

# Kanak (New Caledonia)

Māhea Ahia

# Déwé Göröde

writer, teacher, activist

1949 born at Ponérihouen, speaks Païci

- 1st Kanak writer to publish a novel - *L'Épave* (2005), *The Wreck* (English translation)
- wrote first poems while incarcerated for anti-colonial activism
  - 1985 publication by Édipop
- explores cultural loss, exile through colonialism, Kanak identity



# background

- New Caledonia, Melanesia - French and 28+ Kanak languages
  - Lapita culture 3,000 years ago
  - World War II, American military base. 1970s Independence movement under Jean-Marie Tjibaou
- father Waia - property mgr. (unpublished texts)
- paternal and maternal clergy grandfathers: Philippe Göröde and Eleisha Nabaye
- memory, feeling, identity through genealogy
- fierce commitment to remembering what was lost due to colonialism
- political party PALIKA
- gendered critiques as she speaks in documentary against women's secondary status. Yet she still exhibits self-effacing expectations
- Paavo - rebellious women, refuse arranged marriages and polygamy, follow own path

*the*  
**wreck**

Déwé Gorodé

TRANSLATED BY

&

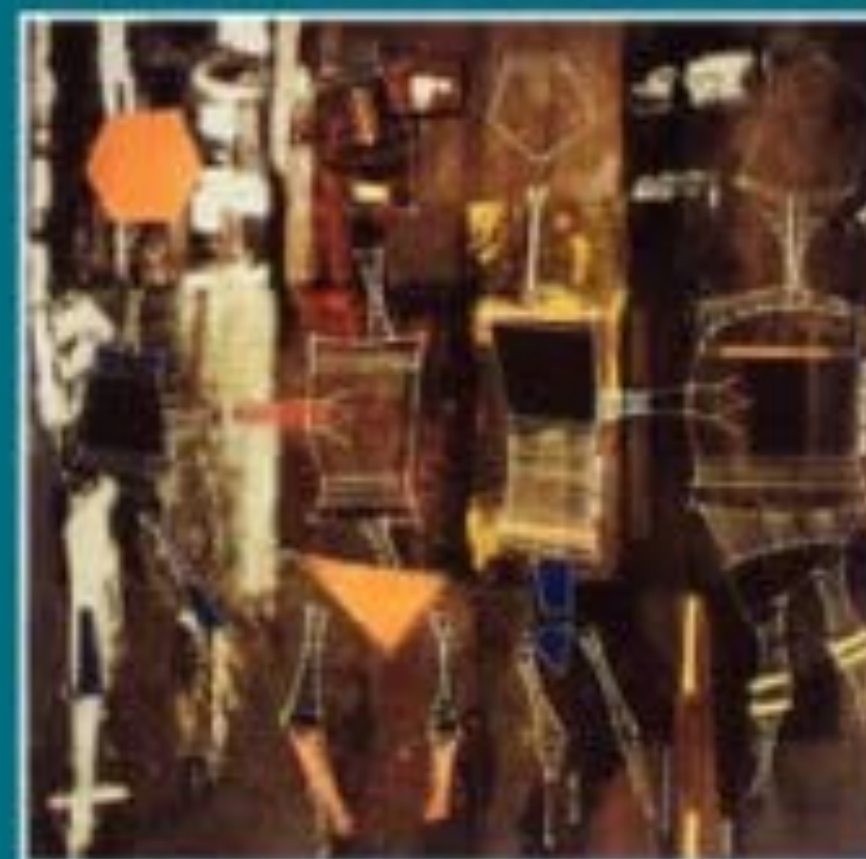
DEBORAH WALKER-MORRISON

RAYLENE RAMSAY

*Selected Short Fiction of*

Déwé  
Gorodé

THE KANAK APPLE SEASON



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

Peter Brown

# “Nukes and Nudes” by Anaïs Maurer

## Discussion of Déwé Gorodé and Chantal Spitz - Francophone Lit

- replaces French “colonial imagery of the welcoming native with anti-colonial narratives of radiation-induced diseases and ambient morbidity” (394)
- ‘root-oriented’ identities as strategic essentialism to politically bridge anti-colonial with environmentalist political concerns
- hybridity - critiques
  - Caribbean alternative where *métissage* not synonymous with de-culturation
    - creation of *creolité* to combat essentialism of slavery and Negritude movement
- critique of progressive narrative presenting hybridization as journey from insular essentialism to a moral superior hybridity (401)

