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KANAK IMAGINARIES: A SENSE OF PLACE IN THE WORK OF DÉWÉ GÖRÖDÉ

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The study of the Kanak imaginary in the work of the first published Kanak (indigenous) New Caledonian writer shows this to be permeated by a sense of place. Rootedness in, and intense community with the land is not incompatible with the fluidity of ancestral criss-crossing of the Pacific or of constant border-crossing (pathways of exchange between groups) but nonetheless remains central. The ‘hinterland’ constituted by the places of the *tribu* (customary lands) sets up a challenge to the dominance of *Nouméa la blanche* and Déwé Görödé’s articulation of places of identity re-negotiate the urban/regional or Noumea/Bush/*Tribunexus* to counterbalance or contest national (French) imaginaries. Yet Görödé’s work presents both a return to a Kanak Place to Stand and a critical self in process (the latter situated in a ‘no man’s land’). The places in her work are ultimately ‘cognitively dissonant’: the marginal or hinter-land of Kanak imaginaries (the *tribu*), can hold (to) their own both outside and inside the city yet also open themselves up internally to multiplicity and critique.

L’étude de l’imaginaire Kanak dans l’œuvre de Déwé Görödé révèle la centralité de l’enracinement dans la terre. L’importance du lieu et de la communion intense avec la nature n’est pas incompatible avec les voyages des ancêtres qui traversaient le Pacifique dans tous les sens, ni avec les sentiers de la coutume et les échanges entre tribus, mais le lieu, qui donne son nom à la tribu, reste primordial. Les lieux de Görödé opposent la tribu (à la fois les pays coutumiers et les gens qui l’habitent) à Nouméa la Blanche afin de contester la domination de l’imaginaire national français et sa conception de la relation entre Nouméa, la brousse (des colons), et la tribu. Toutefois l’œuvre de Déwé Görödé articule un ‘Place to Stand’ (lieu d’origine et de résistance indigène) et aussi un être en procès, critique, qui se situe dans un ‘no man’s land’. Enfin, ses lieux d’écriture sont ‘cognitivement dissonants’ et multiples : ils constituent la marge et le « hinterland » qu’occupe la tribu, mais tout en s’ouvrant aussi à une occupation de la ville et à une critique interne.

The research question underlying the following article concerns first and foremost the imaginaries that construct the particular power and knowledge that attach to Kanak forms of post-coloniality. The centrality of place in these imaginaries from the margins of the French 'country *sui generis*' that is present-day New Caledonia, and their remarkable variance from European norms, makes their study of considerable pertinence to the topic of this issue (perceptions of peripherality).

In the most recent and political Oceanian imaginary, New Caledonia is less a distant appendage of France or Europe, or a far flung island in a vast Pacific ocean, than an integral part of what the Tongan writer Epeli Hau'ofa called "Our Sea of Islands": a Pacific region populated 3000 years before our era by peoples speaking Austronesian languages who crisscrossed the Pacific in their voyaging canoes, marking their passage and interrelationships with their distinctive Lapita pottery. Oceania was then a sea of connected islands, of constant migration, of islands linked to each other rather than to Europe even after the arrival of the first sailing ships seeking the great southern continent that would balance Europe. (A visit to the Auckland Maritime Museum with its animated cartoon of the heroic pioneering voyage of Maori from Hawaiki-Oteiti to pristine Aotearoa-New Zealand provides evidence for the current centrality of this imaginary of 'routes', of legendary voyaging.) Many of the indigenous Pacific populations also identify with a further grouping, that of the world's "First Nations" and in this case, most

particularly with their uprooting, their dispossession from their lands; that is, with roots rather than the differently powerful imaginary of routes or migrations to colonize new Pacific lands. (This imaginary of voyaging is less useful, even counter-productive, for the on-going processes of re-claiming taken lands.)

