

The Paradoxical Pathways of the First Kanak Woman Writer

Déwé Gorodé's *Parti Pris* of Indigeneity

The two previous chapters have tracked the differences in the shared rewriting of history and of the importance of home in contemporary New Caledonian literatures, in settler literatures (to be considered more fully in later chapters), but most particularly in the three major Kanak versions of the story of the first ancestor, Kanaké/Kënâké. Very different perspectives – political, feminist, and mythico-poetical – are at work within the third spaces constructed by these Kanak rewritings of origin. Each writer, I argued, attempts to connect to a lost or buried Kanak cultural core through his/her exploration and reconstruction of history in necessary interaction with the other (European) language or voice. Yet, each writer approaches this core and this history from a different position. Gender and generation shape the third spaces created, and the particular nature of the connections with French language and culture.

The present chapter looks in greater depth at the nature of the internal splitting in the third spaces within the work of one of these indigenous writers, Déwé Gorodé. It traces her life and her coming to writing, initially in her own words. **Condemning the exile and marginalization of her people that resulted from colonization, her texts look back in pain, anger, and with fierce commitment to remembering what is lost.** Yet they also increasingly position themselves critically in relation to her own Kanak group and, as layers of the past resurface and circulate in the present, denounce a probable, shadowy, and age-old oppression of women within tradition that is still occurring. In the mixed and contradictory realities evoked by her work, the hidden and unsaid, the barely

visible, the patterning of voices is perhaps as meaningful as what is said. However, the critical gaze remains that of an insider, and does not prevent Gorodé's writing from being the evocation of a full and intense life within the Kanak community and world view where she centres her work. Nor from being 'unfinished business' – on-going discoveries through writing including those of the possibilities and challenges of the proposed 'common destiny'. Indeed, in a further avatar of hybridity, Gorodé's distinctive and strikingly different 'spaces between' are marked by a series of apparent contradictions.

During an interview with me in December 2002 in Noumea, in the smallish government office of the then Minister for Youth and Culture, Déwé Gorodé disclaimed any personal authority and noted that she was merely the spokesperson for her group, **elected and not appointed to a position of power (as the then Vice-President of the Collegial Government) to serve her party, the PALIKA.** Despite her position of power and her activism, she did not disown the discreet, self-effacing attitude of service required of women in her community. Again in 2013, when I approached her with the project of an intergenerational biography of her family based on the texts of her two grandfathers, pastors who studied oral tradition with Maurice Leenhardt, of her father, Waia, who also worked with the ethnographer, and on her own writing, Déwé initially responded that her texts are not about herself but about others, about the group. In an extensive early interview in 1998 with Blandine Stefanson for a special volume of the journal *Notre Librairie*, the first published journal of essays and literary extracts devoted to a presentation of New Caledonian literature, the writer claimed she still had many stories lying unread and hidden away in a cardboard box: she herself had never initiated any move to be published, either as a spokesperson for her group or as an individual player on a public stage, and she remained somewhat reticent in relation to this undertaking. **Her first collection, *Sous les cendres des conques* [Under the Ashes of the Conch Shells], poems written from the early 1970s onwards and published in 1985 by Édipop, was the outcome of a personal request made by Ismet Kurtovitch, the then Director of *Collège de Do-Néva* where Déwé was teaching Paicî and French. It took our own initiative in proposing to transcribe (from handwritten script in a notebook) and translate her first Kanak novel to push it towards publication in French in 2005 as *L'Épave*, and much later in English translation as *The Wreck*.** Some reaction to the novel was covertly hostile and Déwé's two subsequent publications made efforts to attenuate the internal criticism

and compensate for the telling of secrets that had created a position of insecurity for her within her own group. A portrait of a supportive and wise father, during Tâdo Tâdo's happy childhood, growing up between the *tribu* and the station in the mountain chain (*La Chaîne*) where her father worked as a *métayer*, managing the property for a largely absent settler owner in *Tâdo, Tâdo, wéé!*, replaced the negative figure(s) of masculine power in *L'Épave* – the shape-shifting Ogre devouring his own children and the two-faced Orator-seducer of young girls.

Early in the new millennium, in a **documentary** made on Kanak women for local New Caledonian television, **Gorodé spoke in protest against women's secondary place in their own society. In this public programme she again played down her individual role 'as custom requires'**. Paradoxically, the characters she invents in her short stories, and in her 1994 novella, *Utê Mûrûnû: petite fleur de cocotier* in particular, are called upon to be **Kaavo, 'our legendary kanak princess' (21), women who refuse polygamous or arranged marriage and follow their own steep and difficult pathways, alone and off the beaten customary tracks.** Like *W* in her play *Kênâké* (2000), **Kaavo in oral tradition, or Gorodé herself, these are rebellious or resistant women who refuse compromise.** Yet, like Gorodé, no *Utê Mûrûnû* and no counterpart of the legendary Kaavo sees herself as a completely autonomous subject, insists on her own absolute agency, or feels entitled to speak out in a personal voice other than to a small number of persons close to her. The subtitle of *Utê Mûrûnû*, **'Little Coconut Flower', is a gloss on the title's meaning, symbolizing the positive unassuming service-to-others modesty and self-effacement characteristics of young Kanak women.** Nonetheless, it is evident that Déwé Gorodé is not simply reiterating the enthusiasm of a male European such as Georg Forster for the docile, subservient Melanesian women: Kaavo as an Antigone, a resistant woman, is her primary model.

Gorodé claims (1998: 83) to be tracing the story of her country politically and 'from a Kanak point of view' in the light of historical change. However, in *Utê Mûrûnû*, European history is presented as shadowy, masculine, and death-bearing, and grand male History is pushed into the distant background when it has no relevance to what her work presents as real. This is the immediate reality of the quotidian or small everyday events of women's lives, of women's practical 'savoir faire'. **Echoes of the 1878 and 1917 Kanak revolts and their repression by the colonial administration are filtered through the daily effects these insurrections have on women, notably on the great grandmother, Utê**

Mûrûnú, in her Paicí-speaking valley where she becomes the war booty of the tribes who fought for the French.

This first Kanak novella thus ‘writes back’ to the historical authority of grand narratives of colonization, wars, and politics by foregrounding the lives of five generations of women, all named *Utê Mûrûnú*, and whose stories overlap. Not unlike the prophetess Idara, or other far-seeing heroines of Louise Michel’s tales, these female protagonists who live close to the earth, transmit wisdom, life force, solidarity, and even heroism in their indirect resistance to colonial oppression, but also to patriarchal pressure from within their own traditional society. In *Utê Mûrûnú* the protagonists resist arranged marriages by running away or living alone for a period outside the clan. Knowledge of growing and healing with plants, of story and tradition passed from generation to generation, comes within their purview. Some commune with the *duées* or spirits, or possess powers of magic. In Kanak tradition, every fourth generation takes the name (homonym) and place (toponym) of the great great grandparent as their ‘little sister’ or ‘little brother’ – perhaps the Kanak way, Gorodé has observed, of denying time. All of the five generations of *Utê Mûrûnú*, at once grandmother and granddaughter, are intimately connected to the point of being almost interchangeable – as the final line of the novella makes explicit, ‘*Utê Mûrûnú*, but which one of us?’ (1994: 37).

Difference in Gorodé’s writing is often elaborated in relation to the Word, a powerful, still deeply operative but largely male-centred concept in the Kanak world. The poems of a Kanak woman ‘snatched from ancestral taboos’ (‘raflée aux tabous ancestraux’) in *Sous les cendres des conqués* (1985: 36) seek to break down female enclosure in ‘deadly silence’ (‘silence de morte’ (81)), ‘violently [to] unpick the stitches / of tight lips’ (‘en découdre avec les points de suture / des bouches cousues’ (110)). Speaking to Blandine Stefanson in her major published interview, predominantly in order to celebrate a sharing Kanak society and its survival, Gorodé also refers indirectly but not necessarily critically to the exclusions operated by her society. The writer points out that in Kanak culture what can be said is carefully prescribed by custom, ‘You can’t just say anything to everyone’ (Gorodé, 1998: 11). In this particular analysis, in a society where the Word remains too powerful to be accessible to all, the *pilou* or collective dance functions as a kind of compensation.

The others don’t necessarily share verbally but they are accepted in the group as everyone is. Every person must do something of use to the group and you don’t have the time to worry about individual problems.