# Literature

- paternalistic notions of ‘emerging literature’ and ‘cultural revival’
- imperialist tropes
- marginalization of Pacific artistic production and humanities
- Pacific literature marginalization // geopolitical marginalization of Pacific as disposable nuclear testing grounds
- situates writing in the hinterlands *tribu* - customary lands/village
  - vs. French capital Noumea
  - land, mountains, rivers, waterholes, coastline, trees, stars, plants, taro terraces, yam gardens

# Gendered myths

- sexually available women
- since 18th c.
- young Tahitian woman removed clothing in front of French circumnavigator Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. He presumes it is an attempted seduction.
- Denis Diderot, Herman Melville, Jack London, Victor Segalen
- morphs to the 'hybridized' eroticized island mixed-race woman, symbol of the post-racial utopia

# *Tâdo, Tâdo, Wéé! No More Baby*

- *Ute Mûrûnû* - biographies of female characters with same name across 5 generations
  - 1940s - million American soldiers, granddaughter in 1970s-80s liberation movements, youngest niece
    - external struggles of Kanak awakening, then internal family health, sterility, child loss, death
    - live with voices of others, including the dead
  - ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, identity construction
  - “diseased female bodies function as metonyms for the double oppression faced by Kanak women in a patriarchal and racist society” (405)
  - solidarity struggles of Kanak with Tahitian



# identity

- does not advocate for return to some pure authentic Kanak identity as antidote to hybridity, because potential capitalist co-optation of anti-colonial root-identities
- Kanak identity made visible only through commodification and consumerism thereby deepening Kanak people's dependency on French subsidies and entanglement with capitalist wage labour (408-409)
- hybridity debates obscure and distract from structural racism and unacknowledged consequences of nuclear testing (409)

“I use the term ‘strategic essentialism’ here in order to emphasize the tactical yoking together of nationalism and environmentalism in the construction of a regional sense of identity. Invented by Gayatri Spivak to describe an expedient way to oppose sexism, strategic essentialism recognizes the political dimension of all identities” (410)

- regional identities grown parallel to environmental protection of resources
- environmental awareness and Pacific identity are co-constituted
- when métissage and multiculturalism have been weaponized by imperial powers, a root-based strategic essentialism cannot be as easily dismissed and is therefore politically expedient

# Kanak Imaginaries by Ramsay

“This is the insistence that Kanak cultural roots and vision of the world exist and must not be lost to materialism, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the recognition that tradition is itself fatally altered by a century and a half of colonialism, the tribu flawed by destructive uses of sorcery and by gender inequality. This is the doubleness of writing” (19)

“an island/a land/of water/rain-water/spring-water/sea-water” that is also “nickel-tinted/creek water/muddy water/ of stagnant mangrove/where floundering around in the slime/or swimming through murky waters/like a fish in water/becomes an art” (“Writing” in Sharing 49)

## Speaking Grief

So many words/ or so few/ no number/ can speak the grief/ no letter/ can  
read the pain/ Our suffering is/

an island on the ocean of tears/ a grain of coral sand on the shore/ a pearl on  
a wet eyelash/ a spray of green cordyline/ a piece of cloth laid on a branch of  
araucaria a date to flower on an aloe leaf/ Our grief is/ sharing as in exile the  
igname of the humiliated/ anchoring the event in the history of our struggles/  
carrying the weight of the word mutilated/ organising the anger of despair/  
reorienting the course of the river of monolithic oneness/ building a new  
house for a country that would be otherwise (40)

Ponérihouen, 9 May 1985

*Sharing as Custom Provides: Selected Poems*

## Writing

writing/ an island/ a land/ where beings once were/ where beings were without being/ where beings are without being/ speechless/ lifeless/ visionless/ voiceless/ beneath the heavy cloak/ of silence/ clear felled/ by oneness of thought/ by thought of oneness/ writing/ an island/ a land/ of water/ rain-water/ spring-water/ sea-water/nickel-tinted/ creek water/ muddy water/ of stagnant/ mangrove/ where floundering around in the slime/ or swimming through murky waters/ like a fish in water/ becomes an art/

writing/ an island/ a land/ where/ earth and/ stone speak/ in the place of beings/ in the place of man/ in the place of woman/ so they may speak/ the place of the child/ who is/ to be/ born

Sydney, 15 July 1997 (48-49)

*Sharing as Custom Provides: Selected Poems*

# Discussion Prompts

- hybridity, mixed-raced, de-culturation
- “strategic essentialism”
- identity made visible only through commodification and consumerism
- fierce commitment to recall the colonial loss suffered, despite criminalization for that activism
- speaking out for women’s rights, yet still self-effacing as expected of women
- kuleana and access to information and the power of words:  
“You can’t just say anything to everyone” (1998:11)