of* a demand for or investment in re-running the entire procedure of such form, norm, frame. I suggest this both *because* and *in spite* of its “undoing”, and mindful, like this thesis suggests, that settlement’s expression can build off this iterable undoing and production of difference. I want to thus conclude by touching on corollary questions that I see traversing the field of settler colonial studies and its relations with the racial: “consciousness”, and the adjudication and directionality of resistance, of sovereignty.

¹¹² Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 12.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Although the intention of this thesis was to linger in expository and propositional work, I want to draw provisional synthesis by providing thoughts on the coordinates that inform it and inform the circulation of the racial text through which I am trying to understand the photographs' purchase – namely, the theoretical articulations of settler colonialism, on the one hand, in conjunction with relations of conquest that demand and reproduce indigeneity *and* blackness and that inform a framework for an antagonistic relationship between the two; and, on the other hand, the articulation of settler colonial studies traversed by a certain (and doubled) political production of ignorance (what we could call its “agnotological” inclination), for the dichotomous propositions in compels with regard to consciousness and racial oppression, aspects of which I want to dispute by way of a series of questions already bearing in the present thesis. The conclusion through which I have been performing readings of the photograph and interrogated assumptions around circulation; the point being to situate what the assumptions of either - consciousness or ignorance - does to our understanding of material conditions, and through that our understanding of and the realities and problems of “reading” and of race.

Against the possibility of wallowing in the alibi – the elsewhere and justification – of scholarly publication and of the attempt to carve itself out of violence,¹¹³ what I would understand to be crucial and salient to do here are two things: one, because of the trans-historical and cross-colonial aspects at stake and the anchorage of settler-colonial and anti-black discourse outside the strictly national bounds within which they seem to discretely operate, there may be a

¹¹³ I am suggesting there may be parallels between this present ongoing interrogation and that of citational engagement and investments in the context of academic space serving the operation of the state.

need to place more emphasis on “treating comparison not as a methodological problem but as a historical object.”¹¹⁴ Consequently, the second, just like the shifts in contiguous forms of identification and interpolation that may appear contradictory at first, there is a need to heed the call to not only “explore the relationality between forms of racisms and colonialisms” but also that to “explore the political implications of these relationalities,”¹¹⁵ whether they are analogous relations or not.¹¹⁶ For “if we submit momentarily to the popular position that Black and Native peoples and, by extension, Black and Native politics, are at an impasse represented by their incommensurability, then the flip side of being stuck together—or this stuckness—is already a form of relationality.”¹¹⁷ “Racial capitalism,” “New World order”, “settler colonial capitalism”, “conquest” – I understand all of these to name and contend for analytical approaches that interrogate the correlated metaphysics of “labor” and the “Human”¹¹⁸ and the historical processes that bind the material (economic) with the epistemological hegemonic production of gauges of referentiality – “modernity,” “secular”, “Aryan”, “Europe”, “etc.”. Those processes, likewise, bind the material (economic) with the “literacies” and scientific episteme wielded in the production of so-called scientific disciplines (anthropology, history, etc.) and methodologies¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” 862.

¹¹⁵ Tiffany L. King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, “Beyond Incommensurability: Towards an Otherwise Stance on Black and Indigenous Relationality,” in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 6.

¹¹⁶ See among others Teresia K. Teaiwa, “On Analogies: Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 18, no. 1 (2006): 71–87.

¹¹⁷ King, Navarro, and Smith, “Beyond Incommensurability: Towards an Otherwise Stance on Black and Indigenous Relationality,” 1.

¹¹⁸ See among others Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*; Andrea Smith, “Sovereignty as Deferred Genocide,” in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, ed. Tiffany L. King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 118–32; Da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*; Tiffany L. King, “Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2017): 162–85.

¹¹⁹ See among others Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

under which are continued to be framed and disseminated, circulated, “our” acceptions of “emancipation”, “personhood” – as well as a demand for a racial distribution of these acceptions for the administrative productivity and management of the “Human”. Those analytical approaches concurrently give and unsettle “primacy” or integrity to certain analytical signifiers and to the negotiation of fields of signification that posit produce and demand attention to both an inseparability and an incommensurability between what correspond, at least, to communities, political signifiers, theoretical concepts, as much as forms of “intimate resurgence,” – indigeneity and blackness.

As such, my emphasis on “settlement” is not so much to remove a binary relation or to restore a new one. My point is at least to work out the exposure of a dialectical relation from one of the poles of the structure - “settlement” - whose inscription *and* effacement produces other binaries, as if *in absentia*. If to “explore the political implications of these relationalities” must also significantly be an attention to the epistemological grounding and normative negotiation of resurgent social processes of identification,¹²⁰ I understand or translate it in my work as an attention, again, to whence the demand for the possibility *and* impossibility of these relationalities arises, which, as may appear throughout the thesis, is much less to “bracket” the former (resurgent social processes) than it is to “draw ethical inspiration on [them] to investigate the ways [they are] deferred” through actions that are apprehended as “ordinary”.¹²¹

To put it carefully but in a way that wants to bluntly puts to task the very implication of the question itself for blackness and indigeneity: I dare anyone pronounce themselves on whether

¹²⁰ See Glen Sean Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–55; Terrion L. Williamson, *Scandalize My Name: Black Feminist Practice and the Making of Black Social Life* (Fordham University Press, 2017).