With the new generations, there are perhaps some women who are more preoccupied by their individual lives, but the young people are there, taking part in customary life, sharing in communal work. (Gorodé, 1998: 11)

Kanak society privileges the community over the individual. This does not necessarily mean, as Leenhardt believed, that the individual does not exist but is instead merged in a fusion with the group, or that evangelization brought indigenous people to self-awareness and the capacity for individual choice. However, this is a second paradox: Déwé Gorodé, as an individual, speaker and writer, and Kanak woman, walks a tightrope between her place in the clan and a personal writing/publishing praxis that deconstructs not only French discourse but also what lies behind the traditional Word. Her literary texts denounce colonial injustice and attempt to reconstruct the lost and treasured memory of the group. Writing as an individual, however, especially writing critically, politically, or publically, also places this Kanak woman outside her prescribed gender role and traditional community. Customarily, Kanak stories belong to the group. The Word calls things into being, and speaking directly in a small island community can be dangerous; silence is a protection and can indeed institute a communion with the natural world, allowing the voices of the earth to speak to women. However, as in the Western tradition, Gorodé's writing will also stage the value of speaking out about violence and suffering as an exorcism.

Her Father's Daughter?

Waia Gorodé's *Mon école du silence* [My School of Silence]

Philippe Gorodé, Déwé's paternal grandfather, and her maternal grandfather Eleisha Nâbai were both orators and pastors who worked with Leenhardt recovering indigenous texts. Furthermore, a number of texts written by Déwé's father Waia Gorodé (1913–81), who was also trained at Do-Néva, are presently being edited for publication under the title *Mon école du silence* by Bernard Gasser in collaboration with Déwé and other Kanak informants. This major incipient publication places Déwé's work in a possible new light: as part of the creation of a Protestant East Coast, Paicî-language family tradition. As such, Déwé's writing, and the power it brings, could be argued to derive at least partly from 'paternal legitimization'. There may be a parallel to be drawn here with the contributions to Leenhardt's *Documents néo-calédoniens*

strikingly made by a woman, Sisille Varho, whose situation remains to be researched. It was most probably as the wife of one of the Do-Néva pastors that Sisille's stories gained legitimacy. On the other hand, Déwé's writing also derives from a partial refusal of the significant authority of her father, the eldest child of the elder branch of the family.

Waia Gorodé married the daughter of Eleisha Nâbai, Laura, in a customary marriage arranged by the Paicî-speaking grand chief and the Ajië-speaking pastor, in 1934. Waia and Laura had eleven children, including Déwé. Dominique Jouve shows that Waia's wide-ranging writings, including a glowing homage to Leenhardt as great friend and protector of Kanak, a thirty-page text on Kanak cosmogony, and the autobiographical account, *Mon école du silence*, confided already to Roselène Dousset-Leenhardt in 1974, reveal not only a knowledge of French and a number of Kanak languages (Paicî, A'jië, and some Drehu) but also a deep familiarity with biblical texts, and some surprising acquaintance with classical French texts. Jouve's study presents the Kanak's multilingual and very mixed personal writings, written for a French ethno-botanist as a gesture of propitiation, and perhaps also for his recently deceased wife, Laura, as a gesture of memory and of homage, as a case study of indigenous negotiation of the fracture introduced by colonialism, evangelization, and writing. The text showcases the dynamic processes and re-appropriation that occur in the interstices between the two worlds (Jouve, 2010).

For Jouve, Waia Gorodé's texts demonstrate that, on the one hand, the paths of conversion in Houailou were in fact those of the traditional alliance, revived and reinforced by the new religion, and on the other, that writing is now more than a service to the collective: it is also a means of expressing an individual self in its singular emotions and thoughts. Thinking from the Kanak side of what is happening in the subtle new spaces opening up between the two universes in a period of conflict and of transition, the particular interest of Waia's text lies also in the personal detail of the everyday experience of contact. Alongside the pain of the humiliations and aggressions of the colonial era, the internalizing of guilt for savagery and cannibalism, and the awareness of the de-structuring of his society by the expropriation of land as by the liberated convicts who 'take our girls for nothing' (that is, who do not offer the customary exchange gifts for brides), Waia Gorodé's text speaks of a materially frugal life – little to eat at the mission school at Do-Néva, and no sheets for the bed. His text speaks of values, of hospitality, and of being cheerful, for example, but also of his refusals. Waia rejects

the exclusion of the ancestors from Christian redemption, and the Puritanism of the pastors, recalling 'our first parents, tall and handsome in their savagery like their gods of nature. They were not ashamed of their naked bodies. Their genital organs are just like any other organs' [nos premiers parents grands et beaux dans leur sauvagerie comme leurs dieux de la nature. Ils avaient point de la honte de leurs corps nus. Les organes génitaux sont comme les autres organes] (117). Speaking of the encounters between young people in the bush or on the beach at night, hidden from the missionaries and the elders, or evoking the letters where young girls wrote very frankly of their desire, or of his own preference for non-virgins, who, he claims, are less fixated on preserving their 'prize organ', Waia makes a surprisingly strong case for a full life of the (sexual) body as well as of the spirit. This concern will, in part, be followed up in his daughter's writing. The first names entwined as anagrams engraved on the cellar walls under the mission school that Waia's text describes find echoes in Déwé's *L'Épave*, in the words of young love carved into a cactus in SMS form. In a form of possible continuity, in Denis Pourawa's *Entre voir: les mots des murs* (2006), the 'graffiti' inscribed on the burned-out walls of the buildings abandoned during the *Événements* of the mid-1980s bear similar inscriptions alongside militant slogans and portraits of Éloi Machoro.

In a case study of the role of writing in post-contact cultural syncretism, Beatrice Sudul (2010) analyses the reasons for an astonishing 50 per cent literacy rate by 1850 within French Polynesia. Foregrounding the pioneering and deeply transforming role of the LMS missionaries as speakers/writers and teachers of the vernacular, and their major work in initiating Polynesians (who were, not incidentally, also seeking salted pig and arms) to reading and writing, Sudul argues that this early and rapid appropriation of Western technology, despite the absence of an adequate supply of paper and writing materials – early writing was most often done on banana leaves rolled up and tied with a piece of bark – largely worked for the recording and advancement of the local culture. New Zealand Maori, too, were quick to adopt writing, carrying messages inscribed on leaves or wood from one chief to another, along the Wanganui river, for example. In Tahiti, by 1863, when French missionaries took over from the LMS, claims Sudul, the tradition of *pututupuna*, 'books of the ancestors', with their mix of genealogies, mythical stories, and information on Pre-European Tahitian society, but also their extensive biblical commentary, represented a certain acculturation of the elite. Yet, like the *putufenua* or book of the land (ownership), the *pututupuna*,

although considered to constitute a loss in relation to the richness of recited oral history, were also seen as authentic.

Like the early French Polynesian books, Waia's much later Melanesian writings in French, his magnifying remembering of former ceremonies, the rites of mourning, for example, similarly show a mix of acculturation and evaluation of, resistance to, and appropriation of this influence. This constitutes, for Jouve, a dynamic reformulation of tradition in a fallen present, but within the contexts of the future glory promised by the Christian religion. Jouve's reading of Waia Gorodé finds no trace of dualism in a text that integrates the 'de-territorialized' Christian God and the gods of nature, the Kanak *ba'o*: less, she claims, into a hierarchy than simply into different spaces. However, Jouve presents Waia as also attempting to displace the Western opposition between the sacred and the profane: **Waia's old angel-gods of nature who are alive as visible or felt presence – 'the summits of mountains give life to invisible creatures that people this land of Kaledonia like the holy angels people the Heaven' (Jouve, 2010: unpag.) – are immanent rather than transcendental.** For Jouve, Waia's dynamic interaction with the Christian notions of transcendence, the preference given to immanence, produces something distinctively Kanak yet significantly 'in-between'. In this way, she observes, his text can link the term 'school' of his title ('*école du silence*'), a Western institution with (evangelical) light, and the name of a Paicî vine signifying traditional knowledge (112).

All oral literature, Jouve reminds us, like social relations themselves, is structured by pathways: marriage paths; journeys of initiation, of conquest, or for populating lands; sometimes crossings of the lands of dead. Not unlike the Maori writer Witi Ihimaera's *Rope of Man*, always spinning, actualizing, and bringing into relationship, Waia's lyric written text is, for Jouve, similarly a journey and an exchange, a *fil vite* – a weaving and knotting together of important names, toponyms, and patronyms, organized horizontally.