These South Sea islands discovered for Europe in the eighteenth century are, then, connected Oceanian (is)lands, peopled by *tangata whenua* or 'people of the land' as Māori, for example, designate themselves. They are also, since annexation in 1840 (in New Zealand) and in 1853 (in New Caledonia), English- and French-speaking regions of the world whose populations derive predominantly from nineteenth-century European colonisation of the Pacific and, as in New Caledonia, the penal and indentured labour that often accompanied European economic exploitation and colonial development.

The Kanak woman writer, Déwé Görödé, on whose work this paper focuses, was among the first Kanak to study at university level, completing a BA degree (*Licence-ès-Lettres*) in 1972 at the University of Montpellier in France. After her return to New Caledonia, Görödé became both an activist within the indigenous independence movement and the first published Kanak writer, exploring a sense of loss and exile from her own colonised culture but, paradoxically, also a strong sense of distinctive Kanak being. It is in landscapes, weather, geographical features, places of communion with nature and the creatures that dwell in it, with others, the ancestors, "être seul /

est/ être avec/u et *duée*/ceux que l'on ne voit pas/autour de nous/et qui sont partout" ("être seul", *Sharing as Custom Provides* 76), that her texts, like the unpublished texts of her father, Waia Görödé before her and of her paternal and maternal grandfathers, the pastors Philippe Görödé and Eleisha Nabaye, before them, constitute the **basis of an authentic Melanesian person, of memory, feeling, and identity.**

The description of the panels on "Imagining a Sense of Place: The City, the Region, The Border" in the Program of the Cultural Crossroads conference held in Paris in July 2012 opened up the topic of a 'sense of place' with the premise that, as is also noted in the Introduction to this special issue, "cities are routinely metonymically articulated to the nation state, and urban imaginaries mobilize notions of cultural cohesion derived from the national." Yet, under the conditions of (increasingly late) modernity, **"urban culture as a contact zone and port(al) of entry has been characterized by cultural exchange, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, a border in a cultural and identitarian, rather than a geopolitical sense [...] Cities are anchored in a hinterland [...]. Regions interact with, support, or counterbalance national imaginaries"** (ibid.).

Déwé Görödé, like her father and grandfathers, situates her writing resolutely in just such a hinterland, in a *parti-pris* of Kanak indigeneity, close to the land and to the *tribu* – that is, at once the place, the indigenous village/customary lands, and the people who inhabit the village/customary lands.

By definition, the *tribu* lies outside the French capital, Noumea, closely related to the traditional *chefferie* but also, since colonisation, including spaces reserved for the church, Protestant or Catholic. The *tribu* has largely counterbalanced the imaginary of *Noumea la blanche* in a mainstream imaginary that privileges the colonial town and adds a third term, the colonial Bush of rural white settlement, to overlay the space of the *tribu*.

However, Görödé's 2005 novel, *L'Epave*, her partially autobiographical *Graines de pin colonnaire* (2009), and more recently, *Tâdo, Tâdo, Wêê ! ou "No more baby"* (2012), also increasingly include scenes set in the French capital: the commercial centre and Kanak gathering space of the Place des Cocotiers in *L'Epave*; Rivière Salée, a Kanak residential suburb in *Graines de pin colonnaire*. The shanty towns that mark the gateway to the city and line the mangrove within it figure centrally in her poems and short stories. In Görödé's articulation of places of identity outside, on, and across the political, cultural and ethnic borders that have defined Kanak, her writing practices re-negotiate the urban/regional or Noumea/Bush/*Tribu* nexus to counterbalance or contest national (French) imaginaries.

In her discussion of Māori film titles such as *Mauri* and *Ngāti*, Deborah Walker-Morrison presents New Zealand Maori film as the construction of a *Tūrangawaewae*, a Place to Stand that centres on the traditional *taonga* (treasures) of land and water. In Görödé's text the geographical features of the land, mountains, rivers,