¹²¹ Mark Rifkin, “Settler Common Sense,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (2013): 337.

Machoro, Nonaro, Dawilo, Thiorama, Tonhoueri, Dianou, Lavelloi, Dao, Nine, Wadjeno, Dawano were murdered because they were ascribed as black or because they were ascribed as Kanak – or, on whether it is because Machoro and Takamatsu are either that they can become transit for liberal (self-)inclusion, although the very way they become vessels for settlement may allow us to understand how blackness and indigeneity are being constructed as enmeshed. The different conceptual paradigms are not of course not corrective (indigeneity by blackness, or vice versa) and even if we can say that different kinds of ascription for elimination are mutually reinforcing (rather as an intersectional framework) only to the extent that the analytical distinction between those has to have been worked out in the first place, the risks of tautology remain great.¹²² If nothing else, the purchase and generative elements that blackness and indigeneity as analytical concepts for real life bearings and experiences have had is that they pull in different directions than that of the multiplication of ethnoheaders in the emergence of a liberal framework for which theory is to name or adjudicate the celebration of their visibilized existence within the Theoretical-Real. (The converse would be to refuse to conflate naming oppression and efficacy of redressal, for it may not take into account the gains sustained through adjudicatory power or through the forms of identification that this thesis has been touching upon.)

Additionally, to the extent that most of the murders among the Kanak people during the Events were perpetrated by forces from the metropole, the “settlement” of New Caledonia can seem to only mark the metropole off relations of elimination defining its own autochtony, nativeness by way of its dependence upon contiguous symbolic and material processes for its

¹²² Lye, “Racial Form.”

recursive constitution, something that the phrase “French Imperial-state” captures.¹²³ As such, that “a spectral colonial past persists *only* insofar as indigeneity remains legible as racial difference”¹²⁴ should be understood as *only* one trace of the text whereby “stuckness” is more a segmentation than a fragmentation, the joint of which being a modality of settlement either effaced or redeemed - which is to say effaced, settled, through visibilization, through “reading”.

I see this epitomized by the proposition of a “settler *common sense*” in an article written by Mark Rifkin, a phrase working as an approach which “seeks to address how settler occupancy and jurisdiction are realized, regularized, and actively produced as if inert context in everyday articulations, interactions, practices, and sensations *in which Native people(s) may or may not appear.*”¹²⁵ (*my emphasis*) Against the prospect of a fully coherent and fully structurally determining terrain, this formulation of “common sense” is understood to be that of an “assertion and exertion of settler sovereignty (...) saturating” the quotidian,¹²⁶ “less determining effects and relationships than inducing inclinations and coalescing/catalyzing possibilities.”¹²⁷ Rifkin draws on phenomenology to account for Native disappearance in the US which, he proposes, “may function as the conscious translation of disturbances to the perceptual “self-evident truth of the US jurisdiction of settlement and attendant geographies of everyday life”.¹²⁸ If I am sympathetic to an approach of settlement whereby indigenous peoples function as an presence “consciously” disappeared, native disappearance seems to function as an afterthought, which I mean less as a liberal critique than as the necessary outcome of the thought of a “common sense” as a

¹²³ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); and *Freedom Time : Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

¹²⁴ Alyosha Goldstein, “Possessive Investment: Indian Removals and the Affective Entitlements of Whiteness,” *American Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2014): 1078.

¹²⁵ Rifkin, “Settler Common Sense,” 327.

¹²⁶ Rifkin, 331.

¹²⁷ Rifkin, 327.

¹²⁸ Rifkin, 332.

distinction between the enunciated and enunciation – “in which Native people(s) may or may not appear” – rather than material conditions for the distinction between the two, which, just like Indianization – the enuniated Indian – “may signal possibilities for re-orientation” as “moments when settler phenomenologies might shift to something *new*”¹²⁹, risk ultimately amounting to settler “solipsism”: “not only to return to the place of the white subject but it is also to locate agency in this place.”¹³⁰

Just like “whiteness”, “common sense” being – here, not its Gramscian iteration – “what goes unsaid, what remains unmarked”¹³¹, what is left of such conceptualization when “common sense” is “said” or “marked” can only be a remainder. Rather than “foreclosure”¹³² which rehearses the “sociologics of exclusion,”¹³³ I suggest to apprehend settlement as a “forethought”, implying constant friction and knowledge of that friction by necessity of repetition. The question cannot start at that in which “native people(s) may or may not appear” but from the “inscrutable” impossibility of their absence otherwise one can only explain “loyalist” Kanaks through “binary paths of complicity or resistance”, through categorical coupling of actions and (ultimate) ends.¹³⁴ (I argue that it is only through this uncoupling that we may understand forms of Kanak loyalism as based on a negotiated expression of Kanak epistemologies and political forms of internal antagonisms.) This is what we can make out in Apolinaire Ataba Anova’s “myopic” account of

¹²⁹ Rifkin, 332. See King, “Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight.”