Déwé Gorodé's militant texts that critique the hold of the Church are very different from her father's continuing apology for the sin of cannibalism, and yet Jouve's analysis of the structure of Waia's writing is curiously pertinent to the work of both father and daughter. Waia situates himself as an outsider in relation to academic French language as a 'vieux tayo' [old Oceanian], on what he describes as an irregular 'zig-zag' writing path. **Déwé writes of 'Living writing / In a foreign land / Outside myself / Or as an outsider / In this language that is not mine' in her poem 'Writing' ('Écrire') (2004b: 94–5),** and her work, too, takes

its own distinctive directions. Writing in French nonetheless serves in both cases to recall the effaced connections to the past by reactivating lost links with the spirits, named as both *baou* and *apieru*, affirming the visibility of the 'angel-gods' of nature and the invisible force between the living and the dead. Déwé shares Waia's cry against the degradation of nature – the polluted waters of the land, where the *dames u* or female spirits no longer sing and laugh in the waterfalls. Remaining himself, for Waia, is to protect the sacred in nature: the 'Land of my ancestors. I must study their past, their culture, their cult of the adoration of the sun, of the moon, of the mountains, of rocks, of trees, of plants, and of animals as well as of minerals, etc., etc.' (Jouve, 2010: 113). Jouve's study concludes that Waia Gorodé was a free spirit, his own 'master', as he himself puts it. Déwé, too, is a remarkably free spirit.

Déwé Gorodé: Telling her Life Story as the Birth of a Writer and of a Militant

For Jouve, Waia Gorodé's use of writing to interrogate contradictory and incoherent or apparently incompatible thoughts and emotions is what makes his work 'literature'. The diversity of knots in his linkages, in the net he casts, she claims, are not an addition or a synthesis but rather a syncretism of the kind adopted by Jean-Marie Tjibaou for the *Melanesia 2000* festival (Jouve, 2010: 106). Jouve is drawing on metaphors deriving from Michel Naepal's work, quoted in Julia Ogier-Guindo's doctoral thesis on the traditional discursive form of the *vivaa* in the A'jië language: 'The ceremonial space is the space of the knotting together of the truth in respect of the local organization and the history of the clans that constitute this and the *vivaa* is a central instrument in this tying together' ['L'espace cérémoniel est le lieu du nouage de la vérité quand à l'organisation locale et l'histoire des clans qui la composent, et les vivaa sont un instrument central de ce nouage'] (2005: 120). **Déwé Gorodé's literary work, I argue, is similarly informed by this traditional structure of 'knotting together'. However, for the European reader the sometimes disparate threads create something closer to a kind of 'cognitive dissonance', in a productive sense of this concept.**

In a public lecture entitled 'Écrire en femme Kanake aujourd'hui en Kanaky-Nouvelle Calédonie' [Writing as a Kanak Woman Today in Kanaky-New Caledonia] given in March 2005 at the University of Auckland to mark the launch of the bilingual anthology of her translated

poetry, *Sharing as Custom Provides*, Déwé Gorodé recounted episodes of her life using on this occasion a rather more traditional autobiographical form, but tracing the pathway of a Kanak woman coming to be an activist and a writer; the knots that form this particular itinerary. This is a history of acculturation, but more particularly of the seeds of resistance flaring into life, and of Kanak knowledge and experience called upon to create alternative views of history. The political activist had begun the telling of her life-story earlier in her long interview with Blandine Stefanson, and had continued this process in a fragmentary way in a number of personal discussions with me to facilitate the translation of her poetry and later of her novel. In the 2005 public presentation, the listener follows what is close to an oral tale of her life and work, told in Gorodé's own voice: yet this sketches out scenes of a partially idealized childhood, where both parental storytelling and story books hold a central place.

Before she went to school, an event of some importance in her life, her father had already taught her the alphabet. Apart from being punished for speaking her own language, Paicî, school is predominantly a happy memory, as indeed is childhood.

We used to count using sticks, play marbles with *bancoul* nuts, we would hang our little baskets of food on the coffee bushes, we'd go swimming in the sea before we went back into class after lunch and we would also go and help work in the field that belonged to our old school teacher. So I learn to read and I start to devour all the texts in our reader, *Tales and Legends of Black Africa*. (Gorodé, 2005)

Accompanying a desire to pass on the lessons of her own experience of harmony with the natural world is Gorodé's evident pleasure in the sound of words and her constant awareness of political message. The titles of the readers she has apparently retained from a childhood more than thirty years earlier – 'Masikasika, The Little Duck' and 'Yawatta, The Indian in his Canoe', her first school prize – derive from the traditions of other indigenous peoples. Gorodé evokes the daily morning ceremony of raising the French flag and filing into school to the call of 'à vos rangs fixes', the military formula for falling into line, that she notes with humour returns in the *Astérix the Gaul* comic book series as a garbled formula, 'Avoranfix'.

This selection of memories of the colonial character of the ceremonies of the past – the children's performances for the governor, the raising of the French flag – relate also, of course, to the socio-political contexts of the moment of speaking of the struggle for independence. Déwé Gorodé's

narrative of her growing up evokes the losses involved in evangelization and assimilation to French norms much more critically than Waia. It takes account of both the negative effects of marginalization, first in reserves (denounced as reservations), then in *tribus* or in Mission schools, and of the positive effects of a certain conservation of Kanak ways of living and thinking in this separation of the cultures.

The place where her stories most often begin, and to which, for the most part, they return, are Gorodé's own customary lands, the *tribu* beside the sea at Ponérihouen (Pwârâiriwâ) on the East Coast of the *Grande-Terre*, the Main Island. However, the reader is largely in a women's world. 'As soon as a *popwaalé*' – a white, or, as Gorodé glosses the word, 'a person who speaks by giving orders' – 'turned up, most of the time a farmer or a gendarme – all the women would run away and hide in the coffee bushes and we kids would go running away behind them' (2005: unpag.). The time of Gorodé's stories, as of the account of her life, as we noted, is double: the time of Kanak memory (subjective, emotional, and faithful) and of the history of colonialism (objective, rational, exact). 'And in front, in the court yard between the coconut palms, there would sometimes be long meetings, *palabres* between the various clan chiefs and tribal elders, mainly to settle land disputes. And a gendarme would always be there to draw up the record of discussions and decisions, the *procès verbal de palabre*'. Hers, then, will be the story of a doubly excluded group. Yet it celebrates the roles of these women excluded from the *palabres* but presented as the origin of the writer's later passion for storytelling.

In the evening, the women, the big sisters, mothers, aunties and grandmothers would sit around in the hut and would tell us *tagadée* – stories, fables or fairy tales – around the communal fire. Sometimes, we would fall asleep before the all important last line.

may this tale move your insides

may it send you to sleep

may it wake you

so that you will invent the next line

Or they would send us to sleep with *ololo* – lullabies like (*puuka*) sleep now (*bua e utige*) because he's going to eat you up (*I kau*) the cow. (Gorodé 2005: unpag.)

Here the cow – the settler's cattle – is synonymous with the devil, the bogeyman, or the evil giant, reminding us that the devastation of Kanak gardens by the settlers' cattle, in a subsistence economy, was a major cause of the 1878 revolt.

However, Kanak themselves came to work on the stations as stockmen and today run their own cattle and mining operations, opening up new environmental and ownership questions. If Déwé Gorodé writes fictional stories, to ‘rehabilitate the place of the Kanak in their own history’, it is also, she claims in her life-story, because ‘the political discourse that I used myself, colonizers/colonized, does not account for the perversity and ambiguity of the real relationship between the colonizers and the colonized in the past and in the present’ (2005: unpag.). When her mother took her to Noumea for the first time at the age of eight, Déwé asked her about the identity of the statue of Colonel Gally Passebosc, who was killed putting down the 1878 Kanak revolt. Her mother, the daughter remembers, simply told her that it was a monument to Ataï, the Kanak chief who had led the revolt. Here Gorodé may also be indirectly alluding to the principles behind her writing, the kind of subversive imitation, mimicry, and adaptation that allows for her own reworking and overturning of the colonial relations of power. Perversity here is somewhat analogous to the concept of ‘sly civility’ elaborated in Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, the re-appropriation and re-definition of the dominant culture within the terms of the subaltern culture. Similarly, her passionate but critical images of Kanak culture deconstruct representations of the more recent forms of the ‘noble savage’ as deeply spiritual, non-violent, and unified: a sanitized image of contemporary Kanak.