waterholes, coastline, stars, trees and plants are inextricably linked with, indeed the foundation of, the Kanak social world. The spring, like the rain water that enters the pores, is identified explicitly by Utê Mûrûnû with her grandmother. (“Je pense à la source qui nourrit les tarodières où à l’eau de pluie qui pénètre les pores” *Utê Mûrûnû* 19). In their turn, the *tertres*, or mounds of earth on which Kanak *cases* (thatched houses) have been built, the networks of taro terraces and yam gardens, mark the landscapes with Kanak social organisation, tracing out the pathways of matrimonial alliance and socio-political claims to land. Rows of masculine columnar pines and feminine coconut palms indicate the emplacement of a chiefly house left by the ancestors, customary pathways or landmarks for the failing memory, “voies coutumières... traces repères pour la mémoire qui défaille” (*Utê Mûrûnû* 11). Görödé is the name of a place, the geographical area that gives the extended Görödé family its identity. It is also a genealogy; toponym is patronym, much as Kanaké, the first ancestor of the Paicî foundation story from oral tradition, is the familiar landmark-mountain that Déwé can see from her garden. Despite their voyaging *waka* (which in *L’Epave* is figured as an abandoned wreck in the tribe’s canoe graveyard), these Kanak peoples too, imagine themselves predominantly as *tangata whenua*, as autochthonous, that is, etymologically, as people springing directly from, or rooted in the earth, not unlike the ancient Spartoi of the classical Greek myth of Oedipus.

Racines
racines s’étirant
au quotidien
au gré
du temps qui passe
du temps qu’il fait
creusant
la terre
sous la pierre
toujours plus loin
pour nouer
le lien
le cordon
ombilical
rendu à
la terre
à même
la terre
telle la parure de chrysalide
de cigale
rendue à
la terre
à même
la terre
à la mue
ou sur les racines
pour naître au monde
avant l’envol [...]
 (Görödé, *Sharing as Custom Provides* 54)

Most of Görödé’s short stories in the collections *Utê Mûrûnû: petite fleur de cocotier* (1994) and *L’Agenda* (1996), like her poems and novels, speak of this unique bond with the natural world as with the land.

La Terre
un lopin
entre les sorghos
près d'un gué
sous in banian
au bord de l'eau
où naît une fougère
sur un talus
où me parlent
une poule sultane
une coccinelle
un scarabée
quand je m'endors
en rêve
sous un bout de ciel bleu
ou un souffle d'alizé

un rayon de soleil
au bord de s paupière
au seuil de son regard
où brille une aile de cigale
ou une perle de rosée
sur une tige d'igname
ou un cœur de taro
où palpite mon être
au rythme de la terre
(Sharing 79)

The daily occupations of her Kanak characters are working in the yam or vegetable gardens, fishing, gathering food in the mangrove or on the coral shelf, preparing and sharing and feasting on food to celebrate alliances, marriages, and deaths within the group, or learning or passing on these ancient skills. In "Il est déjà demain" (*L'Agenda*) the busy female narrator tends her gardens, feeds her family, seeing them safely to the ford to catch the bus for school on the other side, helps prepare food for the funeral feast



Fig. 1. Image of the places evoked in "La Terre".

for a young Kanak killed in an alcohol-fuelled road accident. In "J'use du temps" (*L'Agenda*), the young fisherman and independence militant systematically returns the smallest fish of his catch to the river to offer a libation. The natural world, alive with the *U*, ondines of the water, or with the spirits of the forest, encourages a sense of respect and thus of conservation. Work in the gardens aligns with the seasons, with the lunar calendar. Kanak occupation of the land is presented less as a settling or a development than a deeply entwined cohabitation. This is shared with the ancestors, with the gecko on the wall, with the spirits who reveal their presence in premonitory signs. The land is living, vibrant with signs and voices that Déwé Görödé identifies in the novella, *Utê Mûrûnû*, eponymous title of the collection that gives the stories its name, with the "vital energy" of the first *Utê Mûrûnû*. She is the wise old Oracle or "Pythonisse" whose voice is synonymous with the song of the *notou* bird, or the call of the turtle-dove and the gurgling of water ("le chant du notou ou la voix de la tourterelle, le bruissement de l'eau" 30) and who, aware of the wounds of the earth beneath her digging stick, invokes the earth mother, "our life and our death," and responds to the voices of the earth: « Je l'invoque, elle, l'autre femme, la terre, notre mère à tous,

qui était, qui est, et qui sera, avant et après nous. Oui, je l'appelle, elle, la terre, notre mère et notre tombe, notre vie et notre mort » (20).