¹³⁰ Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” 164. I am here drawing from Ahmed’s “Whiteness and Phenomenology”, which is not the text by Ahmed that Rifkin engages with.

¹³¹ Veracini, “Conclusion: Transcending the Settler Colonial Present,” 95.

¹³² Rifkin, “Settler Common Sense,” 332.

¹³³ See Da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*.

¹³⁴ Sharon Luk, “The Asian Problem: Back Toward a Historical Analysis of the Race Concept in the Era of Black Lives Matter,” *Forthcoming*. See for example Trépied, Benoît. “Chefferie, Bétail et Politique : Un notable kanak contre la revendication d’indépendance en Nouvelle-Calédonie.” *Anthropologica* 55 (2) (2013): 335-348.

settler violence during the 1878 Kanak uprising when describing the “limited” and “surrounded” space in which the settlers lived:

*Dans cette perspective [d'autodéfense], toute idée de dialogue avec le parti adverse est impossible. On ne cherchera pas à comprendre l'autre, car dans ces circonstances l'instinct de conservation obstrue l'intelligence. Ce qui compte c'est de survivre, surtout si l'espace géographique dans lequel on vit est un mouchoir-de-poche, et que l'on est talonné de tous côtés par la pression du nombre.*¹³⁵ (my emphasis)

In this mindset [of self-defense], any thought of reaching out to the opposite side is rendered impossible. One will not try to understand the other, because in those circumstances the instinct to live impedes reason. What matters is to survive, *especially when the geographical space in which one lives is so small [lit., is like a pocket handkerchief], and where we are pressured in all directions by numbers, right at our heels.* (my emphasis)

Avowing a problem for “consciousness”, here we may reckon that a “*mouchoir-de-poche*” needs to be discerned as such, while keeping the weight of interrogation lying on “discernibility”. Despite some theoretical divergences in terms of emphasis, I find helpful Butler’s distinction between “recognition” and “apprehension,” the latter “a form of knowing bound up with sensing and perceiving” whereby “we can apprehend, for instance, that something is not recognized by recognition.”¹³⁶ And one may suggest that the photograph of Machoro could feel like a *mouchoir-de-poche* in ways, remaining, to whom, to what ends. In addition to conflating naming and efficacy of redress, and decolonization with demographics, “consciousness” suggests an irreversibility or an equivalence to all the instances of that which is being cognized. As either cognition or affect, it becomes a repository and the form for an

¹³⁵ Apollinaire Anova Ataba, “L’insurrection Des Néo-Calédoniens de 1878 et La Personnalité Du Grand Chef Atai,” *Journal de La Société Des Océanistes* 25 (1969): 212.

¹³⁶ Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, 5.

irreversible (or voluntarist) telos, operating in the like of a “switch”, its directionality – its circulation – being what is at stake, just like “aberrance” discussed previously.

Closing in back on the photograph, I may end by putting an emphasis on how in this instantiation a certain apprehension of gender seems productive of the relation of its settler circulation and subject formation for being constructed/read, in a photograph involving only men, as that which appear to be exempted of any capacity of and intent for violence. As such, what circulates is the proper subject’s sovereign prerogative of ascribing (racial) subjects capable of violence, or adjudicating the rationalized legitimacy – fatalism – of the latter. If Erai’s interest in colonial optics as the politics of distribution of suffering, as ocular violence, locating the violence against Maori women at the convergence of European settlement and Indigeneity as dialectical paradigms of competing definition of “legitimacy” rather than between legitimated and illegitimated enactments of violence.¹³⁷ I would want to suggest that, from the trajectories of the economy of settlement in Kanaky traced in this thesis, there is political and epistemological space to negotiate in the work of not disavowing or not losing “violence” in this paradigmatic emphasis – legitimacy – for “justice” not be assumed a given (universal) form through which to “justify” Kanak Humanity. Likewise about the risk reifying the question and dialectic construction of gender and violence.¹³⁸

I will close with a propositional definition of “racial text”. By racial text I mean at least two concatenated things. (1) Rather than examining varied and contested articulations of race, the racial text demands the definition and expungement of race by instantiating the subject who

¹³⁷ Erai, *Girl of New Zealand*, 17–18.

¹³⁸ I’m thinking here about the example of Kanak justice and the process of “pardon” that culminated in 2004, between the clan of Tjibaou, Yeiwene, and Wéa – as well as that of the bodyguard. See an example of discussion of that event in Léopold Lambert. “Les 4 et 5 mai de Kanaky”. *Acta Zone*, 2020, <https://acta.zone/leopold-lambert-les-4-et-5-mai-de-kanaky/>

can read it – and read it out. And consequently (2), and a performative “alibi”, I propose that the racial text assumes and produces “racial elsewheres” and reserves its proper subject/reader with the prerogative of ascribing capabilities of violence and its corollary justified (fated) violence.