Indubitably the daughter of her resistant mother, able to reveal and contest the falseness of certain apparent truths by indirect subversion, Déwé’s public models and mentors were nonetheless necessarily male. They included her grandfathers, Philippe Gorodé or Eleisha Nâbai, or her father, Waia, since only men could be orators delegated by the group, with full authority to speak. The knowledge embedded in their stories has the status of a parallel and competing non-European history, geography, and science.

My father, Waia Gorodé, like his father before him, whose name was Philippe, and his father in law, Elaisha Nâbai, all pastors trained by the missionary ethnologist Maurice Leenhardt, together with the ethnologist Jean Guiart, was at that time busy collecting the old stories from our oral tradition and the *jemaa* or foundational stories, generally translated as myths – a term I categorically refute because what we are talking about is the history of our ancestors. And if they were mythical we wouldn’t be here! ... The most illustrious characters of our *jemaa* ... are represented or situated in different geographical locations by rocks and mountains.

[...] Some ten years ago, during a panel discussion at the Literary Expo organized by the Ministry for Overseas Territories in Paris, I had this to say: 'When you *popwaalé* talk about the castle of Sleeping Beauty, one can truly say it's mythical because no matter how hard you look, you'll never find it. Whereas in our case, every day we can see the places mentioned in our tales and founding stories.' (Gorodé, 2005: unpag.)

Elaisha Nâbai re-told the story of Kënâké, the founding ancestor of the group whom Tjibaou's play, as we have seen, placed at the centre of an emergent Kanak nationalism. Tjibaou's texts of unity and reconciliation are, as the previous chapter showed, put into question by Gorodé's own play's deconstruction of Kanaké as a virile founding father in a heroic masculine world where women remain hidden, watching from behind the coffee bushes. Nonetheless, Gorodé's accounts of her life reaffirm the importance of the Word in Kanak tradition:

Another story our father used to tell us was a very long speech about the speaking perch or 'wood' – spoken to a *pilou* or war dance rhythm – a speech he got from his father-in-law Elaisha Nabai who was a great traditional orator:

I climb up
on the wood (of the tree)
and the supporting branch
so that I can tell
the word of my fathers
the Bweé
and the grandsons of Béalo
who kill and throw in the oven
the people in the house of the Bai
Meedu

I have recited the beginning of this speech ('written' by my maternal grand-father) so many times that once, I had to be woken up because I had been speaking it in a dream-state like a sleep walker. Our father also used to teach us other shorter texts – called *pwarapwa* – which were more poetic and could be linked to specific historical events ... The *notou*, a symbolic bird, here represents a clan chief who was a soldier during the two world wars.

Noutou, cooing wood-pigeon
notoujéé
notounatanurumoto
where are you calling?
I'm calling to over there
In the direction of the German war. (Gorodé, 2005: unpag.)

In school, where only French was allowed to be spoken, stories of Tom Thumb, Red Riding Hood, Gavroche (the little hero of Victor Hugo on the barricades in *Les Misérables*), Old Testament tales, as well as legends from Black Africa further awakened the child's imagination. Later Gorodé attended the school where her older sister taught in an A'jië-speaking area and learnt the A'jië language. At the age of thirteen, accompanied by her pastor grandfather Philippe Gorodé and her mother, Déwé left her village for the *Jeanne d'Albret* boarding establishment for young Protestant girls in Noumea and attended the *Lycée La Pérouse*.

Déwé's first French teacher wanted her rare and gifted Kanak pupil to take Latin and Greek to enable her to enter the prestigious classical stream. The adolescent preferred to stay in the general education stream with the other small group of Kanak. Then, refusing the advice of the careers advisor to settle for a safe career as a primary teacher, seen as the most suitable for her, she decided to go on to the University of Montpellier in France along with the handful of other Kanak holders of the *Baccalauréat* to become a secondary school teacher of French. Before her departure from Noumea for France on 2 September 1969, her cousin Elaisha Nabai invited her to a political meeting of young people with the son of the *grand chef* Naisseline from the Loyalty island of Maré, Nidoish Naisseline, who at the time was a sociology student at the Sorbonne. Discovering she was the only woman present, Déwé was on the point of leaving, as custom prescribed, when she was offered a chair by an old man from Maré. She stayed on for the meeting, which was followed by the arrest of Nidoish and subsequent riots, and became a convert to the independence cause.

France proved to be a mixed experience of exile and liberation, a catalyst for both her writing and her activism. The young Kanak woman experienced post-1968 euphoria and social restructuring, including African national liberation actions, the anti-Vietnam War movement and protests in favour of women and minorities. She joined the newly formed Association of Kanak Students and young men doing their military service to debate the Kanak political situation. Marxist dialectics, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara became familiar names, she claims, and the young student read the writers of the *Négritude* movement, Senghor, Damas, and Césaire, alongside the French symbolist poets, and Musset and Gênet. To complete her BA, the budding activist, now anxious to return to support the growing independence movement, had to pass traditional French academic subjects such as Latin, medieval French, grammar,

linguistics, and two modern foreign languages – her choices, characteristically different from the mainstream, were Arabic and Romanian. It was against this background that Déwé wrote her own first poems.

Adieu 1970

wild grass has taken over
the ceremonial pathway beneath the coconut palms
Straw and vines of the roof are rotting
mud walls cracked and crumbling
Grande case in ruins

Close call, almost too late

you are returning from afar
long journey
hundred plus years package tour
into the labyrinthine wandering of a youth in tatters
eyelids blinking at the sight of what has come and gone
Eyes opening to see
what was
what is
what will be

It's time to return

start over

Montpellier, September 1970

(Gorodé, 2004b: 2)

Back in New Caledonia, in 1973, Gorodé worked with the *Fouleurs rouges*, the Red Scarves group of Nidoish Naisseline, then with *Le Groupe 1878* (in memory of Ataï's revolt against colonization). She also cooperated with other young activists from the main island who formed the PALIKA in 1976. A number of the early poems of the independence activist were written from prison where she spent time twice: in 1974 after a protest against the celebrations of 24 September (the date of French annexation), and again in 1977.

Inspired by a Marxist reading of history and by anti-colonial writers, Déwé Gorodé's writing continued through the years she spent as full-time teacher and the subsequent decade engaged in full-time activism. The poems of this period, published in *Sous les cendres des conqués*, denounce the pillaging and polluting of the land by 'Madame Multinationale' and by the contagion of white thinking and politics. At this early point of militant left-wing commitment, it seems

that the multinational can be gendered feminine in a scenario where the conch-shell that represents customary solidarity, assembly, and resistance to assimilation has been reduced to ashes. The collection of aphorisms in *Par les temps qui courent* [Signs of the Times], published in 1996, is a pithy, acerbic critique of the infiltration of custom by the profit motives and self-interest of modernity and the imperatives of capitalism. These poems, from the late 1960s and 70s on, like the short stories written at various moments during this period and collected in 1996 in *L'Agenda*, do not hesitate to adopt a politics of confrontation. Gorodé's work already contains a number of poems that denounce Kanak women's oppression.

In 1975, Gorodé took part in the first conference for a nuclear-free Pacific at the University of the South Pacific in Suva (Fiji), then found herself in a delegation to the United Nations Committee for Decolonization and at the first World Conference of Women organized by the United Nations in Mexico. The militancy of her political activism is reflected in the language of her poem 'Word of Struggle', written from prison in 1974: the 'linked syllables to cry out / the misery of our peoples / Chains of phrases / formed out of their long combat' (2004b: 6).

Under the Ashes of the Conch Shells also contains an early poem on solidarity against nuclear testing and political exploitation in the Pacific, written in Suva in April 1975:

NFPC

Faces unknown yesterday

Comrades from all over Oceania

and elsewhere

*to speak of the suffering of our people under
the bomb*

multinationals

spoliation

racism

to share

the poverty of our peoples

smiling and dancing on postcards only

Aboriginal Land

Maori Land

Kanakland

'the same enemy, the same struggle'

with all those who are oppressed

linguistic barriers fall with the NFPC

(Gorodé, 1985: 121)

In 1979, Gorodé decided to go back to her *tribu* and set up local sections of the PALIKA. The Independence Party became the *FLNKS* in 1984 and organized the boycott of the elections of 18 November 1984 which initiated the period of the 'Events' that lasted until the Matignon Agreement, signed in 1988. Gorodé took part in meetings of independence leaders in Paris, Algiers, in Canada and at the United Nations. It was, she claimed, the Melanesian countries of the *Fer de Lance* (the Spearhead Group) which supported the *FLNKS* at the Pacific Forum, and again Papua New Guinea and the newly independent Vanuatu of Father Walter Lini which supported the political movement at the United Nations. From 1985 to 1987, under the jurisdiction of the local branch of the *FLNKS*, the teacher returned to her *tribu* and set up an *École Populaire Kanak* or People's School, where, she observes, 'we learned our language again and where the elders handed on their knowledge to us' (2005: unpag.).