In these very particular places, where place is name and identity, tribal or group memory, story, belonging, where being is being with the others, knowing is being in dialogue with “those people, there,” with the ancestors, nature can nonetheless be both nourishing “little mother” and dangerous or vengeful stepmother full of taboos and interdictions. A lack of the ritual gesture to the tree to be felled may be fatal, resulting in the imprisonment of a human spirit within the tree (as in the children’s bi-lingual story in French and Iaa language, *L'enfant Kaori / Wanakat Kaori*). The ancestor who sticks to the skin in *L'Epave* is at once the fin of the shark, the devouring ogre pursuing Tom, the protagonist, in his dream, and the old fisherman stretching out his hand to protect him from shipwreck.

The *tribu*, too, has more than one face, its inside and outside places. Young girls wandering alone in the bush, outside the boundaries of the customary village, or along the sea-shore, have often been considered as fair-game for gang-rape. Déwé Görödés novels contain a number of allusions to unspoken clandestine but accepted sexual liaisons that take place at night in the bush or on the beach, that is, outside of the socially controlled spaces of the *tribu* and customary matrimonial arrangements. As opposed to the socialized, the civilised, to customary law, the spaces of personal love trysts in the mountains represent wilderness territories of the savage or lawless. The

Utê Mûrûnû who represents the third of the five generations of women all named Utê Mûrûnû (little coconut flower) in Görödés’s novella of the same name, growing up in the *tribu* in the 1940s, crosses the mountain one night with a cousin and falls pregnant to this young man with whom she falls in love. Not long after, her customary brothers come to visit Utê Mûrûnû and her grandmother to announce that the maternal uncles have promised her in marriage to “those (relatives) on the other side” (“ceux de l’autre côté”) who still worship the ancient gods, while her younger sister has been promised to “the maternal relatives from up there” (“les utérins de la-haut” 7) of the new Protestant religion. Custom requires that Utê Mûrûnû remain silent about the fact that she is carrying the child of the cousin from “up-there” whom she is expected to renounce in favour of her sister. However, Utê Mûrûnû, the little coconut flower is also a *Kaavo*, a daughter of the chief, a warrior Princess or Antigone according to Déwé’s text, resisting oppressive social spaces. At the risk of finding herself in the wilderness, outside of the *tribu*, she must find a way, a steep path of her own, around the “rock” (“le rocher” 16) of custom.

The intense sense of place is multi-faceted; closely linked to time and weather. In fact, space can completely subsume time (and challenge French tenses) as in the extraordinary and powerful short story in *L'Agenda*, “J’use du temps” (I weather time), which plays on the polysemy of the French word “temps” (time and weather) turning common European understanding of time against itself. In

this text, a young man who leaves from the *Quai des Volontaires* to fight in the European war returns as a spirit in the ‘formless uniform that scares children’ to haunt the water-hole, the place where he once betrayed and lost the young girl he loved. Moving up and down past, present and future, this “I,” recounts his story as he observes the lives of his descendants, and of the country.

In *Graines de pin colonnaire*, the allusions to weather, to covered skies, are constantly repeated, as the narrator convalesces in a Noumea suburb, recovering (like Déwé herself), from treatment for breast cancer in the hospitals of Sydney. **This curious collection of fragmented but intertwined stories of the everyday lives of four women is haunted by the struggle with and understandings of illness and the voices of others, including the voices of the dead.** Tany’s story constantly addresses the sudden strong sense of a presence, a former ‘folly of love,’ a *lutin* or mischievous and impossible spirit, a rascal leprechaun, imp, given up for the greater good of the *tribu*, but who is also the guardian of the hill opposite. Time is space–time, circularity, but it also nurtures the person: the ‘seeds of the columnar pine’ fertilize the places of memory as the latter emerge to constitute the subject. This is the looking or ‘walking backwards towards the future’ of which New Zealand Māori speak, taking support, identity even, from the past in order to be in the present, in the familiar everyday of family dropping in, of shared take-aways from the toll-booth shop at the entrance to Noumea, of walks,

under cloudy skies, to the spectacular *Rivière Bleue* reserve.

Kanak social space outside and inside Noumea requires the constant, ritual, group sharing of the fruits of the earth and sea as of memories of persons lost (deaths) and celebration of persons gained (births, marriages) for the group. The short-story, “La Saison des pommes kanakes” (*Utê Mûrûnû* 69-78) begins with just such a colourful and mouth-watering display of a huge array of traditional dishes prepared by the women of the *tribu* for a betrothal feast. However, it ends with the fruit from the Kanak Apple tree, offered on this occasion by the very young promised bride to her young prospective brother-in-law, rotting on the ground some two decades later, as the former wastes away. She has become the victim of the sorcery of charlatans and the accusations of a **jealous sister-in-law. Dabbling in black magic practices bruised and scraped** (“écorchée”) like the nickel mining lands from which she comes, this damaged sister-in-law, like the rotting Kanak apples, **reflects both the destruction wrought by colonialism and mining** and the problems latent within the Kanak world itself. In *L’Epave*, the marriage celebration in the *tribu* again consists of a huge array of dishes but these are now very explicitly a mixture of French and Kanak specialities and are accompanied by a vast array of French beverages, wines and liqueurs. The spaces of a Kanak culture are under attack from dispersal and disenfranchisement. The wandering ancestral spirits are unable to re-join their ancient house ‘mounds’ or *tertres* because of the settler’s barbed-

wire and marauding cattle as in the well-known poem by the assassinated independence-leader:

*The homeland of our fathers is no longer
in our hands
A foreign flag flies over our land [...]
The names that we bear
Emerge from the raised mounds of our
fathers' houses
The blood that flows through our veins
Wells from the breast of our maternal
relation
Who wander in search of the mounds on
which their houses once stood
Now trampled and profaned by the White
Man's cattle [...]
Where are our altars, where are our
ancestors?
Jean-Marie Tjibaou, 1996
(Görödé, *Sharing* 277-78)*

The ancestral places presented as threatened by hybridization also dominated the unpublished earlier text of Déwé's father, Waia. Waia Görödé's writings demonstrate for the critic Dominique Jouve that the paths of conversion in Houailou were in fact those of the traditional alliance the new religion revived and reinforced on the one hand, and on the other, that writing is now also a means of expressing an individual self, its singular emotions and thoughts. The particular interest of Waia's autobiographical manuscript, "Mon école du silence," lies in the detail of the everyday lived 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 (the expropriation of land, the liberated convicts who "take our girls for nothing," that is, without customary contract or 'reciprocity' at the level of the group), Waia Görödé rejects the exclusion of the ancestors from Christian redemption and the Puritanism of the pastors. He recalls "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...") Waia Gorodé, quoted in Jouve, 117). Despite his work with Pastor Leenhardt in the Protestant Mission of Do-Néva, Jouve's reading of Waia Görödé finds no dualism in a text that integrates the deterritorialized Christian God and the gods of nature, the Kanak *bao*, less into a hierarchy, she claims, than simply into different spaces. Jouve presents Waia as 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 are, for her, immanent rather than transcendental: "the summits of mountains give life to invisible creatures that people this land of Kaledonia like the holy angels people the Heaven" (Waia Görödé in Jouve 117). For Jouve, Waia's dynamic interaction with the Christian notions of transcendence, the preference given to immanence, produce distinctively Kanak in-between spaces. Waia's text, she points out, can, for example, link 'school' ("école du silence"),

a Western institution, with (evangelical) light and with the name of a healing Paicî vine (traditional knowledge) (Jouve 112).