After the Matignon Agreement, Gorodé returned to the teaching of French and then her own language, Paicî, at the *Collège de Do-Néva*. She then became active in politics as an elected representative of the PALIKA (based in the new Kanak-controlled *Province Nord*), and was re-elected in 2001 and June 2004 as the Vice-President of the New Caledonian collegial Government, having successive responsibility for culture, women's affairs, citizenship, and customary affairs (her first appointment was in 1999 when she was put in charge of culture, youth, and sport). It has been suggested by some that her political role in Noumea was calculated to keep her away from the centre of PALIKA politics. Gorodé made relatively little secret in our discussions of her abhorrence for the machinations, hypocrisy, and self-interest of the male-dominated political world, about which she remains at once determinedly optimistic and deeply suspicious. In 2006, the Manifesto for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the PALIKA reinscribed the party's work as a revolutionary political struggle for emancipation and social transformation by the people. It denounced the exploitation of man by man within the historical references of the 1984 boycott of elections, the provisional government of Kanaky in 1985, the assassinations (martyrdoms) of Éloi Machoro and Marcel Nonarro in the same year, the massacre of the Gossanah cave in 1988, and the liberation by the Noumea court of the assassins of Tiendanite (the assassins of Tjibaou's 'brothers') (2006). If Gorodé has put some emphasis on 'routes' within a traditional Marxist-Socialist frame – her links to the outside – her work focuses on the need to recover one's

own (hi)story and one's local 'roots' in a world increasingly fragmented by globalization. She has continued to hold several portfolios into the present, including those of Minister for Culture and Solidarity.

In her 2005 self-presentation at the University of Auckland, Gorodé also introduced her literary writing, principally through her own reading of its reception, that is, tellingly, through selections from other scholars' interpretations of her work. She chose, for example, to paraphrase Tea Auru Mwateapoo's preface to *Sous les cendres des conqués*: 'these poems are the attempt to interpret the emerging new culture of a people struggling to be subject of their own history' but also to quote the conclusions of Laurence Viellard, the editor of the 1994 and 1996 collections of stories, *Uté Mûrûnû* and *L'Agenda*, that it is 'through the characters of her stories that Gorodé transmits the perceptiveness of her reflections on women's condition [...] These stories inscribe the indissoluble link between the past and the present and the need to think a fraternal future offering readers the elements to understand the foundations of present Caledonian society through the sensibility of a woman' (back cover of *L'Agenda*). What is selected from the volume of the journal *Notre Librairie* (1998) devoted to New Caledonian literature, is Marie-Ange Somdah's statement in 'Déwé Gorodé ou la recherche de la parole Kanak' [Déwé Gorodé or the Search for Kanak Word] that although Kanak memory is essential and non-negotiable it is also the site of a social critique (Somdah, 1998). Gorodé, says Somdah, is herself a *Kaapo* – she who must break the rules or the imposed silences precisely to reveal what is unspeakable, what cannot be said. In her life-story telling, Gorodé becomes an indirect commentator on her own work, revealing the frames in which she would like it to be read, reiterating its woman-centred character, while also focusing on its literary character and on style, a form that is itself content.

The answer to our own question, is Gorodé 'her father's daughter?' must, of course, be both 'yes' and 'no'. If Déwé's work, like her father's, is firmly centred in a Kanak world, this is a very different world, shaped by her different generation, gender, political positioning, and degree of appropriation of French culture. Gorodé's *parti pris* of writing to denounce/improve women's condition is also an indirect 'writing back' to aspects of the father's power in his relationships with women.

Déwé Gorodé's Literary Texts:
Writing the Kanak World through Women's Lives

Like the critical commentaries, the texts themselves highlight the multiple and apparently contradictory perspectives in Gorodé's work: modernity and tradition, women's liberation and custom, political claims and modes of fullness of being, silence and speech, for example, are all in play in *Utê Mûrûnû*. In its *mises en abyme* [interior duplications], its anticipation, and its repetitions, the novella appears to echo itself, to weave past and future one into the Other, in sometimes traditional, sometimes transgressive modes of writing. Yet postmodern play with the French language most often has critical postcolonial purposes: mixed genre and language forms reflect a different, Kanak, vision of a spiralling space-time and of communal identity.

A series of verbs of dislocation and destruction – 'mutilated', 'scattered', and 'in pieces' – woven through Gorodé's early poems speak of the material and cultural destruction wrought on the land and the indigenous people by 100 years of French dominance. Metaphors of bodily harm or physical destruction evoke the scars left on the land by nickel mining and the reification of New Caledonian society, first by capitalism and then by its later manifestations in capitalism's postulated third stage, globalization. It is these very memories of damage and loss that will provide the 'glue' that, through persistence, will recreate the Kanak Word and reinforce the political function of art. Interestingly, however, this struggle is always, already, also against 'betrayal' from within.

Day after Day

We will try to
glue back together the broken pieces of our dashed hopes
reform the slaughtered images of our strangled speech
rediscover the unity of the scattered word
thrown to the four winds of solitude by
the gunpowder of violence
the poison bottle
the bread smelling of small change
the customary gesture by the false brother betrayed
day after day
second after second
like the river hollowing out its bed
the ant counting her dead

the foam marking the shore
recreate the ritual phrase that unmasks treachery
reinvent the magical dance that ensures victory [my emphasis]
Perlou, February 1975

(Gorodé, 1994: 14)

The theme of the betrayal of ‘the customary gesture by the false brother’ is counterbalanced by the theme of roots reaching deep into the earth. This is a maternal earth, creating an emotional attachment between itself and the person sending down roots into the earth’s belly, and returning his/her umbilical cord to the earth.

Roots

Roots stretching
 out
 into the day
 by day
 into time passing
 into sun wind rain passing
 hollowing out
 earth
 under stone
 further deeper
 always ever further deeper
 to tie
 the knot
 umbilical cord
 returned to earth
 on earth’s very belly
 like the chrysalis casing
 of cicada
 returned to earth
 on earth’s very belly ...

(Gorodé, 1994: 52)

Titaua Porcher has noted the references in Déwé’s literary texts to the earth as a vast green uterus, and the calming and enveloping materiality of the nourishing womb (2010: 141–52). This primordial mother bears the physical characteristics of the female body, the milk-giving breast, the many tiny placentas (Gorodé, 1985: 56). In the poem ‘attendre’ [waiting] (43), adds Porcher, the child, too, is described as a product of gestation, a bud that opens, the stem that pushes upwards, the shoot that emerges from the soil in a circulation between the human and the natural world.

From the recovery of these feminized roots, a reaching out to the Other in hospitality that recalls the thinking of the philosopher Levinas is made possible, as in the poem, 'Being with the Other': 'In the footsteps / of my mother / towards the land /... with the other / who is knocking at your door (Gorodé, 1994: 90-1). At the end of the poem, once the umbilical cord lands on the roots, it is able

to be born to the world
before taking flight
bending into the wind
in flight toward a river ford
or toward waters flowing to the sea
and beyond
toward a country ...
some foreign quay ...
railway station ...
airport ...
airwaves ...
a way
a road
a path

toward the Other. Kanak identity, 'being', in the last instance, is universal, '*aboro*, the human being in all that he is' (Gorodé, 1994: 72).