Déwé Görödés militant texts that indirectly critique the hold of the Church on Melanesian society by introducing a Marxist framework of analysis are very different from her father's apology for the sin of cannibalism and yet Jouve's analysis of the structure of Waia's writing can be seen as pertinent to the work of both father and daughter. Waia, too, situates himself as an outsider in relation to France and academic French language. A "vieux tayo" (old 'native'), he describes himself as embarked on an irregular, "zig-zag", writing path. For her part, Déwé writes of "Living writing/ In a foreign land/Outside myself/Or as an outsider/In this language that is not mine." (*Sharing* 94-5). Writing in French nonetheless serves, in both cases, to recall the effaced connections to the past by reactivating lost links with the spirits, both *bao* and *apieru*, affirming the visibility of the "angel-gods" of nature, the invisible force between the living and the dead. Despite the cry against the degradation of nature, the "polluted waters of the land", shared by Déwé, the nostalgic call to the *dames U* or female spirits who no longer sing and laugh in the waterfalls, to remain himself, for Waia, is to protect the sacred in nature in 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." (in Jouve 113). For Jouve, Waia Görödés use of writing to

interrogate contradictory and incoherent or apparently incompatible thoughts and emotions is what makes his work 'literature' as well as historical document. The diversity of the 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 Jean-Marie Tjibaou will adopt in 1975.

Déwé Görödés work creates its own distinctive syncretism; one that also includes the observation of negative forces within the *tribu*, in particular, the suspicion of an age-old oppression of women and children. Metaphors of the natural world thus also figure the "sharp rocks" ("arêtes tranchantes" *Utê Mûrûnû* 16), the brambles on the "steep path" that are a challenge to *Utê Mûrûnû*'s agency and an inevitable consequence of her perilous refusal of the primacy of the *tribu* and a traditional arranged marriage.

I have investigated elsewhere what I call the 'cognitive dissonance' in Déwé's syncretic work (Ramsay 2010). This is the apparent contraction between writing an island where being has been "clear-felled" by the imposition of "the single way of thinking" ("une île/ un pays/ où les êtres étaient/ où les êtres étaient sans être/ où les êtres sont sans être [...] en coupe réglée de/ la pensée unique", *Sharing* 50) and the injunction to the new generation in "J'use du temps" to take the path of return, 'the long pathway of return to their Kanak land' ("le chemin du retour, le long chemin du pays" 70) and to discover what is beneath the ashes of the conch shells (« sous les cendres des conques ») as the title of her first collection of

militant poetry puts this loss that refuses to be definitive. 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 “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). The pressures exerted by the encroaching global, capitalist economy (denounced in the early poem “Madame multinationale” in *Sous les cendres des conqués* 63-4) have been intensified and complexified by the involvement of Kanak, since the 1988 creation of the Northern Province in their own recent nickel mining initiatives, and even by the “common future” proposed by the recent landmark Matignon (1988) and Noumea Agreements (1998). New cyber or hyper-reality adds to this ‘cognitive dissonance.’ In her extensive work on a sense of global place, arguing that places have multiple and not single identities and are not enclosures with an evident inside and outside, Doreen Massey has asked whether calls for ‘return’ (to tradition or to singular and intelligible places) may not derive from a false nostalgia. However, *L’Epave* is a fierce attack on the power of older men over young women in customary extended families; the ancestral canoe here is a stone in the form of a prow in the tribe’s canoe-cemetery

on which very young girls, all called Helena (or Lena) are violated over several generations by a maternal uncle-ogre. These young women fall, mesmerized, under the ogre’s sexual power.

Görödé is not the only writer to courageously critique the power relations within contemporary Kanak society between old and young, men and women, that can lead to abuse and cruelty. The popular plays of the autodidact Kanak playwright, Pierre Gope, from the island of Maré indict such Kanak social ills as underestimation of rape as a crime or chiefly corruption in land or mining sales. Writing from France, Tai Waheo has dared to publish the story of an often lonely and battered childhood as the child of a customary adoption in his bilingual text, *Le petit coco vert*. However much these three writers find themselves in the liminal position of critic and conscience of their society, breaking customary silence, they are no less determinedly rooted in the Kanak world. The intensity and particularity of the sense of place in Görödé’s writing does not prevent her spaces from exhibiting changing faces nor from being in process. Whereas the voices of the warm, nurturing earth, “little mother,” speak especially to women, in a curious passage, reminiscent of Camus’ discussion of the absurd, the narrator also affirms that we create nature in our image but despite its sublime beauty, the natural world is indifferent to mankind. “The gods are in us” (*Uté Mûrûnû* 34). This ‘dissonance’ is compounded when the environment changes from the *tribu* to Noumea. The “urban culture as a contact zone and port(al) of entry...

characterized by cultural exchange, hybridity and cosmopolitanism” mentioned in the Introduction is very present in Gorodé’s work. In *L’Epave*, Eva’s garden, the subversive “paradise of women,” the property which she caretakes at the entrance to Noumea, constitutes a liminal space, what Eva herself calls a ‘no man’s land’ between *tribu* and town. Eva continues to fulfil all her obligations to reciprocity and the group while living independently. The town itself, like *la fête* it comes to embody, has many faces. The central square, the *Place des Cocotiers* is the space of a feverish Saturday morning *fête commerciale*, of buying and selling as of nightlife (*fête*) in the bars. It is also the terminus of the *fête* constituted by the joyful collective Kanak participation in the march for independence that also takes over, the central streets of Noumea. So, too, do new forms of protest, for example, *Kanéka* protest music of the politically militant 1980s, linked to the songs of Bob Marley or Black rap poetry. Like the shantytowns on its outskirts, the city represents a place of mixing and coming together but also of cultural amnesia, the traps of drugs, prostitution, and welfare dependency. The short story of the drug-addicted Kanak watched over by his brother who seeks in vain to take him back to his roots in the *tribu* (“Benjy mon frère”) and the biting recent poems “Ville tropicale” (Tropical Town), “Terrain vague” (Wasteland), and “Deperdition” (Ruin) attack the dereliction of Kanak in the affluent red, white and blue city. However, the city’s cyber spaces are also spreading their tentacles out into the *tribu*, into the *cyber-case*, decried, for

example, in the following poem “Dans les mailles du filet” (Netted):

*Petit garçon deviendra grand
et surfera sur le net
et d’aventure en aventure
s’en ira de par le monde
à la recherche du temps perdu
et des civilisations disparues
sur l’écran de l’ordinateur
du cyber-café ou de la cyber-case [...]
petit poisson deviendra grand
se fera frire et sautera
dans les mailles du filet
(Görödé, *Sharing* 157)*

The critique of the web’s globalising takeover of traditional space is picked up again at length in the novel *Graines de pin colonnaire*, where one of the four female character’s reflections almost uniquely concern a description and implicit critique of the ‘inhumanity’ of the television programmes she nonetheless consumes. The two worlds in fact remain permeable to each other, open to takeover. In *L’Epave*, the ‘master’s’ spaces are appropriated literally by Eva (her garden) and subverted, for example, by the scandalous and daring sex games and inversions of sex roles. The largely non-white shanty-towns that constitute other in-between spaces linking Noumea and the *tribu*, look both ways like the Janus figure of the Renzo Piano designed *Centre Culturel Jean-Marie Tjibaou*, on a mangrove-covered headland at the entrance to Noumea, with its unfinished traditionally shaped *cases* looking both backwards toward tradition and forward to the future. Indeed, in the novels of New Caledonian writers of European origin, Claudine Jacques’

apocalyptic *L'homme-lezard*, *L'age du Perroquet-banane...* and *Noumea-Mangrove*, and Nicolas Kurtovitch's *Good Night Friend*, the infiltration of the white city or its shanty-town periphery by Kanak is depicted as a potential danger – invasion by the boucan (possession, black magic and revenge killings) or by violence against women. Is this a case of the old myth of the 'uncivilised' hinterland of Kanak culture coming to take over the civilised city? In *Foret, terre, tabac*, Kurtovitch nonetheless represents a clandestine native garden within the city limit as a haven of peace, of harmony with the natural world while Görödé presents the shantytown as a place of addiction and child-abuse and a fall from the grace of the *tribu*. Jacques, for her part, finds a form of redemption in the self-sacrifice of the individual, and the solidarity that can emerge in the shanty-town between Wallisian, Kanak and European. In all of these authors, spaces can have shifting values, and the liminal spaces, like the *tribu* or the town, are both negatively and positively coded.