Independence is thus unexpectedly figured not just as a political struggle by a sovereign or self-determining people but as a piece of land a woman works for her extended family:

Independence
is
a bit of garden
bit of field
a patch of dirt
patch of land
land to work
like the woman
tending her children
her taro
her yam
day in day out
fishing night
or day both
lagoon fish

mangrove crab
 whether to feed the extended family
 or for market day
 whether working at her own pace
 or at the set hour
 in her rights and responsibilities
 for the child to come
 or the child at school
 sharing as custom prescribes
 giving to others
 fighting her own desires
 in the face of silence
 of violence
 of inaction
 of apathy
 and state dependence
 in the face of the single way of thinking
 doing
 speaking
 living
 in the everyday
 our aspirations
 of being
 together
 a free country
 a sovereign nation
 a people who share
Sydney, 19 July 1997

(Gorodé, 1994: 68–9)

‘Independence’ was written during a shared tour of Australian universities in July 1997 when Déwé Gorodé and Nicolas Kurtovitch, a New Caledonian of European origin, each decided to write a daily poem on a selected theme. These eighteen poems were published in *Dire le vrai* and I translated them into English, with Brian McKay translating the Kurtovitch poems in the bilingual *Dire le vrai/ To Tell the Truth* (1998). This was the first major literary collaboration between the indigenous and Caledonian communities of New Caledonian writers. **Gorodé herself had translated poems from the volume, *Black Stone*, by the ni-Vanuatu activist Grace Mera Molisa, from English into French, publishing these under the title of *Pierre Noire*.** Not incidentally, Mera Molisa’s courageous poems denounced Vanuatu women’s position as colonized and physically abused peoples within their own post-independence

society, a critique of violence against women and children that is still very valid today.

If Kanak community identity is initially constructed around the experience of oppression and of shared resistant values (the Word, the Land), a close reading of Gorodé's work reveals that the perpetrators of violence have not always been from outside or 'from elsewhere'. Explanations for violence are to be found, first and foremost, in the colonial/capitalist system and the exploitation of the land for profit, rather than in the settler community itself. As Stephanie Vigier points out, in Gorodé's short story 'The Kanak Apple Season' (1994) it is the Kanak bride, who is from the 'lands of red earth' – that is, the areas of nickel mining – and who is perhaps 'wounded' 'like the scraped away tops of the mountain', who brings with her the jealousy, the *boucan* [the magic packet of spells] and the charlatan witch doctor accomplices that cause her sister-in-law to be falsely accused of sorcery and to waste away and die (Vigier, 2004: 59–80). Meanwhile, the apples from the Kanak apple tree that was planted to celebrate her customary marriage symbolically rot on the ground (72–83). But, perhaps, as Gorodé herself suggested in response to Vigier's anti-colonial reading, the origin of this disaster is to be sought not only in the scraped red earth of the mining lands but also in the warlike and scornful reception by the future bride's grandfather of his poorer kin decades earlier. Their leader, the narrator's grandfather, had come to ask for the granddaughter's hand in marriage for his grandson and had finally won acceptance through his arts of oratory. The meanings in Gorodé's text are frequently left open: one truth may hide further layers of meaning again.

Gorodé's open text affirms the singularity of her Kanak identity and perspective, but also its universality. It dares to be a critical voice, 'speaking truth' in the face of 'stitched-up mouths' or abuses of power in a hybrid and rapidly transforming Kanak society, critiquing a custom seen as manipulated for personal power or gain. In particular, her work increases its focus on, and explicitly denounces, the negative consequences of violence against women and children: the incest, rape, or psychological violence (sorcery) that can result from abuse of privilege in a patriarchal society.

Questions

Fear at each bellowed liquor soaked tapers: [temperance hymns]
anxious terror of beatings, blows sometimes fatal
cooking pots thrown around under the coffee bushes [...]

tomorrow, again
 as if nothing were amiss
 at the meeting
 in front of everyone
 he will speak of oppression, of freedom
 whose freedom, whose oppression, who by who with who for ?
 so many questions
 our collective politics' will have to answer to

(Gorodé, 1994: 38)

Despite her own initial disavowal of the term, Gorodé's work has become increasingly aligned with organized indigenous forms of feminism. In recent years, she has given speeches to Kanak women's associations, reminding them of the earliest struggles by Western feminists to achieve votes and equality. *Utê Mûrûnû* responded to women's oppression by recovering and foregrounding their stories/histories and the distinctive values of their lives, re-identifying women with the blood of the earth and the circulation of life, and fiercely denouncing their traditional lack of power within Kanak society:

These voices of the earth, as my grandmother *Utê Mûrûnû* taught me, were none other than the voices of a mother, the voices of woman. And they spoke, especially, to us women, who, better than anyone, were able to understand them. Bearers of seed, we were bound and gagged by prohibitions, branded with taboos that were like rocks blocking the paths of life. From receptacles of pleasure, we became Eves bitten by the serpent invented by the priests of the new religion. *Âdi*, black pearls of customary marriage, we were exchanged like pieces of Lapita pottery to seal an alliance, in between two wars. Matrimonial pathways linking the clans, we survived as best we could a childhood and an entry into adolescence that was too often violated by the lecherous desires of old men. Prestige, virility, war – male concepts for the *grande case* of men, built on the broad backs of women! Sharing, solidarity, humility, the word of women, conceived, nourished, and carried in our entrails of beaten wives. (Gorodé, 1994: 2–21)

The *Utê Mûrûnû* who was taken as war booty in the reprisals against the groups which took part in the uprising of 1917 ultimately takes her revenge on her imposed husband and traitor to the Kanak cause, pushing him into 'the shark hole' one dark night as the couple are returning home by boat. The orator-rapist in *L'Épave* will also slip from the cliff to his death in 'le trou aux requins', the shark hole, a form of poetic justice as the male oppressor is drowned in the feminine element (the sea), and

the devourer is himself devoured. The theme of women's violent revenge recurs disconcertingly in a number of Gorodé's other published stories. Perhaps the most strikingly different of these stories, 'Case Closed', in *L'Agenda*, opens with a farewell party for the sons of wealthy settlers on a grand colonial estate, on the eve of preparations for their departure to the First World War front. The young officer who falls in love under the banyan tree with a mysterious woman in white gloves, Marguerite, and bequeaths her his estate, will subsequently die from his burns at Verdun. Decades later, the young woman returns in the guise of Margaret, a doctor in the American Army, and a second enchantment results in the death at the Battle of Guadalcanal of her fiancé, the American army Captain and ethnographer who had been stationed with her in New Caledonia. The Captain had similarly bequeathed Margaret his wealth. The third metamorphosis, as a young Kanak woman, Maguy, during the virtual civil war of 1984–8, results in the death by burning of an enamoured Kanak soldier fighting with the French. On this occasion, Maguy tells the story of the origins of her metamorphoses, in one of Gorodé's many stories within stories. During the 1878 Kanak insurrection, a French officer had obtained the guard of the young woman when certain members of her tribe joined the rebel chief Ataï. Initiated by her grandfather, an eel fisherman, into the secrets of nature and the land, the very young woman was taboo, the 'priestess of fire'. However, under the lure of love, beneath the banyan tree, she succumbed to the French officer, who had promised her his wealth. The young priestess's betrayal of her own role as guardian of nature subsequently produced ominous presages of natural disasters and death. Her lover then abandoned her to marry his French compatriot, named Marguerite. On the night of the couple's celebration of their engagement, as the end of the 1878 revolt approached, the priestess set fire to the couple's house. The officer and his fiancé Marguerite burned to death.

The many reappearances of the priestess of fire taking the form of her rival, and her revenge across generations, reflect a singular perception of the fantastic: one that contrasts in its materiality with the echoes of the European fantastic evoked in the officer's childhood memories of the banyan tree where he had imagined he was Aladdin on his magic carpet. Gorodé's fantastic, like the themes of metamorphosis and revenge, remains at least partially unreadable or unreceivable for a European, according to Mounira Chatti (2004b). The European reader is nonetheless immersed in the Kanak imagination of the connections and the continuities between the phenomena of the cultural and the

natural worlds, across generations, as across texts. In Chatti's analysis, references to seeing (the figures, traced by the twisted roots of the banyan tree of the young girl in tears consoled by her grandfather), smelling (burned flesh), and hearing (sobbing) allow the story to slip between vision and apparition, the emotional and the rational. Marguerite, Margaret, Maguy, also nicknamed Burned Fingers, is most often figured by her face (white or black) and her white-gloved hands. Chatti cites the 2003 work of the Metropolitan French writer Francis Garnung, *Contes et coutumes canaques au XIX^{ème} siècle* [Canaque Stories and Customs in the Nineteenth Century] to show that the oral tradition of that period represented the dead appearing to the living at night, particularly as faces and limbs. Chatti concludes that the metamorphosis of humans from the dead to the living and the circulation between natural and human elements is presented as a lived and perceived reality in this Gorodé text. As in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and its imitations and rewritings, metamorphosis can also be understood as a feature internal to the text, in relation to questions of continuity and change, and tensions between identity and difference. In Gorodé's writing, the figure of metamorphosis replaces the notion of development.