To return then to our earlier contention that the representation in Görödé of the regional, the *tribu*, the Kanak 'outsider' in Noumea, seeks to critique, counterbalance, or infiltrate Noumea's national French imaginaries. Postcolonial theory, in particular hybridity theory, might seem to require a re-thinking of the translocations involved as the construction of mixed or in-between spaces and a new kind of location. Yet, Görödé's is a rather different kind of hybridity from the one Bhabha is proposing with his 'third' and subversive

space of difference created by the to-and fro between the cultures in contact, indeed by the very (ultimately subversive) mimicry of coloniser by colonised. Görödé's sense of a communal, non-urban, non-European, elemental space, of a Kanak space, is most deeply that of a Place to Stand among the elements, the natural world, infused with the spirits, of the ancestors. More particularly, this is a world of women, albeit resistant women. This place to stand is not, as Doreen Massey fears, an essentialist or single space but manifestly a product of a changing socio-political history – when *Utê Mûrûnû*'s parents leave the land to find work in Noumea, they move from a flea-bitten hotel to a damp cellar under the white owner's house, then to their own shed of corrugated iron and, finally, to a small apartment. The pre-Christian system of polygamy figured by the elderly polygamous husband, from whom the second *Utê Mûrûnû* fled, has disappeared from the life in the *tribu* in her granddaughter, *Utê Mûrûnû*'s time.

Finally, Görödé's places are constructed not only from landscapes and weather and the Kanak figures within them, but from a multiplicity of intertexts, including radical French literature (Rimbaud, Baudelaire); Francophone literatures of struggle, (Senghor, Césaire); Kanak writers (Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Pierre Gope), the texts of Kanak oral tradition, Pacific and feminist texts (Grace Mera Molisa), but also New Caledonian colonial writers (Baudoux and Mariotti), French anthropological writings on Kanak, and other contemporary non-Kanak New Caledonian writers (Jacques, Kurtovitch

or the writer of thrillers, Daenycks). These very disparate influences sit alongside one another. The sense of place that emerges from Görödé's literary creation is in texts that play with French language and its rules, de-territorialising, using and abusing genre, tone or verb-tense, wearing away linear time and creating a dissonant 'place of her own.' This is constructed from the hinterland, but also from both inside and outside her own culture as from the margins of both cultures in a "no-man's land" as Eva explains her simultaneous position of solidarity with the *tribu* and critical distance from it. Despite its *parti pris* of indigeneity and Kanak 'return,' this is itself constructed critically out of the two worlds, the multiple texts and languages Görödé inhabits and that (to recall Derrida) inhabit her. From the short story "Grandfather's House" ("La Case"), a detailed quasi-ethnographic description evoking the intense jubilation of the childhood memory of her Grandfather's place with its protective guardian spirits, on a bright sunny morning in Kanaky, to the attack on the Ogre-fisherman-father figure (using a variety of European intertexts, Dr Jekyll, Jack the Ripper, Bluebeard as points of comparison), and the quasi-anonymous fragments of women's diary-writing in *Graines de pin colonnaire*, linked by atmospheric notations, the strongly affective relationship to place negotiates both a self in process and a central and recognizable writing core. This subversive work on language as on the understanding of her own life, albeit a life inextricably bound up with others, is itself part of the search for a new Place to Stand where

the margin, the hinterland and Kanak imaginaries (the *tribu*) can hold their own both inside and outside the city.

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Image Notes

Fig. 1 An image taken from *La Nuit ses Contes*, a DVD of images by D. Walker-Morrison and N. Morrison accompanying *Nights of Storytelling. A Cultural History of Kanaky/New Caledonia*, ed. R. Ramsay, Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2011.

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