Indeed, the very notion of metamorphosis, Chatti contends, needs to be replaced by the Kanak idea of communication (between all beings, human and natural), and what the European reader will class as fantasy the Kanak will read as realism. Clear-cut categories of real and fictional, visible and invisible, no longer hold. In any event, the military officer sent to investigate the mysterious death of the Kanak soldier will find no rational frame of explanation for his death by fire, finally closing the insoluble case, the 'Affaire classée' [Case Closed] in defeat. Chatti argues that the textual construction of the secret taboo space of the banyan tree in 'Case Closed' represents a call for the restitution of all the taboo places of the land that have been violated: the penalty in Kanak tradition for incursion into these spaces is illness or death. The rational frame of the linear historical time of war gives way to the distinctively repeating and similar, overlapping, spiralling space-time of recurring and communicating events as described in Gabriel Poédi's work on Kanak time (1989), and the time of magic and retribution. It is in the silences of dream, or in the voice of the wind, or a twig that falls at one's feet, in the butterfly that alights on one's hand, that we exist and learn, claims Gorodé, not merely through the male-transmitted Word. It is similarly in the restless heat of night that the *Dooki* or bad spirits make their presence felt. Commitment for Gorodé in this curious story of haunting and

metamorphosis is rewriting history and putting indigenous inheritance (the legacies extorted from the soldiers in 'Case Closed') back at the centre. Sobbing and abused though she may be, the 'priestess of fire', like the modest 'little coconut flowers', turns out to have her own powers and agency in this tale of revenge and recovery of promised wealth.

It is not the dominant language that imposes ideas in Gorodé's work, concludes Mounira Chatti. Rather, the working out in her writing of themes of heritage and revenge rehabilitates the Kanak point of view and, at the same time, exposes the limitations of French language to understand and express this. Similarly, Gorodé's short, two-page text 'La Case' [Grandfather's House], a luminous description of her grandfather's traditional round thatched hut with its ceremonial treasure and ancestor guardians, disavows the colonial or ethnographic point of view that presents Kanak as an object of study or curiosity, and reverses the perspective to present the material objects of her culture as a focus of love and a source of full being. The banyan tree in the colonial park in 'Case Closed', for its part, reveals its deeper roots in a Kanak past and soil.

An Ambivalent Modernity

If the priestess of fire resorts to counter-violence in her anger and shame, the infiltration of customary values by neo-colonialism, modernism, and dominant Western values is also presented as a major act of violence. Gorodé's most recent poems, unpublished in French but translated into English in the final section of *Sharing as Custom Provides*, portray the drift from the *tribu* to urban life in French Noumea as a major influence in the destruction of traditional Kanak ways of life. 'It's a tropical town / with all the iron and concrete it takes / and a few coconut palms / to ensure that it is so / ... we're in France here / twenty thousand kilometres away' (1994: 146–7). Globalization, the market, and mass communication are similarly targeted as foreign bodies, destroyers of tradition.

Tropical Town

I am cut off
from my brothers of yesterday
shattered in a thousand pieces [...]
[in] this endless
mental prison

before the TV screen
 that bashes my head in with
 its loin-like
 truncheon thrust
 that blows my brain
 with its global and virtual
 in total denial of my reality
 my everyday reality

(Gorodé, 1994: 142–3)

Migration to the European city can also be a catalyst of sexual abuse and moral disintegration, located in the shanty towns that have sprung up in the suburbs or around the swamps of Noumea.

With back bowed
 [...]

 children to feed
 going to school
 through the mangrove
 while the hurrying father
 slides a groping hand
 towards the daughter's thigh
 on the floor of the shanty
 knocked out with booze and dope
 to forget her
 prostitute state of
 paternal rape

(Gorodé, 1994: 148–9)

Yet, despite Gorodé's critique of modernity and the city, *Nouméa la blanche* is nonetheless a setting where Kanak increasingly have their place and are even presented as counter-colonizers, taking back the city. The city in Gorodé can also constitute a place of freedom for women from the often harsh constraints of custom, a refuge from customary marriage and difficult or abusive mothers-in-law.

Kanak Difference and Common Destiny

In another striking Gorodé short story, 'J'use du temps' [I Weather Time/(Ab)using Time] (1996a), a distinctively Kanak construction of time and space 'de-territorializes' the French verb system, weaving time, place, and tense to wear away linear chronology. This enables the

narrator of the short story, a ghost who has returned to haunt the places where he lost the woman he loved before going off to die 'uselessly' in war with the Pacific Battalion to propose 'le chemin du pays, le long chemin de l'héritage' ['the path of return to our country, the long path of our heritage'] to young Kanak people of his grandson's generation. This is a path both of return and of the way forward. Significantly, the young man, now the spirit of the waterhole, had driven away the girl he loved away with his jealous mistreatment.

Gorodé's work makes it clear that the ways in which Kanak and non-Kanak understand the world still continue to differ. The relationship with a time largely reduced to space through deictics inflects her use of French. The repeated use of expressions such as 'up-there', 'down-there', 'over in that direction', taken from Paicî, also inscribe the speaker's position and gestures into the space-time of enunciation. Stephanie Vigier's study of time in Kanak literatures (2008) speaks of the force of attraction of place and its capacity to attract and retain time, giving as examples the use of the imperfect throughout the text of 'La Case' and the surprising changes of tense in the final sentence. 'The last ceremony to be held in this place will be to mark the end of the mourning period for grandfather during which a pilou, a dance ceremony, was held at night' (1996a: 9). Grandfather's house ('La Case'), to be destroyed on the anniversary of his death, as is the custom, symbolizes the return to the earth and the rebirth of the dead person. Names of plants refer to their symbolic functions: the coleus offered to the maternal uncles to celebrate a birth; the cordyline branch taken to the relatives on the mother's side to announce a period of mourning. Characters overlap along with the distinction between the dead and the living.

However, this Kanak/New Caledonian literature is perhaps not quite the bi-cephalic animal that Hamid Mokaddem claims (1998b). All Kanak writers do not take the same position. 'Our traditions are an unshakeable rock', observes Gorodé's *Utê Mûrûnú*. Yet this is a rock that women must 'find a path around'. They must decide their own lives and bequeath 'the right to responsible choice' to their children (Gorodé, 1994: 16). In the collaborative play published in 2002 by the Kanak Pierre Gope and Nicolas Kurtovich, *Les Dieux sont borgnes* [The Gods are Blind], Princess Lotha chooses to marry the chief, her rapist (a way in custom of resolving the harm of such situations) to safeguard the descendants of the *chefferie*. For her part, Gorodé refuses any such self-abnegation. However, although her heroines denounce unhappy polygamous or arranged marriages, the power of the maternal uncles,

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and a situation of inferiority that encourages sexual violence against women, Gorodé neither writes out the traditional understanding of women as the blood of the earth nor takes away from the need for the ‘breath’ or gift of life from the maternal uncle, the force of the Word. Her work simply dares to lift the veil on the behaviours that can lie behind the (ab)uses of this Word. Similarly, in *L’Épave*, Éva, in her ‘no man’s land’ between Noumea and the *tribu*, insists that her right to choice does not eliminate her woman’s responsibilities to her clan.

At the end of *Le Vol de la parole*, the flying fox (*rousette*), indigenous to New Caledonia, takes the migratory bird to task for settling down without first making the necessary customary gift gesture (*la coutume*) of the guest to his host. The final text of this book asserts the status of Kanak as first occupants of the land and the need for humility on the part of the immigrants from France. Its message is conciliatory, and appears to prescribe modes of being separate but together. The title, simultaneously evoking both ‘theft’ (*vol*) and ‘flight’ (*vol*) of the traditional Word, is again paradoxical, hybrid rather than double.

Ambivalence in Women’s Postcolonial Writing

This chapter’s consideration of Gorodé’s life-story and literary stories of Kanak culture giving voice to Kanak women has spoken constantly of paradox and ambivalence. A study in *Les Écrivaines francophones en liberté* by Martine Fernandes of the cognitive metaphors used or refused in a number of Francophone postcolonial novels by women writers finds such ambivalence to be the very essence of what is called their hybridity (Fernandes, 2007). In *Georgette*, Farida Belghoul writes of the culture shock produced in the Beur child by the conflict between the French education system, where she learns how to write from a woman teacher, and the world of her father’s authority. In *En attendant le Bonheur*, Maryse Condé tells of the failure of the return to an originary Africa in a Caribbean woman’s quest for a ‘true’ identity beyond the assimilated French culture she rejects. For her main character, Véronique, as for Gorodé’s female protagonists, a passionate liaison – with a powerful (but ruthless and corrupt) high-born African politician – is also servitude and possession. Condé’s strong woman, Tituba, in *Moi Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem*, is also, we recall, something of a prisoner of her desire for John Hanson. Possession or unexplainably self-dispossessing passion is again a characteristic of the love relationship in Condé’s Caribbean

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adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in *La Migration des cœurs* or in her *Traversée de la mangrove*. Assia Djebar writes of her love–hate relationship with both France/French and Algeria and her solidarity with her sisters against military (French) and patriarchal (Algerian) violence in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. The enemy is both within a society where the women label their husbands 'the enemy' and must embody their desire in secret dances, and without – the French fleet anchoring in the bay of Algiers observed by the cloistered women on the roofs of their houses in an erotic play of imaginary conquest and resistance. The irresolvable dilemma is exemplified in the gap between the veiled Arabic-speaking mother who needs the child's protection from men's gaze in the street and the patriarchal French-speaking father who allows his daughter access to the French school but forbids her to ride a bicycle or go out with a young man. Finally, Calixthe Beyala shows the role of colonial, religious (Christian and Islamic), and also traditional African discourse in the physical enslavement of African women in *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*. For Martine Fernandes, these four texts show that the postcolonial condition is beyond any Manichean vision of history or culture, and is necessarily paradoxical for women. Other postcolonial writers, Anandi Devi in Mauritius, for example, similarly reject assimilation to French or European values but show that there is no simple path back to (in Devi's case, indentured Indian) heritage. Interrogating the impossibilities and possibilities of the culturally hybrid contexts out of which they write, these women writers seek a new language of their own. For Martinez, this challenges conventional metaphorical concepts of the destiny of a woman from both cultures: a destiny presented traditionally, for instance, as a well-signposted road or 'pathway', or love presented as a 'battle'. In the remarkable autobiographical work *Vaste est la prison*, by Djebar, a silenced central memory resurfaces in the striking metaphor of being literally cut in two by the train tracks as the train approaches, saved *in extremis* by a quick-thinking driver, a repressed memory of the young writer's despairing attempted suicide in the face of the authoritarian and cloistering gaze of a disapproving fiancé and father.

Ambivalence as Hybridity in Gorodé

In order to confront cultural hybridity and the situation of gender inequality both outside and within the Kanak world, Gorodé, too, is developing her own distinctive metaphors and literary forms. Her

women characters are involved in an active weaving of new identities and pathways. Hybridity or cultural mixing in Gorodé's texts is not the constant movement between two spaces: one of the two poles is given pre-eminence in a *parti pris* of indigeneity. Identity is only very partially the self constituted in the dancing encounter with the Other culture or language in the seduction and resistance to seduction described in the writings of Luce Irigaray or Assia Djebar. The 'spacey emptiness between two named historical languages; the space of the cultural interface' postulated by Gayatri Spivak (1992; 1999) does not describe the very distinctive, local, full 'no-man's land' occupied by a resistant Éva who is also living in solidarity with her *tribu* and her customary obligations. Yet, *L'Épave*, like *Graines de pin colonnaire* and other texts, explores the topos of sexual passion within the frame of sexual possession recalling Irigaray's masochistic loss of the subject and corresponding flowering of the expansive self in this self-loss, as in flow, back and forwards. There may be some aspects in the strangeness of *L'Épave* of a (Kanak rather than a cosmopolitan) Kristevan 'monster at the crossroads' and elements of Kristeva's discovery that we are 'strangers to ourselves' (1988). Gorodé's ambivalence, the paradoxes in her work, does bear some similarity to Derridean 'undecidability'. However, in Derrida, undecidability is a product of *différence* and a lack of fixed identity, where identity is derived linguistically within the system, from the slippage between elements, the relation between signs. In Gorodé's very material understanding of the Kanak world, and her socio-political or didactic messages, there is much that is perceived as 'outside the sign', much that is simply 'different' or 'Other'. In the final instance, rather than the intercultural mosaic that Maryse Condé uses to depict contemporary society in Guadeloupe in her final image of Xantippe's Creole garden in *La Traversée de la mangrove*, the pieces of the mosaic in Gorodé do not quite fit together, leaving gaps between; spaces of the unspoken, the unspeakable, forms of metamorphosis or of the uncanny, producing what I have called 'cognitive dissonance' (Ramsay, 2010).

Conclusion

Déwé Gorodé's paradoxical form of hybridity begins with the will to relegate the colonial Other or Western rights discourse to the background while foregrounding the quotidian lives of women and thereby altering naturalized, unequal power relations. As a member of the emerging

middle class in Kanaky, educated in France and accustomed to travelling the world, her experience separates her from the women living within tradition in the *tribu*, confined to their island: her own position is a hybrid one. However, like her work, it resembles an 'interculture', as opposed to an 'entre-deux', allowing a glimpse of something else behind 'the certainties of national cultures' and changing both the nature of the power relations between the systems and the nature of their intersections, as Maria Tymoczko has put this notion for translation, in 'Ideology and the Position of the Translator' (2003). The binary oppositions of colonial discourse are challenged, as is, reciprocally, the masculinist discourse within Kanak tradition, but multiple positionality is admitted.

However, to return to postmodernism and its argument that meanings exist only within the linguistic formulations that construct them, hybridity in Gorodé is in part also the spark, the exchange that is produced by cultural contact between two language systems, between the rhythms of Paicî and those of French. As we noted, 'le vol' is both the theft and the flight of the word (Gorodé and Ihage, 2002), or, again, to borrow an expression from Deleuze, its 'lines of flight'. Déwé Gorodé's struggle with the powerful Other that is the French language brings both pain and pleasure. In one of her poems, 'Écrire', she presents herself as an 'outsider' speaking in a language that is not hers (2004b: 94–5), again recalling Derrida, who speaks in *Monolingualism of the Other* of 'this language that I live in and that lives in me but that is not mine'. In *Par les temps qui courent* and *Kënâké*, particularly, but also throughout her texts, the play of ready-made expressions colliding, of common-places bouncing off one another, is not gratuitous, but reveals their double meanings, polysemy, and the inadequacy of such expressions to express lived reality, including, for example, such key political leitmotifs, adopted by Tjibaou as a political programme, as 'consensus' or 'custom'.

These words are 'mistreated' or 'jostled', as in Marguerite Duras's *Emily L.* (1987: 153–4), the stereotypes turned over and over as in Nathalie Sarraute or in the work of the Vanuatu poet Grace Molisa, not simply for the pleasure of word games but **to force these French words to 'speak the truth', to show their limitations, or to reveal the absence of the maternal tongue of deepest affectivity.** According to Jouve in her preface to *Par les temps qui courent*, the use of the aphorism by Gorodé transforms a stringent masculine genre in order to question what is happening in Gorodé's own community from the outside. As we saw in Chapter 4, in *Kënâké*, Antigone and her fratricidal brothers, who come from Greek theatre, are doubled by the Kanak heroine Kaavo

and the enemy brothers of the Paicî-origin myth, as well as doubling the contemporary (hi)story of the assassination of Jean-Marie Tjibaou by a Kanak ‘brother’. Forms (parallelisms, theatrical dialogues, etc.) in Gorodé, as in Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, work on the ‘words of the tribe’ [*les mots de la tribu*] to create something new, albeit in a plunge into the abyss, as in *L’Épave*. This is the most important sense of Gorodé’s ‘hybridity’ – which, as we noted, is too asymmetrical to be simply bicephalic or in-between. The reader is drawn inside a thought that takes its material from both worlds to think and refract this ‘otherwise’ differently, but largely within Kanak epistemologies. Yet, this is a thought that is also internally hybrid in its figures of revolutionary (Marxist-influenced) politics alongside a critical and affective Kanak feminine ethics. In a final paradox, if Déwé is in part ‘her father’s daughter’, the third spaces of cultural appropriation and contestation of French culture in Déwé’s texts are far more extensive than in her father’s attempt to bring Christian and Kanak gods into the same space – and this is evidence of the first published Kanak writer’s greater assimilation to Western thought.